



EASTER 2021

Reclaimed

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST



Global Outreach

By Pastor Paul and Amy Hansen

From the Bourne Family: Believers in Mombasa, Kenya, were forced to leave their church and school building. The church has faced many difficulties as they secured a new location in this very strong Muslim portion of the slum, yet God has been faithful, and they have overcome. They were able to get a temporary roof, which is an incredible gift, that has allowed them to meet in the new building. However, they are needing much more to finish this new building. We are praying with them to see the Lord raise up those funds so they might be able to stand as a light in a Muslim stronghold! The roof is complete, and everything except the floor and interior plaster on the walls is done. They need about \$3,000 to complete everything.



The project in Uganda we have talked about previously and the literal starvation they are facing, even still due to COVID-19 shutdowns, has only worsened. They are in need of approximately \$4,600 for completing a well. I say approximate because costs are always going up due to COVID, and they are in a very remote place just near the Congo border.



Join forces with other brothers and sisters in Christ as we lift our voices to the Lord for our Field Staff! Join us on our monthly Zoom call. All are welcome.

DATE:
Third Sundays

TIME:
11:15AM - 12:00PM

ZOOM MEETING ID:
882 8352 8964

Passcode: 574051

God Initiates

By Pastor Steve Scheperle

During March, we will continue our sermon series on the book of Hebrews entitled "Holding Fast." The author's main purpose is to help Jewish Christians hold fast their faith in Jesus amidst growing pressure to return to Judaism. The author of Hebrews repeatedly points out that Jesus completes and surpasses all that came in the Old Testament. So far, we've seen that:

- Jesus is better than Old Testament angelic messengers (Hebrews 1-2)
- Jesus is better than Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6)
- Jesus provides a better rest than Joshua (Hebrews 3:7-4:13)
- Jesus is a better high priest than Israel's high priests (Hebrews 4-5)
- Jesus urges us towards maturity (Hebrews 5-6)
- Jesus offers assurance (Hebrews 6:9-20)



During March's sermons, we will continue to follow the flow of Hebrews and look at how:

- Jesus provides a better covenant (Hebrews 8:1-13)
- Jesus provides a better sanctuary (Hebrews 9)
- Jesus offers a better sacrifice (Hebrews 10)

As I study and prepare for these upcoming sermons with the rest of the teaching team, something powerful stands out to me. In Hebrews 8, the author says that the new covenant Jesus brings surpasses the covenant given in the Old Testament. Part of the old covenant was the giving of the law; God's law which was written on tablets of stone and recorded in writing. God's law was intended to help Israel know how to love God first and foremost and to know how to love their neighbors. However, the author of Hebrews quotes from Jeremiah 31 to point out that the new covenant is better, because the law of God would be written on people's hearts and minds. In other words, the new covenant promises not simply to restate God's law but to fundamentally change those who are in a covenant relationship with their God: our hearts and minds are transformed to know and love the law of God!

What makes this so powerful to me is that the new covenant not only surpasses the old covenant, but it also shows the uniqueness of Christianity among other religions. In most religions, people have to perform certain

ceremonies or rituals to hopefully get a god's attention and bend that god's will. If you go through the proper steps, you should be able to get the god to do what you want (e.g., answer your prayer, give you health, give you good luck, etc.). However, Christianity is much different. In Christianity, it's not that we are trying to get God's attention to bend His will so that He will do our bidding. Rather, God has initiated this covenant in order to bend our will and change our hearts, so that we will do God's good and righteous bidding. In a world suffering under the painful effects of sin, self-centeredness, and self-exaltation, it is good news that God has come to change our hearts and minds. God will not abandon us to our own devices but has promised to be at work in us, to renew our hearts and minds.

