

(Radical Jesus) 38 Radical Pursuit

by Glenn Meldrum

To pursue God is to live a life of love, holiness, and surrender to His will, and to do so is to experience eternal security and freedom from the world's values and priorities.

Duration: 23:10

Scripture: Psalm 73:1, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:35-39, Ephesians 6:24

Topics: "Radical"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of pursuing God with all our hearts in order to find clarity and truth in our lives. He highlights that correct thinking can only come through God's transforming grace and that we were created for face-to-face fellowship with Him. The speaker warns against building our faith on fanciful ideas and sentimental notions, urging us to base our lives on the sure word of God and the person of Jesus Christ. He also emphasizes the need to love the Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love in order to receive the freely available grace. The speaker shares a personal example of how he had to narrow his interests and give up playing music when God called him as an evangelist.

Transcript

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For the last three podcasts, we have been examining the subject of radical pursuit. This is part of our extensive study into the radical Jesus. So far we have covered God's radical pursuit of mankind, man's response to his pursuit, and some opening thoughts on the biblical teaching concerning man's pursuit of God.

Today we will close out this section on radical pursuit by digging a little deeper into how we are to pursue God. One of the comforting things about this subject of our pursuit of God is that He has told us what that pursuit is to look like, so we must go to the Word of God and learn what He has to say on the topic. How should man pursue God? That's a very important question.

Can a person really love God when he or she knows what the Lord likes and dislikes, and then purposely does those things that He hates while refusing to do those things that He loves? Why do so many people

that claim they love God do the very things that He hates, rather than that which brings Him joy? Why are we so prone to justify the sins that Jesus died to rescue us from, and practice those sins instead of crucifying our sinful nature, so that we can develop a godly character that is pleasing to God? And why do we feed our idolatrous love of sin that we know deep down inside that the Lord thoroughly hates? To claim that God is love and do the very things that are repulsive to Him is nothing other than what King Solomon calls the stupidity of wickedness. Such claims also reveal that they are either biblically illiterate, or driven by deliberate rebellion against what they actually know to be true. God is holy, and when we look at the holiness of God, we must comprehend that holiness is not an attribute of God, but it is what He literally is, it's what defines Him.

This means that everything about God is holy. His love is holy, His grace is holy, His mercy is holy, His wrath is holy, and His judgment is holy. Absolutely everything about God is holy.

So one of the first things we must pursue if we want to draw near to God is to pursue personal holiness as defined by God, not by the church or by culture. An important part about the truth of God's holiness that we need to grasp is found in Revelation 15-4, which declares that only God is holy. Since God is the only being that is holy in and of Himself, we can only become holy by entering into fellowship with Him.

Holiness is a gift from God that is only offered to those that surrender themselves to Him. Therefore, holiness is totally relational. Though Christ's atoning work is universal in the sense that it is offered to all of mankind, only those that repent of their sins and receive the cleansing that comes through the blood of Christ can be made holy by God.

After we are made holy by God, we are commanded to pursue the practical application of holiness in our everyday lives by doing the things that He likes and by fleeing from those things that He hates and forbids. This is why holiness on the part of man is totally relational. It is solely obtained by relationship with God and is perpetuated through the Spirit's sanctifying process through the power of that relationship.

When holiness does not define the life of a person, it is because he or she is not in a right relationship with God. When we genuinely love God, we will love who He is. This is not loving a concept about God, but loving God Himself.

To love who God is means that we will want to be like Him, that we refuse to live in any way that is contrary to Christ and strive through divine grace to be what He wants us to be. Is this not the idea that Paul presents in Ephesians 5, verses 1 and 2? Be imitators of God, therefore as dearly loved children, and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God? To love God means that we live like children that are dearly loved by God. Paul gives definition to that idea when he said that we are to live a life of love like Jesus lived for us and prove that love by a sacrifice.

When people continue in the practice of sin, then we have clear evidence that they do not love God or love who He is, which tells us that they love what is evil because anything that is contrary to God is evil. It is impossible for us to love God and the devil at the same time. It is impossible to please both God and the devil.

When professing Christians practice sin, there is sure proof that they are doing the very things that the Lord hates and that which Satan loves. This reveals that they are living and acting in ways that are hostile to God and His holy nature, that they are rebellious to His sovereign rule and antagonistic to His divine

purpose in this world. But to genuinely love God, we must love who He is, love and embrace His rule over our lives, and to love the kingdom through which His divine purposes are revealed in this rebellious world.

