

Good morning everybody, welcome to Church Town Church of God. If you are visiting with us for the first time, you're not a visitor, you are a jamming. So welcome, welcome, welcome. We have a full agenda for you this morning. We are going to be talking about some Old Testament prophecy and how that relates to our New Testament calling. Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father God, we do so appreciate all that we have. We look around us this morning and we are so grateful. We're grateful for the place in which we have to worship. We're grateful for this fantastic weather. We're grateful for your Word. We're grateful for the indwelling of your Holy Spirit that binds us together. May you lead us in prayer. May you lead us in song. May you lead us in the teaching of your Word, Lord. You are the pastor of this church. It is your inspiration that moves us to live the calling that you've placed on our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen. First reading, believe it or not, is from Ezekiel chapter 33. Again the Word of the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, speak to your people and tell them, 'Suppose I bring a sword against the land, and the people of that land choose a man from among them, appointing him as their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against that land and blows the ram's horn toward the people. Then if anyone hears the sound of the horn but fails to heed the warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head.' Since he heard the sound of the horn but failed to heed the warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had heeded the warning, he would have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and fails to blow the horn to warn the people, and the sword comes and takes away a life, then that one will be taken away in his iniquity, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood. As for you, O son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel, so hear the word from my mouth and give them the warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' but you do not speak out to dissuade him from his way, then that wicked man will die in his iniquity. Yet I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you warn the wicked man to turn from his way, and he does not turn from it, he will die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life. We will make sense out of that in just a moment. Well, as long as I can read it, we're going to preach it. Because I'm always the guy that's saying, "You are not an Old Testament prophet. Stop it." But that does not mean that we do not learn from the Old Testament prophets. It does not mean that their situations do not translate into the modern church today. And I've talked about this particular piece that I read about the watchman on the wall in church before. I've spoken to it, and counsel and I have discussed it. I've spoken about it in pastoral groups. Because the message that we read in the beginning is very, very clear. Our calling is to share the gospel. And I'm always saying, and you've heard me say a hundred times, if we do what we're called to do, and we trust that the Lord will do what He says He will do, things work out a lot better for us individually, for we as a church, and it will for the world at large. Regardless of where the Lord may take this world before He comes, we know as watchmen on the wall, as sharers of the gospel, we have done well with the bags of silver that we've been given. Remember when I was talking about that? The watchman shares the word. The analogy is that he's on the wall, he hears the horn of the enemy army, and then he warns the people in the city. If he hears the horn of the enemy army and doesn't warn anybody, then all of their blood is on his hands. If he hears the horn of the enemy army and he warns the people of the town, and they don't care, they don't do anything, that's on them. He has done what the Lord has called him to do, and you can see how that directly translates to the gospel message. You can see how that directly translates to Matthew 28 and the Great Commission. And no, we are not responsible for the salvation of other people, but we are responsible for sharing the truth of the word, for sharing what we know. We are responsible for living the life worthy of our calling, and part of that calling is to be the only Bible that some people will ever read. And so in that regard, we then relate that to what are you doing with your gifts, as we talked about those bags of silver. Are you just hiding it, waiting to die, hoping that you're saved? Or are you making the most of what you've been given, and what you've been given is the very power of God that raised Christ from the dead? It's easy, and I fall into the trap all the time, complain about the world, complain about the world, complain about politics, complain about prices, complain about where I am. My goodness gracious, there's a couple million

dollars' worth of cars in that parking lot. There's thousands of dollars' worth of food to feed a hundred people. We're not hurting. We're not hurting. There are people around the world today who are trying to share the Gospel, being protected by militias. There are people around the world today trying to share the Gospel that will be murdered for sharing the Gospel. There are people around the world every day in basements with candles, or a single dim light, hoping that they're never found out, or they will die. But you know what? Those churches in those nations, like China, for example, or Russia, for example, they continue to grow. How is that even possible? Ezekiel has the answer, as does all of Scripture. I'm going to go back into Ezekiel 34. "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and tell them that this is what the Lord God says. "Woe to the shepherds of Israel, who only feed themselves. Should not the shepherds feed their flock? You eat the fat, wear the wool, and butcher the fat in sheep, but you do not feed the flock." We're translating this now from Watchman to Shepherd, and you can see the direct connection. And then all of the Shepherd language, which we're going to explore moving forward, is here as well, including Ezekiel's good shepherd who is yet to come. "You have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bound up the injured, brought back the strays, or