

(Radical Jesus) 31 Radical Prayer

by Glenn Meldrum

A praying church is the only kind of church that can do God's work God's way.

Duration: 25:04

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of preaching the entire word of God, not just what makes people happy. He shares a true story about a popular pastor who is afraid to preach the truth because he fears losing his church and TV audience. The speaker criticizes the pastor for being a slave to men, pride, and money, and compares him to a defeated army. The sermon emphasizes that true spiritual growth and impact can only come from the Spirit of God, not from man-made plans and programs.

Transcript

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In last week's podcast, we were looking at the subject of prayer and how the quality of the relationship we have with Jesus directly affects our prayer life and how our prayer life directly affects the relationship we have with Jesus. We also examine how the prayer life of a pastor, teacher, professor, or any other church or ministry leader directly affects the people to whom they minister. When ministers fail in the prayer closet, they fail in all of ministry and all of life, no matter how popular they may be in the minds of the people.

The kingdom of God is spiritual, so it can only be advanced through spiritual means. Without living a life of prayer, we cannot operate in the spiritual realm, but only in the natural. The primary reason why the church is lukewarm revolves around the sad fact that a vast number of those in ministry today are either prayerless or so little in prayer that they do not gain much benefit from it or much good for others.

How can those who are called to be the spiritual leaders of Christ's church do any spiritual good if they are not fully engaged in the spiritual work of prayer? We then looked at how the condition of a marriage is directly affected by whether or not the husband and wife are people of prayer. In today's podcast, we are going to turn our attention to how prayer directly affects the spiritual condition of the local church. Is there

any valid way to gauge the spiritual life of a local church? If there isn't, then we are destined to keep reproducing the lukewarm, watered-down version of Christianity that is not very attractive to a perishing world, nor is it to those followers of Jesus that have a passion to know Christ.

There are character attributes of a local church in a similar way as there are character traits in a person. Just as we can misjudge the character of a person by what he does or what he has accomplished, we can also misjudge the spiritual condition of a church by how many people attend or the fame of the pastor. Even a person's gifts and talents does not speak of the condition of the character, and this is true with a local church as well.

Because a church may appear successful due to its large congregation, a fancy church campus or well-attended programs does not mean that they are advancing the kingdom of God or are a spiritually healthy congregation. A father took his teenage daughter to a very well-known youth group at a very well-known church in California when they were on vacation. Roughly a thousand teenagers attend this youth group.

The senior pastor started the youth meeting with a secular dance song that is very sensual, and the meeting went downhill from there. Both the father and daughter were heartbroken, so the next day the father called the church office to talk to the pastor and kindly speak about his concern about the youth meeting. The senior pastor shut him down, saying, Did you see how many teens were there? We must be doing something right.

With that, the pastor ended the discussion. Pragmatism defined that pastor, his church, and youth group, not God or his word or the Holy Spirit. Pragmatism is a belief that if it works, it must be right.

But that is not how the kingdom of God functions, because pragmatism is contrary to God's word. What is right and wrong is defined by God, not pragmatism or popular opinion. According to God's word, that pastor was an absolute failure because he mingled the church with the world, and every time that happens, the power of God is removed from the church.

Just look at Israel, and you will see this to be a biblical fact. Stanley Jones said it this way, We inoculate the world with a mild form of Christianity so that it will be immune to the real thing. Compromise in church does not advance Christ's kingdom, only the devil's.

When we look at the Christian life, it is the fruit of the Spirit, as spoken of by Paul in Galatians 5, that reveals the true spiritual condition of an individual. Spiritual and natural gifts do not speak of a person's spiritual condition, or that they are even saved. If we use anything other than the fruit of the Spirit to evaluate the spiritual condition of a person, then we are sure to be wrong.

I have said all that to establish that the fruit of the Spirit is one of the primary gauges that determines the spiritual condition of an individual. In like manner, the church is called the body of Christ, which speaks that it has its own personality and character. And this is true for each and every local congregation.

