

(Radical Jesus) 4 Radical Plan

by Glenn Meldrum

Jesus' radical plan for our lives is to reveal spiritual truths and expose our inward corruption and deformity, challenging us to follow Him and seek His salvation.

Duration: 26:34

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:10-17, Matthew 13:24-30, Matthew 13:44-50, Matthew 13:52, Luke 18:18-23

Topics: "Radical"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the use of parables in the teachings of Jesus. He emphasizes that parables were used to reveal spiritual truths in a memorable and impactful way. The speaker then presents his own parable about a deformed child in a secluded valley, highlighting how the child's existence exposes the ugliness and pride of the village people. The parable is ultimately revealed to be an allegory for Jesus, emphasizing his role in exposing the truth and challenging societal norms.

Transcript

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Glad you could join in today's podcast, which is an investigation into the Radical Jesus. Last week we began the study by taking a brief look at the radical nature of the Atonement. The Atonement is all about how God made the way that mankind could be reconciled to himself.

This was accomplished through the life, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ. I close that podcast with the opening thoughts that come out of chapter 2 of my book, The Radical Jesus. I will pick up where I left off last week, which is about the radical plan Jesus has for the lives of every person on this earth.

For God's plan to be fulfilled in our lives, we must become genuine followers of Jesus. That is where it all starts. If you miss that, you miss absolutely everything.

Have you ever thought of what it would have been like to be a follower of Jesus when he walked this planet? Well, I have, and that is how my book, The Radical Jesus, came into being. I have agonized at times in my effort to comprehend Jesus and what it must have been like to be one of his disciples during

his earthly ministry. I thoroughly believe that the Christianity Jesus began 2,000 years ago is supposed to be the Christianity of today.

Unfortunately, most versions of the Christian faith in America miserably fall way below the faith that Jesus founded. I have heard many people give their description of what Jesus must have been like, and I believe that those ideas that find their source in Scripture and come out of the hearts and minds of true believers will have at least a vestige of truth in them. Nonetheless, we are prone to take those attributes we like best about people and concentrate on those when we look at Jesus.

We all have the same problems that are inherent to being human when we try to understand and describe the Radical Jesus. First, we were not eyewitnesses of the events, so we can only learn and speak about Jesus from those who were. Second, the eyewitness accounts we have about Jesus were recorded in a very different way than we would report on them today.

Third, the culture Jesus lived in was very different from the modern Western culture we live in today. This means that there are things that Jesus said and did that we failed to see how radical or profound they were, and we may at times have great difficulty in understanding why he said and did certain things. Fourth, we have never seen a perfect sinless person, so we do not know what that looks like.

When we look at Jesus, we are inclined to think of him as a person that had no faults, which is true. But we do this by scrubbing up and sanitizing a sinful person and saying, that was Jesus. I think this falls terribly short of the real Jesus.

We are told that Jesus was like us and that he was fully human, but he was also totally not like us and that he was perfect and divine. Now that brings me to the fifth difficulty we mortals have in comprehending Jesus, and this has to do with the fact that he was 100% man while being 100% God. Nobody, and I mean absolutely nobody, will fully grasp this truth because it is a mystery beyond human comprehension.

I have said all this to help us understand that to have been with Jesus when he walked this planet would have been incredible to say the least. There was never anyone more humble, loving, and kind and compassionate than Jesus. Yet all of his infinite goodness, love, and compassion would have been extremely distressing to his fallen people.

I think it would have caused us much trauma. His words, deeds, and character would have proved him to be a very disturbing individual indeed. Everything about Jesus would have been in one way or another a reproof to our sinful condition and the rebellion we perpetuate.

Another thing that would have caused us a certain amount of distress is that Jesus was not a conventional religious leader. He rocked a boat, upset the status quo, and ruffled our feathers. He did not come into this world to leave it the way it was when he left.

