



LOST IN **TRANSLATION**



Touching Lives
with James Merritt

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Series Summary

I don't believe there has ever been a time that the church needs to hear more sound theology than today. There is no more important doctrine to discuss than what the entire Bible is all about. But sometimes, what the Bible says can get lost in translation, and that's what I want to make sure doesn't keep happening as we dive into this series.

As you read about salvation in the Bible, salvation seems a lot like a kaleidoscope.

When you begin to turn it, you see different aspects, different virtues, different qualities, and different colors. There are various words that are used to describe the whole process of salvation from beginning to end and that is what we're going to look at in this series. As we do, I pray that together we will gain a better understanding of God's Word and His definitions and descriptions of salvation.

Regeneration: Where It Begins

Lost In Translation | Week 1 | John 3:1-13

INTRODUCTION

Today, we’re going to kick this series off by talking about where salvation begins, and that is with regeneration. Regeneration is where God gives a person who is spiritually dead spiritual life so they can truly see the truth with their eyes, hear the truth with their ears, and respond to the truth with their heart. Simply put, without this new birth, no matter what else you do, no matter what else happens you will never enter the Kingdom of God and you will never know the God of the kingdom. So in this message, we are going to look at how that “new birth” happens and what takes place in our lives when we are born again.

KEY POINTS

1. Perceive The Reality Of The New Birth

If we are going to experience true salvation, we need a new life - a new life that only God can give because a new birth is something only God can do for you. We all got here by birth, but we didn’t choose to be born. We didn’t choose where we were born. We didn’t choose when we were born. We didn’t choose what family we were born into. Our birth is something that happened to us without any effort on our part whatsoever.

The same thing is true of spiritual birth. If we are going to come to God and come to know God, He must give us a new life. Because we were birthed in the physical world, we must be birthed into the spiritual world. We must see the reality of the new birth, and that is that we need God to give us a new life and a new birth.

2. Believe The Requirements Of The New Birth

When Jesus said, “You must be born again,” He chose a word that literally means “from above,” or “from a higher place.” In other words, the new birth comes from God and God alone.

A spiritual birth certificate cannot be issued by a government. It can only be issued by God. It is not for your body; it is for your spirit. A physical birth certificate is necessary for this life, but a spiritual birth certificate is necessary for the life to come and only God can give that certificate.

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In other words, we must be born again because physical birth only gets us into this life while spiritual birth gets us a life to come. Spiritual birth doesn't come from below it only comes from above. You can't buy it, borrow it, beg it or steal it. Only God can give it to you, and we must receive this birth from God. That is the requirement of the new birth – that it is God-given and God-granted.

3. Receive The Results Of The New Birth

As we look at today's key passage, we see that Nicodemus' real problem was not a lack of understanding; it was really a lack of belief. As we close out this message, I want you to remember two key words: believe and receive. What Jesus said in effect was this, "Nicodemus, perceive the new birth as a reality. If you believe the new birth is required, and if you will surrender to the new birth, you will receive the results of the new birth. When you are born again as a new person you will be different from the old person you used to be."

When a child is born, that child will bear the characteristics of two people: his mom and his dad. He has their nature. He has their looks. His personality is shaped and influenced by what they brought to him through conception. When you are born again and God becomes your Father, you will look like him, act like him, and live like him. You don't have to question whether or not a child comes from his mom or dad. He will bear their marks and so will a child of God. That Christ-like character is the result of the new birth.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is there any part of salvation that has been confusing to you in the past? If so, what confused you?
2. Can you identify with Nicodemus and feel like there are times you have understanding but you lack belief? When was a time you felt that way and what did you learn from that situation?
3. If you have been born again, what are some characteristics of God that are present in your life as a result of you being His child?

Repentance: The Right Turn

Lost In Translation | Week 2 | Luke 13:1-5

INTRODUCTION

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As we continue our series entitled “Lost In Translation,” we are going to answer the question, “What is repentance?” It is imperative that we understand this concept because the word is mentioned nine hundred and sixty-nine times in the Bible. When God talks about something once it is a big deal, but if He talks about it almost a thousand times it had better get our attention! Sadly, the word “repentance” seems like a forbidden word within the church and outside the church because the word implies that people have something they need to repent of, and of course, that sounds like you are judging others. Regardless, it is a word we cannot forget nor forsake, but rather one we need to zoom in on. That being said, in this message, I am going to share with you three ways to relate to this important principle of repentance.

