

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Easter Sermon

Pastor Scott Dudley

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Transcript:

Well amen and hallelujah. Thank you for joining us. Happy Easter. It is so great to be able to be one church together, worshiping together online. Thank you for joining us. I'm Scott, I'm the lead pastor here and we're just so glad that you are with us. The text I'm going to be preaching from comes from Genesis chapter 50. And this is what it says, "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead. They said, 'What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him? His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him, 'We are your slaves,' they said. But Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then don't be afraid, I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them."

So Holy Spirit in these next few minutes, ask that you help us understand this text and the great, good news of Easter in a way that draws us closer to Jesus in whose name we pray, amen. In that text that I just read, there are two words that can change your life. But God, two words that signal something has changed. That God intervenes. That what has come before doesn't necessarily mean what's going to come ahead is the same thing. And I've always wanted to do a sermon series on those two words because they're everywhere in the Bible. They're all throughout it. So today we're starting a new sermon series on the But Gods in scripture. And let's just acknowledge right off the bat, yes, there are lots of potential immature jokes hovering around the phrase, but God, I know that because I've already thought of most of them.

In fact, I was reminded that I've always been fascinated by this phrase when I heard a pastor say that he'd always thought about writing a book called the but's of God, but he couldn't figure out what the cover would be. So let's just acknowledge that and name it and get it out of the way and talk about what these two words have to do with Easter and the ways that they give us courage and hope even in really difficult

times. And I think especially after the last 12 months, we need to hear the words, but God.

And Daniel alluded to some of those things in his opening spoken word piece, a year-long pandemic, racial injustice and tension, divisive politics, as well as the personal things in our lives. Problems in school or strange family members or unemployment, divorce, cancer, all of which can make us feel heavy except for these two words, but God who moves us from heaviness to hallelujah. And that's what we see in the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. His brothers have sold him into slavery in Egypt where he gets falsely accused of raping his master's wife, thrown into prison where he starts interpreting dreams for his fellow prisoners. One of those prisoners gets out and becomes the cup bearer for Pharaoh, King of Egypt. And when Pharaoh has a bad dream, the cup bearer tells him about Joseph who interprets Pharaoh's dream to mean that a famine is coming. Pharaoh makes Joseph prime minister of Egypt. Joseph starts storing up food so when the famine hits, he saves not only most of Egypt, but most of the Middle East from starvation through his food program. And all of that took decades, decades to work itself out.

And in the text I just read, Joseph's brothers are reunited with him and they're afraid that he's going to seek revenge for selling him into slavery. But Joseph says, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good. To accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." That is an Easter declaration of praise. And it has everything to do with Easter because it is deeply rooted in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. In the New Testament, after Jesus' resurrection, the apostle Peter says to the people in Jerusalem, "You put Jesus to death by nailing Him to a cross, but God raised Him from the dead." Which is just another way of saying you meant it for evil, but God used it for good.

Jesus was God in human form, murdered by his own creation. But he used that evil for good by using Jesus' death to pay the price that we know needs to be paid for our sins, and then raised him from the dead and conquered death. And just as we do every year, we've included a list of reasons to believe that Jesus' resurrection really did happen in history. You can find those reasons on our website, but not now because I'm still talking. You can look at them later. The cross shows that it is in God's character to bring good out of evil. It's just what He does, it's just who He is. And that phrase, but God changes our lives for the better in a couple of ways. First, to quote Bishop Reginald Minton, "But God means the devastation is often transportation to the destination of blessing." If Joseph's brothers hadn't sold him into slavery, he never would have gotten to Egypt to interpret Pharaoh's dream and then become prime minister and save everyone from starving.

None of that would have happened without some of the hard stuff that happened to him. And all of that took decades to work itself out. God didn't cause it, it was human sin but God was driving all along, forcing the devastation to be the transportation to the destination of blessing. And yes, it took years because sometimes God will work instantly, a miraculous cure or turnaround. And we've had some of those in this church and we've talked about those before. But usually God works in a process. And in that process He is growing us and preparing us for the destination He has in store for us. All the injustice done to Joseph made him merciful and forgiving as you saw in that text and has a heart for justice and compassion so that when the famine comes, he doesn't just save Egyptians. He saves foreigners as well.

God was working through the devastation to take Joseph to his destination. Probably not the route that Joseph would have chosen, but it also led to a bigger life than Joseph probably would have chosen for himself. The layoff is transportation to a better job. The breakup is transportation to someone else who is going to be a better fit for you. The setback is transportation to the blessing comeback that God has in store for you. Now the blessing may not be the way our culture defines blessing. It may be miraculous, courage and joy in a hard time. It may be a job that pays less but gives you more time for what you really love. But God will be there to get you to a place of blessing. And for Joseph throughout those long years, there must have been times when he's wondering like, God, where are you? Why aren't you helping?

