CITYLIGHT
CHURCH

SERMON NOTES & TRANSCRIPT

History and Hope

Here We Grow, Part 2

You need a history with God, and you need hope in what He will still do. The future glory of this house is greater than its former glory, so we refuse to glorify the past and fear the future.

PREACHED BY
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SERIES
Here We Grow, Week 2 of 3

MAIN TEXT
Jeremiah 16:14-15

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Sermon Transcript

Let me invite you to go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah 16. Jeremiah 16. I'm going to go here shortly. I just want to share a small thought with you. We're doing some stuff a little different this morning. We're in a series called Here We Grow. Here We Grow. Here we go. Hey, are you feeling the growth? Are you feeling the growth? I know we're growing because I got that air conditioner fixed this week, and I'm still hot. That's how I know we're growing, in Jesus' name. But we're in a series called Here We Grow. I'm treating this like a church-wide staff meeting.

Everybody's on the church staff for the next two weeks. And so in a church staff meeting, this is what I do. I teach, then I tell them where we're going, and then I tell them what I need from them. And so last week I taught. This week I'm going to talk to you a little bit about where we're going, and next week I'm going to tell you what I need from you. And next week will actually not be about serving in ministry. So it might slip what I'm going to talk about a little bit next week, but I'm not going to talk about serving in ministry. Now, we need you to serve in ministry.

I need you to serve in ministry as much as I need a plate of spaghetti by 1:00 today. Okay? We need you to serve in ministry, but that's not what we're going to talk about next week. And so you really want to be here. I think you're going to be inspired, be encouraged, and be challenged next week, so make sure you're with me. But today we are talking about where we're going. Where we're going. Where we're going, talking about where we're headed. And we're going to do a little Vision Sunday follow-up here in a little while. Back in February we had a Vision Sunday. Anybody remember Vision Sunday?

But the problem is our church has so many people who weren't here in February that I realize a lot of y'all think this is just how it is. And a lot has happened since February. And so we just want to bring you up to date on some of those projects and what we've been working on, and we're going to get to that in a little bit. I just want to encourage you first with a little bit of teaching. This week, I don't know about all the school systems, but Saraland City Schools went back to school this week. All the parents of children who can't entertain themselves said amen.

Praise the Lord. And so the Saraland City Schools are back in school this week. So I thought it would be cool that I would just take us back to school for a few minutes today. Can I do that? I'm going to take you back to history class. We're going to do a little Bible history for a moment. Okay, y'all ready? Okay, awesome. So I'm going to go over here to the board. Listen, I want to share with you some information — I'm going to give you maybe more information than you need. But I want to come back around at the end of sharing this information and give you an encouragement from Jeremiah 16.

But I think this is helpful to understand. So whenever we're looking at the Old Testament, we're looking at a group of people that are God's chosen people. They are the Jewish people. They are Israel and Judah, okay? You pretty much see that through all of it, but it's Israel and Judah — they are God's chosen people. And understanding their timeline a little bit can actually make the Bible make more sense. Have you ever read the Bible and just said, "Whoo, I wish it made more sense"? I know I have. And so hopefully this will help you. So here's a little timeline.

Between 1500 and 1200 BC. We're not 100% sure where this lands, so the further back it is, the more wonky we are on the timeline. But 1500, 1200 BC, around this time is the Exodus, okay? So for instance, Genesis, Job, we believe those

happened before this, and then around 1500 to 1200 BC, the Exodus happened. Moses leads God's people out of slavery in Egypt into the wilderness, ultimately into the Promised Land.

> **EXODUS 14:30-31** ESV
>
> 30 Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

So that happens around here. And then around 1000 BC — which I just want to go ahead and say, 'cause I feel like I'm going to forget one of these, they're all BC.

We're not jumping to AD at any point. And I'm going to tell you, in this church it's still AD. Bless God. It's not a political comment. I'm just getting too old to change. So 1000 BC, this is when Israel becomes a nation state. This is when Saul becomes king, and so Israel becomes a formal nation state. That's around — this will be in 1 Samuel, you see this. 1 Kings, you're going to see that in there. Or I'm sorry, 1 Chronicles. 1 Samuel, 1 Chronicles. And then from there around 720 — which I should say this, relatively shortly after this, by like 930, 920, Judah and Israel split.

So they are no longer one kingdom, they're two. So you're dealing with two different people or two different kingdoms at that point. God's people, two different kingdoms. 720, Assyria conquers Israel. Okay? 720, Assyria conquers Israel.

> **2 KINGS 17:6** ESV
>
> 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

And by 610 BC — these are round numbers, by the way. These aren't real specific. Like, I think this is actually 609 BC, but 610, Babylon conquers Assyria, and by virtue of that, Israel. Okay? So Babylon conquers Assyria. By 585 BC, Babylon conquers Judah. So Assyria conquers Israel, Babylon conquers Assyria, and then Babylon conquers Judah.

Now, I do want to let you know that this is a little bit different than how Assyria conquers Israel. For this whole period of time, for 30, 25 years, somewhere in there, Judah and Babylon are in a type of agreement with one another. So even here at 610, for the most part, Judah is conquered, but they come in in 585 and really take over, deport all of the Jewish people out of Judah except the poorest in the land, and they tend to the crops and keep the land fertile. But everybody's drug out of Judah, and they tear down the temple. So they destroy the temple.

> **2 KINGS 25:8-12** ESV
>
> 8 In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar,
> king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to
> Jerusalem. 9 And he burned the house of the Lord and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every
> great house he burned down. 10 And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard,
> broke down the walls around Jerusalem. 11 And the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters
> who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of
> the guard carried into exile. 12 But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be
> vinedressers and plowmen.

That's 585. By 540, Persia conquers Babylon. Persia conquers Babylon. When Persia conquers Babylon, there is some favor that is shown not just to the Jewish people, but Persia had kind of a general policy that they started sending conquered lands or conquered people back to the lands that they were from.

> **EZRA 1:1-4** ESV
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> 1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled,
> the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom
> and also put it in writing: 2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the
> kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Whoever
> is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and
> rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. 4 And let each survivor, in
> whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts,
> besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."

So they let people start going back in, and by 440, about 100 years later, the temple and the Jerusalem wall are rebuilt.

> **NEHEMIAH 6:15** ESV
>
> 15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

And I'm shocked nobody has commented on how good my handwriting is. It's just fantastic. It's really just to jog my memory. But anyway, so this is a timeline of what you see happening in the Bible.

This is why I share this. Actually — can he erase now? Right here in this area, this is the majority of prophetic writings. Okay? So the majority of prophetic writing happens in here. Not all of the prophets are written there, but the majority. So when you read the prophets in the Bible, you're usually reading about this era right here, which can make those things they say make a lot of sense. And this is what I want you to see. I'm going to share with you a passage right now that was written right about here, okay? And that is Jeremiah 16:14-15, okay? So turn there with me, and I want to show you something.

