

RED RIVER GO TELL Crusade

By Brett Hoffman

This week's Red River Go Tell Crusade in Childress began with the type of service that bore witness to spiritual hunger in the area.

After the Rev. Rick Gage preached a potent evangelistic message on Sunday night at Fair Park Stadium, there was a very noticeable emptying of the stands. Of the 150 people who came forward, about half prayed to receive salvation. The rest either rededicated their life to the Christian faith or voiced other needs.

The crusade culminated Wednesday at Fair Park Stadium with hundreds of youth from around the area in attendance. Total attendance for the 4-day event was estimated at 6,000.

Gage, an Atlanta-based evangelist who has a passion for leading crusades in rural areas, models the meetings after those of the Rev. Billy Graham, who conducted massive campaigns for more than six decades.

Like Graham, Gage preaches a very simple, but very thought provoking Biblical message.

"When Jesus comes into your heart, you become a new person," Gage told the Sunday night crowd.

Gage referred to the Apostles Paul's Biblical writings to the first century Christians by citing I Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Gage boldly told the crowd, most of whom sat in the north grandstands of Fair Park Stadium during a warm, sundown meeting: "If there's never been a change in your life, you've never met Jesus!"

Gage said his life changed dramatically when he made a commitment to

follow Jesus Christ in 1984 while hearing the longtime televangelist James Robison preach in Lubbock. At the time, Gage was an assistant football coach at Texas Tech. He said coaching was an occupation he had engaged in after a successful career of playing football for two small colleges.

"I have to tell you tonight, I haven't gotten over it," Gage said of his experience in Lubbock.



Gage said the Bible teaches that everyone can have the same type of experience.

“I don’t want anyone to go to hell and neither does Jesus,” Gage said. “If you do go to hell, you will go over the love of God and over the cross of Jesus.”

During the Monday night service, Gage brought in the Rev. Tony Nolan, who was born to a mentally ill prostitute, was physically abused by his father and became hooked on drugs. Nolan, who also is from Atlanta, testified about how God dramatically changed life for the better after becoming a Christian.

Like the Graham crusades, Gage enlists a praise and worship team, a choir, counselors, and helpers to address other needs.

Curtiss Craddock, who is chairing the crusade, said Gage shares the gospel in a powerful way that draws people in.

“He’s just anointed by God,” Craddock said of Gage. “He’s led by God to reach the lost. He’s real. He’s not a fake. It’s all out in the open. He lays his life before others and brings them to Christ.”

As he preached on opening night, Gage challenged Christians to have a deep concern for people who have not been converted to the faith.

“I pray that God will get a hold of our hearts and give us a great burden for Jesus,” he said. “We’ve got to get back to the main thing and that’s winning souls for Jesus.”

Gage said he’s deeply grieved that many contemporary Christian churches are failing to prioritize soul winning.

“Saved is a term that has become obsolete in many of the churches in America,” he said. “When was the last time you have wept over lost souls who are going to hell? “Young people, when was the last time that you prayed for your mom or dad to be saved?”

Each service begins with praise and worship songs (from Christian musicians Chuck Sullivan and Malissa Smith). After that, Gage delivers the message, speaking boldly leaning forward and pointing at the crowd as he makes point after point.

Gage also has been speaking to students in local and area schools in conjunction with the nightly meetings. On Monday afternoon, for example, he spoke to students Paducah and Memphis, encouraging them to make sound choices. Gage addressed Childress students Wednesday.

During his address, he told about playing college football and about coaching at West Texas A&M and Texas Tech. He also sharply warned students about the pitfalls of drug and alcohol abuse.

“Winning the game of life starts with you making wise choices,” Gage told the students. “You were born and designed by God to be a winner in this game of life.”