If we held the biblical Jesus up against what the majority of church growth gurus say and what religious leaders are purported to be, Jesus would get a failing grade. Jesus was not driven to be some pop religious superstar, as is often the case today with many of our agenda-filled, claim-to-fame, aspiring preachers. He was a meek and lowly Jesus that came to be the Savior of the world, not a super-pastor or superstar.

Jesus did not do ministry and perform miracles for the shock value that tends to draw large crowds. He wanted people to come to him because of who he is, not because he did a miracle. People must see their

desperate need of a Savior, and that could not be accomplished with stage lighting, smoke and mirrors, and lame gimmicks.

Nor was Jesus motivated to develop a cutting-edge ministry to wow the people. Look at all the religious stars of today, and tomorrow they are only falling stars. The religious fads of today are seen as failures tomorrow.

But what do people do, including many of our church leaders? They chase after the latest fad, as if this one was different than all the other ones that came before. Do we really realize that Jesus never took a survey to learn what the local inhabitants of a given city or village wanted out of their religion? He never did such foolish things. And do we realize that he was not trying to give the multitude a positive religious experience so that they would get plugged into a life group or sign up for membership? Whoever came up with these ridiculous ideas certainly forgot to look at the Word of God and see that God builds this church through the power of the Holy Spirit, not pop church growth models and shallow surveys.

The church is never, absolutely never, supposed to go to the world and ask them what they want out of church. The true church is a gathering of true saints, which means that church is all about the worship of God and the building up of those saints. When the true church worships God acceptably, the lost will see and be drawn to Christ.

But it is a biblical fact that the world does not worship God, and in their lawless condition, nothing they do can be acceptable worship to him. According to our modern, lukewarm version of Christianity, Jesus would have been considered a total failure. He broke all the church growth rules, like the one that claims, if you want to grow your church, the message must be tailored in such a way as to make yourself very popular.

Oh yeah, and the preacher needs to watch all the garbage on TV and in the movies so that he can quote them, supposedly to be relevant, because if he's not relevant, he will not have a chance to build a mega church. Jesus never did any of that. He never preached for popularity, to get a big following, or to be famous.

Everything Jesus did, he did for the salvation of people. He preached what people authentically need, not what would make them happy or himself popular. Jesus preached like a savior to dying people.

Anything else would have been an absolute failure. Who Jesus was, what he did, and what he said was so radical and so controversial that religious leaders tried to kill him. Well, they didn't just try, they eventually did.

With this next point, I want to be careful not to give the wrong impression. As I stated earlier, there was never anyone more humble, loving, kind, and compassionate than Jesus. Yet the same Jesus seemed to offend people on a regular basis.

He offended his friends, foes, and even potential disciples. If Jesus was part of a denomination of our day, the officials would have given Jesus a stern rebuke over his antics. Talk about failing in the church growth principles.

Jesus would have failed in all of them. Take, for example, the historical account of Jesus ministering to the rich young ruler who wanted to be one of his disciples. The story is found in Luke 18.

The man comes to Jesus inquiring how to please God. This is like fish jumping into a fisherman's boat. What an easy catch.

But what did Jesus do? He tells him to sell everything he owned and give to the poor. Couldn't Jesus have waited to tell the young man this after he became a disciple? Just think of the great revenue loss that happened to Jesus' ministry. All the money that the rich young man could have given to advance Jesus' ministry was lost.

Just think of the things that could have been done with such money. All the good publicity that the young ruler could have offered Jesus was gone as well. That potential donor left offended, taking his vast resources and influence with him.

Here's another example. It was a time Jesus taught a massive crowd that he was the bread of life. By the time he finished preaching that sermon, everyone but a few disciples forsook him.

So Jesus was the author of the first church split, and he instigated it. Most of his disciples thought he had gone too far, he was just too radical. There are many more examples of these kind of actions from Jesus, but we often fail to realize that Jesus did not come into the world to win a popularity contest, but to save mankind that was hell-bent in the practice of sin.

His agenda is most often very, very different from our own. In each setting, Jesus gave the people exactly what they needed. To little children, he gave a hug and a blessing.

