

#1970—September 27, 2009—“Hall of Presidents”—13

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

[Stowell:] The day in which we live and the worlds into which you will carry this treasure, the worlds into which I will carry this treasure, will be openly hostile to the gospel.

[Gauger:] With a legacy look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded, this is *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents, and I'm Jon Gauger, welcoming you to this very special series of historic broadcasts. I think you're going to be glad you joined us today. Let me tell you why. Our speaker, Dr. Joe Stowell, has a very important message about becoming a steward of God's treasure. Dr. Joe Stowell served as president here from 1987 to 2005, a man with a passion for students, a passion for the Word of God, and really an unmistakable connection with the faculty and staff here on campus. Anybody who knows him knows that Dr. Joe Stowell is a lover of people, and he has always had a unique ability to put his finger on the pulse of our culture and current events and then, with that same finger, underscore the text of the living Word of God. He takes us today to 2 Timothy 1:8–9, a look at Timothy, who was not a courageous person. Maybe that's you. Maybe you don't feel very courageous, and yet here we are, faced with this call to carry the gospel well, to live it out and give it out. Well, that's the message that Dr. Stowell presented at convocation, an address in 2004 presented to students just arriving on campus. Gathered together in the Torrey-Gray Auditorium along with the faculty and staff, this message from 2 Timothy 1 was presented. The title: Stewards of God's Treasure. Join us now as we walk down the Hall of Presidents for a message by Dr. Joseph M. Stowell, seventh president of the Moody Bible Institute.

[Stowell:] He says, “Don't be ashamed, Timothy, of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner,” the prisoner of Christ, “but join with me in,” he says, “suffering for the gospel's sake according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” I think it would be fair for us to say that for those of us who have been trusted with the care of this treasure, there will be serious intrusions by the adversary to seek somehow to discount it in our hands, to trash it in our possessions, to disable us from the capacity of bringing the redemptive message to this world. In fact, isn't that indicated in verse 14, where Paul says, “Guard this treasure which has been entrusted to your care.”

There are two arenas in which trouble seems to impact Timothy, the arena of his temperament and the arena of the times in which he lives. If you reflect back on verse 7, we read that “God has not given us a spirit of timidity,” or fear, or intimidation, “but of power and of love and of sound mind.” Throughout history biblical scholars have assumed that Timothy was an individual whose temperament was shy, that he was perhaps even overly sensitive that he was not a type-A kind of person, that he was reserved. For him to encounter the fact that this treasure of the gospel might throw him in the face of suffering was a thought of great intimidation for him and may have been the very reason why he would not have fulfilled his stewardship of the gospel through his life.

It may be that his shyness and timidity came even out of his home background. It would be a tremendous encouragement to many of us to know that Timothy did not come from a whole family background but a spiritually dysfunctional family. Timothy's mother and grandmother were godly people, but according to Acts 16:1, his father was a Greek, a pagan. I often wonder if he was not the point of ridicule and his mother and grandmother the point of ridicule from a pagan father, who would scoff at their belief in Jesus Christ. I don't know, but all I know is that

Timothy was encouraged that God had not given him a spirit to be intimidated by the trouble that the gospel would bring.

Not only was it the temperament of Timothy, but the text indicates the times in which the gospel would go. Notice in the next verse Paul admits to being a prisoner—a literal prisoner in bonds. Why? Because he proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ. Like Joseph, who was righteous in Egypt, and God said after that righteous refusal of Potiphar's wife, "Joseph, way to go. You're My kind of man." Three years in the slammer, like that! Paul proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus Christ and was imprisoned with a death sentence before Nero.

These were tough times for the gospel. I have to tell you that. These were times when Christians were thrown to the lions to entertain the crowds. These were times when faithful believers were covered with pitch and tied to the lampposts in Rome and lit on fire to light the streets at night. These were times when Christians were mocked and ridiculed, where their love feasts were purported in the broad culture to be orgies, and when their times at the Lord's Table when they remembered the death and blood of Jesus Christ were said to be cannibalistic experiences in the church. These were times of great persecution and tremendous misunderstanding in the culture. You don't have to be timid in your temperament to think twice about taking the treasure of the gospel into a world like that.

The day in which we live and the worlds into which you will carry this treasure, the worlds into which I will carry this treasure, will be openly hostile to the gospel. Some of you are aware of the fact that now in America the whole philosophical underpinnings of the mind-set of the average American is being influenced by postmodern thought, where deconstructionism and revisionism have gone against reasoned logic and the very essence of real history upon which the gospel is based. How is it that we take the gospel to a culture that doesn't value classical reason and logic with the gospel being a reasoned, logical sequence? Or that does not believe in real history when the gospel is grounded in a real cross planted in real soil upon which a real historical Jesus was crucified? How is it that we take the gospel into a hostile environment like that?

Or how is it that we take the gospel into an environment that says there are no absolutes? Barna now cites in his studies that 70 percent of Americans—and the survey covered both Christians and non-Christians—70 percent of Americans today believe that there are no absolutes. How do you take the treasure of the gospel into a world like that, where the gospel is framed in absolutes—the absolutes of right and wrong, of sin and heaven and hell? How do you take the gospel into a hostile environment like that?

