

#1958—July 5, 2009—“Hall of Presidents”—1

[Gauger:] *Moody Presents* the Hall of Presidents.

This minute make up your minds that you are going to be from this time on on the Lord's side. Give a ringing testimony for the Son of God.

[Gauger:] He was an unlikely voice, a man the world would have passed over, but in the economy of God, Dwight L. Moody was one of His richest investments, and few have cast a longer shadow in history. Welcome to the Hall of Presidents, from *Moody Presents*, a legacy look at the men who led the school that Moody founded. I'm Jon Gauger, welcoming you to this first in a series of historic but unusual broadcasts. Today you're about to meet and hear Dwight L. Moody as you may have never met him before.

He was born in 1937 in Northfield, Massachusetts, born on a farm. He had nothing more than a fifth-grade education, but he tired of life on the farm and at the age of seventeen left home, headed east for Boston. There his reluctant uncle, Sam Holton, hired him at the Holton Shoe Store. The hiring was done, though, with the contingent clause that Moody attend church at the Mount Vernon Congregational Church, which he did. It was there that he met Edward Kimball, his Sunday school teacher, who had much more of an interest in Moody than Moody could ever have known. On April 21, 1855, history records that Kimball reached out to Moody and visited him there personally in the Holton Shoe Store. There he was in the stockroom, working with those shoes, as Edward Kimball shared with Dwight Moody about the love of Jesus Christ. Moody, deeply moved, finally came to understand who Jesus was and received Him as Savior.

At the young age of eighteen, he could have in no way envisioned all that God had in store for him. He would have had no idea that God would use him to speak to more people in his day than any other evangelist had. He traveled extensively, crisscrossing the United States. He made several trips to the British Isles, wrote books, ministered in the Civil War, and touched not just a generation, but a world for Jesus Christ. His impact can still be seen and felt in many corners of the world.

Well, Moody loved to preach. But unfortunately, it's almost impossible to hear an actual recording of his voice. But, on this first installment of the Hall of Presidents, we have the unusual opportunity for you to hear D. L. Moody. This is kind of a scratchy recording made on the best technology of the day: a wax cylinder. Back in 1898, someone happened to be recording D. L. Moody as he read from the Beatitudes from Matthew 5. Again, the recording is scratchy, it's noisy, but you can still make out the wonderful words of Jesus, the Savior whom Moody loved to preach. Let's listen to this brief excerpt.

[Moody:]

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

[Gauger:] Amongst the scratches of that recording, the actual voice of Dwight L. Moody, founder of the Moody Bible Institute. Again, that recording was made in 1898. Let me take you back twenty-seven years earlier, October 8, 1871. There was nothing particularly remarkable about that early October Sunday evening, but history tells us that somewhere in the nation's second largest city, a barn caught fire that night. That fire spread from house to house, street to street, block to block. For two days and two nights, a massive red inferno smoldered. When the last of the flames were finally extinguished, 2100 acres had been completely destroyed, 17,450 buildings decimated, 200 were dead, and out of a population of 324,000, 70,000 were now homeless. Now, fast-forward twenty-two years. It's 1893. The World's Fair is in Chicago, the grandest fair the world has ever known, and Moody is there with the largest evangelistic effort ever on display. There's a guy there, a pastor by the name of H. B. Hartzler, who was present for the sermon that Moody delivers, and he is there with a firsthand account of what happened. He wrote it down, and I'd like to read for you an excerpt. Hartzler records,

At the appointed time, the great hall was filled, with hundreds of disappointed people outside vainly trying to gain entrance. Four and a half hours the meeting continued without pause, rising to a climax of overwhelming power with Mr. Moody's sermon.

Tears and sobs and amens and applause and moments of sacred awe and solemn hush attest to the interest of the great congregation. It was a memorable meeting. Exactly what did Moody say? A transcription was made based on the careful notes taken by someone at that message, and right now you're about to hear the text of D. L. Moody's message. Dramatically interpreted, this is the sermon that Moody gave that night in 1893. The title of his address—appropriately enough, "The Fire Sermon." Words from Dwight L. Moody:

[Dramatic interpretation of D. L. Moody's sermon:] In the spring of '71, along with Philip Phillips and Rev. (now Bishop) J. H. Vincent, I went to California, and when I came back here, hot weather had come. Our audience had become scattered, and I came to Farwell Hall wanting to get back the audience. But nearly all had gone, and it seemed almost impossible to get them together again. I remember that for a number of weeks I was turning over in my mind what to do to accomplish that. I thought I would get up some sort of sacred concerts, or get someone to lecture on historical events, for I thought that the gospel would not draw. But I remember after praying over it and getting up from my knees, the thought came to me, *Preach to them upon the Bible characters*. And inside of five weeks I had the largest congregation I had ever spoken to in Chicago.