This tells us that there are spiritual character traits of a local church that will reveal its spiritual health or condition. If we establish the life of the church through pragmatic standards, then we will absolutely fail God, because we will then be gauging the life of the church by worldly standards rather than those defined by God. So we must purposely determine to never define the life of the church according to its size, fame, income, buildings, or any other criteria other than the Word of God.

If biblical Christianity is all about relationship with Christ, and the cross was the means by which there could be reconciliation between a holy God and sinful mankind, then the relationship a church has with God should be the ultimate indicator of its spiritual condition. We rise or fall according to the relationship we have with God, and that stands true for the local church as well. The spiritual life of a local congregation can be determined by three things, each of which speak about its relationship with God.

They are prayer, worship, and the Word of God. To use fellowship, ministry, and evangelism as a gauge of spiritual life in the local church is to put the cart before the horse. The greatest commandment is to love God with all of our being, and the second is to love others.

Our ability to rightly love others flows out of our fulfilling the first commandment to love God. Out of the relationship we have with God will be the fellowship, ministry, and evangelism that will be done in and through the local church. These are the byproduct of the condition of our love for God, not the means by which we grow to love Him.

The problem we have is that we can do church without God, and we can do it very well. If 40,000 people attend a church and God does not show up, then that church is an absolute failure. But if you have a church of 50 people where God is tangibly present, then there is true success.

In Exodus chapter 33, Moses is interceding for the children of Israel because they built a golden calf and then worshiped it. The Lord said that He was angry enough to destroy Israel, but Moses interceded for them. Then the Lord said He would send an angel before the people so they could enter the promised land, but He declared that He would not go with them because He might destroy them because they were such a rebellious people.

Moses then responded, If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? It is the tangible presence of God that is in the midst of a local church that really gauges if God is pleased with the people, not the size of the church or any other measuring stick. It is only the Spirit of God in the midst of the people of God that distinguish them from cults and other world religions.

Remove the tangible presence of God and there is nothing that makes us different other than our doctrine. But right doctrine without the Spirit of God is also dead. So let me return to what I said earlier about the three things that speak of the spiritual life of a local congregation.

That is prayer, worship, and the Word of God. Since prayer is the subject I am speaking about today, I want to concentrate on that. Nonetheless, I will briefly address the other two points.

So let's begin with the Word of God. When people go to church they normally hear a sermon, talk, teaching, homily, or whatever the pop name is that people want to call it at that moment in time. Because there is a message of one sort or another does not mean the people actually heard the Word of God preached under the anointing of God.

This is such a huge problem today and it is heartbreaking. People all the time tell me that they cannot find a church that faithfully preaches the Word of God under the anointing of God. And I believe them.

I myself have heard so many sermons that are really pep talks, motivational messages, or a bunch of fluff and drivel that it is nauseating. They can preach on money, your best life now, and a host of other issues

without ever faithfully preaching the Word. If people can sit under a pastor that does not preach the Word under the anointing of God, then they have gotten what they wanted and what they deserve.

We need to be lovers of truth and until we love the truth enough that we refuse to sit under half-truths and total lies, there will be no real change in the condition of the church at large. We cannot rise any higher in our relationship with God than what we believe about Him. A low view of God always produces a low moral life.

And when you see ministers preaching half-truths and watered-down messages, you will see a church in compromise and a lot of sin running rampant. When a high view of God is preached, you will directly see a high moral condition in the church. The practice of sin will not be the norm, but the rarity because the pastor is faithfully preaching the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Until we believe the truth, we cannot live the truth, and the life of the church will directly be affected by this. The second point has to do with worship, and true worship can only come from real born-again Christians that are walking in holy fellowship with a holy God. The unsaved do not worship God.

They can have sing-alongs, and this includes backsliders, prodigals, and those living in the practice of sin. When a church is in compromise, they may have a song service, but not a worship service. So the worship of the church is defined by its relationship with God, and what they believe about God will directly affect their worship.

Because people are jumping, dancing, and shouting during worship does not necessarily mean that they are really worshiping God. There can be intense excitement at secular concerts where people are jumping, dancing, and shouting. Everything depends upon the spiritual condition of the person in church.

