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Go Tell Crusade sees 'powerful' movement

by David Dawson/Baptist and Reflector, posted Thursday, May 16, 2019 (12 days ago)

WHITE PINE, Tenn. (BP) -- During his years of ministry, pastor Dean Haun has experienced both ends of the "success spectrum" in regard to certain events and projects. He has seen some that fall flat and some that surpass all expectations.

So, when he was asked to serve as chairman of the Lakeway Area Go Tell Crusade, held April 28-May 1, Haun prepared himself and his team for what might lie ahead. The four-day evangelism crusade -- led by evangelist Rick Gage and held at the Walters State Community College Great Smoky Mountains Expo Center in White Pine, Tenn. -- ended up reporting more than 850 decisions, including 341 professions of faith.

"I told our committee, this is either going to be like we're in a big sailboat and God is going to breathe on this and we're going to just glide on through, or it's going to be like an old 1935 Ford truck with the clutch going out and we're grinding the gears," Haun, pastor of First Baptist Church, Morristown, Tenn., said.

By the time the crusade came to a close, it was clear to Haun which way it had turned out. This was definitely not an "old truck" type of event. And the effects of the crusade are continuing, Haun said, with more salvations in the days that have followed.

The crusade drew large crowds each night, with an estimated total attendance of 17,500. The crowd on Sunday (the opening night) was estimated around 5,000, and the final night of the crusade -- which featured a youth emphasis -- drew an estimated crowd of 6,000, including roughly 3,000 students.

"It was really powerful," Haun said. "It was like the hand of the Lord (was) on this crusade since Day One."

The crusade was fortified by the efforts of four Baptist associations -- Nolachucky, Grainger County, East Tennessee and Jefferson County.

"There was a lot of work and a lot of preparation that went into this, but God really rewarded that," said Leroy Davis, director of missions for the Jefferson County Baptist Association. "It (was) an awesome event."

The crusade stretched across multiple denominations, with numerous non-Baptist churches in the Lakeway area, and well beyond, supporting the event.

"Evangelism is a work of the Holy Spirit," Gage said. "A genuine move of God rarely occurs in our communities. I can sincerely say that the [crusade] ... was a genuine work of the Holy Spirit of God. The leadership team beginning with Dean Haun and the preparation, including prayer and fasting, which involved more than 1,500 volunteers, were depending on the Holy Spirit to do a lasting work. This is what led to such a bountiful harvest of souls."



Evangelist Rick Gage leads a prayer at the Go Tell Lakeway Area Crusade at the Walters State Community College Great Smoky Mountains Expo Center in White Pine, Tenn.

Photo by Brooks Gray

The services included a tribute to first responders on Monday night. Veterans and current military were honored on Tuesday night, when Tim Lee served as one of the keynote speakers.

Evangelists Adrian Desires and Ken Freeman delivered messages during the week and Noah Cleveland, Charles Billingsley and At Liberty Band provided music.

How it started

The groundswell for the crusade may have started more than a dozen years ago, when another pastor walked into Haun's office -- Haun was serving as pastor in Atlanta at the time -- and told him that he believed Haun was destined to lead a great revival.

Over the next few years, the sequence repeated itself two more times, with Haun being told he was going to be involved with a mighty work of the Lord. So, when a group of businessmen approached Haun about serving as the chairman for the crusade, he felt led to do so.

"I was so convicted that the Lord wanted me to do this, so I said yes," Haun said.

Initially, the crusade's leadership team began making preparations for a Hamblen County crusade, and began exploring options about renting out a high school gym. But soon, news of the crusade began to spread, and the plans had to be changed.

Davis, the mission strategist for Jefferson County, said, "Several of us (mission strategists) contacted Brother Dean and said that we wanted to be a part of this. This was going to be happening in my county, and I wanted to help."

From there, the crusade took off -- growing larger and larger.

"It's almost indescribable," said Horace Brown, director of missions for East Tennessee Baptist Association. "It just goes to show you that you should never underestimate what God can do."

Brown noted that a group from his association meets each week for prayer at a local barber shop at 5:45 a.m. The group started praying for the crusade weeks and weeks ago, and began putting in some legwork too, with Brown organizing "40 days of prayer." He and his leadership team went to each church in the association to pray specifically for the crusade. "We felt like that would be the best way to get the churches involved," he said.

The prayers and promotion for the event paid off, as evidenced by the encouraging attendance figures. In fact, the event created some traffic tie-ups near the Expo Center each night of the week.

"We prayed for this, and now we're seeing it happen," said Brown as he glanced around the arena on the second night of the crusade.

Reaching the community

In addition to those who attended the crusade, many other lives were touched by the ministry.

For instance, the crusade's leadership team visited local schools throughout the week.

"We had the crusade teams going into 13 schools to speak during the assemblies," Haun said.

"Our team talked to the students about making the right life choices and not doing anything that would mess up their future, physically and mentally," he said. "Our teams weren't allowed to share the Gospel during the assemblies, but we were able to invite the students to the crusade for youth night."

The crusade provided free pizzas for the students who attended the Wednesday night service, and the youth responded in a big way.

"Someone sent me a picture of this mountain of empty pizza boxes," said Haun with a laugh, noting that roughly 300 boxes of pizza were given away. "They really went through it."

The crusade also reached out to local prisons. During the first night, a local prison sent 10 inmates to the crusade to provide "manpower" and help with various assignments, including unloading equipment. Nine of the men were led to the Lord that night -- and by the end of the week, more than 40 prisoners had made professions of faith.

There was also an emphasis on community-wide outreach during the week, Haun said.

"One of the things that the Rick Gage Ministries encourages is for outreach teams to go door-to-door and leave a flyer for the crusade," Haun said.

"We partnered with a ministry called Saturate America," he said. "They have donors that will supply you with clear door-hanger bags, a gospel tract, and the Jesus film DVD, which comes in seven languages."

Setting the stage

Haun said that, in the days leading up to the crusade, more than 30,000 DVDs -- along with invitations to the crusade -- were given away.

Haun also noted that the event generated the largest fundraising banquet in Hamblen County history, and the biggest that Rick Gage's Go Tell ministry had ever had.

"We had 106 sponsor tables and 944 tickets sold to the banquet to raise money for the crusade," he said, "and we ended up having to have the banquet in two locations ... because we couldn't fit everybody."

Haun said he could tell almost immediately that the Lord was at work through the crusade.

"I had prayed for a leadership team of 1,000 people to put this together -- and we went way past that," he said. "I think our final leadership team count was around 1,450. That counts the choir, the ushers and others. We hosted seven different counseling training sessions, and we (ended up) with more than 400 trained counselors for the crusade."

Haun said that all of the work that went into the crusade was rewarded each night when the altar call was made and lives were changed.

"We were seeing people saved every day; people just getting under conviction and coming to know Christ," Haun said. "And that is what it was always about. We just give God all the glory. It was a tremendous event."

David Dawson is a communications specialist for the Baptist and Reflector (baptistandreflector.org), newsjournal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention where this story first appeared.

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