September 18, 2022

Missionary Update – Greg & Kilby Helms

Colossians Message

We’ve been gone for just under two years and it’s a privilege to worship here, to sing praise to Almighty God with likeminded brothers and sisters, with family, with you who send us out. It’s our joy and our privilege to be here.

I think we’ve got some slides. I don’t know if they’re working. If they are, we’ll see them. If they’re not, we won’t. We just want to share a little bit about where we are and what we’ve doing. So, I’m Greg and this is Kilby. We serve in Arua, Uganda, in the top left corner of this East African country. We serve in a place where there’s a lot of poverty, a lot of brokenness. There’s a lot of hunger. There are a lot of broken families. There’s a lot of sickness. There’s a lot of death. There is a person at the end of our road building coffins and he never runs out of work. It’s a place where the government is confusing. It’s a place where people are friendly. It’s a place where most people live in mud brick houses with grass-thatched roofs and they draw water up from a bore hole from a well. Some people have to walk just down the road; other people have to walk three or four miles. It’s a place where we’ve seen hearts really receptive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the midst of suffering and hardship, people are willing to have conversations. Time works different in this place – everybody is not watching their watch and always on the run. They’ll sit down and talk for two or three hours in the middle of their day. They’ll interrupt their schedule to spend time together. And it’s been our joy to be in this place, and to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this place, and to see the Lord at work in the hearts of people who have just trusted Him, people who have been growing now as disciples for over a year and are now evangelizing the lost themselves, as they continue to grow.

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# We are partnered with a group called the Baptist Union of Uganda (BUU). It’s run by Ugandans and we’re their partner. We get to do discipleship and evangelism in a place called the West Nile Region. You might have heard of West Nile Virus, Zika, and other mosquito-spread sicknesses. A lot of those exist here. And there are not a lot of people spreading the Gospel and there’s not a lot of discipleship. There are a lot of buildings with crosses on them but there’s nothing that resembles the Church and there’s not a lot of teaching from God’s Word. So, it’s our joy to serve with this ministry in this place. It’s our mission to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, and share the whole truth of God’s Word, and show discipleship as indispensable. We want to see God glorified as His disciples are trained and then they are spending their lives making more disciples.

It’s our joy to see that that is taking place. While we’re here, there’s a young man still leading a young men’s discipleship group. There’s a young lady still leading the children as they grow in the understanding of the Gospel and they are living their lives for Jesus even when life is really, really hard. It’s our joy to know that there are some pastors who care to share the Word of God rather than political opinions or their thoughts totally apart from God’s Word.

# Habakkuk writes this and Isaiah says something very similar (Habakkuk 2:14).

For the Earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

We’re up in the mountains right now, but if you’ve ever stood by the ocean, you look off to the left, you look front and center, you look off to the right and all you see is water. And I long for the day when we will see the glory of the Lord cover the lands in that way. And what a joy to know that what Isaiah wrote about, what Habakkuk wrote about, what we hear of promised, is coming to pass; that God is drawing people to himself from every language, tribe, and nation. And there are people of the Alur tribe, and the Kakwa tribe, and the Lugbara tribe who are coming to faith in Christ. God is doing a work by His grace as the Gospel goes forth – in places where it’s been muddied and in places where it’s never been spoken, never been shared. Please continue praying for more of this and thank you for the prayers of all of you already.

# We get to share on Matthew 28 quite a lot…

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

…and what we want is, in the place where we live and serve – regarding this first part, there have been people who have gone there, and they’ve maybe sought to make disciples of the nations, and there’s been something of baptism but a lot of confusion and not a lot of teaching.

…teaching them to observe all that I’ve commanded you…

That’s what Christ has given for all of us in Andrews, or wherever we grew up, or wherever we go for vacation or work, in our families and with strangers, to share the Gospel and see people come to faith, see them take a step of obedience in baptism, and then to train them up to observe all that God has given. We really want to be about that in the place called Arua, Uganda, and throughout South Sudan. as the Lord has started to let us travel up there and share the Gospel in that place. And we trust that the Lord is with us.

