

Move That Mountain

Debt is a terrible thing. Proverbs says it makes the borrower the servant of the lender (see Prov. 22:7), and Romans tells us to owe no man anything but love (see Rom. 13:8). Yet in spite of this scriptural mandate, many Christians—even entire churches—get into debt.

One church that got into overwhelming debt was Calvary Assembly of God in Winter Park, Florida. At one time this church carried a \$15 million debt. The pressure of repayment caused speculation that the bank would call the note on the church, forcing it into bankruptcy and allowing the city to take over the facility.

I know Calvary well. Charisma started there in 1975. And even though I have not attended the church since the early 1980s, I witnessed the result of the debt and the crushing load it placed on the church.

In 1987 my good friend John Jones, a prominent local attorney and one of the elders of the church, had a vision about Calvary. He saw the huge glass sanctuary encircled by 15 large chains. The chains, he believed, represented past sins and the debt of the church.

Ten years after John received the vision, he shared it with the elders of the church, who confirmed this was from God. By then seven of the chains had been broken. But one huge anchor chain—unbelief—remained. Nevertheless pastor Clark Whitten prophesied that the debt would be paid off by Oct. 1, 2000.

On Sept. 24, one week before the prophesied date, Whitten and his congregation, along with former church staff members, celebrated the resolution of the debt and burned the mortgage with a huge “Freedom Celebration.”

It was exciting to recount the miracle that had happened—a “miracle of biblical proportions,” Terry Raburn dubbed it after the service. Raburn should know. He’s the Assemblies of God district superintendent for that part of Florida.

The “Freedom Celebration” was a spectacular event. After praise and worship and ministry of the Word by former pastor Mark Rutland, now the president of Southeastern College, the church celebrated with a laser light show, indoor fireworks, confetti and balloons. I’d never been to a service like it.

When Whitten came to Calvary in 1995, the church still was \$11 million in debt. Whitten had already helped a large church in Oklahoma get free from financial bondage. But he didn’t come to help Calvary resolve its debt. He came, he told the congregation, to help the church achieve its “destiny in Christ.”

“Any bondage limits your testimony. You can grow in it, but it limits your testimony,” Whitten said. “The debt limited the ministry of the church. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Calvary has always been a giving church. Even through the most difficult times, Whitten “tithed” 10 percent of its income off the top to missions. And after paying off the debt, Calvary’s first official act was to sow \$100,000 into two other ministries, splitting the amount equally between Southeastern

College and a local ministry called Vision Orlando, through which churches are banding together to evangelize central Florida.

The debt reduction campaign was appropriately called “Moving the Mountain.” Paying down a \$15 million debt was like moving a mountain! And I believe the Lord showed me as I was rejoicing over what He had done at Calvary that the mountain was removed—the debt paid off—as a result of the church’s obedience and faith.

I suddenly saw that the mountains in my own life must be removed in the same way—by faith.

Mark 11:23 reads: “‘Whoever says to this mountain, “Be removed and be cast into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says’” (NKJV, emphasis added).

Do you have a mountain in your life? Maybe it’s debt. Maybe it’s a marriage that is breaking up or family members who seem hardened to the gospel. Maybe it’s addictive behaviors you can’t seem to overcome.

Whatever it is, the same God who helped Calvary Assembly move its mountain can help you move yours. Speak to that mountain, and press into Him for the faith to believe. *

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