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Baptist Cleric To Challenge 'Miracle Man'

Rev. Best Faces

Rev. Bosworth

By LOUIS HOFFERBERT
Press Staff Writer

A Baptist minister and a "divine healer" will meet in the Coliseum at 7 tonight in an open debate on the question of modern miracles.

The meeting was quickly arranged today after the Houston Baptist Pastors Conference yesterday heard a bitter attack on "faith healers" and "religious racketeers" and approved a challenge to the Rev. William Branham and the Rev. F. F. Bosworth, who are conducting an evangelistic meeting that features "miracles every day."

There was a disagreement today over which side issued the challenge, but it was agreed the debate would be held at the Coliseum, where the Branham-Bosworth services are in progress.

Equal Time

The time allotted to each speaker will be determined just before the debate begins, but both sides agree the time will be divided equally.



REV. W. E. BEST

REV. F. F. BOSWORTH

They both talked at once.

Champion for the Baptists will be the Rev. W. E. Best, pastor of the Tabernacle Baptist Church, who blasted the "divine healers" in a talk before the ministers' conference.

Rev. Bosworth said today he will take the platform to present his side, and was not sure whether Rev. Branham also would speak.

His Book

The Rev. Best said the Baptists were accepting the challenge laid down by the Rev. Bosworth, inviting anyone to disprove statements in his book entitled, "Jesus the Healer."

The Rev. Bosworth said the challenge came from the Baptists and that he was "happy to discuss the question at any length."

The Rev. Bosworth said he is willing to cancel the usual "healing service" tonight and devote the full time to the debate, but is not willing to take the same time on other nights.

Healing Needed

"We will be glad to continue the debate at some other hour every day for a month, if the Baptist ministers wish to do so," the Rev. Bosworth said. "But our healing services are too important to be canceled more than once."

The length of time to be allotted to each speaker will be left to the principals.

The Rev. Best said it was up to the Rev. Bosworth to fix the limits.

The Rev. Bosworth said the Rev. Best could "have as much time as he wants, and we will take the same."

Needs No Support

The Rev. Best said he was not sure if other Baptist ministers will accompany him to the meeting tonight, but said some probably will.

"I need no moral support," the Rev. Best said, "but it may be wise to have some police protection."

Both of the leading participants in tonight's debate issued statements today setting out their positions.

"The Baptists have always believed in the freedom of worship," the Rev. Best said, "but we also believe we should expose that which is in error."

Apostle Paul

"The Apostle Paul says: 'For there are many deceivers whose mouths must be stopped . . . who subvert whole houses, teaching

things they ought not for filthy lucre's sake.'

"We do not believe that Christ bore our physical infirmities as well as our sins on the Cross, and that today we should not be sick."

The Rev. Bosworth, who described his associate, the Rev. Branham, as "a man perfectly sincere in his work," declared:

His Booklet

"In a booklet entitled 'Why Some in Our Day May Fail to be Healed' I have given 22 unanswerable proofs of Christ's present attitude toward divine healing."

"For 25 years I have had an open challenge to disprove the statements, but that challenge has never been taken up before."

"I am happy to meet with the Baptist minister and discuss the question, and if I can be shown that I am wrong I will publicly admit it and will challenge my teaching."

"My statements are Scripture-proven."

The Baptists, the Rev. Bosworth said "are just not well posted" on the matter of divine healing, and added:

"But there is no personal quarrel involved here. I honor any man who opposed what he thinks is wrong."

The Branham-Bosworth revival group has been holding services in Houston for two weeks.

Life Story

At meetings this week, according to newspaper and poster advertisements, the Rev. Branham will tell his life story, including an account of how an angel visited him on May 7, 1946, bringing a message that he had been chosen to perform miracles of divine healing.

Advertisements of the meeting also have been carried on street banners, streetcar cards and on the radio. They feature the statement: "Incurable diseases and afflictions supernaturally diagnosed and healed."

The meetings have drawn an estimated 5000 people every day.

20,000 Wanted

The Coliseum will seat approximately 20,000 persons and the Rev. Bosworth said today he "hopes every seat will be filled" to hear the debate.

The Baptists, also anticipating a record attendance, declared yesterday they would agree to the debate "in the largest auditorium in Houston, or an open field if necessary."

When he brought the question of "divine healers" and "religious racketeers" before the ministers' conference yesterday, the Rev. Best pounded a table vehemently and declared:

"These deceivers should be exposed. They are leading the people astray."

"I am not opposed to divine healing, but I am opposed to 'divine healers' as such."

He referred to the Rev. Branham by name and declared:

"We ought to run him out of town."

