

(Radical Jesus) 20 Radical Passion

by Glenn Meldrum

God's divine compassion is a radical and infinite love that seeks to save the lost through every means possible, and it is not limited by human understanding or capabilities.

Duration: 23:57

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 16:24, Matthew 19:22, Mark 10:21-22, Luke 9:23

Topics: "Passion"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that God's perspective is eternal while ours is temporal. He compares our limited understanding to people yelling at a football game, thinking they are experts despite never having played the game professionally. The speaker highlights that God's actions are purposeful and part of His divine plan of redemption, without violating mankind's free will. The crucifixion is presented as the central event in history, showcasing God's infinite compassion. The speaker also addresses the question of what we can offer God in return for His blessings and emphasizes that God desires more than just our money. The sermon concludes by highlighting that God's ways are beyond our comprehension and that many people try to explain Him away due to their inability to understand Him.

Transcript

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Last week in our continuing study of the Radical Jesus, we closed out the section on Radical Holiness, which was an investigation into the radical nature of holiness. This week we are going to begin a new section titled, Radical Compassion. In my book, The Radical Jesus, I open the chapter on Radical Compassion with a question.

Who are we that God would sacrifice himself for us? This is a very serious question, and if we can rightly answer it, then we will receive some profound, life-changing truths. Unfortunately, most Christians take for granted Christ's crucifixion. For those that are not Christian, it is understandable why they take for granted the Savior's atoning work, or just plain ignore it.

But those that claim to know Christ are without excuse. Many people today have a spiritualized entitlement mentality about Jesus and the cross. They think that God was obligated to redeem mankind because we deserve to be saved.

The idea goes something like this. Since God created us, he is duty-bound to save us. The problem is that such thinking is woefully incorrect.

There is nothing that we have done as individuals or as an entire human race that warrants God's love, compassion, mercy, or salvation. Let the truth be known. If we got what we really deserve, then we would all end up in hell.

Then I ask the second question in the opening paragraph of the chapter on Radical Compassion. What do we have to offer the Infinite Creator that he would pay such an extraordinary price for our salvation? What was the purchase price of our salvation? Do you really know, dear listener? I really don't think that any of us have much of an idea, because it is far more than just the crucifixion itself. Yet even the crucifixion is beyond our comprehension, because what took place on that fateful day was greater than the human mind could fathom.

The crucifixion was the climax to Christ's redeeming work as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. The resurrection is the work of the victorious Lord. We should, however, not neglect examining all the events that led up to the colossal act of compassion, beginning with those that happened before creation came into existence or time came to be.

The plan of salvation was laid out in the mind of God before creation even came into existence. It was there, in the eternal heart and mind of God, that he worked out salvation for people that had not even been fashioned or born. So when the Lord spoke those words, let there be light, the plan of salvation was bursting forth as well.

The Lord was orchestrating through divine fiat the very events that would eventually lead to the cross. Within the history of mankind, there has been a divine thread weaving its way through purposeful intent to bring to pass the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Nothing was left to chance.

Everything the Lord did was filled with the unflinching purpose of finishing the work of redemption he began. And throughout this divine plan, the Lord never violated the free will that he gave to mankind as a gift and means to learn how to love. Yet with unrelenting resolve, he finished the plan of salvation 2,000 years ago.

Now the power and life of that marvelous work is flowing through time, and we today are able to partake of its benefits. God is bigger than we have ever imagined, and his ways are past finding out. How he accomplishes these things with the faultless precision that he alone possesses is known only to himself.

The crucifixion is not only an event that took place in history, but it is what history is all about. With all that said, what do we have to offer God for all that he has done for us? Do you think God really wants your money? When was the last time you looked at the heavens at night and saw the countless stars that filled the sky? Do you have the foolish audacity to think that God needs your money, possessions, or even your life? Do you think this God has any need for your house, possessions, or talents? King Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, but will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you, how much less this temple I have built. The Lord does not need our praise as if they filled him with strength, nor is he benefited by our love as if he was a lonely God in need of

fellowship.

He is perfectly fulfilled in himself and needs nothing outside of himself to be who he is. This means that the Lord did not need to create to demonstrate his power, nor did he need to make mankind because he had this emptiness inside of him that only mankind could fulfill. There is nothing or no one that can add anything to the person of God, for he remains fully who he is without mankind, angels, or creation.

God is absolutely self-sufficient, which means that he needs nothing outside of himself to exist. Self-sufficiency is a sin for us fallen creatures that were created to be dependent upon God, but it is not sin for God to be self-sufficient because it is a fact of the matter. He does not need food, water, or air to exist, nor does he need a place to live or a planet on which to dwell.

