

Billy Graham still preaching, filling stadiums at 86_120604

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A screen
projects
an image
of Billy
Graham,
86, at the
four-day
Greater
Los
Angeles
Billy
Graham
Crusade
at the
Rose
Bowl in
Pasadena,
Calif.

Billy Graham still preaching, filling stadiums at 86

By Marshall Allen

Religion News Service

PASADENA, Calif. (RNS)—At 86, Billy Graham moves a little more slowly. But his four-day California crusade revealed the evangelist still can fill stadiums with his classic presentation of the gospel.

More than 312,000 people heard the evangelist preach during the Greater Los Angeles Billy Graham Crusade at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif. Crusade officials said 12,539 people committed their lives to Christ.

Some experts in evangelism question the relevance and effectiveness of massive revival meetings. But Graham said people respond in greater numbers today to his invitations than they did when he started his ministry.

In 1949, about 350,000 people attended the eight-week crusade in Los Angeles that garnered the evangelist national attention.

Experts describe Graham's contribution to modern Christianity in superlatives. He's practically a Christian statesman and has been called "America's pastor."



Worshippers clap and raise their hands at the Greater Los Angeles Billy Graham Crusade. More than 312,000 people heard the evangelist preach during the four-day event at the Rose Bowl, and officials said 12,539 people committed their lives to Christ. (Lee Celano Photos)

Graham has preached the gospel to 210 million people in person, more than anyone else in history, and has trained thousands of international evangelists to spread the gospel. He has been called the greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul.

But in an interview in Pasadena, Graham said he does not even consider himself a leader in the evangelical movement. He refused to take credit for effective strategies, attributing his success to the work of the Holy Spirit.

“I think I'm just a sinner saved by the grace of God,” Graham said.

Graham no longer is the youthful evangelist who crisscrossed the globe preaching the message of Jesus Christ. He used a walker and the assistance of his son, Franklin, to make his way across the stage at the Rose Bowl.

Franklin Graham now runs the day-to-day operations of the Charlotte, N.C.-based Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Billy Graham suffers from Parkinson's disease and tires easily, so he was sequestered during much of his stay in Pasadena. In his heyday, Graham said he preached to more people on the street than in his revival meetings.

Graham's health has become a constant topic of conversation, and people ask which crusade will be his last. The evangelist spent most of the past year in bed after breaking his hip and pelvis in two separate falls.

Now he preaches from a pulpit that allows him to sit down when he gets tired. He is scheduled to preach at one more crusade, in June in New York City, and said he might preach at another after that if his health permits.

Health struggles and the realities of aging have not made Graham dwell on dying, however. He said he reflected on his mortality in 1934, at age 16, when he recommitted his life to Christ at a revival meeting.

“I'm happy to go,” he said of dying. “I'm ready to go. I'm looking forward to it.”

Graham's wife, Ruth Bell Graham, 84, no longer accompanies her husband to crusades. Graham said he always is eager to return to her.

“We have a romance in our 80s by looking into each other's eyes,” said Graham.

“She's been an invalid for many years, and I love her more now, by far, than when I first married her.”

Marshall Allen writes for the Pasadena Star-News of Pasadena, Calif.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.