



Speaker David Nasser

Ted Cunningham - Today, we have a dear friend. He's been here several times; we love David Nasser. God has really given him the gift of evangelism and he shares the gospel in such a compelling way. He is a teaching pastor in Franklin, Tennessee. For a while, we was the campus pastor at the world's greatest university, Liberty University. And yes, we have sports teams at Liberty University. I always get asked that by the other colleges. Grateful for his ministry around the country, but I'm grateful that he makes time for this church family.

David Nasser – it's so good to be back. I've had the great honor of getting to be here on multiple occasions. This is the first time where on a Sunday gathering, Pastor Ted is actually in town. Normally, I'm in the summer. I don't want to miss the opportunity to just tell you that he is a gift to my life. Every time I have sat under his teaching – a conference or whatever. I've left better for it. he's such a master communicator of God's truth and he has such a way about him. You just feel like he's your best friend. It's genuinely a gift that he and Amy have. God gets the glory but I don't want to be at his church without honoring my friend. Bro, I love you and I'm so grateful for you, can we just thank the Lord for Pastor Ted.

I want to preach to you, if you would this morning, out of 2 Corinthians. So, if you have your Bible and you want to go there with me, we will be in 2 Corinthians 5: 17.

Let me give us a little context before we get into the text, a little back story. The apostle Paul is the pen that God uses to give us this passage that we are going to look at. The backstory on it is that Paul becomes a Christian in 33 AD and then starts immediately church planting. He starts going from one place to another, planting different congregations. And as a church planter, on average, he's spending about three to nine months, an average of about 6 months, into a place when he goes in to get from tender shoot to enough of a trunk of a church that's big enough to dare, big enough to dream and to do all the things that it's doing.

But, about 22 years into his ministry, he ends up about 45 miles outside of Athens in this place Corin, and he plants a church. He actually ends up staying there for over 18 months. Now some people think that he stayed longer because he had the Priscillas and Aquilas in that area and that he had friends. But if you go back and historically look at it, the reason he has so many friends is because he stayed so long.

Paul stays there really long, a lot longer because he just can't get this church to get on proper track. The church was awesome in the sense that it was a mashup of two kinds of folks overall. It was a bunch of religious, Jewish people who had gone off of religion and come into redemption and left on their own because they were so pickled in their old ways that they kept weaponizing their faith and making it all about a list of do's and. And then the church was also full of people that were coming in and they were gentiles and they had just come to Christ and all of the sudden, they were trying to exercise their liberalities in Christ by just coming off the rails of being a little rebellious.

So, Paul isn't just dealing with a church that's got a lot of religion going on and is weaponizing religion or he's got a lot of rebellion going on and just weaponizing that... He's kind of got his hands full in all of that and he's spending 18 months getting them to get the training wheels off and then he finally leaves, goes to Ephesus. And then they come off the rails. So, Paul begins to write a series of letters to them and we have two of the four that we know Paul wrote.

The first letter to Corinth, we don't have in scripture. And then the second one we call first Corinthians, the third one we don't have, and the fourth one we have, which is the one we are looking at.

I'm giving you all that backstory to say Paul is dealing, in this letter, with two kinds of people, but he's prescribing for them one kind of solution, one kind of redemption. He's talking to the religious and the rebellious and he's giving them the antidote to both of their problems being the same thing, redemption. And he does so and as he's doing that The comes into this moment a verse that Billy Graham actually calls The Bible in a nutshell, which is second Corinthians 5: 17.

Lets look at it together. Paul says, if... This is the linchpin here, this is the hanging on, if this is actually true, then it's going to have repercussions. If any man is in Christ, you get to behold it. If any man is in Christ, there is something that's gone inwardly that is going to display it's self outwardly. If any man is in Christ, He says, behold, you get to see that the old has passed away and all of the sudden, they are a new creation. I love what theologian and pastor AW Tozer, from the 50's says about this. He said, "This passage is really a spotlight of the reality that the Christian has quite literally, in the Christian life, exchanged weakness for strength, but the strength is not our own. It flows into us from God as we abide, outwardly, in Christ

What he's saying is Paul is reminding us, in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that the Christian life is about exchanging the old to anew. Behold, the old passes away and a new us is born again.

