Living Sermons

A BILLY GRAHAM CLASSIC SERMON

OBSTACLES TO HEAVEN

LUKE 19:10

"Jesus is passing by, and for many of you this may be the last opportunity that you'll ever have to make certain of your own personal relationship to God."

BILLY GRAHAM

Tangerine Bowl, Orlando, Florida

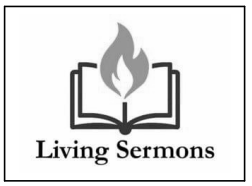
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OBSTACLES TO HEAVEN

Preacher: Billy Graham

Publisher: LivingSermons.com

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Living Sermons

FOREWORD

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” In the Tangerine Bowl in Orlando, Florida, Billy Graham tells again the story of Zacchaeus, the richest and most hated man in Jericho, who climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus.

Dr. Graham walks with Zacchaeus through every obstacle between a seeking heart and the Savior: the press of the crowd, the pull of the world, secret sins hidden behind a respectable life, and the self-righteousness of those “pure in their own eyes.” He shows how curiosity can lead to Christ, why Jesus called urgently (“Make haste, and come down”) and how the encounter ended in restitution, open confession and a joy that set heaven singing.

The message is warm with personal touches: Ruth’s Instamatic camera, a photograph she called “Me on Golden Pond,” tape recorders clicking in an open-air service near Budapest, and a lost boy in the North Carolina mountains found too late.

In preparing this edition, we have preserved the preacher’s message and wording. We removed time stamps and broadcast material, trimmed a few spoken repetitions, arranged the transcript into chapters with subheadings, and corrected punctuation, capitalization and obvious transcription errors.

Jesus is passing by. As you read, may you hear Him call your name.

Wisdom Epsi
— The Chief Editor, LivingSermons.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword 3
Table of Contents 4
Publisher's Note 5
Main Message Begins Here 6
To Seek and to Save 7
Jesus Passing By 9
The Most Hated Man in Town 10
Curiosity 11
Obstacles on the Way 13
“Zacchaeus, Come Down” 15
Salvation Comes to the House 17
Confessing Christ Openly 19
What Must You Do? 21
The Invitation 23
Scripture References 26
About The Speaker 27
About Living Sermons 28
Join Our Team 29

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book is a faithful transcript of a live sermon delivered by the preacher under the inspiration and unction of the Holy Spirit. Every effort has been made to preserve the preacher's exact words, tone, flow, and spiritual authority, while carefully proofreading and formatting the message into a clear and readable ebook format.

The message you are about to read was originally ministered in a live congregational setting. As such, it carries the weight, urgency, and atmosphere of that sacred gathering. Minor grammatical and structural adjustments have been made solely to enhance readability, without altering the substance, intent, or power of the original delivery.

Watch the live sermon from which this message was transcribed on YouTube

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Our standard is reverence for the Word of God. Our daily goal is to transform powerful live sermons into polished PDF and ebook editions for the edification of the Body of Christ. It is our prayer that as you read, the same grace, conviction, clarity, and impartation present in the live service will minister to you afresh.

— Livingsermons.com
A Spirit-led Publishing Stewardship

MAIN MESSAGE BEGINS HERE

CHAPTER 1

TO SEEK AND TO SAVE

LUKE 19

I would like to welcome those that have joined by television tonight, in various parts of the country and in other parts of the world.

Now tonight I would like you to turn with me to the nineteenth chapter of Luke: Luke, the nineteenth chapter, and a very simple little story that many of you have heard since childhood. I'll read it to you: the nineteenth chapter, the first ten verses, if you have your Bibles—and I hope you do.

> *And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was very rich. And he sought to see Jesus who He was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see Him: for He was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I will restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*
>
> **LUKE 19:1-10**

THE PURPOSE OF HIS COMING

And that's one of the key verses in all the New Testament, that tenth verse, because it gives you the purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ. He has come to seek and to save that which is lost.

