

Lithuania's Proof: 'Miracles Can Happen'

Just on the outskirts of Vilnius, Lithuania, a line of cars stretched for miles, waiting to get into the cemetery for Sunday's national holiday, All Souls Day.

Inside Siemens Arena, there was a different celebration of souls taking place Sunday night.

But first, Franklin Graham posed a simple question to the 8,500 in attendance.

"Tonight, I want to talk to you about your soul," Franklin Graham began his message on the final night of the Lithuania Festival of Hope. "Is your soul secure in the hand of Almighty God?"

The direct line of questioning hit many like an arctic blast of wind, walking off a Vilnius city bus in the middle of January.

"The way he said it," said Jurate about Franklin Graham's opening remarks. "First off, that was really shocking."

But the question prompted the 23-year-old woman to start seriously thinking about her eternal life and by the time the invitation was given, "there was a great thought of getting redeemed and having Jesus in your life," and she came forward and gave her life to Christ.

"The Bible says 'What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?' " Franklin Graham continued. "God loves you. He loves you. And your soul is valuable."

And by the time "Just As I Am" was being sung by a massive 400-member white-and-blue-robed Lithuanian choir, hundreds had their soul stirred up, and like Jurate, came forward to settle

things once and all, asking Jesus into their hearts.

After leading a packed stage area in a prayer to receive Christ, Graham told those making decisions: "Your soul is now secure."

For many, this was Eternal Souls Day.

And several thanked Franklin Graham's direct, no-nonsense approach.

"He preaches like he believes it. And that makes a difference," a 21-year-old bio-chemistry student said. "He preaches with conviction, passion and power."

Those three words could also be used to describe many of the musical performances Sunday, from Jamaica pianist Huntley Brown to a Belarus worship band to the Latvian Three Tenors.

But most notably charging up the audience was the Newsboys, which based on the post-Festival comments around the arena, may have a new legion and region of followers after a passionate and charismatic set in their first trip to Lithuania.

Lead singer Michael Tait, who mixed in a spirited acappella version of "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," was performing for the 24th time at a BGEA Festival or Crusade, dating back to his D.C. Talk days and his first 1994 Cleveland Crusade.

"We never get tired of seeing the altar call at the end of the message," Tait said. "To watch the sheep come in, watch them come forward. It's unbelievable."

Renata Ramanauskaite would sum the weekend up the exact way. After working 15 years with Campus Crusade for Christ (Agape) in Lithuania, to see 28,000 people come out to hear the gospel message in one single weekend and then watch hundreds make commitments in three different services, she wonders if this is some sort of dream.

“Even for Christians, it’s hard to believe that God can work in this way,” Ramanauskaite said. “It’s hard to believe. You see the impact, but it’s hard to believe this is happening.”

Ramanauskaite is part of the microscopic percentage of evangelical Christians in Lithuania, a country of 3 million where only one-tenth of one percent are believers, an estimated 3,000 Christians. But after seeing nearly half that number come to Christ making first-time decisions, she can only imagine what might be ahead.

“I would hope for an explosion among Christianity,” she said. “I hope this is an inspiration to Christians that God can do miracles.”

Already, Ramanauskaite witnessed one work of God personally this weekend. On Sunday night, as she was counseling a 32-year-old Russian woman to accept Christ, she asked who invited her and she answered her sister.

Only later, did she realize that her sister, a 25-year-old named Arena, was a woman Ramanauskaite had led to the Lord two years ago and was now impacting her family.

“For me, it’s wonderful that Arena can have an influence and her family members can be changed,” Ramanauskaite said. “God can change hearts. Miracles can happen.”

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