To Pharisees, a scathing rebuke. To the rich young ruler, freedom from slavery to wealth. And to Peter, after his third denial, a convicting look of divine pity.

Jesus did far more than just offend people, he also amazed them. This is understandable for that time since he performed such wonders before the eyes of multitudes. It should also be understandable in our time with the knowledge we possess of who Jesus is and why he came into our world.

Jesus is absolutely amazing. The people of Israel were amazed because never in the history of mankind had such wonders been performed. Jesus made the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear.

He cast out devils and raised the dead to life. All these are good reasons to be amazed. But why couldn't he have been more reasonable in the way that he did them? He angered the religious elders by breaking their traditions when he healed on the Sabbath.

If only he would have pacified the religious crowd, then he may not have been crucified. Oh my, that hits the nose on the head. Then Jesus did crazy things like the time he made mud out of his saliva and plastered it on the eyes of a blind man.

Talk about disgusting. Talk about unclean. He certainly had to get the healthcare industry angry at him over that one.

Not just that, think of how much business the healthcare industry lost over the miracles that Jesus performed. His miracle was hurting the income of many people as a result. Then what about the time that some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk? He stuck his fingers in the man's ears and spit on the man's tongue.

Now that is even more disgusting than the prior account. Surely he alienated those potential disciples that came out of the decent, well-bred middle and upper class. Can you imagine all the critical talk that took place over this event? Yet to the astonishment of all, the sick were always healed.

When we come to how Jesus dealt with demoniacs, some might say that this was strange to the extreme. When a demon-possessed person came into contact with Jesus, there was always a response. The demon-possessed would often fall on the ground, foam at the mouth, or thrash in tremendous agony.

Was Jesus being kind to afflict such suffering on people merely for the reason that they were demon-possessed? I guarantee you that such events made a lot of people very uncomfortable. How many churches today would drive Jesus out of the sanctuary if he began casting demons out of people? I think you would probably start with the church board, of course. Now, if the goal of the church is to make people feel as comfortable as possible, then Jesus totally failed this church growth principle.

Look at the account where Jesus casts a legion of demons out of a man. The demons asked Jesus if they could be cast into a herd of pigs instead of being locked up in hell. Jesus then sent the demons into the herd of swine, which were subsequently driven mad, ran off the cliff, and was drowned in the sea.

Now, just think of this. If PETA, the people for the ethical treatment of animals, and the local humane society heard of all this, Jesus would have spent the rest of his life in jail. Good thing that they weren't around in that day.

Think of those poor pigs. They were driven mad and drowned. Was that loving? But how easy it is for us to forget that pigs were unclean animals, according to the Mosaic law, and should not have even been in the land in the first place.

Then think of how unloving it was for Jesus not to lock up those demons in hell. How many other people suffered demon possession as a result? When the local people heard the story, they urged Jesus to leave the area. His miracle had just devastated the pig industry and severely hurt the financial condition of the local pig farmer.

His actions would also have a direct effect upon the economy of that village. Such rash acts would not endear him to the local populace or to the swine herders of the world. Once again, Jesus showed a lack of concern about building bridges with people the way our modern church growth experts are telling us.

So it seems, from a modern point of view, that Jesus lacked the talent and tact necessary to grow a super church or worldwide ministry. As upsetting as it may seem to people, Jesus simply does not conform himself to humanity's ideas of what it means to be normal. By just taking a simple perusal through the Gospels, we can see very clearly that Jesus loved to teach with parables.

Though this was common for the day, it still shows the genius of Jesus. People love stories, and in an age where people did not have TV, movies, and the Internet I know this is very hard to believe that there was such a time, it helped people to remember his teaching. He used parables to reveal spiritual truths that may have otherwise been difficult to understand or cumbersome to explain.

By following the example of Jesus, I would like to present a parable of my own. The purpose of this parable is to reveal spiritual truths in a way that will leave a lasting impression upon our minds and hearts. I also want to portray some important truths that can be more clearly understood by using a parable.