# These are some of our young men. They’re young. They’re 16 to 20 and there’s a little guy who is 12 and they are faithful. These are some of my most faithful brothers. They walk three, four, five miles to come to our house and study God’s Word. And they’re not looking for just a quick youth group gathering; they study, they read the Bible for two or three hours together, they ask their questions. They didn’t used to. They were very quiet and shy. We’ve watched people come out of their reclusiveness or their shell. We’ve watched people who were afraid to speak because only the older people should speak, but we want them to know God’s Word and they’ve felt that, and they’re growing. Some of them had never held a Bible in their hands and now all of these young men have the Scriptures in their hands and they’re reading day-by-day, and they’re growing and they’re sharing with others. At first, we were just meeting once a week, then three days a week, then six days a week, by their request. They’re the ones walking a long way to get here. It’s such a joy to be around people who hunger for the things of God.

# This young man on the bottom left, his name is Chol. We watched him learn to read for understanding. He could sound out the letters but he was struggling just to read. But as he grew in the knowledge of God, and as he kept coming, he’s the one who said, “We’re not meeting on Tuesdays...why don’t we meet on Saturdays.” He had a hunger and we watched him trust the Lord. Now, he’s sharing the Gospel in his school and he’s been called a model student in his school. The teachers and the administration noticed the change in his life and they told the other students, “Follow like what Chol is doing.” They see that the Lord has changed him and that’s true of many of these students.

# I’m going to let Kilby share a little bit about her work with the young ladies and with the women that she’s been able to minister to. – Hi, everyone. Yes, similar to Greg having a group of young men who he was able to minister with, I was able to have a group of young ladies. They weren’t able to come as much, because the Lukbar tribe, which is the tribe in our region, is kind of known throughout Uganda for viewing women very lowly. Oftentimes, they are seen as property, as objects. So, a lot of the young girls, even from a very young age, have a lot of responsibility as far as what they do in the home. So, the girls weren’t able to meet as much, but we would meet two times a week and it was really beautiful. There are some – maybe not where we are – tribal warfare, but definitely some tribal prejudice, and it was really beautiful to see – I think in this picture that there are maybe four tribes represented from Northern Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda, and tribes that would usually not even speak to one another praying for one another, and sharing the Gospel together with people from their schools. It was a beautiful thing to see and was also a glimpse of Heaven.

The girl beside me in the bluish dress, Stacy, is one of the most faithful believers I’ve ever met. The first time I met her, she was 11 and the girls in this group were about 14 to 18. Her mom was one of our friends and she kept saying, “Please let Stacy come to Bible Study.” I kept, in my own, finite thinking, saying, “Stacy wouldn’t understand. She’s too young.” And the first time she came, she was like, “Okay, now that you’ve told this story, who am I going to go share it with?” And she went and shared it with everybody in her home and everybody at school. It was really cool. We ended up giving her a study Bible and it’s about half the size of her body. But she still carries it every single day, two miles to school and two miles back, because she says, “I would much rather have this Bible and be equipped and ready to share with someone given the opportunity, even if it’s more to carry on the way to school.” You can be praying for her. She does not come from a great family situation. There’s a lot of drunkenness there. It was really sad the first time I met her dad. I was walking down the road with Stacy and we passed a drunk, and once we passed him, she said, “That was my dad, by the way,” and he had no idea who she was. Then, recently, her mother left her to go start a life with another man. So, this was a really beautiful opportunity, though, to see – as soon as I found out that Stacy’s mom had left, I went and visited her. She said, “I mean, I’m sad and I’ll be praying for my mom, but that’s not what defines me. I know who I am in Christ and that is what I’ll hold onto.” I was like, “I don’t have that type of faith and I’m not 12 years old.” So, be praying for her and be praying for her family right now, especially, because that happened right before we left. It was a bit of a discouraging note to leave on. So, just be praying for Stacy and her family but also for her faith and that she would continue to be faithful and to be bold as she shares. And also for the rest of the girls in the picture.