CHAPTER 2

JESUS PASSING BY

BLIND BARTIMAEUS

But here is this Man, Jesus, the God-Man, walking through Jericho. He's on His way to die on the cross. And as He comes into Jericho, He sees blind Bartimaeus, and He heals him. And He has that tremendous experience where Bartimaeus was saying, "Help the blind! Help the blind! Help the blind!" And as Jesus passed by, he cried out, saying, "Who is this passing by?" And somebody stopped and said, "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." And he screamed out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

And if he hadn't cried out at that moment, he would never have been healed. Jesus passed by that one time.

PASSING BY IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

Just as Jesus is passing by in Central Florida right now, and He may never come this way quite like this again—when so many people have joined together and prayed and backed this crusade, with most of the churches in Central Florida cooperating in this great crusade. When will it ever happen again? Jesus is passing by, and for many of you this may be the last opportunity that you'll ever have to make certain of your own personal relationship to God.

CHAPTER 3

THE MOST HATED MAN IN TOWN

RICH AND DESPISED

And then, as He was going out of Jericho—Jericho was a relatively small town—there was another man that wanted to see Jesus, and his name was Zacchaeus. And he meets Jesus going out of the town.

Now Zacchaeus was about the most hated man in the town. He was the richest man in town. He was a publican, a tax gatherer: rich and despised, a social outcast. Because, you see, he was Jewish, but he would collect all the taxes for Rome, the occupying country. And then he would try to get more than the taxes, pay them to Rome, and fill his own pockets.

That's the way the tax gatherers were in those days. They became the richest people in town, and the most despised people in town, because they were looked on as traitors to their own people. They were looked upon as robbers, as cheaters, and they became very wealthy as a result of it. Now if Jesus had considered public opinion, He would have looked straight before Him when He came to this sycamore tree that Zacchaeus had climbed up in.

A LONELY MAN

Now Zacchaeus was a lonely man. He didn't have any friends. And there are many lonely people here tonight: friends that misunderstand you, loved ones that have betrayed you, and you've failed in school. And your loneliness has led you to bitterness. And I imagine he was a bitter man as well, because almost every person in town despised him. He was hated and avoided by most people.

CHAPTER 4

CURIOSITY

HE WANTED TO SEE FOR HIMSELF

Yet he had a curiosity. He'd probably heard about Jesus many times. Maybe he'd heard the enemies of Jesus say that He was a devil, or He was a fanatic, or He was a blasphemer, or He was a heretic, or He was an impostor. Maybe he'd heard some of Jesus' friends say that He was a great teacher and a good man, the Son of God, the great Messiah that had been predicted, or a great prophet. But he wanted to see for himself.

I can see Zacchaeus trying to get through that crowd. He was a very short man. And I imagine some of the people tried to push him away, and some would put their foot out and make him stumble and fall. He was trying to run as fast as he could.

A CAMERA AND A TAPE RECORDER

Probably, if he had lived today, he'd have had an Instamatic camera with him to get a picture of Jesus, like my wife does. She has one, and I enjoyed married life before she got it. (Laughter) And I enjoy it now!

She made one of me the other day and called it *Me on Golden Pond*, because I had an old hat and some old specs on, and I was sitting there beside a fish pond. And she took a picture, and she's sending it around now—maybe on our Christmas card; I don't know.

And Zacchaeus would have had a tape recorder. I remember when we were in Hungary. In the first service we had about fifteen or twenty thousand people, in the open air outside of Budapest. And when I got through preaching, I heard all these clicks going on. And I turned to my wife and said, "Are they gnashing

their teeth?" And she said, "No, those are tape recorders." Everybody had a tape recorder! And they were taking the message down, and then they were sending the messages that had been preached throughout Eastern Europe.

And it was an amazing thing to me that in Budapest you could go to the bookstores and buy my sermons. They put them in book form. And I preached straight gospel sermons, just like I'm doing now.

God is doing some strange and wonderful and thrilling things throughout the world: mysterious things, things that pass our understanding. The devil is at work, but so is God at work.

