JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

A BETTER TREE

Why the Cross Brings a Peace Christmas Can't

> A Christmas tree can bring a temporary truce, but the cross is a better tree. There Jesus bore our sins, and the peace He gives does not come down in January.

MAIN TEXT
1 Peter 2:24

FIRST PREACHED
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SERIES
Christmas 2025

BY
Pastor Jason Mayfield

AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. The Christmas tree gives a temporary peace. In his home it produced a seasonal truce that ended when the tree came down, and by twelve years old it had lost even that power.
2. The cross is a better tree. 1 Peter 2:24 says Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree, and that peace is year round and unending.
3. The better tree makes a new creation, and a new creation changes the trajectory a family history had already set.
4. The church is a building church, not a church building. Sixty years of history, including its most fruitful season under the church's previous pastors, has been followed by struggle, and the current posture is active building rather than maintenance.
5. It is a church for all people. Gay, transgender, Democrat, every ethnicity and every football allegiance are welcome to sit under the ministry of the pulpit and will hear the word preached.
6. One group is not allowed: anyone who would endanger the safety of children. Secure check in, locked doors and background checks back that up, and the message is online for anyone excluded.
7. It is a Spirit filled church, and the point of the power is internal strength for ordinary life, not good church services.
8. Everything is built on Jesus, both because Jesus is worthy and because people need a savior. Being good enough, smart enough and well liked is not a gospel.



WATCH IT PREACHED

youtu.be/Vs2N71AkRJ4



READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/a-better-tree

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This is a Christmas Sunday message for a room full of guests. It does two jobs: it tells the gospel through a personal testimony built on one verse, 1 Peter 2:24, and it gives first-time guests a warm, plain introduction to who the church is. It does not anchor in one long passage. Say so up front, then throw a lot of Scripture at them.

The testimony is the engine. Pastor Jason preached his own story of a chaotic childhood home where the Christmas tree was the only sign of peace. Another preacher should tell his or her own story here, or tell this one as an illustration, and keep it honest without dwelling on details.

The middle of the message walks through the church's mission statement as it read in December 2025, one phrase at a time. The church's language today is "Building Lives on Jesus": an incredible life is built on the finished work of Jesus Christ. Use your own church's mission and keep the same movement: we are building, we are for all people, we need power on the inside, and everything centers on Jesus. Pastor Jason preached the four parts in reverse order from his notes, ending on Jesus so the message lands on the invitation. These notes follow the order he preached.

The "all people" section names gay and transgender people, political party, and one group the church does not allow on campus. Say it with a smile and with conviction: everyone is welcome to sit under the preaching of the Word, and the safety of children is not negotiable.

Introduction

I am not going to read one primary passage this morning. I like to anchor in a text, but this is Christmas, and I want to talk to you about Christmas.

I love Christmas stuff. I do not want to decorate for fall or for Easter, but when we get to Christmas, I want the stuff out. And for me, it is the Christmas trees.

Illustration: real or fake? Survey the room. Who likes fake trees? Who likes real trees? (What do you do with them when you're done, throw them in the lake?) And who thinks I'm the devil for talking about Christmas trees? They don't come to church; they comment on Facebook. I like the fake ones. There is a little magic in putting the tree up.

THE TEMPORARY TREE

For me, the tree symbolizes something else. I grew up in a very dysfunctional home. Both of my parents were alcoholics. There was drug abuse, physical abuse and adultery in the home. I was an only child, so there was no team. I lived scared most of the time.

But for whatever reason, when Christmas came, my whole family pulled it together. The tree went up the day after Thanksgiving, and **whenever the tree went up, it was a beacon that now we're all going to get along and there's going to be peace.** The problem was that when the tree came down and we moved into January, that temporary truce was broken, and we went back into the uproar of normal life.

By the time I was 10, 11, 12, the tree had lost even that power. I remember the Christmas my dad left. I picked up the other phone in the house, hit the mute button, and heard him tell my mother, "I'm not coming home, and I'm not coming back." The tree had no power anymore.

