

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Key biblical words
that many Christians
don't really understand.

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Regeneration: Where It Begins

Lost in Translation | Week 31 | John 3:1-13

Introduction

What if understanding one biblical word could change everything about your relationship with God? In the comic strip *Peanuts*, Lucy fears a thunderstorm might flood the world, but Linus reassures her by explaining God's promise to Noah and the rainbow as a guarantee. Lucy says Linus has really reassured her, and Linus says, "Sound theology has a way of doing that." Indeed, the church desperately needs sound theology today, especially about salvation—what the entire Bible is all about. In our "Lost in Translation" series, we're defining key biblical words that many Christians don't really understand. Today's topic emerges in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, a highly religious Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council, to whom Jesus delivered a shocking message: "You must be born again." This conversation reveals where salvation begins—with regeneration, the miracle where God gives spiritually dead people spiritual life.

Notes

Key Points

1. Perceive the Reality of the New Birth

Why would the most religious person in town need to be born again? Nicodemus was one of only 6,000 Pharisees. These were five-star Jews of biblical scholarship who kept every religious rule, and one of only 70 members of the Jewish Supreme Court. In other words, if you could bet on anyone being right with God, it was this man. But when he approached Jesus respectfully, Jesus immediately responded, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3:3, NIV). Jesus was saying that even someone with the religious pedigree of Nicodemus needed to begin again with the new birth. For the first time in his life, Nicodemus heard, "Your best won't do, your works won't work, and your religion won't cut it." Religious behavior can't earn God's favor. That means you don't just need a new life; you need the new life only God can give. Just as we had no part in choosing our physical birth, spiritual birth is given without any effort on our part.



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No amount of religious activity or moral goodness can substitute for the new life only God can give through spiritual birth.

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2. Believe the Requirements of the New Birth

What makes the new birth absolutely non-negotiable? Jesus made clear that regeneration isn't optional: "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:7, NIV). When Adam and Eve disobeyed in the Garden, they died immediately in their spirits, and every human since has been born spiritually dead on arrival. A dead person doesn't need religion or a behavior modification plan; they need life. Whatever you think you were born with doesn't change this truth: You must be born again. You don't just need to become a better you; you need to become a new you. And only God can issue the spiritual birth certificate needed to make you alive now, giving you life that never ends.

Spiritual death affects everyone in the same way, and only God's regenerating power can give us the new life of His kingdom.

3. Receive the Results of the New Birth

How can you know whether you've been born again? When Nicodemus asked, "How can this be?" his real problem wasn't lack of understanding but lack of belief. When you are born again, you become a brand-new person, not just an improved version of your old self. Just as children bear their parents' characteristics, when God becomes your Father through spiritual birth, you will display His nature. According to Jesus, your eternal destiny depends on how many times you've been born. If you've only been born once, you'll die twice—physically and spiritually forever. If you've been born twice, you'll die only once—physically.



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Reflection Questions

1. Like Nicodemus, have you ever assumed that being religious or being a morally upright person is enough to be right with God? What does Jesus' conversation with this respected religious leader teach you about the importance of spiritual rebirth?

2. Jesus explained that spiritual birth comes "from above," with our decision to accept God. How does this truth change your understanding of what it means to have a relationship with God?

3. The results of being born again should be evident in a transformed life that reflects God's character. What evidence of spiritual birth do you see in your own life, and where do you need God's continued transformation?

Introduction

Key Points

1. We Are Commanded to Repent

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are. The real issue isn't when, why, or where you die; it's that you will die and face God. That's why Jesus repeated His command twice: "But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:3, 5, NIV). This wasn't a suggestion but a direct order from Christ Himself.

Recognize that repentance isn't optional; it's Christ's command for anyone who wants a relationship with God.

2. We Are to Commit to Repent

What exactly does it mean to repent, and why is it truly a life-or-death decision? In this passage, Jesus used the word “perish,” which doesn’t just mean physical death but spiritual and eternal death. Many people misunderstand repentance, thinking it’s about conviction of sin. Others think it’s just confession. But true repentance is not just turning from something; it is turning to Someone. It is realizing that you are just as much a sinner as a murderer on death row. You need the grace of God just as much as anyone else, and the only one you can rely on to clean you up is Jesus. Repentance is when you realize only Jesus can clean you up and you turn to Him. Then you learn the process of repentance: conviction (realizing you’ve sinned), confession (agreeing with God about your sin), contrition (feeling what God feels about sin), and conversion (turning from sin to Christ). Repentance is true remorse over our sin, a determined renouncing of our sin, and a sincere resolve to forsake our sin and follow Jesus.

Don't try to clean up your life before coming to Jesus. Turn to Him, trust Him completely, and let Him lead you through the process of genuine transformation.

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3. We Are to Continue to Repent

Why does repentance need to be a one-time action and a continuous attitude? The word “repent” in Luke 13:3 and 5 is in the present tense, which indicates continuing action. That is, initial repentance brings salvation and dismisses sin’s penalty, but sin’s presence remains. When you turn to Christ, you declare war on the devil, sin, and the world; and they declare war on you. While you’ll ultimately win the war, you’ll sometimes lose battles and need ongoing repentance. Initial repentance establishes relationship with God; continual repentance maintains fellowship with God. As Martin Luther wrote in his first thesis at Wittenberg: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” I’ve done more repenting since getting saved than when I got saved, because salvation makes us more aware of sin. There’s no sin so small you don’t need to repent of it and no sin so great you can’t repent of it.

