

The Dollars Kept Coming!

by Emerson Hartman

April 10, 1966, was the last day on which Mrs. Wright could pay the second half of her taxes before they would become delinquent. Her problem was that for two years she had been unable to pay. The city government would soon sell her home for those back taxes.

A frown crossed her usually peaceful face as she recounted her pitifully inadequate funds. Even before she paid tithe, there was far less than enough. Should she use her tithe money to help pay the bill?

Instantly putting away that thought, she counted out God's portion and tucked it into a tithe envelope. After all, if the city authorities sold her home, God would surely have something else for her.

She put the tax bill and her thin billfold into her purse and left the house. Instead of going at once to the courthouse, she drove to the house of Irma Johnson, a fellow deaconess and her best friend, who instantly saw that something was wrong.

"Edith!" You look as though you've lost your best friend. What's the matter?"

"I feel as if the four walls of my house are falling in on me. It's my unpaid taxes."

"Taxes!" Mrs. Johnson exclaimed. "What's wrong with them?"

Today's the last day to pay them, or they'll sell my home. And I just don't have the money to—."

"Let's get down on our knees and pray about it," her friend interrupted.

Down on their knees the two women went. Mrs. Wright was too depressed to pray much. Her church sister also said a short prayer. When they stood up, Mrs. Johnson told her, "Now go on and take care of your business, and stop worrying."

Mrs. Wright felt as if a ton had suddenly been lifted from her. Tears forced themselves from her eyes.

But even as she drove to the distant courthouse, worried thoughts kept returning. True, she knew the Lord would do His part. But how? And where would she live if the house was sold? Maybe she should keep the money to rent a house. No, that

wouldn't be fair. Didn't the Bible say, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's". She needed to pay all she could.

When she reached the courthouse, the problem was still unsolved. She went to the cashier's window and asked the cashier for advice.

The cashier told her, "Pay your second installment. When you do that, all the overdue taxes become a bill to be paid, but the authorities can't touch your home. You must pay eventually, of course, but you can take as long as you need to."

"Then they can't sell my home?" Mrs. Wright cried eagerly.

"No, not after you pay the half that is due today."

This was a real break. "Then I'll pay it now. I have just enough in my purse.

Mrs. Wright handed the clerk her money. The clerk counted out the correct amount and handed back some change in dollar bills. Mrs. Wright slipped these in beside a thin sheaf of dollar bills she still had. Then she turned and crossed the hall to the delinquent-taxes window.

"May I make a small payment on my delinquent taxes?" she asked.

"Have you paid the bill?" the clerk asked, noting the tax bill Mrs. Wright was still holding in her hand.

Yes. See, it is receipted. I have a few dollars left over, and the clerk said I could pay the delinquent taxes a little at a time."

"Yes, that's right. Let me get your file."

When she had found the bills for the delinquent taxes, the clerk added them up. Then she asked Mrs. Wright how much she wanted to pay.

"I think five dollars," Mrs. Wright replied. She opened her billfold to the thin sheaf of one-dollar bills.

One at a time she took five out and then placed them on the counter. Then she noticed that she still had some more in the billfold. She told the clerk not to write the receipt because maybe she could spare 10. She counted five more dollars.

There were still more dollar bills in the purse. Strange! She counted another five. And still there were more. What was happening? Perhaps she should just take bills out until she saw only a few left. She began piling them one at a time on the counter.

The clerk was watching sharply, counting each bill as it was placed on the growing pile. It was like watching a performer taking handkerchiefs out of an empty hat, because already there were too many bills to ever go back into the billfold.

Finally Mrs. Wright saw that there were only three more dollars in the billfold. She looked up and met the clerk's puzzled eyes.

"If you can dig up 50 cents," the clerk said, "you'll have the whole bill paid. I've been counting. There are 147 dollar bills here."

"No! There can't be that many!" Mrs. Wright cried.

"Yes, there are. I counted them as you put them down.

"Well, here is another dollar."

The clerk placed 50 cents on the pile of bills and handed the other half dollar back to Mrs. Wright. Just take this across to the treasury window and pay there," the clerk directed, handing Mrs. Wright the delinquent bills.

The cashier was surprised to see Mrs. Wright back so soon. "Why didn't you pay when you were here the first time?" she asked.

To this, all Mrs. Wright could answer was, "I don't know."

One by one the cashier counted the 147-dollar bills. The 50-cent piece finished the count. Stamping the bill "Paid in full," she handed it over with a question in her eyes.

Mrs. Wright had a question in her eyes too. Her mind was such a swirl of impossibilities that she left the window in a trance. Moving to a little table, she began searching through her purse.

The tithe envelope still had the exact amount she had put in it. Her billfold had two dollars in the paper-money section. No. No. That billfold could never have held even a fourth of the immense pile of bills on the counter. Only God could have done this thing.

Closing her purse she bowed her head to say a sincere "Thank You, Father." Then returning to her car, she drove home rejoicing. She knew that in spite of what some people said, God was not dead. Only a living God of love could have performed this miracle just to help a poor widow woman.