When I came to Christ, I intended to devote six nights to His life. I had been spending four Sabbath nights on the subject, and had followed Him from the manger, along through His life, to His arrest and trial, and on the fifth Sabbath night, the eighth of October, I was preaching to the largest congregation I had ever had in Chicago, quite elated with my success, having for my text the words "What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called the Christ?"

That night I made one of the greatest mistakes of my life. After preaching, or talking—I did not call it preaching then—with all the power that God had given me, urging Christ upon the people, I closed up the sermon and said, "I wish you would take this text home with you and turn it over in your minds during the week, and next Sabbath we will come to Calvary and the cross, and we will decide what we will do with Jesus of Nazareth." I have never seen that congregation since. I have hard work to keep back the tears today. I have looked over this audience, and not a single one is here that I preached to that night. I have a great many old friends and am pretty well

acquainted in Chicago, but twenty-two years have passed away, and I have not seen that congregation since, and I will never meet these people again until I meet them in another world.

But I want to tell you of one lesson I learned that night, which I have never forgotten, and that is, when I preach to press Christ upon the people then and there and try to bring them to a decision on the spot. I would rather have that right hand cut off than give an audience a week to decide what to do with Jesus.

I have often been criticized, and people have said, "Moody, you seem to try to get people to decide all at once. Why do you not give them time to consider?" I have asked God many times to forgive me for telling people that night to take a week to think it over, and if He spares my life, I will never do it again. This audience will break up in a few moments, and we will never meet again. There is something awfully solemn about a congregation like this!

[Gauger:] From *Moody Presents*, this is the Hall of Presidents, a legacy look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded. We're listening to a dramatic reading of a sermon preached at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. If you'd like to order a CD or MP3 of today's broadcast or the entire Hall of Presidents series, you can do that quickly and easily online at our Web site, moodypresents.mbn.org. Again, that's moodypresents.mbn.org. Just look for the Hall of Presidents button.

Now, the conclusion to Dwight L. Moody's "Fire Sermon," heard in 1893.

[Dramatic interpretation of D. L. Moody's sermon:] You will notice that Pilate was just in the condition that my audience was that night, just the condition that you are in here today. He had to decide then and there what to do with Jesus. I do not believe that ever in the history of the world was there a more unjust judgment given than that of Pilate upon Jesus Christ. After examination he declared, "I find no fault in Him," and in the same breath he said, "I will chastise Him." And the scourge, which is made of cord knotted with sharp pieces of steel, was brought down upon the bare back of the victim, lacerating the flesh, cutting it to the bone, and many died under the infliction. He scourged an innocent man, but he wanted to curry favor with the Jews and also hold with the Roman, and that was his decision.

The Jews had the judge. They saw that he was vacillating and knew that he was the man for them, and that they could get their own way. They said, "If you let that man go you are not Caesar's friend." Then he tried to shift the responsibility. What man is there here who has not tried in the same way to shift responsibility? And I will tell you that every one of you will have to decide for himself what he will do with Jesus. Your wife cannot decide it for you. No friend on earth can decide it for you.

It was the custom to release a prisoner at the feast of Passover, so Pilate took the most noted criminal he had and asked the Jews whether he should release Barabbas or Christ. He thought they would rather have Christ than Barabbas, but they cried out, "Barabbas! Barabbas!" Then Pilate asked, "What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called the Christ?" He had sent Him to Herod, but Herod sent Him back and refused to take His life. And when he could not prevail, he was willing to go with the multitude instead of standing up against the current.

What we want in this city is men to stand up for the right, and even if you do suffer for a little while, the crowning day is coming. We want men to stand up against the current, not go with it—and not only to stand up against the current, but to go right against it. There was Pilate's failure.

Would to God that he had had the courage of Joseph of Arimathea! Hardly any name in history shines brighter than that of Joseph. I can imagine him that night in the council chamber when Jesus was condemned by the Sanhedrin. "What think ye?" is the question. And then it rang out through the judgment hall, "He is guilty of death!" But away down at the other end of the hall, Joseph arose, and with a clear, ringing voice he said, "I will never give my consent to that just man's death!" How that voice must have refreshed the soul of the Son of God in that dark night, when no one stood by him, when all cried out against him! Oh, it is an honor to confess Christ!

There never will be a time when we can do more for Christ than now, and there is no better place than here in Chicago. May God help us to take our stand in these dark days, when Christ is rejected by so many, and when they are telling us that He is not the Savior of the world and are putting Him on a level with other men. Come out and take a high stand for Christ. Let others go on scoffing, but you come out and identify yourself with the disciples of Jesus Christ. Take a high stand. That is what we want to do. May God help you!

