

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon: NEW WINESKINS**

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So Holy Spirit, as we turn to your word, asking that you help us learn from it and have our courage and our hope and our faith anchored in you Jesus, we ask this in your name. Amen. Well, a phrase that we're all hearing a lot of these days is "new normal" that this COVID crisis has changed so many things that when it's over, we will be living in a new normal. The question is, will that new normal be better or worse than old normal? And here's the good news, right? At the very beginning of the sermon, here's the good news. We get to decide what our new normal will be.

There's a lot right now that we can't control, but the one thing we can is how we respond to events, and we can choose to cooperate with God as he uses this crisis to stretch us and grow us and make us into the people and the church that he created us to be. Now, that's not going to be easy, stretching, growing. That can be difficult, but I believe that if we allow God if we cooperate with God as He does that He will use this crisis, and we will emerge in a new normal, more courageous people, freer from anxiety and worry and wouldn't that be an awesome new normal?

I think we'll end up with deeper relationships with friends and family. And since every study ever done says that one of the keys to having lasting joy is meaningful relationships, that would be an awesome new normal. I think we're going to emerge from this freer from stress and busy-ness and boredom, having discovered a better adventure, being part of Jesus' rescue mission and on and on and on. New normal might be awesome. God can make it that way. And I think when we look at it this way, when we get that, it helps us go through what we're going through because we know that God is going to use it hard as it is. God is going to compel it to be the ultimate servant of our joy.

And here's the thing, by the choices we are making every day, we are already creating our new normal right now. By the choices we're making every day, we are already creating our new normal right now, and BelPres I got to tell you, y'all are creating an amazing, wonderful new normal. We are seeing the best of this church right now. You are serving. You are praying. You are giving. You are worshipping. You are seeking God. You are an awesome church, and you are creating a wonderful new normal by how you are responding to this.

So we're starting a new sermon series today called new normal about what that might look like for us and about how God can... how God will get us there and how we get there by cooperating with Him. What's that new normal going to be like? For the prophet, Isaiah God says this, "Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing," and that verse is a blueprint for what our

new normal can be and how we get there because it says, "Some things from old normal need to be left behind in the past so that new can emerge."

A couple of months ago, we asked our elders to write out what they believe was some of BelPres's shadow missions. That's a term I've used before comes from pastor John Ortberg. And what it means is every company, every business, every church, they have mission statements, and they sound very noble. But if you observe how they actually act, it points to a shadow mission that we sometimes give into instead. It's not what we want to do, but we give into it. And as I've said before, I think it'd be kind of interesting if churches posted their mission statement or their shadow mission statement based on how they act. If they posted that on their reader boards for everyone to read, I think we'd see things on church reader boards like, "Successfully avoiding conflict for 40 years, right? Or first Baptist Iowa or whatever." Judging others together for since 1975, and if we posted our shadow missions, they'd be very revealing. So we asked our elders, "What do you think are some of BelPres's shadow missions according to some of our actions and our attitudes?" And boy did they have fun with that. Here are a few of the things our elders came up with. "BelPres, a successful church for successful people." Ouch. BelPres, if you will, during array of activity leading nowhere or my personal favorite, "BelPres, we can do it. God can help." Now to be clear, that's the band like that last, but not to be clear that's not who we want to be. And it's not who we are much of the time. As I just got done saying, "I think we're an awesome church, but on our bad days, like everybody else, we slip into some of those shadow missions."

And, of course, our collective shadow missions are nothing more than the sum total of all of our individual shadow missions. And many of those shadow missions right now have been put on hold because of COVID, so let's leave those things on hold when we go back to normal. Let's leave those things, those shadow missions in the past, so that a new normal can emerge because here's the thing. Jesus is in the reinventing business. Jesus is in the reinventing business. Jesus says, "Behold, I make all things new, a.k.a, I am the bringer of new normals."

