

# Man in the Mirror Bible Study

## Speaker Series

### Guest Speaker: Michael Aitcheson

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley/Michael Aitcheson

#### **Patrick Morley:**

Today, we're honored to have back with us Mike Aitcheson. Mike and I share the last same last name. My mother's maiden name is the same as Michael's last name. It's a Scottish name. And so Mike is the senior pastor of Christ United Fellowship Church. It's a PCA denomination church, for those of you who are familiar with that. It's located down on Gore Street, and it meets at Lake Como Elementary School.

Mike is the senior pastor. He's also the planter of the church. For those of you who have not heard Mike speak here before, you'll notice that he's very big. He used to play football at Kentucky, where he was alternating between guard and tackle. Mike is just the most winsome person really, that you... If you were making a list of the 10 most winsome people, 10 most charismatic people, et cetera, in Florida, he's going to show up on 80% of the lists, 80% of the time.

Anyway, he's just amazing. And he's married to Lucy, and they have four kids, but he's going to talk a little bit about that. And we've asked him to share his man story, his story this morning, rather than necessarily doing some deep theological Bible teaching, just so you can get to know him a little bit. And then in case, if you're interested in looking for a church home or know somebody who is, then you'll have another tool in your tool belt.

So I wonder with that, if you would join me and give it a very warm, rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to Pastor Mike Aitcheson.

#### **Michael Aitcheson:**

So my congregants remind me. Let me tell you something. When Pat Morley gives you an endorsement like that, you have reached the mountaintop. I can go home now. Oh man,. I could go home. Was that recorded? Yes. Yes, yes, yes. We going to keep that one for perpetuity.

I'm so excited to be here with you all. Again, as Pat told you, he let the secret out the bag. I wasn't always this svelte. Normally when people ask me, "What did you do?" I tell them that I was on the diving team. All right. And I'll open us in prayer and then tell you what my coach told me after that.

Father, thank you for this opportunity to connect with these brothers this morning. God, meet us here and bless us during this time. May much be made of the name of your son, Jesus, and may all hearts today be encouraged. In his great name we pray, amen.

Jimmy Heggins told me he was offensive line coach at Florida State during some great years. He ended up coming over to University of Kentucky. And Rich Brooks said to me, all right, spring, my junior year, he walked up to Hayden Lane and I and said, "300. 300." And I'm thinking, "What is Coach Brooks talking about?" He wants us to be 300 pounds by the time the fall came around. And so I said, "All right, no, that just means that we'll have to spend an hour or two more at the buffet, in addition to how much

time we spend there already." And Jimmy Heggins looked at me and said, "You'll be spending the rest of your life getting rid of that weight."

Now I want to proudly announce this morning that I'm somewhere about 50 to 60 pounds into the rest of my life. So in about 20 or 30 more, I think I'll be able to go back to Coach Heggins and say, "I've got about 20 to 40 years of life left, so I beat your prediction."

And so I played offense line in college. I was a hog. Somewhere around 310, I stopped stepping on the scale. And it took a lot of work in the weight room. And it took a lot of effort at the dining table in order to reach that. Frederick Buechner talks about sharing our stories, a great writer, a pastor, Presbyterian theologian. And he wrote a little book called *Telling Secrets*. And in our stories, others can find their stories. And in others' stories, we can find ours. A very powerful book, I commend to you. He goes deeper and deeper into some of the suffering that his family faced, and such a tremendous encouragement to me, the book was, and to many.

And this morning, I want to talk about story. I'm going to talk about three stories. You'll see on the slide already, the first one is God's story. The second one will be my personal story, that's Mike's story. And the third one is CUF's story, that's Christ United Fellowship, that's the story of our church. And the wise among you or perceptive among you will notice that as a pastor, all three of those stories converge for me, like a DNA helix, a triple helix. All those things come together for me in a unique way, because I get paid to tell people about God. I also get paid to be holy. If I'm not living a holy life, then telling people about God can get me into some trouble.

