

(Radical Jesus) 36 Radical Pursuit

by Glenn Meldrum

God's radical pursuit of mankind is a call to reciprocate His love and pursue holiness, lest we face the consequences of rejecting Him.

Duration: 25:02

Scripture: Psalm 95:7, Hebrews 3:7

Topics: "Radical"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher uses an analogy of a young man who passionately loves a woman but discovers that she is in love with his enemies. This analogy represents the ache in our hearts to be faithfully loved and the need for a lasting love that can satisfy our yearning. The preacher explains that God uses physical suffering, depression, and the consequences of sin to open our eyes to our need for Him. He emphasizes the urgency of the situation, warning that many professing Christians may be heading towards eternal judgment if they do not understand the power of sin and God's pursuit of us for eternal well-being. The sermon references 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 to highlight God's justice and the punishment for those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of Jesus.

Transcript

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In last week's podcast, we began a new section on radical pursuit that is part of our continuing study on the radical Jesus. In that lesson, we concentrated on God's radical pursuit of mankind, which is a phenomenal truth about the wonder of God's love that is worth the investment of our time and energy to learn about and apply to our lives. In this week, we will look at man's response to God's pursuit of us.

As we saw in last week's lesson, Christ's pursuit of mankind is thoroughly radical. His pursuit of us is far more than the historical event of His crucifixion because it reaches into the distant past before creation existed and time began. For God to create the human race when He knew that they would willfully rebel against Him is reasoning beyond what our mental abilities can process.

To create people in His own image as the Genesis creation account records means that the Lord had to give mankind a genuine free will. This is important because authentic love cannot exist without free will. It will not be long before mankind invents the technology that can make computers and robots communicate in ways that make them appear to have legitimate emotions.

The insurmountable problem this technology faces is that without genuine free will, there cannot be legitimate emotion, and this includes love. Scientists may develop elaborate computer programs that work through powerful computers that respond to the emotion of people with what appears to be legitimate emotion. But we must not forget that those responses can only be the result of programmed computers and robotics working together, not of that which comes out of a genuine life.

Man is not a mere sophisticated organic machine. In Genesis 2-7 we are told the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being. To be a living being, or as the King James translation translates the word, a living soul, we must have an authentic free will.

God created man and woman in such a way that they could love each other and this cannot happen without the choice of a will. Since the Lord created us with the capacity to love each other, there is then the ability that we can know the love of God and love Him in return. This is God's design for humanity, and though sin marred and perverted our free will, it did not eradicate it as some have claimed.

If sin destroyed our free will, then we would not have the ability to love each other to love God. The Lord said in Genesis 1-26, Let us make man in our image and in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the livestock and all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground. God is the only truly free being that exists, which means that He does not need anything outside of Himself to exist, to be who He is or to be fulfilled, for He is perfect and complete in and of Himself.

For God to make mankind in His image tells us that He gave us authentic personhood, similar in nature to His own, but our personhood is finite, while His is infinite. For us to have genuine personhood, we must have an actual free will. Though we have free will, ours is not like God's since we are not free as God is free.

Our freedom is limited, His is infinite. We need God, but He does not need us. We cannot live without God.

He can live without mankind and still remain fully who He is. We need to be loved because we are created to love. God does not need our love, nor is He benefited by our love, yet we are totally benefited by His love for us.

For God to be free, He must be able to freely love with a disinterested love. For mankind to love God and to know His love, they must have a free will, or there can be no reciprocal meaningful relationship between God and man. Now, I have said all this to lead us to the idea that the Lord, who is all-knowing, knew that when He created mankind in His own image, they would have a free will with the ability to love Him or not to love Him.

The historical account of Adam and Eve's rebellion teaches us that when their free will was placed in certain conditions, they would rebel against God. And we know that this is exactly what happened. Love must be willed or it cannot be loved, which leads us to the conclusion that for Adam and Eve to love, they

had to be given the opportunity to make a choice.

So the Lord created knowing that we would rebel and that the only way there could be reconciliation was for Him to become human and take upon Himself the sins of the world as the Lamb of God. Can you get a glimpse of the pursuit of God that began before creation even came into existence? I think one of the reasons Christians do not passionately follow Jesus is that they do not have eyes to see the phenomenal love that He has for us that is proved through His radical pursuit of us. Sure, there are tons of sermons preached every Sunday on God's love, but much of it is watered-down, humanistic, man-centered love that does not represent the magnificent love of God.

Though we are made in God's image, we must lay hold of the fact that He is not made in our image. To make God in our image is idolatry, for it creates a God out of our own imagination and then bows down and worships it. The difficulty we have in understanding God's love is that His love is by nature infinite while ours is finite.