# This is awesome. I think you guys have seen this photo another time. This is a brother of ours named Howard who was involved in Islam his whole life, and as he read the book of Luke, he trusted the Lord. Me and another missionary got to visit with him several times and he started reading through the book of Luke. He wasn’t asking for material gain; he just said, “I’ve saved up my money. Can you go buy me a Bible? I want to read on my own, as well.” As he was studying the book of Luke, he had questions and we would just spend time together. He sells beans. We would go to his bean shop and buy beans. He would invite us into his home. We would sit there under the grass-thatched roof on the three little chairs borrowed from his neighbor. And this man came to trust Jesus. Then the local church walked two miles down to this watering hole. You had people jumping off the rocks and swimming like we do up here and washing their clothes, and their motorbikes, and their babies, and their pots and pans, and then everything stops. Howard gives his testimony, and the preacher shares the Gospel, and everybody sings, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back,” and Howard gets baptized. It’s an awesome proclamation of the Gospel. Believers are encouraged and the unbelievers get to hear the message of salvation. It was a special day.

# These are some men who came to a study Bible training. These are all pastors. Some are from South Sudan, some of from Uganda. Some of them traveled three, four, five miles on foot to come to this training. Some of them road their bicycle 15-20 miles on rough roads. Some of them got in a taxi, which is not like the little yellow or orange car that we might imagine from the movies but a bus that fits about 20 people or a van that squeezes in about 20 people. They travel from far distances because they heard there’s an opportunity to receive a resource to help them share the Gospel better and teach the things of God better in the local churches. I’m greatly encouraged by these men and I’m also challenged by them.

The man on the right in the red shirt, and the yellow hat, and the purple tie is an older fellow who has never had any kind of study resources. He said, “This has already, today, in our 8-9 hours together, helped me understand the things of God better. Now, I can go home and pass these things on.” And he said, “I would have had to sell two goats to get enough money to buy this but my family doesn’t have any goats. Any if we sold two goats, that we don’t have, and got money, they don’t have this in our region and we don’t know people in the capital.” The capital city is 8-9 hours south of where these men are and they don’t know people there; it’s just a place far off.

God is working through these men who are reading the Bible and they’re growing in the knowledge of God. That enables them to feed the sheep, to feed the local churches, rather than just trying to take from them. I’m very encouraged by them.

# This was another baptism for several of our students, and I can say that all of those young men who were baptized on that day are faithful and growing still. This was just shy of a year ago. I’m very encouraged by them, very thankful for them. The baptism was in a water storage container. It was in the dry season and it’s hard to find water, though trees and a few different plants can stay green. It was a special day.

# 72 students at a local school that we got to share with for eight weeks, because one of our students, when he went back to school, spoke with the administration and they invited us to come and share. I thought it was just once and then they said, “Can you keep coming?” So, we kept going there and they learned stories from creation to Christ. They learned a short Gospel presentation. Some of them trusted the Lord. Some of these are young believers and they said, “You’ve helped us to be able to know God more. You’ve helped us know God more and you’ve put a Bible in our hands so that we can keep growing.” Some of these young people, on this day when they received their Bibles, said, “We are the first person in our family to own a copy of God’s Word and we’re going to read it faithfully. You’ve changed our lives.”

I’m so encouraged by these young people because they learn these stories, just like what we discussed with Passover and its meaning. They know what the blood of the lamb represents and they know that it was pointing forward to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who came to take away the sins of the world. They know when they look at creation that our God made this. And they know that the prophets were looking forward to a new King and a new Kingdom, who would be born of a virgin in Bethlehem. These students, they receive knowledge and they are excited, they’re hungry, and they remember the things you say. Then, all of these students are in a boarding school, so when it comes holiday time, they’re going back to maybe 30 different local churches, 30-40 different families, and we encourage them, “Go and tell them the truth. Go and make the truth known.” God is using young people in Uganda, in a place where there’s a lot of stubbornness in older folks, specifically in the Church community, where they say, “We don’t want anything new. We don’t need anything from the Word.” God is going to uproot that and we’re going to see it happen.