My mentor, a missionary for a long time over in London and Poland, was on the golf course with some friends, probably witnessing to this guy. And the guy asked him, "What do you do?" He told him, "I'm a missionary." "Oh, so you get paid, da da da." Made some slick comment. And my mentor, being an expert at badinage, told him, "Well, look at it this way. I get paid to be good. And you're good for nothing. How about that?" Now I'm not going to come here and tell you that y'all are good for nothing this morning, but I do get paid to be good.

And so you notice in this first slide, there's a passage, a popular passage that's listed, Revelation five verses nine and 10. So as we enter into this thing of stories, the first thing I want to do is give us a big picture of God's story, the one who created us, the one who created all things except him himself, as William Lane Craig says. And Revelation 5:9-10 tells us, "And they sang a new song, saying worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals. For you were slain, and by your blood you ransom people from every nation, tribe, and tongue." And these people sing a new song, the text tells us. What in the world is going on in this passage? What in the world's going on?

Well, the Bible has this unique way of presenting itself like an old fashioned clock. I think David McCullough, the great historian, while giving a speech before a joint session of Congress talked about how much he loved the old fashioned clocks, particularly one in Statuary Hall. He said, "Because when you look at the old fashioned clock, it tells you where you've been, tells you where you are now, and where you're going to be."

And so does the Bible. The Bible gives you a picture of what God has done in history, what God is doing now, and how the story ends. We call this redemptive history. And so, what we're looking at there in that verse is a snapshot of how history ends. This is God's redeemed people, standing around the throne, singing a new song, praising God almighty. You see a picture of a lion and a lamb.

When I downloaded that picture, I sat behind my desk and almost welled up in tears because what you have there is an image of power. What you have there is an image of strength. What you have there is an image of the king of the jungle, right next to a precious, gentle animal. A lamb who has to be guided, has to be guarded, has to be shepherded. And those two imageries right there characterize our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He's conquered all his and all our enemies, and he did it through laying his life down

like a lamb. He was the strongest man that ever walked the face of this earth, simultaneously being the most meek man that ever walked the face of this earth. And so, that picture right there is an image of what happened for us in redemptive history. It's why we have a relationship. It's why we are right with God, because the king laid down his life for his subjects.

And what you also notice in that picture, in that verse, is that it's a multitude of people that come from a diversity of backgrounds. And this was part of God's story from the very beginning. If you think all the way back, all right, let's take a look back now, God created and everything that he created was good except one thing, that man was alone. God creates a helper for him. God says, "You do this, Adam, as a representative of mankind, and you will live. If you don't do this, you won't live. If you eat from every tree, except the tree of knowledge of good and evil, things will go well. The day that you do do it, you'll die."

What happens? This little thing called a serpent comes slithering his way through. It's the devil. Tempts them, they fail, and now all of a sudden their eyes are open, sin is in the world, and we've got a big problem that has entered the story. But then shortly thereafter, after the Lord is pronouncing blessings, curses, and judgment and disciplinary actions, he makes a promise in Genesis 3:15. For those of you who might like fancy theological terms, we call this the protoevangelium. That's the first gospel. Proto, first. Evangelion, gospel in Greek. That's the first mention of the good news. God told Eve that your offspring is going to crush the head of the serpent. What God was doing was saying that here's how I'm going to remedy the problem of sin entering the world.

You move along to Genesis chapter 12, this dude that's wealthy and got lots of possession and all kinds of goods by the name of Abram is called by God. And he tells him to go to a land. He tells him he's going to bless him with offspring, bless him with more land. And he tells him something significant. He says, "In you, all the families of the earth will be blessed." Emphasis on all. All the families of the earth will be blessed. All right. So notice here, God is up to something. He's bringing blessing. He's working through history. And he's giving us a snapshot of what's going to happen.

You get to Psalm 87 and you see something, you see a psalm where that Israel used in their worship service that celebrates a day when their enemies, all right, Rahab, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, Kush, where their enemies would know their God. Their enemies would know their God. Already, God was communicating to his people that this promise will come to pass. All peoples will be blessed. We see all peoples celebrating God in Psalm 87.

