

(Radical Jesus) 39 Radical Discipleship

by Glenn Meldrum

To be a true follower of Jesus, one must make a conscious choice to obey his command to follow him, no matter the cost, and surrender their heart, mind, and will to God.

Duration: 26:44

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 14:27, John 14:6, Romans 12:2, 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, Glenn Meldrum emphasizes the importance of following Jesus wholeheartedly and obeying his commands. He highlights the need to escape the corruption of the world by saying yes to following Jesus in both word and deed. Meldrum outlines several basic requirements for believers, including daily prayer and Bible study, spending time at the altar before Sunday service, and having a ministry mindset at church. He also emphasizes the importance of making Jesus the center of one's conversation and making him known on social media. Overall, Meldrum challenges Christians to count the cost of discipleship and follow Jesus no matter the circumstances.

Transcript

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We just finished up four weeks of examining the subject of radical pursuit. We looked at God's pursuit of man and man's pursuit of God. In this continuing study on the radical Jesus, I have strove to do two things.

First, to take a fresh look at Jesus. Without a fresh look at Jesus, we will continue to reproduce the lukewarm, anemic Christianity that is defining a vast portion of the Western Church. A large percentage of American believers have forsaken the truth of Scripture and exchanged the biblical Christ for a pop Christian version of Jesus that is grossly watered down.

Many of the pop preachers and teachers of the day have sanitized Jesus and Scripture from anything that they deem negative or that will make people feel uncomfortable. A large portion of the church growth principles that are promoted today are more interested in filling pews with warm bodies rather than genuinely saving souls. These are just a few of the reasons why we need to return to the book of all books

that clearly reveals the path of salvation by revealing the author's salvation in clear and concise terms.

It is very important that we let Scripture speak for itself. And when we do that, we will find the real Jesus has been there all along in plain sight for any to gaze upon in utter amazement, if they would so desire. By taking a fresh look at Jesus, we will see that Jesus is absolutely radical in every dimension of his being.

Now that is the only reasonable conclusion that can be attained when we comprehend that Jesus is God who became man to rescue us from our sin and rebellion. The second reason we have been studying the radical Jesus for the last 39 weeks is so that we can give a right response to the Jesus of Scripture that is thoroughly radical. Jesus told us many times and in various situations that the servant is not greater than his master.

If Jesus is radical, then true followers of Jesus must be radical as well. To be radical according to Christ's definition means that we are to be like Jesus, not strange, weird, or bizarre. It is only Christ's likeness that makes people radicals according to God's definition.

Today we will begin a new section, which is on radical discipleship. To understand discipleship, it is important that we go to the source, to the one that created Christian discipleship in the first place, and learn from him what it means to be a disciple. God is not interested in our opinions on discipleship, nor is he asking us to come up with a new paradigm of discipleship as if discipleship in the 21st century would be different than it was in the 1st century.

The Lord has already taught us what it means to be one of his followers, and that standard has not changed in 2,000 years, no matter what goofy strategies we come up with to replace the biblical concept of discipleship. Over all my years of ministry, I have seen so many fads come and go on how to disciple people that I am weary of them all. As a result, I have become extremely cynical of all the new ones that keep popping up out of the minds of men and not out of the mind of God.

If we fail to be disciples according to God's definition, the ramifications will be tremendous. Many will find when they stand before God that they were never true followers of Jesus. They will be expelled from the glories of heaven and thrust into the horrors of hell.

Others will find that they barely make it into heaven. Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 3.15 that their selfish works will be burned up. He will suffer loss.

He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. If we want to know how to get to heaven, then it would be very wise to know what God has to say about it. Jesus is the sole authority of discipleship, the ultimate authority on the subject.

He has made himself the only standard by which discipleship can be defined. We must never fall into the trap that makes the church the definer of discipleship, for that will surely take us away from Christ, not near to him. Our responsibility is not to redefine what Jesus has already defined, but to obey what he has commanded.

One very important point about discipleship is that it must be voluntary. And this is where we have all of our troubles. Anything that is forced is not discipleship, because people are not choosing to follow Jesus, but are coerced into it one way or another.

You cannot find in the gospel accounts of Jesus forcing people to be his followers. In fact, many times Jesus drove people away that were not serious about being one of his disciples because they refused to lower the standard to get in more followers. Here's an interesting point.