So today, I want to do an overview of Mark:2 in the Bible. Mark:2 because Jesus is doing a bunch of new normals in that chapter. In fact, this chapter could be titled "Jesus makes religious people mad by doing new things," and it gives us some clues about kind of way, maybe what our new normal will look like and how we get there. Mark:2, it opens with Jesus teaching in someone's house, and four people bring a paralyzed friend to Jesus to be healed, but it's too crowded. They can't get the guy in. So they start digging a hole in the roof, and you got to kind of picture this scene, right? There'd be chunks of roof flying or falling down as Jesus was teaching right in the middle of this house, right? What was the owner of the house doing? Right? Like, "Hey, stop it. That's my roof," right? So you got to imagine the scene, and they opened the hole in the roof, and they lower the paralyzed man down in front of Jesus.

And Jesus looks at him, and he says, "Son, your sins are forgiven." "Come again. What? Your sins are forgiven with this guy's paralyzed," right? Why didn't Jesus say, "You're healed or here's the number of a good doctor," or "Hey, I'm a carpenter I can fix that roof," right? But instead, He says, "Your sins are forgiven," and you can kind of see the paralyzed guy going, "That's nice, Jesus. But my legs," the real problem here is, "I'm paralyzed my legs." But what Jesus is saying is, "No, no, no. There is nothing more important than our relationship with God and having a right relationship with God."

But there's this thing in the way called sin, and it blocks us from God and all the ways we've hurt people, all the ways we've heard ourselves, all the ways we have rebelled against God, and it needs to be dealt with. And the reason Jesus here can forgive this man sin is because He is God in human form and is going to lay down His life on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins that deep down inside we know needs to be paid or there is no justice.

And notice what Jesus says, He says, "Son, your sins are forgiven." It's relational. It's personal. It's loving. Jesus is offering a new normal, a new covenant, a new testament, a new relationship with God, not as our boss, but as a loving father, which makes us beloved sons and daughters of the most high King. The most important thing in life is our relationship with God.

As some of you know, this has been a very hard week for me and my family. My mom, who's had Alzheimer's, died. We did not see this coming. She was fine at the beginning of the week, and she died at the end of the week, and it's been a very painful week because of that. And she did not have COVID. It wasn't COVID, but even still because of all the regulations, we were not allowed to be with her when she died. We were allowed one hour to visit her, and we had to wear gowns and masks and gloves and all of that, and we were allowed to visit her for one hour to say our goodbyes and then we had to leave, which just made it worse. Right? I mean, because of my job, I have stood beside the bedside of other people as they've died.

My siblings and I were there for my dad when he died, but we weren't allowed to be there other than that hour. We weren't allowed to be there for my mom. And we can't even have a memorial service, can't even plan a memorial service right now because of the lockdown. Right? But when we visited her, we made sure to pray for her and pray around her, and we pray, "Jesus, we cannot be here when my mom dies. But Jesus, you are here and help her to know that you are here. When she goes through that Valley of the shadow of death, Jesus, you guide her through. We can't be here because of this lockdown, but Jesus, you can be." And we know that he was, she died peacefully and we know that. And we know now that her mind has been restored, healed of the Alzheimer's. She is in her new glorified body, and she is free of the disease that has made her life miserable for the last couple of years.

And I thought, "Oh my goodness, Oh my goodness, there really is nothing more important than our relationship with Jesus." Because at the end of the day, all we have is Jesus. And that's good news because He is all we need and it can never. He will never be, can never be taken from us, not by anything, not even by death. And that's what my siblings and I saw as we prayed for my mom knowing that Jesus was going to be with her.

When Jesus tells this paralyzed man that his sins are forgiven, He creates a new normal where the most important thing isn't career or accolades or status or even being paralyzed. It's our relationship with God. So we are making our new normal right now. So let's be creating that new normal. So many of you are doing by making sure there's more time for God in prayer and in scripture and in worship and in community. All of our idols, all the other things we rely on, have been shown to be flimsy paper tigers, money. It can disappear overnight. Accolades can't protect us from the virus, but when we are connected to God in a deep way through Jesus, He is the stable anchor in the storm. And we can face anything with more courage and with more hope, which is why my family and I right now we are grieving. We are sad at the loss of my mother. But we can also honestly say, "It is well with our soul."