Martin Luther says it this way... Martin Luther calls this particular passage a passage that spotlights double exchange, double imputation. He's saying, in the Christian life, we take our position, sinner, and we give it to Christ. Christ takes on our sin and he takes his position, sinless, and gives it to us. It's a double exchange, a double imputation. We get what we don't deserve and he gets what he doesn't deserve.

It is the ultimate horrible exchange rate. Think about... I mean for him. For us it's the best. And that's what we get at the foot of the cross.

If you are the notetaking kind, I want to kind of run down a few things here for us in this passage of in Christ, we are reminded, in Christ, we exchange religion for redemption. That's what he's saying. He's saying if any man is in Christ... can we just stop here for a second. Life ultimately comes down to whose hands you are in. That word *in* means possession, right? Like take a golf club and put it in my hand... Ted and I are going to go play golf tomorrow. He's like, "Hey, you want to go play golf

I'm like I don't really play golf." He's like, It's okay. We'll call it charity/missions. So, he's graciously going to host me tomorrow. We are going to go play golf, but I've already told him I'm very bad at golf. When I say I'm bad at golf, I'm horrible at golf. I don't even know what kind of clubs to use.

Take a five iron and put it in my hands, it's horrible. It's actually destructive. If you give me a five iron, I will take out a window, I will take out a construction worker. I'm from Iran. All my balls end up in the sand. It's almost like God is going, "That's where your people

belong.” That’s how I feel. I mean there won’t even be a sand wedge I But I will find it. I will somehow find it. So, you put a five iron in my hand, it’s worthless. Take the exact same five iron out of my hands and put in Pastor Ted’s hands, it’s much better. He calls it Pastoral. I do golf for ministry.” No, you don’t but anyway... but take a five iron out of my hand and it goes from like destruction to like pretty good. Take the same golf club out of his hand and put it in Tiger Wood’s hands. You’d have to make sure he takes his hands off other people who are not his wife, but... Take a golf club and put the same golf club in his hands and all of the sudden, every swing, same golf club is worth a lot of money. Why? Because it’s all about whose hand it’s in. possession is everything. Take my life in my own hands..., I’m destroying my life.

Some of you have been trying. You’re like, I’ve got this. You look in the mirror in the morning and you’re like it got this. That’s your problem. You don’t have this. How’s it working out for you. You ain’t got this. You were never built to “got this.” You were built to go “I don’t got this.” I can’t, but I know the one who can. Put my life in my hands, I’m in trouble, put my life in the hands of other people and I’m in trouble, put your future in the hands of the boss and he might be a good boss, but you’re gambling. Put your hands in Christ and all of the sudden, you find the very purpose why you were made.

So, life is all about whose hands you are in. So, this is what Paul is getting at. He says, “in Christ, we exchange religion for redemption. In Christ, we exchange death for life. That’s a pretty good exchange rate. In Christ, we exchange rules for a ruler. In Christ, we exchange will power for his power. In Christ, we exchange upgrading for uprooting. In Christ, we exchange New Year resolutions... by the way, I don’t have a problem with New Years resolutions. I made a new year’s resolution in the beginning of the year. It was kind of fun when I said them.

I said, This year, I want to lose 30 pounds and I wanted to gain 30 Grand. I want to send my whole family on a big fat vacation that was going to be a lot. I don't have that, so this year, I'm like I'm going to lose 30 pounds and gain 30 grand. Nothing wrong with resolutions. Everybody has resolutions. The problem is the Christian life is not about flesh management. There ain't nothing wrong with losing weight unless that's what Christian life becomes. I'm going to clean up my act and all the if that's what you're doing, you just replaced the idol, if that's all you do. If you replace the idol of health and wealth. It's just sin management, sin management. Flesh management. The Christian life isn't that. It's so much more. Why demote it less than it is. In Christ we exchange upgrading with uprooting. In Christ we exchange New Year resolution with old life resignation.