Jesus did not labor to make converts, but disciples. You may say that is only a debate over semantics, but that is not true. Discipleship, according to Jesus, is all-consuming, and we will see this as we continue in our study.

Converts are people that only ascend intellectually or emotionally to the teaching of Jesus, while never truly surrendering their all to follow him. I think that we have many converts in the church today that have refused to become authentic followers of Jesus because they do not want to pay the price to be a disciple. Jessica and I have been for the last few months helping a church that was planted a few years ago by a pastoral couple that are dear friends of ours.

I fill the pulpit for the pastor when his business takes him out of town or he asks me to preach. To help with the spiritual life of the church, Jessica and I started a young adult discipleship class that has really become a discipleship study for anyone hungry enough to attend. I call it discipleship rather than a Bible study because I want to disciple those that attend, not just impart knowledge to them.

Have you ever noticed how we can give all kinds of Bible knowledge to people on a constant basis, and yet they never change? Why does this happen? Either they do not want to be disciplined, or true discipleship is not available at their church. When I began this discipleship class, I let them know what I was doing, and I keep bringing it up to them so that the vision is fresh. I told them that since this is discipleship and not a mere Bible study, that there were things I wanted them to do.

I made it clear that discipleship is voluntary and that I was not a babysitter. If they want to be disciplined, they must make a commitment to God about what this discipleship class is all about. Since my time with them is limited because my preaching is all over the country, I made sure that I did not require of them too much.

Here are a few of the things that I asked of them, all of which is very basic. They have to have a daily life of prayer and personal Bible study. They have to spend at least 15 minutes at the altar before Sunday morning service and prayer that the Spirit of God moves and the lost are saved.

They also need to come to church with a ministry mindset, so I required them to get out of their comfort zone of their near friends and talk to others, especially to visitors. It is important that they learn how to look for opportunities to minister and how to make Christ the center of their conversation while at church. I also asked them to make Jesus Lord of their Facebook and other social media.

I wanted so that anyone that went on their news feed would know that they are true followers of Jesus. Finally, I asked them to pray every day for the loss of this community. All of this is just simple, basic things that every Christian should be doing without the need to be asked.

Since discipleship must be the choice of the will, I told them that I was not going to keep track of them, I was not going to babysit them, that if they want to be disciples that they must give themselves to it. Before God they stand or fall, not before me. I am wanting to raise up radical Christians that the Lord can use to turn upside down the communities that they are a part of.

But it begins with learning to apply the basics of the Christian faith. How many churches would find their Bible studies shrink to almost nothing if they asked the people to be disciples instead of mere attendees? How many church folk would never go back to the study if the pastor or teacher required them to do the simple things I am asking the saints of this discipleship class? How many would get angry declaring that the teacher does not have the right to put upon them such obligations? Why would they rebel? Because so many people just want to be converts, they don't want to be disciples because they are rebellious to the core. The radical Jesus did not come into the world to make tame converts, but radical on-fire disciples that he can use to shake this planet, to shake communities.

The early church turned the known world upside down because they were true disciples, not converts. Yet the majority of self-professing Christians in America cannot turn their neighborhood upside down. They can't turn their family upside down.

This is because a vast majority of churchgoers do not have a desire to change the world for the glory of God. There are some that would like to change the world, but since they have never been disciples, they do not know how to do such a work. The greater portion of our pastors and church leaders have never been effectively disciples themselves.

So how can they disciple others to turn the world upside down where they have never experienced it themselves? When the pastors are not on-fire disciples of Jesus, then the congregation will not be as well. The pastor cannot take the people any further than what he has gone. Not just that, most churchgoers do not want anything that will upset their comfortable version of Christianity, so true discipleship is not even an option for them.

Where would we be today if the faith of the early church was of the low caliber that defines the American church today? If the early church resembled the anemic faith of today's pop Christianity, would she even exist in the 21st century? Could she have survived the persecution that she faced in those early years? If we want the church to explode as it did in the beginning, then we need to return to the teachings of Jesus and restore to the church the standard of discipleship defined by Christ. Jesus knew that they needed to be disciplined men and women of God, not spoon-fed, coddled, perpetual babies. If Jesus had not accomplished his task of making disciples, then Christianity would have ceased to exist by the end of the 1st or 2nd century.

