

ARE WE GUILTY?



by Hudson Taylor

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905), the famed British missionary to China in the 1800s, told a story that shook many from their indifference to the spiritual plight of those who have never heard of Jesus Christ. Once, as Taylor traveled by boat from Shanghai to Ningbo, he met a man named Peter, who had heard the Gospel but had never put his faith in Jesus Christ. The two had an earnest conversation, and Peter asked to accompany Taylor when he went ashore to preach the Gospel. But before they reached shore, as Taylor prepared to preach, he heard the sickening sound of a splash and a cry. He wrote:

I sprang on deck and took in the situation at a glance. Peter was gone! The other men were all there, on board, looking helplessly at the spot where he had disappeared, but making no effort to save him. ... I instantly let down the sail and leapt overboard in the hope of finding him. Unsuccessful, I looked around in agonizing suspense, and saw close to me a fishing boat with a peculiar dragnet furnished with hooks, which I knew would bring him up.

"Come!" I cried, as hope revived in my heart.

"Is it so hard-hearted, so wicked a thing to neglect to save the body? Of how much sorer punishment, then, is he worthy who leaves the soul to perish?"

"Come and drag over this spot directly; a man is drowning just here!"

"It is not convenient" was the unfeeling answer.

"Don't talk of convenience!" cried I in agony. "A man is drowning, I tell you!"

"We are busy fishing," they responded, "and cannot come."

"Never mind your fishing," I said, "I will give you

more money than many a day's fishing will bring; only come—come at once!"

The men actually began to haggle over how much money it would take for them to rescue the drowning man! Taylor said he would give them all he had—about \$14. They paddled over—slowly—and let down their net. It was too late. Taylor reflected:

Were not those fishermen actually guilty of this poor Chinaman's death, in that they had the means of saving him, if they would but have used them? Assuredly they were guilty.

And yet, let us pause ere we pronounce judgment against them. ... Is it so hard-hearted, so wicked a thing to neglect to save the body? Of how much sorer punishment, then, is he worthy who leaves the *soul* to perish?

The Lord Jesus commands me; commands you, my brother; and you, my sister. "Go," says He. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Shall we say to Him, "No, it is not convenient"? Shall we tell Him that we are busy fishing and cannot go? That we are engaged in other and more interesting pursuits, and cannot go? Ere long "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body" (2 Corinthians 5:10, KJV). ■

The Scripture quotation is taken from The Holy Bible, King James Version.

Adapted from *A Retrospect*, by James Hudson Taylor. Work is in the Public Domain.