

Good Morning Horizons. There is a cathedral in Paris, France. It's called Notre Dame. Maybe you're familiar with it. It's one of the oldest and most well-known Catholic cathedrals in the world. Construction started in the year 1163 in Paris, meaning it's 860 years old. This past February, just 22, 2022, National Geographic published a focus on the cathedral at Notre Dame.

They shared it was the first grand masterpiece of new French architecture. It was revolutionary. There were pointed arches, thin stone walls that were going soaring high, and enormous windows that let the light come flooding in, reminding people of the presence of God. And in the middle is a huge spire built of wood beams and a large, tall, led roof. Up till even five years ago, 3000 people a week would attend mass services each week at the cathedral.

And even more impressive than that. 10 to 12 million tourists would visit each year. That is until April 15th of, 2019. Almost four years ago to the day, everyone in France remembers where they were that day. The fire burned at 1400 degrees. The wood beams that held up the spire lit up in flames, and the roof that was made of lead melted and rained down into the church.

Luckily, a lot of areas and almost no artifacts were impacted by the fire, but the spire lit up in flames. Someone in the National Geographic article said, You have to admit, in a way, when I was watching the fire, the fire itself was beautiful. But afterward, it was certainly ugly until the building came back to life again, as it must normally work.

To restore a building like this would take decades, experts say. But leaders quickly promised that the restoration work would be done in five years. There's a lead architect, a restorative architect, that's been working on the building since 2013. At first, his job was just to restore it. But then, when the fire hit, his job got much more urgent.

He spoke of the people who had done restoration work on the building a couple of hundred years earlier. He said they invented the restoration of historical monuments. That didn't happen before people repaired them and they repaired them in the style of their day, or they didn't repair them, and they tore them down. And then, the article raised this question that I thought was a fascinating question.

It said this. What part of the past is worth preserving and transmitting to future generations? What duty do we owe the creations of our ancestors? What strength and stability do we draw from their presence? And when, on the contrary, do they become a lead weight, preventing us from projecting ourselves into the future, from creating a world of our own?

We're in a series right now called Reconstruction, and the definition of reconstruction is a thing that has been rebuilt after being damaged or destroyed. And this can apply not just to buildings but this can apply to us as well. It can apply even to our faith. Often, the faith that we have been taught doesn't stand up when crisis strikes.

So we either choose to deconstruct our faith based on the world and what we see around us, or a crisis causes our faith to come completely crumbling down. And you can't really blame someone for that, right? And so we've been talking about constructing or reconstructing our faith so that it is ready to face a future. We talked about reconstructing our belief in the resurrection.

Last week, we talked about reconstructing our view of the power of God's people. We talked about Nehemiah and the exciting work that Horizons is going to be part of through Justice in Action. And this

week, we're going to talk about reconstructing our excitement for the future. It's so easy. It's so easy to lose hope in the future. And sometimes, it seems like it's especially easy to lose hope in the future.

When it comes to the church, right? Over and over, we see news stories about church leaders who are abusing power, or we know someone who goes to a church, or we know of a church where it seems like they seem to put their views or their stances on the most important pedestal and not the people that they serve.

And so it's so easy to lose hope in the church. And sometimes we wonder if we even should give up on the church, Right? Should we just make our faith an individual thing? And you've probably noticed people are giving up on the church. U.S. church membership. When Gallup started measuring it, 73% of U.S. adults were members of a church in the year 1937.

And that number for the next six decades stayed around 70% For 60 years. Around 70% of U.S. adults were members of a church. That is until the year 2000 when it began to steadily decline. And by 2020, for the first time, less than 50% of U.S. adults were members of churches. In 2020, 47% of U.S. adults belong to a church, synagogue, or mosque, down more than 20% from the turn of the century.

And a change is primarily due to Americans with no religious preference. It almost makes you want to pump the brakes when anybody talks about deconstruction, right? Like, whoa, whoa, whoa, let's not talk about that. We need to preserve the church that we have left. But it's worth noting that deconstruction is not the same thing as conversion. While everyone who deconstructs or who converts probably deconstructs first, not everyone who deconstructs necessarily converts from Christianity.

It's a crucial distinction to make, and it's often obvious that there are things within Christian culture that need to be challenged and need to be reevaluated. Deconstruction is sometimes necessary. Sometimes there are beliefs or views that we hold. Has that held us back? There's a church leader named Carey Nye Hof, and he blogs about this. He's a leader of leaders within the church.