And then you get to the New Testament, and we see this dude named Jesus, who shows up and quotes from Isaiah 61. And he walks around Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and he interacts with people in ways that are taboo. He brings dignity to people who have been overlooked, who have been underserved, who've been cast down. All of a sudden, he starts hanging out with women who were considered the least of these in the society. All of a sudden, he is hanging out with the poor, he's hanging out with sinners, he's hanging out with people of different ethnic backgrounds.

What do we see here happening? We see God's promise being realized that all kinds of people are going to be brought into his family. Remember the promise he made, that in your offspring, all the families of the earth will be blessed. Then Paul tells us in Galatians three that that offspring is Jesus Christ. So that any person who places their trust in Jesus, any person, no matter what your background is, no matter where you come from, how much money, how little money you have, you will have a seat at the king's table. Everyone. No matter your socioeconomic background, no matter your generational background, no matter how great or small your sin, you place your trust in Jesus, you are adopted into God's family. You become one of those all families of the earth that will be blessed.

And so, that plays a big part in my story. That plays a big part in why I do what I do. Okay. We move on to the next slide here, Mike's story. Oh man, I've got the keys to the kingdom this morning. Man, usually

somebody's telling me what to do. How about it? There we go. Mike's story. That is me right now. This is my primary ministry. All right. You see my wife, my beautiful wife, Lucy, my daughter, Leah, Annie, Carissa, and Hannah. We took that picture right there in Winter Park, right there on the lake by the burger place.

This is my little flock at home. I have four beautiful girls. I'm a blessed man. Let me say that up front. They are fun. They are sharp. They're athletic. They love Jesus. But I'm also a man that's worried about that bill one day called a wedding. So, I'm just saying, if y'all in the mood to take up a love offering this morning, I'm just saying. I'm just saying, that's all. All right, I'm just going to put my need out there. All right. And so I'm thinking a lot about story these days, because I have five lives that are under my responsibility as I think about the present and look to the future.

But I just lost my mom, April 8, 2021. She would've been 58 this November. And so I'm dealing with a bunch of firsts in my life. Before that I lost my grandfather, who was a pillar in my life. So two major people in my life are gone. So there's a chapter that has closed, a significant chapter in my life. So I'm thinking about my life in ways that I didn't think I would this early. I'm thinking about these things, oh, this would come around maybe 60 or 70, something like that. But God has me thinking about story in a very intentional way.

I grew up, I was the product of a Jamaican immigrant, an African-American woman. Dad came over in the '70s. Mom's family migrated from Millbury, Alabama, in the 1950s down to Miami, Florida. And from those two people meeting came Michael Anthony Aitcheson.

My grandparents were very instrumental in my life, my paternal grandparents and my maternal grandmother. They loved Jesus, and that had a major impact on my upbringing. In high school, I was a part of FCA. I was involved in leadership in church and in other community capacities. Then I would go off to college, already saved and protected from many things that are at a young man's disposal in college. But it was there where several things happened. It was there where I played college football, where God taught me a lot about perseverance, where God taught me a lot about manhood, where God dealt with my call to the ministry in some unique ways.

I started getting phone calls at 4:30 in the morning from friends. "Hey, this happened. My girlfriend beat me up, she scratched up my car and bleached all my clothes. Can I come stay at your place?" As long as you don't bring that drama with you. Well, so here's the deal. If a young lady's doing that to you, you're doing something. You are miscommunicating. You are breaking some promises that she either perceive you've made to her, through actions or through words. All right. So let's talk about that.

All these things started happening. People started making me a defacto pastor of our gospel choir, our team, but what I realized was that was the external call to ministry coming on strong. God was saying, "Mike, this is how I'm going to use you." I didn't want to be a pastor. I didn't. I'm telling you all. I wanted to go to school, get a job, make lots of money. I remember when I was excited about making \$45,000. That wasn't too bad in 2002, '03, '04, '05, '06. I was excited about that. I said I want to get out and make some money. And there's this thing called inflation. That was not a political joke, by the way. I'm not a political pastor. It's just a reality.

And so, God dealt with the call to ministry there, but it came in a very interesting context. It came in a context where I was navigating life with different kinds of people. I do believe that during my time there at Kentucky, it would've been the first time that I think some of my teammates had an intimate relationship with a black guy, with someone who's different than them, someone who's not white. Someone who maybe even came from a big city.