Because in this timeline, things are bad, but they're not as bad as they're going to be. They're about to get worse. He prophesies this in Judah, in Jerusalem, having seen what has happened with Assyria and Israel, and now he's watching

what's going down with Babylon and Assyria. So Assyria conquering Israel, that's old news. But now, people are starting to watch the political structure, and they're going, "Babylon's taken a lot of ground, and Assyria is losing power. Something's about to happen." And so as Jeremiah senses something is going on, this is what he says, okay?

> **JEREMIAH 16:14-15** ESV
>
> 14 "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' 15 but 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers.

"Therefore, behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when it shall no longer be said, 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country.'" The north country is Assyria and Babylon. That's what the north country is. The north country is this country that had overthrown Israel, this kingdom that had overthrown Israel, and this kingdom that's about to overthrow that kingdom. He says, "There's a day coming when you will no longer say the Lord brought us up out of the land of Egypt, but out of the north country."

For years, especially at this time when Israel needed to stand on the promise of God, they would look back to the law of Moses, which was quite frequently brought back to, "Because I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."

> **EXODUS 20:2** ESV
>
> 2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

So throughout the law of Moses, which is the first five books of our Bible, there is a constant reminder, a constant encouragement — not only should you do this because, but you also need to be encouraged because I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. But in this passage, Jeremiah says, "There's a day coming that I'm no longer going to watch my people say, 'The Lord brought us out of Egypt,' but rather you're going to say, 'The Lord has delivered us from the north country.'"

You have a present, pressing problem, and there will be a day that you don't say, "Let me tell you about this testimony once or twice removed." Instead, "Let me tell you how the Lord brought me through something about five weeks ago in Jesus' mighty name." So this morning, what I want to share with you are some things that I think are going to be helpful to us as a church, but I need you to hear this. The prophet says, in essence, you need history with God. I would encourage everybody in our church to build a history with the Lord. Build a history with God. You need to have moments in your life that you can say, "God came through for me here."

But not only do you need history, you also need hope. You need to be able to look forward in your life and say, "God is not done with me. God is not done delivering me. God is not done helping me. He hasn't just brought me out once. There's going to be more stuff that He brings me out of. God is going to continue to deliver me throughout my life." Okay? If you have hope and you look forward and you can get faith around something, God can do a great work. God

can do something. This is why we encourage you in this church almost repeatedly that you need to get a word from God.

You gotta get a word from God. You've gotta get something burning in your spirit that you say, "God can do that in my life, and I believe he will." And we lean a little bit too much on what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said when the king was about to throw them in the fire and they said, "Well, we believe the Lord will deliver us, but even if he don't, we'll still serve him."

> **DANIEL 3:17-18** ESV
>
> 17 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us
> out of your hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the
> golden image that you have set up."

I think that's great, but why don't we stand a little bit more on, "I believe God's going to deliver me. I believe he's going to do it. And hey, if it doesn't work out, I don't think I'll get burned up in the fire.

If he doesn't deliver me from this, he's setting me up to deliver me from something else that's going to serve me better in Jesus' mighty name." Now, the reason I'm saying that this morning is because we have a tendency as humans to glorify the past and fear the future. You hear it in our language. We say things like, "The good old days. They don't make 'em like they used to." "The glory days." But then when it comes to the future, we'll say things like, "Tomorrow's not promised." "I don't know what this world's coming to. It's only getting worse." These are the kind of things we say when we look towards tomorrow, but the Bible says in the book of Hebrews, of Jesus, it says, "We've come to Jesus, whose blood speaks a better word."

> **HEBREWS 12:24** ESV
>
> 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the
> blood of Abel.

I'm telling you, your best word doesn't have to be about what's behind you. You can speak a better word about what's coming ahead of you in Jesus' name. That's a good place to give the Lord a praise right there if you believe it. Especially in the church, I've noticed that people struggle to step into the future because they become infatuated with the past. We are so fascinated by what God has done previously, and every church has got a time rubber band attached to them. I've been to some churches that are just in this tension with what God did 10 years ago.

And then I've gone into some churches where there's a tension in what God did 100 years ago that ain't got nothing to do with him. You get into some churches, all they talk about is Azusa Street. You don't know nobody that was in Azusa Street. I'm telling you, you're just crazy about it. But you'll have people who get a tension because they're attached to this point in their history where it seemed like that was the moment. And I want to tell you, in this church, about 30 years ago, in the 1990s — which I have heard young people refer to as the late 1900s. And you want to talk about having to really invoke the fruit of the Spirit when you hear something kick you in your neck, man.

Late 1900s. You crazy. But if you could look back to the 1990s, I want to tell you something. In Mobile, Alabama, as it goes for the Assemblies of God, this was the church to be in. I don't mind them hearing it from me: in 2026, it's the

church to be in too. Sorry. You just gotta let people know. But in the '90s, man, this was the church to be in. And this was the place. It was hopping, it was popping. There was people coming out our ears. The youth group was huge. A lot of the ministers that were in the church then have gone on and done other... In fact, a lot of people I know, when I came here, they're like, "I worked there."

And I'm like, "What?" And I'm finding out all these people were here and all this stuff. There was a time when this thing was just banging. It was, if you will pardon my French, the bee's knees. Sorry, I didn't mean to go there on y'all. Unfortunately though, those days are not just behind us, they are far behind us. There are people in our church who were not alive when this church was the place to be. That day is behind us. The trap a church like ours can fall into is we can always look back to when it was better and never look forward to what God actually has intended for this house.

And I just want to declare to you today, as Jeremiah 16 says, there's a day coming that you'll no longer say the Lord brought you up out of Egypt. But there's a day coming when you'll say the Lord delivered us from the north country. I'm holding onto a better word. I believe that the future glory of this house is greater than the former glory of this house.

> **HAGGAI 2:9** ESV
>
> 9 The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.'"

I'm not trying to be too aggressive. I'm not trying to be too competitive. But I've gone to district council, our state meeting for the Assemblies of God in Alabama. I've gone to that meeting where [a former pastor] had this church at its peak, where [a former pastor]... Nobody has ever gotten the church up to what [a former pastor] had it.

[a former pastor] is a legend in this church. But I'm going to tell you right now, I'm ready to go to district council and hear, "Well, you know, [a former pastor] didn't have it as big as Mayfield has it. [a former pastor] had it good, but he didn't quite have it where Jason Mayfield got it." In Jesus' name, I'm believing that we're stepping into a fresh season where God is about to move in this church in a powerful way. If you believe that and receive that, give the Lord a good praise this morning. So I want to spend the rest of the morning just giving you some updates. I want to share some things with you that are happening and that are coming.