searched for the lost. Instead, you have ruled them with violence and cruelty. They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and when they were scattered, they became food for the wild beasts. My flock went astray on all the mountains and every high hill. They were scattered over the face of all the earth, with no one to search for them or seek them out." You certainly would see this, though, those who were given the calling of Shepherd to look over the people failed. Lots of reasons why they failed, if you know the context of this. And you know the context of the fact that they've been shipped off to Babylon, and they're in captivity, and one bad thing seems to happen after another, and all of it is ordained by the Lord. But as it is happening, they are simply giving up. Remember how, again, when we're talking about Jesus and His sovereignty, time and time and time again, He talks about how little faith those who have experienced Him actually have. And He gets angry. Remember last week? He's angry because the closer that draws into Him, His very closest disciples, His very closest friends, they do not have faith that He can do what He says He can do. And He actually is angry and deeply troubled, the text says. And here we are, again, with Yahweh, sovereign over His people, He's been making the promises and the prophecies all before Ezekiel have been going on, right? Time and time and time and time and time again, His people who profess to be His followers simply give up, walk away, and denounce Him, and go worship other gods. It's not just giving up and walking away. They spit in His face time and time and time again. And not only the people, Ezekiel says, there's a special portion of wrath for those who have the calling of shepherd. So we see, and you've heard me say this a lot, you're probably sick of hearing me say this, the more things change, the more they stay the same. We see shepherd after shepherd after shepherd, elder after elder, people calling themselves bishops and apostles and this and that and the other thing, leading people astray, preaching whatever they want to preach, loosely maybe based on the Bible or something they thought was in the Bible because they never really read it. And then we're seeing that again. Now, can we directly translate that? Yes, we can. The prophecies of old speak to the people of God. The people of God were the Israelites. The people of God are you. Now, New Covenant. You are the temple of the Lord. So yeah, being saved, no big deal. It's kind of a big deal. It's kind of a big deal. Being reborn, Mackenzie said, what is this for? I talk about baptism. We talk about being baptized in water. And she said to wash away my sins. I said, yes. She said to be reborn. I said, yes, you're being taught well. Not all by me. Being reborn is a significant thing. And being reborn means that you now have a calling placed upon your life because you are professing to be a disciple of Christ. If it means nothing to you, then take that bag of silver, bury it, eat your chicken and go home. That's what your life is. I hope that it means a lot to you. You can see. I'm bringing it. You can see that you don't think I'm connected. No, I'm just kidding. Now I sound like one of those wacko preachers that says that kind of stuff all the time. So he says this morning. Oh, my goodness gracious. Maybe I don't know. Maybe I should have said that. You know, I said to you, so good. If anybody sees a funnel cloud over there, let me know. Therefore, you shepherds hear the word of the Lord. As

surely as I live, declares the Lord God, because my flock lacks the shepherd and has become prey and food for every wild beast. And because my shepherds did not search for my flock, but fed themselves instead. Therefore, you shepherds hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord God says. Behold, I am against the shepherds and I will demand from them my flock and remove them from tending the flock so that they can no longer feed themselves. For I will deliver my flock from their mouths and it will no longer be food for them. Take he, he who would like to share and preach the word for the double portion of responsibility is yours. James says, for you like to be a teacher, there is a responsibility that comes with that responsibility to do the work. The other week, I jokingly I found one of those AI service. I'm bombarded with those things all the time. Send it will plug in a scripture or a supposedly biblical idea and boom for 50 bucks. This AI will write your sermon. I'll never have to write a sermon again. And I said that and I'm like, should I do this? I think, can we put this in the budget? I'm just joking. And they knew I was joking. And heavens, because we're called to do the work, not just me, but every individual who has access and desires to share the word of God, get in the word of God. It's you do the work, learn, grow, become the man or woman of God that you, that he sees you to be. That's the message from Ezekiel days of old through the New Testament Gospels. Good news. And into the epistles, the teaching in the new church. Live a life that's worthy of your calling. And part of that calling is the fact that you indeed are a speaker, a preacher, a shepherd of the word to your neighbor, to your family, to your co-workers, to whomever God brings in front of you. The kingdom of God grows most effectively, one conversation at a time. We'll look at that final piece in just a moment. Ezekiel goes on to talk about the good shepherd. Can you still hear me? OK. And I want you to hear this, hear the song and hear the preaching of John. Not only the teaching of Jesus, but also the teaching and preaching in John. When we talk about the good shepherd, there is an example that we've just been given of bad shepherding. And bad shepherding are those who are in it for themselves. And again, we see that all over the New Testament church today. Ezekiel, God, through Ezekiel, does not leave us hanging, he gives us the image of the good shepherd. And he speaks of one who will come in the line of David and be the good shepherd for all of God's people. And this is what we need to know, and we see it all the time in the Old Testament, when the words of the prophets transcend the circumstance and transcend the age and speak directly to us. When they speak of all people, one day God will pour out his