In Christ, we exchange climbing up for giving up. That's why we have a ladder on stage. So much of the Christian life is misunderstood in that so much of the Christian life is different than every other religious life in that every religion in the world, take it from a former Muslim, every religion in the world, except Christianity, is about a ladder where you're climbing with your efforts and your good works and your good deeds and all your attempts to get closer to God. God is up here, we are down here, and this is the ladder by which we get close to God.

So much of religion is always about here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to change, I'm not going to cuss as much, I'm going to make a decision. I'm going to tithe. I'm going to sign up for the Mission trip. Oh, I found out that this week my buddy and I are going fishing so I'm not going to go on a mission trip.

OR...My wife was really sweet to me today so we are going to pray together after the meal My wife was really mean to me... my attitude toward her and so much of the Christian life becomes shoots and ladders, like one day I'm mean, one day I'm not. One day I'm gracious

and one day I'm not. *I can't believe I watched that, I can't believe I said that, I can't believe I cussed.* So much of it is just this idea of like God is up here and I'm down here and I'm going to do, do, do, do.... and the Christian life becomes about doing, doing, doing
It's do do, that's literally what Paul calls it. he calls it Dung.

What is Paul saying. He's saying the Christian life is not about giving and doing and doing to become. It's not about us trying to get to God. The Christian life is different in that God comes down to us. We call it Emanuel at christmas time. God comes down and says, "You can't come to a place where you can earn my love, but I have given you what you could never earn on your own. It's called grace. The Christian life is not about living up but giving up. It's not about climbing up, but coming to the end of you. That's what Paul means when he says, "If any man is in Christ, behold, the old you has passed away and a whole new you is walking around.

Religion is ultimately man staying where they are and cleaning up their behavior, putting another coat of pain on the outside of something that's never truly belonged to him on the inside, but the Christian life is not about bad people becoming good people, but about dead people coming alive. Behold, there's a whole new me walking around.

The problem with this is... And this is why it took so much longer for Paul to get in there and try to repickle a pickle in this thing. The problem with it is that those two things don't look that much different on the outside, the idea of changing and changing verses exchanging.

On the outside, it just looks like Wow, this guy used to cuss a lot and he's not cussing as much anymore.

This guy used to sleep in on Sunday and he's getting up and coming to church on Sundays. This guy used to have nothing to do with God and now he's singing worship songs.

All of a sudden.

What happens is so often, we look at all this external and we think well, Well, there's evidence there that there's been change, but the problem is... change ain't bad, but the Christian life is not about change, it's about exchange.

A few years ago, I was going to go speak for the Billy Graham organization at this event that they were having. There was a little run in my life where for about five or six years, I would do about 15 to 20 Billy Graham organizations events a year. They would do these pre crusade rally's On time. They had booked me for this rally in Greenville for a Franklyn Graham pre-crusade rally. The difference between working for them and any other organization that I ever had the privilege of working for is that normally, just about every other time when you're going to speak for somebody as a guest, you book your travel and when you get there later on, somebody will turn in receipts and then they reimburse you. but the Graham folks are different in that they have a travel agency and they insist if you work with them, they book your travel for you.

I say all that to say a few years ago, I got the folder for this Greenville pre- crusade rally for Franklin Graham and I opened it up the day before the travel day and I saw that I had an early morning flight where I was going to fly on Delta to Atlanta, Atlanta to Greenville, and that's what I did.

Got up, got ready, and went to the rally. I get to Greenville and when I got to Greenville, I opened up the folder again and it said, "Please secure your luggage at baggage claim. That was pretty norm for them. And then take the shuttle to the Hilton by the airport.

So, after I got my luggage, I saw there was this wall right there by the baggage claim where they had pictures of hotels that are near the airport and they have a phone where you pick it up and push a number and it dials automatically to the hotel.

I dialed the hotel and said, "Hey, I'm here. I would like to get picked up." and a few minutes later the shuttle came by and it took me to the Hilton.

