

(Radical Jesus) 24 Radical Sacrifice

by Glenn Meldrum

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a high view of Jesus and living a life of sacrifice, surrendering our lives to him as living sacrifices.

Duration: 24:15

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 16:25-26, Matthew 20:10, Matthew 20:25-28, Romans 12:1-2

Topics: "Sacrifice"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the concept of being a servant to God. He uses the analogy of a master and servant to illustrate the level of commitment and sacrifice that is expected from believers. The speaker highlights that giving ourselves fully to God is not just a duty, but also a reasonable service and an act of worship. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the true cost of following Jesus and the consequences of not fully surrendering our lives to Him. The sermon references passages from the book of Matthew and the book of Romans to support these teachings.

Transcript

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Last week we started a new section in our continuing study on the Radical Jesus titled, Radical Sacrifice. Since we have examined in many different ways the subject of the cross and the sacrifice Jesus paid for our salvation, I concentrated last week on the timeless nature of the atonement. We looked at how Christ's sacrifice began before creation even came into existence.

This means that the atonement is a timeless, limitless work, since it was done by the infinite, everlasting God, even though the actual historical event took place in our world at a specific point in time. Time and chance had absolutely nothing to do with the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, since we were already in the eternal mind and will of God. I do not want to get off track here in today's study on radical sacrifice, but I want to clarify what I have just said.

God is sovereign. That is a biblical fact. But there is not a single person, either past, present or future, that will understand the sovereignty of God.

There are a lot of people that think they have figured out how God's sovereignty works and makes great boasts about how he manages creation. Yet all such boasting only shows how ignorant and proud we humans can be. Listen to what the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 40.

With the breath of his hand marked off the heavens, who has held the dust of the earth in a basket or weighed the mountains and the scales and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the Lord or instructed him as his counselor? Who did the Lord consult to enlighten him and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket. They are regarded as dust on the scales. He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

The Lord has no equal, no counselors, no instructors. Our opinions are worthless. They do not alter who God is, one iota.

All that he has done or will do will come out of his own infinite and faultless mind. No one can add anything to God, for he is perfect and complete in himself. Only God knows how to give his rational creatures an authentic free will while still remaining the sovereign Lord over all.

This is a mystery that we should learn to be content with. I am not afraid or ashamed to admit that I am extremely finite and that our God is an infinite mystery. I love that God is an infinite mystery.

It causes me to long to know him more. It causes me to worship and adore what can be known about the Lord. He has given us in his word and it is our responsibility and obligation to strive to understand all we can to know about him while keeping within the confines he has established for the human race.

Nevertheless, those that are passionately pursuing God will always come to the place where they must acknowledge that their human wisdom has exhausted itself and all that is left is to worship and adore such a glorious God. The moment we think we have figured God out, we have only proven how little we know about him. Any God that our mind can fathom is inferior to the mind that conceived such a small God.

This is a form of idolatry and it is in the church today. When we look at the radical Jesus, we see a God that refuses to conform to our preconceived ideas. Though we can only comprehend a small portion of the person and work of God, we are nonetheless commanded by God to seek to know him to the fullest extent that we mortals are allowed to know him in our fallen condition.

Though Jesus is the almighty God that became human, he is the only pure and faultless example of what it means to be human and Christian. That is why he alone must be our example of what it means for us to be Christian. By examining the various dimensions of Christ's sacrifice, we are presented with the true nature of sacrifice and commanded to be like him.

Peter gave us a command that is very disturbing to most Christians in our present day and age. It is found in 1 Peter 2.21. To this you are called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. This is what we will now turn our attention to.

The sacrifice Christians should be living out for the glory of God and for their own spiritual well-being. Jesus sacrificed everything for us and he deserves the reward of his suffering, which means that we should sacrifice everything for him. This is basic Christianity.

Giving Jesus everything is our reasonable or expected service. Anything less is another gospel than the one Jesus delivered to us. Let me illustrate this point with a parable Jesus gave us in Luke 17, verses 7 and 8. Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep.

Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, come along now and sit down and eat? Would he not rather say, prepare my meal, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink? After that, you may eat and drink. Since we do not live in an ancient Middle Eastern culture, it can be very difficult for us to understand the context in which Jesus spoke. So we need to be careful to grasp the setting which Jesus is speaking in.

Western culture is prone to equate servants with our concept of employees, but this is a grave mistake. The Savior is purposely using servitude as an example of the life of an authentic follower of Jesus. So Jesus is speaking about a master-slave relationship, and such an idea can make us very uncomfortable in our 21st century Western culture.