spirit on all people, the prophet Joel says. Isaiah says. Ezekiel says. The words transcend. And yet all we want is a superficial understanding of what would Jesus do. What did Jesus say? The word is so rich and so deep, and we can go through such understanding and grow such roots in it by understanding that it is one continuous story, pointing to and talking about God through Jesus Christ. All of it. All of it. Let me read these things to you. If the good Lord will love me. He's challenging me. He's challenging me. From Chapter 34 again, for this is what the Lord God says. And this is the caveat. Remember, like I said, I'm always the guy telling you, you're not an Old Testament prophet. Don't be telling me that the Lord God said through me, tell you, OK? It happened under the Old Covenant. The word of the Lord came verbally under the Old Covenant and then was written down. We all have the word of God now, don't we? By the indwelling of His Holy Spirit and the discernment of His will and a little something that we call the Bible. But here is the word of God coming directly through Ezekiel, and he's talking about getting the house of Israel back in shape. For this is what the Lord God says. Behold, I myself will search for my flock and seek them out. As a shepherd looks for his scattered sheep when he is among the flock, so I will look for my flock. God is coming to look for his flock. Who do you think that is? Jesus Christ. God came and sought his flock. He did what Ezekiel said he would do. Well, he did what he said he would do through Ezekiel. You know, sometimes when you're dealing with the prophets, you're always manipulating that language a little bit. I will rescue them from all the places to which they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples, gather them from the countries, and bring them into their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and on the settlements of the land. I will feed them in good pasture, and the lofty mountains of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land. They will feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. The prophecy is for

them. The prophecy is for now. That's why it's in our Bible. We hear the fact that he will regather Israel from exile, and we hear that he will come himself to gather up all of his people. The prophecy is for them, and the prophecy is for now. I will tend my flock and make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the broken, and strengthen the weak. But the sleek and strong I will destroy. I will shepherd them with my justice. I will shepherd them with my justice. And this is a big encouragement for today. I know that you're all living lives. I know that you see good, and I know that you see evil. I know you see the wickedness of the world pressing in every day. I know that you hear the lies that are spewed by everything from businessmen who are trying to get you to buy something to politicians who are trying to get you to vote. I know all of that because we all live lives. But take heart. You are not called to redeem them. The Lord will shepherd them with his justice. You do what you're called to do. Be in the Word. Live your life worthy of your calling. Be the only Bible some people will ever read. Know the Word. Share it. Live the life that Jesus Christ teaches you to live as one of his disciples. And justice will be dealt by the Lord. If you can release yourself of that anxiety, you will be happier. You will be less anxious. Trusting in the Lord in all things. Trusting in his sense of justice. Trusting in the fact that he will tend to the good and the evil. Now in Ezekiel as well, the Lord says, "I have no desire to watch wicked people go to hell." "I want them to know my word and be redeemed." That's where we come in. The Lord has no desire for the unrighteous to die and be condemned. It speaks that as well. And that is where his church comes in. That is where the good shepherd comes in to tend to us. And then we as the shepherds of our homes, of our families, of our churches, of wherever we might be. That is our calling. Grow his church. Grow his kingdom. One conversation at a time. Listen to this now and see if you can't hear any of the words that we were just preaching. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul." "He guides me in the paths of righteousness for the sake of his name, the holy name of Jesus." "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Hear those words. "Though I walk through the shadow of the valley of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Why? Why? Why is the Christian church so afraid today? Why are we? Not we collectively. I like to think we're grounded in the word. And we hear stories all the time when we talk to each other about you talking to people in parking lots and churches and folks coming to you at schools and other places. I like to think that that is a fruit of the labor of delving into the word every week and being conscious of it and serious about it and not being fearful. Those are powerful words. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. And as I am a child of God, whether He comes while my heart is still beating or whether my heart beats its last here, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That's where my faith is. That's my rock. That should be the faith and the rock of the Christian church, the church local and the church universal. We celebrate because of that. We celebrate things like picnics. We celebrate in song. We celebrate in prayer. We celebrate in our relationships, in our conversations. We celebrate with the little things that we do to help one another. And then we celebrate when there's somebody that's outside of the kingdom of God. And we get to touch and talk with them and share with them. We celebrate little things, little things, one conversation at a time, one behavior at a time. Two years from now, and this has happened with a lot of students that I've known and people that I've coached, two years from now, five years from now, somebody will come to you and say, "What did you mean when you said..." This has been bothering me since the day we had that conversation. "What did you mean when you said that?" "Who?" Seed was planted. Seed was watered. Holy Spirit gave it life. And now here we are having a conversation about somebody's salvation, one conversation at a time.