

All

THINGS

New



Touching Lives
with James Merritt

ALL THINGS NEW

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Series Summary

As we near the end of another year, we can have a renewed sense of hope that what is coming will be better than what has been. The past couple of years have been tough for our community, our nation, and our world. But that doesn't mean that we have to lose hope. We're not looking for a restart, but a reset. In this series, we're going to look at how we can experience a reset when we surrender it all to Jesus. After all, the only life worth living is the one spent following Him. He is the Way. He is the Truth. He is the Life. And He is our only hope if we want to stay hopeful in a world that makes us feel as if all hope is lost.

Worship: Right From The Heart

All Things New | Week 1 | Romans 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION

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If I were to ask ten people in this room to write down their definition of worship you would get ten different answers. Amazingly, though the Bible talks very much about worship and describes what worship looks like, worship is really only defined in one place that I can find in the Bible, and that is in Romans 12. In this passage, Paul tells us that worship is giving all that I am to all that God is. That means you can come to church. You can lift your hands. You can sing at the top of your lungs. You can listen to every word that is preached and take copious notes. You can even drop a dime or a dollar in the offering, but you have not worshipped until you have given all that you are to all that God is.

KEY POINTS

1. Take The Road Of Total Dedication

If we want to worship the way Scripture instructs us to, we have to be completely dedicated and surrendered to God. True worship is placing all of you – your desires, your wants, your privileges, your rights, your demands, your goals – on the altar of the sacrifice you make every day. Worship is a total sacrifice.

But our problem is that we don't want to sacrifice ourselves. We want to give God things. We want to give God some of our money. We only want to give God a certain amount of our time. However, you will never ever get to true worship until you understand God is not after your money or your time. God wants you! Jesus didn't die for your money. He didn't die for your time. He died for you! To put it simply, what God wants is your complete surrender.

2. See The Result Of A Spiritual Transformation

One sure fire way you can know you have truly worshipped God and that you are truly a worshipper of God is that your life will never be the same. You will see this world through the eyes of God. You will hear this world through the ears of God. You will think about this world with the mind of God. This is what Paul means when he writes, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Romans 1:2).

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The way that this change takes place is by the renewing of the mind. You cannot worship God and think the way the world thinks and see things the way the world sees things. When you worship God, He not only changes your heart, He changes your mind.

3. Get The Reward Of Personal Revelation

Once you worship God through total dedication and then you experience that spiritual transformation, you will get the greatest reward in this life: “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

You cannot separate the worship of God from the will of God. It is the will of God that you worship Him, and when you truly worship Him, He will reveal His will to you. Here is a principle to remember – When you do what God wants you to do, He will reveal to you what to do when you don’t know what to do.

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All Things New | Week 1 | Romans 12:1-2

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is there an area of your life that you have yet to completely dedicate and surrender to God? What is holding you back from letting go and surrendering fully to Him?
2. How have you seen God transform your mind and your heart as you've engaged in worship?
3. What is a personal revelation you've been praying for God to give you?

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Serve: Opening My Gift

All Things New | Week 2 | 1 Peter 4:10-11

INTRODUCTION

If you are a follower of Christ, you have been called to be a minister for Christ, to serve others with the gifts and talents you've been given. What's more, you will maximize your fulfillment in life, your enjoyment of life, and your impact in life when you find the sweet spot of serving other people. A disciple called Peter wrote a book called I Peter in which there are several reasons why we should not look at serving as something we have to do, but something we should want to do. Let's look at those reasons right now.

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KEY POINTS

1. I Am Gifted For Service

Serving is not just what you do; a servant is what you are. Serving is not just an action; it is an attitude. We all ought to have a servant's heart and when we do, we will have serving hands. We all have various abilities, passions, gifts, and interests that God has given us, and we are to leverage those for the service of other people.

God never asks us to do anything without giving us both the power to do it and the equipment to do it. We hear that we have all received at least one gift, and just as a gift is to be unwrapped and used, so is your spiritual gift. God made you the way you are and gave you the gifts He did so you can accomplish what He wants you do for His kingdom by serving others.

2. Others Are Gratified By Service

I was reading the other day about the rhinoceros; a two-horned terror of unbelievable speed, size and agility and feared by all the other creatures in the jungle. However, there is one creature that has no fear of the rhinoceros and it is called the "Buffalo bird." These birds perch on the back of the rhino and some even peck into the rhino's back just like a woodpecker pecks on wood. Some fly around the head and others perch on the ears. But the rhino doesn't attack and doesn't get angry, because he knows what that Buffalo bird is doing.