Because we are uncomfortable with the master-slave model that Jesus used, many people degrade or dismiss this idea. Our Lord's use of the idea does not mean that he sanctioned slavery, just that it is a very good illustration of the relationship between God and man. I think another reason why we do not like this master-servant relationship is because it obligates us to live in a way that is contrary to American culture and our rebellious fallen nature.

The picture of a servant who represents a true Christian, which had been laboring all day in the service of the Master, which is Jesus. Because a servant labored more than eight hours a day does not mean he received any overtime pay. The truth is that servants did not get overtime pay for working long hours, since they did not get any pay for their labor other than food, shelter, and clothing.

Notice the strong point that Jesus is making. Should the master say to the servant, come along now and sit down and eat, would he not rather say, prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink, after that you may eat and drink? The master was not asking the servant to give himself to the will of the master for eight or twelve hours a day while he worked in the fields. No, the master demanded all of the servant's time, and all of his energy.

The sacrifice the man was to give the master was what was expected of him. It was his reasonable service. It was the basic of what it meant to be a servant to a master.

Anything less would have been an act of insubordination against the master. It would have been sheer outright rebellion. Jesus then asked a very important question that was pointed at his disciples.

Would the master thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? How would most people today answer that question? How would you answer that question? Many would reply, yes, he should be thanked and rewarded for his faithful servant. He should receive a hundredfold blessing because he deserves it. The problem is that Jesus does not agree with such a concept of discipleship.

People are not saved because they deserve it. What we deserve is judgment in hell for the anarchy we have fermented through our sin and rebellion. Any good thing that Jesus gives us is a gift.

In our pleasure-driven self-absorbed culture, we think that we deserve happiness, wealth, and the right to live as we please. Now listen to how Jesus answered his own rhetorical question in verse 10. So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, we are unworthy servants.

We have only done our duty. Most Christians cannot even say that they've done their duty, their reasonable and expected service. Yet we think that we deserve a ton of blessings from God.

All those who are true followers of Jesus were rescued from their damnable rebellion. And you are obligated to give him every fiber of your being without exception and without argument. The problem is that most Christians cannot comprehend the servant mentality that Jesus lived and commands all his disciples to live as well.

Most self-professing Christians have an attitude that is the exact opposite of Christ. Listen to what Jesus said to his apostles in Matthew chapter 20 verses 25 through 28. This happened immediately after there were some divisions and jealousies among them.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them and their high officials exercised authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.

And whoever wants to be first must become your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. How do most people perceive success and greatness, even in the church? More often than not, it is not in line with Christ's teaching, but is filled with ideas of being served by others, of being the master, not the servant.

True followers of Jesus are forbidden to think and act like the world. Jesus equates greatness with servanthood, not ruling over others. Christians are given a greater calling than the world could ever comprehend.

And that privileged calling is to be like Jesus, to sacrifice like Jesus, to be a servant like Jesus. Yet in our watered-down version of American Christianity, we find Christ's command to be far too costly. We don't want a faith that calls us to pick up our cross and follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

Personal fulfillment has become the driving force of most professing believers. And it is the mantra of the seeker-sensitive, lukewarm megachurch movement. We will only sacrifice if there is some kind of personal reward to be gained, whether it is material or financial growth in political power or the applause of people.

Loving, selfless sacrifice is not convenient, and it does not usually offer us any personal advantage. Sure, church folk will pray, serve, or worship so long as it is expedient and fulfilling. But the moment they deem it too costly, then they leave the church to find another that will satisfy their selfish desires and adhere to their concept of comfortable Christianity.

A vast number of self-professing Christians do not want a costly faith. They do not want to work all day and then get home and feel that they have to serve Jesus before they serve themselves. A me-religion always puts self before God and others.

One way this parable of the servant can be applied to our lives has to do with prayer. We can work all day long and then want to veg out in front of the TV without the least thought of serving the Master in prayer. We think that God does not expect us to seek him when we are tired or hurting or hungry or sad or happy or whatever other excuses we make.

And then we have the audacity to make the foolish boast that God understands, while failing to grasp the truth that he really does understand and will one day hold us accountable for our actions and thoughts and motives. Our selfish way of living is diametrically opposed to Christ's standard of discipleship, which is

all-consuming. Some Christians even claim that living such an abandoned life is legalistic.