And he says, at the same time, there are a lot of good reasons to deconstruct our faith. There are also reasons to be cautious when it comes to deconstruction. He says one of the biggest concerns is left unchecked. Deconstruction can spiral into destructive cynicism. Self-righteous judgment and empty nihilism, the view that life is meaningless. He says the biggest argument against deconstruction is deconstruction itself.

There's no limit to how far you can go, and you can easily come out the other side. A lonely and bitter person with no hope to offer the world or yourself. He says deconstruction without reconstruction is a tragedy. So let's today, we're going to look at a few times when together, God's people were excited about the future, and they had hope for the future.

And we're going to ask ourselves while we look at these stories, how can we face the reality of things in our faith that do need deconstructed while also at the same time living as people with hope? If you have a Bible with you today, turn to Exodus 36, verse five. We're going to pick up the story. Shortly after Moses had led his people out of Egypt, God's people out of Egypt were freed from slavery, and they were redefining their faith together in the wilderness.

God was giving Moses a lot of specific instructions, and at the point, we're going to pick up, God was giving Moses instructions on how to build a tabernacle or a tent. If you ever pick up Exodus and you just

start reading, you might come to the specific instructions on how to build this Tabernacle or tent. And if that's your Bible study for the day, you're probably going to be like, How do I apply this to my life?

I guess I just go in my backyard and build a tent. I don't even know. But God's giving these very specific instructions to Moses to build a tent where his presence is going to dwell. This is a brand new thing. His presence is going to dwell among the people in this camp. And so all these volunteer laborers are giving their skills and their talents, and all the people in the community are bringing anything they have that's necessary to build this tent.

And that's where we pick up here, the volunteer said to Moses. The people in our community are bringing more than enough to do the work the Lord has commanded to be done. Then Moses gave an order, and they sent this word throughout the camp. No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.

And so the people were straight and from bringing more because what they already had was enough to do all the work. They knew that this work that was being done was so important because God himself was going to dwell among them, and they knew it was so important that they prioritized it. And together, they had an excitement about what was happening in the future.

Through this project, the Tabernacle, this tent would last for years and years and years, and God's presence would dwell in the innermost room, the holy of holies, and only certain people could go there. And then this Tabernacle would get a permanent facility. It would get a permanent building called the temple. And so some of the things that were in the Tabernacle moved into the temple, and it had a permanent home.

That is, until Babylon attacked it. And when Babylon attacked it, it was completely destroyed, and God's people were moved into exile, living in a different land and country for over 70 years. But eventually, they would go back. They would reconstruct a second temple. And this is a temple that would have been in Jerusalem at the time that Jesus was here on Earth.

Jesus would have gone to this building multiple times. And when Jesus died on the cross, the veil of this temple would be torn, meaning the curtain that separated the inner room where God's presence had dwelled for years and years in the second temple, the first temple, and way back in the tent, the place where God's presence had always dwelled was going to be somewhere completely brand new.

It's worth noting that you can still go to Israel and see ruins from both the first and second temples. Today. But God's presence, instead of living in this room or this space, was now going to fall on all believers. Anyone who believed in him, and this is what's recorded shortly after God's presence fell on people for the first time after Jesus died and rose again.

This is what's recorded about the people. It says. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, and the breaking of bread into prayer. Everyone was filled with the many wonders and signs performed by the Apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had a need.

Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes, and they ate together with gladness, and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people. And the

Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved in this. Fast forward to the time of the Tabernacle tent to the temples, to the first church.

Even in this fast-forward, you can see there are times of great challenge, right? Right after the get-go. When the first Tabernacle was going to be constructed, the people had just come out of slavery. They had been in slavery for years, and Moses would lead them out. They would construct the first temple, and it would be completely destroyed. And again, they'd have to go live in another land.

There are definitely times of great challenge, but you can also see there are clear times of hope and excitement for the future. And so three things we're going to take from this story today. Number one is this. There is still hope in the church, is Jesus is playing to provide that hope to the world. There is still hope, and the church is Jesus has plan A to provide that hope to the world.

The night before Jesus would die, the night before he died, he'd say a prayer, and he'd pray for his disciples. The ones he had spent so many years with. And after he was done praying for them, he would pray for all the believers who were going to believe because of the message that they spread. The question here is, why didn't Jesus pray for the whole world?

At this point, we clearly know that Jesus came into the world to love the whole world. Why did he say his prayer specifically just for those who would believe in him? I think the answer is that the hope of any community is found in Jesus' followers within that community. If you want to pray for a group or a community of people, the best thing to do is to pray for God, strengthen the church, and get the church on the right path within that community.

