

Fiery evangelist managed to 'wake up old York'

The Rev. Billy Sunday brought his revival to the town of York on Jan. 19, 1924.

Sunday arrived during a "soul-saving and devil-fighting" tour of the nation. He was based in Charlotte for six weeks that January and February.

The 1920s were the heyday for Sunday's type of operation. The team arrived by railway, set up a

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huge tent and recruited local citizens to serve as "advance agents" and ushers, take pledges and follow up.

In Charlotte, Sunday attracted more than 500,000 to his services, with an estimated 8,500 going to the

altar to confess their sins. Ministers all over Charlotte held additional services, and "8,000 business women collected over \$25,000."

Sunday came to York for less than one day. Newspapers reported he spent a little over one hour in town but in that time managed to "wake up old York."

As in all of his appearances, Sunday treated York to a slashing attack on the forces of the devil, or as the newspaper said about his preaching, he "scorched and withered, and then, bearing aloft the banner of righteousness, went over the top with his customary eclat."

Sunday preached in First Presbyterian, a historic church that had seldom, if ever, witnessed a performance such as Sunday's. The church probably never had been as filled, either, with little space left because much of the countryside turned out to hear him. A large number who could not get inside stood on the street.

Sunday's performance lived up to its billing. Even the skeptics and cynics (of which York had a good share) reportedly had nothing but praise for the powerful sermon.

Carried away by the message, a reporter wrote: "The appeal of his message, vibrant in sincerity and at

times couched in diction of rare beauty, reinforced by the flaming crusader spirit of the speaker, was all that was needed to make an impression lasting and profound."

The service began with a song led by Walter Jenkins, who traveled with Sunday. Next, Sunday was introduced by John R. Hart, a York lawyer representing the Men's Bible Class of the church. Hart read a letter from the governor of South Carolina, Thomas G. McLeod.

McLeod assured Sunday the God-fearing Scots-Irish of York would provide him with a congenial atmosphere in which to carry on his work — a work for which the governor had much admiration.

Billy Sunday traded compliments with McLeod by terming him the best S.C. governor since Wade Hampton.

Sunday based his sermon on Christian hope on the First Epistle of Peter, third chapter, 15th verse. Christianity, said Sunday, is the only religion that brings serenity of spirit. Lord Byron and Edgar Allan Poe were cited as two men who had brilliant but empty careers.

Sunday also stressed the importance of personal neatness. He gave graphic illustrations.

"Some people think that the more they look like a hedgehog the better it is for them. They would stand a better chance of getting to heaven if they went to a barber shop oftener. If a girl looks better with a little rouge, she should put it on. If the lipstick helps use it too; if a mop of artificial hair enhances her appearance, put it on."

Leaving York with the admonition, "You are either going to heaven or hell, and you must make your choice," Sunday hurried to Clover for another service. In the evening, he packed another crowd into his Charlotte tabernacle.

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