CHAPTER 5

OBSTACLES ON THE WAY

UP A SYCAMORE TREE

Now this man Zacchaeus was so anxious to see Jesus that he decided to climb up a tree. He climbed up a sycamore tree.

Now there are many obstacles in getting to Jesus that you face too! He faced the obstacle of there being so many people there, and he was so small of stature. I imagine him sitting up there on that limb with that tape recorder, or the camera. He wanted to get everything that Jesus said. He was so interested.

You, too, have your obstacles.

(Billy Graham) Now if you're watching by television right now, you can pick up a phone and call that number that you see on your screen and get spiritual help right now. There are people standing by to answer that phone. Call right now, while I'm talking.

THE WORLD

But, you see, the Bible says—Jesus said—"And what shall a man profit, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" And all the way through the Bible you find choices made between the things of the world and the things of God.

Moses had to make that choice. He had to choose between all the wealth of Egypt and all the power of Egypt, as an heir to the throne of Egypt, and he had to turn his back on it and follow Christ. Abraham had to turn his back on all he had ever known, to go and find, by faith, a city whose builder and maker was God.

SECRET SINS

And then there are secret sins that become obstacles to coming to Christ. The Scripture says, "Cleanse Thou me from secret sins." You see, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. He knows what goes on inside your heart. He knows what you're imagining, what you're thinking, what you're fantasizing. He knows the things you're lusting for. He knows the evil thoughts and the pride and the jealousy and the greed that are in your heart. And He judges by what He sees inside, not just by what He sees outside.

And how many of you are members of the church in good standing, officers in the church, Sunday school teachers—but down deep inside you know that your heart is just as dark as some of the worst sinners in town? And you know you are a hypocrite, and you are ashamed of it, and you don't know what to do about it. And you wish that somehow you could find peace, and you haven't been able to find it.

Make your commitment to Christ tonight, and say, "Lord, forgive me. I want to come back to You. I once knew You. I once knew the joy of Christ, but somehow I've lost that joy, and I'd like to find it again."

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

And self-righteousness can also be an obstacle. "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness."
Self-righteous, like the hypocrites of Jesus' day.

CHAPTER 6

"ZACCHAEUS, COME DOWN"

CURIOSITY BROUGHT HIM

Now Zacchaeus was sitting up there. He found his way to the sycamore tree, just like you found your way here, and curiosity brought him. Curiosity! Did you know many people find Christ out of curiosity? Many of you have come to this meeting out of curiosity. Many of you came because somebody brought you, but many came out of just sheer curiosity.

We heard about a man the other night who was on his way past on the highway, and he saw the lights on. I think it was in one of the papers I read. And he just stopped in here. He found a parking place way off somewhere, and he walked over here. And it was halfway through the service, but he gave his life to Christ. And it tells in the paper the joy that he found in Jesus Christ. That can happen to you.

THE CROWD MURMURS

And so He calls Zacchaeus: "Zacchaeus, come down." The crowd murmurs—and they still do when you eat with sinners, or try to reach those that are on the other side of the tracks.

And Jesus tears the hide off religious sinners, but He treats other sinners with tenderness and love. You see, the argument and the debate Jesus had was not even with the Roman Empire. His debate was with the religious leaders who were not living as they should live. They were hypocrites. And there are many of us that way; we've developed that same thing. And this is certainly true in some parts of our country, where people go to church in great numbers, but during the week they're not living a daily life with Christ.

NO CHEAP GRACE

But, you know, Jesus never compromised. He doesn't offer a cheap grace or a cheap salvation. When you come to Christ, you must be willing to repent of sin and receive Him in your heart.

AN URGENT CALL

And notice, it was an urgent call. He said, "Make haste! Come down now!" "Now is the accepted time; today is the day of salvation." There's no promised tomorrow. There's no promise in the Bible that you'll be alive tomorrow. God doesn't make any promises for tomorrow. It's today—now, now, now, now—all the way through the Bible.