A church that is preaching the Word of God but does not allow the vibrant worship of God will grieve the Holy Spirit, which is something Paul commanded us not to do. We must refuse to separate the Word from the Spirit. Just as anointed preaching should be a character trait of a local church, so anointed worship should be.

The Word and worship are not opposed to each other, but this is what many church growth gurus try to say. They claim that a church must either be focused on worship or on preaching because they assert that you can only be one or the other since you have to get the people out of the building in an hour or hour and a half. Well, I wholeheartedly reject this premise.

Do you think that people will only want to be in heaven for an hour and a half once a week? Well, where will they spend the rest of their time? Partying in hell? Sometimes what comes out of the church is absolutely ridiculous. For those that have a passion for God, an hour and a half service is not long enough. They love being with God, and they love His Word, so they want to spend quality time with Him.

The issue is not about the length of service, but whether or not the people have been fully engaged in worshipping God and in hearing the Word of God preached under the anointing. Just like our life is to be defined by God's Word, so our life should be defined by worship. The worship of the church is a type of gauge of the spiritual condition of the church.

Worship is a lifestyle, a state of being, not something we do only on Sunday mornings. Who we are on the inside throughout the week comes out of true followers of Jesus freely and joyfully in public worship. When we have been worshipping God all week long, the public worship service is just another expression of our

love and devotion to God.

If we do not have a life of worship, then Sunday morning is only a sing-along. We cannot make up for a week of no worship by an hour or two on Sunday morning. We may deceive others, but we cannot deceive God.

Jesus made a very scary statement to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. He said, Guess what? He knows us as well. He knows what we are on the inside when no one is watching. He also knows the difference between genuine worship that is a passionate pursuit of God from that which is only dead religion and from that which is just exhibitionism.

I have not here mentioned worship styles because what I am talking about has nothing to do with that. Two worshipers worship, whether it's hymns or old choruses or modern worship songs. If people only worship God when it is their favorite style, then they are not worshipping God at all.

They are but part of a song fest of their favorite tunes. When congregations fight over worship styles, you have solid evidence that the people are not true worshipers, but attend a country club to have their favorite sing-alongs. God created us to worship Him with all of our being, and we can never be what He created us to be if we are not fully engaged in worshipping Him seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Now we come to the subject of prayer. And if there is anything that is the surest gauge of the spiritual life of the church, it is the prayer meeting. Prayerless churches are backslidden churches.

Prayerless pastors are backslidden pastors. Prayerless Bible teachers are backslidden teachers, and prayerless church folk are also backslidden. Now there may be another option for prayerless people, which is that they have never truly been saved in the first place.

Those that are truly saved love Jesus, and when people love God, they want to spend time with Him. It's just that simple. As the love of God grows in the heart of His disciples, they want to spend even more time with Him, for there is nobody more exciting than God.

If you have a church of 40,000 people, and you can only get a few people out to a prayer meeting, then you have proof that the church is spiritually dead, and that the pastor is an absolute failure. Praying people love going to prayer meetings. So when you see a church that has a very high percentage of people in the prayer meetings, you can see that the pastor has made prayer a central part of the life of the church.

Now there is something about the kind of prayer meetings that churches have that speak of the condition of the church as well. Dead prayer meetings keep a church in the place of spiritual deadness, and more often than not, it does not allow those who have a passion for God to alter its spiritual condition. We must remember who we are talking to.

It is the King of Kings, and we must also remember what we are talking to Him about, the souls of men and the needs of people. Prayer meetings should not be quiet dead gatherings, but alive, vibrant times of communion with God. Here is a very difficult point.

The life of the prayer meeting is directly the result of the pastor. When you look at prayer meetings that are alive and passionate, you will find that the pastor knows how to pray and has taught the people how to pray. Dead, dry prayer meetings are the result of a pastor teaching the people to pray in such a manner as well.

The spiritual vitality and strength of a congregation is determined by the amount of time it spends in quality prayer. Churches and denominations rise or fall according to their prayer life, and the life signs of a church are not found in the size of its Sunday service, but in its prayer meeting. Prayerless churches are dead churches, no matter their size.

