

# (Radical Jesus) 17 Radical Holiness

by Glenn Meldrum

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*The sermon explores the radical nature of God's holiness and its significance for our understanding of who God is and how we can relate to Him.*

**Duration:** 24:54

**Scripture:** Exodus 33:8, Exodus 33:20, Revelation 4:8, Revelation 5:9, Revelation 6:16, Revelation 14:10, Revelation 15:4

**Topics:** "Holiness"

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## Description

In this sermon, Glenn Meldrum discusses the importance of having a high view of God as revealed in the Scriptures. He emphasizes that our spiritual and moral growth is directly linked to our understanding of God. By studying the radical nature of Jesus as portrayed in the Bible, we can gain a fresh perspective on who He is and what it means to be Christ-like. Meldrum also highlights the inner conflict that arises when encountering the holiness of God, using the example of Peter's fishing experience in Luke chapter 5. Overall, the sermon encourages listeners to deepen their understanding of Jesus and strive for spiritual maturity.

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## Transcript

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We have been studying the Radical Jesus for roughly the last four months. I am developing this study by using my book titled, The Radical Jesus. As you can tell, I am not rushing through this study because this study does two very important things.

First, it gives us a fresh biblical view of Jesus. It is a fact that we cannot rise any higher, spiritually or morally, than our understanding of God. So it is vitally important that we hold to a high view of God as revealed in the scriptures.

The second benefit we can receive from this study is to mature in our spiritual life. By elevating our view of Christ as revealed in God's word, we will experience spiritual growth. To see the Radical Jesus more clearly will cause us to see more clearly what it means to be Christ-like. Because we have been in this study for roughly four months, I would like to take a minute to outline where we have been before we start

a new section.

My opening statement in chapter one is the thesis of my book, and it is the thesis that I build my thought upon for this study, that Jesus is absolutely radical. Of course, the Word of God is the book I use to support my claim. I support my proposition by looking at how and why Jesus is absolutely radical, a fact that is clearly taught in the Word, even though the Word does not directly use that terminology.

My premise begins with the fact that since Jesus is the timeless creator God that broke into human history by becoming fully human, then everything about Jesus must be absolutely radical. When the radical Jesus came into this world, he established what it means to be human, and more specifically, Christian. Jesus is the standard by which we are to judge what is normal or abnormal, what is Christian or not Christian.

We then dug into the radical nature of the truth and saw how Jesus made the startling claim that he literally was the truth in flesh and blood. Since Jesus is the truth, he most certainly is a lover of truth, and anyone that would be an authentic follower of Jesus must be a lover of truth as well. We then examine the radical humility that defines Jesus.

Jesus is our perfect example of what it means to be humble and surrender to Christ. All true followers of Jesus should be striving to be like Jesus with all of their being. Now we come to today's podcast, where we begin a new section titled Radical Holiness.

The holiness of God is one of my favorite subjects to read about, study, and to preach. I love preaching on the divine holiness, even though I feel woefully inadequate to do so. I have experienced God's holy presence, been overwhelmed and terrified by it, while simultaneously being engulfed by his holy embrace.

God's holiness is the primary motivation for worship, and this is easily proved in Scripture. One simple example is the recorded worship that angels offer to God. They do not cry, Love, Love, Love, but Holy, Holy, Holy.

Why? Because holiness has to do with who God is, not something he does. I want to begin this section on radical holiness by establishing why God's holiness is radical. To do this, we must first look at mankind.

Out of all of creation, only the human race received the phenomenal privilege of being fashioned in God's own image. We live day in and day out without ever understanding the significance of this great gift that God bestowed upon us. Our ignorance of the value of this gift causes us to never tap into its power or enjoy its privileges.

By being created in God's image, we are given the unfathomable honor that allows us to share in a limited way in certain of his divine attributes. What is the benefit, you may ask, of sharing in these attributes? First, and most importantly, it opens the door that we could have real communion and union with Almighty God. Unbroken fellowship with God is the greatest gift offered to mankind, and the only way that this is obtainable is that we must become enough like him so that we can have meaningful fellowship with him.

