

INTRODUCTION

Pastors often use a Greek or Hebrew word when they are trying to explain the Bible. Years ago, a teenager asked me why I always say what a word means in Greek, but I never say what it means in Spanish or French. That was a good question. I was able to explain that the New Testament was originally written in Greek.

Whenever we read the Bible in English we sometimes lose something in translation. Because not only do we speak and read a different language, our culture is totally different than the culture of the New Testament. If you don't understand some of these translation and cultural differences, you might miss the meaning.

Even though we share the English language with people in Britain, we have different words for the same thing. We put suitcases in the trunk of the car and in England they put it in the boot. We both talk about football, but those are two different games in England and America. But to me, the most interesting has to do with the toilet. If you're in Britain and you ask where a restroom is they may look at you with a puzzled expression. In Britain, they call a public restroom a W.C., which stands for "Water Closet."

That difference is the source of a funny story I read about. There once was a British lady who was going to stay a few days in the lodgings at a State Park in North Carolina. She wrote a letter to the park manager asking about the toilet arrangements, so she asked, "Can you tell me about the arrangements for the W.C.?"

The park manager had never been out of North Carolina, and didn't have a clue what a W.C. was. But then he remembered that there was a little church nearby named the Wayside Chapel, so he assumed she was asking about the Wayside Chapel when she wrote "W.C."

He wrote back to her: "Dear madam, in response to your letter, I'm happy to report that we have a lovely WC located only two miles from our park. The WC can seat two hundred people – all on padded seats. The WC is usually open only on Sundays from 9:00 AM until 3:00 PM. – but people can visit during the week as they have needs. The W.C. is a place where people come to find relief from the pressures of the week. You can sit and read the literature provided, enjoy the organ music, or just converse with those beside you. I'm sure you will enjoy the WC and I'll be happy to accompany you there." Sincerely, the Manager.

If you don't understand the language and cultural differences, you can get very confused! The word "believe" is like that. It appears over 250 times in the New Testament. Most of us know that in order to go to heaven when we die, we must believe in Jesus. But our English word "believe" isn't the same as the Bible word for "believe." To us, "believe" means to "give mental affirmation to a fact." For instance, "I believe that the sky is blue." In this passage, we will learn more about the real meaning of the word. This passage talks about receiving and believing.

Here's the sermon in two sentences: "You can BELIEVE in Jesus and not RECEIVE Him as Lord. (And you aren't really saved) But when you RECEIVE Jesus as Lord, you BELIEVE and are saved."

To put it another way, you can believe without receiving, but you can't receive without believing."

John 1:10-13 (CSB). "He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God."

The most important question you'll ever answer is, "Am I a genuine Christian?" That's a question I have to ask myself and you should ask yourself. I don't want you to doubt your salvation. Instead I want you to come to a place of absolute assurance. This message is all about salvation. We are going to talk about receiving Jesus and believing in Jesus. We are going to talk about being born again and being part of God's family. In this message I want to present four broad concepts about salvation, each summarized by a word that starts with R. Then I'll leave you with three practical take-away truths.

I. RECOGNITION: The world doesn't recognize Jesus as the Creator.

The Bible says, "The world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him." The supreme truth of history is that Christ came into the world. The supreme fact of history is that the world was created through Him. But the supreme tragedy of history is that the world did not recognize Him.

In 1961, the Soviet Cosmonaut, Yuri Gargarin, became the first man in space. When he returned Nikita Khrushchev announced. "Gargarin went up into space and didn't see god anywhere." That would be like trying to find Shakespeare by reading Macbeth. Shakespeare created the story of Macbeth, but you won't find him in it.

For most of human history after Christ, scientists believed that God created the universe. However, in the past 100 years, that teaching is no longer popular. Physicists declare the Universe occurred spontaneously billions of years ago and they call it a Big Bang.

Unless you are attending a Christian school, Jesus is largely ignored today in academia—and He created the mind, knowledge and wisdom.

