

BELPRES CHURCH

Better Than New

Mark 16:7

Speaker: Scott Dudley

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Well, hello to all of you. Thank you so much. If you don't know me, my name is Scott Dudley and I'm the lead pastor here. We are so glad that you are here to celebrate Easter with us. Thank you. Thank you for being here. The promise of Easter is not just that Jesus restores dead things to life, he does that, but the deeper promise of Easter is that Jesus restores all things to better than new. At Easter, we celebrate the fact that after Jesus was crucified and he was dead, he was buried. Three days later, he rose from the dead, but when he came back, he didn't come back in his old body. He came back in a better than new body that would never know pain, suffering, or death again. And if we follow him, if he is our leader and our forgiver, we will come back not as disembodied souls floating around on clouds playing harps all day, thank God.

Because that seems like it could get boring after a while, right? That's not in the Bible. That's Plato, that's the Greeks. That's Bugs Bunny cartoons. We come back in a better than new body that will never know pain, suffering, or death again. But it's not just us. Jesus restores all things, not to just how they were before the divorce or the health crisis or the financial challenge or whatever it is. He restores things to better than new. And not just if you have problems, because sometimes I think we preachers make it sound like Jesus is good if you've got problems and hardships and you're kind of needy, but otherwise, don't worry about him. But no, even when things are going great, with Jesus, there's always more, and I'll get to that in a bit. Jesus restores to better than new in a couple of ways.

First, Jesus restores us to better than we were before sin wrecked us. And sin is kind of a funky word. It just basically means that deep down, we all know there's some messed up stuff about us. I know that there is some messed up stuff in me. We hurt people. We think and do things we hope nobody discovers in our lives. And even when we think we're doing great, right? Boom, there, suddenly you're doing something that you later on

regret. Even when you think you're going on a good path, suddenly you're doing something that you regret. Pastor friend of mine was officiating a wedding for a man that he had mentored for 10 years, and the pastor wanted the wedding to go really well, and he thought it was going really well. And then he got to the vows and he said, "Okay, now Catherine and Mark, join your hands and say your vows." Problem was, the groom's name was Matt, not Mark.

Mark was one of the groomsmen. So Matt just stepped aside to see if Mark would like to maybe step in and do the vows. Sin is like that. We're cruising along, thinking everything's going on, and boom, suddenly we do stuff we regret, mistakes, sins and all religions except Jesus, say the way to deal with that is to work really hard to earn God's approval, follow a bunch of rules. Karma says, all the bad stuff we do will come back and bite us, but Jesus is different than all those others. First, because he's real, but also because Jesus dies on a cross to pay the price for our sins. The price that we know needs to be paid. And the reason we know it needs to be paid is when someone hurts us, we want them to pay a price or else we don't feel like there's justice.

Jesus pays that price for us on the cross. He gets bitten for our bad karma. So we are forgiven and restored, not just to who we were before but better than you because now Jesus puts his Holy Spirit in us, and over time we gradually become more and more like him if we follow him. See, following Jesus doesn't make me better than other people. It makes me better than I was, that I used to be. In the Bible, there's a group of women, they discover that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and there's an angel there and he says, "Go tell his disciples and Peter." Okay, Peter was one of the disciples, so that's kind of redundant. But see, Peter was also the one who after swearing that he would never abandon Jesus, denied even knowing him three times because he was afraid and he ran away and he's filled with shame and he's filled with remorse and guilt over it.

So the angel singles out Peter because he really wants him to know, that Peter to know that he's forgiven and that he's going to be restored, not just to how he was, the old Peter, but better than new Peter. This time was so much courage. Eventually he is willing to be crucified himself for following Jesus. My wife recently came across this book called *The House of Dudley*, which is a history of the Dudley family from which I'm descended. And the Dudley family was one of the most powerful and noble families in England way back in the 16th century. Okay, this is what the book description says, "The shocking story of adultery, treachery, the most conniving, manipulative family you've never heard of." What? My answer, she's going to put that on her resume. The first chapter is titled *Nest of Traitors*. Okay, that's just hurtful. I mean, it's true.

Several Dudleys were beheaded for treason and others had to flee to America to escape. And that's how you go from being one of the most powerful families in England to farmers in eastern Washington. Okay, let that be a lesson to you. But must we write a book about it? Can't we just let it go? But see, our shame is like that, right? We can't let it

go, and it seems to not let us go. But Jesus pays the price, we know needs paid so that we know we're forgiven because justice has been served. And gradually he makes us better than new. Jesus also restores our circumstances to better than new. Now, you may think, "Yeah, yeah, pastor, you don't know my circumstance. Man, what I'm facing right now in school or career or health or finances, you don't know." You don't know how bad my circumstances are.

