

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Sermon Title: New Creations

Rich Leatherberry

Disclaimer: *This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.*

---

### Scripture:

---


Ezekiel 37:1, 11-14

<sup>1</sup> “The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.”

<sup>11</sup> Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. <sup>14</sup> I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

2 Corinthians 5:14-20

<sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:  The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

---

**Transcript:**

---

Heavenly Father, we just give you this time. We thank you for your word. It is good. It is right. It is the best. So Holy Spirit, would you fill this room and would you take these words and would you make them your words? Jesus, we want to be more and more like you. So would you change us? Would you do that in this space? We pray that in your name, Jesus. Amen.  
Amen.

Well, my first preaching experience was for a group of teenagers and adults who were in recovery from addiction. It was a ministry that our church offered, and I was the intern in charge of spiritual formation. Now I'd never taken a preaching class. So I didn't know what I was doing, which may be why I picked this really complicated passage from the book of Romans, a perfect selection for a group of teenagers in recovery. Don't you think?

Well, I studied that passage. I prayed a lot. I wrote down what I thought Jesus was saying to me in scripture or through that scripture, but I was so, so nervous. I was scared to death. Well, Sunday came, and while everyone was singing these praise songs, "Hallelujah, praise you, Jesus," I was counting down the minutes until I had to stand up to preach that sermon. Finally, my turn came. I walked up to the podium. I thanked everybody for the opportunity to preach, which was a total lie, and then I asked everyone in the room to turn with me to the Book of Romans. But somehow, between the time that I stood up to walk to the podium and the time that I actually got to the podium, the Book of Romans had completely fallen out of my Bible. I couldn't find it. It was nowhere to be found. Turned the pages of my Bible one way, and I was turned the pages of my Bible the other way. Was it in the Old Testament? Was it in the New Testament? I couldn't remember.

Well, by the time I finally found it, I was so anxious that my mind went blank. So I read the passage, and then I just stared at everybody. It was sort of creepy. Then I remembered that I had a manuscript and I should probably read it. So I did, but I messed that up. I stumbled and I bumbled my way through that entire sermon, and by the time I finished and sat down, I was so disappointed in me, in the experience, in the sermon. Ever been there? Where you thought you should do better or be better with something in your life, where you just felt like you weren't meeting the standard, where your life or your Christian faith had more failure and struggle than you think you really should have? Maybe it's something in your past that someone did or said. Maybe that's a teacher, a friend, or a parent, and it's defining you. And you've been living like, it's true.

Well, we're going through this sermon series called Remake, and we've been looking at what's been dry and dead as a result of this pandemic over the last 18 months. And this vision from Ezekiel, it gives us hope because it shows us that God is remaking our world, bringing his heaven to this earth, uniting what's been divided, bringing justice, cleansing those impure, raising up his kingdom army. And today what I want to look at is how God is remaking you and me. So I'm going to do that by going through this passage in Second Corinthians. We're going to walk through some of the main verses there, and then afterwards, we'll circle back and take a look at what this means for us.

So our passage starts off like this: "For Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore, all died." The context of this passage is that Paul is defending his ministry, is defending against some Christian leaders who are slandering him. They've been saying that Paul is crazy, and Paul's defense in this verse is that it's Christ's love that compels him to do the things that he does. Now there's several words in the Greek language for love, friendship love, sexual love, but here Paul uses the word [agape 00:04:37]. Agape love is self-giving, sacrificial, unconditional. The cross shows how far Jesus' agape love is willing to go for us. So Paul is saying, "Who does that? Who sacrifices their life for everyone? Who hands themselves over to be whipped, humiliated, beaten, and hung on a cross until they died for people they don't even know? For the worst, the unworthy, the broken? For you and for me? Who does that?"