When you look around you, and see all the precision and beauty of creation, do you really think that all this just happened? Can you honestly accept that we are simply accidents of evolution?

Isaac Newton was the Father of Physics and a committed Christian who believed that God created the universe. One of his fellow scientists was an atheist.

Newton had painstakingly designed and built a model of the solar system with the sun in the middle, and each planet separated from the sun by metal spoke representing the correct scale of our solar system. When he activated a crank, the planets all moved in orbit around the sun. His atheist friend visited his workshop and was admiring the model. He operated the crank and watched as the planets moved around the sun. He said, "This is marvelous! What a great model. Who made it?" Newton thought for a moment and said, "Nobody made it. It just appeared one day in my workshop." And his atheist friend was silent. He got the point Newton was making. Jesus made everything we can see and everything we can't see, but the world ignores Him.

II. REJECTION: The Jewish leaders didn't embrace Jesus as the Messiah.

The Bible says, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." It's bad enough for the world to ignore Him. But imagine this: His own people, the Jews, didn't ignore Him, they passionately REJECTED Him.

And the ironic thing was that they were all waiting for a Messiah. Their forefathers were the prophets—and they KNEW the prophecies. When the Magi went looking for the King of the Jews and came to Herod's Palace. Herod asked the Jewish priests and scribes, "Where will the Messiah be born?" And they had the right answer. They said, "In Bethlehem in Judea," and they quoted the prophet Micah.

Every book of the Old Testament testifies to one great truth: "The Messiah is coming!" And yet, when He showed up, they were expecting a royal king like David, who would lead Israel back to world prominence. And a king certainly couldn't have been born in a barn.

The Jewish leaders ultimately sentenced Jesus to death for blasphemy, claiming to be God. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate couldn't find any reason to execute Jesus. So he wanted to release Jesus. But the leaders stirred up the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas. Then Pilate asked, "Then what shall I do with Jesus?" Then the ultimate rejection was voiced. "Crucify Him!" They cried out. He was rejected by the very people he came to save.

III. RECEPTION: You receive Jesus by inviting Him to take control of your life.

The Bible says, "But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God." Some people today ignore Jesus. Others reject Him. But the good news is that some people receive Him. And not all the Jews rejected Jesus. From the Day of Pentecost until the Roman Centurion, Cornelius, was saved, ALL the followers of Jesus were Jews. But notice the word "all who did receive Him." The all refers to anyone and everyone who receives Jesus. It means Jews, Greeks, Samaritans, pagans, men, women, boys and girls. Thank God for the "ALL" who receive Jesus.

Now what does it mean to "receive Jesus?" The word "receive" simply means to welcome in. It's like when someone comes to your front door and you invite him or her to come in.

There was a time when I was little when I really didn't like girls. Gail, a girl from my class lived down the street from our house. I think she liked me, but I wasn't interested. She rang our doorbell one afternoon and I answered the door. Gail said, "I want to invite you to my birthday party this Saturday." I didn't want to go, and I didn't really know what to say, so I just slammed the door in her face. Yes, I was a mean kid. About that time my mother said, "David who was that at the door?" I said, "Nobody."

She opened the door and saw Gail crying. She said, "Gail, why don't you come in?" She received her into our house. I didn't. She welcomed her in and had her sit down on the couch and offered her a glass of lemonade. My mother had received her. I hadn't. And after Gail told her about the invitation to her birthday party, my mother looked at me and said, "Why Yes, David will be happy to attend your party." I went—but I wasn't happy. And I was the ONLY boy there!

We accept Jesus when we invite Him to come into our lives. We all know that there comes a time when we feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit and it's as if Jesus is knocking on the door of our heart. When we are aware of that, we should receive Him. But when you receive Jesus, you can't just welcome Him into your life as a part of your life. He must be in control. He wants to be your Lord. And if Jesus is not Lord OF all, He is not Lord AT all.

If you still don't understand the difference between believing and receiving, let me try to illustrate it. I've asked someone to join me on the platform for a minute. They have agreed to help me but they don't know what I'm going to do. So they are pretty brave.