1. The Cross Is a Better Tree

Around 12 years old, I discovered a tree that had endless power for peace: year-round, unending, time after time peace.

> **1 PETER 2:24** ESV
>
> [24] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

The tree in this verse is the cross on which Jesus gave His life. Today I want to talk to you about **a better tree.**

I gave my life to Jesus Christ at 12. I was a first-generation convert. I had been to church, but church did not come home with us. When I gave my life to the Lord, a peace took over me that began to shield me from my environment. **When I got saved, things started getting worse and worse at home. And yet I started getting better and better.**

2. The Better Tree Makes a New Creation

Now I am old enough to see the trajectory I was on by default, the destination my family history had set:

- My dad was on his third marriage at my age. My mother was on her second.
- My parents had been through two bankruptcies by my age.
- At my children's ages, I had been cut off from my mother for two years while she was in a work release program.

That is where I ought to be. But the Bible promises that when you find the better tree, you are made a new creation.

> **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17** ESV
>
> [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Because I found a better tree, I never experienced any of those things. My wife's story is not altogether different; in many ways it is worse. We both come from very dysfunctional backgrounds, and God brought us out of where our lives were headed.

Because we know what the power of God has done in our lives, we want to build a ministry where people, no matter what they are going through, where they have come from or where they might be headed, can encounter the life-changing, course-altering, trajectory-changing power of God.

Transition: If this is your first time here, or your first time in a long time, let me give you a real introduction to who we are and what we are building.

3. We Are Building

That word is intentional. Have the room look at a neighbor and say, **"This isn't a church building. This is a building church."**

You walked into a great story. This church has been in the community for more than 60 years. It was founded about 60 years ago, and about 40 years ago a new pastor led it into its most fruitful season of ministry and built the building we meet in. For the last 20 years the church has kept fulfilling its mission, but there have been struggles. That is why we are actively and aggressively building. We are not staying stagnant.

You need the church, and the church needs you. If you are here once or twice a month, we need you.

We take connecting with people seriously. (Adapt to your church: Pastor Jason pointed to the connect card and the tap disc, told guests the church would feed a hungry child for 30 days for every card filled out, and offered a coffee meeting with him and Ashleigh.) Don't slip in and out of a Christmas service. God has more for you than that.

Have the room say it: **"We're building."**

4. A Church for All People

There is an elephant in the mission statement: "all people." Someone new to the church asked me recently, "Do you really mean all people?"

I know some of you are wondering what I mean. So let me say there is one group of people we do not allow here. Then walk through who it is not.

"Is it gay people?" No. If you are gay, you are welcome here, and I want you to sit under the ministry of this pulpit. You will get what you expect from a conservative evangelical pastor: I am going to preach the Word and stand on the Word. But we want you here, and we want to connect with you.

"Is it transgender people?" No. If you are transgender, you are welcome here, because this is a place to receive gospel ministry, and there is a greater identity than the one you may be searching for. We want

you to know who you can be in Jesus Christ.

"Is it Democrats?" No. **Jesus is not a Republican. He's not a Democrat. He's not an independent. He's a King.** He sits on the throne, and our political affairs are well beneath His feet. He has already been given to the church as head over all things (Ephesians 1:22). I am less concerned about who you vote for than about the throne you worship around.

Who is it? Anyone who would endanger the safety of children. Every child goes through a secure check-in. We lock doors. We background check every worker. If we know there is a problem, you will be listening to the service on your phone in the parking lot.

Answer the objections with a smile:

- "The gospel is for all people." Yes, and that is why the message goes up on YouTube, Facebook, Apple Podcasts and Spotify.
- "We're not supposed to forsake the gathering of the brethren." Cool. Bye. We protect kids. (The objection leans on Hebrews 10:25.)

Other than that, we want everybody in here: every color, every nationality, every generation and income level. Alabama fans, Auburn fans, and even a few LSU fans.