Jesus died for us all. Only Jesus loves like that. And this is God's solution to our sin problem. Justice is met. A substitute stands in our place, and Paul finds in Jesus a love that is just so compelling that he can't help himself. He's basically saying, "I just have to do what I'm doing. Amazing love. So pure, so divine has transformed my soul, my mind, my all." Verse 15 and 16," And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again." So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

Now this is really important. See, centering our lives around Jesus helps us see other people differently. We no longer size them up according to their abilities or their reputation or by what they have. We don't judge them any longer, by their appearance or their age, their stage, their culture, or by the way they dress. We see others as Jesus sees them because they've been made in the image of God, created to flourish. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, anyone ... Now this may shock you, but this word, as is translated from the Greek, it means anyone. Everyone, you and I lay eyes on, every person in this room or is watching online, or will be listening to this podcast, no matter what you have done, or haven't done, whatever experiences, relationships, or words you've been carrying around that define you, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. Hallelujah!  
Hallelujah!

New creation means exactly that, new creation. And Paul is pointing back to Genesis 1:1, where we read, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," and then the next verse says, "The earth was formless and empty." Now the Hebrew word for that phrase is *tohubohu*, and it means "chaos and disorder." The point is that God created order and life out of all that disorder and chaos. He brought it together and transformed it. He created light and dark out of it, land and sea out of it, plants and animals, you and me. He transformed the chaos.

Now sin brought that chaos and disorder back into our world. It's anti-creation because it wrecks us. It wrecks us, it wrecks our relationships with each other, it wrecks our relationship with God, and on cross, Jesus absorbed all our chaos and disorder, past, present, and future.  
Hallelujah!

And then he paid the price for it all.  
Hallelujah!

Amen. The good news of the gospel is that when we give our life to Jesus Christ, we are instantly made a new creation. He transforms all of our chaos and turns it into life. Life eternal. The old is gone. The old has gone. Now notice that's past tense, "gone." I even messed it up when I said it to you. It's past tense. Gone. Not someday gone, not kind of gone, not maybe gone, coming back, sort of. It is gone. Sin gone, shame gone, brokenness gone, chains gone, the moral failures of our past gone. God remembers them no more. Our past is past.

Hallelujah!

The new has come. Holy Spirit in you, new life in you, new hope in front of you, new purpose within you.

Yes.

Freedom. Freedom. Hallelujah. Amen. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. We are, therefore, Christ ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. Now reconciliation means making peace with others. It's about healing relationships. That's what we do as Christ ambassadors. We bring Jesus healing, and being an ambassador means we represent Jesus. We work on his behalf. We live his life. We love with his love. We bring his heaven to this earth.

Okay, that's our passage. That's the Bible study. It's a quick run right through it. Let me share this with you. Now a woman in our church, she told me that she and a friend had been praying for their neighborhood, and then she told the neighbors that they were praying for them. These women would get together, they'd share their joys and struggles in their lives, and then they pray for each other, and then they'd pray for the neighborhood. Well, great things started to happen. Neighbors started calling them up

and asking for them to pray for the neighbors, and a couple of the neighbors had these significant medical issues. Well, the neighbors put together this meal train and they started bringing all these meals over to take care of this family, or these two families, and they started doing other things to help them.

It was amazing because nothing like that had ever happened to that neighborhood. It was changing. It was transforming. And the woman said to me, "People are attracted by compassion and care. They respond really well to it." I love that. "They respond really well to it." Yes, they do. Now this woman and her friend, they are this picture, a picture of what Paul is inviting us to in this passage. And the passage means four things for us today. The first one is this. You and I, we have a new identity, and one of the things that I love is just hanging out my neighborhood, watching new neighbors move in.

The previous owner moves out, the new owner moves in, and they usually start fixing stuff up. Stuff that's broken, been neglected, needs servicing, stuff the owner never got around to or didn't care much about. The new owners might patch some walls. There's always painting involved, maybe an argument or two as they're working together. But my wife and I, we literally cheered the day that we ditched, chucked, got rid of our '70s style red shag carpet that was throughout our house. Actually, it was rust color. Awful. Anybody familiar with shag carpet? You feel my wince. Just awful.

