

The Moment

He was tired from the train ride and having to sit through two hours of oration even though it was delivered by a widely acclaimed speaker. But either the man's message was too long, or too empty, or perhaps he was just too restless about what he was going to say when it was his turn. He knew that the odds were great that no one would even remember what he had to say. But this was the very chance that he had been waiting for.

This was his moment. All of his life he had dreamed of this, the chance to be at a crucial point in history where he could step in and with his thoughts and words change the world. Most everyone dreams as a kid of saving the world and being a hero in a thousand different ways. But when they grow up, the childish part of this goes away and leaves the basic yearning to do good.

He had listened to so many impassioned speeches by politicians, lawyers, and preachers which had true impact. He knew that it was destiny that determined whether he might be placed in that kind of situation. And he had prepared well. All of his study and efforts at public speaking were about to be tested in the greatest arena of all.

He believed in the Great Good and loved it with all of his heart. He believed in freedom and the equality of all mankind. The Constitution of the United States was, as far as he was concerned, the greatest document ever written. But there were those who had limited its interpretation. The unity of the country for people of every belief and background must be preserved at all costs. The grave difficulties and tremendous suffering should never be minimized or forgotten. It was critical that the nation remember and be preserved.

It was now time for him to step up to the podium. The speech that he had prepared would only take a few minutes to deliver, but he hoped that it had the power to save a nation. He was in a position to take a lead, and this was his defining moment. He unfolded a sheet of paper and began to speak:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us--that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion--that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Heard Lowry, 1997