Peter explains to us in 2 Peter 1, 4 the second and third benefits that come out of being made in God's image. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. We are created to fellowship with God, and since God is holy, we must be holy to fellowship with him.

For the scriptures clearly teach that without holiness no one will see the Lord. The second benefit is that we can participate in the divine nature to a limited degree so that we can rightly love God and others. The more we become like Jesus, the more we will be able to love God with all of our being like Jesus loved the Father.

And the more we become like Jesus, the more we will be able to love others like Jesus loves us. The third benefit of being made in God's image is that we can be with him forever. When sin entered the world, death came upon mankind both naturally and spiritually.

Sin so twisted us spiritually, morally, intellectually, and relationally, that it negatively affected every relationship we have, including that with God. This judgment of death brought with it separation from God. The privilege we were originally given being made in God's image so we could fellowship with him was ruined by sin.

Eternal separation from God was the worst judgment we could ever receive. Jesus came into this world so that we could be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and once again share the divine nature so that we could know sweet fellowship with God and be with him forever. The fact that God created us in his image has nothing to do with physical qualities.

God is spirit, so he does not have a body as we understand it. When Jesus became human, he became like us in the flesh, so only in that sense can we say that God has a body, but God in his essential being is spirit. Being made in God's image has to do with our inward life, where we were designed by the Lord to be finite reflections of his infinite perfections.

He created us in such a way that we uniquely share certain of his attributes such as personhood, intellect, and free will. We also partake of his moral attributes such as love, patience, kindness, and so on. By becoming similar enough to God, we have the potential to enjoy genuine relationship with him.

There is one attribute that God has that no created being has in and of themselves, and that is holiness. We are told in various scriptures that God is love, that God is good, that God is kind, and so forth. These we may properly call divine attributes, and it is these attributes we are allowed to share in, for it is in this sense that God made us in his image.

However, when we come to the subject of holiness, we are not looking at another divine attribute, for the idea of attribute is too small. We are looking at the defining nature of God. Everything about God is holy.

His love is holy, his wrath is holy, his mercy is holy, his justice is holy. It is the holiness of God that makes him absolutely unique from all created beings, whether material or spiritual. We have a terrible time understanding the holiness of God because it is not something we have by nature.

Revelation chapter 15, verse 4, tells us the reason. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.

Only God is holy, for neither men nor angels are holy in and of themselves. This means that there is nothing men or angels can do of their own volition that can make themselves holy. This declaration that only God is holy is part of a hymn sung by the saints who were victorious over the beast of Revelation.

These saints are in their glorified state and gaze upon the holy face of God that they were forbidden to look upon when clothed in earthly flesh. In Exodus 33, we find Moses on top of the mount of God. He was communing with the Lord and made a very bold request, which is found in verse 8. Show me your glory.

The Lord responded in verse 20, But you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live. In our natural fallen condition, we cannot look upon a holy God, unless, of course, he is clothed in flesh and blood. The fact that God's holiness does not naturally belong to any created being causes us great difficulty in understanding it and defining it.

A. W. Tozer said it like this, We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible, and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it.

He may fear God's power and admire His wisdom, but His holiness he cannot even imagine. Since we are not naturally holy, we cannot fathom what holiness really is. It's like trying to explain to a person that has never tasted chocolate what chocolate tastes like.

There are no words that can define chocolate other than the word itself, and that does not help to explain it. Or it is like someone striving to describe the color blue to a person that was born blind. Without a legitimate point of reference, the color blue is a meaningless word or concept.

So it is with the subject of holiness. Scripture tells us in Psalms 51.5 that we are sinful at birth. If all that we have ever known is a sin nature, then how can we comprehend the divine holiness? The Lord knows our spiritual condition, and what God commands His creatures to do, He will empower them to accomplish.

