

When Billy Graham Evangelized North Korea

Franklin Graham's father, Billy, visited the DPRK in 1992 and 1994, and his mother, Ruth, returned in 1997 after attending high school in Pyongyang in the 1930s.

"When I was growing up my mother spoke often about her experiences here, and one of the high points of her life was the opportunity she had to return in 1997," Franklin said when he landed at Pyongyang airport in 2008.

At the conclusion of her six-day visit in 1997, Mrs. Graham summarized her experience as one of the true highlights of her life. "Almost nothing remains from my school days here during the 1930s," she said to her hosts. "But two things have not changed: the beauty of the two rivers that flow through the city of Pyongyang and the warmth and hospitality of the people."

During the cold winters, Mrs. Graham recounted, she and her classmates often ice skated on Pyongyang's frozen rivers. "Those were some of the most memorable years of my life, and many of my best friends over the years have been people who were classmates there," Mrs. Graham said. "After leaving in 1937 I never thought I would be able to return. But now 60 years later God has opened the door."

Mrs. Graham spoke briefly at a Sunday morning service in Pyongyang's Bongsu Church, at the time one of three churches open in the DPRK. "My years here were very important to me spiritually," she said to the congregation. "I pray that each one of you will know – as I discovered during my school days here—that God so loved you, that he gave his only begotten Son, that if you would believe in him, you will not perish, but will have everlasting life," she added, paraphrasing John

3:16.

A highlight of the 1997 trip was a dinner given in Mrs. Graham's honor by the country's Foreign Minister, Kim Yong Nam. "We have great respect for the Graham family, and especially Billy Graham, who met our late President on two occasions," he noted in welcoming her. "We know your health kept you from coming here in the past and we are honored you would undertake such a long and difficult journey to be with us."

Like Father, Like Son

In 1992, Billy Graham became the first foreign religious leader to preach in Pyongyang. During that visit he gave a lecture at Kim Il Sung University, the nation's leading educational institution, and met with President Kim Il Sung.

He visited again in 1994. Billy told reporters at a packed press conference he was welcomed "very cordially" by the people and government leaders during his visit, which he termed "unquestionably, one of the most memorable events of my life."

The evangelist also spoke to students and faculty at Kim Il Sung University. His speech was given in their largest lecture hall, after which he answered a number of questions from the audience. He also had an informal discussion with English-speaking students in a classroom.

"When we come to know Christ by committing our lives to Him, God comes into our lives and begins to change us from within," Billy said after offering them a spiritual challenge. "And when we are changed from within, we become concerned about the problems of our world and we want to do something about them."

"That is why I believe true religion has a legitimate place in modern society and why I believe Christ has a message for the people of the DPRK," Billy continued. "In my experience in

many countries, Christians—although often a minority—make good citizens and have a positive effect on their societies.”

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