

Will Graham Carries on China Legacy

When **Will Graham** took the pulpit to preach in Shenzhen a few weeks ago, he became the fourth generation in his family to minister in China.

The legacy began with Dr. L. Nelson and Virginia Bell, who arrived in 1916; followed by daughter Ruth, who married evangelist **Billy Graham**; and continues with **Franklin Graham**, whose ministry in China has included both evangelistic preaching and relief efforts.

“To me this trip was very emotional because I was preaching in my Grandmother’s homeland,” Graham said in a recent interview. “Not only was it my first time in mainland China, but to preach and to hear the language my grandmother grew up with was really special.”

Shenzhen, just across the river from Hong Kong, has a different feel than the rest of mainland China, said Graham. It is home to some of China’s most successful high-tech companies, including firms that manufacture iPhones, iPads, Kindles and the Xbox 360.

Due to explosive demand for these high tech products, the city has grown quickly. A few years ago, the population was roughly 30,000 people. Now it’s a couple million, said Graham.

“When you cross the river from Hong Kong, it becomes a Communist country. But Shenzhen is kind of the halfway between that and the capitalism of Hong Kong. People have a lot more freedom and it is a beautiful city—and the church has more freedom there,” he added.

After explaining that the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) works with state-recognized churches, not

Chinese **house churches** or the underground church in China, Graham described his time of ministry: "We saw some great things take place. The church, which was the biggest in the city, was filled to capacity. We did four services in 24 hours and all were full."

Graham said he had total freedom to preach on any topic he wanted: "As long as you are inside those walls, you can preach the Bible without restrictions."

He also gave an invitation and invited people to respond to God's Word: "Culturally, they aren't used to coming forward, but they stood or raised their hands, or we told them to seek out counselors who were wearing special vests—to talk with and pray with and receive materials from."

Another special part of this trip, said Graham, was having the privilege of preaching at the church's first all English service. State officials asked the church to start an all English service that would minister to Chinese people who had grown up outside of China, but who were returning to their homeland.

"They weren't fitting well back into the Chinese church," said Graham. "They are used to being in America. So, they are more comfortable in English. And there are a lot of westerners who visit who want an English church. So I had the privilege of preaching at this all English service."

The entire trip was a wonderful experience, he said. Perhaps, as he flew home, Graham recalled his father's words to a different Chinese congregation a few years ago: "So much has changed in 20 years," Franklin Graham said. "But one thing has not changed, and that is our family's love for China. When my grandfather came to China almost 100 years ago, he was a young man with lots of dreams. But his number one dream was that one day in China there would be a strong, vibrant church. And that dream has come true."

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