What a lie! This is a mighty convenient statement that people throw around in an effort to avoid one's obligations to the Lord. What is the standard for all Christian behavior in this fallen world? It is Jesus and only Jesus. What was Christ's motivation to sacrifice himself for our salvation? Disinterested love.

The disinterested love Jesus exhibited through his life and crucifixion is the only standard that is to define the life and sacrifice of those that follow Jesus. Jesus sacrificed everything for us, and we are thoroughly obligated through his disinterested love to love him in like manner to sacrifice everything out of loving devotion. This is not an option.

We owe him all the affection that our hearts can give and the absolute devotion of our wills. To give him anything less is an insult to his majesty and to trample underfoot his sacrifice. Our low view of Jesus causes us to give him only a portion of our lives to him.

What happens when people begin to have a high view of Jesus? When they begin to see his holiness and majesty more clearly? One Muslim convert to Christianity clearly characterized what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Duty before self-preservation. That is a very important principle in scripture.

This is what it means to pick up our cross and follow Jesus, which is a very important principle in scripture. This was one of our Lord's common preaching themes, an example of which is found in Matthew 16 verses 25 and 26. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? The sacrifice of ourselves to and for Christ is central to the true faith. There is no way around it. Everything we do should be expressions of worship to the God that paid the purchase price of our redemption.

This means that our worship, prayer, Bible study, evangelism, and practice of holiness are to be expressions of loving sacrifice to God. This is our duty and what we were created for. Yet think of all the foolish and evil things that people will forfeit their eternal souls for.

And think of how many self-professing Christians will forfeit their eternal souls because they did not believe that what Jesus said he really meant. So they live contrary to Christ's commands, thinking that sentimental feelings are more than enough. Now let's look at the book of Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. Therefore I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

The entire Christian faith is summarized in these two verses that define the nature of our spiritual act of worship, or as the King James translates it, our reasonable service. Being a living sacrifice is all about the surrender of our personal claims, rights, and prerogatives to Jesus. Jesus is not the Lord of your life if you retain control of any portion of your life.

To surrender our lives to him as living sacrifices means that we relinquish and sacrifice the rule of our lives to him so that he can use us as he pleases. The acceptable sacrifice that Stephen offered to God was first a life of loving devotion, which in turn produced the church's first martyr. If Stephen would have sought to save his life, then he would not have been murdered.

Paul would not have heard him preach and the church would not have been spread throughout the world in the way in which it was. It is not our place to tell God what he can do with our lives and talents. Ours is to surrender to Christ as a living sacrifice and to not be conformed to this world.

Then he will transform our minds so that we can know his good, pleasing, and perfect will, which in Stephen's case was to testify to the reality of Jesus through life and then by his death. Whether through life or death, ease or hardship, we are to relinquish all our rights to the Lord Jesus Christ, who holds the deeds of our souls as creator and redeemer. If you follow the deaths of the apostles, you will find that according to church history and tradition, that all of the original apostles were martyred for Jesus, Judas being excluded from the twelve.

Why would these men die such torturous deaths, such as Peter being crucified upside down? John was considered a martyr because his persecutors tried to kill him by putting him in a boiling vat of oil, but the Lord preserved his life. His persecutors then plucked out his eyes and exiled him to the prison island of Patmos. So the Lord gave John eyes to see that which men cannot naturally see and gave him freedom that few men have ever known and his visions are recorded in Revelation.

Why would they suffer the hardships associated with taking the gospel to the known world? Why would they give themselves away for Jesus and be hated, abused, maligned, and eventually killed for him? Because they believed that Jesus was who he claimed to be. And since they were eyewitnesses of his life, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension, they were willing to sacrifice themselves for Jesus. We too must come to that same kind and level of faith or we will not lay our lives down for Christ.

On one occasion, Jesus asked his disciples, who do the crowds say that I am? You'll find this account in Luke chapter 9, beginning in verse 18. It is also found in Matthew 16 and Mark 8. The disciples responded with some of the popular explanations that the people were saying at that time. Then Jesus became confrontational by asking them, but what about you? Who do you say that I am? People can talk about Jesus while living at a distance from him.

They can have sentimental feelings for Jesus while never genuinely loving him. They can spout off religious jargon in a safe way that does not obligate them while giving the impression that they are spiritual. But what will we do when the question becomes personal? But what about you? Who do you say that I am? We must give a response to this question sooner or later.

And once the question comes to us, either by way of scripture, the preaching of the word, or the spirit speaking to the hearts of people, we are then required to give an answer to Jesus. And according to the answer we give will be the response of the life that follows because the answer must be with the life, not just with our lips. People that call themselves Christians, but have a low view of Jesus will never pursue him with a holy passion.