Pilate had come to the fork of the road. That was a memorable day in his history, for he had only to take the advice of his wife and obey his conscience. They had sent word to him, saying, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." I do not know what Pilate's wife's dream was, but perhaps she had a dream of judgment day and saw Christ sitting upon the throne with the angels about Him, and her husband coming before Him to be judged, and she was terrified and made haste and sent word to her husband: "Have nothing to do with that man, for I have suffered many things in a dream because of Him."

Every man who had anything to do with the murder of Christ soon came to a terrible end. Be careful about your decision in regard to Jesus, for He is to be the judge of the world.

I cannot detain you much longer, but I would like today to press upon you this one question: What shall I do with Jesus Christ? I cannot speak for the rest of you, but ever since that night of the great fire I have determined as long as God spares my life to make more of Christ than in the past. I thank God that He is a thousand times more to me today than He was twenty-two years ago. I made some vows after that Chicago fire, and I want to tell you that God has helped me to keep those vows. I am not what I wish I was, but I am a good deal better than I was when Chicago was on fire.

Just as I was preparing to leave London the last time I was there, I called upon a celebrated physician, who told me that my heart was weakening and that I had to let up on my work, that I had to be more careful of myself. And I was going home with the thought that I would not work quite so hard. I was on that ill-fated vessel, the *Spree*, and when the announcement came that the vessel was sinking and that there was no hope, and the stern sunk thirty feet, and we were there forty-eight hours in that helpless condition, no one on earth knew what I passed through during those hours, as I thought that my work was finished, that I would never again have the privilege of preaching the gospel of the Son of God. And on that dark night, the first night of the accident, I made a vow that if God would spare my life and bring me back to America, I would come back to Chicago and at this World's Fair preach the gospel with all the power that He would give me. It seems as if I went to the very gates of heaven during those forty-eight hours on the sinking ship, and God permitted me to come back and preach Christ a little longer.

I would like to say that if there is a man or woman in this house today living under a broken vow, you had better right here and now, in the presence of these people, resolve to pay your vows before God. Sometimes we wait for a calamity to strike us. When the Chicago fire struck me, I

was in the middle of my life, if I live out the time allotted to man. After the fire I just looked around, and I cannot tell you what a blessing that fire was to me. I think when calamity comes to us we ought to get all we can out of it, and if God has a lesson for us to learn, let us take the lesson. It may be that God has a wonderful lesson for us.

I will venture to say that many of you have been in this same state. You that are in the middle of life, look around you and ask yourself whether your life is what it ought to be. Come today just for a little review and look down along the way from whence you came. Do you not see some spot in your life where you have made a vow and have not kept it? You have said, "I will be a more consecrated man," or "I will be a Christian." You have stood by the bedside of a dying mother and have said, "I will meet you in the better world." Are you going to make good on that promise? Why not do so here, just at the close of this four hours' meeting? Make up your minds that you will carry out that vow. It may be I am talking to a father or mother who has laid away a little child. When that child was taken away you said, "I am going to live a more consecrated life. I will not get rooted and grounded in things below, but I will rather set my affections on things above. I will make good my vow."

It is only a little while, a few months, a few years, and we will all be gone. May God help us now to pay our vows in the presence of all these people. Come now while I am speaking and just make a full, complete, and unconditional surrender to God and say, "Here am I, Lord. Take me and use me. Let me have the privilege of being a coworker with Thee," and there will be a fire kindled here that will burn into eternity. This hour, this minute, make up your minds that you are going to be from this time on on the Lord's side. Go to your home, to your church, and give a ringing testimony for the Son of God. Go to work, do what you can for Christ, and there will be grand days for this Republic and a blessed life for you here and hereafter.

[Gauger:] We've been listening to "The Fire Sermon," a message preached by Dwight Moody at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 and dramatized for us by reader Bob Mayer. This is the first in a series of special broadcasts from *Moody Presents* that we're calling the Hall of Presidents. Over the next few weeks we'll be hearing from all eight of Moody's past presidents. We'll also meet our new president, Dr. Paul Nyquist. The important thing for you to remember right now is that if you go to our Web site, moodypresents.mbn.org, you'll find a button there called Hall of Presidents. Click on that button, and you'll find everything you need to order your own collection of this great message series. The Hall of Presidents—check it out at moodypresents.mbn.org. Next week, a second message from Dwight Moody. I'm Jon Gauger, hoping you'll join us then, right here on *Moody Presents* ... the Hall of Presidents.