Practice daily repentance to maintain close fellowship with God, knowing that every day you delay repenting means more sin to repent of and less time to do it.

Key Takeaway

Repentance is Christ's non-negotiable command that transforms your present life and your eternal destiny. Without it, even the death, blood, and cross of Jesus cannot save you.

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Repentance: The Right Turn

Lost in Translation | Week 32 | Luke 13:1-5

Reflection Questions

1. When you think about Jesus' first public word being "repent," how does this challenge your understanding of what it means to follow Him?

2. Repentance is more than just feeling sorry; it requires turning from self and sin to the Savior. What area of your life needs this kind of complete turnaround?

3. Since repentance should be both a one-time action and a continuous attitude, how could you build daily repentance into your relationship with God?

Introduction

Key Points

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I experienced this while watching a movie about Christ, when the darkness of that theater was illuminated by spiritual light brighter than the noonday sun. Whether through God's Word, a movie, a sermon, or a quiet conversation, that same transforming light is ready to illuminate your life too.

When you see the light of truth that Jesus is the resurrected Lord, not just a crucified Messiah, your entire perspective on God, Jesus, and the church will change.

2. Share the Life of God

How does seeing God's light lead to receiving His life? After being blinded by the light, Saul was led to Damascus. God sent him a man by the name of Ananias, and despite his reluctance to approach Christianity's greatest enemy, he obeyed God's command. "Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul... be filled with the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 9:17, NIV). The Holy Spirit is God. When you receive the light of God's Son, you receive the life of God's Spirit. Three things happened to Saul: He saw the light, gained his sight, and received God's might. For the first time, Saul understood that religion isn't the way to God; it can actually be an obstacle to Him. Instead, God wants a relationship, not religion. Religion alone will never change your life; only a relationship with God will do that. This reveals why conversion is so vital: Genuine change must start from the inside out, and that only happens through conversion.

True conversion means receiving God's Spirit and understanding that He wants a relationship with you, not religious performance.

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3. Surrender to the Lord of Heaven

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Genuine conversion shows itself not in what you say with your words but in what you show with your life through complete surrender to Christ's lordship.

Key Takeaway

Conversion is total transformation by the only One who can transform any life—the risen Lord Jesus. It means seeing the light of His truth, sharing His life through the Holy Spirit, and surrendering completely to His lordship.



Conversion: Total Transformation

Lost in Translation | Week 33 | Acts 9:1-20

Reflection Questions

1. “If you are not different after you meet Jesus than you were before you met Jesus, then you never met Jesus.” What specific changes do you think demonstrate your conversion experience?

2. Paul immediately began preaching that “*Jesus is the Son of God*” (Acts 9:20, NIV). How has your surrender to Christ’s lordship shown itself in your words and actions?

3. Who in your life seems like “the least likely person” to be converted? How might God use you to share the light of truth with them?

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Key Points

1. God Commences His Work of Sanctification in You

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Sanctification: God At Work

Lost in Translation | Week 34 | Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13

Trust that God's work in you is as certain as His character—what He starts, He will finish.

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2. God Continues His Work of Sanctification with You

How do you access everything God has placed within your Christian life? Salvation isn't the end; it's just the beginning of God's work with you. "...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12-13, NIV). Paul doesn't say work for your salvation but work out your salvation—like working in a mine to extract gold, silver, and precious jewels. You get out of your Christian life exactly what you put into it through worship, discipleship, serving, and being sent. God works in you to create both the desire *and* the ability to do what's right. Like the farmer who told his pastor, "You should have seen this farm when God had it all by Himself," sanctification is a partnership requiring both God's power and your participation.

Actively participate in God's transforming work by consistently walking with God through spiritual disciplines and obedience.

3. God Will Complete His Work of Sanctification for You

What hope do you have when you fail to live up to God's standards? You may feel discouraged by your failures and shortcomings, but remember this truth: What God starts, God finishes. "...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6, NIV). The phrase "carry it on to completion" means "to fully complete." God never leaves any job half-finished. You can't finish what God starts; only God can finish what God starts. You will never be completely what you're going to be in Heaven, but you can obediently be what God wants you to be on earth. Like



a piano duet where one person plays perfectly while the other struggles with the notes, God takes your imperfect efforts and turns them into a masterpiece when you walk with Him.

Rest in God's promise that His work in you is guaranteed to be completed, while continuing to faithfully do your part.

Key Takeaway

God has begun an unstoppable work of sanctification in every believer, which He will faithfully complete. While you're called to actively participate in this process, your confidence rests not in your performance but in God's unchanging character and His commitment to finish what He started in you.

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Sanctification: God At Work

Lost in Translation | Week 34 | Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13

Reflection Questions

1. Looking at your daily life, would others be able to tell you're a Christian by how you live, or do you blend in with the culture around you the same way the Susan B. Anthony dollar did with quarters?

2. In what specific areas of your spiritual life do you need to “work out your salvation” more intentionally through consistent worship, Bible study, service, or witnessing?

3. How does knowing that God will complete His work in you change the way you view your current struggles with sin or spiritual growth?
