

# (Radical Jesus) 26 Radical Faith

by Glenn Meldrum

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*Radical faith is a faith deeply rooted in a living relationship with God that is founded upon the truth of who He is.*

**Duration:** 24:45

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Mark 11:12-17, Romans 1:16

**Topics:** "Faith"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the inseparable connection between faith and knowing God. He uses the example of Jesus cursing a fig tree and overturning tables in the temple to illustrate this point. The speaker also discusses different types of faith, including faith in the laws of nature and faith in God. He references Paul's statement about love in 1 Corinthians 13 to highlight the importance of understanding the object of our faith. Overall, the message emphasizes that true faith is not blind, but based on verifiable evidence and focused on the radical Jesus.

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## Transcript

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Last week we finished up the section on radical sacrifice by looking at how sacrifice is an integral part of loving God. It is impossible for us to obey the Lord's command to love Him with all of our being and to love our neighbor as we would want to be loved without sacrifice being involved. We also examine the necessity that we live daily lives of loving sacrifice so that when those times of great sacrifice are demanded of us, we will rise to the occasion and obey the Lord's command.

We closed out the section on radical sacrifice by digging into the life of Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. This woman of God modeled a godly character that was expressed through deep devotion to the Savior. At times her devotion was revealed through extravagant acts of love, such as when she anointed Jesus just before His arrest and crucifixion.

The love and devotion Mary showed Jesus is really not extravagant, but the love that is expected of every true follower of Jesus. This is normal Christianity as defined by God, and it should be lived out on a

constant basis by everyone that claims to be a Christian. Today we move on to a new section in our continuing study of the radical Jesus by looking at radical faith.

In my book, *The Radical Jesus*, I open the chapter on radical faith with a statement, Faith can only be as radical as the God in whom we place it. If our faith is not radical, then it is not biblical. And if it is not biblical, then the object of our faith must be focused upon something other than the living God.

Everyone has faith, even the self-proclaimed atheist has faith. Faith is part of the human makeup. It is part of who we are.

It is impossible to remove faith from us humans because faith is a necessary part of any of God's rational beings, because we are finite, so faith has to be active in the life because we do not know everything. Since we are finite beings, we are forced to trust in people, things, laws, and spiritual beings throughout life. Whether what we trust is good or evil depends upon the relationship we have with God.

There are different kinds of faith. One kind of faith is focused on our intrinsic need for God because we were created to be worshiping beings and created to be dependent upon Him. We will worship something or someone.

We cannot escape this reality. Since we are worshipers, it would be wise for us to make sure that what or who we are worshiping is worthy of our worship and is able to save us when all is said and done. Another expression of faith is that which is placed in people.

This is something everybody does, from the infantile faith of a little baby trusting mama to the old atheist that trusts in himself and his humanistic religion. A wife trusts that her husband will be faithful to her, a teenager that her parents will take care of her needs, and an employee that the boss will pay him for his labor, and so on. We trust people to keep their word and to fulfill their vows and commitments.

This is how we work. Then there is faith in law, such as that expressed towards government, nature, or of God. We have faith in the nature of how things work, such as the everyday faith that when you turn on a switch, the light comes on.

These are all expressions of faith to a lesser or greater degree, and they are part of life because we are finite beings that are not omniscient or all-knowing. Paul speaking about love in 1 Corinthians 13 stated, Though Paul was directly talking about the nature of love, his statement also applies to the nature of faith. When we strive to learn how faith works, then we must understand the importance of the object of our faith.

For a woman to put her faith in a man that states he will be faithful to her, yet all his life he has been a womanizer and an adulterer, is to put one's faith in someone that is very unreliable and is sure to disappoint her in the end. So the object of our faith is very important, and when it comes to God, it is all-important. When we look at faith in God, this is where our theology becomes very important.

We cannot rise any higher in our faith than the God in whom we place our faith. A low view of God will produce a feeble faith that will never meet the needs of the person. A high view of God will cause people to believe in a miracle-working God that has proven Himself by being a God of miracles in and through history.

Every rational person is a theologian in the sense that we all have a view of who God is or is not, what He will or will not do, and so forth. Our view of God may be based upon revealed truth or sheer fantasy, but everyone has faith in a God of one sort or another. Those who believe in a wimpy, wishy-washy God will hold very anemic convictions, and their lives will be filled with worldly desires and compromise.

People who believe in a God that commands them to kill whoever they deem an infidel will be very violent, hateful people. We end up looking like the God we believe in, because the God in which we believe will define who we are and how we live. People that believe in man-made gods can rise no higher than the God they have created out of their own imagination.