But all along, God was there, working for Joseph's good. So if you are in a season of having to wait right now on God, remind yourself that God's working for good in your life is not dependent on you feeling it. He is doing that whether you feel it or not, and faith is believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse. Some of you have heard me talk about how years ago a friend of mine offered Christina and me tickets to a Mariners game and he'd offered before, we'd already said, no, I almost said no this time, but finally said yes. And he said, "Well, they're good seats." Well since we always set up in the nosebleed section, anything below freezing level is good seats for us. And so he gave me the tickets and I noticed they said on the diamond club and I thought, well, that does sound good. Oh indeed.

We went and there's a special restaurant for diamond club people. It's got steak and salmon and all kinds of cake. Only in diamond club they don't call it cake, they call it gateau, which is a French word that means cake. But it tastes so much better when you call it gateau right? And then we got to our seats, second row behind home plate. I turned to Christina and I said, "We can heckle and it counts. A. Rod is going to hear everything I have to say to him, this is going to be wonderful."

Here's my point. My friend told us the seats, the destination was great, but we almost passed them up because we didn't see that in advance. Our expectations were really low of what that was going to mean. And so often our expectations of what God can

do are really low. Faith is believing in advance the seats are going to be good. That the destination He is taking you to is going to be really, really good. God will do it. God will make the devastation be the transportation to the destination of blessing. He does it. He does it every time. It's just what He does.

Which brings me to the second way that this phrase, but God changes our lives. And that is, it means that zombies come to life. And here's what I mean. Zombies walk around and moan and look alive, but really they're dead and want to eat your brain. And that describes all of us sometimes, and maybe some of us all the time. Like do you ever feel like a zombie? Just kind of going through the motions of life. You get up, you go to school or work, you come home, you eat, you go to bed, rinse, repeat, do it all over again. Same old, same old, over and over and over. Walking around, feeling a little dead inside.

But what Easter means is that God brings dead things back to life, starting with Jesus. And if we know Jesus when we die, we will be raised from the dead just as he was for eternal life. But Jesus doesn't just bring back dead bodies back to life. No, He brings dead hearts and dead souls back to life. The apostle Paul says, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins when you follow the ways of this world. But God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ." Sin turns us into zombies. Just deadens us to life at its best. And we don't really think about sin because we mostly think, well, we're good people, but that contradicts how we live because we're always trying to prove that we're good people. Perform, achieve looking at my job, looking at my posts, look at my looks, aren't I worthy/ that dog don't hunt because inside we know that we sin. We know that we make mistakes and every day there's always something there to remind us of our failures and our flaws and our inadequacies.

I recently saw a book called The Worst Alphabet Book Ever. You know the little books for kids A is for Apple, B is for ball. Well the title of this one is, P is for pterodactyl. And it has other things like C is for czar. Worst alphabet book ever designed to make you feel inadequate and flawed. Life does the same thing to us, reminds us of our flaws. And deep inside we know, we know our sin hurts people. We know our lying manipulates people. We know our insistence on our own way tramples on other people, we know. And it deadens us inside and it makes us sound zombies. But God came to us in the person of Jesus, paid the price for our sins, the penalty for our sins that deep down we know needs to be paid or there's no justice in the world. And if we accept Him, our sins are forgiven. The slate is wiped clean. The shackles of shame fall off and we are free.

The God of the universe loves you so much He died for you. And when we really get that, when we really get that, we come alive. No longer zombies weighed down by the burden of trying to prove our worth. The God of the universe loved me enough to die for me. That's my identity, that's my security, that's my confidence. But that's not all God does. That's not the only way He frees us from being zombies because we're not just saved from our sins, we're saved for something as well. We're saved in order to be

part of God's rescue mission to bring justice and healing to this world. And when we do that, our lives get bigger and we are zombies no more because God is working through us in exciting ways.

My dad was a incredible example of this for me. He was a Christian and over his life, he just let Jesus lead him into greater and greater adventures. One of the first big ones that happened to him was when I was visiting him in Eastern Washington, where my parents live and we were on a walk and ran into one of his neighbors who's a Christian who goes into different countries to pray for and comfort people who are really sick, who don't have other means of comfort. And sometimes there's a miraculous cure, not all the time, but sometimes. But even when there's not a physical cure, there's tons of emotional and spiritual healing that's going on. And this neighbor said, well he was going to go to the Philippines in a couple of weeks and God just nudged me and I said to my dad, I said, "Dad, you should go."