CHAPTER 7

SALVATION COMES TO THE HOUSE

THOSE PIERCING EYES

And it was a successful call, because Jesus did go to Zacchaeus' home. And He probably took Matthew with Him, because Matthew had been a publican too, a tax gatherer. And Jesus had said, "Follow Me," and Matthew had gotten up and followed. And maybe He took Matthew with Him to give his testimony to Zacchaeus; I don't know.

But Zacchaeus probably was very proud and showed Jesus all the things in his home: all the art that he had, and his servants, and the beautiful carpets he had on the floor, and the beautiful picture windows that he had, and the beautiful view out there, and the grass and everything. He was so proud of it all.

But Jesus probably just stood there looking at Zacchaeus. And Zacchaeus began to wonder, "Well, why is He looking at me like that? Those piercing eyes—they're reaching into my soul."

Then Jesus turned and looked out the window and saw broken humanity. He saw those who were suffering, those who were poor and didn't have anything, that Zacchaeus had stolen from and cheated. And Zacchaeus' conscience began to bother him. He became convicted of his sins.

"LORD JESUS, I'M READY"

And suddenly he opened the door, and he yelled at the top of his lungs, "Lord Jesus, I'm ready! If I've stolen from anyone, I'll restore it fourfold. I'll give back everything I've ever taken from anybody. I just want to know You."

It took restitution. And it says he did it with a new joy in his heart. He did it joyfully.

TWO KINDS OF JOY

There seems to be little joy in too many modern lives, even among professing believers. And the Bible says there are two types of joy.

There's joy in heaven when a person comes to Christ. "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents." When you come to Christ tonight, you may be the only one, but you'll set off the orchestras of heaven, and the choirs of heaven will be singing because of you. Just one person will cause joy in heaven!

Then there's joy inside your heart when you come to Christ. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

CHAPTER 8

CONFESSING CHRIST OPENLY

BEFORE ALL THE PEOPLE

Notice, it was open confession. “Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord,” in front of all the people. Jesus said, “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father which is in heaven.”

That’s the reason I ask people to come forward to make their commitment to Christ publicly. Every person that Jesus called in the New Testament, including Zacchaeus, He called publicly, in front of other people. He said, “If you’re not willing to acknowledge Me before your friends and other people, I’ll not acknowledge you before My Father.” Wouldn’t it be terrible to get there and Jesus would not even know us? He says there are many people who are going to say, “But, Lord, I did this for You, and I did that and that.” But He said, “I never knew you.” And He won’t acknowledge us. Come to Christ openly!

Yes, his repentance cost him something. He had to restore fourfold—to the surprise of the crowd, the shock of the crowd. There come times for restitution, if our repentance and faith are to be real.

YOUR SOUL IS WORTH MORE

And the purpose of Jesus coming into the world was to seek and to save people like Zacchaeus, who were lost. And many of you tonight are lost from God. And all the prayers and all the work and all the money that's gone into this crusade have gone into it for you: to reach you, because your soul is worth more than all the rest of the world put together. You say, "How could that be?" Because it's going to be eternal. Because it's going to live forever. When you die, that's not the end of you. You can't commit suicide by taking a gun to your brain. Your body dies, but your spirit—the real you—lives on forever and ever and ever and ever, in heaven or hell. And it depends on what you do with Christ now, publicly.

CHAPTER 9

WHAT MUST YOU DO?

LOST IN THE MOUNTAINS

I'm going to ask you to receive Him tonight.

You know, there was a little boy that was lost in the mountains of North Carolina, where we live. And they organized the police, and they organized the helicopters, and they got all the police dogs they could, and they organized hundreds of people to search for that little boy. And they searched for about five days before they found him. And when they found him, he was already dead, lost in the snow. It was too late.

"MAKE HASTE, MARY"

Thousands of people have worked and prayed for this crusade, for you. And God sees you sitting there. He knows your heart, and He knows your need, and He calls you by name. And He says, "Make haste, Mary, come! Jim, make haste, come! For today I'm coming into your heart. Will you allow Me? Will you entertain Me in your life and in your heart?"

REPENT

You say, "Well, Billy, what really do I have to do?"