And I started noticing all these different things. So now my pastoral sensibilities are kicking in. It was in that context where I met my beautiful wife Lucy. And it was when we started dating, we had to wrestle through some questions around race. And I experienced some deep wounding in this context and from

friends and people that I didn't think would administer these kinds of woundings. And so, anyway, we would process some of these things. The first time I asked her to date me... One thing you need to know is my wife is from the South. She's from Birmingham, Alabama. And in the South, the great offense is offending someone. That is the greatest sin. You just don't hurt anybody feelings. If you're from the South, raise your hand. And is there an amen?

Okay. All right. And so I sent her a text message, because I got some intel, maybe Pat will bring me back during the dating series to tell some more detail. And I said, "Hey, da da da da da." I sent her a text. I tell young guys, number one, do not text. Don't text. Okay. You go knock on the door, write them a note, do something. Don't text. She wrote back, "I'm enjoying the small steps we're taking right now," which is Southern for no.

Anyhow, I persevered. And I got an award one night at Rupp Arena. Yes. Adolph Rupp legendary UK basketball coach, got an State Farm student athlete of the month. Thousands of people inside Rupp Arena screaming, and I'm all dressed up on the court with some other athletes. And then Lucy and I went out to dinner. At the time, we're just friends. Remember, she told me no.

Well, my phone rings, and someone said, "What are you doing tonight?" And as she's sitting next to me, I said, "I'm going to dinner with my girlfriend." Yes. And then I hung up the phone, and she looks at me and says, "Oh, so now I'm your girlfriend?" To which I responded, "Yeah, you got a problem with that?" She said, "No." I said, "Well, let's go eat." And that's how we started dating. I was not taking no for an answer the second time around. Perseverance, perseverance, perseverance, brothers.

And so from there, I would go on to playing an all-star game in Houston. Had an opportunity to train for pro day against my will. My friends hit me up in the corner. My family hit me up in the corner. Something you must know about playing SEC football, you do not leave there 100%. You don't. That's just how it works. Jim Madaleno, the legendary trainer, was at the Giants when Bill Parcells was there. He looked me in the eyes one day after practice, he said, "You will not play 100%." And that was one of the truest things, after they had taped my wrists, after they had taped my two fingers, my torn ligaments in my hands, put on my knee brace, all that. I played in the trenches. He was right. You don't leave that place 100%. So many more stories there.

Dewayne Robertson. Okay. Dewayne Robertson was a guy for whom I had to give a scout team look. And he was the fourth pick overall in the 2004 draft, played defensive tackle. I witnessed this man, weighing 317 pounds, run a 479 40. Every scout from the NFL was there. And they were watching. Some people said 469, 479, 46... But 315 pounds moving that fast. And the thing, Dewayne was cool. He always just gave us a heads up. He said, "I'll let you know, when we're playing LSU and we're playing Florida and we're playing Georgia, get ready." And so he was good about that. He didn't beat our heads too much on scout team.

And so one day, we're on scout team, I think we're getting ready for LSU. And we run a reverse, and I do something, and Dewayne turns around and he elbows me by accident and knocks me off my feet. And I got up, I said, "Dewayne, you said you would warn us when you do stuff like that." And he said, he had high pitch, but he said, "My bad, Mike. My bad. Next time I'll let you know." That was my life, playing SEC football. I did not win every battle. God taught me a lot about humility.

And so I would move on from there, playing an all-star game. And then the Washington Redskins at the time, when Joe Gibbs had just returned, gave me a rookie camp invite. I came there. It was an awesome experience. I was the second to smallest offense lineman north of 300 pounds. I remember the legendary Jon Jansen working on his stance out there and all these other guys. So it was a great experience. I felt like I got an opportunity to peek over into the promised land, but my body was done. That was it. They didn't sign me. I called my family, told them, "I'm not traveling from camp to camp,

trying to get on any team. It was a wonderful experience." And that's where the Lord said, this is as far as I'm going to take you in this part of your journey with football.