22 Invalids Just Asking for Prayer

By BEN KAPLAN
Press Staff Writer

They came in wheel chairs and cots, in the arms of loved ones, hoping for the miracle and clinging desperately to a faith they hoped would make shriveled limbs sound.

There were 22 of them, unable to walk, crowded up to catch every word from the Rev. F. F. Bosworth, upholding faith-healing Rev. William Branham, in his debate with the Rev. W. E. Best, the Baptist pastor who charged the Rev. Branham was bewitching his audience night after night.

Hope for Prayer

The 22 had been to the Coliseum and Auditorium night after night themselves, hoping the Rev. Branham would make an individual prayer over them, so they'd be well.

Somehow, he hadn't gotten around to them. But in the two weeks he'll continue here, they had faith that he would. Then they'd be able to leave their sickbeds and wheelchairs, hale and hearty.

They had the faith. They were sure the Rev. Branham had the power through God's Spirit, to help them get well.

There were many Baptists in the crowd to cheer the Rev. Best last night, although they were greatly outnumbered.

Polite Hearing

The Rev. William T. Richey appealed to the audience to give each speaker a polite hearing.

"When you agree with the speaker, say 'amen' and when you disagree, say 'no,'" he asked.

For nearly four hours, the Coliseum rocked with "amens" and "nos."

When the Rev. Best made a point, the Rev. Bosworth would rush to the microphone on the stage from which the speakers held forth and dramatically ask those in the audience who had been cured through faith to stand.

Hundreds Rise

Each time hundreds would rise.

"How many of you are Baptists?" the Rev. Bosworth shouted.

At least 100 stood up.

"No man has the power to heal!" declared the Rev. Best.

To Mrs. W. E. Wilbanks of 712 Teetshorn, the Rev. Best misrepresented the slight, black-haired evangelist who has been preaching to crowds of 5000 nightly.

She's a Baptist

"I'm a Baptist myself," said Mrs. Wilbanks. "Brother Branham does not claim the power of divine healing. It is simply that faith and the spirit of God working through him heal people. Rev. Best is misrepresenting Baptist sentiment in attacking Rev. Branham."

Ordinarily, the way the miracle cures are developed, persons in the audience fill out cards which bear a number and their name. The Rev. Branham picks a number and prays for the cure of that person. Occasionally, he selects a person at random.

Those attending are informed that it is possible they won't be reached during the evening for an individual prayer—but they come, night after night, hoping that their turn will arrive.

Woman Reborn

Mrs. Mary Georgia Hardy, 708 Columbia, said she was "reborn three years ago," but that she first experienced the wonders of faith healing 18 years ago.

"After the birth of my second child, I was a nervous wreck, but faith healing made me well and I've had two children since," said Mrs. Hardy, attends the Assembly of God Church at 18th and Ashland in the Heights.

Sitting next to her, Mrs. Gray Walker of 2501 Blodgett, pointed to her four-year-old grandchild, Diane Cox.

She's Well Now

"Diane was born with a clubfoot. A doctor wanted to put the foot in a cast but our Assembly of God pastor, the Rev. J. C. Miner, suggested we try prayer. We did. Gradually—over a period of weeks—the foot straightened out. Diane is well now."

One week ago, during a general prayer by Rev. Branham, Mrs. W. E. Miller who lives on the Genoa-Alameda road, was suddenly cured of chronic sinus trouble, she said.

"I was simply praying for others when it happened," she said.

When the Rev. Best shouted there were those "who used sorcery to bewitch people, so that people are sincerely misled and say it's the power of God," James Ayres, a commercial photographer of 1610 Rusk, agreed.

"Branham puts on a show," said Mr. Ayres. "Somehow he never gets around to the cripples and the persons who have arthritis. He simply hypnotizes his audience."

8000 Hear Faith Healer, Pastor Debate

Fists Swing, Words

Fly at Coliseum

8000 Crowd Into Coliseum as Baptist Pastor Challenges Curing Claims of 'Miracle Men'

By LOUIS HOFFERBERT

Press Staff Writer

A thousand years and more ago learned men would debate over how many angels could stand on the point of a needle.

Then they would have a fight to see who won.

The atomic age was forgotten and time rolled backward in Houston last night when some 8000 persons crowded into the Coliseum to hear a Baptist minister and an evangelistic preacher debate over the power of divine healing.

Fight Follows

Bystanders broke up the fight before the question was settled.

The principal debaters had no hand in the fight—that was in the audience—but they almost wrestled for possession of the microphone at times as they shot heated verbal barbs back and forth.

