

Billy Sunday and the Banker

If there be any truer measure
of a man than by what he
does, it must be by what he
gives. — Bishop Robert South

By Lon Woodrum

There never was a more colorful Christian evangelist than Billy Sunday, the onetime baseball player who rose up out of middle America in the early 1900s to stir great throngs wherever he went. The stories about his exuberant, unorthodox ways of bringing people to the Lord abound to this day. One of them was told to me years ago by Wallace Byrd, then vice-president of a bank in Pennsylvania.

Byrd was head teller in the bank at the time Billy Sunday came to town to conduct his crusade. Huge crowds gathered to hear him, but Byrd did not attend. He wanted no part of religion, especially not that of itinerant evangelists.

But by some quirk of fate Billy Sunday arranged for an account to be set up in Byrd's bank.

Day after day Byrd watched Billy Sunday's account grow. And as it grew, so grew his animosity toward the evangelist.

On the Monday after his crusade ended, Billy Sunday came into the bank to settle his affairs. Among the checks from the previous night's collection was one for five dollars. That gave Byrd a chance to loose some of his resentment.

"Sir," Byrd said, "we can't honor this."

"Why not?" Sunday asked.

"The woman who wrote this check has less than five dollars in her account," he replied. "She is a widow, and very poor."

Sunday frowned at the check, and Byrd saw the opportunity for an extra harpoon.

"Actually, sir, we are holding a mortgage on her home for \$1,500. We'll have to foreclose very soon."

That, Byrd thought, should hit this money-grabber where it hurts!

Sunday responded by tearing up the widow's check. A moment later he laid a slip of paper in front of Byrd and said, "Will you honor this one?"

Byrd looked down to see a check on Sunday's account for \$1,500. "For the widow's mortgage," Sunday said.

"Why are you doing this?" Byrd asked.

"Friend," Sunday answered, "have you never read in the Great Book what a person of means is supposed to do about orphans and widows?"

After the evangelist left, Byrd was shaken. Again and again he thought about what had happened. He began to revise his thinking about evangelists. He thought, too, about the widow. Had she, by giving in faith out of her tiny possessions, been rewarded by this gift?

That was the turning point in Wallace Byrd's life, the event that led to his becoming a Christian. As Wallace Byrd told me, he never heard Billy Sunday preach from the pulpit. Sunday's only sermon to him was a signature on a personal check.

The precious stone

Author unknown

A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation.

The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime.

But a few days later, he came back to return the stone to the wise woman. "I've been thinking," he said. "I know how valuable this stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me this stone."