

Billy Graham's Birthday All About 'The Cross'

A 95th birthday party sounded nice.

But when Billy Graham was asked about plans for such a landmark celebration, the world-renowned evangelist raised an eyebrow.

"Would anyone want to come to my party?" Don Wilton shared on Thursday night was Mr. Graham's concern. "And he said this from the bottom of his heart."

"He's afraid people have forgotten who he is," Franklin Graham said.

Clearly, that was not the case on Thursday at the Grove Park Inn. More than 800 individuals honored Mr. Graham's 95 years of life, including Donald Trump and Rupert Murdoch, with dozens of media members clamoring for just one more glimpse of the "pastor to the presidents."

On a day when all eyes were on his 95th birthday and his new message was airing during primetime on Fox News, Mr. Graham wanted his celebration focused on one thing: the cross.

"He's the most humble man you'll ever know," North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory said. "He knows it's not about him. It's about the cross."

The evening began with a showing of *The Cross*, a 30-minute My Hope America short film featuring a gospel message Graham has passionately wanted to preach for the past three years, along with life-changing stories from musicians Lecrae and Lacey Sturm.

Franklin Graham became the night's "Matthew" host, giving a short testimony about how he waited 22 years before realizing

he “was sick and tired of being sick and tired,” and extended the invitation to accept Christ.

The evening program wrapped up with former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin sharing about her mother making a decision to follow Jesus through a televised Billy Graham crusade, which impacted her entire family for Christ.

“Billy Graham has been able to articulate this message more than anyone else,” Palin said. “He reminds us that Jesus is the only answer.”

Fox News host Greta Van Susteren finished off the night by leading a cupcake-and-candle-infused “Happy Birthday” singing group, bringing up Michael W. Smith, Lecrae, Lacey Sturm, Kathie Lee Gifford and Ricky Skaggs for musical harmony. She offered a personal gift to Mr. Graham “by not singing” herself, she said.

Graham then addressed the crowd twice at the end of the program, first to thank his ministry partner and dear friend Cliff Barrows “for all that [he has] meant to [him] through all these years,” and second to recognize his grandson Edward Graham, an Army major. “We’re so proud of you,” he said.

Will Graham, vice president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, is proud of his grandfather, whose ministry is still active long past the normal retirement age.

“He realizes the calling that God gave him is for his whole life,” Will Graham said. “It’s not just for 60 years.”

Very few know this better than Barrows, 90, who has been a ministry partner with Billy Graham for more than 60 years and took one more opportunity to thank his dear friend.

“I thank God for every remembrance of you,” Barrows said, his voice cracking. “And I praise God for the journey we’ve had ... with all my heart.”