In Psalm 73, we find a wonderful example of man's pursuit of God that is expressed in real-life practical terms. This psalm was written by Asaph and opens with a declaration of God's goodness to Israel in general, but then quickly narrows down to reveal who God shows His goodness to specifically. Verse 1 reads, God is good to those who are pure in heart because they are the only ones that can be pleasing to God.

The psalmist then gets into the nitty-gritty of his message by being blatantly honest about the inward struggles he was facing at that moment in life. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped. I had nearly lost my foothold, for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Here was a man struggling with the real world in which he lived, struggling to pursue God when life is hard and injustices abound. He reveals the inward battle he was suffering due to his wants and needs that arose out of his striving to walk with God, while those that lived wicked lives seemed to prosper and have no need. The fight he was facing was so intense that he declared, This is the confession of a very honest man, and we will never be people in hot pursuit of God if we are dishonest with ourselves, dishonest with others, and most importantly, dishonest with God.

The struggles the psalmist was dealing with came about because he was confused about the nature of God, his own reason for being, and the prize of life. These three issues are at the root of most of the trials that we face as Christians. The psalm continues with Asaph outlining the apparent injustices he saw in life, but those injustices were looked at through the eyes of man, not the eyes of God.

He observed how the righteous suffer adversity while the ungodly enjoy prosperity. This observation was superficial because it did not see the reality of the situation as it relates to both the temporal and eternal dimensions of life. When we come to verse 16, he makes the honest confession, Yes, indeed, such thinking is always oppressive, because such thoughts are not founded upon truth but illusions, and those illusions are the tricks of the master illusionist, which is Satan.

There is a two-fold lie that is the illusion Asaph experienced that we can experience as well. First, it does not see the reality of the prosperity of the wicked. Second, the illusion blinds us to the goodness of God and to what He has given us that far surpasses what the wicked get out of their wealth.

It is a simple fact that the majority of true followers of Jesus in this world are poor. Those genuine believers that are rich are in proportion to the poor a very, very, very small group of people. Yet when people suffer the realities of want and need, they can fail to see what God has already given them and are prone to fall victim to Satan's illusions.

The story of Lazarus and the rich man is a perfect case in point. The rich man had wealth in his life but was thoroughly bankrupt in the next, while Lazarus, who loved God yet lived in great need, possessed all the wealth of God by entering into a life of true wealth in heaven. The common thought of Christ's day and of ours is that the wealthy are blessed of God while the poor are cursed.

But God has a whole different take on this situation, and what He thinks about this situation is true, and it's of great importance that we understand it. To believe that financial prosperity is the pinnacle of God's blessings here on earth is an absolute lie. It comes from Satan, the great illusionist weaving his web of

deception.

When the psalmist finally pursues God, he comes to the truth. He was oppressed by his wrongheaded thinking until he said, I entered the sanctuary of God. Then I understood their final destiny.

Here is the truth breaking into a life, bringing with it great deliverance and freedom. When the psalmist finally began to do what he was created to do, he could begin to think correctly because correct thinking comes only through God and His transforming grace. We were created for face-to-face fellowship with God, and when we pursue God with all that is within us, we will find the God of truth shine His light of truth upon our human condition and situation.

In the spiritual temple where God's glory dwells, which is now in the life of a truly surrendered soul, we will find that divine truth gives us clarity in things that really matter. By pursuing God and entering His sanctuary to meet with Him, the psalmist could finally see clearly that the wicked will always reap what they sow, for it is a spiritual and natural law from which we cannot escape. The eternal reality is that the wicked will receive the worst judgment that can ever be given, and that is eternal separation from God.

And that is not prosperity. We must understand that judgment is not just reserved for the future state. People reap what they sow in this life.

With great wealth comes great sorrow. Just look at the disastrous lives of our music, TV, and movie stars, and you will see what I mean. Wealth cannot buy what is of true value.

Asaph then confessed in verse 21, When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant, I was a brute beast before you. Thank God for His patience and kindness to those who belong to Him. Asaph came to his senses when he passionately pursued God, and that is always the case with mankind.

Is this not strange, then, that we grow more sane the more the world thinks we are getting more demented? As long as we think and act like the world, the world will call us one of their own. Yet the moment our sanity begins to come to us, they reject us as being deranged through our religion. Now we come to the pinnacle of Psalm 73, when Asaph declares in verse 25, Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

This is an absolutely radical statement that few have ever been able to truthfully live out. It is easy to say, Whom have I in heaven but you? Since those that love Christ want to be with Him forever. But can we honestly declare, The earth has nothing I desire besides you? When Asaph envied the wealthy, he could not make that statement, for his heart was not fully given to God.