The Lord is fully complete in himself and there is nothing or no one that can add anything to him. And he does not need anything outside of himself to be who he is, for he was holy, wise, just, loving, kind, and almighty before creation began and will remain the same when all that is ceases to be. All this reveals the raw truth that the Lord does not need us.

Now this really grates against our arrogant belief that all of creation centers on us and that God exists to make us happy. But God does not need us. He does not need our love, prayers, worship, money, or anything else that we have.

If we get down to the nitty-gritty, as creator he owns us already. The problem is that we have rebelled against his rule and are now in open revolt. So now we can see that God does not need us and that we have absolutely nothing to offer him.

So where does this leave us? It is a sheer fact that the Lord does not need us, but he offers us something better. He wants us. To me this is even more overwhelming than the fact that God does not need us.

What do we have that could make him want us? It is like a billionaire that has a whole fleet of exotic cars and then goes to great lengths to find an old, rusty, beat-up VW Bug with torn seats and a headliner that is falling down, and that is the car of his dreams. What do filthy sinners like us have to offer an absolutely holy God? What do we have to offer him that would make him want us so much that he would suffer the horrors of Calvary to redeem rebels like you and I? The divine compassion is amazing, and it is a great, great mystery. In the book of Job we find that the patriarch has four friends that come to comfort him in his great time of trial.

Three of those friends prove to be very troublesome and have been rightly labeled Job's miserable comforters. The fourth man, Elihu, was the youngest of the bunch and so was silent until his elders had finished speaking. Then he revealed the wisdom God had given him.

He pronounced in Job 36.26, This is a fact about God, a reality from which we cannot escape. Whether we like it or not, God is beyond our understanding in every dimension of his being. And most of humanity hates him for this.

Because they cannot comprehend him, they try to explain him away with pseudoscience, man-made religions, or worthless opinions. Many strive to reduce him to a manageable deity that we can figure out and manipulate when necessary. Our inability to understand God carries over to his love and compassion.

Because we possess the ability to love, we think we know what love is and how to love. We think ourselves experts at it. This leads us to the foolish conclusion that we comprehend God's unfathomable love and compassion, but we don't.

Our difficulty begins with the truth that our love is finite. And then add to this our sinful nature, and we end up with a twisted, selfish, narcissistic kind of love, not a selfless love like God's. Even if our love and understanding had not been mutilated through sin, we would still be finite creatures barely able to grasp the infinite attributes of God, including his love and compassion.

Since his compassion is as infinite as he is, we are helpless as finite creatures to comprehend how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Paul tells us that Christ's love surpasses human knowledge, but that does not mean that we cannot know it to a limited degree. Because we fail to understand the ways of God, we often accredit him with injustice.

This happens because we do not understand the facts or the spiritual laws that govern this fallen world. This also happens because we reduce God to our low, depraved level, thinking he is driven by emotions like we are. So people accuse God of injustice because they do not understand how he operates in this world filled with evil, pain, and suffering.

We humans are virtually blind to the measureless extent of his compassion and activity on our behalf. He is working in greater ways than we could ever even imagine. Besides, everything he does comes through his eternal perspective, while ours is a temporal one.

Have you ever seen people yelling at the TV when they watch a football game? You would think that they were experts in the game. Yet many people think that they are experts at the game, even though most of them have never played the game other than in fun. If you put them on the field with those professional burly football players, they would probably wet their pants in fear.

It is one thing to be an armchair athlete. It is totally another thing to be one of them. The comparison here is not even close between us and God, because there is no way that we could even manage the dance of the heavens, much less a little planet filled with rebellious people that are full of themselves.

We think ourselves knowledgeable about the subject of compassion when we have a hard time loving our own families like we should, much less people that hate us. And then we have the audacity to tell God that he is doing a bad job. We are mighty small-minded people.

Because we love our family or feel a twinge of pity over suffering people, we think we know how to manage this rebel planet. We think we could tell God how to do a better job. Yet in the end, most people have little resolve to do anything of substance to relieve the misery of suffering humanity or rescue their souls.

What, then, is divine compassion? Divine compassion is the attribute that causes the Lord to sorrow and grieve over our sins, suffering, and misfortune. But there is more to compassion than that. We humans can feel sorry for those that suffer.

This may be pity, but compassion has to do with action. So divine compassion compels the Lord to intervene into our lives for our temporal and eternal good, even to the point of the atonement. We can see, then, that divine compassion is more than the emotion of pity, but it is all about the action of intervening into this world of sinners.

The radical nature of divine compassion is seen when we look at the Jesus of Scripture, not at the pop-American Jesus that is really a false Jesus, a spineless God of cheap grace and cheap love. At any time, the Lord could have sent 12 legions of angels down to deal with the problem of mankind's rebellion. Instead, the radical expression of His infinite love is beautifully seen in where He literally becomes a remedy to our lives.