# I’m going to let Kilby share about the children. – This was the first time that we had a children’s program and these were the original children who came. It’s really cool, there’s Stacy again, in the pink dress in the back. Then, that girl would be her aunt but it’s like her cousin or her sister who is with her. They opened their home to us and let us have Bible study on their porch right there. We used the *Jesus Storybook Bible* and they memorized so much Scripture. They’re an oral culture, so they can memorize things like I never could. It’s so cool, because I would ask them each week, “Now, who are you going to go and share this story, or this Scripture memory, with?” and every single time they would have somebody and they would actually share it. It wouldn’t just be that they felt the pressure or the obligation to say a name. They would actually go and share it, even these tiny little kids. So, I was very thankful for that. Again, you can be praying for them while we’re gone. Stacy, we actually left her with a *Jesus Storybook Bible* and she’s been continuing this children’s program, which has been a huge blessing.

This is a church up in South Sudan where we’ve been privileged to travel this year several times. I’ve been up there several times and Kilby’s been up there three times. It’s a difficult place and it’s a difficult place to get to. We could not drive here, although we have a van thanks to people like you, but the roads aren’t safe. It’s the type of place where you could be killed trying to drive up there. But our friend is a pilot and he flies a plane, and we get to go on that plane as passengers. It can be really costly to get up there because they have all these restrictions and there’s Covid testing on both sides. That’s if you’re a normal passenger.

So, this brother of ours, who has also been a mentor to me, and who has been a missionary there in a hard place for 20 years, and his wife has also been a mentor to Kilby, said, “If I make you guys crew on this little plane then you can come and go freely and it won’t cost anything.” So, I chock the tire and Kilby buckles her seatbelt and we’re crew. We’re doing really good; we’ve practiced a lot.

That church is a place where I’ve seen some of the most beautiful discipleship happening. Some of the pastors that come in, some of the indigenous missionaries who come together – one dude, on his way there his bicycle broke on his way in from 18 miles out and he walked the rest of the way. He just wants to be growing. When we were leaving there, he put his hand on my shoulder and he said, “Don’t forget about us. We know you’ve got to go visit family and we know you have invitations with churches, but don’t forget about us.” Please be praying for us as we continue to look at spending more time up in South Sudan. There is a great hunger for the things of God, at least in this local community, and these people who’ve been discipled by our friends for the last eight years are now getting on that little plane and flying out to other villages in Muslim-dominated areas, and they’ve said, “We will preach Christ anywhere you drop us off. We don’t know what we’re going to eat all the time and we don’t know where we’re going to sleep, but the people in that hospital and in that market, they need to hear this message we’ve heard and received.” I’m so challenged by them and I’m so encouraged by them.

# This is a local church in Arua where we fellowship regularly and where we labor throughout each week. Please pray for that place. It’s been a hard place. There’s a pastor who in some ways is a stumbling block to many of the people there, but the church as a whole is growing up, and the people are growing in faith, and growing in knowledge, and growing in reading the Scriptures for the very first time themselves, and they are passing these things on to others. There’s a lady named Sarah who has been learning the Word of God. She sells fish in the market and she said, “I meet a lot of people and now I have something to share with them. I’ve trusted Christ for a long time but I didn’t know how to share that with someone.” We started our session in a small group meeting on Thursdays with a short Gospel that’s about one minute. It goes like this:

This is the short Gospel. There are four parts: God, man, Christ, and the response. God is righteous and holy. He created everything perfectly. But man sinned against God and created a separation between him and God. But God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a perfect life and died as a sacrifice on a cross. On the third day, He rose from the dead. In response, all who repent and believe in Jesus will be saved from their sins and have eternal life.