KEY POINTS

1. We Are Commanded To Repent

Repentance is not an option; it is a command. The first word Jesus ever spoke was a command to repent. And the last word Jesus ever spoke he spoke to the church and it was the same command. “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent,” (Revelation 3:19).

The first thing we need to understand about repentance is we are commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ himself to repent. It is not just that everybody needs to repent. Everybody must repent if they are going to have a relationship with God. This isn’t something we can continue to ignore if we want to live lives that honor God and have strong, thriving relationships with our Heavenly Father.

2. We Are To Commit To Repent

If we are going to commit to repentance, we need to understand what true repentance looks like. Repentance isn’t just conviction. You can be convicted of your sin but not repent. You can even confess your sin and not repent. Repentance is remorse over your sin.

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Now hear me when I say that repentance includes conviction – that is the first step. It leads to confession where you agree with God about your sin. It is born out of contrition where you feel what God feels about your sin and ultimately it leads to conversion to a turning.

Repentance is when you turn from all that you are and all that you've done to all that He is and all that He has done. This is my definition of repentance: Repentance is true remorse over our sin, a determined renouncing of our sin, and a sincere resolve to forsake our sin and follow Jesus. This is the type of repentance we need to commit to if we want to be obedient to God with the way we live and the way we pursue Him.

3. We Are To Continue To Repent

One other thing we need to understand about repentance is that it's not a one-time deal. There is an initial repentance, but there is also a continual repentance. Repentance is not something you just do one time and then put it in a can or on a shelf.

Before you place your faith in Christ and become a believer you must be willing to repent of self and sin. You do an about-face and you are willing to take that 180° turn and turn from self to the Savior, from sin to salvation. Once you do that, there is no necessity for repenting in the sense of getting saved over and over again. The penalty for sin has been dismissed, but the presence of sin still remains.

When you turn to Christ, the real battle begins because you just declared war on the devil, sin, and the world, and they just declared war on you. Ultimately, we will win the war, but sometimes we lose the battle. So there are still times we have to confess sin and repent of sin. Initial repentance is for salvation. The continual repentance is for sanctification. The initial repentance is so that we will have a relationship with God, but the continual repentance is so we will maintain fellowship with God. Simply put, repentance is a one-time action followed by a continuous attitude.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. When was the last time you repented of your sin?
2. Why do you think Jesus mentioned repentance so many times in Scripture?
3. How can you implement a continuous attitude of repentance in your relationship with the Lord?

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Conversion: Total Transformation

Lost In Translation | Week 3 | Acts 9:1-20

INTRODUCTION

There is no greater illustration in the Bible of a complete and total conversion than of a man by the name of Paul. In fact, it may be the most famous conversion in history. His conversion is well documented. It is talked about in detail three times in the Book of Acts. In fact, the story of Paul's conversion occupies more space in the New Testament than any other event except the crucifixion of Jesus. It may be the most intense, in-your-face, radical encounter with Jesus in all of the New Testament. But even though Paul has one of the most talked about conversion stories of all time, that doesn't mean our own stories of conversion are any less miraculous. With that in mind, I want us in today's message to look at three things that happen anytime someone experiences conversion.

KEY POINTS

1. See The Light Of Truth

When Saul had the encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he finally saw the light of truth and believed, saying, "Jesus Christ is alive! He is the risen Lord!" In that moment, not only did everything change about Saul, but everything changed in Saul. The game changer was the resurrected Jesus. It wasn't the virgin-born Jesus that changed Saul. It wasn't even the crucified Christ that changed Saul. It was the resurrected Lord that changed Saul. At that moment, Saul changed his mind about everything he had ever thought about God, Jesus, and the church.

I promise you if you will simply ask this question, "Who are you Lord?" and you are truly open, you will find the right answer. He is the Lord. He is the resurrected, risen, reigning Lord and you will see the light of truth. You see, Paul had always believed that everyone else was living in spiritual darkness, but all of a sudden, he realized he was the one living in spiritual darkness. He realized that it wasn't his religion or his righteousness that mattered. It was the resurrection of Jesus that mattered. He saw the light of truth.

