

Dwight Lyman Moody: American Evangelist

Born 5 February 1837

Died 22 December 1899



D. L. Moody was born the sixth of nine children in Northfield, Massachusetts. His father was a bricklayer and an alcoholic who died when Dwight was four years old, leaving the family bankrupt and in poverty. D. L.'s mother, Betsy, endeavored to bring the children up in a Christian environment and she took them to church and Sunday school.

Although Betsy tried to keep the family together, hard times and the need for money resulted in some of the children, including Dwight, to leave home to find work. Dwight worked with one of his brothers on a farm for a while, but then he tired of farm life and when he was seventeen years old he decided to go to Boston to seek his fortune. D. L. became a clerk in his uncle's shoe store, and one of the work requirements was to attend Mount Vernon Congregational Church.

Moody's Sunday school teacher at the church, a dry-goods salesman by the name of Edward Kimball, set his heart on winning the young man to Christ. After praying about the matter, Kimball arranged to visit D. L. at the shoe store. The story continues in Mr. Kimball's words,

I determined to speak to him about Christ and about his soul and started down to Holton's shoe store. When I was nearly there I began to wonder whether I ought to go in just then during business hours. I thought that possibly my call might embarrass the boy, and that when I went away the other clerks would ask who I was, and taunt him with my efforts in trying to make him a good boy. In the meantime I had passed the store, and discovering this, I determined to make a dash for it and have it over at once. I found Moody in the back part of the building wrapping up shoes. I went up to him at once, and putting my hand on his shoulder, I made what I afterward thought was a very weak plea for Christ. I don't know just what words I used, nor could Mr. Moody tell. I simply told him of Christ's love for him and the love Christ wanted in return. That was all there was. It seemed the young man was just ready for the light that then broke upon him, and there, in the back of the store in Boston, he gave himself and his life to Christ.

Of his experience D. L. said that he felt that he was in a new world, that the sun shone brighter and he had never known such peace. He commented that "Before my conversion I worked towards the Cross, but since then I have worked from the Cross; then I worked to be saved, now I work because I am saved."

Two years later Moody moved to Chicago where he again worked as a shoe salesman and became very involved with a variety of Sunday School classes in the Plymouth Congregational Church and other ministries. He was very good at rounding up boys from the streets, and his zeal produced the largest Sunday School in Chicago, having attendance of 1,500 children weekly.

When D. L. Moody was 23 years old he accompanied a dying Sunday School teacher to the homes of all the girls in his class. The man was greatly concerned about the salvation

of the girls, and as they went from home to home he was able to win them all for Christ. Moody was so affected by this he decided soul winning was really the only important thing for him to do. He made a vow to tell some person about Jesus each day, and he decided to do the Lord's work full time.

In 1862 Moody married Emma Charlotte Revell and they had three children, Emma (born in 1864), William Revell (1869) and Paul Dwight (1879). While his family was growing, Moody's work was expanding as well and he held meetings with the Christian Commission, was the president of the Chicago YMCA, and on February 28, 1864 started a church which is now known as Moody Church.



D. L. felt that God was calling him to more evangelism, and three things helped prepare him. The first was when he heard Henry Moorehouse preach for seven nights from the text John 3:16. In private Moorehouse told Moody, "Teach what the Bible says, not your own words, and show people how much God loves them." Moody's preaching became much more effective.



Second was the addition of Ira A. Sankey to his team. The first time Moody heard Ira Sankey sing he said, "You will have to come to Chicago and help me. I've been looking for you for eight years." Sankey left his job and joined Moody in his ministry in 1871.

The third incident was the Chicago fire and Moody's subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit. The night of October 8, 1871 while Ira Sankey was singing the closing song, the sound of fire trucks and church bells signaled that Chicago was on fire. The YMCA building, the church and the parsonage were all destroyed. Moody realized more and more how little his personal talents were, and how much he needed the Spirit's power to continue the work God was calling him to do. This realization was sharpened by conversations he had with two women who sat on the front pew of his church. While he was preaching he would glance at them and he could tell they were praying. After the service they told him, "We have been praying for you." "Why don't you pray for the people?" Mr. Moody asked. "Because you need the power of the Spirit," was the reply. Moody remembered thinking



I thought I had the power. I had the largest congregation in Chicago, and there were many conversions. I was in a sense satisfied. But right along those two godly women kept praying for me, and their earnest talk about anointing for special service set me thinking. I asked them to come and talk with me, and they poured out their hearts in prayer that I might receive the filling of the Holy Spirit. There came a great hunger into my soul. I did not know what it was. I began to cry out as I never did before. I really felt that I did not want to live if I could not have this power for service.

It was while Moody was traveling the east coast raising funds to build a new church that he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Of the experience he said,

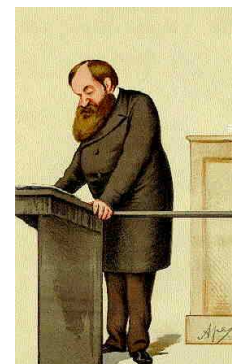
One day, in the city of New York, oh what a day! I cannot describe it. I seldom refer to it. It's almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say that God was revealed to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths; and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world—it would be as the small dust of the balance.



In 1873 Moody was invited to England to conduct evangelistic meetings and they were so successful that invitations came from all over the British Isles to conduct more meetings. Over the course of two years D. L. Moody and Ira Sankey traveled throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland ministering to overflow crowds. It is

estimated that Moody preached to several million people that many thousands gave their lives to Christ.

The awakening in the British Isles became world news, and invitations for city-wide crusades came from America. The first meeting occurred in Brooklyn beginning October 31, 1875, and subsequent meetings were held in Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Boston, St. Louis, Atlanta and San Francisco. These meetings were also very successful, with large crowds and many decisions for Christ. It was during this time that the Chicago Evangelization Society was established. This later became Moody Bible Institute.



Moody's last crusade was in Kansas City in November, 1899 and on November 16th he preached his last sermon on Excuses, preaching

from the text of Luke 14:16-24. He became very ill that night with heart trouble and died on December 22nd. He was buried in his home town of Northfield, Massachusetts.

Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal—a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever.

--D. L. Moody

References:

Martin Luther Had a Wife (includes a chapter about D. L. and Emma Moody) by William Peterson, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton IL, 1983.

www.wholesomewords.org/biography/biomood4.html

www.biblebelievers.com/moody_sermons/m22.html

To hear a recording of D. L. Moody reading the Beatitudes go to the following link:

<http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/mydownloads/viewcat.php?cid=24>