I will refer back to this parable many times throughout the rest of this study, so make sure you grab a firm hold of the parable and the important points that will come out of it. There is something about the nature of parables that I think we should know. Parables have a narrow purpose to reveal certain truth, but not all truth.

This is true even with Christ's parables. We should never force a parable to say something that it was never intended to say. This means we have to strive to understand what truth the parable is endeavoring to present and to not go beyond what it may say to force it to say something it never intended.

Here is the parable. Nestled within a lush, secluded valley lived an ancient people that had never been discovered by the outside world. In the course of time, a young couple living in that mountain-ringed valley brought a child into the world.

According to the tradition of this people, such an event customarily was a very happy occasion. This time, however, it turned into a nightmare for the parents and the entire clan. You see, the newborn child was horribly deformed.

This caused the tribe to be filled with dread because they thought that such a deformed child must be a curse from the gods. Though the tribal leaders wanted to kill the child, he was allowed to live, and in spite of the infant's deformities, he survived and grew strong. There was never any doubt in the midst of the village people that the deformed child was severely abnormal.

He was not like other children. The way he ran, the way he played, and the way he worked were all noticeably peculiar. In fact, he looked totally different from all the people of the tribe.

When the deformed child grew to manhood, his abnormalities only further served to set him apart from his clan. The deformed man was so unlike the rest of the village people that he seemed not to belong to them at all. When the deformed man was a child, the village people felt pity for him.

When he grew to adolescence, they strongly disliked him. By the time he reached manhood, they absolutely hated him and regretted that they had not killed him in his infancy or that he didn't die in his childhood years. One day their hatred of him reached a pinnacle, and they fell upon him, beat him mercilessly, and then killed him.

Why did the village people hate the deformed man so passionately? To understand this, we must learn a very important truth about the village people and the deformed man. The village people were an ancient race of hunchbacks. Throughout their known history, there had never been one account of a child born without a hunchback.

It was not just that they were hunchbacks, but their arms and legs were twisted and their faces were misshapen. The reason why the village people were so terrified by the deformed man is that he did not have a hunchback, nor did he have deformed arms, legs, hands, or feet, and his face was perfectly formed and without flaw. The deformed man was actually born a perfectly formed baby that grew up to be a perfectly formed man.

The village people never had a point of reference for such a thing, so to their minds he was the ugliest child that had ever been born. As the deformed child grew into boyhood, his perfections clearly exposed their deformities. By the time he reached manhood, it became obvious that they were the ones who were deformed and he was normal.

After all these generations, to be finally confronted with the truth that they were deformed caused them emotional trauma they had never experienced before. With the birth of that perfect child came the only sure standard of what it means to be normal. Before that event, normal was determined by the opinions of the village people.

But when the deformed man broke into their world, a light shined upon the ugliness of the village people, and they hated the one that brought that revelation. The very ugliness they praised, applauded, and reveled in for generations was now seen for what it is, a perversion of what they were meant to be. The deformed man's existence awakened in their conscience an understanding that they were not normal, and that truth exposed the lies that fed their pride and revealed the foolishness of their vanity.

His very existence was a relentless silent reproof of their ugliness. Rather than acknowledge their condition and seek to learn his more noble ways, they turned their shame into hatred of him. By now I'm sure that you have discerned that the spiritual truth of this parable is all about Jesus.

The village people correspond to the human race and the secluded valley represents our planet that is in rebellion against God. Their outward deformity symbolizes the inward corruption of mankind that is the result of the love and practice of sin. Sin, in all of its various forms, literally warps man's spiritual, mental, and emotional being so that left to ourselves, we are a very, very deformed people.

The deformed child represents the perfect child born of a virgin 2,000 years ago whom we call Jesus. In spite of Christ's perfect life, mankind hated him so much that they crucified him. These truths are hard for us to grasp, and they are very offensive to our pride, so we are prone to fight against them.