It was only when he went into the sanctuary to meet with God could the revelation of the wonder and the glory of Christ be seen and understood. He could then say with the Apostle Paul, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ.

To declare that the earth has nothing I desire besides you means that wealth, possessions, and comforts no longer have a hold on our heart and affections. To truly say that the earth has nothing I desire besides you reveals that we are beginning to see the glory and wonder of Christ and would gladly sell all that we have to gain deeper fellowship with Him. To follow hard after Jesus forces us to make daily choices to pursue Him rather than the things of this earth.

Through the passionate pursuit of Christ, the entirety of our life is given new priorities. Everything is transformed and revolutionized because we want to know the depths, heights, and riches of His love. I recall reading a statement many years ago that impacted me regarding this subject.

I cannot recall the book or who the man of God was that made the statement, but he urged his readers that if you want to deeply know God and be used by Him, then you must narrow your interests. To narrow or limit our interests forces us to take great pains to keep our lives free from unnecessary clutter. Let me give you an example from my life.

I used to play guitar and was in a real Christian band that strove to glorify God with our music and to win the loss to Christ. Though I was only a mediocre musician, I loved playing music anyway. When God called me as an evangelist, He called me to narrow my interests and give up playing music altogether.

So I sold my guitars, which included a fantastic playing Fender Strat and my Mesa Boogie amp. Over the years, all kinds of people have asked me why I stopped playing guitar, and few have understood what I told them. They thought that I could have kept my guitars and still been an evangelist, but to have done so would have cost me.

It would have kept me from walking near to Jesus. First of all, the Lord told me to lay it down, so to do otherwise would be an act of rebellion, and God cannot bless an anointed rebellion. Second, the time I would have invested in playing and practicing would have kept me from the prayer I needed to walk in the anointing as an evangelist.

Those that are genuinely called to music ministry need to invest in that ministry in a right way. But if God calls a person into another ministry, then anything that would keep him or her from fulfilling that call would become sin to them. As the thought, the earth has nothing I desire, consumes our heart.

The clutter demanding our time and attention is treated as a thief attempting to steal our most valuable treasure, which is the precious Savior himself. Jesus must be the prize of our lives, the one we seek above everyone and anything. He must be the most valuable treasure that we would sacrifice life and limb to obtain and retain.

He must be the destination of our lives and the road by which we get there. We must not let anything or anyone move us from that road, beguile us off that road, or tempt us to forsake that road. The prize, which is Christ himself, is too great to forsake, and the cost of losing him is a price too great to pay if we were to forsake him.

The Lord gave us a wonderful promise in Romans chapter 8, verses 35 through 39. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, for your sake we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

Knowing all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul is not teaching the false doctrine of eternal security, which will damn many souls to hell because it offers a false security that can cause people to think they are eternally secure when they are lukewarm or living in blatant sin.

There will never be a time when God will take our free will away from us. For if he did, at that moment we would cease to be human. To say that there is no such thing as backsliding is to reject the testimony of Scripture that clearly teaches that it is a spiritual reality.

Besides, if salvation cannot be forsaken, then how do we explain Satan and the demon hordes that at one time dwelt in the presence of God? The Lord told us in Romans chapter 8 verse 28, we know that all things work together for those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. This is a qualifying statement to what Paul said in verses 35 through 39. If we love God, if we are passionately pursuing him, then there is nothing that can separate us from him because he will make everything that we go through in this life to work towards our eternal salvation.

But what is the alternative? What if people do not love God? Can people that do not love God go to heaven? No, they cannot be truly saved people. Those that are genuinely born again are given a new heart and new mind so that they can love God and serve God with all of their being. Only in God's loving embrace true security is found.

Outside of his embrace, there is no security. Notice that in Paul's list of things that cannot separate us from the love of God, there is something very important missing, and that is ourselves. Only we have the ability to forsake God, to move away from him or to jump out of his protective hand.

There is not a single circumstance, trial, or temptation that we can face in life, no matter how terrible they may be, that can separate us from God. As free moral agents, we are the only ones that can separate ourselves from Christ, and that can only be done through the conscious choice of our will. Whether people forsake him from prosperity or adversity, it is always a choice of the will, and not the circumstances themselves that cause people to forsake Christ.

