

(Radical Jesus) 21 Radical Passion

by Glenn Meldrum

God's compassion is infinite and perfect, and it is always aimed at redemption, never conflicting with His justice.

Duration: 26:17

Scripture: Isaiah 5:4, Matthew 21:12-13, Matthew 23:13-37, Matthew 24:1-2, Luke 15:11-32, Luke 19:41-44

Topics: "Passion"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the radical love and compassion of God towards sinful people. He highlights how Jesus showed compassion to various individuals, such as healing the lame, lepers, and delivering the possessed. The preacher also discusses the correlation between divine compassion and omniscience, emphasizing the importance of understanding God's infinite nature. He warns against being deceived by teachings that contradict scripture and emphasizes the need for a solid understanding of Jesus based on God's infallible word. The sermon concludes with an analysis of the parable of the prodigal son, highlighting Jesus' compassion as portrayed by the father in the story.

Transcript

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Last week we began a new section in our study on the Radical Jesus titled, Radical Compassion. Before we begin this week's study, which is a continuation of last week's lesson, let me summarize what we covered last week. We began by looking at the radical love of God expressed in His compassion towards sinful people that have absolutely nothing to give God that would benefit Him in any way.

The truth that God does not need us but wants us was then examined. I then strove to explain the fact that our human mind cannot comprehend the wonders of God's infinite nature, including His love and compassion. It was important at that point to give an extensive, practical definition of divine compassion.

We then began to study the correlation between divine compassion and omniscience. We will pick up today where we left off last week, looking at compassion and omniscience. I took some time in our last podcast to define divine compassion, but I did not give a definition of omniscience.

Webster's Dictionary defines omniscient as having complete or unlimited knowledge, awareness or understanding. It means the ability to perceive all things. The definition for omniscience may be easy to state, that God knows everything that there is to know, but to grasp such truth is beyond our finite abilities.

Last week I closed the teaching by looking at the story of the rich young ruler, which is found in Mark chapter 10. We got a glimpse of Christ's omniscience that was revealed by His having perfect knowledge of the man's true spiritual condition and what he really needed to do to gain eternal life. Christ's radical compassion was revealed in verse 21, where we are told that Jesus looked at him and loved him.

Divine love was perfectly directed at the rich young ruler's deepest need. That need was to get deliverance from the idols of his heart that kept him from the glories of salvation. Now here is a comforting fact.

God is not confused. Talk about a horror story. If God was confused and yet possessed infinite power, I think there would be one less planet in the solar system.

The prophet Malachi spoke God's declaration on His immutability in the third chapter in the sixth verse. Immutability means that He does not change. And when we get down to the nitty-gritty here, we are more blessed than we can imagine.

Another fact about God is that He is not divided within Himself. He does not have an internal conflict within Himself. Deuteronomy 6-4 reveals the unity of God.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. This verse teaches us that there is only one God and that this one God is in unity within Himself. As we move on, I hope to make this a little bit more clear.

The fact that God is omniscient also tells us that it is impossible for there to be any division within Himself. The reason why we have division inside of us is because we are finite fallen creatures that do not know everything. Well, actually, we know hardly anything, so the problem is even worse.

It is that we are both finite and sinful that causes us so much trouble. But angels are created beings, which means that they are finite. But they do not have the problem of being divided like we do, because they are walking with God in a holy relationship, being totally surrendered to His perfect will.

So the real issue we have with our internal division is not our finiteness, but our fallenness. God is infinite in knowledge, so He knows everything that there is to know, and there is no end to all that He knows. And He is perfect in nature, so there is no evil or flaw in Him.

As a result, the Lord knows what is right for every situation, and He possesses the will and power to always do what is right, so there could never be any division in Him. Since the Lord has infinite knowledge about everything and every person, indicates that He knows what is true and right in every situation. The Lord does not make educated guesses because He knows the absolute truth about everything.

He can only do what is right in every situation, because that is who He is as God. All this teaches us that the Lord's compassion will never be at odds with His wrath. Nor will God's mercy be contrary to His justice.

His kindness is not opposed to His severity. His holiness does not fight against His benevolence. There is no such thing as an internal conflict with God.