A similar powerful point relates to Jesus offering a better sacrifice in Hebrews chapters 9 and 10. The author points out that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross surpasses and outstrips all the sacrifices made in the Old Testament. Those earlier sacrifices had to be repeated, but Jesus' sacrifice was totally effective and only had to be made once. Here again, Jesus' sacrifice not only surpasses the Old Testament sacrifices, but shows something significantly unique about Christianity. In most other religions, people have to get a god's attention, make sacrifices to appease the gods, and hopefully curry favor with the gods. But in Christianity, God Himself has already made a sacrifice to pour unmerited favor upon

undeserving sinners out of sheer love and grace! In Christianity, we find a God, who of His own initiative, has made a sacrifice to save and redeem us. And, what He sacrifices is not some animal or other offering but His very life in our place!

During these sermons in March, may God spur us all on to hold fast to Jesus. In our Lord, we have a generous and gracious God who has made an immense sacrifice to save and redeem us. And we also have a faithful God who is changing us into His image for His good purposes in the world.

THE MEANING OF EASTER

BY STEVE SCHEPERLE

Growing up as a kid in church, I have many memories of Easter. My earliest memory is receiving a brown bag on Easter morning at our Lutheran Sunday School as a preschooler. Each year bags like these were given to kids, and they included two or three pieces of candy and always a large fragrant orange. Somehow, that small gift left an impression on me. It reminded me that this Sunday was special out of all the other Sundays of the year. I didn't understand why it was special, but that small bag made it clear that this Sunday was different.

When I was an early elementary student, my parents left the Lutheran church for a Pentecostal church, and Easter took on a deeper meaning. I came to understand more clearly that Easter was a time to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. We did not have any services to specifically mark Jesus' death (no Good Friday service). Rather, all the emphasis was on celebrating Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday. I loved these big services! The choir and entire congregation sang so loudly, celebrating Jesus' victory over death!

Years later, as a married student at a non-denominational seminary near Boston, I encountered yet a new layer of meaning for Easter. During these years my wife and I valued learning about other church traditions. We had our regular church home, but on rare occasions would visit other churches to learn about their traditions. The most profound experience was attending an Episcopal church's Good Friday service. Never before had we been forced to consider with such gravity the weight of our sin. Never before had we sat through an entire service to give exclusive focus to Jesus' pain and agony as He inched closer to the cross. The service came to a climax as we recalled Jesus' death on the cross,

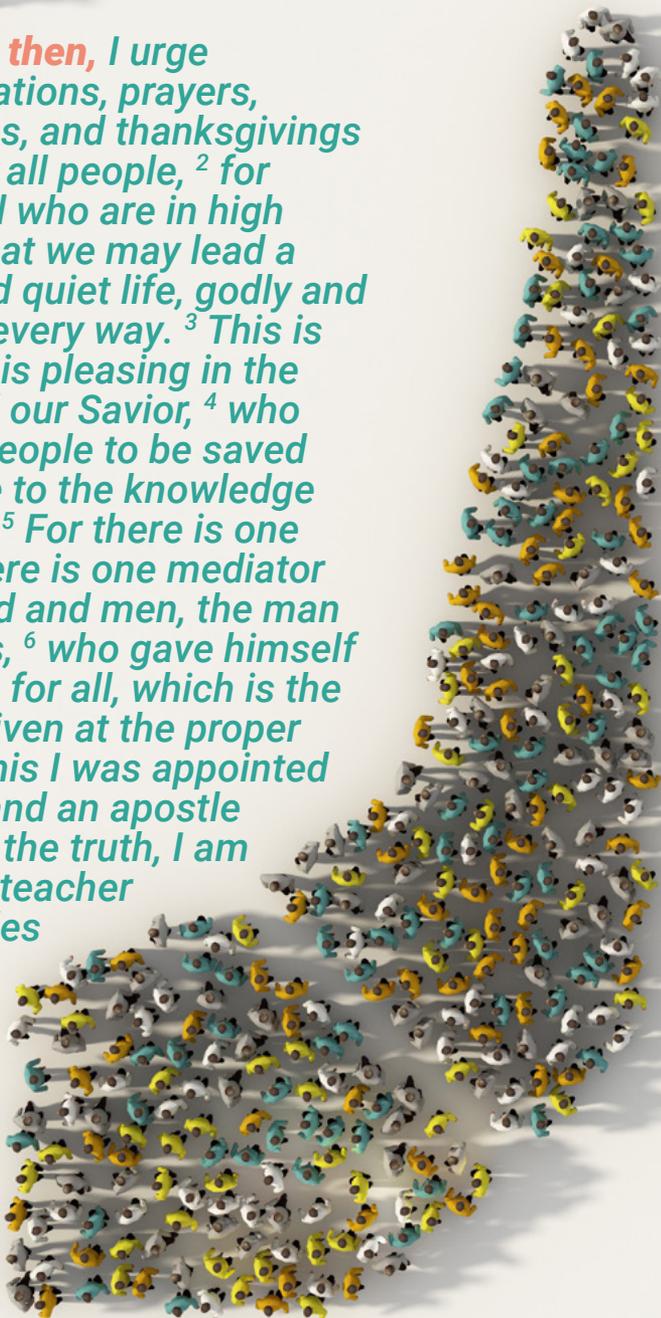
and then we were left in deafening silence, forced to ponder in quietness our sin, the brokenness of the world, and Jesus' great sacrifice to redeem us. There were no closing prayers, no concluding remarks, and no canned music over the sound system to break the silence or ease us back into "normal life." Few services have caused me to wrestle with the reality of my sin the way this service did. And few have given me such great appreciation for the extent of God's sacrificial love for me. And now, I find myself gaining yet another new layer of appreciation for Easter. I'm learning that there is a richness to Jesus' resurrection.