My friend Julie regularly, regularly goes to her appointments, and she said she gets in conversations with her, her friend, and the hairdresser all the time, and she said sometimes she could be such an anti-church, and she's so anti-Christianity, and she's so anti-Jesus, even at times. One time the things she was saying were so bad that I was like, I'm going to have to get a new hairdresser, she said.

And so she canceled her next appointment. But it turns out that lady does hair really well. So she's like, I'm going to go back. And she was encouraged when she went back because she knew negative thoughts about Christianity were still going to probably come up. But this one time, her hairdresser said to her This, she said and this is her hairdresser talking.

She said I've noticed that it's the church that's doing most of the good in our community. And if we want to be the church that we're supposed to be, that's exactly what we're supposed to look like. And it's backed up by statistics. Christian people. Lancer P accounted for 70% of all American philanthropy in 2022, 300 billion total dollars.

And the church gave the U.S. government to address global poverty. This is all according to Barna. One pastor would say the church remains a seismic value add to the world. And you all have been part of this, too, since 2015. You've given over \$600,000 to help orphaned and abandoned children in India have a home and have all the things they need.

Since 2008, you've given almost \$200,000 to the Miracle Fund to help people in need right here within our own community or beyond. And that doesn't even count the ministry budget that you've been so generous to that this upcoming Saturday is going to rent a movie theater for families in our church or in our community to be able to attend a movie that is sensory friendly.

And the ministry budget also supports justice and action. The new ministry that Horizons is part of that's looking to make real changes to criminal justice and mental health within our city. Plus, every single week, every single week that the staff and volunteers here, this church, especially within the youth ministry, are coming into contact with people going through real mental health challenges.

And they're there as someone to love them and support them and listen to them as they go through those things. And although we've done a lot, there's still more to be done. And this is something we want to invite everyone to be part of. There is still hope in the church. Is Jesus has Plan A to provide that hope to the world? The point of this is that being people of hope and excitement doesn't mean we need to lose touch with reality.

Being people of hope and having excitement for the future doesn't mean we need to choose to lose touch with reality, right? There have always been real challenges working against God's people or followers or Jesus' followers or the church or really anybody. There are real challenges in this life. There are countless. We've seen some of them today. There are countless others. I'm reminded of a story that has really nothing to do with the church.

If there's a Navy admiral named James Stockdale. He was an admiral and an aviator in the Navy. His plane would be shot down during the Vietnam War. And even as he was ejected from the plane and parachuted into enemy territory, he told himself he was going to become a prisoner of war for at least five years. He'd end up being a prisoner of war for seven over seven.

During that time, he was repeatedly tortured. He was denied medical attention. He was kept in solitary confinement. And he even had to cut his own face at one point to be to prevent it from being used as military propaganda. He was the highest-ranking officer among the prisoners of war, and he saw countless others die and give up.

And so he was asked what kept him going. The author, Jim Collins, asked him, What kept you going? He said, I never lost faith at the end of the story. He said This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end, which you can never afford to lose, with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.

He was asked who didn't make it out of the prisoner-of-war camp. He said That's easy. The optimists, the people that were so optimistic that they quickly lost hope. He said, You almost have to have this paradoxical balance between the acceptance of the brutal reality of now with unwavering faith that you will make it in the end.

I was reminded of this story by a friend who was recently diagnosed with cancer. I asked him about the hope that he still had. He said he was. He's always looked back to this story, and he always accepts the brutal facts and reality around him. But he said he also wakes up each day, and he prays to God first thing; he prays to a God who gives each of us hope through Jesus in a brand new way, in a great end of the story.

Being people of hope doesn't mean we need to lose touch with the reality around us. Number three, we should invest in hope, and we should invest in the church. We should invest in hope and the church. Several years ago, I went to a conference where the speaker was a church conference. The speaker was a pastor, and he was telling a story about being in an airport in Puerto Rico.

And he was at his gate reading a magazine, waiting for his flight to board. And all of a sudden, in front of him, a nine-year-old and a seven-year-old started to have a fight. And he looked up from his magazine and started to look around for the parents like, where are they to stop this fight?

And as he's looking around for the parents, he watches the nine-year-old wind up a fist, and he thinks, no, no, no. The nine-year-old hits the seven-year-old straight in the face with the first seven-year-olds head and hits the tile floor, the hard tile floor. So he goes over to help. This nine-year-old is still just pounding on this kid.