You're right. I don't. But I do know that that first Easter came out of some of the most hopeless situations... The most hopeless situation imaginable. Jesus had been crucified. That's hopeless. But he was raised from the dead, which shows that he has power that brings life out of death, good out of bad. His power can conquer all things. And sometimes that means he will change our circumstances, or other times our circumstances don't change, but our experience of them does change, and we can go through them with more hope and more joy and more courage. I heard a man named Keith talk about how growing up he had a very physically abusive father. It was so bad that he would sometimes fear for his life. That's how bad the abuse was. And his father would always say to him, "You aren't worth one thin dime." And Keith, as he grew, as he got older, spent most of his life living up to that label and that prophecy over him, "You're not worth one thin dime."

Lot of destructive behavior eventually wrecked his marriage. They ended up in divorce, and then after that, for some reason, in his truck radio, it got broken. And the only radio station that worked was a Christian station, which really annoyed him. It would've really annoyed me as well, maybe how some of you feel if you were dragged here today against your will by a relative. But over time, the music, the conversations on that radio station began to sink in and he started to pray and he started to read the Bible and he'd never felt loved in his entire life, but began to experience the supernatural love of Jesus. And then he began to follow Jesus. And the closer he got to Jesus, the more that destructive behavior began to diminish. Not all at once. It was a process that took several years, but feeling loved by Jesus made him more loving to people around him, including his ex-wife.

And eventually they actually ended up getting remarried. Well, then down the road, he decided that he wanted to sell his truck, but he wanted to keep the broken radio because it had started a process that had changed his life. But when he removed the radio from the truck, guess what fell out? One thin dime. Now, who knows if that's what broke the radio. I mean, it doesn't really matter. Keith took that as a sign from Jesus that he was worth way more than a dime. He was so valuable. Jesus died for him. Jesus restored him not just to how he was before, restored him to better than new, less anger, fewer destructive behaviors, more love, more hope, more joy, more courage. And I don't know where you're at with Jesus today. Maybe you've been burned by Christians who did not treat you well. They were not the voice of Jesus to you.

They were not the voice of Jesus to you. Or maybe you have a hard time believing that Jesus really was raised from the dead. Totally understandable. It's kind of a whopper. I used to not believe it myself. If that's you, I'd encourage you to read a document that you can pick up in the lobby on your way out at the welcome desk, or it's on our website and it lists, it gives some of the reasons, the proofs we have that Jesus really was raised from the dead in history. I'd encourage you to grab that if you want to know more. But the best proof that Jesus is real is what he can do in your life and in mine, to make us and our circumstances better than you. And not just in hard times, but even when things are going great, everything, marriage, career, school, finances, everything up and to the right.

Even then with Jesus, there is always more. And if we follow him, he will lead us into adventures we never dreamed of as we partner with him and his rescue mission to the world, to bring his justice and his healing and his hope. We'll see lives changed in ways we never thought were possible, which will give us a sense of purpose and meaning, depth in relationship you never thought you'd have. And there are hundreds and hundreds of people in this church who will tell you that has been their experience of Jesus. Everything from bringing hope to prisoners, to healing in places like Rwanda and Congo where there's been genocide, all kinds of adventures. Jesus gives us a bigger life. Friend of mine and a former president of Fuller Seminary, Mark Labberton tells a story about an 87-year-old woman named Doris, who was part of his church when he was a pastor in Berkeley, California.

And Doris had followed Jesus for decades. Well, one Sunday someone told Mark that something terrible had happened to Doris on the way to church. So after church, Mark went to her house and said, "Well, what happened?" And Doris said, "Well, I had just parked and I was reaching in the back seat for those nut muffins, you know those nut muffins I bring to church sometimes. And then somebody struck me from behind, put me in the passenger seat, grabbed my keys, and off we went. So I asked him, what is your name? And he said, Jesse." And then Doris said, "Jesse, what's happening?" And Jesse said, "I need money and I'm going to steal it from you." And then in a series of stops at various ATMs, Jesse took as much money from her as he possibly could. And as they were driving the whole time, Doris kept talking to him.