So the fact is that we do not naturally know the nature of holiness, and if we do not know what constitutes holiness, then how can we ever live it out? I think the most important way that we can begin to comprehend holiness is by looking at God and the truths He has given us in His Word. Without God's self-disclosure, there is absolutely no way that we could know what constitutes holiness, because it is not naturally in any of God's rational creatures. Through the purpose or pursuit of God and the study of His Word, we can learn a great deal about the nature of holiness as it applies to God and mankind.

Then we will have a knowledge base in which to seek the Lord so that He will make us holy and give us the power to live out the practical application of holiness on a daily basis. So what can we know from Scripture about the holiness of God? Since God is infinite, we can only obtain a limited amount of knowledge about God, but what we can receive is more than enough for us to be able to walk with a holy God in authentic fellowship. And since God is infinite, there must be endless dimensions to His holiness that we will never exhaust, or maybe even never know exist.

There are, though, three facets of divine holiness to which we can gain a limited understanding. The first is that God's holiness includes the total absence of evil. How can people that are born with a sin nature ever comprehend a being with the total absence of evil? It's impossible.

Even though we can theologically and philosophically claim that we know what holiness is, because we live in a world filled with evil, and because we are sinners by nature and by choice, we fail to comprehend God's holiness. Now here's the great dilemma we face. Since God is holy by nature, and since we are unholy by nature and conscious choice, then we must be making ourselves His enemy by our persistent practice of sin.

That's a very scary thought. This proves our desperate need of a Savior. God's moral perfections are so pure that were He to show us even a glimpse of His goodness and purity, we would flee from Him in absolute terror.

C.S. Lewis wrote, To understand the divine holiness, we must move outside of the human condition where we see holiness in the sense that people cease doing bad things and start doing good things. But the Lord has never had an evil thought or done an evil deed. Evil is absolutely absent from His person and being.

It is not that God was bad and became good. It is that God is perfect in goodness and holiness. It is who He is as a timeless Creator.

He is infinitely perfect in holiness, which means He cannot increase in holiness or decrease in it. The second aspect of the divine holiness is interwoven with God's total absence of evil, and this is His moral perfection. God's holiness means that He is morally incorruptible.

His nature is the total embodiment of perfection. It is who He is. Because a bad person performs an act of kindness does not turn him into a good person.

A bad person is a bad person no matter what he or she does. God is not a bad God that somehow became a good God. God is perfect and complete in moral goodness, which means that He is absolutely free from any and every expression of evil or corruption.

All of us through personal experience have come to know the moral corruption that defines this world, and for this reason we have a terrible time understanding a perfectly good and holy being. Now this leads us to the third dimension of divine holiness, that God is totally other. The idea that God is totally other is a phrase that theologians and Christian thinkers use to explain the infinite difference between a holy God and all of His creation, both what is seen and unseen.

This is especially true for rational moral beings, and even more so for those that are unholy, such as devils and mankind. That God is totally other tells us that He is separate and distinct from His creation. Eastern, native, and New Age religions claim that God is one with His creation, which is definitely not true.

In spite of the fact that God is totally other, we have this terrible problem of trying to pull Him down to our low spiritual and moral level. What we are endeavoring to do, whether intentionally or not, is to make God more like us. A.W. Tozer correctly declared, Why do we do this? Because if we acknowledge that God is holy, then we must acknowledge that we are unholy and alienated from God due to our sinful condition.

So if we can make God less holy, then we can believe the lie that He is like us. And if He is like us, then we are predominantly good people instead of being desperately wicked. God's faithful testimony about mankind is found throughout Scripture, but Jeremiah 17.9 brings that thought out very powerfully.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it? The fact that God is not like us makes us very, very uncomfortable. The Exodus is a historical event where the Lord delivered Israel from the tyranny of Egypt through ten miracles.

After the plague of frogs covered the land, Pharaoh summoned Moses and asked him to pray to the Lord to remove the plague. This account is found in Exodus 8. Moses told Pharaoh that the day and time when the plague would stop would be according to his decision. So the Pharaoh said, Tomorrow.