[Gauger:] In case you've just joined us, you're listening to Dr. Joseph M. Stowell in a historic series we've titled the Hall of Presidents, a significant look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded. All eighteen messages in this series are available on nine CDs at our Web site, moodypresents.org. Just look for the Hall of Presidents banner. Again, eighteen messages on nine CDs ... We'll send them out to you when you place your order at moodypresents.org. Now part 2 of Dr. Joe Stowell's message, Stewards of God's Treasure.

[Stowell:] For those of us who will move and mix in the masses of America, we just need to know that we are being trained in this season with the treasure of the gospel, and we take the treasure of this gospel into the trouble of these times. For us, our suffering may not be measured in imprisonment. It may not be measured in the discounting of wealth or health. For us the challenge of our strength and courage may very well be, are we willing to be intimidated, to be maligned, to be marginalized? Are we willing to be called bigoted and old-fashioned? Are

we willing to not even be heard in so much of a sense because this culture is so very foreign to the tenets of the gospel?

Nobody likes to be rejected. I personally like to be liked. Most of us do. I haven't met many people who don't like to be liked ... Well, a few I have, but not many. To be rejected and to be called "uncredible" is a measure of suffering that God will call us to bear in this culture.

Some of us will move into the urban centers with the treasure of this gospel, into urban settings where the despair is so deep that philosophical underpinnings and the statements of women at a conference or university professor really seem very irrelevant, urban settings in which the despair and pain are so deep that there seem to be no solutions. And God will call us to take the treasure of the gospel into these desperate, despairing segments of our society. And our suffering may very well be the fact that we work there for years and years with little evident gain, where we are just faithfully plowing the rough and crusty soil, where we cling to the smallest of victories because there are no large victories seemingly ever won. And we will face the trouble of being faithful in a difficult environment.

Some of us will take the treasure of this gospel that is entrusted to our care into rural areas, where we will minister our whole lives, and no one will ever know our name, and we will never be invited to speak anyplace, and we will never write a pamphlet or a book. We will minister for years unknown, unheralded, underpaid, and the trouble for us will be to ask, why was I put in this outpost? And the suffering of a seeming sense of insignificance may very well trouble the treasure of the gospel in our hands.

Others of us will be called by God to take the treasure of the gospel into other places on this planet around the world. Some of our international students will go back home to places where the political turmoil is so deep that imprisonment is very real as a possibility for Jesus Christ. We have on our campus in this freshman class a student whose father in Colombia this moment is a hostage and has been since last fall for the cause of the treasure of Jesus Christ. Think of that.

I received a letter this week from the parents of one of our graduates last year. She is a student who came from mainland China, Communist China, to study here. Let me read an excerpt of their perspective on what it means to take the gospel, the treasure of the gospel, into the troubling environment of a place like that. In the midst of their letter they say, "We came from the house church of China. Although in these years we have been persecuted and under a lot of political pressure," but they write, "our Lord is still faithful. He heard the prayer of the believers both in China and overseas. He enables the gospel spreading around the nation, and many, many people became believers. Indeed," he writes, "this is not the work of man but the work and power of the Holy Spirit. However, the harvest field is so big. We need more young people to serve the Lord there." Then he says this of his daughter: "Rebecca is going back to China. There are a lot of unknown difficulties that she will have to face, but we believe that as long as we walk in the will of God and have a heart of being willing to suffer for God, God will lead her and God will empower her." What a testimony to people in other parts of this planet who take the treasure of the gospel into such troubling environments: the persecution, physical, material imprisonment for the glory of Jesus Christ.

We just need to know that for all of us who take the treasure of the gospel, we will take the treasure of the gospel into troubled places, and suffering will be a measured part of our portion. But we should not be surprised. Did we think that the adversary would lie silent, with arms folded, merely watching us carry out the very redemptive power that spells his doom? Did we think that?

So Paul says, “Timothy, guard the treasure that has been entrusted to your care, and do not be timid, and do not be ashamed of me, the prisoner of the gospel, who is willing to suffer by the very power of God.”

I have to say that if that’s all we had in this text, it would be a rather compelling call for us to take this treasure and to be trained in it, but it would be troubling—wouldn’t it?—to think that we were scheduling our lives to an environment in which there would be at times measures of suffering. It’s not really, I don’t think, a real happy thought. But that’s not the end of the text. Paul told Timothy, “Timothy, God has not given us the spirit of fear, but rather you and I take tools for triumph in the midst of the trouble as we take this treasure out.” He says, “You know what God has given to us to enable us as tools in this task of the treasure? He has given us the spirit of power, He has given us the spirit of love, and He has given us the spirit of the ability to manage ourselves in discipline, that we be not diminished or distracted by the adversary.”

The power sources in Scripture for us are the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, who wants to use us as a channel to work through us. And when we submit ourselves and give our wills away to Him, who really knows best, then He lets His unusual supernatural power flow through us. The power of prayer, where God meets us and we meet Him, and He puts all of life and ministry in perspective, where we plead for courage and strength, and He grants it as a gift of grace. The power of His Word that gives us the courage to go on. The power of His Word to proclaim in any hostile environment, and the truth of the Word that cuts like a two-edged sword. There is no human philosophy, there are no bonds of imprisonment, there is no ridicule or marginalization or death itself that can ever dull the edge of the truth of God as a powerful instrument in the Spirit’s hand through you.