They will live in compromise because they will see no need to live otherwise since they have such a low view of God. We are told that Peter quickly answered Jesus' question, declaring the Christ of God. Peter had been watching Jesus very closely ever since he started following him three and a half years earlier.

Through the process of the unfolding revelation of Peter by the spirit, he had finally come to the clear conclusion that Jesus was Messiah. With this revelation, knowledge comes responsibility and accountability. To know that Jesus is God obligates us to live like he is God, to come under his rule no matter the cost.

When we grasp the truth that Jesus is God and are awestruck by that fact, then there will be a lifelong loving sacrifice that is offered to God in gratitude. This is where sacrifice ceases to be a burden, but a joy. Jesus replied to Peter's bold declaration saying, blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my father in heaven.

Isn't it wonderful to know when we have truly heard the voice of God? And doesn't that give us encouragement to want to listen to his voice and obey his commands all the more? In response to Peter's declaration, Jesus told the apostles that he would suffer in Jerusalem, which they could not understand at that time. If we really want to know God, then we must know him through Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Lord, because there's no other path that leads to the father. It is at this point that Jesus declared, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self? I quoted earlier the Matthew version of this account, but I want to expound on a few more points. Jesus asked the question, who do you say I am? To bring them into a deeper consecration to follow him no matter the cost, because it would not be long before the cost would be great.

Through this dialogue, Jesus made it very clear that he was the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament. Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is forcing them to make a decision of what they will do with that knowledge. With that knowledge, everything changed.

They could not go any further in their faith journey until they answered this all-important question of who Jesus is and then fully commit themselves to his service. Jesus declared, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Jesus is not afraid to be confrontational.

Actually, it is a necessary part of preaching the gospel and to remove the confrontational dimension of the gospel is to preach a false gospel that cannot lead people to salvation. With the knowledge of who Jesus is comes the obligation to take up our cross and follow him or rebel against him. There are only two possible responses.

There is no escaping this standard of biblical discipleship. We will either adhere to it or rebel against it. To follow Jesus, we must pick up our cross, which speaks of our willingness to suffer in a way that will cause us to be dead to sin and to sacrifice ourselves in service for Jesus.

Those that do not want to pick up their cross cannot be Christ's disciple. Jesus was presenting here some of his non-negotiable terms of discipleship. These are not options, but mandatory items of what it means to be a true follower of Jesus.

It is one thing to profess to be a follower of Christ. It is a totally different matter to actually live like Jesus, to be Christ-like, because you are a real follower of Jesus. Those that seek to save their life will surely lose it.

Jesus then asked another very important question. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self? Many a self-professing Christian will spend eternity in hell because they

refuse to obey Christ's command to pick up their cross and follow him. They want a happy religion that will not place upon them any uncomfortable demands.

It is a very sad fact that hell will be filled with people that thought the cost of following Jesus to be far too great, so they were willing to forfeit their eternal souls for the horrors of hell. Following Jesus is very costly. In reality, it will cost you everything.

Is sacrifice and suffering involved in it? Absolutely. But do not be deceived. Sacrifice and suffering are a part of life for all of mankind, and nobody can escape it.

So we are confronted with another question. Since sacrifice and suffering are a part of life in this fallen world, who are you going to sacrifice and suffer for? Yourself? For money? For a bigger house? For retirement? For the devil? Or for Jesus? The cost of not sacrificing yourself for Jesus means that you will sacrifice yourself for the devil and for your own selfish desires. And if that is the road you choose to take, then understand that you will surely experience suffering in this life and then suffering throughout eternity.

For all those that will pick up their cross to follow Jesus, they will experience sacrifice and suffering in this life. But in the world to come, they will only know joy, peace, and the glory of dwelling in God's presence forever. To pick up your cross to follow Jesus means that you must crucify all your worldly affections and lusts.

You must crucify your inherent right to rule yourself so that you can be ruled by a good and benevolent God. It means that you crucify every love that is contrary to Christ so that you can love Him supremely. It means that you are fully devoted to Jesus in everything.

And it means that you find His commands are not a burden to you, but the path to true freedom in Christ. Jesus never allowed any room for half-hearted devotion among His followers. The very idea of half-hearted devotion or lukewarmness is thoroughly repulsive to Him.

Those that would be true followers of Jesus must do more than call Him Lord. They must bow in complete obedience to His Lordship.

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