The philosophies of men are only as strong as the finite minds that concoct them. People may have great faith in a false god, philosophy, or ideology, and even strive to do great feats in the name of their belief, but faith that is not rooted in the rock Jesus Christ will be like shifting sand, unable to satisfy the deepest needs of the soul. A man may try to start a car that he knows does not have an engine, and may claim that he believes the car will start because he has faith, but his faith is placed upon an unreliable source.

Faith in faith is also a false religion. For all those that place their faith in a glorious, almighty God, they can legitimately believe him for the miraculous, because he has done the miraculous in the past. Since God is faithful, he is able to be trusted.

We will not be disappointed, or as Paul said in chapter 1 of Romans, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. The faith that God calls us to live out is not a blind faith, but a faith that has been proven, that is focused upon a God that has revealed himself in a host of ways. The Lord has given us enough verifiable evidence so that our faith can have substance to stand upon.

True faith will always be radical, because the object of that faith is the radical Jesus. What we believe about God is very important, because it defines how we then live. Faith in a man-made God or philosophy cannot produce real satisfying results, because the object of one's faith is a lie or an illusion.

Faith in God must be focused upon who God is, as he has revealed himself in Scripture, not upon opinions and pop teachings. Over the centuries many people have grown angry at God, because they claimed to have believed that he would do what they asked him to do. But their anger came out because they believed he failed to come through for them.

It is not enough to believe God, but we must believe in the God that is clearly revealed in Scripture. To claim to have faith that God will do anything we ask is to have faith in a mythical God, not in the true and living God. If we want to see God answer the prayer of faith, then we must know the character and nature of God and then pray according to his will, otherwise we will be very disappointed.

The Apostle John said it this way, This is the confidence we have in approaching God, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. There is one of the major keys to powerful prayer, praying according to God's will, not our own. Throughout this study on the radical Jesus, I have strove to be faithful to the Scripture, to preach the truth in love and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I have also endeavored to keep the focus of this study on Jesus, and to assert again and again that he is the only true and reliable standard of what it means to be human, normal, and Christian. At this point I would like to address a challenging issue that relates to Jesus and faith. If Jesus is our example of what it

means to be human, normal, and Christian, then how do we make him our perfect example of faith? This forces us to ask the question, does God have faith? Central to this question is Jesus, who is God incarnate.

Did he have to operate by faith when he walked this planet? This is a very challenging idea. Earlier in this study I stated that faith is a necessary part of being finite creatures, because we do not know everything like God does. I believe that this is true for men and angels.

But what about Jesus when he walked this planet? The self-proclaimed Word of Faith teachers allege that God does have faith, and that everything he does comes out of that faith. There are some very great problems with such an assertion, one of the primary being that faith must have an object in which to place one's faith. If God has faith, then what is the object of his faith? The Word of Faith teachers claim that God's faith rests upon his Word.

Well, that sounds good, at least at first, until we get into the nitty-gritty of such a claim. If God places his faith in his Word, then his Word is something separate from him, for it must then stand outside of himself. His Word must then be a distinct entity from God himself, otherwise he is having faith in himself, and that is a ridiculous idea.

The Lord is one, which means that he is one in being, and one in the sense that he cannot be divided. So you cannot divide God from his Word. Besides, Jesus claimed that he was the Word made flesh.

Then we have the added problem that if God has faith, then whatever he puts his faith in would be the God of God. Logically speaking, such a claim would mean that God is only a lesser God, and that there must be a bigger or better God behind him. If this is not heretical, then I do not know what is.

It is not the purpose of this podcast to confront false doctrine, but to study the infinitely magnificent Jesus, so that we can learn how to live in this present evil world. But we are looking at the radical nature of faith, so we must address certain issues. Let me make this very clear.

God does not have faith, since he does not operate through faith. God operates through divine fiat, or God's creative command. He speaks, and it comes to pass, because he is all-powerful and all-knowing.

Faith speaks of limitations and finiteness of ability, weakness or limitations, so it is not something that God is in need of, but because he needs nothing outside of himself to be who he is, and to do what he wants to do. God is infinite in every dimension of his being. He is not limited in any way, shape or form.

This is why faith is for God's creatures, not for God himself. Faith is something we need, because we are not all-knowing and all-powerful. Now, I freely admit that when it comes to Jesus, we are faced with the daunting task of trying to comprehend how an infinite God could be fully human, and how all that works together.

There is a mystery that engulfs God, and we are finite creatures striving to understand an infinite being. What an impossible task! What a glorious pursuit! Here again we are faced with the issue that faith always has an object, and if Jesus had faith, then he had to have an object. For Jesus to make the Father an object of his faith would make Jesus less than the Father.

This also is heretical. It would also take us back to the issue that God is not divided, and to say that God the Son had to have faith in God the Father is to defy the Godhead. This would also lead to the heretical

teaching of tritheism, which is the belief in three gods that are distinct from each other, each with an independent center of consciousness and determination.