Yes, Jesus' resurrection guarantees that believers too will be raised from the dead to eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). But Jesus brings resurrection in a host of ways! Sin brings death, decay, and destruction to so many areas of life; to our bodies, to relationships with one another, to societies. In His life and ministry, Jesus sought to give new life to people in many ways. The sick were made whole. The overlooked and undervalued had a place in His kingdom. Repentant sinners received rich grace. The humble were raised up. Jews and Gentiles, who had been at odds, were made into one united family. At Easter, we have deep joy knowing that Jesus' resurrection guarantees that one day, the dead in Christ will also be raised to eternal life. But during Easter, we also have hope that He is raising us to new life even now.

So, which of these meanings of Easter is true? They all are because the Bible speaks to all of them. I think Easter can best be celebrated as a larger season, Lent leading into Easter because it gives us time to ponder all of these complex realities of Easter. It has been meaningful to work through the Lenten Devotional series together at Grace. If you have not signed up to receive these daily devotionals, I invite you to do so by texting "lent21" to 94253. The Lent devotionals started on February 17, but it's never too late to join us, as we devote time to this fruitful season of reflecting on Jesus' rich work.

¹ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷ For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

1 Timothy 2:1-7





Begin with Prayer

By *Pastor Brooks Simpson*

As you look out over the landscape of America in 2021, what do you see? Are you hopefully optimistic or are you cynical? If you are in Christ, you are God's ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:17-21), strategically placed in this location during this time in history to be salt and light. How will we be salt and light in a dark and decaying culture?

Francis Schaeffer said in his book *How Then Shall We Live: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*:

"Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) in his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire said that the following five attributes marked Rome at its end: first, a mounting love of show and luxury (that is, affluence); second, a widening gap between the very rich and the very poor (this could be among countries in the family of nations as well as in a single nation); third, an obsession with sex; fourth, freakishness in the arts, masquerading as originality, and enthusiasms pretending to be creativity; fifth, an increased desire to live off the state. It all sounds so familiar. We have come a long road since our first chapter, and we are back in Rome."

"It all sounds so familiar," Schaeffer wrote in *How Then Shall We Live* in 1976. I was nine years old when he published those words.