I need to go at kind of lightning speed, so everybody take a deep breath. Okay? Unclog your ears if you need to. I recommend pinky fingers. They're the easiest one to get in there, as I taught you last week. And so in February, we spent some time laying out some things we wanted to get accomplished around the church, and I just want to talk to you about some things that we've gotten done, some things that we haven't gotten done, and some things that are new that we're going to be doing. And so a few things that we've gotten done. One of the things we talked about back in February was updating the auditorium, and obviously we haven't done much in here yet.

For those of you who are relatively new, everything you're looking at is brand spanking new. We've done the whole room. We've done this right angle, and now at some point we're going to do this right angle of the room. But we're in a room now where we have an excellent sound system. How many of y'all are encouraged by how clear everything is? You can hear well, and it's balanced. It's the same everywhere in the room. And so we've got new sound. We have new lights. We have a new screen, in Jesus' name. We've got new drums. And we got a new keyboard, in Jesus' name.

We got it going on around here. This is a world-class worship space as far as I'm concerned. And I just... It's hard to believe that right before Palm Sunday, this is what the room looked like, if you've never seen it. This is where we came

from. And we actually... Those are TVs that we were about to put in. We had to put TVs in so we could share things with you and show you videos because the projection screen was so dim. And now look at us. That stage only came out to about here, but now I can come way out here and throw microphones on the ground with the best of them, in Jesus' name.

So we've got a great room. Give the Lord a praise for what he's doing in here. We were going to do it sooner, but the... Well, I tell you what, I'm not going to fight with this. Everybody: [worship] All right. Well, I'll keep singing for a little while longer. I ain't ever talking about that projection screen again, though. That was the last one. Well, let me get it in while my mic... The projection screen was rough. All right, let's keep going. We had to put it off, but we hosted a revival service. How many of you enjoyed that time with Pastor Tyler Harris?

That was a powerful service, amen. And we also introduced — well, we announced, and now we've already had it — our new baptismal, which was unveiled in April. Let me see that baptismal. Brand-new baptismal. You can stand up in, get in with stairs. And we had a third guy, but David Stevens drowned him. We settled out of court. So we announced our new baptismal. Our next baptismal, by the way, is going to be... Our next baptism is going to be set September 13th. We also told you we were going to partner with Kilimanjaro School of Missions. We currently are providing a full-ride scholarship to David Wikumba with the Kilimanjaro School of Missions.

Come on, give the Lord a praise. That is an extension of our church right there. You're going to reap off of his ministry for the rest of his life, in Jesus' name. We've completed some facility repairs. We have done a lot of air conditioner and room and roof repairs. But I'll let you know, we have more to do. Not because we haven't got them done, 'cause we didn't know about it at Vision Sunday. And so we kinda learn on a regular basis what's going on with the building. I will tell you, we have about $7,000 worth of repairs left to do with the roof. And so if the Lord speaks to you about the church having a good roof, that's where we're at.

And I do want to let you know that sometimes urgency moves the funds around. So there are moments you might hear me talking about, "Hey, we gotta fix this roof." But if the air conditioner goes down in the nursery, that gets fixed first. And I just want you to know we are mindful of how money is given, but we are also mindful of what we have to do operationally around here. Kids ministry. Speaking of that, kids ministry areas are completely transformed. Down here we're going to have new furniture and new toys just in the next, probably the next two weeks. So you're going to see downstairs look completely different.

You've seen the transformation with the walls and the ceiling and all of that, but you're going to see new toys, new furniture in there in the next couple of weeks. And in the next couple of weeks we're opening the Loft, which is our upstairs kids elementary area. That is going to actually have an open house next week. So you can walk through that space. We can't have you walk through down here, but we can have you walk through the Loft next week, and I'm telling you, it looks awesome. Let me show you just the progress right now. So this is where we started, and you see all that black there is covering up windows, and we had the brown chairs in there, which were four times too big for kids.

They were swimming in those. And so we went in, and this is without any furniture. This is just the cleanup of the room right there. So we've got windows are back, new lights, fresh paint, fresh floors. There's another room behind there that had toys and stuff that they would play in. And so we've also refreshed that area. And yeah, go ahead and give the Lord a praise. We've got couches and video game systems going in there. It's going to be super cool. We're thinking about putting an Atari in there. Come on, somebody, in Jesus' name. If the Lord speaks to you about the Atari... No, I'm just... And so we've got a lot happening with our kids ministry.

Make sure that you tour that next week. Also, we announced that our Legacy Builders were getting a fresh launch, a kind of a relaunch, a redo, if you will. And we went into that plan. We renovated a room for them. Pastor John and Miss Sheila stepped in and started teaching that group, and then something happened that I wasn't particularly expecting. It started growing. And it grew too much. And so in September, we're taking them out of that room and we're moving them over to the Event Center so they can continue to grow that Sunday morning class. On top of that, what we're going to do is we're going to be putting our nursing mothers room in the current Legacy Builders room, and we're going to be able to accommodate several nursing mothers at a time with the service playing, with the audio from the room in there.

You're going to be able to be in there with your kids, or our guests that come in and that have kids and need to nurse, and you'll be able to do the whole thing in there and still have the church experience. Come on, somebody. So speaking of the Event Center, I do want to let you know that Wednesday nights are launching on August 26th. And I want to let you know kids ministry's going to be in their spaces by the 26th, so we'll have them there. And youth is going to be meeting in the Event Center along with — not at the same time, but along with — our Legacy Builders. How many of you have ever seen a church where the senior adults and the youth group were in the same room?

But we're a generationally intentional church, amen. And so we're going to let the Legacy Builders pray, and then we're going to let the youth reap that right there in the room. Get it off the atmosphere. But Wednesday nights are launching. And the Event Center has not gotten a lot of attention from me since I got here. I've joked that my vision ends at that door over there. I just couldn't think past that door. But the reality is, that room needs to be cleaned pretty thoroughly. And so write this down, that on August 22nd — that's a Saturday — at 10:00 AM, we're calling a church work day to clean this whole area up over here really well.

And there's a lot of stuff we need to get out of there, thrown away in dumpsters. We just gotta give that room a once over. And so we appreciate you if you can come out and help us on that day. Now, speaking of Wednesday nights, we're also going to be having adult ministry on Wednesday nights, and I want to kind of let you know what to expect. We haven't talked about this a lot, so here's kind of what you can expect to happen in here on Wednesday nights. We are going to do a few minutes of worship. We're going to do a teaching, and then we're going to break out into tables, and we're going to have a community element on Wednesday nights where you'll be able to talk and discuss and ask questions and share thoughts based on the message.

You'll also be praying at that table, and then you'll go home. It's going to be a good Wednesday night. And I do want to let you know, though — okay, this is where our size and how much I'm doing, we all have to just be mindful of, okay? And I also know there's a sensitivity to what I'm about to say, so I'm aware of what I'm telling some of y'all. You're not going to see a lot of me on Wednesday nights. I am going to do the teaching, but you're going to see me on video. I am going to be in the building, but I need y'all to know we've been able to do what we've done here because we got rid of Wednesday nights early enough.