We suffer such internal conflicts because we are finite sinful creatures. Our limited knowledge combined with our fallen nature causes us to be divided over what is right and wrong, whether we did the right thing or the wrong thing. Let me give a simple example here.

I have a Master's in Theology, Church History, and Philosophy. One of the courses I took in Philosophy was Ethics. I love Theology because there are concrete truths that can be known about God and man.

But with Philosophy, that is not the case. With Philosophy, things are more fluid, more subjective. With Philosophy, we aren't working with concrete thought, so things are harder to nail down or grab hold of, since they are filled with opinions, personal perceptions, and changes with culture.

When I took an Ethics class, I was thrown for a major loop. I thought I had a good handle on Theology and on what I believed. In the Ethics course, I came to understand that there are a vast more things that I do not know than what I do know.

I had never thought about such theories such as Just War versus Pacifism until I had to write on them. And then I realized that I did not know what I really believed. Both arguments sounded good and carried a lot of weight.

The Just War theory is firmly established in the Old Testament, while Pacifism comes out of the New. I was torn between the two ideas, and because I am finite and live in a fallen world, I did not know which position was right. When I see the atrocities that go on in this world, I am for Just War.

And when I look at Jesus, I am for Pacifism. I am glad that the Lord knows what is right with this issue and every issue. He is not divided like we are.

Let me add another component to the equation of God's omniscience that will help us see the wonder of His compassion. And this component is that the Lord is righteous and good. The Lord will always be true to who He is, so He can only do what is right and good at all times and every situation.

This is true whether He damns a soul to hell, pardons the repentant sinner, bestows compassion on undeserving people, or unleashes His wrath upon a person or nation. He cannot make a mistake because He always knows what is good and right for every situation, problem, or need. This idea is terribly upsetting for us because we can be so divided on what is right and wrong, good or bad, evil or righteous.

And because we can be so divided, we can grow angry at God, which is really an accusation that He is not good and that He does not do what is right in every situation. Here is one area where the pop-watered-down teaching on God's love grievously errs to the great harm of multitudes. By divorcing divine love from omniscience, they have created an ignorant God that is at war within Himself.

His love is fighting against His wrath, while His mercy is battling against His holiness. This is a gross perversion of the person and work of God. As a result, they remove from their theology and teaching those attributes about God they do not like or they deem too negative to speak about.

Because they cannot figure out the ways of God, they cut Him into manageable pieces and discard those messier parts that make them uncomfortable. What is the end result? They have created a God in their image, a spineless sentimental deity that is filled with a humanistic love that is baser than that of fallen mankind. This wimpy man-made deity is weaker than the pagan gods of Greece, Rome or Egypt and would never damn a soul to hell because He is so loving.

Then they offer to the church and the world an ugly monstrosity of a God that is only concerned about your best life now or your financial prosperity. This worthless God of cheap grace is sending multitudes to hell and the devil is in full support of the effort. Actually, he's pulling all the strings.

Sadly, all they have to give is a fantasy God that does not exist and if He did exist, He would be a weak, worthless thing that is not fit to be worshipped by men or angels. Their rendition of God's love is nothing but spineless sentimental notions that leave people in their sin. With one fell swoop, they have severed the head of divine justice from the heart of compassion.

This monstrosity of a man-made God is not holy, so He winks at the sins of mankind. Such a God has no moral strength by which to stand. They claim that their God is good because He does not damn people to hell.

But the moment they take away divine justice, their man-made God is no longer good because a God that is not just cannot be good. This false teaching on God's love has had a strong influence from the world through a Christianized version of moral relativism. They have created a God without moral strength, who has goodness without justice, truth that is subjective, and love that lacks authentic compassion.

This is why it is imperative that we are lovers of truth so that we will not be deceived by fine-sounding teaching that is contrary to Scripture. And this is why we need a fresh vision of Jesus, one that is solidly based upon God's infallible Word. So let's look at the compassion of Christ as revealed in the Bible.

