

The Great Exchange

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[0 : 0 0] Well, dear friends, it's always an honor and a joy to open the Word of God. I love being here at St. John's. I love the complete commitment to faithfully proclaiming the Word of God week by week.

And it's my joy to enter in and be part of the series which you're doing, the Upside Down series based on 2 Corinthians. I'd like to invite you, if you maybe already have your finger in them, but go back to 966 in the Pew Bibles.

We're going to be making our way through this passage that was just read. And just to remind you that this letter of Paul called the 2 Corinthians is what I would describe as Paul wearing his heart on his sleeve.

I like that. I like it that he finds himself in a situation where he has to just tell it as it is. And he does. As you probably remember, the context is of intense criticism by a church that Paul founded. And it was through him that this church heard the gospel and became a congregation. But there was this influx of what is known as the super apostles.

[1 : 2 1] And with that, there was a whole new thing going on. And out of that came a criticism from Paul and his apostleship. And what is amazing and so incredible is that it was out of that unfortunate and even unsavory situation to think that Paul had to defend himself in this way, that this great portion of scripture speaks about the grace of God so eloquently, page after page after page.

And rightly, the title of this series that you're engaged in is called Upside Down. Because the grace of God confounds the world and the system of the world.

So that, for instance, we learned in chapter 1 that rather than all difficulties and afflictions being a negative, they're never welcome, they're always an invasion, they intrude our lives.

But in Christ, he says, Blessed be the God and Father of all mercies, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions. And he goes on and says, So therefore we have an experience of the comfort of God, but then so that we may be able to comfort those in any affliction with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

And so this overflowing thing, the grace of God not only meets me at my point of need, but the very experience of receiving the grace of God and comfort affords me the opportunity to be a blessing to others.

[2 : 5 2] It's an extraordinary thing. Or think about the 2 Corinthians 3. This, imagine you went for a job interview and you divulged that you had no competency, that you were totally inadequate in all ways, and it would be a disgrace for you to be considered for this position.

But as a matter of fact, you say, actually you're the one who is going to provide all that's required. Well, that's what the grace of God does. So it is that, for instance, Paul says, Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.

Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything is coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God. This is amazing, upside down, incredible, exciting things.

Or, last week, I think you would have looked at 2 Corinthians 5 and think about the issue of death. Usually when we think of death, we think of it as a person has succumbed to an illness, the illness has finally won the day, and has taken a life.

All loss and all defeat. But Paul's view, described of the grace of God, puts that upside down for the believer.

[4 : 1 7] So that instead of death being defeat and loss, it's just the opposite. Listen to this, verse 4 of chapter 5. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened.

Not that we are unclothed, but that we would further be clothed. So that, here it is, what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Rather than this being an expression of great loss, in fact, I love that expression that Salvation Army speaks about when a saint goes to be with the Lord.

They talk about he or she being promoted to glory. That's what Paul is talking about. That the death of a believer is a situation in which they are swallowed up by life.

Victory, not defeat. So it's this upside down gospel, this grace of God that we're thinking about. And it should come as no surprise to us that the section we're now looking at is also, begins with, and comes out of criticism.

[5 : 25] So it is that, for instance, it starts where, verse 11 of 2 Corinthians 5, therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others, and it ends, 2 Corinthians 6, working together with him then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

The context is of a need to persuade, encourage, to consider. The background we carry on and look, what does it say?

It says, but what we are is known to God, and I hope is known to you also, to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance, and not about what is in the heart.

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. If we are in our right mind, it is for you. Well, you'll probably remember, this thing of boasting and commending is a very big deal.

The super apostles were into asserting themselves, making known what they considered to be their best traits. In neon lights, this was what you did, if you were a serious person, and you also got others to commend you, and that was the base.

[6 : 48] And so Paul is caught in this situation where repeatedly, he finds himself having to boast when he doesn't want to boast. And he knows, for instance, as it says in Jeremiah, and it says in 1 Corinthians 1, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

That's the only thing he wants to boast in. But he's caught in this situation, and so he's saying, what I want to do, folks, is provide you with some ammunition so that you, Corinthian Christians, can stand up for me and boast on my behalf.

Now understand that you're boasting about something to people who are only interested in outward appearances, and you're actually speaking about the heart. So it's fundamentally different.

Did you see in verse 13 what it says, for if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. If we are in our right mind, it is for you. Evidently, one of the words that was out there about Paul was that he was unstable.

That he was probably a little bit crazy. And that that sort of was the answer as to why this counterculture, different kind of such gospel and grace that he was speaking about.

[8 : 02] He's saying, okay, if that's the case, it's for the Lord that I am perceived as being a little bit nuts. And if I'm in my right mind, it is for you that I stand accordingly.

Now dear friends, what I want to say is that I have two texts, two key verses that I would commend to you to consider in this passage. The first one is 2 Corinthians 5.17 which began our service this evening.

And I think it answers the question, what is it that the grace of God does in the life of a believer?

And we're going to see as we look, this is the summary verse of it, that there are three qualities which we're going to look at, which are expressed here in the bulk of this passage.

And then 2 Corinthians 5.21 is the answer as to how it is that the grace of God could be available at all to sinful people.

And this verse, 2 Corinthians 5.21, is perhaps the most important verse of the Bible. It certainly could be argued that. And let me say that in fact all I'm doing tonight is a bit of a survey of this passage.

[9 : 16] I'm hoping that someone will pick things up for me and cover some of this territory again because it certainly merits not just one go as we're doing tonight.

The theme, the first verse therefore is, therefore if anyone is in Christ he's a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.

This being in Christ is an incredible reality. It's, it acknowledges the fact that when a person puts their faith in Christ they are actually connected to him in a very real way.

So connected that in fact when you think about 1 Thessalonians 4 of the return of Christ speaking about Jesus returning first with those who have gone before, that's only logical because they are so connected to him that if he's coming they'd be there with him because they are in Christ.

But notice that, that what Paul is saying is that the gospel is not a process of a little bit of change, a little bit of change, of rubbing off the rough edges.

[10:44] It's, it's a miracle. It's a new creation. The old is gone, behold the new has come. And that's what Paul is talking about here is the grace of God brings about a miracle which is complete in itself and the expression of it is the grace of God as seen in the passages that we're going to look at.

So first we go to verses 14 and 15 for the first quality. For the love of Christ controls us because we have concluded this, that one has died for all and therefore all have died.

And he died for all that those who live might live no longer, might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

He's talking about the grace of God bringing a whole new motivation.

motivation. Why is it? This morning again, my mind went blank this morning and again it did here. A whole new motivation. this morning in the baptism at nine o'clock one of the candidates Beck was baptized the curtain was opened and behind this section there is actually a baptismal tank and he was baptized by immersion Anna, the other child was baptized by sprinkling as all four were tonight.

[12:23] The strength of the baptism by dunking as David called it and I agreed with him is helpful as we think of Romans 6.

Listen to this. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried before him with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too might walk in newness of life.

So it is that what Paul is saying here in Romans 6 as he's saying in 2 Corinthians 5 is that when Christ died all who put their faith in him died as well.

So that in fact we're so connected to him that in fact his death becomes my death. And in baptism I identify with the death of Christ.

[13:34] And similarly I identify with the resurrection of Christ. So it is that Paul is saying that this miracle happened in him whereby he now no longer lives for himself for numero uno but for the one who died for him.

I have to say that when I think about for instance Ephesians 2 1 to 3 talking about the slavery we are by nature children of wrath the worst enslavement that I think is not the world or even Satan it's ourselves living as sitting ducks to our own desires as if we're just a bunch of chemical reactions who put the appropriate stimuli in front of us and we naturally have to go that way because I want it I will have it I need it the grace of God in Christ changes all that so that in fact now I'm no longer enslaved that my chains have fallen off as in the hymn and can it be and now I'm unshackled such that I can love the one who died for me rather than be wrapped up in my own desires and needs a new motivation a new perspective verse 16 from now on therefore we regard no one according to the flesh even though we once regarded

Christ according to the flesh we regard him no longer do you remember in Matthew 6 where Jesus said that the eye is the lamp of the body so if your eye is healthy your whole body will be full of light but if your eye is bad your whole body will be full of darkness if then the light in you is darkness how great is the darkness the Bible has a lot to say about sight about blindness and seeing and what Paul is saying is that in fact outside of Christ we are not only blind the seeing that we do see is distorted and tainted and destroyed the darkness is great as Jesus would say so it is that for instance Satan himself who is the thief who comes to steal kill and destroy it says in John 10 it says in their case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers that was 2 Corinthians 4 to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God that's what Satan wants to do he wants to keep us such that we cannot see Jesus for who he is but verse 6 says for God said let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ part of the grace of God the upside down thing is to transform our eyes so that we see Jesus for who he is remember the conversion of Saul of Tarsus being confronted as recorded in Acts 9 and repeated again in Acts 22 and Acts 26 it's the story of him and after he's confronted with the risen Lord Jesus

and we know that's who it was because he gives testimony in 1 Corinthians 15 after who are you Lord I am Jesus whom you're persecuting he then is blinded and he's led by others to Damascus staggering along and spend some days in prayer and fasting and has a vision that Ananias someone will come and pray for him and after Ananias prays for him do you remember the scales fell from his eyes now he not only could physically see but his eyes saw Jesus in his glory for who he was the wonderful Lord and Savior worthy of his life worthy of his trust worthy of even suffering even dying for but not only did his eyes change in that regard he also says that we see the world we see everybody else in a different way as well do you remember in Matthew 9 that account of Jesus looking on the crowd and it's quite startling in comparison to what we typically think of when we think of crowds it says this verse 36 when he saw the crowds that's Jesus he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd that's the way the eyes of

[18:43] Jesus saw me I'm more prone to see people as an annoyance as an obstacle as surely getting what they deserve because they're making bad choices and all sorts of as something which is demeaning of people and has little compassion or heart the grace of God changes our vision to where we begin to see people as Jesus does a new perspective a new motivation and thirdly a new occupation verses 18 to 20 of 2nd Corinthians 5 all this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation therefore we are ambassadors for Christ

God making his appeal through us we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God imagine the minister of foreign affairs deciding he's going to recruit his diplomatic service in the prisons it's not very likely imagine the minister of foreign affairs looking at terrorists those who are trying to destroy the very fabric of the nation that they're to represent this is the picture which Paul is talking about that in fact those who were the problem the very reason that Jesus had to come and die they become the means through which God chooses to sound his message and to represent him it's an extraordinary picture he's saying that God in Christ the son is reconciling the world to himself God didn't have to be reconciled to the world he was without sin but the world needed to be reconciled to him and so in Jesus he sent one who made it possible for the world to be reconciled to him and now he says has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation to be ambassadors who sound the appeal be reconciled it's an extraordinary place of honor that you and I have been put in now the thing about ambassadors is that they're not to sound their pet peeve or the things that they're into they're simply to represent the nation that they come from and the leadership of the nation and to declare the message which they have been entrusted to give faithfully and accurately without distortion without veering it to the left or the right but what's also interesting about this appeal is that it's with heart he says therefore we are ambassadors for

Christ God making his appeal through us we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God this is not like a robot saying here I'm going to give you the message and you better listen because if you don't you won't get it but here it is I'm just going to say it and I don't really care whether you take it or not but this is it and then say the message that's not the spirit at all of what we're talking about we're talking about with lump in throat we're talking with maybe quivering lips and tears and the stakes which are here for the person to whom we are presenting this wonderful message the issue is between life and death between heaven and hell and so it's not just a cold hard here it is take it or leave it but it is that we implore with urgency and with heart we seek to be as winsome as we can be and yet faithfully deliver the message we have motivation we have a new perspective we have a new occupation all summed up in therefore if anyone is in

Christ he is a new creation the old is gone behold the new has come but how you ask does that work how is it possible for God to take sinful people and work it out such that they become the agents through which these things happen well I'm just going to read the verse and say that this is the great exchange that the title of the sermon is based on for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God my guess is many most are very familiar and clear about what this is said but let's go through it just one more time to understand what we're talking about is if you have two columns we have us and we have two problems one is we have this incredible debt because of our sin which we could never pay a judgment which will certainly be ours in fact

[24 : 22] Jesus said in John 3 18 that outside of him if we haven't believed in him we've been judged already that's how certain our debt and how deep our indebtedness is that's number one secondly even if we didn't have that we don't have a righteousness now in the other column is Jesus who has no sin yet without sin it says in Hebrews 4 15 and has righteousness what's going to happen does he he doesn't have to do a thing he could just look over and say too bad for those guys but instead of that he literally crosses the floor and says I'll take your indebtedness and on the cross he paid for it and I'll put into you my righteousness it's called imputing it it's putting it right there whereby it becomes ours and he on the other hand is known as sin and the father on the cross treats him as sin and judges him accordingly and looks down upon him and when

Jesus cried out my God my God why hast thou forsaken me it was because he took my sin and yours and he was because he knew my sin he became sin on my behalf he had to be judged accordingly but when he said it is finished it was finished it was enough so that I was forgiven and then he imputed his righteousness it's incredible it's the great exchange it's just so good that it's many perceive it to be too good to be true but the facts are it is true and it's based on the very cross and resurrection of Jesus and then Paul says in chapter 6 verse 1 working together with him then we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain for he says in a favorable time I listened to you in the day of salvation I have helped you behold now is the favorable time behold now is the day of salvation what is absolutely extraordinary is that the grace of God can be neglected we can turn our backs on it we can say no thanks or we can drift from it whereby it no longer is operative in our lives it's as astounding as in 1 Corinthians 1 where it talks about that it's possible in 1 17 and 18 for the cross to be robbed of its power these are incredible realities but they're true and so Paul is saying you've heard about the grace of God one more time you know its power it takes the old and does away with it and makes you a new creation whereby you have a new perspective a new motivation and a new occupation in Christ by the grace of God and it's all won by virtue of the cross of Christ he took our sin upon himself on the tree it says in 1 Peter 2 now he's saying don't don't neglect it I appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain what a tragedy for it to be there and to leave it out there without ever appropriating it I made a commitment to God when I became a bishop because I'm an itinerant guy I travel around and so I'm in all sorts of congregations and many like you I can see on your faces that you know the Lord Jesus and you demonstrate that you are saying amen to these things that we've been looking at but lest there be any at all even one I made a commitment to the Lord which was when I speak about these things to always invite people to respond so what I want to say to you friend is that these wonderful realities which are so incredible because no one is disqualified no one is so far gone that whereby these things are not for you in fact that it's for you that Jesus came as he came for all of us as he came for Saul of Tarsus don't just let it dangle in front of you don't presume that at some time it'll automatically happen action is required and that is to receive the Lord Jesus but similarly there are many who are in Christ who are here and perhaps as they've reflected on these qualities they can see that in fact they have drifted and drifted and drifted how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation

[29 : 43] Hebrews 2 talks about and this drifting like a boat where it's not been tethered to the dock all of a sudden automatically it seems to find its way far away Paul's saying and quoting from Isaiah 49 he's saying in a favorable time I listened to you in a day of salvation I have helped you behold now is the favorable time today is the day of salvation today is the day and so this may be for some tonight an opportunity to repent of drifting whereby you're now living for yourself rather than him who died for you whereby you now are seeing people and situations and Jesus even with a worldly kind of taint and whereby you are not occupying yourself making the appeal for God as an ambassador today's the day good friend to repent of that and to recover what seems to be lost behold now is the favorable time behold now is the day of salvation would you stand with me and we'll pray

Lord Jesus every time we look at you and we look at the gospel we're amazed and we're so grateful that you secured a salvation which is so comprehensive and so completely available to all it's the power of God for salvation to anyone and everyone who believes Lord if there be any who want to receive you tonight would you hear their cry Lord Jesus I repent of my sin come into my life I want to be yours forever and Lord would you hear our cry for those of us who have a sense of having drifted from the grace of God in a very real way would you hear our cry

Lord we are sorry for that and we want to recover we want to actually live for you and not for ourselves we want to actually see things see you and the world as you do and we want to be enlisted again as ambassadors of Christ forgive us restore us and equip us we pray by the grace of God Amen