There is a lot that rests on me, just as a singular individual for this church right now. And so, Wednesday nights do put me in a little bit of a funky spot, where if I'm up here preaching and praying and singing and doing the whole bit, that at some point, you gotta decide, do you want to have Sunday or do you want to have Wednesday? 'Cause I don't know that I have two of them in me every week. And so I am going to be teaching. It is going to be on video, but we're going to have that led. You want to be here. It's going to be great. If you'll just trust me, I think you're going to love it, in Jesus' name.

Everybody give the Lord a praise. Go ahead. Couple of things I also want to let you know that are coming up that we haven't done yet. One of those is that you're about to start seeing more musicians on stage. Did you notice anything this morning? There's more musicians on stage. And I can't formalize this in any way. I do not have a plan, but I just need to tell you it is in my spirit. I need to be not up here for the first 20 minutes of the service around January. And I don't know how we're going to get that done, but I just need y'all to start getting ready.

I know y'all like to look at me for an hour and a half. See, one person, amen — that knew they had to say it. But we're going to start changing some of that over the next several months by faith, in Jesus' name. We also talked to you about Neighbor Boxes. Neighbor Boxes are going to be our benevolence ministry here at the church, and I know some of you have thought, "Well, hey, is that ever going to happen?" Well, we're actually still right on schedule. We told you we were going to do that in fall. I can tell you now that we're looking at launching that right before Thanksgiving.

So we're trying to do it after the end of October and Thanksgiving — we want to launch it right in there. And we're right on track. Me and Pastor John, we're meeting about it this week. I do want to prepare you. We may do some rebrand. So when we launch it and it's something that isn't Neighbor Boxes, don't go, "Well, he never did that Neighbor Box thing." No, I might just have to. I'm seeing some stuff, and I gotta be flexible, amen, in Jesus' name. And so that is coming at the end of the year. Also, we talked about Spanish translation in our service, so people who speak Spanish can come in and experience our services translated into their language.

We're expecting — I'm hoping — that that is going to start in the next couple of weeks. So it's right here. So give the Lord a praise. We're on target for everything we plan to do. Now, we shared with you some major capital projects, and you're going, "Well, we haven't done the front, and we haven't done the parking lot." Well, listen, I told you we're going to do that as we have the capital available. And listen, I only need 1.5 million to get it all done. I know it ain't nothing. No problem. But we're going to get to those things as we can. I do want to prepare you.

We're probably, in the next couple of months, going to do a light renovation in the foyer. And so we're going to refresh that a little bit. It'll be a little nicer when you walk in, match some of the aesthetic that we have going upstairs and into the downstairs kids' area. And so just bear with us as we communicate and make adjustments around that. By the way, I do want to say that when we started announcing these things, we really didn't know how we were going to do 'em. A lot of this stuff we haven't known. In some weeks, I'm sitting around going, "I don't know if we can do this," and then something will happen, and I go, "Okay, let's make that happen."

And I just want to tell you, that's the power of vision. That's the power of vision. Vision tends to create a pathway. It creates a road. And I want to let you know that two of those roads have names. It's Jeff Avenue and Kenny Boulevard. Would you stand to your feet and give them a big hand clap of appreciation this morning? Come on. They've made most of this stuff happen. And I want to tell you, these guys serve the Lord in what they do. 'Cause I haven't even bought them lunch. They don't ask for anything. They come in and they work and they serve the Lord in this, and it is such a blessing to me personally.

But I want you to know, if you don't know, it's a blessing to you and your family and your kids. Those two have made a ton of this vision come to pass, and I'm so grateful for the two of you, and I'll buy you Burger King this week. Nobody? He said no. He didn't even want my Burger King. Look a gift horse in the mouth. All right. Well, here's the deal. I want to take the next few minutes and talk to you about some things that are coming up. I want to prepare you. There's a big change that is coming to our church. There's a big change coming. Look at your neighbor and say, "There's a big change coming."

There's a big change coming. There's a big change coming. Now, I want to let you know that we're going to have a Sunday in October where I actually share some specific vision for 2027. The Lord's put some things in my heart about 2027 spiritually that I'm going to be sharing with you. God's about to do something powerful in this church, and I need to get you ready for that so you kind of know what's going on. Some of that is starting early. I want you to know in three weeks, I think, I'm going to start teaching through what will probably end up being more than 30 weeks on the Lord's Prayer.

So those of y'all sitting in church this morning going, "He ain't even preaching the Bible today" — okay, no, I'm going to be doing the Lord's Prayer for 30 weeks. So I'm about to give you some word, amen. And so that's going to be part of what we're preparing for in 2027. But on that Sunday, I'm going to give you more details about what I'm going to say right now, and I need to prepare you that I don't give this information this early very often. I would not tell you something and wait this long for a change normally, but I want to give you an opportunity to settle this in your spirit if you need to.

Most of you that have come in the last six, seven months, this won't faze you at all. There's some of you that are sitting in here that you had a diaper changed in this church. And some of you were little kids in this church, too. Nobody? Okay, that was good. That was better than y'all thought it was. I thought y'all would catch that faster. You'll be sitting at lunch later and go, "That was a good one." All right. But some of you, you have deep sentimental attachment to this — not just the church, but the organization. And so I want to prepare you and give you some time.

And I think we have gotten to the point, based a lot on what I've shared with you this morning of just what we've gotten done, that there is a measure of trust between us now. And I think you know that I do not do things just to do them. I don't make decisions just to make decisions. I'm not out here willy-nilly. I don't really build things around me as a pastor. I try to do what's best for the church, and this isn't for me. This is a decision we've made in the spirit. But I also believe this is a good tactical decision that I want to share with you here. And that being said, in January of 2027, we are going to officially change the name of the church.

And we will still be an Assemblies of God church. I will still be an Assemblies of God minister so far as it is up to me. And so we're going to stay, we're going to be who we are. We're still going to be building a Jesus-centered, Spirit-filled church for all people. The mission, the vision, what we've been doing over the last year together is not changing. And I'm going to explain a little bit of why we're going to do that. Now, I'm not going to tell you the name today. I'm going to share that with you in October. In fact, I'm going to tell you how serious I am about that, about not telling you the name.

Only two people in this room know what it is. And for those of you that know, our board is split into two parts. We have an internal board and an external board. While my internal guys have known that we were going to do this, they don't know the name. Only the external board knows it. And the reason we're doing that is we just don't want y'all sitting around talking about different names that it could be over the next few months. We just want you to be ready to ride along. And if not, we'll have David Stevens baptize you. The greatest threat we have. We turned that into a threat today, amen.