And the neighbor said, "You should go." So my dad asked his pastor and the pastor said, "You should go." So my dad noticed a reoccurring theme and he went. And after he'd been there a few days, my mom called and said that my dad was calling every night from the Philippines just so excited. And he and his neighbor would arrive in a town, they would preach about Jesus. People would become Christians. And then the neighbor made my dad go out into the crowd and lay his hands on people and start praying for them. Which was way outside my dad's comfort zone because in Eastern Washington you can get arrested for doing stuff like that. But my dad did it and he didn't see any physical miracles, but he saw lots of other kinds. People getting free from their shame and guilt because of Jesus. People feeling cared for, loved. People in places where they weren't feeling cared for, loved, felt cared for, loved, comforted because my dad was there for them.

And my dad found it enormously fulfilling to be part of that. And that trip was part of what Jesus used to bring him to life. And he just kept doing things like that over the years. And it wasn't always going to some foreign country. One of the things he started to do was he was pen pals to under resourced students in local schools. And he'd write to encourage them. They'd practice their writing by writing him back. He got to know their lives. He prayed for them. He'd visit them at the schools because studies show that when students have caring adults like that in their lives, they do way better in school.

He loved those guys. He talked about them constantly. For him, that was an adventure too. My dad was not a zombie. He was fully alive until the day he died because of Jesus and now he lives forever with Jesus. But God means that the devastation is transportation to the destination of blessing. Zombies come alive and what all of that means, and what Easter means is your present circumstances don't determine where

you can go, they just determined where you start. Your circumstances have no say over where you go, just where you start because God is always at work.

So this summer I was out in my yard and a man pulled into driveway and said, "Are you Scott Dudley?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "You don't know me. I don't go to your church. I go to a different church, but I know who you are and I've seen you out here before." And he said, "This is going to sound weird, but God," there's that phrase again, "but God just told me to give you \$5,000." And immediately I said, "No, He didn't," just like that. The poor guy, like he gets up this nerve to say this weird thing to this guy he doesn't know. And the pastor who is filled with faith and believes that God nudges us to do things and we should follow those nudges says, no, he didn't. But he was undeterred by my rudeness and he said, "I know crazy right?" And he said, "I tried to ignore it, but it just wouldn't go away. And so I said, okay, God, I'll drive by his house and if he's outside, I'll stop and you were outside." And I said, "Well, I don't need \$5,000."

And the guy said, "It doesn't matter, God told me to give it to you." And I said, "Well, why don't you give it to your church or my church or Jubilee Reach or something like that?" And he said, "No, I'm supposed to give it to you." Well, I didn't feel right about taking money that I don't need so I said, "Give me your phone number and I'll pray about it. And if something comes up, I'll let you know." So I prayed and said, God, is there someone that needs \$5,000? And God brought to mind, Adrian, who is on our staff. He helps with new hope revival. And a year ago, last March, when everything was shutting down, I was in Rwanda, along with a few other people where Adrian was going to give an evangelistic concert and I was going to be the preacher. But the night before the concert, the government shut it down, canceled it because of COVID. But the venue didn't cancel the debt that Adrian owed for renting the venue. Money he would have had had the concert gone forward through the ticket sales, but he didn't have it.

So I knew that he had this debt. So I texted him and asked him, "How much do you still owe on that venue?" Thinking \$5,000 right? Because that's what needs to happen for this to become a sermon illustration. He texted me back and it actually was significantly more than \$5,000. And I thought, well, okay, maybe I'm supposed to give the 5K to help with that debt. But the number that the guy in my driveway heard God say was so specific it felt like the need should be at least close to that number. So I decided to pray some more and see if God had another need in mind. And I told a few of the staff people here at church about it, and I said, "Look, don't go looking for it. But if you happen to hear someone who needs \$5,000, let me know." About a month later, I got a text from Micheala Butler who leads our prayer and care department.

And she'd been talking to Adrian and it turns out that Adrian and his wife had to leave the house that they were renting and they'd been looking for four or five months to find a house in their price range, which wasn't much because they don't have a lot of money and rent is really high here. But after months of looking, they'd finally found a house to rent in their price range, but they needed to put down first last and deposit and they didn't have any money. So Adrian and his wife were fasting and praying for, you so know where this is going, \$5,000. Now, Micheala didn't say anything to Adrian. Adrian didn't know about driveway guy, but she told me. I called driveway guy and said, here's the need and he wrote the check.