And love ... the ability to love God so much that you’ll give everything for Him, since He gave everything for you. To love God enough that you give up schedules of comfort and ease to do even the hard things for Him. To love God enough that you give your life to the cause of the treasure of the gospel. To love people enough that you proclaim the truth of God and the gospel with tears running down your eyes with compassion toward even the worst kind of people in this world, so that when they get near us, they feel in us a certain warmth, a certain kindness, a solid compassion that becomes compelling to their souls.

To be disciplined enough in our lives to say no to what we want to do and say yes to what we ought to do. To be self-controlled enough to say no to pleasure that would destroy us and yes to sanctification that will make us, mold us, and empower us.

These are the tools, and I have to tell you that it is my prayer that you will give your life to the development of the power ministries of the Spirit and the Word and prayer, that you will schedule your life to love God more than anything else and to love others around you, whether they are like you or not. The triumphant tool of discipline and self-control will ready your life for this treasure that’s been entrusted to your care.

[Gauger:] From a convocation address in 2004, that’s Dr. Joe Stowell speaking on 2 Timothy 1:8–9, his message, Stewards of God’s Treasure. That message is part of the eighteen-message collection we’re calling our Hall of Presidents series, available at moodypresents.org. More on that in a moment, but first, with today being our concluding message from the Dr. Stowell era, we wanted to take a bit of a glance back in history and show you what it was like for Dr. Stowell in his final moments as president. We do it with a bit of a retrospective. The first voice you’re about to hear is Dr. George Sweeting, as Dr. Stowell is installed as seventh

president. Then we hear Dr. Stowell speaking wistfully as he looks back over those many years of his presidency. Again, here is Dr. George Sweeting setting the whole thing up.

[Sweeting:] This is an unforgettable day in the life of Moody Bible Institute.

[Gauger:] September 28, 1987.

[Speaker:] President Stowell, today you're to be installed as the seventh president of the Moody Bible Institute. We rejoice with you today and trust that God will bless you in your leadership as he has your six predecessors.

[Gauger:] And with that Dr. Stowell took to the pulpit.

[Stowell:] Good morning on this inaugural day. We lift our faces to the Lord with the psalmist who has said, "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord while I live. I will sing praises to my God while I have being."

[Gauger:] January 31, 2005, some eighteen years later Dr. Joe Stowell in a Founder's Week farewell.

[Stowell:] I will never forget the day I came in July 1986 to meet with the search committee. I flew into Chicago all by my little old self. I took a cab, and the cab let me out at the corner of Chicago and LaSalle. I stood there in my summer suit and briefcase. I got out of the cab, and I realized that I was on the brink of something overwhelming. It was like the city didn't care, the buses and cabs buzzing by, and the rush of it all. People have asked me in the last couple of months, what have you learned over the last eighteen years? It's what God has taught me over the last eighteen years. You know, you come to a place like Moody believing you might have an impact on Moody for God and then eighteen years later realizing Moody has had an impact on you, and that you're a far different person, and that it's been necessary for you to have passed by and passed through the Moody Bible Institute. Some of the things that God has taught me: He's given me a love for the city. I didn't have that before I came. I've learned since coming to Moody that the cause of Jesus Christ is really about the coming generation, really about young people, young people that bring such passion. Our students believe they're going to get their world for God. I love that about them! I'm rooting for the kids. I'm rooting for this new generation coming up who will take their world for Jesus Christ. I'm very thankful for that.

Which reminds me that I've learned here how much I need Jesus, how desperately dependent I am on Him. I'll be forever grateful, but I want to be sure that you know that it is all and only because of Him, and without Him I could do nothing at all. I am no more than just a pilgrim. I'm just sojourning, a short time to make this trip, and then His grace. I'll be forever grateful that my pilgrimage moved through eighteen years at Moody Bible Institute.

[Gauger:] Dr. Joseph M. Stowell III, seventh president of the Moody Bible Institute. His message today, Stewards of God's Treasure, as well as the retrospective you just heard, is a part of the package of messages we're calling the Hall of Presidents, eighteen messages on nine CDs, starting with D. L. Moody, a historic and rare recording of his actual voice. We have dramatized sermons from Moody's notes. You'll hear a message from R. A. Torrey, his actual voice, Is the Bible the Word of God?—a man who speaks powerfully, born more than a hundred years ago, and we've captured it in this message that you'll hear as part of the collection. James M. Gray, Will Houghton, Dr. George Sweeting asking, What Is a Christian? as well as an in-depth conversation you'll hear nowhere else other than this Hall of Presidents series with Paul

Nyquist, the newly appointed ninth president of Moody. Eighteen messages on nine CDs. How do you get it? Go to our Web site, moodypresents.org, and click on the Hall of Presidents button. That's moodypresents.org. I'm Jon Gauger, saying thanks for listening, and do come back next week when we hear from Dr. Michael Easley, right here on *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents.