

**“Get Back to the Cross”**  
**By Associate General Pastor Emeritus Edward J. Thomas**  
**Sunday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Good morning. It is good to be here. It's great to see so many faces that have come to the church in Norfolk over the years. You know, I remember that, when Parrish walked in the door; it was a memorable experience. It's good to see, he's really grown and developed. A lot of you took your initial growth in the church in Norfolk, Virginia. Amen. I remember Kirk up there, singing with Pam and the rest of the Good News Singers, and so many others. Some gave their life, there, and they're here, now, still working for the Lord. Some were baptized here, and ended up worshiping with us because they got stationed in Norfolk, and now you're here, and you're faithful, and you're doing what God's called you to do, and it is just awesome for me to be back among you. This is where I took my growth. I was baptized here. I met Pastor Davis at a little greasy spoon restaurant. We used to call it the—they called it Jim's Ranch-house, and we used to call it Jim's Raunch-house. But, Pastor Davis came in and shared the Gospel with me. Two days later, I was baptized, about one o'clock in the morning in Lake Michigan in the precious name of Jesus.

Yeah, there was a short time after I got saved that I went home on leave and didn't do what I was supposed to do, and, so, I came back, the first thing I was thinking of wasn't coming out to church. And, then, Pastor Davis—I was on duty, shore patrol, and, I was sitting in my truck, in a parking lot off of 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, watching all the Navy guys come across, out on liberty. All of the sudden, the door got ripped off of its hinges, and this upper torso of Pastor Davis, he stuck his head in there, and shook his finger, and said, “Where have you been?” And I've been faithful ever since. That kind of does something to you. But, you know, it was love that did that. It was love and caring that did that for us, and I am so thankful for it.

Well, today—how many watched the news the past couple of days? Pretty scary, isn't it? I'm not going to talk politically at all, but I am going to talk a little bit this morning about politics and government. And, I was talking to Pastor Gonzalo, yesterday, before the funeral service, and we were talking about just how difficult things are in different locations, and he shared with me how that there's so many people that he knows that are very concerned, very worried about this going after people who are in the United States illegally. They come to him and they ask him, “Can you help me. What to I need to do?” He says it's very stressful. And, I'm sure it's stressful for a lot of different people for a lot of different reasons. There are a lot of people just scratching their heads and saying, “My word, what is going on? What is going on?” I mean, we said the same thing when Barrack Obama was elected president. You know, we elect the people, and we hope for the best. Don't we? We just say, “God, please, let us have a government of peace.” And it just hasn't happened. It just hasn't happened. People think they've got problems now, you should have seen it when Eisenhower, and Kennedy, and Johnson, with all the racial disturbances that were going on. It was downright ugly. Murders and shootings. People were rebelling against government in society. It's something that has always happened. If you want to see a real ugly election, all you have to do is read about Thomas Jefferson and Madison. Do you know they both bought newspapers, so they could slander the other politician? They did, they each bought a newspaper, just so they could say what they wanted to.

How many of you are concerned? Let me ask you a question: How many styles, or forms of government are there? Give me some ideas. Anarchy? That's no government. Communism. Socialism. Democracy. Monarchy. Oligarchy. Dictatorship. Aristocracy, Democracy. What do we got? What is America? A democratic republic. And that's important to mention that. A democratic republic—we, every American, votes for someone, and that someone is supposed to represent our views in Congress,

in the Senate, in the presidency. And, it's the same in local governments, whether it's your city council and your mayor, or your state government, your governor, the state legislature, and they appoint all kind of people, right? And, sometimes, when we elect somebody to represent us, they don't quite represent us the way we want. You know, they go in there and they say, "Well, I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do that..." They can't make those promises, because it takes everybody to come together collectively to come together to make those decisions and that. But, what about a dictatorship? Do we have any decision in that? No. When Hitler came into power, or Muammar Gaddafi, or Idi Amin, or Stalin? Stalin said there was free elections, but there's only one party and one name on it; that's dictatorship, I don't care what you call it. And, how does a dictatorship work? He says it; everybody does it. He says it; everybody does it. And there's a fear of death. There's a fear of imprisonment. You know, a lot of people live, in those kinds of states, in absolute terror. They get our children to report us; to talk about us. Man, when I was a kid growing up, if you got in trouble in school, you got beat, and then when you got home, you got beat again. If you were out playing, and you did something you were not supposed to, you got in trouble by the people that lived around there, and then, they called your parents... You know, back when they had the party line on the phones, you know, you had a certain ring that was your house, well, sometimes you could pick it up and listen in on everybody else's conversation. So, when they called your mom's house, everybody in the neighborhood eventually knew you got into trouble. There's one more I want to talk about, and that's a monarchy. What is a monarch? A king, a ruling faction. It's usually hereditary. You know, the king's firstborn son. If they don't have a son, they killed the wife. And some of them tried to make sure that they had a son. Henry the Eighth was a prime example of that. But, what do they have in England and Holland and other European countries now? They have a monarchy that's governed by the parliament, just as we are a democracy represented by a Congress and a Senate. Now, what do we have in a religious state, say Iran? They're run by the religious people. They have a government, president and stuff, but, if they make decisions that go against the religious policy, it doesn't happen. The religious rulers, dictators, shut it down. I say all of that, I give you those kinds of options, and I want to ask you, what is God? What is the government that it talks about in Isaiah nine, verses six and seven?

**Isaiah 9:6-7** *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

So, reading that, what kind of government do we have, as Christians? What kind of government? Democracy? Theocracy? Monarchy? Dictatorship? What do we got? A monarchy? All right, a monarchy. I agree with you. We also have a dictatorship. What God says, we do. No options. No options. Perfect example: Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16) If it was a democracy, we'd all say, "How do you like that? What are y'all thinking?" People would raise their hands; by the time we got done taking the poll, the majority of the people, they would set the tone. As an example, in a pure democracy, it's mob rule, basically, is what it is. So, if Parrish did something, and he was brought before us, the mob would say, the rule would say, the majority, if they said, "Hang him!" then it was legal to hang him. All right? If they say something else, the majority... Now, a dictator, he would just stand up and say, "This is what's going to happen to him." A monarchy rules—a true, real monarch, rules with love, because they are his people. So, God is both a dictator and a loving, caring monarch, a king.

In our society, today, we've grown up—well, not me, as much, but it influences my generation, horribly—and that's the Jerry Springer syndrome. Know what I'm talking about? I think his show's right

out of Chicago, isn't it? Do you know he's from Ohio? He was actually going to run for Congress. He'd have been a good fit, standing up there and arguing with absolutely everybody. But, what do you get out of that kind of show? Drama, conflict, you know, the one that shouts the loudest is right; isn't that true? What do you see when you watch the news? They call them 'talking heads,' but, what do you get out of that? Drama! They don't talk about the news. They get angry; they force their opinion on everybody else, and, if you don't agree with them, God help you. They are really just out there messing with everybody. So, what happened in the church? What happened? We, if we're truly honest, have a Jerry Springer system in our church, and we're arguing with God, and we're arguing about things that don't matter for eternity. And, yet, we let those things cause division in the church. We let those kinds of attitudes break the—attitude, do you know what that is? Is it an odd term? I just want to make sure I'm using words that everybody understands. Y'all understand attitude, right? Or, as the younger generations says, "Tudes." "You've got a 'tude, man." There's probably an emoji for that, too. Now, how is this attitude, how is this Springer Syndrome manifested in the church—I'm not talking about 'in this building,' but, I'm talking about the body of Christ. How is this Jerry Springer system of behavior in the church? How is it manifest itself? Listening to the wrong spirit, splitting churches, frustration, all of those things. All of those things. We get—human nature—our anger, our frustration, our listening to the wrong spirit; it's all about *me*. It's all about *me*. So, everything we do, we turn it into *me*. "I don't like the way you treated *me*. I don't like the way you—you looked at *me* the wrong way." But, you know, you're looking back; you're looking back.

I know you're discussing spiritual gifts, and it's awesome. They're important to know. We need those gifts now, manifested in our church. But, is God going to give somebody a gift of helps, a gift of government, a gift of preaching, a gift of whatever it is; is He going to give that to somebody who's not also, maybe even previously, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit? So, you can't say, "Lord, I want this," and you've got an attitude. You can't say, "Lord, I want the gift of miracles," and you argue with everybody, and you hold grudges with everybody. You know, the Kingdom of God is a grudge-less society. How many of us hold grudges? I'm glad I'm in an honest church. You know, it's a natural thing for a human being to build a wall around us, and to not let anything come in, and, when something tries to get over that wall, we throw another brick, and we prevent them from going over that wall, because we don't want *me* being touched by you. But, we are our brother's keeper, are we not? (Genesis 4:9) The Kingdom of God is about all of us, and, because we are human beings, we are not going to get along with everybody all the time. It happens. Long term friendships can automatically turn, and then there's this division; well, that's not of God. There's got to be a unity, a love, a compassion, a striving for that unity, that has to happen in all of our relationships. And if we say, "I won't," or, "I can't worship with somebody else," why don't you see the fact that God, with all of His greatness, and all of His mercy, He couldn't worship with you, either, because you've got an attitude. So, what we've got to strive to do is look—like God did for us, look beyond our faults, see our needs, and forgive our sins. How can you say you love God, if you cannot love your brother, if you cannot look past what's going on with each other? So, if there's any division, if there's any angry spirits, if there's any grudges, if there's any hurt feelings, our Monarch, our compassionate Dictator, wants us to embrace each other, to worship together, and work together for His Kingdom. A monarch owns, pretty much, the kingdom, so, therefore, his people work the ground for his benefit. They work in the fields, they work in the mills, they build his ships, everything, to support his kingdom. Isn't that what God tells us to do? Everything your hand findeth to do, do it with all your heart, for what? For the glory of God. Right? You must be about your Father's business.

There was a time when England was going to go to war, and they were massing all of their people. And the king passed a law that said every goose in the kingdom must donate a feather. Every *goose* had to contribute to the cause. Isn't that something? You know, the monarch said, "We're going into battle, and I need everybody's cooperation. I need the pig's cooperation to feed the troops, I need

the chicken's cooperation to feed the troops, I need the goat's contribution to nourish the troops, and I need every goose to give up a feather. God wants us to give up of our lives, for His Kingdom, so that everybody would see what's going on. In his case, they won this tremendous battle, and everybody said, "Great is the king! Long live the king!" In our case, we want people to say, "Great is the God of these people!" When Nebuchadnezzar saw the three Hebrew children walking inside the fiery furnace, and a fourth, walking in there with them, and the fire did not touch them, and the smoke was not upon them, what were his words? "Great is the God!" You know, if people see us, and all of our races, and all of our ethnic backgrounds, and all of our socioeconomic differences, and they see us coming together, and they see us worship, and they see us praying together, they, too, will say, "Great is the God of these people!" But, church, they're not going to hear about it...

You know, I thought this was a wonderful idea: Rod Williams is soliciting all this stuff from his different contacts in Virginia, and then he ships all this candy up here, by the case. Now, some of you are looking at me, like, "I didn't get no candy." Well, it's for the military ministry, to pass it out on base. And, you know, you can put all the stickers on those candies you want, you can attach all the cards to it you want, people are going to read that, and they're not going to say, "Great is the God of these people!" they're going to say, "Ooh, candy! Nice!" You can send out all the invitations you want, and it won't move anybody to say, "Great is the God of these people!" But, when they see us in unity, and they see us in love, and they see us with compassion, and they see us with mercy, that affects them.

Many of you have heard me preach over the years about the indwelling of God's Spirit in our lives. We have to have it in so great a measure as Moses did, when he came down from the mountain with the tablets. The Bible said his face shone with a radiance that people couldn't look upon him, and he had to cover his face, because the glory of God was in him with such power because he spent time in the presence of God. And that's what you have to do; you have to spend time in the presence of God as an individual, and collectively, because, it's in that collective prayer that reinforces what we do as individuals. And, what we do as individuals, worshiping and praising God, magnifies what we do collectively. We have got to come to the point where, when we walk in a room, when we come into other people's presence, the atmosphere changes, and people look around and wonder who just walked in the room. And they will look out, and they will find something that's different. I have experienced that, I have seen other people walk into rooms with that same spirit, that same unity, and people are ashamed to swear. They're ashamed to talk vulgar. They don't know why, they just feel a presence. And, when that happens, people will come to you and say, "What is it about you that's different? Something is different. When you came in the room, things were different," and we will take the opportunity to share with them, "It's Jesus, it's Jesus, it's Jesus." But that's what you have to do; you have to change the room. Not because you bring the biggest Bible. Not because you wear Christian T-shirts and Christian ball caps. By the way, I think that everybody here should buy Parrish Lee a ball cap from Tasty-Kake.

Back on subject. Back on subject. Do they have one? Make one, man. When I was in Texas—I always complained about having to wear a ball cap that's got somebody else's name and logo on it. You know, you go in, and you buy a ball cap, because you like the color or something, and it's got somebody else's name on it. Nike, or, yeah, whatever. A gas station. I've got two of them from Auto Zone I wear when I work in the garage. So, I always wanted just a plain ball cap; nothing on it. No initials, nothing. And, so, I pulled into this place—they talked about cowboy boots, and I was looking to get some cowboy boots for my grand-kid—and this place, they had blank shirts and everything, and they would put anything you want on them. And they looked at me kind of strange when I said, "I want that ball cap, and I don't want anything on it." So, I walk around with a cream colored ball cap, and people look at me strange, going, "Where'd you get that?" How many have walked into, like, a ball cap hut? They've got one in the mall, I don't know what it's called, but, you look around, and there's all these different styles and colors, and every one of them's got a name on it.

Well, the Bible said that the priest had a mitre on their head. What was on it? What were the words on it? What was on it? No, it wasn't the phylactery. It said, "Lord King," I believe. Look it up. It had a thing about God; it was the forefront of their minds. Because the High Priest had to always think about and concentrate on God. And the Bible said we must have on our minds, at all times, God, how we can minister, we think about God. We look at every situation; we analyze it like God. Because, we must be about our God's business. Because He is the King over us. He is the Ruler over us. Remember the service--I know Pastor Paine preached about it. "If Jesus isn't Lord *of* all, He's not Lord *at* all." If Jesus isn't Lord of everything in your life, then He is not Lord of anything in your life. Because you are like a democracy, saying, "Well, God, I like this, but I don't like this. I know You can satisfy me in this, but I'm going to look to that to satisfy my need over here."

I preached a message about three chairs. Basically, it was where you sit. In chair one is a godly man, is a godly woman, and everything about them is of God. That chair might be uncomfortable; a straight-backed chair, hard to sit in, uncomfortable at times, but, do you know, people who sit in chair one raise chair one children? Chair two is an easy chair, nice and relaxing. They're the kind of people who come to church when things are going good. You know, when they come to church, they might be fighting with their family in the car, but when they get in church, "Oh, praise God, brother! How you doing? It's great to see you. Bless you!" And, as soon as church is over with, they're at the football game, they're not thinking about God, and they're cursing at the player that just dropped the ball, you know? That's a chair two Christian. A chair three Christian doesn't even think about God, he doesn't care about God. He's in one of those chaise lounges, just laying back, enjoying the world? You know what kind of children chair two people raise? Chair three. Because they see what a fake chair two is. And their children walk away, usually, and, they don't want anything to do with church or God.

Now, do you want to influence people? Do you want to see people come to Jesus and accept Him as Lord and Savior? Then He must be your Lord and Savior *every single* moment. Every single moment of our lives He must be Lord of lords and King of kings. And, for that to happen, church, you need to spend time at Calvary. You need to spend time on your knees at the foot of the cross. Kirk, remember what a blessing it was? You know, there's places in Israel, and our guide told us there are three things tradition says that this happened here. "We're pretty sure this is where that happened." "We're confident this is where Jesus walked on the water." And, "We know, beyond a shadow of a doubt that this happened right here." One of those was the valley of Elah, where David and Goliath fought. But, there was another place, it's a huge church. There's three different religious organizations that take care of this church. And, in the center of it, you walk up these steps, and, right there, right there, is the notch in the ground where the cross of Jesus stood. There's no doubt that that's the place. And, they've got this glass cover over it, but they've got a little hole where you can reach your hand, and you can touch where the cross of Jesus—where His blood spilled.

We must go back to that cross. We must go back to that moment when we found our sins forgiven. That moment when—for me, it was when Pastor David just took and said, "Son, there's a better way to live than you're living. There's a better way to live than you're living." And I didn't understand that. I was having so much fun getting stoned, hanging out with my friends, but when I got saved, I saw everything differently. I experienced things through a different emotional experience in my life, and I knew that God was awesome, and I knew that God loved me! God cared about me, as a man! And God wanted the best for me! But, He said, "I am Lord, it's not your way." Our way led to the mess we were in; maybe the mess you found yourself in again. Because, you might have been a Christian for a long time, and you got away from the cross; you got away from the reason you accepted Jesus. And we need to go back to that moment when God touched our lives, just like He did with the Apostle Paul. When he was known as Saul, he was going around and killing the Christians, and God spoke to him, and the Spirit said, "It's hard to kick against the pricks." It's hard to ignore, it's hard to fight against the awesomeness and the presence of God. So, we need to go back to the cross. I need to go back to the

cross. Yes, not once a month when we take communion, not once a year when we have a revival or something, but we need to do it every day in our personal devotion. We need to do it every time we come together, whether it's two or three or a houseful or a roomful. We need to go to the cross and collectively experience the joy of Jesus Christ and get past the pettiness of the flesh. Stop trying to tell God what to do; He's not asking our opinion. He doesn't care what we want, He wants us to have the best.