Converts to a religion or cause will not lay down their lives because their belief is not strong enough to compel them to defend and expand their belief, no matter the cost. It takes disciples, because disciples not only have a belief to which they passionately hold, but they have the desire to live that belief out to its logical conclusion. This is why Jesus aggressively made disciples and at times drove away converts because they were not really committed to him.

If you don't believe what I just said, then take some time and study John chapter 6 that opens with Jesus feeding the 5,000 and then leads into his teaching that he is the bread or the manna from heaven. That Jesus was so radical that John states in verse 66, from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. It takes more than intellectual ascent to the doctrines of the Bible or experiencing the miraculous to bring people to the point that they will die to their sinful nature and suffer persecution for Christ.

Not one of those first disciples would have suffered and died for their faith had they not been thoroughly convinced that Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be and did everything that is recorded in the Gospels.

Jesus taught those early believers to be radical through the example of his life and through his teaching. After he taught them what it meant to be one of his disciples, then he imparted to them the supernatural power of the Spirit to live it out through divine grace.

We can now see that Jesus was not interested in making converts but disciples. So what are you, dear listener? Are you a convert or a disciple? A convert is a person that has sentimental feelings about God but does not have the desire to be radical like Jesus. A convert does not want to fully surrender the entirety of his or her heart, mind and will to God so that the Lord can rule his or her life.

Or are you a bona fide follower of Jesus? A real disciple that is constantly learning and growing in Christ's likeness because you are determined like those early saints that Jesus is who he said he is and did what he said he did. Jesus gained many disciples in many ways, but none of them were forced against their will to follow him. Of their own free will, they had to make the choice to be one of Christ's disciples.

He did the calling, but they had to say yes to that call. Some of his disciples came through preaching. Others were attracted by the miracles he performed.

Some went to him and asked if they could be one of his disciples, while others he personally called out. No matter how they came to be one of his disciples, the end result was the same. They had to forsake all to follow him.

When Jesus had followed me, the people of the day knew what he was saying. Maybe something has been lost in the translation or lost through the differences of culture, time and language. For some strange reason, we Americans do not know what Jesus meant by those words, follow me.

First off, it was a command, not a suggestion. Either we respond to his command with a yes or no. A maybe or someday is always an answer of no.

When the command comes to us, then we must make a conscious choice to obey or disobey. It really is just that simple. When Jesus commands us to follow him, he is not giving us a suggestion or presenting his opinion or giving us another option among all the other options that the world offers.

Jesus meant what he said. And when he said follow me, there is no room for negotiation or personal opinion. Either we follow him or we don't.

To follow Jesus means just that, to follow him. That command is very simple to understand if we are honest people that want to know the truth. You cannot go your own way and follow Jesus at the same time, for such a thing is impossible.

We can only go in one direction at a time. So to follow Jesus, you must stop going in your own direction, living for yourself and doing your own thing. Are you getting the picture here? Because it is very, very simple.

We complicate this obvious command because we do not want to follow Jesus. We want to rule our own lives and not be ruled by another. What we really want is to follow Jesus our own way by making our terms of discipleship that the Lord must submit to.

But for that to take place, Jesus must follow us, which means that we are his Lord and he is subservient to us. But such an idea is outrageous. It is absurd in the extreme.

When Jesus commanded people 2,000 years ago to follow him, they knew they had to leave everything to follow him. Christ's terms of discipleship have not changed and will never change because God does not change and mankind is in the same condition they have been in ever since the disastrous fall of Adam and Eve. Those that endeavor to alter the terms of discipleship Jesus established will find that they are placing themselves at odds with Almighty God and that is not a wise or safe thing to do.

He will not alter his terms of discipleship for anyone or any people group or any culture. He is not enslaved to political correctness and is absolutely unmoved by opinion polls or the winds of change that constantly blow in our political systems. God does not show favoritism to anyone or to any people group or to any political system.

What it takes to follow Jesus in one nation is what it takes to follow him in another. Yes, there are cultural differences between nations and eras, but the standard of discipleship remains the same. Even though I referred to Luke 14, verses 26 and 27, often in this study, I want to highlight it again since it clearly portrays what it means to be a true follower of Jesus.