First, you have to be willing to repent of your sin. You say, "Well, what does that mean?" That means to change your way of living; to change your way of thinking about Christ, about God and about yourself. It means to live a new kind of a life. It means you're willing to give up some of those wrong things in your life and walk with Him. That's repentance.

And Jesus said, "Except a man repent, he can't see the kingdom of God." Have you repented? Are you sure of it? Did that change take place? I'm not talking about you saying, "O Lord, I'm sorry." That's not repentance. "O Lord, I've sinned." That's not repentance. It means a change. Old things are passed away, and everything becomes new.

RECEIVE HIM BY FAITH

And then, the second thing: you must receive Him by faith. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." Just simple faith, like a little child believes in its father or its mother. You believe. Jesus said you have to become like a child.

You may be a professor at the university in mathematics or one of the sciences, but you have to become like a little child when you come to Christ, in faith, believing. Just as I have confidence and faith in this platform to hold me—that's what the word *faith* means. You put your confidence, your strength, everything you have, in Jesus Christ. And you're going to do that tonight.

FOLLOW HIM

And then, the third thing: you must be willing to follow Him and obey Him, in reading the Scriptures and in prayer and in witnessing. Are you ready to do that?

If there is a doubt in your heart tonight that you are right with God, you come and be sure. You may not be a member of any church, or you may be a member of several churches; I don't know. You might have been baptized every way you can be baptized, but that's not enough. You must come to Christ and find Him as your Lord and your Master and your Savior. And I'm going to ask you to do it right now.

CHAPTER 10

THE INVITATION

YOU MAY NEVER HAVE ANOTHER MOMENT LIKE THIS

We've seen hundreds of people come every night. I'm going to ask you tonight to get up out of your seat and come. And you that are watching by television, pick up that telephone and call, and there will be a counselor to talk to you right now, and you can make the same commitment that people are going to make here.

I'm going to ask hundreds of you to get up out of your seat and come, because you may never have another moment like this again. Come now. If you come from that top balcony, it takes about two minutes, so start now. If you are with friends or relatives, or you've come in a bus or with a group, they'll wait on you. After you've all come, I'm going to say a word to you and have a prayer with you, and give you some literature to help you in your Christian life.

You get up and come. You know you need Christ. Bring your friend with you. Husbands and wives, and sweethearts, and whole groups that are here tonight: you need to come. You get up and come. We're going to wait.

Young and old: there are some old people here tonight. You've heard the gospel many times, but somehow you've never really found peace with God, and you're uncertain about your relationship with Him. Come and settle it tonight. We're going to wait as many people come from everywhere.

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

(Announcer) As you can see, many hundreds are making their way forward here in the Tangerine Bowl to commit their lives to Christ, and we hope you'll do the same while you're watching this program. For spiritual help and counseling, please call the number on your screen right now. Trained counselors are standing by, waiting to talk with you. If the lines are busy, just wait a moment and call back later, or write the number down so that you can call at any time throughout this evening. Counselors will be there as long as the calls keep coming in. God bless you.

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings within, and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE

(Billy Graham) You that have been watching by television can see here in Orlando, Florida, in this beautiful Tangerine Bowl, many people coming to make their commitment to Christ. You can make that commitment right now, where you are. You may be in a barroom; you may be in a hotel room; you may be in your living room or in your bedroom. Right where you are, bow your head and say, "Yes, Lord Jesus, come into my heart." And He'll bring you the same joy and peace that He's brought to my heart, and to those you've heard speak or sing tonight.

Give your heart to Him now. And if you will, pick up the telephone and call. You may have to call two or three times; keep calling. There will be people there for

the next two or three hours, ready to talk with you. Don't let this night pass, or this day pass, without making that commitment. God bless you. And be sure to go to church next Sunday.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind…

CLOSING WORDS

(Closing Announcement) If you just prayed that prayer with my father, or if you have any questions about a relationship with Jesus Christ, why don't you call the number on the screen. There will be someone there to talk with you, pray with you and answer those questions. And remember, God loves you! If you would like to commit your life to Jesus Christ, please call us right now, toll free at 1-877-772-4559. That's 1-877-772-4559. Or you can write to us at: Billy Graham, 1 Billy Graham Parkway, Department C, Charlotte, North Carolina 28201. Or you can contact us on the web 24/7 at PeaceWithGod.tv. We'll get the same helps to you that we give to everyone who responds at the invitation.