So, my friend, what I want you to do is simple. I want to give you a gift. In fact, it's a \$5 bill. Let me ask you some questions. Have you done anything to earn this? Do you owe me five dollars? Do you believe this is a genuine \$5 bill, not a counterfeit? Do you believe I really want to give it to you? Final question: Then why don't you possess it? Reach out and receive it.

The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23 CSB) When you receive Jesus, you receive the gift of eternal life. But you can believe forever, and never receive.

IV. REBIRTH: When you receive and believe, God makes you His child.

"To those who believe in his name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God." All of us are born into the wrong family. We are part of Adam's family, and because of his sin, we are all born sinners. In order to join God's family, we must be born again.

Every physical birth is a miracle of God. It takes a father and mother who come together, and conception is a part of God's creative plan. In the same way, when a person is born again God's Word interacts with our faith and the miracle result is being born again.

We will say a lot more about the new birth when we study John 3. In that chapter, a hyper-religious Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to visit Jesus. And Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3 CSB)

After looking at these four themes, let me give three practical applications. I call these Take-away truths:

A. Jesus understands the pain of rejection.

We all know how much rejection hurts. Maybe you weren't picked to be a part of a team, or you were excluded from a group of friends. Maybe you applied for a college or a job, and you weren't chosen. Or maybe you wanted to pursue someone romantically and they told you they didn't share your feelings. Or perhaps you married someone and they abandoned you for someone else. Rejection comes in all colors, shapes, and styles.

Rejection hurts. There is no pain quite like the pain of offering you heart in sincerity to someone only to have your heart returned back to you broken and bruised. Someone said rejection is worse than a kick in the gut; it's a kick in the heart. Jesus really does feel your pain.

Not only was he rejected by the Jewish leaders, Jesus returned to His home synagogue in Nazareth. And after he preached His first sermon, the people in the synagogue tried to kill Him.

We see the pain that Jesus endured when He wept over Jerusalem. He said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34 NIV)

So the next time your heart is hurting, remember that Jesus cares and Jesus shares you pain. The Bible said He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

B. Jesus wants to make your heart His home.

When you truly RECEIVE Jesus as your Lord, you invite Him to come live in you. You invite Him to move in and to take control of your life. So if a friend comes into your home, I'm sure you would welcome him or her. You'd probably say, "Come in. Make yourself at home." But do you really mean that? What if this guest started going through your drawers, your closets, and started rearranging your furniture. How would you react?

That would be inappropriate behavior for a human friend. But when you invite Jesus into the home of your heart, your attitude should be, "Lord, mí casa es su casa." My house is your house. My heart is your heart.

Robert Munger was a Presbyterian pastor in California. In 1954 he wrote a simple little tract called "My Heart, Christ's Home." This is a classic short story that has been widely distributed by the Navigators and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. It has changed thousands of

lives. It's based upon the idea that Jesus is standing outside your life and He is patiently and politely knocking on the door waiting on you to invite Him in. Jesus answered, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our HOME with Him." (John 14:23 CSB). Also, in Ephesians 2, Paul prays that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.

Here's part of what Robert Munger wrote: "One evening I invited Jesus Christ into my heart. What an entrance He made! It was not a spectacular, emotional thing, but very real. It was at the very center of my life. He came into the darkness of my heart and turned on the light. He built a fire in the cold hearth and banished the chill. He started music where there had been stillness, and He filled the emptiness with His own loving, wonderful fellowship. I have never regretted opening the door to Christ and I never will—not into eternity!"

Then he wrote about allowing Jesus to enter and take control of his library, the dining room, the living room, the recreation room, and the workroom. Finally, in the story, he transferred the title of his life to Jesus and said, "Jesus, here it is. Take control of it all. You will be the Master of the house and I will stay with you as your friend and servant."

That's what it means to receive Jesus. It means you transfer the title of your heart by transferring your trust to Jesus. Do you have a dynamic sense that Jesus has made your heart His home?