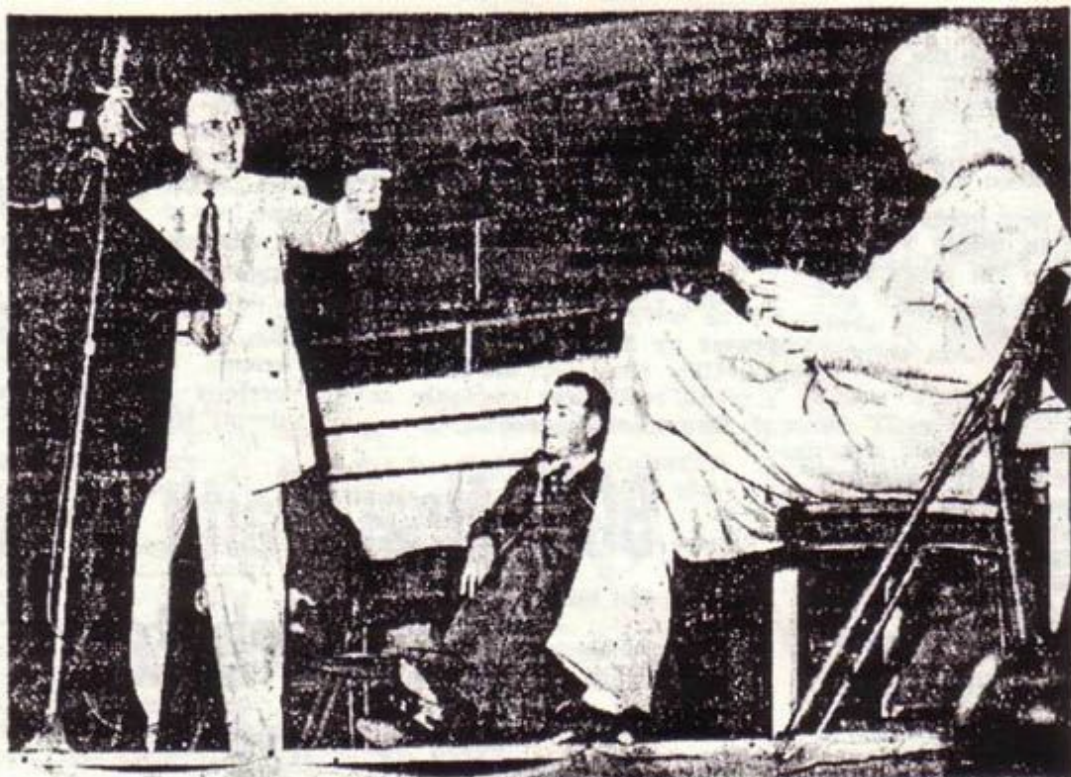
On one side was the Rev. W. E. Best, fiery pastor of the Tabernacle Baptist Church, who appeared as the spokesman for the Houston Baptist Pastors Conference and took the view that power of divine healing died with the Apostles.

Audience Testifies

On the other was the Rev. F. F. Bosworth, suave, balding itinerant evangelist who offered the testimony of the audience itself to prove that miracles of healing are accomplished every day.

During the three-hour meeting, broken by frequent outbursts of applause and disapproval from the audience, the principals agreed on only two points—that Christ and His disciples did have the power of divine healing; and that you can't believe what you read in the newspapers.

While the argument rolled back and forth a half dozen sick and afflicted lay on cots and stretchers in front of the platform, brought there in the hope that they would be cured by miracles. But no heal-



"THIS IS NOT HEAVEN ON EARTH." shouts Rev. W. E. Best, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church, as Rev. F. F. Bosworth, an out-of-town evangelist, sits quietly listening. The debate between the two preachers centered around whether any man has the power of miraculous healing.



A NEAR BATTLE WAS AVERTED by quick thinking ushers during the debate between a Houston Baptist preacher and an out-of-town evangelist in Sam Houston Coliseum Tuesday night. The coatless man in the foreground here, Martin Jones of 1315 Shearn, and the son of Rev. H. T. Dennis exchanged light blows before they were pulled apart by ushers. Rev. Mr. Dennis is seen in the back being held by one usher and shielded by another, with his son beside him.

ing was attempted by the Rev. Bosworth or by his associate, the Rev. William Branham, whose activities during a two-week meeting brought on the debate in the first place.

Comes the Battle

The fight, if it could be called that, was brief and inconclusive. It came near the end of the meeting while the Rev. Best was being pressed to answer a question on whether his appearance had been "cleared" by the "publicity department of the Baptist organization of this district."