So Jesus forgives this paralyzed man, which makes the religious people mad because that was new, and they don't like new, right? And so they say, "He's blaspheming, who can forgive sins but God alone." And it says, Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts. Remember that sentence. I'll come back to it. Jesus knew what they were thinking, and He said, "Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven or get up, take your mat and walk." But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. So he said to the man, "Get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat, and walked out. This amazed everyone and they praise God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this," A.k.a, this is a new normal.

So this brings me to my second point, but this text tells us about new normal. And that is to have new normal we need to repent. That word repent, it means to be going in one direction and then to turn 180 degrees around, and go the opposite direction. That's what repent means. Repentance, in other words, it's a theological word for new normal, and what old patterns, what sins, what old habits might God be calling you to leave in the past to leave behind so that new healthier things can be born into your life. Maybe it's to have greater empathy for people who are really struggling, right? There are people in our community who they were barely making it financially as it is, and this has just pushed them over the cliff. It's not a matter of having to work from home. They don't have a job at all, and soon they may not have a home at all. And there are people in our community and in this church family for many people who knew hope, this is what they are experiencing right now. And God is calling us to address that which we're going to do in which we are doing and talk about that in a minute.

Maybe God is calling you to be part of that, or maybe God is calling you to finally fix that marriage. Now that you're together with your spouse a little more than normal, maybe some of the cracks are starting to show, so maybe repentance means really go into talent that marriage and bringing healing into it. This crisis can work for us, or this crisis can work against us, but I believe if we are constantly praying, "Jesus, show me what you are trying to eliminate in my life in this season so that new things can be born." God is eager to answer that prayer.

It's interesting in this story, an ironclad rule in the Old Testament is that in order for forgiveness to happen, you have to repent. Kind of makes sense, you can't be forgiven unless you admit that you need to be forgiven instead of making excuses. But what's interesting in this story is that this man, this paralyzed guy, he doesn't ever repent. He never asks for forgiveness, right? But Jesus forgives him anyway.

So why did Jesus do that? Why did Jesus forgive his sins when he didn't repent? I think it goes back to that sentence I asked you to remember. Where Jesus knew what the religious leaders were thinking, which means He must have known what this paralyzed man was thinking, right? And so somewhere this paralyzed guy must've had some kind of halfhearted, half-baked desire to change. And Jesus is so eager to love. So eager to forgive, so eager to make us new. He says, "That's good enough for me. You've forgiven me."

See, you don't have to be good at repenting at all. You can be a lousy repenter, right? Maybe you don't even want to repent, but maybe you want to want, to repent and that is enough for Jesus. And if you eat so much as want, to want to repent, Jesus is going to tackle you with his love like a linebacker in a playoff game, which brings me to my last point.

In order for new normal to happen, prioritize relationship with God, repent, and then third, and finally, we're going to need some new wineskins. We're going to need to get some new wineskins. After Jesus heals the paralyzed man and irritates the religious leaders for doing something new, he continues to annoy them for the rest of the chapter. Right? And the next story, He eats with a group of what the Bible describes as tax collectors and "sinners," right? And the religious leaders get mad because that's new, and they prefer to judge people instead of love them.

Then in the very next story, the religious leaders get mad again because they don't think Jesus' disciples are fasting enough, right? And then Jesus says to them, "No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined," which is kind of cryptic. So what does that mean? Well, here's what's going on. The religious leaders are

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complaining the disciples didn't fast enough. But here's the thing. The law only required one fast a year, while simultaneously, the law commanded six feasts a year. It's a six to one ratio, right? But the religious leaders added all kinds of other fast days could time prove how holy they were. And Jesus here is not condemning fasting. It's Jesus fast. It's a good thing.

The issue is Jesus wasn't following the religious leaders' traditions. In fact, He obliterated their traditions, right? Rather than fasting was so-called saints. Jesus prefers to feast with sinners. And that was a new normal. That was a new normal where Jesus prioritizes relationship over tradition and says, "New things require new forms." Old wineskins are brittle. So if you put new wine in them, as the wine ferments and gives off gas, the old wineskins will just burst because they're brittle. New things require new forms.