There are depths to God's love that is beyond human reasoning, and at times when we get a peek at it, it can seem as if He was not very loving at times. Then we have the added problem that our sinful nature has perverted our love into a selfish, taking, grasping thing, which is all we have as a point of reference in this fallen world. Our sin nature causes us to either misunderstand His disinterested love or to be oblivious to His selfless nature of divine love.

If we could see a little more clearly God's radical pursuit of mankind, then we would understand that man's pursuit of God should display that same passion. It, too, should be radical. But how often is this the case with most professing Christians? The norm for the American church is so low that it does not resemble Jesus, who is the standard of the New Testament faith, nor does it resemble those early saints that walked with Jesus.

The Lord not only deserves our passionate pursuit because of who He is, but because He deserves the reward of His suffering. Jesus did not die on the cross so He could give us a sickly, anemic response to His work on the cross. He fully gave Himself for us so that we could fully give ourselves to Him.

Most people respond to His loving overtures with indifference and at times even utter rejection. The Lord spoke through the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 7. I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen. I called you, but you did not answer.

The context of this verse is that the Lord is calling those that were supposed to be the people of God, but they had given themselves over to their sin and idolatry and so refused to respond to God's call. The Lord then declared in verse 20, We know that history proved this prophecy to be true. Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians, who also destroyed the temple at the same time.

In chapter 1 of Malachi, we find God confronting Israel over the compromise that had crept back into the people after they returned from their Babylonian captivity and the rebuilding of the temple. How quickly we can turn a living faith into a dead religion. The people accused the Lord that He did not love them when the fact was that the people did not reverence the Lord.

In Malachi 1.14, we hear the Lord declare, For I am a great king, says the Lord Almighty, and my name is to be feared among the nations. We are obligated to God to give Him the absolute best of our life, time, and wealth. The Lord is a great king that deserves to be feared and loved.

It is very important that when we look at the subject of the fear of God, we understand that love is an integral part of the equation. Whenever people love God correctly, they will rightly fear Him, and whenever they rightly fear Him, they will genuinely love Him. He is a great king and deserves our wholehearted devotion, for no one has loved us as He has, and no one has proved His love for us like the radical Jesus.

In spite of man's willful ignorance of God's love for us and of all the ridiculous lies we hurl at Him, He presses on with deliberate, persistent desire for us and for our salvation. How long would our love endure if we were rejected as mankind has rejected the Lord? The frailty and limitedness of our love would soon give way under the first wave of rejection. Our shallow love would quickly turn to hatred after the first time we were aggressively attacked by people.

Would you die for the salvation of those that hated you, for those that rejected you? In John 1, verse 11, we are told that Jesus came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. And we are among that number, though that verse is directly speaking of Israel. If you were all-powerful, would you destroy those people if they hated and attacked you like they did Jesus? Or maybe we would have destroyed them way before such events got that far, like right after Adam and Eve sinned.

God is good to us, and as revealed in Psalms 103.10, He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our inequities. And still we are prone to make our excuses for why we do not passionately pursue Him like He pursued us. We think ourselves noble if we are more passionate about God than most professing Christians, yet we fail to seek Him as He sought us.

He deserves the reward of His suffering, which includes our passionate pursuit of Him. If we fail to comprehend God's radical pursuit of us, how will we be able to grasp the urgency of the matter? The Lord loves mankind with a radical love beyond human comprehension, but there is an urgency to His radical pursuit of us. He pursues people with urgency because He knows our lives on earth are as a vapor.

We are here today and gone tomorrow. There is a narrow space of time in which we can be reached, and that space of time is far shorter than the span of our lives. For each person, the space of time in which he can reach us is as varied as the number of people.

The Lord must work within the few years we live, and then there are only so many minutes, hours, days, months, or years that we will be open to His call. Though He is laboring behind the scenes to save us, He is ever moving us to the point of decision. He does not want us to be as stillborn babies that never come to life, nor as preemies or sickly babies that die before their time.

There is an urgency in God's call such as can be found in Hebrews 3, verses 7-12. So the Holy Spirit says, Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart as you did in the rebellion during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried Me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation and said, Their hearts are always going astray and they have not known My ways.

So I declared on oath in My anger, They shall never enter My rest. See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Three times in Hebrews, Paul quotes Psalms 95-7, Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.

The Lord knows that we are in desperate need of Him. Actually, there is nothing we need more than Christ. Israel fought against God for forty years in the wilderness.

They had hard, unrepentant hearts, so they never entered God's rest, which is symbolized by the promised land. They died in the wilderness outside of God's promises, which strongly implies they died in their sin and were separated from God forever. With relentless passion and limitless energy, the Lord is driving people to the foot of the cross so they might be saved.

But He will not force His salvation on anyone since He gave us a genuine free will. He uses every means at His disposal in His loving attempt to win man's devotion so He can bring them to His eternal home. He draws some people through the ache of loneliness.