I want to explain to you a little bit of why we're going to do this. There are a myriad of reasons. There are many more reasons why we're doing this. This is a good decision on a lot of fronts. But I just want to prepare your heart for October and tell you a little bit about why we're doing this. The church at large — I'm not talking about our church, I'm not talking about the Assemblies of God, I'm talking about every church, period. Mostly in America, I should say that. There is a

major leadership crisis that we are in and entering. And there are people who are big leaders in denominations, and they're calling it a senior pastor crisis that we are entering.

And I just want to give you the high points of this. I want you to know I have spent quite a bit of time looking over data and research on this. I could start going through all kinds of financial issues that the church faces, all types of qualification issues that the church faces. There's a lot of details that go into what's happening right now, but the high points are this: 25% of pastors are planning to retire in the next three years. That's a quarter of every preacher. One in four senior pastors are planning to step down in the next three years, but the number of pastors under the age of 40 has dropped 50% over the last 30 years.

We do not have ministers coming up who can replace these pastors who are leaving. I was telling the Legacy Builders this before service. I thought they deserved to hear it before you because I like them more than you. And I told them, I said, "The reality is, as little as 10 years ago, when you would post a job for a church, you'd get hundreds of resumes." Now, if I posted for a children's pastor or a music pastor or a youth pastor, it is very likely we don't hear from anybody. Anyone. It has gotten very difficult to staff a church, and now that's hitting the senior leadership roles.

There's also a tension that about 70% of churches are going to struggle to afford both a building and a pastor. They can't pay for both. So we're asking potential senior pastors — you gotta think about this ask — we're asking you to give up your livelihood and take over a church that is dying, make no money, fight to pay the bills. And the reality is the guy probably isn't going to be qualified to do it in the first place. This is a huge ask that smaller churches that cannot afford to do both are asking. 70% of churches, by the way, are under 100 people in America.

And I'm just glad to say that we aren't one of them. I used to pastor a small church. Now I pastor a big little church. In Jesus' name. So there's a tension there. Now, these are the three solutions that a lot of denominational leaders and people who look at the data and the statistics of churches, these are three solutions that they're pushing. One is that you close churches. You would think that's something they're talking about. This happens. About 4,000 churches shut down every year in America. So this is something that does happen. So one is to close churches.

The second is to train new pastors, which I support. I support training new pastors. One of the things I really love about Church of the Highlands and their leadership model is Chris Hodges has made it his personal mission to make sure that the next generation of preachers are getting trained. While every Christian university — and I would look at our Assemblies of God universities right in the eye and say this — while they have turned their attention away from the gospel mandate and made it cost about $150,000 for a preacher to come out there and learn how to do his job for an $18,000-a-year part-time pay. We've abandoned preachers in our universities.

We've abandoned preachers in training. We're not training... I'm thankful for Chris Hodges doing that. Here's the problem. His plan's going to work great in 20 years. We have a problem coming now. It's happening now. So I support it, but it won't solve the problem that we're currently facing. The third is that a lot of churches are hiring consultants to find the next senior pastor. Here's the issue with that. The church pays the consultant, and the consultant's getting paid by the church. So where is their interest at? It's the church. Here's the issue. If those consultants don't have an interest in pastors who can fill those roles, they're not going to have pastors for them.

That only works if consultants have more pastors than they have churches. Otherwise, you've got churches paying for nobody behind the curtain. It doesn't work. And I'm just going to say this while I'm just being feisty. And I'm not on medicine this week, amen. This is just in me. I want to let you know, when we started talking about going back into

senior pastor ministry a few years ago, I called a friend of mine who pastors a church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and he said, "You need to call this group." It was something like a legacy group. I don't remember what it's called.

If I knew the name, I'd call it by its actual name. I reached out to these people over and over and over again. And I just want to tell you — and if you're watching the video, you ought to check it out too — I want y'all to think about what we've gotten done here in the last year. These people would not get on the phone with me. And they weren't the only placement consultants that would not even entertain a phone call with me. And churches are paying. I just heard of a church that paid a consultant group for three years, and they still don't have a senior pastor.

Y'all better get your act together. I think that's wrong. That's wrong. You're getting paid for nothing. So here's the deal. These are the solutions that we have floating around, and they're just not good solutions. They don't solve it. Well, I kind of see a fourth path we could take, that we as a church could take. Last week, I talked to you about the necessity of an apostolic and prophetic foundation. I wasn't planning on preaching this part of the service, but I'm feeling something right now, and I just gotta go there. And we talked about an apostolic and prophetic foundation.

There's a fourth pathway where there are some senior pastors of churches who step into an apostolic mandate, and they say, "We might be able to rescue these churches from a distance. We might be able to rescue these churches from here." And rather than watching these churches suffer with a senior pastor who is hanging on because they can't find anybody — and there are guys who are staying in the pulpit because they just can't find anybody to replace them right now — and rather than them living in that and seeing their church deteriorate and their legacy deteriorate, we as a church could reach out and say, "Hey, I think what we could do is partner together, and we think we could incorporate what you guys do into what we do, and we could merge, and you guys become a satellite location of our church."

And I want to tell you, not a lot of guys who are running 100, 120 would toss that out there. But I want you to know, we as a church have some unique qualifications that would allow us — probably a few thousand dollars and about four weeks — to set up a satellite church in an existing church building with pretty little fuss. We could be preaching in four or five churches right now. We can do that. We have those resources available to us here at the church. And so I believe that there's a season coming where we have to stop being just a Saraland church. Now, let me go ahead and tell you, Saraland Church was never a Saraland church.

First Assembly of God was never a Saraland church. There is a mandate that goes back decades on this church to be a regional church. We are in Saraland, but we serve the greater Mobile area. If you're coming from Satsuma, Creola, anywhere that's not Saraland — I know some of you are in West Mobile. Just wave at me this morning if you're coming from somewhere else. We have people who aren't in Saraland. This is a regional church. And we need a church name that's going to match a regional church movement, especially if we're possibly going to have more locations as we step up and step in and try to solve this pending senior pastor crisis that is looming.

It is coming. The waters are about to break loose on it. And we just, at the end of the day, I think Saraland Church Bayou La Batre has a weird ring to it. So we need something that's going to identify our mission, move us forward, keep us open to these opportunities. Now, here's what I do want to tell you that you need to know. We ain't got nothing on the table. We aren't talking to anybody. We aren't looking at taking another church or doing anything right now. There's nothing. I'm telling you, there's nothing on the table. But I do want to say, just to the camera: Pastor, if you're somehow getting on this video and you're in the Mobile general area, whether that be right across the Mississippi border or you're in Pensacola, wherever you may be that's in our general region —

Pastor, if you're struggling and you don't know what to do and what your next step's going to be, and you know that you need to start thinking through transition and you need to step out of that role and you just don't know who the next senior pastor could be or would be, I want to encourage you, reach out to me. I want to have a conversation with you that involves you retiring with dignity, that involves your legacy staying intact, that involves divine partnership where we could potentially bring our churches together and reach the kingdom with the gospel of Jesus Christ that breaks every chain and sets the captive free, and a Pentecostal movement in your area.