Forty-five years have passed since then, and if those five attributes described our culture in 1976, how much more so do they describe America in 2021. Modern man sees himself as the measure of all things. Modern man has banished God from all public discourse. Modern man has defined truth as whatever 51% of the population says it is. Christians watch the moral decline and are rightfully concerned. I hear repeatedly again and again from concerned Christian citizens that our nation was founded on Christian

principles, and we need to return to our Christian heritage. I would agree, but how do you take a culture where it does not want to go?

“Ours is a post-Christian world in which Christianity, not only in the number of Christians but in cultural emphasis and cultural results, is now in the minority. To ask young people to maintain the status quo is folly. The status quo is no longer ours.” – Francis Schaeffer

I see many Christians grabbing onto politics as a potential means of changing America. The idea is to fight along ideological lines. Get the right party in, and laws can be passed that will restore America. Don't get me wrong, Christians have a civic duty to engage in politics as salt and light but can good policy change the heart of a nation? Read the words of one of our nation's founders.

“We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” – John Adams

Democracy only works when a majority of people believe they are accountable to a holy God. This is what our founders believed. Adams' point was that if you lose that religious foundation, you have nothing to build on. When the culture defines truth as the arbitrary desire of the masses, the foundations are gone.

With that less than cheery synopses of our culture, **where do we begin?** What do we do given that we are a minority in a culture becoming increasingly hostile towards our faith? We pray. Paul tells us that praying

for the salvation of our leaders and neighbors is of FIRST importance (1 Timothy 2:1-7).

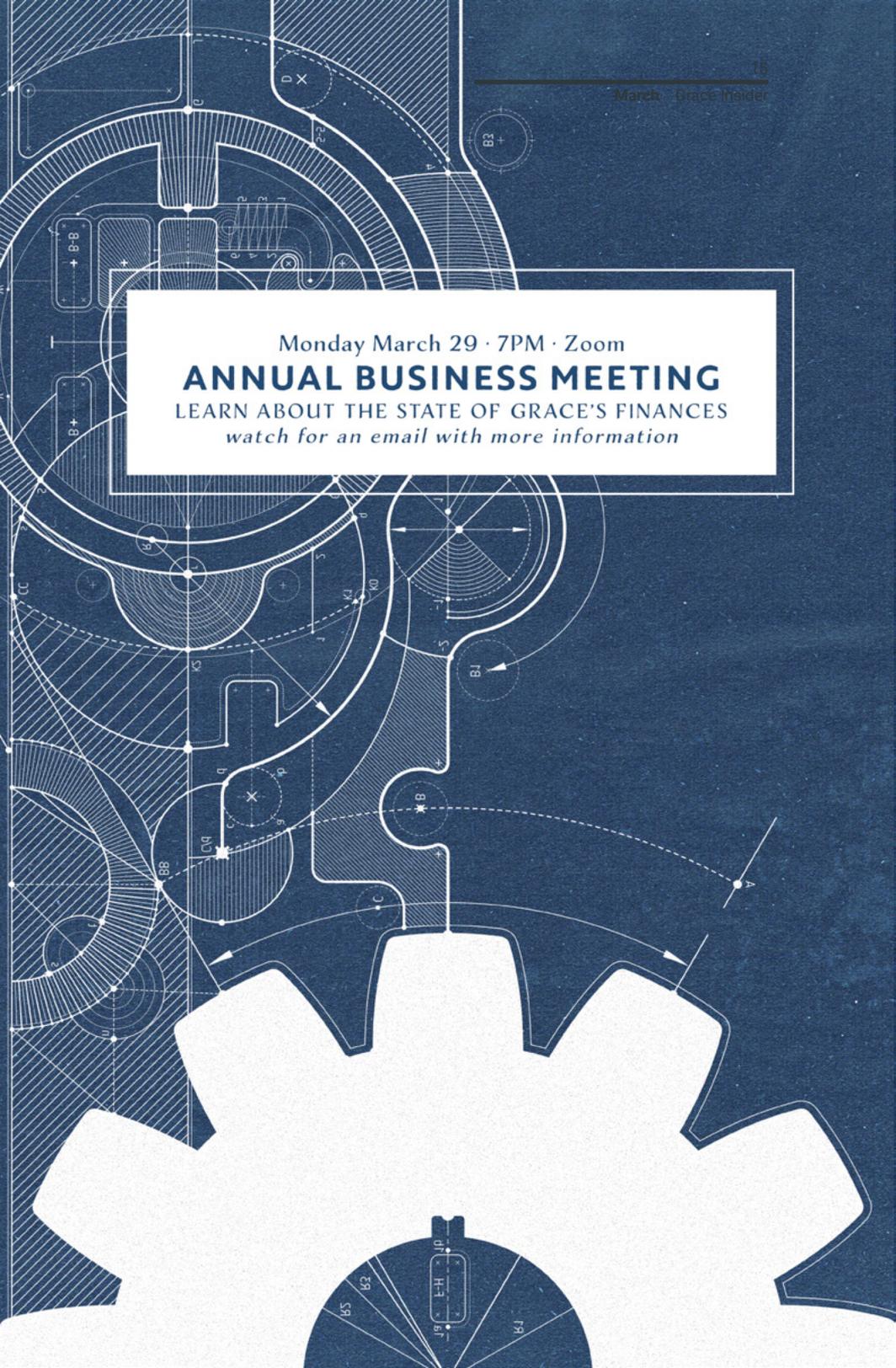
Paul wrote to Christians living under the Roman Empire who had neither political power nor influence. They didn't need it. Instead, they saw themselves as ambassadors for Jesus dwelling in a foreign land, and as such, they understood their primary duty was to pray, serve, and speak to the end that their neighbors would come to know Jesus. Paul said to begin with prayer, and that is where we must begin.