And Sarah can share that with 20-30 people a day, because she loves the Lord. And it helped her put into words what God has done in her heart and for eternity. It’s really awesome to see these people growing.

# This is a pastor’s training center, where we’ve gotten to teach on local church. There are pastors here who represent local Baptist churches that haven’t practiced baptism or haven’t practiced communion, because they don’t know what it means or what it is. There is a lot of confusion between Catholics and “born-agains” where we live. Christians are called “born agains” and they are hated by Catholics, and there is some reciprocity to that, sadly. But a lot of people at the Baptist church will say, “We don’t do those things because the Catholics do them,” and we will say, “But what does Jesus say and what does God’s Word teach?” These men are growing faithfully. After the teaching on baptism, three of them were baptized who hadn’t been. Then, they went home and they taught on baptism. They said, “We’re going to go and we’re going to share on communion for the very first time and we’re going to teach it from the Scriptures.” It looks very similar to what we have done here tonight. I’m very thankful for them. They all received study Bibles as well and they all received several hours of training on how to use it.

Some of these people never knew what a table of contents, or an index, or concordance are. What are footnotes or cross references? These are things in the Bible that can help us study, and as they grow in their study and in their knowledge, they are able to share. And they’re humble. Some of these guys come from so far because there’s a real hunger to know God. They read the Bible because they want to know God. They don’t just want to know the name of Jesus and some stuff about Him. They want to follow Him clearly in all of life. Again, they’re some of the most faithful men that I’ve ever met.

# Kilby’s up. – This is actually cool because the lady in the back with the blue and white dress is Lillian, and a few people from Red Oak actually came to visit up in December and they were with me when I met Lillian. Since then, I got her phone number and she kept asking me when we did Bible study. She knew we were Christians and she kept saying, “Please come and share the Bible where I work.” So, this is where she works. It’s an African cloth market and all these women sit there every day, usually for 10 hours a day, and since they all sell the exact same thing they will have maybe one customer each day, maybe two. They are just sitting there, so I started going there a few times a week and sharing with them. Similar to what Greg said, many of these women had never held a Bible, never owned a Bible, their families had never owned a Bible. Again, they are from a culture where the women are seen as very lowly, so we just walked through all of the stories in Jesus’ life and ministry where He’s loving on and ministering to women. It was amazing to see the way that they now saw their value through who Christ says they are instead of how their culture values them or treats them. Their favorite is the story of the woman at the well and it was cool to see how eager they were to go and share it with their children and with their neighbors, even this woman over there. Her name is Ikru. You can be praying for her husband who is Muslim. She said, “I’m even going to go share with him because he needs to know.”

 Before we left, we got to give them all Bibles, and like I said, many of them had never even held a Bible. It was a huge blessing, and Lillian is continuing Bible studies while we’re here. She’s still meeting with them. They all work right there together so it’s kind of perfect. I love it – no one in Uganda is in a rush for anything. So we would sometimes be having Bible study, and a customer would come to one of their booths and ask what was going on, and they would say, “We’re having a Bible study,” and the customer would just stop and sit for two hours and join in on the Bible study. That happened almost every week. Sometimes we would never see the woman again and sometimes she would come back the next week. That was really a big blessing. I’m very thankful for this opportunity that I’ve had with these women and also their faithfulness. I think, before the Bible study, most of them would say they were Christians but they really knew nothing about Christ, about what Scripture says about the Gospel, and now I’m very confident that they do, and most of them are very, very faithful women.

# This is Stacy, again, and some of her family members. It’s just a fun picture. We get around by boda, which is a motorcycle taxi, so this is five of us on a little motorcycle. You can’t really see, but Abinah, the driver is all the way up on the gas tank and his legs are stretched behind him to reach everything that he needs to. But that’s how we get around.