I got there at noon, so I walk up to this lady who was at the front desk. I said, "I know I'm here early, but is there any way I can get into the room early. She said we're not sold out, I have a room for you, but the problem is our computers crashed today and because the crashed today, I have no way to officially check you in. but I trust you. she said, "Write your information down, I'll go ahead and get you in a room right now and in a couple of hours with the computers come back up, I'll probably check you in.

So, I go in and I'm in the room all day. I'm in the room by about 12 30. My little folder said I was going to get picked up at 5:00 for this Rally.

All day long I'm just wasting my day. I don't know what Pastor Ted does when he has a whole day to kill. He's probably memorizing Leviticus and King James or whatever he does. When you are me me, I'm doing some of that, but I got stuff I got to do, like maintenance I have to like if I don't pluck in the middle, it turns into a visor because I'm herry.

Anyway, I'm doing my thing and at about 5:00, the folder said be in the lobby for pick up and I'm waiting to get picked up. At 5:15 no one has come to pick me up yet. And that's not the norm for them. They are very punctual normally. So, at 5:50, I open up the folder and I see that my friend, Danny Little is actually the pre-crusade coordinator for this rally. I knew him so I call his number and I'm like hey bro, I'm at the

Lobby. I was supposed to get picked up about a half hour ago and no one has come to get me. I'm just checking in.

He goes, "Dude, I'm so sorry, I'm at the lobby trying to pick you up and they just told me that you're not checked in. in
I said, That's because the computers were down and they probably never got them booted back up and that's probably why I'm not checked in.

As I'm saying that to him, he goes, "But I'm in the lobby"

I go "well; I'm in the Lobby."

Then he goes, well, I am right here standing by the front desk.

I'm five steps away from the front desk. So, I lean on the front desk and I'm like I'm at the front desk so while we're trying to figure out what is going on, all of the sudden the lady behind the register who works there as an employee reaches over the counter and taps me on the shoulder. She asked me, "Baby, you need to ask your friend what Greenville he is in. As soon as she said that, my friend hears it and he goes, "Are you not in Greenville?"

This is why I front loaded the story by telling you they booked the travel. They had flown me to the wrong Greenville. They had flown me to Greenville South Carolina and this rally was in Greenville, North Carolina. So, while this is being processed and I'm just hearing this, this other employee comes out from this back room to the area where the employee standing there and she looks at him in front of me and says, "We've got another one, which is like Shorthand for like this guy is an idiot but he's not alone. And then she says, Baby, you ain't gonna believe this, this happens all the time. Since then I've learned that

there are 31 Greenville's in the United States of America. That's 30 too many.

She tells me that people get flown into the wrong Greenville in the Carolinas all the time. So, while she's telling me this, my friend, Danny is like Oh my gosh we've got you in the wrong Greenville. I look at her and I go; *I've got a question.*

She goes, I know what you are going to ask me, Baby. You want to know how far it is from this Greenville to the other green Greenville It's about 3 and a half hours and no, there is no direct flight. Although there should be for people like you. she asked me what time I heeded to be there and I said, "In about an hour. And she goes, "Well, you ain't gonna make it, Baby.

Normally, that would be the end of the story except this is the Billy Graham people, there are like the Christian Mafia so their like you need to be here or you'll be dead to me.

Danny is like, "Bro, you have to get here immediately. I hang up the phone and I look at this lady and I said, "Mam, I was just commissioned to get there no matter what, whether it's a helicopter or an airplane. I just need to get there and she goes, "Let's do it"

She pulls out the yellow pages and she goes to Aviation and she and I, with my phone and her phone, we were calling every private aviation company we could find. it's not 5:45 and we are calling and no one is answering. Then all of a sudden, I called this one number and this elderly gentleman picks up. He sounded so old. Sir you don't know me but my name is David and have just flown to the wrong Greenville and I need to be in Greenville in North Carolina and I'm wondering how long is the flight from this Greenville to the other Greenville? He said it was about a 30-minute flight. I asked him if there was any way he could

take me on the other end there would be somebody with an envelop of cash for you or whatever.

The next thing you know, this lady that was working there was excited. She gets the shuttle to come and get me I get put in and I'm getting back to the airport, but not the front part we all go into, but the back part where the municipal part is. This was before Sept 11 when Iranians were allowed back there.