C. God has no grandchildren, only children.

Meghan and Prince Harry were married last week in England. How many of you got up early to watch the ceremony live? More people tuned in to their wedding than to the wedding of Kate and Prince William. When Meghan married Prince Harry, she became Her Royal Highness Duchess of Sussex. She married into royalty. And when their children are born, they are automatically considered royalty. They inherit their royalty from their royal parents. But that's not true in the Christian life. If both of your parents are Christians, when you are born, that doesn't make you a Christian. God has no grandchildren, only children. Being born in a Christian home doesn't make you a Christian any more than being born in a garage makes you a car.

I understand that there are Christian groups where parents have their children baptized as infants. You might have been baptized as a baby, or had your children baptized. I know that those parents' intentions were good and they were only following the teachings of their church. In their minds, they are passing on their faith to their children. But being baptized as a baby doesn't make you a Christian. You cannot inherit salvation from your parents.

We believe it is important for new parents to dedicate themselves and their newborns to God. We have a dedication service to do that but we don't believe that parents can impart their faith to their children. We believe that each person must grow up to the point where they realize they are a sinner in need of salvation. And that individual must personally put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Parents, we can train our children and we can pray for our children, but they must make the choice themselves to receive Jesus as Lord and believe in His name so they can become a child of God.

CONCLUSION

You can believe without receiving Jesus. You can believe all the facts about Jesus yet not invite Him to control your life as Lord.

What does it mean to welcome Jesus into your heart? Maybe you've heard the story of Wallace Purling. He was a nine-year old boy who was older than the other kids in his class because he had trouble in school. But he had a kind heart. When it came time for the annual Christmas Pageant, the director asked Wally to play the role of the innkeeper. After all he only had one line, "We are full! Begone!" And she thought that his larger size would add to the force of his refusal to give lodging to Joseph and Mary.

On the night of the Pageant, Wally stood offstage waiting for his cue to stand behind the inn door. He was fascinated by the entire night.

Then the time came when little Joseph arrived, slowly, tenderly guiding Mary to the door of the inn. Joseph knocked on the cardboard door painted on the inn front, and Wally the innkeeper, opened the door.

Joseph said, "We seek lodging." Wally said, "We are full. Begone!"

Joseph said, "Please sir, my wife Mary is with child and needs a place to rest. She is so tired. Wally played the part and looked at the girl playing Mary with the pillow under her robe." Once again he stood tall and said, "Sorry! We are full! Begone!"

Joseph looked sad and placed his arm around Mary and she laid her head on her shoulder and they started to move away from the door of the Inn. Wally stood there watching the couple leave. And at that moment this pageant became different than all others.

Wally departed from the script and smiled a brilliant smile and said, "Joseph, don't go. Bring Mary back. You can have MY room!"

Some people said the pageant was ruined, but there were others, many others, who considered it the most Christmas of all Christmas pageants.

And that's what it means to receive Christ. You receive Him by welcoming Him to come into your life. Here, Jesus, you can have MY heart!

You don't receive Jesus just by saying a prayer; you receive Him by faith. But here is a sample prayer you can pray to express your faith: "Lord Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner and cannot save myself. By faith I gratefully receive your gift of salvation. I believe you died for my sins and

rose from the grave. Right now I open the door of my heart. Please come into my life. From this moment on I am trusting in you as my Lord and Savior. Amen.”

OUTLINE

I. RECOGNITION: The world doesn't recognize Jesus as the Creator.

"The world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him." vs. 10

II. REJECTION: The Jewish leaders didn't embrace Jesus as the Messiah.

"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." vs. 11

III. RECEPTION: You receive Jesus by inviting Him to take control of your life.

"But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God." vs. 12

IV. REBIRTH: When you receive and believe, God makes you His child.

"To those who believe in his name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God." vs. 12-13

Take-Away Truths:

A. Jesus understands the pain of rejection.

B. Jesus wants to make your heart His home.

C. God has no grandchildren, only children.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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