Take a look at the cross, and you will see a multitude of marvelous facets that reveal the wonder of God's infinite compassion. Most of us have tried to help someone that grew angry at us for not doing enough for them. I remember recently reading a news story about a family that was driven out of their home by a bigoted, hateful next-door neighbor.

This was race-related. Eight or nine months of constant harassment finally caused the family to move. Do you think that family was happy with their treatment? I don't think so.

If you were that family, how would you respond to such hateful, prejudiced attacks on a nonstop basis? Now imagine a world filled with such people that were spewing their hatred at God. Do you think God should come down and give this wicked, hateful, sinful race of people a group hug? Or would divine judgment be more fitting? Let me paint this word picture a little more clearly, so we might gain a clearer understanding of the radical nature of Christ's compassion that is powerfully revealed through the cross. Can you not see the hatred that was poured upon Jesus by the religious people of His day? Look at the unfathomable lengths He went to that He could rescue a world hell-bent on hating Him.

From the moment Jesus was taken by the temple soldiers, He was beaten, taunted, and mocked. Even in the presence of the high priests, He was beaten. The religious leaders that should have been defending Him were His ruthless enemies, holding a mock trial, knowing that they did not have a legal right or legitimate cause in which to judge and execute Jesus.

They turned Jesus over to the Roman procurator for one reason, to have Him murdered. The Roman soldiers' disdain for Jesus was brutally taken out on Him. Hatred was poured upon the Lamb of God, with blow after blow, lash after lash, callously laid upon Him.

They mocked the King of kings by putting a crown of thorns on His head, laughing at His suffering and coming execution. The hatred of the multitude was poured out against Jesus when the people cried, As He carried His instrument of death to the place of execution, the hatred of hell welled up in the hearts of people as they cursed Him, spat upon Him, beat Him along the way, and ripped the beard out of His face. After the agonizing journey to Golgotha, the soldiers piteously threw Him on the cross and began nailing His hands and feet to that implement of death.

The whole time there was not one expression or word of hatred from Christ, but only compassion. While the soldiers beat the nails into His hands and feet, Jesus must have looked into their faces as they performed their reprehensible work. Do you know what they saw? Eyes of compassion, holy eyes, without the slightest taint of evil or vengeance.

Can you imagine what it must have been like to be the soldiers, having the eyes of infinite compassion looking at you while performing such gruesome acts? Those soldiers knew what hate-filled eyes looked like, but they had never seen eyes filled with immeasurable love and compassion. I believe those men never forgot those eyes. They must have haunted them for the rest of their lives.

Christ's radical compassion comes out very clearly with the words He spoke from the cross. They were not words of vengeance and retaliation, but of mercy and compassion. Father, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

Who would have responded in such a way to abuse like Jesus experienced? Could you or I? No way. Let this picture sink into your heart and mind. Let it sink into your very soul.

Jesus spoke those words of infinite compassion to the Roman soldiers that had just brutally beaten and flogged Him. He spoke those words to the men that placed the crown of thorns upon His head in mocking contempt, who had stripped Him naked before a gawking crowd and then drove nails into His hands and feet. He spoke those words of the Pharisees that instigated the disgraceful event and to the multitude that cried, Crucify Him.

He spoke those words of the multitude that lined the streets as He carried the cross and spat upon Him, beat Him, and mocked Him. He spoke those words of the apostles and disciples that denied Him and fled for their lives because they loved themselves more than Jesus. Listen, though.

There is more to the story. When Jesus cried, Forgive them, He was interceding to the Father to hold back the just wrath that would have been unleashed upon mankind for the evil that was perpetrated against Him. Christ's compassionate intercession literally held back the Father's just wrath.

The soldiers and onlookers heard those words, though they did not understand the tremendous significance of them. What incredible words! And they were uttered in the face of brazen hatred and hostility. The most heinous crime ever committed took place that day.

Mankind crucified their God and Savior. He came to them for one reason, to save the people from their sins, but they rejected His gift. None of the people understood the dire circumstances they were in.

They deserved divine wrath for their guilty part in this crime of all crimes. The truth of the matter is that we, too, deserve His wrath. All of mankind is guilty of this crime because we are willful sinners in obstinate rebellion against the One we should love and adore.

Jesus did not die on the cross for their sins alone, but for ours as well, because we, too, are just as guilty. We can see that Christ's compassion is not merely a sentimental response to our suffering and the judgments we justly deserve. Genuine compassion always produces right action.