> **LUKE 4:18** ESV
>
> 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

Breathe new life into your area in Jesus' name. Church family, if you'd welcome them. That's a good place. So again, I'm going to unveil the new name in October. It'll go into effect in January, but we do want to have some time for you to prepare. Jeremy, would you come up and play the keyboard for me for a few minutes? I'm going to take a minute here, and I want us to start closing out our service. This is an exciting season for us. I just want to let you know that when things change, change can be scary. And one thing I've learned by being viewed by 274,000 people on the internet this week is that it is very easy to assign motive when you don't know what's going on.

I just want to paint a clear picture for y'all. I'm talking to you today as a senior pastor 'cause I've been accused several times this week of being a megachurch pastor. Which I'd appreciate. And I could see how people would assume that, 'cause I pastor a big little church. Sometimes you can think there's something going on, there's something... And you can start trying to put pieces together and, "Why would he do this? Why is this? This doesn't make sense." I just need to paint a clear picture for you guys. We gave up a lot of money to come here. We have not recouped that money.

I want to be honest with you, pastoring the church has not been particularly kind to our personal finances and our businesses that we run. It is not an easy thing that we do. I'm the senior pastor of a church that runs between 100 and 120 every Sunday. We are not a huge church. We're not a big church. When I sit in the office, Monday through Friday, I sit here by myself. There is nobody in. I don't have a secretary. I talk to FedEx, UPS. I'm the one that calls Alabama Power. I talk to the gas people when... I am everything, okay? There is no benefit to someone who's doing that in the office, then doing the music and preaching, and everything you see on the screen, I put it on the screen.

The leaves you see right there, I made the leaves. Nobody else is doing this stuff. Okay, I need you to hear me. The benefit of taking another church and rescuing a church would fall on me like a ton of bricks. It is more than we can do. Well, why do we open ourselves up to do more than we can handle? Why do we take on a heavier load? Why do we do more? Why would you work more hours? Why would you go? Why? Because "this gospel shall be preached to the ends of the earth." That's why.

> **MATTHEW 24:14** ESV
>
> 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Now I'm not going to do it forever. In five years, I'm going to play golf every day, and y'all are going to complain about that.

And then someone who is here today will come up and say, "Don't you ever talk about that preacher not being in the office again. His car lived there." The next building project needs to be a carport for my car. Especially — I got in there this week. My Lord, it's like 107 degrees in that black car. My God. A roast preacher. Why do we do it? We do it because He's worthy. We do it because there are people's lives at risk. The people, if they don't get... If a community does not get the gospel, they go to hell without an option. And let me just tell you, don't think down here in little Bible Belt that people have got the gospel.

I've learned people have got a lot of church teaching and have never heard about the cross of Calvary. I'll never forget hearing someone who was a spiritual mentor in my life talk about coming to the Lord around 40 years old, around the age I am now. Sat in a church, had grown up in church, and the pastor began talking about being born again. And she said, "I was 40 years old. I had never heard about being born again."

> **JOHN 3:3** ESV
>
> 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Raised in church, never heard it. So we're entering a season where we have options. We're either going to see churches shut down, or we're going to step in and we're going to be the ones that say, "No, we will bring you on, and you will be a part of the movement that we've started here in Saraland and throughout this greater region.

We will reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ." That's why we do it. That's why we do it. Lift your hands to heaven all across the room this morning. Heavenly Father, we thank you for what you're doing in our church. God, we thank you for these unique days we live in. God, we thank you that we don't just serve in a status quo situation. It's not the same thing as yesterday. It's not repeat, reheat, redo and reuse. God, we thank you for a fresh wind that's blowing in the church, a fresh season that's on our church. And God, I ask you that you'd give everybody here, if they've been with us for years, if they've been in this church for years or decades, God, I'd ask you that you continue to strengthen and encourage them through change.

And Father, I ask you that you'd put something in the spirit of every person who has walked into this church in the last several months, that they are not here to come to church, but they are here to make a difference in the greater Mobile region, that they are here to get to work in the work of the Kingdom of God, seeing the gospel go forth, the power of God expressed in a Pentecostal movement in Mobile and the South Alabama area. Hallelujah. Thank you, Lord Jesus.

02

Preaching Notes

Before You Preach

This is week two of a three-week series called Here We Grow, framed as a church-wide staff meeting. In a staff meeting the pastor does three things: teach, tell the team where we are going, and tell them what he needs from them. Last week was the teaching week. This week is about where we are going. Next week is the ask.

The message has two halves. The first is a short Bible lesson: a whiteboard timeline of Israel and Judah that lands on Jeremiah 16:14-15 and the call to have both history with God and hope for the future. The second is a vision update: what the church has done since Vision Sunday, what is still coming, and a big change, a new name for the church, explained by the senior pastor crisis facing the American church.

The second half is specific to this church's season. Its dates, numbers and plans are kept here as preached. Adapt them to your own church, or replace the update with your own.

Bring a whiteboard and write the timeline as you go. Round numbers are fine; say so.

Introduction

Turn to Jeremiah 16. We are in a series called Here We Grow, and I am treating it like a church-wide staff meeting. Everybody is on staff for these weeks.

In a staff meeting, I do three things:

- I teach.
- I tell you where we are going.
- I tell you what I need from you.

Last week I taught. This week I am going to tell you where we are going, and we will do a little Vision Sunday follow-up. Next week I will tell you what I need from you, and it is not about serving in ministry. (We need you to serve, as much as I need a plate of spaghetti by 1:00 today. But that is not next week's message. You will want to be here.)

The schools went back this week, so let me take you back to school for a few minutes. History class. I may give you more information than you need, but I want to come back around and encourage you from Jeremiah 16.

1. Know the Timeline

In the Old Testament we are watching God's chosen people, Israel and Judah. Understanding their timeline makes the Bible make a lot more sense. Every date here is BC, and these are round numbers. The further back you go, the less certain the dates.

- **1500 to 1200 BC: the Exodus.** Moses leads God's people out of slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness, toward the Promised Land. (Genesis and Job come before this.)
- **About 1050 to 1000 BC: Israel becomes a nation-state.** Saul is crowned king (1 Samuel). By about 930 BC the kingdom splits in two: Israel in the north, Judah in the south.
- **722 BC: Assyria conquers Israel** (2 Kings 17:6).
- **612 to 609 BC: Babylon conquers Assyria.**
- **587/586 BC: Babylon conquers Judah.** For years Judah had lived under Babylon's thumb. Then Babylon comes in, deports everyone but the poorest of the land, who are left to tend the vineyards and fields, and destroys the temple (2 Kings 25:8-12).
- **539 BC: Persia conquers Babylon.** Persia's policy was to send conquered peoples back to their own lands, and the Jews begin going home (Ezra 1:1-4).
- **About 440 BC: the temple and the wall of Jerusalem have been rebuilt** (Nehemiah 6:15).