Everything about Jesus and his faultless life exposed the horrendous evil that dwells within our very bosoms. We have become so accustomed to our moral and spiritual deformities that we do not know what it means to be normal. Our spiritual, moral, emotional, and intellectual deformities have perverted us to such an extent that we actually celebrate our deformities.

How do we do this? We take the most perverted people among us and make them our stars and heroes. We take the most warped people of our culture and make them our politicians. We worship and emulate the most twisted that mankind can produce and declare that this is normal.

Is the church really any different than the world? Absolutely not. Take a look at those we praise, applaud, and exalt to high positions of influence. Most of them are as twisted and perverted as their secular counterparts.

We take the proudest within the church and make them our stars and celebrities. Look at many of their lives and you will see the drugs, drinking, illicit sex, greed, and divorce just like in the world. We take the most arrogant people that are full of self and elevate them to the largest churches and the head of our denominations.

We propagate the perverted dimensions of our fallen nature by exalting some of the most depraved, arrogant, sensual, and greedy people to high-profile positions. Look at how we embrace the world's concept of beauty and are attracted to its deceptive notions of sophistication. We are easily dazzled by secular society's sensualities.

And the vast majority of American Christians are addicted to the world's entertainment and are possessed by its mesmerizing hold. The church has become such good disciples of the world that the media has

restructured our morality, redefined the family, reinterpreted the purpose of life, and reinvented the church. Here is a fact that we cannot escape.

The more we become like the world, the uglier we grow on the inside, and the uglier we grow on the inside, the more we grow like the world. It is a vicious cycle that many professing believers find themselves caught up in. As the church grows more like the world, the corrupting process only causes greater pain by alienating us from one another and, most tragically, separating us from God.

I use this parable of the deformed man not to degrade those with handicaps, but to create a visual aid to assist us in seeing that to which we are naturally blind. So if you have a physical handicap, please do not be offended at this. But understand why I use this parable.

Until we comprehend that our spiritual, emotional, and mental deformities are of our own making and the source of our alienation from God, we will never experience authentic spiritual transformation. Just as the deformed village people were helpless to change their outward deformities, so we are helpless to change for the better our inward disfigurements. Apart from God's grace, our rebellion and love of sin will cause our character to grow increasingly uglier.

Mankind does not have, nor will it ever have, the remedy for the ugliness of our sinful nature. The psalmist said it right in chapter 121, verse 2. Our help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Physical handicaps, as we call them, do not make a person less of a person.

Who we really are is not defined by what we are on the outside, but what we are on the inside. Many people that are outwardly beautiful are inwardly hideous. They may be famous because of their outward beauty, but all those Hollywood sleaze magazines and tabloids reveal just how ugly they are on the inside.

Though people may suffer with certain outward handicaps or not be outwardly beautiful by the standards of this world, they can inwardly radiate a beauty that the majority of outwardly beautiful people will never know. Since we are such a mess on the inside, we will never comprehend what it means to be normal by comparing ourselves one to another. This is why the Scripture strictly forbids such prideful and foolish comparisons.

Our only hope of change and improvement lies in fixing our eyes upon the only perfect being that there is, was, or ever will be, and learning from him what it means to be truly normal. The radical Jesus possesses the sole right as Creator and Redeemer to define what it means for mankind to be normal. The perfect God-man must be our sole point of reference.

With all that said, how do we rightly define normal? It simply means to be like Jesus, to be Christ-like. To be like Jesus is an integral part of the radical plan God has for us, and it is the means by which we can draw near to God. I want to make this very plain and simple.

If we are not Christ-like, then we cannot fellowship with him or fulfill his perfect will for our lives. Here is the key to how we grow more like Jesus. We must passionately seek him with all of our heart.

The more Christ-like we become, the more the world, and even the lukewarm church, will see us as deformed, fanatical, and even radical. However, a Christ-like Christian is the only type of true Christian that there is. Anything else is an ugly deformity.

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