Begin with prayer. Pray that over the next five years we would see 1000 people come to Christ and become fully devoted disciples of Jesus. Pray that your church would diligently equip you to realize this desire. Pray for three people you know personally that God would use you to introduce them to Jesus. Pray for your local and national leaders, that the gospel would break through and they would embrace Jesus as savior and Lord. Pray for the church that she would be faithful to her witness as the culture is increasingly hostile to that witness.

Reflection

Write down the names of three people you are praying for:

Write down the names of your local and national leaders you are praying for:



Monday March 29 · 7PM · Zoom
ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING
LEARN ABOUT THE STATE OF GRACE'S FINANCES
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The Joy of Together

By Kat George

Since I first began attending Grace, I can say without hesitation that one of the most life-giving times spent with other believers has been the time when we are in the word together, sharing life (the good, the not-so-good, and the very, very, hard!). Perhaps you, too, have found this to be true – the joy of gathering together, learning, studying, and sharing. Or maybe, just maybe, you are still looking, longing for that experience. If so, you are not alone, and even better, there are so many amazing opportunities at Grace to join others in serving, learning, and growing together in Christ. One such opportunity is right around the corner for the Women of Grace. Each spring and fall we



gather together for roughly 8-10 weeks to do a Bible study. This spring is no different. Starting the first week of March, we will be offering Jen Wilkin's Bible study on 1 Peter. As we were able to do last fall, we will be offering this study on Tuesday evenings at 7pm in an online-only format, and on Friday mornings at 10am in person at the North Liberty Campus. If this is something you might be interested in, but you have questions, don't hesitate to email me at kathryng@graceb3.org and ask away! One common question is do we have child care on Friday mornings, and the answer is yes! If you have joined us in the past and wish to do so again, here is the registration link, graceb3.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/717219

One of the sweetest aspects of these gatherings is that women from all stages of life come together to study God's word. Even those that might not have had the chance to do so in the past are encouraged to dive in and discover what the gospel is all about. More than anything, we want you to know you are welcome, and we look forward to meeting you!





U P S I D E D O W N K I N G D O M

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