Jesus set the standard for discipleship when he declared, If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. It is disturbing how many preachers, theologians, and commentators are prone to soften the meaning of these words, especially in our era of lukewarm Christianity.

We must not be deceived by smooth-talking preachers and compromised authors that diminish the radical nature of biblical discipleship. The Lord has clearly spoken to us through Scripture, and our responsibility is to let Scripture speak for itself and then obey it. It is of the utmost importance that we do not force upon Scripture our pet interpretations that were never intended by the author, which is God himself.

Paul told us in 2 Timothy 3.16 that all Scriptures God breathed, so it is very important that we do not alter what God has said in one way or another. What Jesus told us about discipleship in Luke 14 is plain and simple. It does not take a degree in theology to understand what the Savior is teaching.

Here is a very important point. Jesus said exactly what he wanted to say, and said it in the exact way he wanted to say it. There is no mystery in what Jesus was teaching.

We do not have to search for some deep hidden meaning in these verses or strive to make them allegorical so we do not have to live them out. Jesus was not offering us a soft, easy path to heaven that is filled with positive affirmations and financial prosperity. Jesus is the truth, so he spoke only the truth, and he is a lover of truth.

He knew the true spiritual condition of the human race, that we are by nature anarchists against Christ and his rightful rule over us, and no soft motivational message could transform rebels into loyal servants of the king of kings. When Jesus had followed me, he meant what he said. We are then confronted with a decision to either obey his command or rebel against it.

If we want to escape the corruption of this world, then there is only one response that will accomplish that feat, and that is to say yes to follow Jesus in both word and deed. It takes a powerful rocket to break through the gravitational pull of the earth to enter into the starry heavens. No paper plane thrown from the hand of a child will break through the force of gravity.

Jesus told us exactly what must be done to break the hold this world has upon us as people who are sinners by nature and by choice. This is why Jesus told us that we had to count the cost of discipleship, or we would not break the stranglehold of this dark world to break into the glorious kingdom of God. If we will not love him supremely, then we will not pick up our cross to follow him.

And if we will not pick up our cross to follow him, then there is no hope that we will ever grow to love him supremely. To be his disciple simply means that we must follow him no matter the cost, no matter where he leads us, no matter if the path gives us prosperity or adversity. Is this the faith of the majority of self-professing Christians in America today? No, it is not.

The pop-watered-down faith of today has redefined discipleship to mean blessings, prosperity, comfort, convenience, and the living out of our own desires and will. Here is a Christless, crossless religion that does not require people to pick up their cross to be a disciple, nor are they obligated by their lukewarm faith to love Jesus with all of their being. This is another gospel than the gospel of Jesus Christ, the one that he gave us in the beginning.

According to Jesus, discipleship is all-consuming, and we briefly touched on this in Luke chapter 14. Another expression of this all-consuming discipleship is found in John chapter 6, where Jesus teaches his disciples that he is the bread of life. Here we find Jesus describing discipleship in a new and an extraordinary way.

He told his followers that since he was the bread of life, they must eat his body and drink his blood, or they cannot be his disciple. This is non-negotiable. The account reads in John chapter 6, verses 53 through 56, I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

Some theologians and denominations have erroneously interpreted what Jesus said here as a reference to communion, but that is not true. Jesus is not talking about communion, but about discipleship, and what he is teaching here is very radical. He is presenting the absolute necessity that if we want to be one of his followers, then we must devour him and be devoured or consumed by him.

According to Jesus, there is only one kind of discipleship, and it is all-consuming. This teaching was so radical, many of his disciples forsook him. If we presented this criteria for discipleship in the church today, how many would obey it and how many would reject it? How many would even flee from the church and never return to that church? Though Bible-believing, truth-preaching churches might grow smaller through the preaching of such truth, the caliber of their faith will only rise.

You can see this in Scripture and in church history, that the purer the faith, the more power of the Holy Spirit is poured upon them. This is the type of discipleship that we are in desperate need of today in America. Jesus was not a slave to popular opinion.

