

Franklin Graham: Still Preaching the Gospel as the Plane Went Down

Dear Friend,

Last month I was in South Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya. South Sudan is the world's newest nation, gaining independence in 2011, and we held a large evangelistic Crusade in the capital city of Juba in 2012. Now ethnic divisions and political rivalry have led to civil war, with fighting and lawlessness across the nation. I met separately and prayed with the country's president, Salva Kiir, and the leader of the opposition, former vice president Riek Machar, and I urged them to sign a peace agreement.

I also met with about 150 South Sudan church leaders in Juba. We worshiped together and prayed for peace and unity in their nation. These pastors care passionately about the people of their nation and about sharing the gospel, and they asked us to return for another evangelistic Crusade as soon as conditions in the country make that possible. Pray that we would be able to do this and that there will be an end to the strife in South Sudan.

In a few weeks I'll be in Barcelona, Spain, for an evangelistic Festival. Spain is a country with its own political unrest as separatist movements keep the country under constant pressure to pull apart. Secularism has spread rapidly, just as it is spreading across the rest of Europe and the United States. An increasingly large part of the population, especially among young people, accepts an "anything goes" attitude toward sexual behavior, drugs and morality in general. Spain has the highest rate of cocaine use of any nation in the world. Officially a Catholic nation,

Spain today has more people who say they have little or no interest in religion than it has actively committed Catholics. The country has twice as many Muslims as evangelical Christians.

Barcelona, the country's second-largest city, is the center of one of the major separatist movements. It is also the city with the highest concentration of Muslims—along with a number of small evangelical churches—and that is where we will be going May 1 to proclaim the gospel. Pray with us that God will open hearts and do a great work among the people of this city.

Later in May, I will lead a Crusade in Jacksonville, Florida, and three weeks after that in Lviv, a city in war-torn Ukraine. My son Will has just returned from the Philippines, where he led Crusade events in two cities, Tacloban and Cebu. He will lead a Crusade in Owensboro, Kentucky, this month and another in June in Tanzania.

Traveling in Ethiopia brought to mind a man I met there and got to know in the 1980s. Andy Meakins was a gentle giant of the faith, an Englishman who loved Jesus Christ and served Him in Africa for many years. In 1996 an Ethiopian Airlines flight was hijacked and crashed into the ocean just off the Comoros Islands after running out of fuel—you may have heard the story. The dramatic moment of impact was caught on home video and broadcast around the world. Only later did we learn of something even more dramatic happening in the cabin as the plane headed for disaster.

Andy Meakins and his wife were on that plane, seated together. The hijackers demanded to be flown to Australia even though there wasn't nearly enough fuel for that distance. As they neared the Comoros Islands in the Indian Ocean, one engine flamed out, and the pilot told passengers that the remaining engine would soon run out of fuel as well. Immediately, Andy's wife heard the snap of a seatbelt being unbuckled and turned to see her husband stand up.

“Many of us might die in this crash,” he called out, “so there’s something you need to know.” Andy then began explaining the gospel simply and urgently, moving to each part of the cabin so that everyone would hear. He invited people to place their trust in Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. A flight attendant heard Andy’s words, bowed her head, and asked Jesus to forgive her sins and come into her heart. She watched many more respond and, along with another survivor, later told the story. Of the 175 people on board, 125 died, including Andy, who was still on his feet preaching the gospel as the plane hit the water.

Every day tens of thousands of people slip from this world into eternity—the vast majority unprepared, “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph. 2:1, NKJV). We need to take every opportunity to share the love of Jesus Christ and the truth of the gospel, the only message that will make a difference to a lost soul. Just like an airplane going down, time is running out.

Andy Meakins used his life to witness every day, and he did so to his last breath. It is this same urgency that drives all we do at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association as we seek to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible. Will you be a part of this work through your prayers and your financial gifts?