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You see, rhinos have poor eyesight, and their bodies are covered with parasites which they can't control. Buffalo birds love to eat parasites. And then when danger is in the area, the birds will let out a shrill call warning the rhinos of what they can't see. That little Buffalo bird does a great service to that rhino and in return, the Buffalo bird doesn't fear any predator, because it is on the back of the most dangerous animal in the jungle.

Now, if God can use a little Buffalo bird to serve a mighty rhino, don't you doubt for a moment that God cannot use you and the gifts He has given you to be a great benefit and to gratify other people.

3. God Is Glorified By Service

When you serve God, you get a "two-for-one." Not only are others gratified by your service, but most importantly God is glorified by your service. You were put here on this earth to glorify God. If you are a believer, you will spend eternity glorifying God. That is why the scripture plainly says, "Whatever you do, you do all to the glory of God."

There is one simple way you can evaluate anything you are thinking about doing in your life, or with your life, at any given moment, and that is to ask this question: "Is what I am doing or about to do would be glorifying to God?"

I am convinced that so much of what we do in life really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter today, and it won't matter tomorrow. But the things that will always matter are the things that will gratify others and glorify God. So let us be diligent in making sure that what we do, what we say, and how we spend our time and talents bring glory to the Father.

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All Things New | Week 2 | 1 Peter 4:10-11

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What are one or two spiritual gifts God has given you?
2. How are you using those gifts to serve others right now? If you're not currently using them, what are some ways you can begin to utilize them to serve?
3. When was a time you were blessed by someone else using their God-given gifts? How does that motivate you to use your own gifts to bless others?

Sent: Send Me

All Things New | Week 3 | Isaiah 6:1-9

INTRODUCTION

I truly believe that the best life, the greatest life and the only life to live is the cross-shaped life. That is a life where we worship, we are discipled, we serve and then we are sent. Now, please understand that this is not an idea I made up. It actually comes from a vision that a prophet named Isaiah had 2800 years ago. Isaiah had a front-row seat to see who God really is and it changed his life forever. From that moment on, he became a “sent” person. The reasons he was sent are the same reasons that we should want to be sent as well. Let’s look at those reasons right now.

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KEY POINTS

1. We Are Sent Because Of The Holiness Of God

I believe that the single most important picture of God you will find in all the Old Testament is in today’s key passage, because by reading Isaiah’s words, we learn what really makes God “God” and who God really is. He is the “Holy” God.

If you went through all the lexicons, dictionaries, and every thesaurus of this world to choose one word that would characterize God, it would have to be “holy.” God is a holy God. Every twelve references to the name of God in the Old Testament refers to God as “holy.” That adjective is used for God more often than all the other adjectives in the Old Testament put together. In other words, the chief attribute of God is not mercy, grace, love, compassion, power, or knowledge. The chief attribute of God is holiness.

2. We Are Sent Because Of The Heart Of God

When you look at the cross, you see the heart of God. When you look at the tears of Jesus, you see the heart of God. When you look at the nail-scarred hands of Jesus, you see the heart of God. When you see the suffering of Jesus, you see the heart of God. When you see the death of Jesus you see the heart of God.

The God of both the Old Testament and the New Testament is not primarily a God of condemnation; He is the God of salvation. His first instinct is not to judge sin; His first instinct is to atone for sin. It is because of the heart of God that we are sent. God has a heart for everyone we know without Christ to have their sins atoned for by Christ.

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3. We Are Sent Because Of The Hope Of God

As you well know we no longer have a draft in this country. We have a totally volunteer army. The only people that serve in the military are the people that volunteer to be sent. God also has a volunteer army, but there is one big difference. He expects everybody to volunteer. He expects everybody to take up their weapon, put on the uniform, take the oath, go through boot camp, and go wherever you are sent.

As any soldier might expect you are not always sent to easy places. The work is not easy, but we are still to be sent. We are to share the best news, but we are going to run into hearts that are hard, eyes that are blind, ears that are deaf. Yes, you will get more “no’s” than you will get “yes’s.” But what you need to understand is that your mission is accomplished once you go and once you share. Then everything else is up to God.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How would you define the word “holy” in your own words?
2. When was the last time you saw the heart of God on display in your own life?
3. Do you have an attitude of willingness to be sent by God or are you fighting hesitation to follow Him? If the latter is true, what is causing you to hesitate?