Most of the prophetic books were written in this stretch of time, from the conquest of Israel to the return. When you read the prophets, you are usually reading about this era.

It is a long period that is fragile, stressful and fractured. And all through it, especially early on, God's people draw strength from the testimony of the Exodus.

2. You Need History with God

Jeremiah prophesies in Judah, in Jerusalem. He has seen Assyria take Israel, and now he watches Babylon gain ground. Things are bad, but they are not yet as bad as they are going to get. And right in the middle of the timeline, he gives this word:

> JEREMIAH 16:14-15 ESV
>
> 14 "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the Lord
> lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' 15 but 'As the Lord lives who brought up
> the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' For I
> will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers.

The north country is Assyria and Babylon: the kingdom that overthrew Israel, and the kingdom about to overthrow it.

All through the law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, God's people are reminded, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:2). Do this because of who I am, and be encouraged because of what I have done. That is a good thing. It is a Bible practice to mark and remember the moments when God came through.

Now Jeremiah says a day is coming when that will no longer be the testimony. You have a present, pressing problem. And a day is coming when you will not say, "Let me tell you about a testimony once or twice removed," but, "Let me tell you how the Lord brought me through something about five weeks ago."

So here is the first thing the prophet says, in essence: **you need history with God.** Build a history with the Lord. You need moments in your life where you can say, "God came through for me here."

OPTIONAL: REMEMBER THE YEARS

This material is in the original notes but was not preached on August 9, 2026. Use it if time allows.

The psalmist, in a dark season, said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High" (Psalm 77:10). He went on, "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old" (Psalm 77:11). We draw strength and encouragement from those moments to get through "the sufferings of this present time" (Romans 8:18).

3. You Also Need Hope

Not only do you need history, you also need hope. You need to be able to look forward and say, "God is not done with me. He has not just brought me out once. There is more He is going to bring me out of." Hope that God is about to do something. Hope that the hand of God is still moving. Hope that there is more to come.

Jeremiah is telling Israel and Judah, "A day is coming when your breakthrough is going to exceed your current testimony."

When you have hope and get faith around something, God can do a great work. That is why we keep telling you: you need to get a word from God. Get something burning in your spirit so you can say, "God can do that in my life, and I believe He will."

We lean a little too much on what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said at the furnace: "But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods" (Daniel 3:18). That is a great word. But why not stand a little more on, "I believe God is going to deliver me"? And if He does not deliver me from this, He is setting me up to deliver me from something else that will serve me better.

4. Don't Glorify the Past and Fear the Future

We have a tendency as humans to **glorify the past and fear the future.** You can hear it in our language.

About the past:

- “The good old days.”
- “They don’t make ‘em like they used to.”
- “The glory days.”

About the future:

- “Tomorrow’s not promised.”
- “I don’t know what this world is coming to.”
- “It’s only getting worse.”

But Hebrews says we have come to Jesus and “to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Hebrews 12:24). Your best word does not have to be about what is behind you. Believe a better word for your life, your family and your future.

Especially in the church, people struggle to step into the future because they are infatuated with the past. Every church has a time rubber band attached to it. Some churches are in tension with what God did 10 years ago. Some are in tension with what God did 100 years ago: all they talk about is Azusa Street, and nobody there knew anybody at Azusa Street.

This church has a vibrant history. In the 1990s, which I have heard young people call “the late 1900s,” this was *the* Assemblies of God church in Mobile. It was hopping. The youth group was huge. All over the area I meet people who say, “I worked there.” (In 2026, it is the church to be in too.)

But those days are not just behind us. They are far behind us. Some people in our church were not alive when this church was the place to be. **The trap a church like ours can fall into is always looking back to when it was better and never looking forward to what God actually intends for this house.**

So I declare to you, as Jeremiah 16 says: a day is coming when you will no longer say the Lord brought you up out of Egypt, but that He brought you out of the north country.

I am holding onto a better word. **The future glory of this house is greater than the former glory of this house.** It is the word God gave the people who came home from Babylon and rebuilt the temple: “The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former” (Haggai 2:9).

I have sat at our district council and heard about the years when this church was at its peak under a previous pastor, a legend in this church. I am believing for the day when people say this house has gone beyond even those days. We are stepping into a fresh season, one that eclipses what we have called the best days of this church.

5. Where We’re Going: Vision Sunday Follow-Up

Church-specific. These updates are kept as preached on August 9, 2026. Replace them with your own church’s progress report.

In February we laid out what we wanted to accomplish. Many people have come since then and think this is just how it has always been. Here is where things stand. (Go at lightning speed.)

What we've gotten done:

- **The auditorium.** Everything you are looking at is new: excellent sound, new lights, a new screen, new drums, a new keyboard and a stage that comes out further. Before Palm Sunday the projection screen was so dim we were about to put TVs in. This is a world-class worship space.
- **A revival service** with Pastor Tyler Harris.
- **A new baptismal,** unveiled in April. The next baptism is Sunday, September 13.
- **Missions:** we are providing a full-ride scholarship for David Wikumba at the Kilimanjaro School of Missions. You will reap from his ministry for the rest of his life.
- **Facility repairs:** a lot of air conditioner, room and roof repairs. About $7,000 of roof repairs remain. Urgency moves funds around: if the nursery air conditioner goes down, that gets fixed first. We are mindful of how money is given and of what we have to do operationally.
- **Kids ministry areas,** completely transformed. New furniture and toys downstairs in the next couple of weeks. The Loft, the upstairs elementary area, has an open house next week.
- **Legacy Builders,** relaunched with Pastor John and Miss Sheila teaching, and it grew too much. In September they move to the Event Center, and their current room becomes a nursing mothers room with the service audio piped in.
- **Wednesday nights launch August 26.** Kids will be in their spaces, and youth will meet in the Event Center. The Event Center needs a deep clean: **church work day, Saturday, August 22, 10 AM.**

What to expect on Wednesday nights (adults): a few minutes of worship, a teaching, then tables to discuss, ask questions and pray together. You will not see a lot of me on Wednesdays. I will teach on video and I will be in the building, but there is a lot that rests on me right now, and Sunday requires so much. We have been able to do what we have done because we stepped away from Wednesday nights early enough.

What's still coming:

- **More musicians on the stage.** I cannot formalize this yet, but it is in my spirit: around January, I need not to be up here for the first 20 minutes of the service.
- **Neighbor Boxes,** our benevolence ministry: still on schedule, launching right before Thanksgiving. It may get a new name.
- **Spanish translation of our services,** hopefully within the next couple of weeks.
- **Major capital projects** (the front of the building, the parking lot) will happen as capital is available. We only need $1.5 million. In the next couple of months, a light refresh of the foyer.