# It’s really amazing, the people we’ve gotten to meet and the people who’ve been consistent, though time works differently there and it took adjusting for us. There are a couple of young pastors who come every Monday from different distances. One guy comes three or four miles on foot and another guy named Richard rides his bicycle eight miles on a rough road. They just want to come and learn; they want to come and study; they want to come and grow so that they have something to share later in the week. I’m just so grateful that we get to be there and I’m grateful that over 1000 Bibles have been able to come to this area because of you and others who have supported this work.

I’m thankful for the pastors we get to meet face-to-face, whether it’s driving six or seven hours out to a village place, or if it’s a village right around our town of Arua, or if it’s right in town. I’m thankful for the young people who are growing up in the ways of God, when they never saw that on display, and they never heard the Gospel. They guy who asked for the young men’s meetings to be six days a week said, “I’ve just gone to church to play the drums. I don’t know anything about what the pastor’s saying and I don’t know what he’s talking about.” Then, he hears the Gospel, he trusts Christ, and now he’s an avid reader, sharing the Gospel with everyone. He was quiet and timid; now he’s bold and he’s faithful. His teachers are seeing his life changed. His Muslim classmates are hearing the Gospel at school. They’re borrowing his Bible to see what he’s talking about. It’s really amazing what we’ve been privileged to witness in under two years and it’s God’s faithfulness. We’re weak and broken and we just want to share the message of hope, the message of joy and peace that comes through Christ.

# This was in one of the schools. Students are so open. The parents are fairly open and this is in a place where people pray to dead ancestors in the cemetery and hope for prosperity. This is in a place where people are meeting under a certain tree because they think it’s going to make them wise. This is a place where there is so much confusion among Muslims in a kind of folk-Muslim area and in a place where there is some mention of Jesus’ name and there are some buildings with crosses but very little Gospel preached and very little discipleship. So, it’s our joy to serve there, and we are grateful to be there, and we’re thankful that you’ve helped us be there, that you’ve sent us there, and prayed for us while we were there. We’re also grateful to be back with you at this time.

I’m going to just say a prayer for us and then I’m going to share a little bit from the Word. Are y’all still with us? Is that okay? Cool.

Father God, we praise you, we love you. God, we pray that you would speak to us through your Word and that it would be touching our hearts. God, help us to know you and to know your Gospel clearly so that we can share the message of hope with others and so that we can live as faithful witnesses. We praise you for all that you’ve done by your grace in Uganda, and South Sudan, and in Andrews, North Carolina, and out from here. God, we pray for much more of it. Use us as your people, as your children. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

We’re going to be in Galatians 2. We’re going to be brief because I know we just talked a long time, but Galatians 2:20-21, in just a second.

Just to give some context, Paul is writing to some people who are adding or subtracting things from the Gospel and they are doing a disservice to Christ, which is a big deal, so Paul speaks up even when it’s another brother in the Lord, the Apostle Peter, who is adding to the Gospel. He is putting Gentile believers, believers in Christ who are not from Jewish lineage, he is putting them at arms’ length, and Paul says absolutely not. Paul says absolutely not. No one is saved by the law. No one is saved through the keeping of the law, by the works that we do in the flesh. There is only one way of salvation and that’s by the blood of Jesus, the grace of God poured out on us. And Paul takes a strong stand on this.

In the United States, in the South, it could be that we’re fighting against some moralism, where people just think, “I’m good and I hope to be good enough for God.” That’s not the Gospel. In Uganda, it’s a pastor who is saying some true things but it’s mingled with false, African, traditional religion. He’s trying to put the things together and he’s adding or subtracting from the Gospel and he’s doing a disservice to God.