I get taken to Hagner 9. We pull up and the guy blows a horn and the door opens up from hanger nine. The door opened up and this dog ran out and then this elderly gentleman showed up at the door and he sounded old but he looked even older. He looked like one of the original wright brothers that invented aviation. I get out of the car and I look like, you know, Iranian, so he's looking at me and I'm looking at him and then he looks over at his dog and goes, "come here bear Bryant. as soon as he said that I though he's named his dog after Coach Bear Bryant from Alabama, so I go "Roll Tide and he goes Roll tide and instantly we bonded over SEC football. I followed him back and we go through his hanger, out in the back where the runway is, he's got his plane. We get in his plane – Me, Bear Bryant, and old man river are in this plane. I'm talking about a tiny, little plane. We're climbing in the plane, he closes the door and we start going down the runway and as we are going down the runway, we're going faster and faster. We are about to take off and all of the sudden, he stops and he looks at me and he goes, "I just realized I don't have sufficient gasolene.

He goes all the way back to his hanger and he gets out the dog jumps out. He goes and gets a key, gets back in, gets Bear Bryant back in, closes the door, we go all the way to this one area where there is a place he can get gas.

He comes all the way back, gets out again, and puts the keys back. Bear Bryant won't get in. he gets bear Bryant back in, we close the door, we're going down the runway. As we are going down the runway, we're about to take off again and he goes, I just realized I've forgotten to take the weather meter covers off. As he's getting stuff put back on, I'm rushing him. He's just being gracious and kind a, but I've rushed this sweet man and everything I look at my watch and the rally is like five minutes from starting. So, before he got back in, I said, Sir, we are just not going to make it. I'm so sorry to waste you time... He was so gracious. An hour later, he graciously gave ride in his pickup truck back to the Hilton. I had a room. An hour later, while the rally is going on, four hours away, I'm sitting there and I'm flipping channels and I'm thinking to myself, Man, there is a problem that's bigger than the problem. Here's the problem that's bigger than the problem. It is one thing to not to be where you are supposed to be, that's a problem. It is a problem when you are not where you are supposed to be.

But it's a whole other problem, your problems got a problem when you are under this false pretense that you are exactly where you are supposed to be. The only thing worse than not being where you are supposed to be is having this false sense of security that I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be and you're no where near where you're supposed to be

Why am I telling you this? I'm telling you this because number one it's funny. Number two, I'm telling you this because that is exactly what Paul is getting at. He's saying the Christian life so often feels to people like Greenville to Greenville when they make it about changing and not exchanging. Outward change looks like this guy is coming to church, this guy is doing good things, this guy is helping pay for the new facility, this guy is singing worship songs. So often, it looks, on the outside, like good things are happening, but the problem is it is Greenville to Greenville. It feels right and so often people hang onto this like I'm

doing good things, but the Christian life is not about bad becoming good, it's about bad becoming alive. It's the exchange life and not the changed life.

And all day I had this false pretense of where I was at and I'm telling you Billy Graham says it this way. He says, 85 percent of the church are people who come to church and they have religion, they don't have redemption. They've made it about changing and not exchanging

The other day, I was preaching this sermon and I saw an 81-year-old man come to know the Lord. An 81-year-old man who came down... when he dropped his cane and we sat together in our next step room and we started to have that conversation, he looked at me and he said, "Son, I know more Bible Verses than you ever will." I believe him. He looked like a good man. This wasn't some rebel who came off this weird Harley as an 81-year-old. This guy grew up in church. He said, "I helped build one of the great churches, which means he probably doubled down in a season of his life and helped build something. He said, "I know all these things, I know all these bible Verses, but I've never truly given him my life.

At 81 years old, he gave his life to Christ. The next day, his behavior didn't change that much. The intent behind it did.

My wife was that way. My wife grew up in church. my wife grew up Bible drill Champion for the state of Alabama four years in a row. I've seen the ribbons in the family album this was back when you had to earn ribbons. Everybody didn't just get ribbons. My wife was on the pastor church committee when she was 16 years old. That's the leader that she was.