5. We Need Power on the Inside

The next part of the mission is a little elephant: we are a Spirit-filled church. "Are you them people?" Yes, we're them people. We believe in the active, present ministry of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit and the power of God to touch people and take their lives to the next level.

But not so we can have good church services. Many Spirit-filled people want the power in the room and on the outside. Paul prays that believers would be "strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Ephesians 3:16).

You don't just need power to have good church. You need power to go to Walmart. You need power on the job, with the person who irritates you, with that boss, with that family member at Christmas. There are moments I have responded in a way that surprised me and thought, "That must have been power."

There is so much happening on the outside that I need something on the inside working on it. As an old song says, "I got something on the inside working on the outside." "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

My wife and I were rescued from the destiny of a dysfunctional life, but God has also done things in us well above simply breaking the cycle. That took more than motivation. We needed the power of the Holy Spirit in our bones.

Look ahead (adapt to your calendar). Pastor Jason invited everyone back for January 4, 2026, when he would anoint everyone present with oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, to consecrate the new year to the

Spirit's ministry, followed by about two months of teaching on the power of God. **2026 needs to be a year powered by the Holy Ghost.**

Illustration: Walmart. Some of us associate the power of God only with church services. If you go into Walmart and start laying people out in the Holy Ghost, they are taking you to jail. The manager comes on the intercom: "Everybody in the cleaning aisle is down. Do we have a leak?" We want to help you get your hands around what the Spirit's power looks like in everyday life.

6. Everything Centers on Jesus

We center everything on Jesus for two reasons.

First, because He is Jesus. He is high, holy and lifted up. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last (Revelation 22:13). He is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). He is a high priest better than any priest who ever walked the earth, after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:17). He is God in the flesh, and He is worthy of our praise.

Second, because people need Jesus. And people, inside and outside the church, underestimate how much they need Him. Many people, especially in the South, believe that if they believe in God and do their best, they are fine with God.

Illustration: Stuart Smalley theology. (Put a photo on screen.) Stuart Smalley was a Saturday Night Live character from the early 1990s, a parody self-help host who looked in the mirror and said, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me." Many people believe that if they are good enough and smart enough and people like them, and they believe in God, they are going to heaven.

That could not be further from the truth. You need a Savior.

- "All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6). At your best, you are still not doing that well.
- "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).
- "There is none who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3).

Bottom line: no one is good enough to meet the righteous standard of an absolutely holy God. Not you, not your neighbors, and not the preacher. There are days I look in the mirror and remind myself that no matter how I feel, I am the righteousness of God in Christ, because I need a Savior.

But God, rich in mercy, gave us Jesus.

> **ISAIAH 53:5-6** ESV
>
> [5] But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. [6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Go back to the verse we opened with, the better tree:

> **1 PETER 2:24** ESV
>
> [24] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

You don't have to be good enough for God, because you can't be good enough for God. Jesus has paid the price for you to be saved and rescued from the punishment of your sin. There is one hope for this church, this city, this state, this country and this world. Even if we make it to Mars, whatever microbe we find there will need a Savior.

Conclusion

With every head bowed and every eye closed: maybe Grandma asked you to come, or you came to see Santa. That's fine. You're here now.

Maybe you are saying, "I don't want to go into another year sacrificing the peace I could have in my home. I don't want to go into another year with other people determining how I'm doing. I don't want to go into another year not knowing where I would spend eternity."

Ask them to raise a hand on the count of three, then lead the whole room in prayer:

> Dear Jesus, I know I'm a sinner and I need a Savior. Today I put my faith in You. I believe You are the Son of God, God in the flesh. I believe You lived a sinless life, died for my sins, and rose to give me new life. I receive Your forgiveness, and I confess You are Lord of my life. Thank You for saving me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ask everyone who prayed to check "I gave my life to Jesus today" on the connect card (or fill it out digitally) so someone can follow up this week and help them start their faith journey well.

The Christmas tree comes down in January. The better tree never does.



ABOUT

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Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, an author, and the creator of POWER 27. He has given more than 20 years to the local church and helps pastors and ministry leaders lead BIG.

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