When you look at the parable of the prodigal son, you see one of Christ's great lessons on compassion. We need to understand that a parable is not meant to teach all truth, just some truth. So we must seek to learn the truth that Jesus is striving to teach us in each parable and not add more to it that was never intended.

The parable of the prodigal son is found in Luke 15, verses 11-32. I'm not going to take the time to read it. I'll just highlight the story.

The father that is portrayed in the parable is actually Jesus himself, and he is longing for a wayward son to run home after forsaking his father's house to live a wild life of rebellion. The first expression of the father's compassion is found in the act where the father lets the son make the choice that he knew would bring ruin to his son, but could also be an instrument that could lead to the boy's redemption. The father would not have been loving his son if he had put the boy in a cage so that he could not go wild.

The cage could not change the heart of the rebel. It would only embolden it. Many times what parents call parental love is really self-love.

They are doing what they claim to be the best thing for the child, but it is really what they want for themselves. Central to the story of the prodigal son is that the son ceased loving his father, and that is why he asked for his inheritance while his father still lived. The request was really a statement.

I do not love you anymore, father. I wish you were dead so I could have my inheritance now and get away from you so that I can live as I please. Such a request in that culture would have been a serious insult to the father and would have disgraced him before the people of that village where he lived.

There is only one reason why people backslide, and that is because they have forsaken their first love. They have stopped loving Jesus just like the prodigal son stopped loving his father. The wages of sin

eventually caught up to the reckless boy which brought upon him much suffering for his rebellion.

It took profound suffering to bring the rebel to his senses, and we are no different. The fact that the father loved the son did not cause the boy to run home until the consequences of his sin became severe enough to open his eyes to what he had forsaken and what sin had inflicted upon him. Even as the prodigal was on his way home, he had a plan worked out in his mind and still wanted things to go his way.

It was at this point that the compassion of the father does its tremendous work. When the prodigal finally returned home from his long painful journey, the father ran out to meet him. To understand the compassion that Jesus is here presenting, we must understand the cultural setting of the ancient Middle East.

In that culture, it was considered an undignified act for a man to run, especially a wealthy man that would have held a prominent place of authority in the village as this parable portrays. The very idea that this affluent man would lay aside the customary decorum to run in such a way speaks of the deep emotion he was experiencing at that moment. To see his son coming down the road tells us that the father was looking for him, waiting for him to return home.

This act of compassion literally overwhelmed the boy and upset all of his plans. When he saw his father run to greet him, he fell apart, and it was at this point that we see true repentance and surrender come into the boy's life. The father's love had conquered the wayward son.

Overflowing with compassion for the repentant prodigal, the father embraced the boy, kissed him, and then properly clothed him. The father had always loved his son, but the boy's rebellion did not allow him to see the profound and various expressions of that love. When the son repented, the father instantly forgave him.

The father would not demand the son to grovel at his feet and beg, even though the boy had begged forgiveness, which the father was more than willing to grant. Joy filled the father, and he threw a celebration in honor of his dead son that was now restored to life. If the father had acted in any other way than what he did throughout the entire ordeal, he would not have been acting in love for his son, but would have been acting out of self-love.

Compassion defined every act of the father, and as the cross clearly teaches us, compassion can be very painful. So why do we think that if we show compassion, that it should not cause us pain in the process? When we look at Jesus, we see that he was the literal fulfillment of this parable. We are told that he was filled with compassion, so he touched the prodigals and untouchables of his day.

Who are the outcasts and untouchables of his day? Prostitutes, tax collectors, political and religious zealots, the demon-possessed lepers, and Romans, Samaritans, and the list goes on. Luke 19:10 declares Christ's mission, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. That includes all of mankind throughout all ages.

Look at his heart, which is revealed in Matthew 9:36, when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus did not come into this world to leave us as he found us. He came to transform those that would comprehend their need of a Savior and run home to him like the Son in the story of the prodigal.

Christ's compassion compelled him to teach the people how to enter and live in the kingdom of God. To those that were his apostles and disciples, he taught them how to rightly preach the truth that can set people free. He gave them his power and authority to heal the sick, cast out devils, and raise the dead.