I love what the Apostle Paul says here from Galatians 2, verses 20-21. He says,

I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Paul is not living for himself any longer. Ever since the Damascus Road, everything has changed. His old ways of persecuting believers in Christ – that’s dead and gone away. His old ways of boasting in himself – that is totally gone. His boast is in Christ alone. His boast is in the blood of Jesus. His boast is in the sacrifice that was made for him. Paul understands that he is owned by the Living God and that is a good thing. He’s been purchased. I love how Peter writes – it’s not that we’ve been purchased with gold or silver, those are cheap things. We’ve been purchased by the blood of Jesus our Savior. That is a great thing. That is the greatest message. It’s the message of hope that is needed in North Carolina and it’s the message of hope that’s needed in Uganda, and South Sudan, and all across this world. And as this message goes forth - that the grace of God is what we need, that the blood of Jesus is what we need -- we’re going to see what Habakkuk writes about. We’re going to see what Isaiah writes about. There’s going to be people on this Earth, all over the place, singing praise to Almighty God, bowing before Him, surrendered to Him, living their lives for Him, singing His praises. And we want to be about that and we don’t want to place any hindrance in somebody’s way. The Gospel is offensive to people already and we don’t want to add any offense to that. We want to preach the truth. We want to herald the name of Jesus and this great Gospel message. And that’s our aim in Uganda, that’s our aim in South Sudan, that’s our aim with the young people, that’s our aim with the old people, that’s our aim at the print shop in town. And along the path when someone stops you and says, “You don’t look like you’re from Arua. What are you doing here?” and you get to share Christ with them just the first time you meet them, it’s amazing. It’s awesome, that people are open to listening. It’s the message of hope that’s needed on the roads here, and in our workplaces here, and in our families here, by those who may have heard but have not received the grace of God.

Paul is not living for himself. He says, “It’s no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.” His life is all about Jesus. That’s why he can write elsewhere, “To live is all for Christ. To die – that is gain!” Sometimes we don’t live like it. Paul lived like it. He would do anything and everything he could to make Christ known, because it was Christ alive and at work in him.

It’s my prayer that would be true of each of us here who have received the grace of God; that it would be Christ visibly at work in us, shaping us and sanctifying us, just as He has saved us, just as He has justified us. He’s going to be sanctifying and growing us and He’s going to help us walk in step with the Spirit because we cannot do that apart from Him. And we’re going to bear good fruit – not because we’re good, not because we’re strong, not because we deserve it or earned it, not because we’re taking pride in our own works. It’s just His grace. It’s just His grace. It’s the work of the cross alive in us; visible and on display in us. And to the world, it can be a stumbling block. To many in the world, it looks like foolishness, but it’s the power of God unto salvation to us who have been saved and there’s nothing else worth living for, and we need to keep this message clear. It’s a simple message – that Christ died to save sinners. You need to trust Him and to set your faith on Him. You need to follow Him. You need to turn away from evil and walk in the ways of Christ. Trust Him with your everything.

That’s the message Paul lived his life for. He says,

…and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Charles Spurgeon, an old dead guy with a beard, said,

I do not know a better summary of the Christian experience than this: it is no longer us living for ourselves; it’s Christ alive and at work in us.

I just want to encourage you, church, to set your faith on Him and to walk out that faith. As humans under the Fall, our sinful flesh has the tendency to try to prove ourselves, or proclaim ourselves, or please ourselves. But for the grace of God – praise God for His grace. We’re not going in that way anymore. There’s this battle taking place between the flesh and the Spirit and we, like Paul, want to walk in step with the Spirit. We want to keep in step with the Spirit. We want to proclaim the grace of God in the name of Jesus and make His Gospel clear to people who don’t have hope; people who are hooked on drugs, people who are broken and stuck in alcoholism, people who have left their families, people on the other side of the world, or here, who don’t have food to eat; people who have really hard circumstances. And when we’re in really hard circumstances, let us keep our hope set on the grace of God, and walk in step with the Spirit, and let people see that the joy that we have isn’t coming from our circumstances, or from the good stuff that God has given to us, but He’s saved us. We’re His family now. It doesn’t matter if I have food to eat or no food to eat, Christ is my Redeemer.