Jesus brought this effervescent new relationship with God that just bursts out of the confines of formal religion. God did not cause COVID. God did not cause my mother's Alzheimer's. God did not cause my mom to die. But I believe that God can use all of that to lead us to a new normal, and that's going to require that all of us get some new wineskins. Do some things differently. That might mean, for instance, a different schedule, prioritizing God, and people may be more than we have in the past. Maybe it means me more open about our faith in Jesus. Maybe it means some of you, inviting a neighbor or a coworker to join us on the live stream, or maybe posting on social media invitations to join us on live stream.

Right now, people are way more open to exploring faith than they have been in a long, long time. So invite them. They're probably going to say yes. There are three guys on our staff, Gabe, Anthony and Daniel, a lot of you know them, they're roommates together in the same house and in this season they've been reaching out to their neighbors, kind of playing music from their garage, kind of having DJ kind of DJ parties. They've got hopscotch on the sidewalk. All of this at appropriately safe distances, right? Creating community, bringing life and joy.

And this week Gabe told me that, that the people in their neighborhood, they're discouraged, they're depressed, and that sometimes when one of the neighbors is out walking, right? They'll stop in front of these guys' house even if they're not outside. They'll just stop in front of the house. The neighbors will because this house is so filled with the Holy Spirit, and it has become this source of hope and light for the whole neighborhood. That's a new wineskin.

As a church, we're having to figure out all kinds of new stuff, right? How do we make these online services as engaging as possible? Because it's a different medium and maybe y'all are going to have to learn some new stuff about participating online, like maybe don't have like three tabs open on your browser while you check Instagram and eat breakfast with worship in the background, which some of you may be doing right now, right? But instead, maybe just sing the song and engage and focus and pay attention, right?

We have to figure out how we help you and help our children and our youth, and all of us grow in our faith in this season. And we're trying to figure that out, and we're trying to pivot quickly because things are changing. And then for Presbyterians, pivoting quickly, that is a new wineskin, right?

Throughout this whole sermon series, one of the things we'll be doing is posting on social media brief interviews between me and some people in our church to talk about what they're discovering in this season for their new normal and how they're changing. We'll post those to social media as well as to have the links in all church emails at the end of the week.

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In partnership with Jubilee REACH, we set a goal to provide 20 under-resourced families with groceries every week. So many of you volunteered that we are now doing that for 330 families. Thank you. That is a new thing. That is a wonderful thing. And almost all of the thank you notes we're getting from this. They're saying things like, "I know God is helping us." That is because you're serving because you're helping. People are discovering God's love in their life.

And the needs keep expanding and we're going to meet as many of those as we possibly can. In fact, we need to help even more families. If we get this week alone, if we get 35 more volunteers, we'll be able to help a lot more families if we do that. New times require new wineskins. The last words of every dying organization, whether it's a business or a church, last dying words, we've never done it that way before. Not that the old thing was bad, it was good. It's just that it served as purpose, and new times require new wineskins.

So don't let what was, keep you from taking steps toward what could be. Don't let what was keep you from taking steps toward what could be and realize your greatest obstacle to your future thriving, maybe your current success. Because people who are most resistant to the new thing, often are people who succeeded in the old thing and because it made them successful and they don't want to give it up. But here's the thing, what got you here may not get you there. What worked then may not work now, what didn't work yesterday may work tomorrow.

When I taught college, most of the students I had were stress cases because they couldn't say no to anything. They just said yes everywhere because that's the way you get into college these days. Right? You pack your resume full of activities. You know I was president of the Taekwondo club, chairperson of the Swedish Hula committee, right?. So all of my students were stress cases because they said yes to everything because they didn't want to give up that old pattern of saying yes to everything because that was what made them successful.

So there are basket cases all of the time filled with stress because of it. And I know sometimes people think it's older people that resist change. I'm not sure that's actually true. My second year doing college ministry, we made a few changes to our program in my second year, and there was this one sophomore guy, he hated the changes, and he complained about them, and he actually said, "We've never done it this way before." And I laughed, and I said, "You're a sophomore. You mean, we didn't do it this way last year."