Well, slowly these homes, they start looking better. They're being transformed because there is a new owner living there. And here's the point. When you and I make Jesus our most important relationship, we are under new ownership. Jesus died, paid the full price for us. That immediately makes us just like that, new creations. Now the Holy Spirit lives in us. Now this Holy Spirit starts making us more and more like the people Jesus wants us to be. More compassionate, more gracious, humble, more like Jesus. So we are new creations who are being created newer.

Hallelujah!

He's remaking you and me into the best version of the you and me God created us to be. That means and gives us better relationships, better marriages. It makes us better employees and better bosses. Now we talk a lot upfront about how that happens, listening and obeying to the nudges from the Holy Spirit, like reading and obeying scripture, like prayer, like serving other people. And just over the last couple weeks, you may have heard us say more and more that if you are able, please, and I'm speaking particularly to those of you who are watching online, please come back to in-person worship. We miss you. If you're able, we would love for you to come back and join us, and for those of you who are in the room, thank you for being here and bring others. There is just something unique and special, spiritually, when we come together in worship, when together we realign our lives around God's truth in worship. Yep, yep.

Better together. We are new creations being created newer. We're all under construction, every one of us, which leads me to the second thing this passage shows us. We are part of a new story. Now when we say yes to Jesus, we become part this story, this new story, and it's a story about God who created out of love, created us for relationship with himself, but the people back then, they rebelled and they rejected God. Now God could have started all over. He could have just done a do-over, creation 2.0, but God never gives up on you or on me. So he sent a man, Abraham, and then a nation, Israel, and then a savior. Jesus came to rescue us all.

He came to show us what God looks like, and he came to start a kingdom movement called the Kingdom of God, which was about bringing heaven on earth, broken relationships restored, sicknesses healed, justice for the poor and the oppressed. And in return, the people back then hung him on a cross until he died. But three days later, God raised him from the dead. Jesus is alive. And ever since that day, sickness and division, injustice and oppression, those will never be the end of God's story because Jesus rose again from the dead, and he is coming back to finish what he started.

Our father's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. We live in this in-between time, this time between when Jesus first came and inaugurated this kingdom movement, and the time when Jesus will return and fully bring it to its completion. So we have a job to do in this interim time, and I'm going to say more about that in a minute, but that's a very different story than the story that our culture is living into, a story of pursuing happiness, power and success, and this endless drive to perform in order to achieve it all.

Now, there's certainly more to that story, for sure. But I want to just say that these are two different stories, and when we live Jesus-centered lives, we don't fit in that old story so well anymore, right? So we have, really, three options. We can withdraw from the culture and all the chaos and the disorder that that brings, or secondly, we can accommodate, we can compromise, make all kinds of compromises, so we really don't look any different than culture, we're these incognito Christians, or third, we can engage the culture around us with a new identity as people who are part of different story, living in this in-between time.

Now that's hard stuff, but it's what Jesus calls us to do. So what story are you living in? Where or with whom might the Holy Spirit be nudging you to engage? That brings me to the third thing that this passage means for us, and it means that we have a new perspective. You see, we see others, and even ourselves, with a new sense of what truly matters. We look at it all with different eyes. We see everyone as Jesus sees them, no matter their age, stage, color, gender, or whatever is going on in their life. They are made in God's image, created to flourish and to thrive.

That's what the first Christians were notorious for. They saw people who God meant them to be, so they gave generously and they shared what they had for the poor. They saw a disease and sickness as part of the brokenness of this temporary world. So

they took care of the sick and they stayed with the dying, even at risk of their own lives. They saw a world created for a relationship with God, yet missing out on it. So they shared the Gospel wherever they went.

That's what changed the Roman world. It wasn't a strategic plan that they all sat around and drew up one day. It was them simply being focused on Jesus, imitating him the best that they could, no matter what. They lived as new creations in a new story with a new perspective.