Two scriptural themes that clearly illustrate backsliding is prostitution and divorce. In either case, it is the choice of the individual that purposely forsakes God to chase after other lovers. When husbands and wives love each other, they do not get a divorce, nor will they live the life of a prostitute.

When one or the other makes a conscious choice to stop loving the other, then the prostitution begins, or the divorce happens. The love that once defined the marriage has been replaced with another love, whether it is a person, possession, ambition, or even the love of bitterness and anger. There are too many verses in Scripture that clearly teach that backsliding is a reality, and all we have to do is let the Scriptures speak for themselves instead of forcing them to say what our pet doctrines dictate.

There is such a thing as eternal security, but we need to understand that it is only obtained in one of two ways. First, when we die in Christ, we are eternally secure with him forever in heaven. Now that is good news.

I cannot explain what happens to us on the inside when we make heaven our home, but it is something so revolutionary that it even purifies our free will so perfectly that we will love and serve God forever. Second, we are only secure in this life if we passionately pursue Jesus, if we love him with all of our being, if we cling to him with all that is within us, or as Paul worded it, if we lay hold of eternal life. As long as we love God, we will walk in security, but there is nothing to protect us from the world and the forces of hell if we forsake the love of God.

We must move beyond a false form of Christianity that is built upon fanciful ideas and sentimental notions and base our life in eternity upon the sure word of God and the person of Jesus Christ. Our love for God must become all-consuming, and when it is all-consuming, we will not let suffering or prosperity, life or death, angels or demons, to separate us from the love of God. I love what Paul stated in Ephesians 6, verse 24, grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

According to Paul, grace is freely available to only one kind of person, and that kind of person is the one that loves the Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. Let's be reasonable here. What man in his right senses would marry a woman under the conditions that she can have all the lovers she desires anytime she desires? Now, I'm not saying that such evil practices do not go on in our world, but people that do such things cannot have a sane mind.

Ever notice how our best love stories end with lasting love? Even in children's stories, the prince and princess always live happily ever after. Yet we do with God what would destroy any relationship among people. What right-thinking husband or wife only wants half-hearted devotion from his or her spouse? Then why do you think that God is not bothered by her uncommitted half-hearted devotion to him? The Lord has never accepted lukewarm half-hearted love and devotion, for he is a great king and deserves the entirety of our lives and affections.

What does it mean to love Jesus with an undying love? It is a fulfillment of the first and greatest commandment to love the Lord with all of our being. It denotes that we love him with a burning passion, that we love him more than any person, possession, or profession. It indicates that we love him more than self in all of its various expressions.

It signifies that we love him more than pleasure, comfort, and wealth, and to love him through the midst of trials, temptations, suffering, and loss. The logical conclusion of Paul's statement that grace is given to those that love God with an undying love leads us to understand that grace is withheld from those that do not love him with an undying love. In today's American culture, we have somehow come to sanctify lukewarmness and turn that which God hates into an acceptable sin that people can practice and still go to heaven.

The pop church of today has turned lukewarmness into the ultimate standard for the faith and made that which loves Jesus with an undying love extreme and fanatical. Yet the sins of lukewarmness and half-hearted devotion are extremely evil because they are an insult to God. They are declarations of life that screams, God is not worthy of the total abandonment of our lives to him.

God does not give grace to people so they can insult him through the practice of sin and through their rebellion. Such an idea is absolutely ludicrous. Grace is freely given to those that love Jesus with an undying love because they are the ones that are clinging to Jesus for all it's worth.

They are the ones that are striving to glorify his name in this fallen world. To love Jesus with an undying love is to be consumed with one thing, to be driven by one thing, to want one thing, and that is Christ. It is the passion to know the wonder and beauty of his love that surpasses human understanding.

The radical pursuit of God is just that. It is radical. And if it is not radical, then it is not biblical.

It is substandard. It is way below what God would ever want for a person. We must lay hold of the truth that the true pursuit of God is radical in this world.

It is not radical by God's standards nor by those of heaven, but it is by this world. According to God, we were created to love him with every fiber of our being, and that is actually what God determined as normal. We have been subnormal and twisted for so long that we cannot even recognize what it means to be normal.

Whenever people strive to be normal by God's definition of normal, both the world and the lukewarm church will think that they are extreme, weird, or fanatical. The radical pursuit of God is the very thing for which we were created. It is the highest calling given to mankind by our Creator.

Anything less than this is adulterous, idolatrous, and unworthy of what the King of Kings rightly deserves. He deserves the reward of his suffering, which is our total and absolute love and devotion, to love him with an undying love.

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