The Lord is relentlessly seeking to save the lost through every means possible that is in keeping with His perfect holy character. Because we cannot see the motions and movements of the Spirit working to bring persistent sinners to repentance does not mean He is not active. The Lord knows what He is about and is able to accomplish the work with exquisite precision.

The Savior will not miss one soul that wants salvation. The natural human compassion that we have is limited and flawed because we are flawed. And it is limited because we are limited.

We are far more finite than we would like to confess. This means that when we respond to the needs of others, we do not always know what is good for them. Think of the parent that keeps striving to protect their son from the consequences of drug addiction.

They think they are responding out of love for their son, but their actions only keep him in his addictions because they are not allowing him to reap what he sows. Their limited, fallen love cannot do for the man what he really needs. Until the man feels the pain of his sin to be strong enough to turn from his sin, he will continue the practice of his sin.

The Savior's infinite compassion works in cooperation with His omniscience. He literally knows everything about everyone throughout all time and eternity. We cannot escape His searching eyes that see all, nor His probing mind that knows all.

The Lord does not make any guesses about what our true need is. He knows the truth of the matter. He knows when to let people reap what they sow because He knows what it will take to bring them to the place of repentance.

He knows how and when to rescue people from their bondage to sin. The wonder of God's compassion and omniscience is that He uses everything that is usable to lead us to the foot of the cross where we can cry out for mercy. He will allow the devil to torment us, sickness to eat away at our strength, suffering to bring us low, and so on, all because He knows us perfectly and knows what it will take to bring us to salvation.

Divine compassion is thoroughly interwoven with the Lord's limitless knowledge of mankind's tremendous need and our actual need, not our perceived need. Jesus knows the real moral, spiritual, mental, and physical condition of every person who has ever lived or ever will live. Before closing today's podcast, I want to take a brief look at the historical account recorded in Mark chapter 10 of the conversation between Jesus and the rich young ruler.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke also record this event, but there is something in Mark's account that I want to point out. The man was a synagogue ruler in the village where he lived, which meant that he was the religious leader of that local congregation. To use a modern Gentile term, the man was a pastor.

But he was also wealthy, and that wealth probably came through a family inheritance and of his own business savvy. Excitedly, he comes up to Jesus, desirous to know the answer to a very important question. Taking the three accounts together, we get a full picture of the man's seemingly good request.

Good teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Matthew's account sheds a little more light on the motive behind the question when the man asks, Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life? Here was a man that believed that salvation is obtainable through works, so he wanted to know what good works he needed to perform to earn a place in heaven. Why do you call me good, Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone.

At the core of this issue is the knowledge of who Jesus is. Is he God? Or just a good teacher as this man declared? Or maybe a madman? How we respond to Jesus depends in part on our answer. In Matthew's account, Jesus replied, If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.

The man lied to Jesus, not maliciously, but through self-deception. Teacher, he declared, All these things I have kept since I was a boy. Jesus revealed the truth that the man was a sinner, but he could not comprehend it.

Only God is good, and no one will make heaven their home by being good because we will never be good enough to deserve a place in heaven. Notice that Jesus does not address this gross perversion, but goes

after the idols of this man's heart. Until the real idols of our affections are confronted and dealt with, we will never see Jesus as we should because our idolatry will blind us to him.

Jesus then took a direct frontal attack and dealt a blow to the head of this man's idol, saying, One thing you lack. Go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

Jesus was not saying that salvation was earned by giving to the poor, but by following him. Here is where the question of who Jesus is comes into play. Were Jesus a mere mortal, then following him would not be able to give salvation to this man.

But if Jesus is Messiah, God in flesh and blood, then to follow him would lead to eternal life. We are told the synagogue ruler's response. At this time the man's face fell.

He went away sad because he had great wealth. What were the idols of this pastor's life? Salvation through good works? Wealth? Comfort? And pride which came about from his wealth, position, and self-righteousness? The man did not want what Jesus offered. He wanted a religion that would let him go to heaven while never having to experience a spiritual revolution.

Now look at the compassion of Christ which is revealed in the 21st verse. Jesus looked at him and loved him. It was divine compassion that told this man the truth of his spiritual condition.

It would not have been love or compassion to give the man a positive, uplifting message or a personal prophecy about how he was going to be mightily used of God when that was not what he needed. So much of the church today is void of true compassion. They are filled with a wretched form of pity that causes blind preachers to give only motivational talks while his congregation is rushing to hell.

That is not love, and that certainly is not compassion. Jesus wrote seven churches a personal letter exposing the truth of their spiritual condition. If Jesus wrote you a personal letter revealing the truth about your life, what would he write? The content of that letter can only be changed while we breathe the air of this world.

When our breath leaves our body, the content of our letter from Jesus will be finished and eternally unalterable. Make sure you like the letter he is writing to you.

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