Now on the other side of the age spectrum, conversely, a few months ago, after one of our high school students shared her story of starting a Christian club at school, I got a wonderful email from a woman in our church, and she said this in her email. "I really appreciated hearing the high school student's story, having celebrated my 100th birthday party last night, 100 years old. My mind was at the opposite end of the age spectrum. I realized now that I was all in at my birthday party, attended by 430 friends, relatives, and family. I was asked to say something, so I gave a testimony of having God as my heavenly father and Jesus as my best friend and guide. I guess I was all in at that point. Even nonbelievers told me it made him think. I am a forceful speaker despite my age. I could speak on stage as well as any high school student can." Yes, you could, and when this is over, I'm going to find you, and we're going to have you talk to us.

At 100 years old, she is doing new things. Where my family and I first moved here from California, where I'd been a college pastor. Every time we went back to California to visit my wife's family, I would pack my schedule with all, seeing all kinds of former students, former church members. I would just fill my days with seeing these people, and the result was I was gone a lot, and I figured it's all good, right? My

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wife got to be with her mom and her sister, and they got to see our kids who were toddlers at the time while I was out seeing all these people. Perfect, right? It all worked. What could go wrong? It turned out quite a lot could go wrong. Right?

And my wife tried to tell me she didn't like it, but somehow, I don't know, it didn't sink in, until one day I came home and Christina was sitting on the floor with this look on her face that made me think, "I think something is terribly wrong, and I think it's me." And she said, "Do you think this is fun for me?" And I was like, "I think the right answer is no." And she said, "We don't see you in Bellevue because you're working all the time. We don't see you on vacation either because you're always meeting all these people, and I am stuck here with the kids, and don't you think I might like to go out sometimes and meet with people?" And I was like, "Yeah, probably." Right.

And then she said, "But I have a plan." She knew the plan she had for me. Right? And she said, "When we come to California, let's prorate your time with other people. If we are here for a week, you get a day. If we're here for a day, you get an hour, and you have to decide out of all of these relationships that you have in California, which ones are for life because you can't keep them all." She said, "What do you think?" And I said, "Great idea, honey," like I'm dumb. But I'm not that dumb. Right?

And it's not that those relationships were bad, they were good, there was just too many of them, and there wasn't room for family and rest and for most of the people I was meeting, I was their pastor, and I was counseling them about their faith and their problems, which I like doing. That's why I have the job that I have, but it is the job that I have here, and Lord knows y'all have enough issues to keep me busy for a lifetime. So why was I pastoring former church members in California? When what they really needed is a pastor down there.

It was one of the best gifts my wife ever gave me. After that, whenever we went to California, I only saw my closest friends who encourage me and point me to God. It also made me ask the question, "Why does my family see me so little in Bellevue? I need to change that. I need to fix that." I was hanging on to old wineskins old patterns when God was doing a new thing, and clue number one that he had created a new normal was he brought us here.

So I had to repent, let go of some stuff that wasn't helpful in the new season and embrace new ways for better new normal, where I went deep with a few rather than shallow with the many and the result of that was better relationships, and where we had more time together as a family when we were on vacation and the vacation wasn't just a synonym for work in a different location.

So what new normal is, God, trying to create in you this season. Let's allow Him to show us some things that may be from our old normal we need to just leave in the past so that new things can happen, and Jesus will use this crisis to lead us to a new and better normal. Now, truth be told, it'll probably also be harder. It'll probably also be harder, but bigger, richer, deeper, better. And when we see it that way, it gives us hope and courage, knowing that God will compel this crisis to be the ultimate servant of our joy. Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. Behold, I am doing a new thing.

Jesus. Thank you that you are always doing a new thing, and Lord, I ask that you would help us see that. Help us step into that new thing. Lord, help us to embrace it. Show us what we need to leave behind from our past so that we can embrace the new future that you have for us and thank you, God, that you use all things for good and that you are going to compel this to be the ultimate servant of our joy. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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**Discussion Questions: Read Mark 2**

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1. Read all of Mark 2. What common themes do you see emerging from all these stories?
2. Why did Jesus tell the paralytic, "your sins are forgiven"? What exactly is the miracle here?
3. Why do you think the religious leaders were so upset with Jesus?
4. In your own words, what do you think Jesus means in verses 21-22? What are practical ways to do what Jesus suggests here in your life? In a church?