My wife went with the senior citizens to this mission trip and she went with the high school kids to the other mission trip

She was good, she never missed a tithe, they gave her a quarter and she dropped it in the bucket.

The worst thing my wife did was read under a dim light or take that tag off the pillow you're not supposed to. She was moral. She was good. And my wife was a counselor at a city-wide crusade, the Rick Stanley crusade at the Bamma Theater

She walked the aisle one night as a counselor. She had her counselor badge on number 2 pencil, breath mint, and a card ready to lead someone to Christ. And my wife walked an aisle during the invitation during the second night, she took off her counselor badge, handed it to her youth pastor and said, I don't need to be a counselor, I need a counselor. And our youth pastor looked at her and said, "What are you talking about? She said, "I need to talk to someone about how I can give my life to Christ.

Her youth pastor said, "You're the leader of the youth group. She said, "I looked at him and said, "You are right, I'm the leader, but it's always been about leading by the stuff I do, not the person I am. It's always been about doing to earn his favor, not doing because I already have his favor. It's always been about the climb and not about the surrender.

I'm just telling you the church is so full of people, good people, who are hanging on to it "my good is never going to be good enough" and how's that working out for you.

Wouldn't it be crazy this morning, in the buckle of the bible belt if God sent the missionary from the 1040 window to you to ask you do you know him. Not do you have a relationship with him, but what kind of relationship is it? Do you actually know him?

Some of you right now, you are hanging on to all the change and you're thinking *I've got to do more change and I've got to do this...* It's always been about stuff to do. Jesus has always been behavior police instead of the God of my life. The affection of my being.

With your eyes closed, your heads bowed in every venue right now, wherever you are right now. Put a mirror in front of yourself and ask this question: What kind of relationship do you have. Do I pray right now more to a black void or to a Christ that I know intimately" Could it be that you've been at ease about the most important question because you're thinking when it comes to salvation, I'm where I need to be, But maybe you prayed a prayer and you walked an isle but you know it never truly was for real. It's like that old adage: you can believe on soap and still be dirty. You've got to apply the soap. You've never applied his saving power. It's always been about the dead man cleaning up his act, not about you giving up your life. If you're wondering what Christianity cost, Paul says you come with all of who you are. He's selfish for all of you. You give your heart , your soul, your mind, your ambitions, your future, your wallet, your mind. He wants your Netflix account. He has the audacity as got to ask for every ounce of who you are. You don't have to clean up any of it, but you come just as you are but he wants all of who you are.

Some of you come to these moments and you're like, He wants all of me? Yes, it's the greatest exchange rate of all times. He wants all the brokenness, all the religion, all the excuses, but then he'll give you a new you.

Come home today.

In moments like this I think of my wife, a good who realized good is never going to be good enough. We need grace.

I think about myself as an 18-year-old kid who was so messed up and I kept thinking I'm sure he loves good people. He's never going to love me, but I was awakened to the reality that I'm never going to be too bad for the gospel. God loves me just the way that I am, but just too much to leave me that way. Could it be that long before the foundation of the earth, God has set this moment as your home coming. I would say to you come home today.

Pray with me. Jesus, I know that you are real and I want you to be real in me. I know that you are God and I want you to be my God. I'm done trying and trying. I'm ready to start trusting and trusting. I'm done working and working and wearing myself out trying to work my way into your favor. I'm ready to start just worshiping. It's not about striving but surrender. Just as I am, not good enough, not bad enough, just as I am. With all the baggage, with all the religion all of it just set to the side today. I'm a human being in need of a savior. Save me. What you did on the cross is sufficient. I don't even have to take the first step up the ladder, you meet me all the way, just as I am. Save me from me.

Lord,

We pray your blessing over the counselor moments that happen, the prayer moments that happen now, that people would know where to go in scripture, where not to go, when to be gentle spirited and when to and when to be bold. Thank you Lord that today you are raising the dead from religion. You're raising the dead from rebellion

You are doing what you did in Corinth years ago, you are putting people in alignment with what the gospel really is. We need this and we pray this in your name,
Amen