I was off to RTS that summer, July 2007. And it was during this time... You can move to... Man, look it there. I keep forgetting I've got the power here. It was during that time where I entered with, as I told you before, a great deal of racial wounding as Lucy and I started dating. And I came there frustrated in many ways. And a dear friend of mine, and this is the power of friendship, comes up to me in chapel. This guy from lower Alabama, Enterprise, Alabama. And he asked me if I want to go to a Crimson Tide game, because they were playing down in Jacksonville. And I did. I honestly thought that he was just coming up to the only black guy he saw in chapel because he wanted to veil his racism. Yeah, you actually can laugh. It's funny. It's a part of our friendship story.

But then what would happen is God would use that friendship to open my eyes in some unique ways, to heal my heart in some important ways, and to further affirm how he wants to use me in ministry. On that guy's back porch, we dealt with a lot of things about our country's history. We dealt a lot of things about his story around race. We dealt a lot with the wounding that I experienced. And I saw a tough, rag-tag dude weep over that. That's one of the few things of which I ever witness him. And that changed me. He was from the South, he was white, he was conservative, and he came from a wealthy family. All sorts of stereotypes in my mind, perceptions were shattered. And God taught me something that day. And that shaped me in large part with the type of ministry that God would call me to engage here with CUF.

Christ United Fellowship, our vision is to be a gospel-centered, diverse church where anyone is welcome to come experience, be transformed by, and share the love of Christ. All right. That's Revelation 7:9. All right. People from every nation, tribe, and tongue celebrating around the throne of grace. Matthew 28:18-20, the great commission. Our mission is to extend the kingdom of God by making disciples in Orlando and beyond. It's not anything novel. We want to see God's story in God's heart realize right here in our city. That's the vision of our church.

Bob Barber pulled me in his office one day and said, "God has a wonderful plan for your life," and told me what it is. Be aware of people who tell you things like that because there's lots of hardship that awaits you. We would go on to do some demographic research and discover that there were some trends in American Christianity that pointed to a decline in church attendance, which was expressed microcosmically right here in our city, 85% unchurched at the time when we started Christ United Fellowship. Fourth fastest growing city in the US. We were ranked 66 among the least biblically minded cities in the US. According to Barna, Providence, Rhode Island ranking 100, being the worst. So we knew that there was a great deal of work to be done here in our city. Not to mention that Orlando is a very diverse city and growing in its diversity, so we figured that this was the ideal place to have a model that reflected God's heart in this very critical way.

Not only that, I was ordained as a PCA teaching elder. And at the time in 2013, I would've been the 46th black ordained teaching elder in our denomination's history. And so, I tell you these things because my heart burns to see people from different backgrounds come together, whether it's generationally, whether it's racially, whether it's cross culturally, whether it's socioeconomically. That's a part of my story. That's a part of what I saw growing up in Miami. I've had experiences being on both side, privilege and underprivileged.

And above all, it's what I saw this Jewish rabbi in Jerusalem do. It's what I saw him do. Bring dignity to people who were left out. I saw him cross lines that were taboo. I saw him elevate those who were in the ash heap, Psalm 113. God raises the poor from the ash heap and sits them in places of his princes. I saw God tear down the wall between warring tribes, the Jew and the Gentile. Paul says in Ephesians chapter two, that in the blood of Christ, he has abolished the wall of hostility that exists between the Jew and the Gentile.

And so, that's what we're about at Christ United Fellowship, seeing the realization of God's heart expressed in this way. We value Christ-centered preaching. We value hospitality. We value service, and we value diverse community. You'll notice on there, on that middle slide, as I close, that I had I Timothy three posted. Those are the qualifications for a teaching elder. Those are the qualifications for a pastor. So anytime you think about me, anytime you think about us, I would appreciate it if you'd pray that those things would always be real in my life, that the Lord would guard me, that the Lord would protect me. Because I don't want to be found talking about God, but not living for God in my private life.

So brothers, thank you all so much for giving me a few moments to share some of the highlights of my story. And I hope in some way, shape, or form, that you found some of your story and my story, and that it was an encouragement to the glory of God. Thank you.