They are operating in the flesh, not in the spirit, for how can a truly spiritual work be done apart from the spiritual means God has given us? A prayerless congregation that is running a benevolence ministry or various outreach is only doing social work, not kingdom work. Prayerless churches are actually detrimental to the kingdom of God because their plans and programs originate in the minds of men and come out of the works of the flesh. As a result, not only do they not know the true spiritual needs of the people, they are also utterly powerless to meet those needs.

Any church that wants to please Jesus must do so by crying out to him on behalf of others, not doing social work. John Greenfield rightly stated, Prayer always precedes Pentecost. The book of Acts describes many outpourings of the Spirit, but never apart from prayer.

And this still stands true today. Through a life of prayer, worship, and love of the Word, a church will be led by the Spirit and change eternity for the glory of God. So who is going to define the life of your church? The money givers? The complainers? The lukewarm? The deacons? The drinkers, smokers, and worldly? Or those who have a passion for Jesus? Gold chains are still chains that bind the wearer as much as chains of steel.

If a pastor is controlled by the money givers or deacons, then he is not the slave of Christ, but the slave of men. In such a condition, he will never lead a congregation into the will of God because the chains that bind him also go through his nose, so he is led about by the will of men. Let me take you back to the letters Jesus wrote to the seven churches of Revelation chapter 2 and 3. In these two chapters, Jesus clearly and powerfully debunks the notion that he was pleased with the congregation because of its size or ministry activity.

Some of the churches he rebuked were the megachurches of their day. They were prosperous and in need of nothing, yet he called them lukewarm and blasted them for their practice and tolerance of sin. A church in compromise is not successful no matter its size.

Maintaining a love affair with the world, stated David Ravenhill, is akin to having a mistress. It is spiritual prostitution, and the Lord strongly condemns that throughout Scripture. In the mid-1990s, I was blessed to experience firsthand a revival that changed eternity.

The Holy Spirit was tangibly present, so the lost were saved, backsliders ran home, and church folk were convicted and transformed. There are many opinions on why the Lord visited this particular church, but the question was answered for me when I heard a comment made from the pastor. He said for years this church had a group of women that met weekly and prayed for one thing, revival.

These women went home to be with Jesus before they saw the fruit of their intercession, but true prayers do not die with the saints that uttered them, for they are timeless. The foundation of prayer was laid by those women, and the work would be accomplished because they prayed the heart of God. We cannot get around the fact that a praying church is the only kind of church that can do God's work God's way.

All other churches are only doing the work of man through the strength of man, and that is a very sad commentary on the spiritual condition of a large portion of the church today. Search through the books on church history, and you will find that days of great power were always preceded by days of passionate, persistent prayer. Paul Smith wrote, The history of revival proves that conviction comes as a result of the prayer of God's people.

Where there is fervent prayer, there is deep conviction. Where there is no conviction, there is the lack of earnest prayer. So if you attend a church where there is no conviction, then it's because there is no prayer, and my suggestion would be get out of that church as fast as you can.

God designed the church to be an army that marches on its knees, and if we fail to advance God's kingdom God's way, then we are destined to be a defeated army like the one in Ezekiel 37, where the prophet sees a valley of very dry bones. The picture that is given us is of a defeated army with the bodies of the dead that were picked clean by the wild animals and birds. They were not buried in a noble manner, but left exposed to the world to show the disgrace of their defeat.

The Lord asked Ezekiel, Son of man, can these bones live? I said, O sovereign Lord, you alone know. No life were in those bones, and man's wisdom and programs and principles could not change that situation. Even when bone came to bone and flesh came upon those bones, they were only corpses.

They were still dead and could do nothing to advance the purposes of God. Only when the Spirit of God came into them did they become a living army. All our plans and programs are worthless to raise up a spirit-filled army to touch a hurting, dying world.

We need another Pentecost, or we will remain an army of very dry bones that is a disgrace to the Lord. Jesus declared before the Pharisees and money changers that his house would be a house of prayer. To our shame, we have made his house a den of thieves, like they did in the days of Jesus.