The power of vision. When we announced these things, we did not know how we would do many of them. Vision creates a road, and two of those roads have names: Jeff and Kenny. (Have the church stand and thank the volunteers who made the work happen.)

6. A Big Change Is Coming

Have the church say it to a neighbor: “There’s a big change coming.”

In October we will have a Sunday where I share specific vision for 2027. Some of it starts early: in about three weeks I begin teaching through the Lord’s Prayer, likely for more than 30 weeks.

I do not usually announce something this far ahead. But some of you had your diapers changed in this church, and you have a deep attachment not just to the church but to the organization, so I want to give you time. I think there is a measure of trust between us now. I do not do things just to do them. This is a decision made in the Spirit, and it is also a good tactical decision.

In January 2027, we are going to officially change the name of the church. We will still be an Assemblies of God church. The mission and vision are not changing. The new name will be revealed in October. Only the external board and two people in this room know it, so nobody spends the next months guessing.

WHY: THE SENIOR PASTOR CRISIS

The church at large, mostly in America, is entering a major leadership crisis. Leaders are calling it a senior pastor crisis. The high points:

- About a quarter of pastors plan to retire in the next three years.
- The number of pastors under 40 has dropped by half over the last 30 years.
- About 70% of churches will struggle to afford both a building and a pastor. Most churches in America have fewer than 100 people.

We do not have ministers coming up to replace the pastors who are leaving. Ten years ago, a church job posting drew hundreds of résumés. Today a church may post for a children’s, music or youth pastor and hear from no one. Now it is reaching senior leadership. We are asking a potential senior pastor to give up his livelihood, take over a dying church, make little money and fight to pay the bills.

THREE SOLUTIONS THAT DON’T SOLVE IT

1. **Close churches.** Thousands of churches close in America every year. 2. **Train new pastors.** I support this. Chris Hodges and Church of the Highlands have made it a personal mission to train the next generation of preachers. Meanwhile, Christian universities, including our own, have made ministry training very expensive for graduates whose first jobs often pay very little. Training is right, but it will work in 20 years, and the problem is here now. 3. **Hire a consultant to find the next senior pastor.** The consultant is paid by the church, but placement only works if there are more pastors than churches. Otherwise churches pay for nobody behind the curtain. When we were looking to return to senior pastor ministry, placement consultants would not even take a phone call.

A FOURTH PATH

Last week we talked about an apostolic and prophetic foundation. There is a fourth path: **some senior pastors step into an apostolic mandate to oversee multiple churches across a region,** through mergers, campuses

and expansion. Rather than watching a church and its pastor's legacy deteriorate because no successor can be found, a church like ours can say, "Let's partner. You can become a location of our church."

We have unusual capacity for this. With a few thousand dollars and about four weeks, we could set up a satellite location in an existing church building.

This church was never meant to be just a Saraland church. First Assembly of God was never a Saraland church. There is a decades-old mandate on this house to be a regional church. We are in Saraland, but we serve the greater Mobile area: Satsuma, Creola, West Mobile. We need a name that matches a regional church movement. (And "Saraland Church Bayou La Batre" has a weird ring to it.)

Be clear: **there is nothing on the table.** We are not talking to anyone.

Then speak to pastors watching online: "Pastor, if you are in our region and you are struggling, you know you need to think about transition, and you don't know who the next senior pastor could be, reach out to me. I want a conversation about you retiring with dignity, your legacy staying intact, and a divine partnership that brings the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel that proclaims 'liberty to the captives' (Luke 4:18), and a Pentecostal movement to your area."

Conclusion: Why We Take On a Heavier Load

(Have a keyboard player come up.)

This is an exciting season. Change can be scary, and when you do not know what is going on, it is easy to assign motives. So let me paint a clear picture.

We gave up a lot to come here. Pastoring has not been kind to our personal finances or our businesses. This is a church of 100 to 120 on a Sunday. Monday through Friday I am in the office by myself. I talk to FedEx and UPS, I call Alabama Power, I do the music and the preaching, and everything you see on the screen, I put on the screen. Taking on another church would fall on me like a ton of bricks. It is more than we can do.

So why take on a heavier load? Why work more hours?

Because the gospel must be preached. Jesus said, "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Matthew 24:14). Because He is worthy. Because people's lives are at risk. If a community does not get the gospel, it has no other way.

Do not assume that in the Bible Belt people have the gospel. Many have a lot of church teaching and have never heard about the cross. A spiritual mentor of mine came to the Lord around 40. She grew up in church, and one day the pastor talked about being born again, the new birth Jesus says we must have to "see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). She said, "I was 40 years old, and I had never heard about being born again."

So we have a choice in this season. We will either watch churches shut down, or we will step in and say, "We will bring you on, and you will be part of the movement God has started here, throughout this region. We will reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ." That is why we do it.

Pray (hands lifted): thank God that this is not a status quo season; it is not "repeat, reheat, redo and reuse." Thank Him for a fresh wind on the church. Ask Him to strengthen those who have been here for years and decades through change. And ask Him to put it in the spirit of everyone who has come in recent months that they are not here just to come to church, but to make a difference in the greater Mobile region and to see a Pentecostal movement across South Alabama.

03

Scripture List

Every passage read, cited or alluded to in the message, in the order it comes up.

Read

Read aloud in the message.

JEREMIAH 16:14-15	14 "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' 15 but 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers.

Cited

Named or quoted along the way.

EXODUS 20:2	2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
DANIEL 3:17-18	17 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."
HEBREWS 12:24	24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Alluded to

Drawn on without naming the reference.

EXODUS 14:30-31	30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

2 KINGS 17:6	6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.
2 KINGS 25:8-12	8 In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9 And he burned the house of the Lord and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. 10 And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. 11 And the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile. 12 But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen.
EZRA 1:1-4	1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: 2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. 4 And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."
NEHEMIAH 6:15	15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.
HAGGAI 2:9	9 The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.'"
LUKE 4:18	18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
MATTHEW 24:14	14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

JOHN 3:3	3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Pastor Jason Mayfield

SENIOR PASTOR, CITYLIGHT CHURCH

Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, where he and his wife, Ashleigh, lead a church devoted to Building Lives on Jesus. His preaching is rooted in the Bible, full of hope, and grounded in one conviction: an incredible life is built on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

For more than 20 years, Pastor Jason has given his life to the local church. He has been credentialed with the Assemblies of God for 21 years and ordained for 14, and he has led revitalization in churches that went on to rank among the Top 100 Fastest-Growing Churches in America. He carries a deep conviction that the church can be both excellent and supernatural, and a passion for revival.

He is an author and the creator of Tear Up Your Bible and POWER 27, a daily rhythm of Bible reading, prayer and worship. His resources have helped more than 100,000 people go deeper in the Scriptures. Above every title, his greatest joy is seeing people meet Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, and grow into everything God has called them to be.

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