

Billy Graham Is Not Dead, So Who Started the Rumor?

Billy Graham today may be quoting Mark Twain, who once famously said, "The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

Somehow, a social-media report of the iconic evangelist's demise at the age of 96 gained enormous traction late last week—despite denials from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Nevertheless, an "." Facebook page quickly gained 1 million "Likes."

Who would perpetrate such a malicious social-media hoax and why?

We may never know.

"News of religious figure Billy Graham's death spread quickly earlier [last] week causing concern among fans across the world," reported. "However, the November 2014 report has now been confirmed as a complete hoax and just the latest in a string of fake celebrity death reports. Thankfully, the 96-year-old religious figure is alive and well."

Rumors of the religious figure's alleged demise gained traction on Saturday after an ". Billy Graham" Facebook page attracted nearly one million "likes." Those who read the "About" page were given a believable account of the American Christian leader's passing:

"At about 11 a.m. ET on Saturday (Nov. 22, 2014), our beloved religious figure Billy Graham passed away. Billy Graham was born on Nov. 7, 1918 in Charlotte. He will be missed but not forgotten. Please show your sympathy and condolences by commenting on and liking this page."

Christian media quickly debunked the rumor as a sad Internet hoax.

Graham's own website noted this about his legacy:

"Mr. Graham has preached the Gospel to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history—nearly 215 million people in more than 185 countries and territories—through various meetings, including Mission World and Global Mission. Hundreds of millions more have been reached through television, video, film and webcasts," reads part of his biography on the website.

The day before Graham's 96th birthday on Nov. 7, *Charisma News* reported this:

"At 96 years old, Billy Graham's desire to share hope with the world is as strong as ever. On Nov. 7, the day Graham celebrates his birthday, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association will debut *Heaven*, a film that includes a never-before-seen message from Billy Graham.

"Graham's message was recorded last year, while the aging yet still passionate evangelist worked with a camera crew to capture his thoughts in a series of interviews at his home in Montreat, North Carolina.

"I know I'm going to heaven. I'm looking forward to it with great anticipation," said Graham, who explains in the film how people can share that same hope.