Moses replied, It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like the Lord our God. Moses proclaimed the fact that there is no one like the Lord. The gods of Egypt could not stand against the Lord.

Even when people fashion a god of their own making, it infinitely falls short of being like the one true God. To encounter His manifest holy presence would be indescribably glorious, yet altogether frightening. It would be beautiful beyond reckoning, yet thoroughly disturbing.

We would find His holiness wonderfully attractive, yet utterly repulsive at the same time because we are so unholy. When the Lord reveals His manifest presence, it can engulf you. His love and goodness can overwhelm you.

His beauty and majesty would enrapture you, but His holiness would terrify you. Look at Isaiah chapter 6, where the prophet encountered the holiness of God in a vision. He was undone because he saw the Lord, who is infinitely holy.

This encounter caused him to cry out in terror, Woe to me, I am ruined. In that moment, he saw that he was unholy beyond anything he had ever imagined, and he was filled with dread. He wanted to flee from this holy God because divine holiness hurt him right down to the deepest resources of his being.

At the same time, God's holiness was wonderfully attractive and enthrallingly captivating. Look at the biblical account, where people encounter the holiness of God, and you will see many similarities. One glimpse of God's holiness would make us want to flee from His presence in shock and terror.

In Revelation chapter 6, verse 16, we are given a glimpse of this, where the wicked called to the mountains and the rocks, falling to hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For those that love God, there is something infinitely better, something that accompanies the terror, something that is so wonderful and satisfying that you would want to fall at His feet and weep because He is so good and merciful, while also being terrible in holiness. Because we are so unholy in and of ourselves, and because He is limitless in holiness, an encounter with His holy presence would tear us in two.

It would rip us apart. One side of us would want to flee from the terror His holiness produces upon sinful creatures. At the same time, we would want to flee into His arms or to fall at His feet in adoration.

An example of this inner conflict is found in Luke chapter 5. Peter was a commercial fisherman, and he knew his trade very well. He had been fishing all night, yet did not catch anything. Here is a whole night's work without anything to show for it.

Peter came to shore in the morning and then loaned Jesus his boat, so Jesus could use it as a platform to preach to the multitude on shore. When Jesus finished ministering to the people, He told Peter to go back out on the lake and try again to catch some fish. Let's get real here.

Peter was not at this time a follower of Jesus. We can glean from the life of Peter in the Gospels that he was probably a devout man. More than likely, Peter was a little peeved when Jesus asked him to go back out fishing after not catching anything all night.

There are some seemingly legitimate reasons for this, though. Jesus asked at the time of day when it would be hardest to catch fish. Then you have the issue that a new prophet and teacher is telling a seasoned fisherman how to fish.

That won't go over very well. Not just that, Jesus was by trade a carpenter, and how would a carpenter know anything about commercial fishing? With great reluctance, Peter complied with Jesus' request. Peter knew the best fishing places, so when Jesus told him to let down his net, it must have all the more seemed like a crazy preacher was taking him on a crazy mission.

But Jesus was not operating in the natural, so Peter and his fellow laborers let down the nets, and they caught such a quantity of fish that the nets began to break. We are told that Peter and his companions were astonished at the catch of fish because it was so large. This miracle opened the eyes of Peter to get the briefest glimpse of the holy majesty of Christ.

What was Peter's response? To fall at Jesus' feet, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man. I guarantee you that it was not a boatload of smelly fish that convicted Peter of his sin and compelled him to implore Jesus to depart. In that moment, the veil which hid Christ's glory from mankind was parted just a sliver, and that glory burst through, piercing Peter's heart.

Peter got a glimpse of the divine majesty, of God's holiness, that was both terrible and beautiful. It tore the naturally strong fisherman in two. The piercing, convicting power of pure holiness so hurt Peter that he cried out, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.

