

(Radical Jesus) 40 Radical Discipleship

by Glenn Meldrum

True discipleship is about reproducing ourselves in others, but first, we must be transformed by the Holy Spirit to become more like Jesus.

Duration: 24:53

Scripture: Proverbs 27:17, Matthew 6:33, John 4:34, John 6:38

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of relationships in the Christian life and discipleship. He uses a parable about a deformed man and a village of hunchbacks to illustrate the fallen state of humanity and the perfection of Jesus. The preacher highlights that discipleship is hindered if relationships with God and others are not properly established or maintained. He also emphasizes the need for preaching the Gospel and learning God's Word in order to grow in discipleship. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the importance of having a deep and obedient relationship with Christ, mirroring the perfect relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Transcript

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Last week we began a new section in our continuing study on the Radical Jesus. Radical discipleship is a topic we are digging into right now, and to this point we have examined the standard Jesus ordained that anyone who would be a true follower of the Savior is required to live out. In last week's study we began looking at the thought that Jesus does not want converts that only make an intellectual or emotional response to him, but disciples that surrender their entire life to him.

To shore up this idea we then turned our attention to Christ's teaching that a disciple must love him supremely, pick up his cross to follow the Lord, and eat his body, which is all about our consuming Christ so that we are consumed by him. If professing Christians would live out these three mandatory aspects of discipleship that are absolutely radical, then they would certainly become bona fide radicals for Jesus. Whenever the Lord finds saints that will fulfill his unalterable requirements for discipleship, they will see the Lord do great and marvelous things through them.

Just like with the early church, such lives are conducive to the outpouring of the Spirit, for true revival so that they become instruments in the hands of God for rescuing perishing immortal souls. From the clear teaching of Scripture, Jesus is the standard for the Christian faith, not popes, priests, denominations, churches, or preachers. Christians can fall into hero worship almost as easy as ancient Rome did.

We look to men and their structures rather than to Christ. Yet if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we cannot escape the truth that Jesus is the only one that possesses the right to define the true faith. It is not only that Jesus possessed the sole right to define discipleship.

He made himself the standard and example of the true faith so that we would know how a disciple should live in this present evil world. By looking at Jesus and his earthly ministry, we find that one of the primary reasons for his coming to us was to reproduce himself in us. This is the nature of true discipleship.

For some crazy reason that I have not been able to figure out, the church easily forsakes Christ's teaching on discipleship to follow the pop teachings of the day. There are all kinds of counterfeit schemes to replace true discipleship, such as coaching or the many other models that the church growth gurus promote and sell. Whenever we forsake Christ's model of discipleship, we have to find something to replace it.

And when we do the research, you will find that the origin of many of these ideas come out of the secular business world. A disciple must first have a teacher that is living out the faith before he can impart it to others. This teacher must be active in the disciple's life to be able to speak into the life of the disciple, whether it is words of encouragement or reproof.

When you look at the coaching model, all that a coach needs is to know the coaching techniques. The life of the coach is not really that important. But that is not the biblical model which makes discipleship totally relational.

And this model has not changed ever since Jesus established it as a standard for true discipleship. Paul said it this way in 1 Corinthians 11:1, Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ. That is how true discipleship works, and anything else is counterfeit.

We have to grasp the truth that discipleship is totally relational, and whenever the personal dimension is removed, all that you have left is concepts and principles. The power of discipleship is that the one who is living it out is passing it on to others who are to live it out, and they are to pass it on again to others, and so it continues. This is what Jesus taught, and what Paul taught, and what the early church taught.

But is this what we are getting from the church in the 21st century? We can have our megachurches without any discipleship. People can hop from church to church and never be disciplined. People can even be faithful to a church they have attended for decades, and yet they have never been disciplined.

Sitting in a Bible study does not mean you are being disciplined. It just means that you are learning the scriptures, but it cannot take the place of true discipleship. Jesus disciplined people who in turn disciplined others, and this standard of discipleship was meant to be passed on from one generation to the next.

For the church to have disciples, they must have people that want to be disciplined. But there is another part of this issue. There must be people that walk near to Jesus that want to disciple people.