That ache burns in our hearts so that we might look for a better and lasting love that can satisfy our yearning to be faithfully loved. He uses physical suffering that can wrack the bodies of the young and old alike to show them that they are frail and in need of a great physician to heal their sin-sick souls. He uses the depression and feelings of hopelessness that can immobilize people to drive them to the only place where there is true hope.

He also uses the painful consequences that our sin produces to open our blind eyes that only He can satisfy the deepening longings of the soul. And He even uses the hordes of hell to drive people into His loving embrace after they have suffered the horrors of being a plaything of hell. The Lord fully understands the urgency of the time because He knows when He will return and bring to an end the insanity of sin that has taken control of the human race.

The Lord spoke through Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1, verses 6-10. God is just. He will pay back trouble for those who troubled you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well.

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power on the day He comes to be glorified in His holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

The only reason the Lord delays His second coming is that He is compassionate. 2 Peter 3.9 informs us that the Lord is not slow in keeping His promise as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Though God patiently delays His second coming out of compassion, we must not misunderstand that delay as an expression that He is not greatly bothered by the sins of mankind. He delays so that He can save all that want His salvation. Yet there is a time that is fast approaching when He will say, Enough! Until that time, we can hold to the heart of God as revealed in Ezekiel 18.

Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the sovereign Lord? Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their wicked ways and live? I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the sovereign Lord. Repent. Turn away from all your offenses, then sin will not be your downfall.

Rid yourself of all the offenses you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the sovereign Lord. Repent and live.

Can you not hear the urgency in God's appeal in these verses? He knows that salvation is a gift offered to people only in this life. In the next life, it is too late to repent, too late to be saved, and too late to fall in love

with God. When we pass through the veil of this world into the next, the condition of our character in this life will be fixed forever in the next.

People that die without God in this life will get their wish for eternity. They will not have God forever and ever. Wherever Jesus is, there will be heaven, and wherever He is not, there will be hell, since hell is the tangible absence of God.

And since God is good, kind, loving, and beautiful, those that will spend an eternity with Him will only experience the wonder of who He is. Only what is good, kind, loving, and beautiful will be in the new heaven and new earth. But hell is the total absence of everything that is good, kind, loving, and beautiful.

In this fallen world, we can see to a limited degree what is good, kind, loving, and beautiful, but in hell, they will not exist in the least. Think about that for a moment, and let that sink in. Think of the horror of what it is to never see beauty again, because beauty comes only through God and is defined by God.

Or to never know love again, because God is love, and where God is not, there can be no love. So this is the total absence of love. In hell, there is no kindness.

I do not think we can fathom a world where there is no kindness at all. And God is the only good that exists. There is no evil in Him.

So goodness will fill what He fills, but where God is not tangibly present, there can be no expression of good. Hell is an existence without any expression of goodness, kindness, love, or beauty. And I do not think that we can comprehend such an existence, nor grasp its horrors.

So is it any wonder that the Lord is filled with an urgency to save all that will embrace His salvation, because He fully knows the joys of heaven and the terrors of hell? Oh, how foolish it is when people fight against the only One that can do them infinite good. How crazy it is to run away from the hound of heaven that is in hot pursuit of us to do us good and not evil. To have once known the Lord and then to turn our back on God is the greatest act of insanity that could ever be committed by a human being.

To run from the One that offers us life so that we can chase after the very things that will produce our ruin, misery, despair, and damnation is the most irrational, idiotic thing that can be done, yet people do it all the time. Should not the lives of those who call themselves Christian be the complete opposite of those that are rushing to hell? Should not the lives of those that want to flee from the wrath to come so that they can know the glories of heaven live like they want to go to heaven? Yet the life of the typical, self-proclaimed Christian today is full of the very things that will be the downfall of those that blatantly do not know Christ. Church folk can watch the same filth that is on TV and in the movies that the mass of people rushing to hell watch, but they think that for some illogical and unscriptural reason that they are safe from judgment.

They can be immersed in the same porn, greed, sexual immorality that will damn multitudes to hell, but for some very foolish reasons think they are exempt from the spiritual law that they will reap what they sow. You can have people engrossed in the same devilish party spirit that grips the world, smoking dope, sucking down beer, sipping wine and hard liquor, and yet think that their actions are not damnable. In the end, it all comes down to this.

If we had a passion for God, we would not allow any form of compromise in our lives. The pursuit of holiness is all about the pursuit of God. Legalism is never the pursuit of God or the pursuit of holiness, because legalism is all about trying to be right with God through our own moral goodness, which is not

obtainable for fallen man.

It is one of the weakest and most despicable lies when people justify their compromise by claiming that they are not legalistic, that they are free in Jesus. To use Jesus as an excuse to practice sin is a very evil thing to do. Paul warned us of this in Romans 6, verses 1 and 2. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sitting so that grace may increase? By no means.

We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? Grace gives us victory over sin. It does not allow us to practice it.