The Rev. Best turned to a dozen other Baptist ministers seated in a group to the right of the platform and said:

"I'll let them answer."

The group moved in a body toward the platform while other members of the audience crowded close.

Suddenly a fist lashed out. It struck Martin Jones, 1315 Shearn, a salesman in a downtown store, across the nose and inflicted a slight cut.

Mr. Jones whipped off his coat and whirled around, but could not find his assailant.

Fist Waver

Mr. Jones retired to the sidelines, grumbling, while a tall, black-haired young man dashed in front of the platform, waved his clenched fists and shouted:

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."

In the confusion the Rev. Best stepped down from the platform and the group of Baptist ministers disappeared.

Earlier in the meeting statements made by the Rev. Best brought a heated interruption from the Rev. Raymond Richey, pastor of the Evangelistic Temple, who indignantly refused to remain on the platform with the speaker and ostentatiously placed his chair in the audience.

Rev. Bosworth First

The debate itself started quietly enough, with the Rev. Bosworth taking the platform first.

A tall, gray-haired and slightly balding man, with a slow, soft voice, the Rev. Bosworth outlined his doctrine that sever. Hebrew compound names—he called them redemptive names—are proof that the spirit of God still heals through faith. He cited the name Jehovah-Japhat, interpreted as "the Lord that healeth" as the final proof.

The Rev. Bosworth called upon the audience to attest to healing miracles. When he asked for all who had been cured miraculously to stand several hundred in the audience rose to their feet.

He Has the Letters

The Rev. Bosworth also declared he has "thousands and thousands" of letters and testimonials telling of miraculous cures.

The Rev. Best sat quietly during the long opening talk and the Rev. Bosworth concluded without interruption.

But the Rev. Best did not fare so well.

He opened with a declaration that the audience was being "sincerely misled" and was immediately greeted with cries of "No! No! No!" from the crowd.

Proof by Scriptures

"You can prove anything by testimonials," the Rev. Best went on. "What I am interested in is what the Scriptures say."

He started to read from a booklet written by the Rev. Bosworth, when a member of the Branham-Bosworth group on the platform ran forward, seized the microphone over the Rev. Best's shoulder and shouted:

"I call on you all to witness. He's not reading from the Bible."

"What difference does it make?" the Rev. Best shouted back. "Mr. Bosworth also read from writings that are not the Bible."

The Rev. Bosworth, who had taken a seat at the edge of the platform, nodded, then stood up to agree and the crowd quietened.

More Interruptions

Again and again during his rapid, heated declaration, sprinkled with biblical quotations, the Rev. Best was interrupted by cries of "No. No." from the the audience, but he also was greeted with bursts of applause and shouts of "amen" at some points.

The sharpest exchanges came in the closing minutes of rebuttal.

"The Bible says 'He bore our sicknesses,' the Rev. Bosworth shouted. "Whose does that mean."

Cries of "yours" and "yours and mine" rang out from the floor.

Gray Hair, Glasses

The Rev. Best ran back to the microphone, pointed a finger at the Rev. Bosworth and shouted:

"Why does he have gray hair? Why does he wear glasses?"

The Rev. Bosworth didn't answer.

But he raised the question of whether the Rev. Best officially represented Houston Baptists.

"No. No. No. No." came from the audience again.

"Where is his idea of religious tolerance," the Rev. Bosworth demanded. "If he wants to run any preacher out of town."

Scriptures Again

The Rev. Best ran back and the two wrestled for the microphone as the Rev. Best shouted:

"When he shows me he has the power of the Apostles I will believe."

"What do the Scriptures teach?"

"They teach the opposite of everything you have said here tonight," the Rev. Bosworth shot back, and the crowd roared.

At the very last the Rev. Branham walked slowly to the platform amid prolonged applause and spoke briefly. He is dark and slender with deep-set eyes and a soft, persuasive voice. He declared:

"I have never taken any credit for healing, or claimed to have the power to heal. Jesus didn't take such credit, but said it was the power of His Father."

'Give Us More'

"Our friend (referring to the Rev. Best) has spoken of 'religious racketeers.' During this meeting 3000 have been saved. If that is racketeering, God give us more racketeers."

"If I am not doing good in Houston you won't have to run me out, I'll leave."

"No. No. No. No. came the shouts from the audience."

"But if you want me to stay . . ."

the Rev. Branham concluded with a smile, and the applause was deafening.

As the Rev. Branham left the platform a group of followers quickly surrounded him and the group marched in almost military fashion to a rear door and the evangelist disappeared into the night.

His associates ended the meeting with prayers.