Now, as it turned out, the owner of that house rescinded the offer. But eventually Adrian and his family found another house to rent. And it all worked out actually from a church member here, giving them a bit of a break on the price. And the 5K went for first, last and deposit on that house. It even turned out his kids didn't have to leave their school which they love because it's in the same district. In fact, the day they moved in, his kids went into their bedroom and got down on the floor and started praying and thanking God for the house. And they are so grateful. They didn't want to have to move to some other part of the country where it's cheaper to live. They want to stay here because they believe they are called here. And they're so grateful for that.

Now, I suppose, I suppose you could say, well, all of that was coincidence because people are always pulling into people's driveways and saying, God told me to give you \$5,000, happens every day right? The guy who gave the money doesn't even go to our church. And when I prayed and God brought Adrian to mind, I had the right person, just the wrong need. And I know that story raises questions like, well, why that need and not the bigger need for the debt on what he owes for the venue? I don't know, I don't know. Miracles are messy. They don't fit in our boxes. That's why they're called miracles. But it's also part of why I wanted to tell the story because we preachers we're in the habit of telling stories that always end with a nice tidy bow and everything's all wrapped up, no loose ends. But as I said, that's not how life works. It's always a process.

And this story is still in process, but already it has strengthened my faith and Adrian's faith. And the guy who gave the 5K, when he handed me that check, he said the whole thing had been an adventure in faith for him. And that it was just thrilling to be part of helping someone else. The God of the universe spoke to him. That's not a zombie day. That's a good day. And he persevered through my rudeness when it would have been so easy to just say, Oh, you're right, nevermind, it's crazy. But he persevered and he got to help an immigrant family in need. And if God was faithful then, He'll be faithful again on this venue thing. I don't know how. I mean, the venue's waited this long, maybe they'll just cancel the debt or maybe Adrian will make that money up at another concert. There's a lot of ways God could do that. God will be faithful somehow for that as well. Adrian was in need, but God stepped in.

And the devastation, distress of looking for a house on a low budget and all of that was transportation to the destination of blessing. And it helped me be more alive. Seeing God move like this, the man who wrote the check felt more alive and it helped Adrian be fully alive and stay here and continue to help people in New Hope find a spiritual home here at Bell Press. And it's the same kind of thing God did for Joseph. Not the route that Joseph would have chosen, but led him to a much bigger life than Joseph ever would have chosen for himself.

So where do need the phrase but God in your life? If you don't know Jesus and you want to get to know Jesus or know more about Jesus, if you want to make Him your leader and forgiver, you can let us know in the chat or you can contact us. We would love to help you take that step. And if you do know Jesus, where are you feeling hopeless or dead inside? Take courage that He will make the devastation lead to the destination of blessing. And where you are today does not determine where you can go, it just says where you start. And one day you will look back and say, it was hard for a while, but God. I was struggling in school, but God can deliver me. I feel rejected by my peers or family, but God loves me and that's my identity. I have cancer, but God is giving me miraculous, unbeatable courage and joy in the middle of it. There's injustice and sin in our culture, but God has called us to work for justice and healing. My business partner cheated me, but God is my recompense and He will provide.

All through the Bible is this ringing declaration but God. The Israelites became slaves in Egypt, but God rescued them. David faces a giant, but God brought the giant down with just a sling and a stone. Esther and all the Jews faced a genocide, but God saved them through Esther's courage. Jesus was crucified, but God raised Him from the dead. When it looks like evil is winning, when it looks like the battle is lost, when it looks like all hope is gone, come these two resounding words, but God. Turns death into life, injustice to justice, sickness back into health, lies to truth, despair to hope, fear back to courage and sorrow to joy. He turns heaviness into a glorious hallelujah. Hallelujah, He has risen. Hallelujah, He has overcome. Hallelujah, He is working still and He will reign forever and ever and ever, hallelujah. And all of God's people said, amen.

Discussion Questions: Read Luke 19:28-48

Opening Question:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions -- Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Luke referenced three Old Testament passages without mentioning them specifically. Read Zechariah 9:9, Habakkuk 2:11, and Psalm 118:26. How did Jesus' final visit to Jerusalem generate both praise and woe? How does each passage help us get a clearer understanding of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem?
- What does Jesus' reply to the Pharisees (v. 39-40) imply about him?
- How do verses 45-48 relate to Jesus' concern about Jerusalem?
- What person or group do you weep for?
- How has Jesus 'turned over the tables' in your life? what has he been clearing out recently?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?