

Billy Graham Warns of Fire and Brimstone in 'Final' Book

In his latest book, evangelist Billy Graham declares that non-Christians are doomed to live in a fiery hell, a message his son said he has wanted to share for several years.

"There were some family members who thought that he shouldn't do it because it was a negative subject," said Franklin Graham in an interview Friday (Oct. 2). "And Daddy said, 'It is a negative subject. It's a real subject. It's a real place.'"

"Where I Am: Heaven, Eternity and Our Life Beyond," released this week and billed as the "final work" by the 96-year-old, offers a vivid depiction of hell that harkens back to his youthful zeal as an emerging evangelist on the national stage.

"As a Christian and a preacher of the Gospel, I am always grieved to have to interrupt a marvelous picture, such as eternal life in Heaven, to talk about another eternal place that Jesus calls Hell," Graham writes. "It has no similarities to what is typically called home, nor is Hell a resting place, a holding place, or a graveyard. Hell is a burning inferno."

Scholars who have followed Graham's ministry say his words are a significant shift from the approach he took after the first decade of his ministry, which gained prominence in a Los Angeles crusade in 1949.

"In the 1950s, especially the early years, he could be pretty specific and colorful, but as early as 1954 during the London Crusade he noted that he was not sure if fire would be involved," said William Martin, author of a 1991 biography of Graham and a senior fellow for religion and public policy at Rice University's Baker Institute.

Michael Hamilton, chair of the history department of

evangelical Seattle Pacific University, said Graham spoke often of “the hell of the contemporary state of the world and the hell of the chaotic personal life. Those are the two hells that are really dominant through most of his ministry, though in the earlier years he talked more about an actual Bible hell.”

But Franklin Graham said of his father: “He’s always pictured hell as what the Bible teaches.”

In the new book, Billy Graham hedges his bets, but just a bit.

“I can say with certainty that if there is no literal fire in Hell, then God is using symbolic language to indicate something far worse,” he writes. “Just as there are no words to adequately describe the grand beauty of Heaven, we cannot begin to imagine just how horrible the place called Hell is.”

Matt Baugher, W Publishing Group’s senior vice president and publisher, said the book project included collaboration with Franklin Graham and Donna Lee Toney, who read portions back to the elder Graham, who suffers from macular degeneration.

The younger Graham said he encouraged his father but did not write the book.

“One of his concerns was that hell and heaven were being distorted by Hollywood,” said Franklin Graham. “And you have these films that have come out and books and so forth about heaven or hell. And my father wanted people to know what the Bible has to say about them.”

The younger Graham, who is now president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, was at the Billy Graham Library in Charlotte, N.C., on Friday, when North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory signed a bill requesting the U.S. Capitol’s National Statuary Hall include a statue of the evangelist to replace that of Charles Aycock, a former governor and white

supremacist.

"I think for another generation it will give an opportunity for my father to reach out from the grave with the gospel of Jesus Christ," Franklin Graham said. "As people read and study his life, they'll read and understand the message that he preached."

In a chapter titled "Forever Separated and Forever United," Billy Graham emphasizes his belief that individuals can choose to avoid what the Scripture describes as "unending death in a lake of fire and brimstone that burns forever."

"God does not send unrepentant souls into the pit of darkness; those souls choose their destiny," he said.

Franklin Graham said his father no longer has the Parkinson's disease-like symptoms he once had but sometimes needs people to speak up so he can hear them. He watches the morning news, football and golf on his big-screen television and keeps up with current events.

The book, filled with passages from the Bible, dwells on the evangelist's views of eternity. But it also gives glimpses of Billy Graham's personal life, including his love for his wife Ruth, who died in 2007.

"She no longer has detours to maneuver; she has traveled the smooth highway to Heaven," he writes. "I will join her soon."

Here are a few excerpts of what Billy Graham wrote about heaven and hell in "Where I Am":

HEAVEN:

"We will know morning glories that never cease because the Son will shine His eternal light upon us forever, and all of Heaven will be filled with resounding joy. Being in His presence will be our treasure. I look forward to that."

“Heaven captures the imagination, but it is not an imaginary place. It is not a fantasyland in which to dwell. It is not a place one can travel to and come back again – at least not in our earthbound life. Heaven is a literal place.”

“We need to say either yes or no. But some of us say maybe. Some of us try to straddle the fence and live in both worlds, but Jesus will not compromise with us. The Gospel plan is all set. We must accept His Son if we are to enter into His eternal kingdom. If your answer is not yes, then the choice is made.”

HELL

“You may be thinking, ‘Billy surely you do not believe all of this Hellfire and brimstone!’ My dear friends, it is not what I say that counts; it is what the Word of God says.”

“The worst kind of death is described in Scripture – unending death in a lake of fire and brimstone that burns forever. Just as we cannot fathom the wonder of living forever in glory, we cannot possibly comprehend the alternative.”

“Every person who rejects Christ and His atoning work will be cast into this horrible pit of despair. Worse will be to remember that it was by choice – that God called you to salvation but you rejected His wonderful gift. God does not send unrepentant souls into the pit of darkness; those souls choose their destiny. You’ve heard the saying, ‘They aren’t living; they are just existing!’ There will be ‘no purposeful living’ in Hell, just an existence beyond all misery.”

“You may wonder what Hell is really like. Don’t look to comedians for answers. The Bible tells you the truth. Hell is a place of sorrow and unrest, a place of wailing and a furnace of fire; a place of torment, a place of outer darkness, a place where people scream for mercy; a place of everlasting punishment.” {eoa}

© 2015 Religion News Service. All rights reserved.