So he restrains him. And other people come over to help the seven-year-old and get him the attention they need. And about that time, his gate called his name specifically, and they said, it's time for you to board your flight. And so he said, I'm kind of dealing with this situation. And they said you have to board now.

Otherwise, otherwise, your flight is going to go without. You will help take care of the situation. And so reluctantly, he boarded the flight and hoped that the situation was being helped with. But on that flight, it's not really a flight that you can pick up and just like listen to a podcast or read a book. Right? He just had that image in his head the whole flight home.

And he thought to himself. He said he said, where is this nine-year-olds life heading? Right. If at age nine, he's going to just be on somebody like that, what's he going to do by age 16 or age 25? Like, if you look at the trajectory of this kid's life, it's not going in a good direction. And then he asked himself, what's one thing that has the power to change this kid's trajectory of life?

What's one thing that has the power to change his heart? Is there a law that can be passed that would change this kid's heart? Is there a new product that would come out that would be able to change this kid's heart? And then he thought to himself, he's like, what? This kid will probably change this kid's heart. The only thing is some fired up and excited Jesus follower from some fired up and excited church who intersects with his life because the message of Jesus is the only thing that has the power to change somebody's heart.

And because Jesus trusted that message to his church, that pastor determined that day that the local church was the hope of the world. And if the local church is the hope of the world, the church is in a building. The church is a people, which means that each of us has a very specific role that we need to play within the church.

What every member of the church does matters. Churches everywhere. Our church and churches everywhere need leaders to lead. We need teachers to teach. We need administrators to administrate. Because when we can get the church right, there is nothing like it in the world. Moses would lead a project where he'd end up having to turn people away. They were giving and helping.

So much. I wrote this in my notes to be a part of how God is working in the world through His church is one of the most important things we can do with our lives. I open today with the story of the cathedral at Notre Dame. The article in National Geographic that came out a year ago, so it came out in February of 2022, said in the article it said reconstruction is about to begin.

It took more than two years after the fire to just remove burnt timbers and other debris and to build up these structures that would prevent catastrophic collapse. And then after that, the first step is cleaning

all the surfaces of dust and toxic residue that was built up from the LED roof melting into the building. If you have experienced a crisis in your faith or, for whatever reason, if you've deconstructed parts of your faith, it may take time to reconstruct.

But I'm encouraged by the words of Isaiah, a prophet who lived during the time of the first temple, he said, and provide for those who grieve in Zion to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes. God makes beauty from ashes. Just by chance, the story I want to close with today is about a piece of art called that's been named Checkmate.

And I think, yeah. There's the piece of art. And just by chance, this piece of art hangs at the Louvre, an art museum in Paris, France, that's just a mile away from the cathedral at Notre Dame. Do you see this? This game of chess? This guy appears to be in despair in this game of chess. So he's playing against the devil or a demon.

The devil or the demon has seemed to make a move that has trapped the king of the young man. And if you know anything about chess, you know if your king is trapped, you've lost the game. And so people who are familiar with chess have analyzed this picture, and they've looked at it in the pieces of the arrangement, and they've concluded that the young man's situation is impossible.

He has no hope of winning the game. And I think we all know what that's like to back ourselves into a corner, feel like we've tried our hardest, but we just can't make it happen. And if his king is trapped, the game is over. But the way the story goes is there was a grand chess master, one of the people who are best at chess in the world, who ran into a replica of this painting, and he just couldn't quit staring at it.

He couldn't quit staring at the pieces and looking at him. And he's one of the people who's best at chess in the world. At one point, excitedly, he said about the young man's pieces. He said his king still has another move, meaning there is hope. Two weeks ago, we started this series on Easter Sunday, a day that reminds us that even when the world feels hopeless, there is still hope.

And my prayer today is that together, as a church, we would passionately commit ourselves to bringing that hope to the world. Let's pray to God. Thank you for the opportunity to play a small part in bringing hope to the world through your church. We come here today, and we're just honored to be part of it. Most of all, we're thankful to you for giving us that hope.

We're thankful to you for loving us like you love us. And God, today I pray for people who have been deconstructing their faith that even just have some little piece of hope stuck with them today, that they grab on to that. Not that it would fast forward their process of deconstruction or not, that it would fast forward anything in their lives, but just that they would have hope and that you would move.

How only you can move in their lives, and I'm thankful today to be part of a church that is bringing this hope to the world week after week after week. A church that is full of people who are generous and who share their talents and skills to change the world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.