Jesus did ministry in this way so he could impart to his followers not just the truths of the kingdom of God, but his heart of compassion as well. He did not send them out to preach a greedy prosperity gospel or a motivational message so people could feel good about themselves. Jesus preached exactly what they truly needed, and that is our responsibility today.

His compassionate preaching was summed up in Matthew 4.17, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Why was that the most loving, compassionate message that Jesus could preach or that we could preach today? Because repentance is what we need the most. Think about this for a moment.

If repentance was the message that the omniscient God preached when he walked this earth, then who do we think we are to preach anything different? Mankind has not changed. We are still sinners in desperate need of a Savior. Jesus preached the message they needed the most to hear.

And if we would be wise, then we would be like our Master and preach that same message. Look at how Jesus ministered to people, and you will see the wonder of divine compassion. To prostitutes, he reached out with tenderness.

To adulteresses, he rescued them from death and told them to sin no more. He ate with tax collectors so they could obtain freedom from their lascivious lives that their wealth produced. To the hated Romans, he reached out to them in mercy so they could know that there was a living God.

To a widow in mourning, he gave back her dead son. To the blind, he gave back their sight. The lame were given power to run.

Lepers were healed of their cursed disease, and demoniacs delivered from their eternal tormentors. To the self-righteous, he expressed compassion through strong rebukes, woes of judgment, and grave warnings that they might choose to escape the condemnation of hell. In each and every situation, compassion poured forth to meet the genuine need of the people so they could be delivered from their slavery to sin.

And the message of repentance was central to it all. The Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 5, verse 4. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? There has never been anyone more compassionate than Christ. But did he fail to do something that was necessary for our salvation? Was there something else that he needed to do that would have caused the people to follow him? Are the church growth gurus correct in that we need to remove from the church anything that could possibly offend people or make them uncomfortable? We must not forget that Jesus was God, and as God, he was perfect, so he gave the people what they really needed, not what the pop church growth gurus say.

If we will read the book of books with a pure heart, then we will see the strong and loving message that Jesus preached, which was also very confrontational. Immediately after Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, he agonized over the plight of the people and their persistent rebellion. Was not Calvary enough? Was it not ample proof of the divine love? Was it not ample proof of God's infinite compassion? When he approached Jerusalem, he wept over it, declaring, The sin of the people blinded them to the divine love and

compassion that was bountifully poured upon them.

No other people group in the world has experienced God's self-disclosure like Israel did, yet they refuse to love him or to walk in his ways. Jesus prophesied the coming destruction of the city and nation by the Romans. They will not leave one stone upon another, and they didn't.

Why would this happen? Because they did not recognize the time of God's coming to them. The judgment the people received was what they deserved, not just because they were willful sinners, but because they rejected Messiah and the message of repentance that he offered them. Now that may sound like a harsh statement, only because we are finite creatures that do not understand the ways of God.

Since the people rejected the offer of Christ's tender compassion, the Lord would later attempt to reach them through severe compassion by the devastation of their country and city in 70 AD. Everything that the Lord does for mankind is about redemption, absolutely everything. Because we do not comprehend what the Lord is doing does not mean that he is not active in his work of redemption.

The ultimate expression of Christ's radical compassion can be seen in the events associated with the crucifixion. It is seen in his agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane where he yields himself to the Father's will to be sacrificed as the Lamb of God so that people could be saved. You can see it in his response to the temple guards that illegally arrested him.

Jesus was not taken by those guards, but voluntarily went with them. This is powerfully revealed when Jesus asked them who they were looking for. They responded, Jesus.

When the Savior said, I am he, they were all knocked to the ground, including Judas. Jesus was proving to them that he was going of his own volition, that he was offering himself up as the sacrificial Lamb, and that they were not forcibly taking him. Christ's compassion is also seen when he told Peter that he could call down 12 legions of angels, yet he didn't.

Do we realize that with one word Jesus could have destroyed the creation he had created with a word? The compassion that Jesus showed Peter was seen through the prophecy that he spoke over the apostle that he would deny the Savior three times. And Peter did exactly what was prophesied. What did this produce in Peter? Brokenness and clear proof that he is in desperate need of a Savior.