Now, not too long ago, I was talking with a friend of mine who told me that he just started and mentoring a neighbor's son. And his son is 29 years old, and he's a heroin addict. He's stolen from neighbors. He's been arrested several times. His behavior is so bad that one person in the neighborhood doesn't even want to look at this kid anymore, or this guy anymore. And as he was telling me, my friend, as he was telling me about this son, he said to me, "How can I be a Christian and not help?"

Now, God, isn't calling every one of us to do something like that. Some of us can't, but God is calling us to look at people differently and to have the courage to ask God, "What are you asking me to do about this situation?" So what do you see? What bothers you? What brings a tear to your eye or causes you to pound on your fist on the table? We have a new identity. We are part of a new story. We see with a new perspective, and lastly, we have a new purpose.

Now, Paul calls us Christ ambassadors, and however that feels to you at its most basic level, it means that you and I, we have a new purpose. We bring heaven to earth. We bring God's peace, his healing, and his wholeness for everyone, anyone. And the beautiful thing about our job is that it's so daily. We get to do this every day with every person that we greet, everywhere we go, school, the grocery store, our kids' soccer game. We get to change the atmosphere of the places that we are in. Heaven on earth.

Now, one of my favorite things to do around Christmas is to go to Auto Angels Christmas party. Now Auto Angels is this ministry that fixes up cars for people who are in chronic poverty, and they're always looking for volunteers, but they partnered with a few auto shops in our area who help them, but for not much money. So the Christmas party is really for those people in the auto shop, and we go to a restaurant and the whole evening starts off with this social hour, happy hour thing. And the first party I attended, there was this guy behind me who was asking his friend if it was okay to buy a beer. See, he wasn't sure that it was okay to drink at a church event.

We were in a restaurant. He got the beer, and then he sat down for dinner, and the guy ended up sitting right behind me. Now one of the Auto Angels welcomed everyone, and then another one stood up, prayed for the meal, and as we started to eat, a couple guys stood up and they shared their testimony. One of them got so choked up as he shared the impact that Jesus had been making in his life as a result of this ministry. You could hear a pin drop.

Well, after the meal, the guys thanked the auto shops, handed out some awards for different things the guys had done, we closed in prayer, sang a couple of Christmas carols. We were having church right there in that restaurant. The guy behind me couldn't even believe it. I just kept hearing him say things like, "This is cool. This is so cool. I can't believe this. I didn't know churches did this. What church is this? How do I go to a church like this?"  
Hallelujah.

That's heaven on earth, right? That's heaven on earth. Those Auto Angels are new creations, knowing they're part of a new story, engaging their culture with a new perspective in creative ways to bring heaven on earth. So here's your homework. This week, ask yourself, "What story am I living in?" Pray, "God, what do you want me to see?" Third, commit to do one thing the Holy Spirit is nudging you to do to bring heaven on earth.

Now I've learned that bad sermons happen, but they don't define me. Only Jesus does that. Only Jesus makes the unrighteous righteous, turns sinners into saints, transforms lost people into his followers. You are a new creation. That's what defines you. That is who God says you are. The question is, "Do you believe it?" We believe in God, but do we believe God when he tells us who we are? New creations with a new identity, living in a new story, with a new perspective, for a new purpose. You are a new creation.  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

So believe it BelPres. Live it. So Jesus, we worship you for this amazing condition that we are in as new creations. We owe it all to you. We owe it all to you. And Holy Spirit, we invite you more and more into our lives. Do this work of transformation. Change us more and more to be like you. Jesus, help us bring your heaven on earth. Give us courage. Give us faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.  
Amen.

---

**Discussion Questions:** Ezekiel 37:11-14, 2 Corinthians 5:14-20

---

*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Questions:**

- Icebreaker: If you had to describe your week this week as a sandwich, what kind of sandwich would it be?
- 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:**

- 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:*

- What does Paul mean by "new creation? What's new? What has gone away?
- What is the ministry of reconciliation? What does this mean to you and how can you participate in it?

**Closing Question and Application:**

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

**Closing Group Prayer:**

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.