Disciple: Conquering Cultural Christianity

All Things New | Week 4 | Luke 9:23

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest problems we have in the church is that we have too many people who have made decisions, but too few people who have become disciples. What we have in the church more often than not are not disciples; we have cultural Christians. These are people who proudly bear the label of Christian, but they don't truly live the life of a disciple. The only cure for cultural Christianity is discipleship. In Luke chapter nine, Jesus tells us what it takes to become a disciple in just one sentence. I am going to reverse engineer what Jesus said and show you four marks of a cultural Christian. As I do, I want you to decide whether or not you are a true disciple or a cultural Christian.

KEY POINTS

1. A Cultural Christian Wants To Follow Jesus If It Is Convenient. A Disciple Wants To Follow Jesus Even If It Is Not.

The first step to becoming a disciple is you have to desire to become one. "Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple...'" (Luke 9:23). Now this is an invitation from Jesus, not a command. Jesus is only looking for people who want to become his disciple. You have a choice in the matter. Jesus will not force discipleship on anybody, but notice this. There is a difference between saying you want to follow Jesus and wanting to follow Jesus.

I love those first two words, "Whoever wants." Those words really surprise me. I would have thought Jesus would have said, "Since everybody wants to be my disciple." The more I know about Jesus, the more I don't understand why everybody doesn't want to follow Jesus. It just boggles my mind that most people refuse to follow Jesus. But here Jesus makes it clear that He only wants people to follow him who want to follow him. He will not force you to follow Him and He will not coerce you to follow Him. He wants you to want to follow Him. It's just that simple.

2. A Cultural Christian Asks, "What Can Jesus Do For Me?" A Disciple Asks, "What Can I Do For Jesus?"

So many people come to church and come to Jesus with the attitude of, "What can I get out of this?" They have a very self-focused, self-serving mentality.

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But that’s not at all what Jesus has asked His disciples to do. If you are going to be a disciple of Jesus, that means for the rest of your life you have to put Jesus before you, above you, ahead of you, and instead of you. You’ve got to come to the point where your life is all of Jesus and none of you.

Once you realize what Jesus has done for you and you receive the Jesus that has done so much for you, you refocus every part of your life on this question, “What can I do for Jesus?”

3. A Cultural Christian Enjoys The Benefits Of The Cross. A Disciple Embraces The Sacrifices Of The Cross.

You don’t become a disciple just by believing that Jesus died for you; you become a disciple when every day you die to you. To get to heaven, you have to die in this life, but to get to Jesus, you’ve got to die to your life. Death is the ultimate surrender of your heart, your life, your desires, and your possessions to God.

One other thing to notices is that being a disciple is not a part-time job. You never get a day off. He says you have to take up your cross daily. Today, the number one thing you have to do to start your day is to have a funeral. You will either live for Christ and die to you, or you will live for you and die to Christ. It is not a one-time decision. You have to die to yourself every single day.

4. A Cultural Christian Is A Fan Of Jesus. A Disciple Is A Follower Of Jesus.

I never ever refer to myself as a Christian because the term has become basically meaningless. I much prefer to refer to myself as “a follower of Jesus.” I can tell you, though, that oftentimes that term convicts me. Sometimes I act more like a fan and not a follower.

With this in mind, I want to make two things extremely clear. First, you cannot follow Jesus unless you give up everything to Jesus. And second, the only Jesus worth following is the Jesus who demands you give up everything. You learn in the Christian life you have to give up to grow up. And you do that by becoming a disciple, being discipled, and becoming a disciple maker.

If you desire to become a disciple and if you accept Jesus’ invitation, you just signed up to deny yourself, die to yourself and devote yourself completely to Jesus. But even though it sounds like a heavy decision, I promise it is a decision you will never regret.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. After going through the four differences between a cultural Christian and a disciple, which category do you see yourself falling under?
2. If other people were asked to describe your relationship with Christ, would they describe you as a fan of Jesus or a follower of Jesus?
3. When you walk into church, or when you begin your daily quiet time with the Lord, do you have the attitude of, “What can Jesus do for me?” or “What can I do for Jesus?”?