He was not filled with an ego that needed to be stroked by the praise of man, nor was he driven by the concepts of success that defines the majority of pastors and churches today. Since he loved people perfectly, he always spoke absolute truth to them, even when it drove them away from him, because he always knows what we really need and will only give us what is just and right. His radical agenda was to

bring salvation to mankind, and this he accomplished through who he was, what he taught, and by what he did.

Through Christ's revolutionary teaching, he revolutionized people by making them true disciples so they could take a spiritual and moral revolution to a world that is at war with God and thoroughly spiritually bankrupt. The tame religion of today cannot advance the spiritual and moral revolution Jesus started 2,000 years ago. He takes simple men and women who he revolutionizes and uses them to turn the world upside down for his glory and mankind's well-being.

Jesus was not an entrepreneur, so what he offers is not for sale in the marketplaces of this world. Those charlatans that put a price tag on the gospel will stand before God and give an account for the evil they have propagated, the money they have defrauded from people, and the lives they have misled and destroyed. Jesus never lured in followers with cheap promises of earthly prominence and financial prosperity.

Just take an honest look at Christ's teaching and you will see what I mean. He even rebuked James and John for seeking the most important positions in his kingdom, which was motivated by their selfish ambition and that of their mother. Jesus commanded his disciples to consume him and be consumed by him so that the flesh life would be swallowed up in Christ's likeness.

Many in the church are backslidden because they no longer want to live out Christ's all-consuming standard of discipleship. There are also many that have never genuinely come to Christ because they refuse to embrace Christ's all-consuming standard of discipleship. The half-hearted devotion that defines a vast portion of the professing church is a disgrace to Christ.

People have a hard time going to church every Sunday morning, and the Sunday evening service has almost disappeared because people would rather watch TV than worship God. The low percentage of people that regularly tithe reveals that a great number in the church have not let God be the ruler of their finances. The church of our day has sunk into a despicably low spiritual condition as evidenced by the belief that half-hearted devotion is the acceptable norm.

The reason for this belief is painfully simple. The church has forsaken Jesus, his standard of discipleship, and the truth he first delivered to the saints. If we loved Jesus more than father and mother, more than spouse and children, and more than ourselves, we would fully embrace Christ's standard of discipleship.

But a false gospel of easy-believism has taken a firm hold of the minds and hearts of the vast majority of professing Christians. This false doctrine of easy-believism is permeating every strata of the modern church by supplanting the true gospel of Jesus Christ with a false gospel of cheap grace. In this false gospel, grace has become a license to sin, and discipleship carries little or no cost or responsibility.

This is a pop religion where people live as if heaven and hell are just different suburbs of the same kingdom. The spirit that has driven the message of easy-believism is the very spirit that permeates our pagan culture, and it comes right from the pit of hell. Because this false religion of cheap grace speaks the language of religion, masses of people think that it must be true.

But this could not be further from the truth. In today's churches, people want the comfort that Christianity offers without the radical standards of Christian discipleship. But that is a false religion, a lying religion that cannot save people.

Whenever we redefine the Lord's terms of discipleship to fit our own selfish desires, we have perverted the true faith and turned it into a lie. All who believe such lies and illusions have not only deceived themselves, but they have brought that deception into their homes, workplace, and into the local church. They have become propagators of lies by the life they live while claiming to be Christian, and they will give an account of their lives to God.

The Lord will not alter His standard of discipleship for anyone, be it popes, priests, megachurch passers, televangelists, or the ever-elusive good people of the local church. He does not show favoritism to anyone. If we want to be genuine disciples, then we have to follow Jesus no matter the cost.

We must love Him more than any person, possession, profession, wealth, or dream, which means that we love Him supremely with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Jesus commanded His disciples to pick up their cross and follow Him. This is not an option, but the privilege of the divine call to die to our own self-rule, to our sinful nature, and even to everything that is good in our lives so that we can live in the fullness of Christ.

Our entire heart, mind, will, tongue, and body must be surrendered to Jesus. We are obligated by our Lord's divine right as God, and by His death on the cross, to bow to His rule over us in everything. Obedience is not an option for a true disciple, but a mandatory requirement that is a joy to fulfill for all those that love Jesus with an undying love.

When we want Christ desperately enough, then we will consume Him and be consumed by Him so that our all in all is in Christ alone and not in ourselves. Then we will experience the unspeakable joy of knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead. This is true discipleship.

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