Whenever our love for Jesus grows, so will our love for holiness. Do you want to overcome a sin in your life? It begins with a growing passion for Christ, to love Him enough that we do not want the least expression of sin or compromise in our lives. Peter warned us in 2 Peter 2.19 of those that teach we have a right to practice sin.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption. For by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. You will not find a person that is in passionate pursuit of God to be an alcoholic because they want to be so close to Jesus that they will not let alcohol touch their lips.

The more God fills our lives, the less room there will be for any expression of sin, compromise of the world. Empty lives have little interest in God. They are too full of the world to be holy, too busy to pray, too busy to study God's Word.

Much of the church has become as self-absorbed and pleasure-driven as any professing atheist. Selfish people who claim to love God while they are sleeping with the devil are no closer to heaven than those in deliberate defiance of God. Prostitutes and drug addicts are closer to entering the kingdom of God than the self-righteous that justify the practice of sin by claiming that they are saved by grace and are walking in the liberty of the Spirit.

There is a very important question that would be good for us to answer with all honesty. Do we really love Jesus? And I think that there is another equally important question that logically follows the first. What proof do we have to offer that we love Jesus? If we truly love Jesus, then there must be substantial proof of it in our lives.

Love is proved by our actions far more than by mere words. The flip side is also true. When we do not love God, then there is ample proof for that as well.

How can people say they love Jesus and not respond to His love with actions that prove that love? Is it not reasonable to expect that genuine professions of devotion should have substance behind them? But what do empty promises and professions of love without substance really mean? Let me present an analogy to illustrate my point. Think of a young man who passionately longs to marry the woman of his dreams. She has accepted his offer of marriage and openly wears the engagement ring that signifies their commitment to each other.

How would that young man feel if he found out that his bride-to-be is actually in love with his personal antagonist and archenemy? Would this not be an offense of horrendous magnitude? Would this not break his loving heart and justify his righteous anger? But this is exactly what a large portion of professing believers do all the time to Jesus. While claiming to love Jesus, they flirt with the world that is openly

hostile to Him and hang out with the devil that stands in defiance of Christ's rule. They want all the benefits associated with a relationship with Jesus yet without any of its obligations.

When you look at the lives of people that live in compromise, you will see the undeniable fact that they have given their hearts to the very things that make up the kingdom of this world. At best, their love for Him is half-hearted. At worst, it is totally counterfeit.

It does not take a Bible scholar to know that there is something terribly wrong with mingling the world with the Christian faith. Jesus did not radically pursue people so that they could become spiritual whores, prostituting themselves from the world Jesus came to deliver us from. We see this thought many times within the prophetic books of the Bible and it also comes out within the New Testament.

Just look at why the Lord judged Jude in Jerusalem through Nebuchadnezzar and you will see an example of His reaction to the spiritual adultery and prostitution of Israel. The Lord declared through Isaiah in chapter 1, verse 12, See how the faithful city has become a harlot? He later made a similar statement through the prophet Hosea in the fifth chapter. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.

A spirit of prostitution is in their heart. They do not acknowledge the Lord. I believe that a spirit of prostitution has a strong hold on much of the American church.

Israel's sin was far deeper than just the accumulation of their outward sins. It was what they had become, spiritual prostitutes. Our outward life is only a reflection of the condition of our inward life.

A spirit of prostitution had filled their hearts so that it defined their actions. Their love of self and sin kept them from returning to the Lord. The idols they served and the pagan practices they performed were only the byproduct of the spiritually corrupt condition of their heart.

What they had become on the inside also revealed what they believed about the Lord. It is easy to look at the events of ancient Israel and think they are different than us, but that is not a very wise approach to the study of Scripture. These accounts were given to us for our admonishment so that we would not be taken up with the same sins that they were.

Much of the American church is in a very similar position with the Lord, as was ancient Israel. We can claim to love Jesus while we prostitute ourselves with the world. Half-hearted devotion always keeps people striving to live between two worlds.

And the deceptive nature of sin can cause us to believe the terrible lie that we are right with God even when we are in the practice of sin. Time and again, the great compassion of the Lord is revealed through the Spirit's convicting power. Only deep, heartfelt repentance can lead us to the only source of power that can transform our hearts and lives.

If we want God's transforming power at work in our lives, then we must fully embrace His gift of repentance. The urgency of God's pursuit of us for our eternal good can be seen in His calling us to repentance. Only an aggressive commitment to love God and to break off every expression of sin and every association with the enemy will allow people to possess the real life that can only be found in Christ.

Let me be honest with you with this closing statement. I fear that many professing Christians are quickly heading into eternal judgment because they have not understood the urgency of the situation, the dangerous condition that they are in, or the power of sin to bind and enslave them. God is pursuing us for

eternal well-being.

Do not fight against His astounding love and compassion.

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