So the God that creates through divine fiat became human. You will notice that Jesus never did a single miracle in the name or authority of the Father because he did them all through his own infinite power as God. The couple of times that Jesus prayed before he performed a miracle, such as the raising of Lazarus, he did not ask the Father to do the miracle, but prayed for the sake of those who were listening.

I have said all this to establish that when it comes to faith, we cannot use Jesus as an example and object lesson in the same way we have with the other points I have been making in this series. What we can do is look at what Jesus says about faith and to examine the lives of those that he said had great faith. One very important characteristic of great faith that Jesus wants us to learn is that faith and knowing God are inseparable.

To help illustrate this point, I want to look at something Jesus did and said that is found in Mark 11, beginning in verse 12. The next day, as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit.

When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, May no one ever eat fruit from you again. And the disciples heard him say it.

Jesus then went to the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and declared, Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of robbers. In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, Rabbi, look, the fig tree you cursed has withered.

Jesus answered, Have faith in God. He then went on to say, I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, Go, throw yourself into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you will receive it, and it will be yours.

Jesus commands us to have faith in God. Like I said earlier, faith is the duty of creatures to the creator, not of the creator himself. To help us understand faith, it would be helpful to understand the nature of unbelief and why we have unbelief.

Unbelief is either the byproduct of not knowing God, or of not knowing Him well enough to trust Him fully. In Hebrews chapter 11, we find Paul making a list of some of the Old Testament heroes of the faith. With the names that he mentioned, there is an expression of faith that produced the desired end.

Their faith was directly contingent upon knowing God enough to trust Him. How can we trust a God we do not know? It is impossible. If we want greater faith, then we must grow in greater intellectual and relational knowledge of God.

Otherwise, we will be prone to have doubt and skepticism. Notice that I am not talking about head knowledge alone, but relational knowledge as well. The two work hand in hand, and we will never be the Christians we should be if we lack one or the other.

Some people have head knowledge, but little or no relational knowledge. Their difficulty with faith arises because they always have to figure it out first. So they will have a difficult time making the leaps of faith

that are necessary to have great faith.

Making great leaps of faith comes through a sound knowledge of God and a relational knowledge that causes people to make the necessary leap of faith because they do trust God. People that primarily have a relational knowledge of God without the intellectual will be prone to believe in things that are false or even erroneous and will place their faith in a God that is based more upon opinion than reality. The radical nature of faith that Jesus wants us to live out is a faith deeply rooted in a living relationship with God that is founded upon the truth of who He is.

To help us understand the faith that Jesus wants us to have, we will look at a couple of examples of people that Jesus praised because they had what He called great faith. I think this is very important because there are not many people in Scripture that the Lord praises. So when we see a life that He does praise, it would do us well to closely examine that life.

At the top of the list of people Jesus praised are those that had great faith. One such person that Jesus prayed was a pagan woman, a Canaanite, that had a demon-possessed little daughter. The story is found in Matthew 15, verses 22-28.

The woman comes to Jesus in a state of desperation pleading, Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession. Before I get into the interaction between Jesus and the Canaanite woman, I want to paint the picture of the situation.

The woman was a Canaanite as to location, nationality, and religion. As a Canaanite, she was an idol worshipper that held to the gods her family and culture taught her to worship. Some of the pagan religions had very sensual practices, such as with the fertility gods, and this was the case with the Canaanites.

There was great animosity between the Canaanites and Jews. They both rejected the religion and culture of the other. For the woman to come to Jesus tells us that she had reached a place of desperation to come to a Jewish prophet for help.

It also tells us that she had come to see that her religion was powerless to help her. Her going to Jesus for help would have caused her to suffer a certain amount of persecution from family members and the village she lived in. At this point, we need to ask how the daughter came to be demon possessed in the first place.

The word used for daughter in the account means that she was a little girl, maybe three to six years old. Demon possession happens in a similar way as with a person that becomes a Christian. In either case, the person must open themselves up and invite God or the devil into their life.

For this little girl to become demon possessed, she had to live in a very wicked environment that caused her to open up to demonic forces and eventually allow the demon to enter her. The spiritual atmosphere of the home is defined by the members of that household and the parents are the primary force in creating whatever spiritual environment defines the home, whether good or evil. In the case of the Canaanite woman, she must have been living such a debauched life that it led to her daughter's demon possession.

I do not doubt that she had gone to the doctors of her village and the priests of her pagan religions, but all to no avail. So in desperation, she implored Jesus to heal her daughter. As we look at Christ's response to the woman, we must understand that he is not her enemy, but her advocate, that he is laboring to save her, not harm her.