And at one point she said, "Jesse, why are you doing this?" And he said, "Because I'm a drug addict and I need the money." And Doris said, "Oh, Jesse, being a drug addict is going to wreck your life. Oh, it's just going to destroy your life. Jesus loves you. He has more for you than this, and you need Jesus and you need rehab." And Jesse said, "I've tried rehab. None of it ever worked." And they continued to talk. This went on for a while. She kept talking to him like that. Finally, he pulled over because he was done. He was going to leave, but Doris said she couldn't get out of the car. So Jesse went to the passenger side of the car, helped her out, got her back in the driver's seat, reached in, put the seatbelt around her, and as he did, he kissed her on the cheek.

Now, I'm guessing he doesn't kiss everyone he robs. There had to be something in Doris that made him feel loved, not judged. And Doris says, "I'm going to pray for you that you find Jesus and that you get into rehab so that you can have a better life." And Mark is listening to all of this, and he said, "Doris, I came here to be your pastor, but maybe you'd like to just close us in prayer. Because I feel pastored myself," right? Well, Jesse did get caught, and Doris was called as a witness in his trial.

And she got in the witness box and she said, "Hi, Jesse, remember me? We had that time together in the car." And then she said to the judge, "I'm going to take care of his real need, which is he needs to know Jesus. That's not your concern. I'm going to take care of that. But Judge, I want you to put him in a really good rehab place. He's had others before. They were bad ones. They didn't work. Judge, I want you to put... He needs a really good rehab place. Please put him in a really good rehab place."

Jesse was convicted. He went to jail and Doris visited him every week to show him that he's more than a drug addict. He's loved, and he's valued by her and by Jesus. And eventually, Jesse was moved to another facility where she couldn't visit him. So she doesn't know how his story ends, but however it ends, Jesse got to experience Jesus' love through Doris. And it must have made an impression. Why else would he have kissed her on the cheek? Now, I have a question for you. Is some 87 year old grandma braver than you?

Yes.

Yeah, pretty much me too. Pretty much me too, right? But I want to be like Doris. I want to be like Doris, who even as she was being kidnapped and robbed of all of her money, the only thing she cared about, her only focus was on Jesse, not herself. I want to be like Doris because she led her life with love, not fear, not because there wasn't danger, there was tons of danger. But because her fear had been recalibrated by the presence of Jesus in that moment. But most importantly, I want to be like Doris, because Doris wants to be like Jesus, who while hanging on the cross, asked God to forgive the same people that had nailed him to it. Jesus who has God in the flesh, experienced suffering and hardship and rejection and pain and death. And he did all of that with only one thought in his mind.

And that was you. And that was me. That we would be set free by his death and resurrection. The hero of this story isn't Doris. It's Jesus. Because see, that kind of character doesn't just happen. That's the result, that's the end product of following Jesus. The hero of this story is Jesus, who year by year made Doris not just new as she followed him, but better than new. Mark says it was about the same time that there was a professor at UC Berkeley, who was the youngest person to ever be tenured in his department. And he was a major star in his field. And he got to know Mark a little bit. And one day he said, "You know, Mark, I've listened to some of your sermons about how helpful Jesus can be for needy people and people who are going through some crisis or problem. But that's not my story. I've gotten everything I've ever wanted. I just don't know

what the purpose and the meaning of it all is. So are you telling me that if I come to your church, that I'll meet people who are actually like Jesus?"

Well, now there's a question for a pastor, right? I hope so. I think so. Mark said, "Yeah, there are some people like that." And Mark said the first person he wanted this man to meet was Doris. And this man eventually did become a follower of Jesus. And he is bit by bit becoming better than new. Because the power that raised Jesus from the dead is not a middling sort of power. It is the power that makes an 87-year-old woman brave enough to bring Jesus' hope and healing even as she's being robbed to the person that's robbing her. It's the power that sets captives free, and it breaks every chain.

And it empowers timid hearts. It smashes addictions. It loosens the grip of sin. It eradicates shame. It is the power that destroys every dividing wall of hostility between people. It heals all things. It transforms all things. It brings good out of bad, life out of death, hope out of despair. It is the power that can do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all you can ask or even imagine according to that power working within you. It is the power of Jesus to make all things, and that includes you and me, not just new. He makes all things better than new. Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

Jesus, thank you. That's what you do, thank you for your power that we see in your resurrection. Thank you Lord for the ways that you change us and transform us, and not just us, but the world around us. So Lord, help us to experience that. Help us to even this Easter leave just a little bit different, connected more to you as you bit by bit make us better than new. So that we can participate with you in your rescue mission to transform this whole world. And Lord, we will give you our thanks, and we will give you our praise, and we will point to you as the author of our transformation. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

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

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures):

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

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.