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2. Share The Life Of God

Towards the end of today’s key passage, Paul is described as being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is what happens when you experience conversion – the Holy Spirit of God comes to live inside of you and guide you through your life on earth. In other words, when you have received the light of God’s Son, you receive the life of God’s Spirit. So you might say that the following has now happened to Saul:

- He saw the light
- He gained his sight
- He received God’s might

For the first time in Saul’s life, he saw that not only is religion not the way to God, but it can be an obstacle to God. He understood that God is not interested in religion; He is interested in a relationship. Religion alone will never change your life. Only a relationship with God will do that. And it is that kind of close relationship with our heavenly Father that allows us to share the life of God.

3. Surrender To The Lord Of Heaven

You can have mystical ecstasies, wonderful dreams, and mind-blowing experiences of all sorts, and they may be a part of your conversion or they may not, but it doesn’t matter. Having them doesn’t mean you’ve been converted and not having them doesn’t mean you haven’t been, because conversion is neither a feeling nor even just a subjective experience.

True conversion is literally a turning around. It is a change of direction. Indeed, it is a moral and spiritual reversal. It is not what you say with your words, but rather what you show with your life. We know Paul was truly converted on that Damascus Road, not because of the light that he saw or the voice that he heard, but of the transformation in his life.

You are not converted just because you believe Jesus lived or was a great spiritual leader or prophet or great moral example. Hindus and Muslims believe that. A Christian, a real Christian, a true Christian is someone who has totally surrendered to Jesus as Lord. At the end of the day, conversion is not just a decision. It is not just a commitment, but a surrender to the Lordship of Christ.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did your life change once you were converted?
2. What is an example of a time when the Holy Spirit guided your life and your decision-making?
3. Is there any area of your life that you have yet to fully surrender to the Lord? If so, what is holding you back from doing so?

Sanctification: God At Work

Lost In Translation | Week 4 | Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13

INTRODUCTION

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We are in a series we have been calling “Lost in Translation.” We have been dealing with some big biblical words that even many Christians don’t really understand the meaning of; they get lost in translation. Sanctification is one of the most important biblical words, but we don’t hear much about it anymore. However, even though this word is not talked about nearly enough, it is so important that we understand what it means to be sanctified or we are going to be out of the will of God. The word literally means to be set apart. But how does God set us apart? Well, that’s what we’re going to look at in this message – three ways God is working to accomplish our sanctification while we are still here on this earth.

KEY POINTS

1. God Commences His Work Of Sanctification In You

One of the greatest problems in our relationship with God is that we stay focused on what we want God to do for us, but God is focused on what He wants to do in us. I will never forget hearing Charles Stanley talking to a group of young pastors, and this was back when I was a young pastor. He made a statement I will never forget, “Men, I know all of you want to build your church, but don’t ever forget this. God is more interested in building you than He is in building his church.”

God is far more interested in building you than He is in building your business, your finances, your house, and I can say as a pastor, even the church. The work of salvation that God commences in you begins the work of sanctification in you.

2. God Continues His Work Of Sanctification With You

When God begins His work of salvation in us, He expects us to do the work of sanctification with Him. Go back to when you were saved, and you gave your life to Christ. At that moment, God begins His work in you. He gives you a full-time job working out what He has worked in you. After all, the Christian life is the outward human expression of an inward divine presence. It is a 24/7 job that you never retire from until you draw your last breath.

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Every day people ought to see us working out what God has worked in us. We are to do everything with fear and trembling. We should have a healthy fear of offending God or breaking God’s heart. We ought to have such a desire and such a passion to live out what God has worked in us and tremble at the thought of doing anything that would break God’s heart or bring God disappointment.

3. God Will Complete His Work Of Sanctification For You

At this point, you might be a little bit discouraged, because if you are like me, you fall short of what God wants for you. You fail. You blow it. You are not always what you ought to be. You don’t always desire to do what is right and you don’t always do what is right.

But don’t be discouraged. While you are still on this earth, you will never be completely what you are going to be in heaven, but you can be obediently what God wants you to be on earth. How do I know that? Go back to Philippians chapter 1, “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus,” (Philippians 1:6).

Who began the work of sanctification in you? God did. What God starts God finishes. You can’t finish what God starts. Only God can finish what God starts. The word for “carried on to completion” is a word that literally means “to fully complete.” God never leaves a job half finished, three-quarters finished, or ninety-nine percent finished. What God starts God finishes. And He is going to complete His work of sanctification in your life.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have you been focusing more on what you want God to do for you than what God wants to do in you? If so, how?
2. What is something that breaks God's heart that doesn't break your heart like it should? Ask the Lord to align your heart with His on this issue.
3. What is one example of how God is sanctifying you in the season you're in right now?