When the Lord looked for spiritual people that would advance his kingdom through spiritual means, he found a self-willed, self-filled, self-seeking people instead. Have we robbed God of what he wants most out of his people? Prayerless churches are robbing God. They are taking from him what he died on the cross to purchase, that is, our heart, mind, will, and strength that is poured out to him in prayer and the seeking of his face.

A church will never become a house of God until it becomes a house of prayer. The foundation of a house determines the entire structure. The foundation of a prayerless church and of prayerless people is the idol self, where the will, wisdom, and strength of self rules.

When the idol self rules the people, then the life of the local church will be defined by that most hideous of idols. The church would do well to take heed to what the prophet Malachi said through the word of the Lord. O that one of you would shut the temple doors so that you would not light useless fires on my altar.

I am not pleased with you, says the Lord Almighty, and I will accept no offerings from your hands. The sacrificial system was God's idea, not man's. Yet through Malachi he stated that what he gave them for their good, they had turned to their ruin, and we are no different today.

This is what dead religion always does. It brings death, not life. It blinds the people that are trapped in its clutches because it cannot give true spiritual sight.

I agree with Malachi. It would be far better that churches closed their doors and went to the upper room until they were endued with power from on high. To keep offering the useless sacrifices that we do week in and week out is not helping anyone.

Besides, they are the byproduct of the works of the flesh in man-made religion. It is detrimental that churches continue in their spiritual barrenness when the Lord is not pleased with their prayerlessness. This is why we are in such desperate need of a spiritual revolution that will awaken the church which has become a valley of very dry bones.

Let me share with you a story, and for obvious reasons I will keep the names anonymous. A well-known evangelist called a well-known megachurch pastor. The evangelist asked the pastor, What are you doing? You are preaching cupcakes and cotton candy.

The pastor responded, I am not like you. I cannot preach like you. I am not asking you to preach like me, said the evangelist, only that you preach the entire word of God, that you preach all the words in red, not just what makes people happy.

I cannot do that, replied the pastor. If I do, half the people will leave the church. This true story is not unique.

The pastor is also very popular on TV. If he preached the truth, he would lose half of his church and most of his TV audience. He is a slave to men, a slave to his pride, and a slave to his money.

The gold chain that is in his nose causes him to be led around like a dumb bull. He cannot do the will of God, nor can he build a church that is pleasing to God, yet all the church growth gurus think that he is the epitome of a megachurch pastor. He has deceived his church, his adoring TV audience, and the church growth gurus.

Charles Spurgeon once said, The church which the world likes best is sure to be that which God abhors. On the flip side, I have known many struggling pastors that have felt like failures because everything in the church growth movement makes success all about the size of the congregation and the number of programs within the local church. I once entered the office of a pastor as he was sitting at his desk in his church office.

He held his head in his hands in utter despair and agony and spoke in a tone that was filled with pain. He told me that he had just returned from a coaching class that was mandated by his denomination because he passed at a church under 100 people, though he was in a rural town. He said, Every time I go to those coaching classes, I leave feeling like an absolute failure, and then I want to leave the ministry.

My heart broke for that pastor. I did not know what to say to him after his denomination had just beaten him up. But I know he is a good and loving pastor, and I tried to help him the best I could.

Whenever we forsake the biblical model of success, we are going to be oppressed by the worldly views that drives the church culture. I have known many a good praying pastor that was striving to grow a praying church because he knew the heart and will of God for the local congregation. These pastors have purposely built praying churches that love the Word of God and love to worship God, but because they are striving to be New Testament churches, they are often not that large.

When an on-fire pastor preaches the truth under the anointing of God, the lukewarm will find it too hot, which will cause them to seek a colder church where they can practice their lukewarm, comfortable religion. No preacher should ever feel ashamed when they preach the truth, have a Spirit-filled praying church, and have dynamic, passionate worship that draws people to Jesus. When I minister in these churches, God is tangibly there because He prepared the way for my coming as an evangelist through much prayer.

When all is said and done, the most important thing is that we hear from Jesus, Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Anything that will stop those words from being spoken to us by Jesus must at all costs be removed from our lives, no matter what it takes, no matter what it costs.

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