

Franklin Graham: I Was Afraid I May Faint

As media from all over Bolivia gathered in the city of La Paz Thursday, one thing was clear: Like all of us, Bolivians are searching for hope.

During the March 8-10 Festival with Franklin Graham, more than 800 Bolivian churches will band together to freely offer that hope by preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Because of the social problems we’re having in our country, some pastors decided to invite Franklin Graham, because we know he delivers hope,” said Pastor Johnny Dueri, executive committee chairman for this weekend’s Festival de Esperanza, which translates to “Festival of Hope.”

There was just one problem. Franklin Graham was hesitant, at first, to come to this part of Bolivia to speak. He came to Santa Cruz in 1999, but the city of La Paz reaches heights of 13,500 feet, making it the highest capital city in the world.

“I wasn’t sure I would be able to preach,” said Franklin Graham. “I was afraid I may faint in front of a crowd of people, and that would be very embarrassing. But we prayed, and we felt like God was calling us to come.”

Graham arrived in La Paz several days early in order to adjust to the altitude. Still, Festival organizers have a back-up plan.

“They have provided an oxygen tank, so I can take a breath of oxygen if I need it,” Franklin Graham said with a laugh. “I don’t think I’ll need it.”

With the Festival set to begin Friday evening, excitement is building in La Paz. As local church leaders gather for final

preparations, their anticipation is palpable. It's clear that they're expecting the Holy Spirit to move in a powerful way among the people of Bolivia.

"Our society needs a deep change. It needs transformation," Johnny Dueri said. "When we see violence in the family and violence in the streets, we know something is wrong in the people's hearts."

His daughter-in-law, Monica Dueri, has worked for Samaritan's Purse in La Paz since 2009. She echoed her father-in-law's sentiments.

"There is a lot of sadness here," she said. "You see it on the people's faces. And you cannot give them jobs. You cannot give them money. You cannot give them hope. Only Christ can do that."

Monica Dueri will attend the festival all three nights. Like hundreds of other believers in La Paz, she has invited friends who don't know Christ.

"I think the hope for everyone who's taking someone is not only that they will hear the Gospel, but accept Jesus Christ as a friend and savior," she said.

Monica Dueri loves her breathtaking mountain city and believes God's work is visible in her hometown – if you just open your eyes.

"Look at the houses built on the mountains. The land isn't always steady. It can be very dangerous," she said.

But somehow, the houses stand, even as they appear to cling precariously from the steep ledges.

"It seems like someone is really holding the houses," Monica Dueri said.

She believes the same God who holds up the homes of La Paz

will move among her people this weekend. Most of all, she believes the words of Jesus Christ will spread hope.

“It’s amazing to see how the Gospel can change and transform a community.”

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