On behalf of Franklin Graham and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, thank you for watching and thank you for your prayers.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Passages quoted or alluded to in this message, in order of appearance. An asterisk (*) marks a passage the preacher did not name by chapter and verse; the editors identified it.

Luke 19:1-10 — Zacchaeus. (Named by chapter and verses.) *(Chapters 1, 6, 7, 8)*

Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43* — Blind Bartimaeus. *(Chapter 2)*

Mark 8:36* — What shall it profit a man? *(Chapter 5)*

Hebrews 11:24-26* — Moses' choice. *(Chapter 5)*

Hebrews 11:8-10* — Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. *(Chapter 5)*

Psalm 19:12* — Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. *(Chapter 5)*

1 Samuel 16:7* — The Lord looketh on the heart. *(Chapter 5)*

Proverbs 30:12* — Pure in their own eyes. *(Chapter 5)*

2 Corinthians 6:2* — Now is the accepted time. *(Chapter 6)*

Matthew 9:9* — Matthew the publican: "Follow Me." *(Chapter 7)*

Luke 15:7* — Joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. *(Chapter 7)*

John 15:11* — That your joy might be full. *(Chapter 7)*

Matthew 10:32-33* — Confess Me before men. *(Chapter 8)*

Matthew 7:22-23* — "I never knew you." *(Chapter 8)*

Luke 13:3; John 3:3* — Except ye repent; except a man be born again. *(Chapter 9)*

2 Corinthians 5:17* — Old things are passed away. *(Chapter 9)*

John 1:12* — As many as received Him. *(Chapter 9)*

Matthew 18:3* — Become as little children. *(Chapter 9)*

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

William "Billy" F. Graham Jr. (1918–2018) was raised on a dairy farm in Charlotte, North Carolina. In 1934, at age 15, he made a commitment to faith during a revival led by Mordecai Ham. He was ordained in 1939, graduated from Florida Bible Institute in 1940, and earned a B.A. from Wheaton College in 1943, where he married Ruth McCue Bell.

After pastoring in Illinois and serving as the first full-time evangelist for Youth for Christ International, Graham was vaulted into national prominence by the 1949 Los Angeles Crusade. This event launched decades of global outreach, including historic, extended crusades in London (1954), New York City (1957), Seoul (1973), and Rio de Janeiro (1974). Overall, he preached live to nearly 215 million people in over 185 countries and territories.

In 1950, he founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). Through BGEA, Graham hosted the syndicated *Hour of Decision* radio program for over 60 years, published *Decision* magazine, and authored 33 books—including bestsellers such as *Angels: God's Secret Agents* (1975) and his 1997 autobiography, *Just As I Am*.

A counselor to U.S. presidents, Graham appeared on Gallup's "Ten Most Admired Men in the World" list a record 61 times. His honors include the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1983), Congressional Gold Medal (1996), and an Honorary Knighthood (2001). Following his passing in 2018 at age 99, he lay in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, and a bronze statue of him was added to the U.S. Capitol in 2024. Billy and Ruth raised five children, 19 grandchildren, 44 great-grandchildren, and nine great-great-grandchildren.

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- **Prayer Intercessors:** Stand with us in prayer as we labour to spread God's Word across nations.
- **Transcribers:** Convert sermon recordings into accurate transcripts.
- **Editors:** Refine transcripts into polished, readable eBooks.
- **Bloggers:** Create SEO-friendly posts to announce and distribute newly published books.
- **Social Media Managers:** Share books online, grow our reach, and engage our global community.
- **Language Translators:** Help translate sermons into different languages so more people can access the truth.
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