The healing that we so critically need in body, soul, and mind was obtained because Jesus allowed the Roman soldiers to fillet his back. This was prophesied in Isaiah 53. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our inequities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. It was compassion that compelled Jesus to audibly speak to the Father, his intercessory plea, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

He was telling his abusers, mockers, and antagonists that forgiveness was even available for them. Look at Christ's agonizing cry of rejection. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Here is pain and suffering beyond anything we could imagine, endured because of divine love and compassion.

The suffering that people will undergo in hell is nothing compared to what Jesus experienced in being the Lamb of God that took upon himself the sins of the world. We have a hard time bearing our own sins, much less the sins of humanity. What would happen to us if we had to bear the full weight and knowledge

of our sins for just five minutes? I think we would go insane.

The weight would be so excruciating that our minds could not bear up under it. The verse in Isaiah 53 that I read a minute ago tells us that Jesus was crushed under the horrifying weight of our sin so that we could be pardoned. All this and so much more is what happened when Jesus became the sacrificial Lamb, and it demonstrates the radical nature of divine compassion.

When Jesus took upon himself our sin, he accepted full responsibility for those sins. At that moment, the full force of the law fell upon him. The wages of sin is death, the law declares.

He died in our place so that we could have his life. But there is more. When Jesus accepted responsibility for our sins, it was not just physical death that Jesus would experience, but the worst death of all, separation from the Father.

Let me try to illustrate the horrors of this event. Imagine you are a famous symphony conductor, and right at the height of a concert, you instantly go deaf. You knew the beauty of the music, heard its rising and falling, felt its influence upon you as a conductor, and then in a moment, it is gone, all gone.

A man that is born deaf has never heard music, so he does not know the feelings and joy it can produce. He does not know the loss because he has never known its joys. How can we comprehend the infinite joy that is within the Godhead? And so we will never grasp the infinite agony when that fellowship was broken.

At best, we have known only partial fellowship with the Lord. But Jesus had infinite union with the Godhead between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The breaking of that fellowship came about when Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world and literally became the Lamb of God's sacrifice as a sin offering for us.

That horrible, horrible separation that ensued, we will never understand, but we must nonetheless strive to grasp what is obtainable to us so that we would be a thankful people for the marvelous redemption he purchased for us. Compassion. It was infinite compassion that produced those words, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And since divine compassion caused the Lord to intervene into our lives for our temporal and eternal good, his separation from the Father was the means by which our separation from the Father could be rectified.

We are the prodigals that rebelled against our good and loving Heavenly Father, and he was so good to let us reap what we sowed so that we might run home to him right into those arms of infinite compassion. What a wonderful God we serve. Jesus fulfilled his teaching, greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus did not talk about love and then live something different. That is a problem we humans have, but not God. Jesus lived what he taught, and what he taught we are commanded to live.

Adam Clark wrote, No man can carry his love for his friends further than this. For when he gives up his life, he gives up all that he has. Jesus gave all to us.

Again and again, Jesus proved the boundless love that he has for mankind. The Father gave the Son, and the Son gave himself. What more needs to be said to prove his love? What more must he do to demonstrate his compassion? Is not Calvary enough? And is not the sending of the Holy Spirit an even further expression of his compassion? This was Christ's promise in John 14, that he would not leave us as

orphans, as unwanted, abandoned, and desolate children.

He would prove his fatherhood and care for those that are his own. So Jesus promised to send another comforter and counselor, the spirit of truth that will be in us forever. Today would be a very good time for you to take a long, hard look at your life.

Are you really in Christ? Are you walking near him? Is your life pleasing to God? Are you striving to be like Jesus? No matter where you are in your spiritual journey, if you are honest, you will be able to see the fingerprints of God all over your life. He has been far more active in bringing you into a right relationship with him than you could ever even imagine. He has personally shown you compassion by bringing you to salvation or bringing you to the foot of the cross.

His compassion is further revealed to us in that he offers us the sanctifying power of the Spirit so we can live the victorious Christian life. The more we study Jesus, the more we will find that love and compassion are timelessly wedded in the precious Savior with sublime beauty and perfection. To him be glory and power both now and forever.

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