What good would it be to cast the devil out of the little girl and then throw her back into the wicked environment that produced her demon possession in the first place? So Jesus had to do a work in the Canaanite woman before he could set the child free. At the beginning of the story, we find that Jesus ignored the woman's frantic pleadings. The disciples begged Jesus to send her away because she was wearing them out with her constant pleadings.

I think that her constant pleading was an expression of faith because she knew there was not help from any other place, so she would not give up till she got help from Jesus. Jesus finally answered her, saying that he was not sent to the pagans, but to the lost sheep of Israel. This seems at first glance to be a rejection of anyone that was not Jewish in faith or nationality, but it was not.

How would most people deal with the seeming rejection this woman was receiving, first from the silence of Jesus and then with this seemingly prejudiced statement? They would respond with anger or nasty words, rejecting Jesus and turning and walking away. It is a fact that Jesus came to Israel first. Yet it was never his intention that salvation should stay only among the Jews.

He had come to be the savior of the world. The woman was desperate to see her daughter delivered while not yet being desperate enough about her own spiritual condition. This is such a huge problem.

Many people do not come to salvation because they are not desperate enough to seek it. They do not really see their desperate need. And many Christians do not receive the miracle they need because they are not desperate enough to act like this Canaanite woman, giving Jesus no rest till the miracle comes.

The woman needed the great gift that Jesus was going to give her because it would be the revolution of the lives of the mother and daughter. What happened next is that the Canaanite woman fell at Jesus' feet, begging him to help her, pleading for mercy. The cry of mercy is very powerful when people reach that critical point in their lives.

Yet Jesus does not seemingly respond to her cry for mercy or her falling at his feet, which is a very good place to be. Instead, he makes a very derogatory statement. It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.

To call a person a dog in ancient Middle Eastern culture was a very serious insult. Throughout this interaction between Jesus and the woman, you see a desperation rising up in her that will eventually produce great faith. This is what Jesus was doing all along, laboring to build this woman's faith so that he would respond with the needed miracle in her life and in that of her child.

Not only did she overlook Christ's insult, but she actually agreed with his declaration that she was as a dog. In her response, we see an integral part of faith. To know Christ and affirm that what he says is true, even if it seems offensive, negative, or contrary to our understanding.

This woman was a sinner in tremendous need of a Savior, but she had come for her daughter being oblivious to her own terrible condition. She had already acknowledged that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah the son of David prophesied about in the Jewish scriptures. She actually acknowledged what the Jewish religious leaders should have been acknowledging all along.

So she had a right knowledge of who Jesus was, at least to the best of her ability at that time, and she knew he performed miracles. Her faith now rises up undaunted in the face of such seeming rejection. This simple woman refused to be denied.

Then in true brokenness and humility, she replied, Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. The Canaanite was agreeing with Jesus, and to agree with Jesus is a very important part of overcoming faith. In essence, she was saying, Yes, I am as a dog.

I know I do not deserve your help, but I am coming to you for mercy. You are good and kind, so I trust that you will come to my rescue. Isn't that a wonderful response? She agreed with Jesus about her true spiritual condition and then came to him asking for help.

Neither the Canaanite woman nor the disciples understood what Jesus was really doing. At first glance, it would appear that Jesus was unloving, even cruel. But on closer scrutiny, you will see that Jesus used these circumstances to move the woman from passive belief into radical, miracle-experiencing faith.

Jesus loved the woman and her little daughter and longed to heal them both, so he worked in such a way that would bring the woman to the place of great faith and personal salvation. The Lord works in similar ways all over the world and throughout time to bring people to saving faith. We may not understand what he is doing in our lives or in the lives of those we love, but I guarantee you that he is laboring for their eternal well-being.

Jesus is laboring to bring people to saving faith as he did with this Canaanite woman or to bring them to greater faith so that he can do exploits through them. The Lord wants to grow his people up so that they can see the greater things that he promised we would see. It is a fact that the Canaanite woman knew the Lord better than the majority of Israelites of that day and the majority of self-professing Christians today.

Though she was originally an idol worshiper, she came to know that Jesus was Messiah and that he had power to do whatever he desired. So she operated in faith by making Jesus the object of her faith, and she was not disappointed. Jesus granted her requests, declaring for all to hear, Woman, you have great faith.

In essence, Jesus said, You have prevailed with God, dear woman, because your faith was great. Such a response does not come from a bigoted person, but from a loving Savior. The Canaanite woman's daughter was healed from that very hour, and so was the woman herself.

She would never be the same. The environment of the home was radically changed because the woman was radically changed. Radical faith accomplishes that which it seeks because the object of the faith is focused upon the one who never fails, the one who is absolutely radical, which is Jesus.

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