But the beauty of holiness was drawing Peter to Jesus, which caused him to fall at Jesus' feet and cling to the Savior. In essence, Peter said, Depart from me, but don't leave me. Your holiness is wounding me, but never again can I live without it.

I remember a situation that happened a few years ago that brings to light this thought. I was ministering at a church in the Southwest, and while preaching I confronted the sin of fornication, which is something I often do because the sin is so prevalent in the church today. There was a woman who regularly attended this church that was living with her boyfriend.

This is called fornication, and it is always damnable. Needless to say, she left the church that morning very angry with me. The next day she called a pastor to tell him that she was awake all night, torn with feelings of guilt and thoughts of running from God.

Yet something else was going on. She was yearning for Jesus to forgive her. Like Peter, she was crying to God, Leave me alone.

Your holiness is tearing me apart. I want to flee from you, yet I long to cling to you. Most of the time when people get angry at me for confronting their sin, it only proves that they are unwilling to repent and cease their practice of evil.

Fortunately, in this case, I just mentioned, the ache for Jesus and a desire to have a pure heart won out in the end. Jesus is not a different God from the Old Testament Jehovah, or a lesser God as some cults would try to claim. He is the one and only God, the radical Jesus that heaven and earth cannot contain.

He was totally other before time came into existence, and will be totally other when it ceases to be. When He walked this planet, He was totally other, even though He was in flesh and blood. He was like us, yet not like us.

Jesus has never been, nor will He ever be a manageable deity. It's like C.S. Lewis stated in his wonderful children's stories, The Chronicles of Narnia, God is not safe, but He is good. The Lord refuses to fit in the

ridiculous little boxes we attempt to force Him into, no matter how pretty or pretentious they may be.

He was radically holy before creation came to be, and will be so when it ceases to exist. Holiness thoroughly defines Him. It is who He is, and who He will always be, for it will be impossible for Him to be otherwise.

Though this is very difficult for us to understand, Jesus did not decrease in holiness when He became human. He did not cease to be who He is right now, or was, or will be. The infinite, glorious God was encased in human flesh so that man might look upon Him and not die.

Jesus is not the safe, manageable deity that so many self-professing Christians fashion Him into today. In their small minds, they have concocted a feeble theology that revolves around an even feebler man-made God. This is a God made in man's image, a little God that does not have a problem with sin in all of its various forms, a perverted God that is supportive of our sexual sins of fornication, adultery, incest, and all the sodomy sins.

But the living God will not change to accommodate the works of the flesh that we so often try to Christianize. The wise Elihu, in the book of Job, chapter 36, verse 26, stated, How great is our God, beyond understanding, the number of His years is past finding out. And in Psalms 113, God is extolled, Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? God is so great and so holy, He must humble Himself to look upon creation.

This is the same Jesus who died upon the cross, the infinite holy God becoming sin for us, that we might become the righteous of God through His atoning sacrifice. This is absolutely radical. Within the very nature of divine holiness is the power to revolutionize our lives, to revolutionize families, communities, and even nations.

Whenever we are confronted by the holiness of God, we will be forced to make a decision. When the Lord comes to us, He will not leave us as we are. There are only two possibilities.

The first is to fall at His feet in sweet surrender and experience the transforming power of God. The second is to flee from His presence, only to sink deeper into rebellion and the corrupt character that comes out of it. We will either be a child of God or an underling of hell, a soldier of God's army or an enemy combatant for the prince of devils.

The holiness of God causes us trauma because it upsets our understanding about God and ourselves. We are in desperate need of His coming to us in holiness for this very reason. We need to look upon the glory of God as so many of the patriarchs of old did.

This will work deep down inside of us the same fear and awe of the Lord that they had. This is what the American church is in desperate need of, a spiritual revolution that comes out of a fresh revelation of the holiness of God. To remain in the dead religion that is defining the majority of the American church and of the self-professing Christians that fill them will only set in motion the further corruption of our nation from which there may be no recovery, only judgment.

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