It’s a special thing to get to share this message in Uganda. It’s a special thing to get to see people filled with the hope of Christ when before they were hopeless, like Howard, the guy from that baptism photo. He’s got the hope of Christ. It’s a strange thing to live in a place where rice is a luxury food and where people eat meat four or five times a year, or maybe 12 if you’re doing okay. It’s just a different environment. But they’re not looking just to have more meat to eat or a better place to live; they need the hope of salvation, which is everything that we need in this life and for eternity. And when they receive this hope, they walk in it. Their life doesn’t look the same. Everything is changed, and it’s been our joy to see people start teaching these things to their family. And it’s our joy to see people who are already called ‘preacher’ or ‘pastor’ start sharing these things with the local church. And it’s a joy to see people reading the Bible for the first time. And it’s a joy to see people say, “I want to follow Paul as he followed Christ.” I want to make the grace of God known to others. I want my flesh and my aiming to please and prove myself – that’s all been put to death and I don’t want to go back to weak and worthless things. I want to follow Jesus. And where Paul was imitating Jesus, I want to imitate Paul. And I want to find somebody, because I know that Paul was teaching that guy, Timothy, and some others and I want to do that, also.

It’s been really awesome to see some young people going out and finding people to disciple and that’s made possible because they heard the message of hope. People around us need to hear the message of hope. It’s not that they need to become Jewish and then they can become Christian; it’s that they can look to Christ and be saved. They can call on the name of Jesus. They can repent of their sins and have life eternal, and joy, peace, and purpose that nothing in this world can offer.

People in Andrews can be satisfied. People in Uganda can be satisfied. They can live and walk in purpose as they look to Jesus, as they receive the grace of God by faith, as they trust Him and follow Him all the days of their lives. It’s such a joy to see these young men – baptism is such a big, symbolic picture in this culture, as it should be everywhere, and as it is in this place. It’s, “I have decided to follow Jesus and I’m not turning back. This is the new life. This is my life. Christ is King. All praise be to Him.” And you want to share Him with others. It’s been such a joy to see that all these young men who have been discipled are still growing, and they’re growing and sharing the Gospel with others. They are sharing the messages they’ve learned with their family. They are teaching others in their schools.

That one young man, Chol – there’s an opportunity for a Bible teacher to come and that Bible teacher never comes. And Chol is now the Bible teacher and he’s like an eighth grader. God is using him in a mighty way with 120 other students who listen for 40 minutes and he just shares the Scriptures, and shares his testimony, and walks as one. I pray that would be true in this place and wherever we go and I’m very, very grateful for y’all. I just want to keep it short. I’m thankful for you. Let us keep our eyes set on the grace of God, let the flesh be put to death daily, and let us have moment by moment faith, actively setting our minds on the things of God. Just follow Jesus. Share the simple Gospel with the people around us. Some are going to reject it – many. Some are going to receive it and it’s going to change everything, and they’ll be our brothers and sisters forever. That’s the best thing we could ever see. Let us pray together.

God, we praise you, and we worship you, and we thank you for the good news message. God, we thank you that you redeem sinners, that you’ve made us family, that you’ve brought us out of darkness and into light, that you’ve brought us out from being orphans and you’ve made us your family. God, we praise you for the work of Christ on the cross and, God, we thank you that that work is sufficient. God, I pray for anyone in this place that hasn’t trusted Jesus, to set their eyes, their hope, and their faith on Him and on Him alone. God, we have nothing good to bring before you of our own doing or making, but God, we trust you and we long for you to work in us and through us, and we ask you to do that, Lord. In the week ahead, help us to think on grace. Help us to think on presenting the true Gospel simply. God, let us see our flesh put to death daily and just see Christ alive in us, at work in us. God, we thank you for the gift of fellowship, the gift of the local church and that we can gather together. God, we thank you. You are King of all. You are sovereign, you’re powerful, you’re loving, and gracious, and we praise you with all that we have, in Jesus’ name. Amen.