My dad was an awesome father, most of the time. How many of you had a dad that said, "If you don't show back up at ten o'clock, or sunset, I'm going to spank you, or you're going to lose some privileges." My mom and dad bought me a bike; that bike was my freedom. Man, I got on that bike when I got up, and I traveled. I could ride for miles, and go see my friends. When I got to their house, though, I called my parents, and said, "Hi, mom," because dad was usually at work, "Hi mom, I'm over at Joe's house." Then I'd call up, "Hey, mom, I'm headed over to so-and-so's house." Then I'd say, "Hey, mom, I'm at so-and-so's house." I didn't have to do that; I did that because I didn't want them to worry about me. I wanted to let them know that I could communicate. That way, if I wanted to do something, they had the confidence to know that I was going to do it, and I was going to be okay. How do you communicate with God? We were talking, the other day, Andy and Parrish and I, and I mentioned my philosophy of God, if the only time you talk to God is when you're in misery and in trouble, guess what? God's going to keep you there, so you'll talk to Him. God's will keep you there, so you'll talk to Him. But, if you talk to Him constantly, if you talk to Him constantly, God gives us liberty to go and do things in His name! God gives us that liberty! Well, my dad one day said, "If you're not back by this time, I'm going to nail your bike to the garage." I didn't get good grades, you know, I had—I wasn't real nice to my sister for a little while, neither one of them. Lupe, did that ever happen to you? You had too many sisters, they'd be ganging up on you. You know what, I was home on time. Why was I home on time? Yeah, I wanted to keep my bike, but, also, because I loved and respected my dad, and I didn't want to disappoint him. God said, "Be holy, for I am holy. Be godly, because I am godly. Be compassionate, as I am compassionate. Be merciful, as I am merciful." Why should we do that? Because we don't want to disappoint Him. Because we don't want our liberty taken from us. We don't want our salvation taken from us. We want to please Him, so that we can hear those precious words, "Well done," not, "Be well done." That took a while for some of you to get.

You know I heard a joke one time; I thought it was awesome. This woman dies; car accident. Tragedy. And she goes to Heaven, and the angel looks at her when she come sup, and he goes, "There's some mistake! You're not supposed to be here for ten more years. So, you're going to go back, and you're going to get revived, and you're going to be okay." And she said, "Well, since I'm here, can you give me a tour of Heaven?" He said, "Sure! We can stop time." So he stopped the sun, and she saw everything, the golden streets, the castles, the mansions... She said, "Oh, man, this is awesome!" And then she said, "Well, while I'm here, can I see what Hell looks like?" And the angel looked at her like, "You're crazy! You want to go there and see what that's like?" And she said, "Yeah, why not? I've got some time, I'd just like to see what that's like." So, she goes to Hell, and Satan's standing at the gate, and he's got this cat-eating grin on his face, and she says, "I know I'm not going to be here, but I just want to see what it's like." So, he said, "Sure!" And he opened the door, and there's a beach party going on. People are playing volleyball and surfing and listening to music and dancing, and she's going around, and there's parties, and all this other stuff, and she said, "This is Hell?" He goes, "You saw it." And, poof! She's back in the car, and she's healed, and she's living her life, and she doesn't live it for God. She said, "Man, they're both great places, and I just want to do what I want to." So, she dies, and she goes up for judgment, and the angel said, "What in the world happened to you? We had a place for you; we had blessings for you..." And he said, "You know the path. Go." So, she grabs up her beach towel and her picnic basket, and she starts skipping down the road to Hell like Dorothy did in the Wizard of Oz, she's just ready to go. And, when she gets there, the devil's got that cat-eating smile on his face,

and he kicks the door open, and there's agony and torment and pain and sorrow, and she says, "What's this? You showed me..." And he goes, "I lied." Realize that, in this life, your choices determine where you go, and you will be blessed or you will be cursed.

I love these smart watches we've got now. Man, you can talk to other people. It'll act as your phone, now. Man, that's just like Dick Tracy. They've got apps for that now. You can do anything you want on your phone, as long as you've got trifocals. You can do what you want on your watch. And I've always said that I would love for that Dick Tracy watch to be found, and Hubble telescope find Heaven, and there would be a channel seven that we could dial into and see the angels sing, and the pearly gates. And, then, you can turn it to channel six, and see Hell, and the agony, and I guarantee you, all of your decisions will be on channel seven. Well, there isn't; we have a promise, and it's up to us, what do we do? I want you to get back to the cross; I want you to get back to Calvary. I want you to find the blessings. I want you to find the gifts that God has for you. I want you to manifest the fruits of the Spirit. I want you to shine like no one else has shined before. I want people to look at you in this church, in our ministry, and say, "Great is the God; great is the God of these people."

I love you, church, it's good to be back here. I'm looking forward to being back more often. And, together, we will take the land. And, together, we will preserve the land for our Monarch, Jesus. Jesus, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. God bless you.