When I was a young pioneering pastor in the streets of Detroit, I went to many pastors and asked if they would disciple me, and I could not find one man that wanted to invest in my life. Here was a disciple that could not find a man that would disciple him, and I think this is not an uncommon problem. This is why we are in desperate need for mothers and fathers of the faith, so that those coming into the faith will have spiritual, on-fire men and women to disciple them.

All of discipleship is about reproducing ourselves in others. But are we worth reproducing? Is our faith of such a high caliber that Christ would want it reproduced in others? If not, then something has to radically change. Jesus did not coach people.

You can't find that in the Gospels. He was out to reproduce himself in people who would continue the same work in the lives of others. Look at the Jesus of Scripture, and you will see he was far more interested in what people were than in what they did.

When men and women are transformed on the inside, the outside life will change as well. The spiritual revolution Jesus began 2,000 years ago deals with the spiritual, moral, and intellectual condition of the people. It literally transforms lives, which in turn transforms families and communities.

Biblical Christianity is all about relationship, first with God and then with other believers. It begins with salvation that takes enemies of God and turns them into adopted sons and daughters of the King of Kings. The Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in the life of believers is all about the maturing of our inward life so that we can have deeper fellowship with Christ.

Heaven is all about the redeemed having eternal, unbroken fellowship with God. Though each of these works are done by God, the work is also accomplished through people. And if somewhere along this spiritual journey the relationship breaks down or is never rightly made, then discipleship is thwarted.

People must preach the Gospel, or the lost will never hear about Jesus. The Word must be rightly preached, or the saints will not learn God's Word. The sanctifying work of the Spirit is partially accomplished through interaction between believers, as Proverbs 27, 17 says, as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Discipleship can only be done through the relationships between fellow believers. So the entirety of Christian life and discipleship is all about relationships, first with God and then with one another. Let me return to the parable I gave near the beginning of this series on the radical Jesus.

If you have my book, *The Radical Jesus*, you will find the parable beginning on page 25. The parable is about the deformed man that was born and raised in a secluded mountain village. The deformed man represents Jesus, while the village people characterize the race of fallen humanity.

The deformed man was hated by the village people because he was perfect, without defect, while the village people were a race of hunchbacks with a variety of deformities. The village people did not know they were deformed until the deformed man was born. The village people thought the child the ugliest thing they had ever seen, and as the child grew, his perfections clearly revealed the people's deformities, so they hated him all the more.

At this point, I want to expand the parable a little and bring it into the realm of discipleship. For the next few minutes, I will continue to refer to Jesus as the deformed man for the sake of the points I want to make. Now imagine that the deformed man began to gather around him a number of people that became his

disciples.

These men and women were like all the other village people in that they had hunchbacks and deformities. The major difference between the people that followed the deformed man was that they recognized that he was perfect and that they were the deformed ones, while the rest of the village people were blind to the truth. The disciples followed the deformed man because he promised that he could make people more like himself if they would hold to his teaching.

He proved his ability to accomplish this by performing many miracles that untwisted portions of people's bodies. What was one of the missions that the deformed man was on? To make people more normal by healing them from the deformities that have caused them so much pain and suffering. So the deformed man gathered around him many people that were really deformed so he could slowly untwist them and heal their deformities.

And this is exactly what Jesus was all about when he broke into this rebel planet. Jesus is the only perfect, sinless man that ever walked this planet of morally, intellectually, spiritually, and relationally deformed people. He came to untwist us and make us more normal according to the original design of the human race.

Jesus is the only normal person this world has ever known, and we hated him for those perfections because they reproved us of our gross deformities. He became the true standard of what it means to be normal, and he diligently labored to reproduce his radical perfect nature in the deformed and twisted people he gathered around him. So this is the core of discipleship, the untwisting of our lives so that we will live and act more like Jesus.

Jesus striving to restore to mankind God's original intent, what we were originally created to be. He wants to transform us to such an extent that we become enough like Jesus so that we can walk with him in unbroken fellowship. Sin has twisted us to such a great extent that we cannot fathom just how twisted we really are.

Nor can we grasp how our twisted natures have kept us from knowing Christ and the joys that come out of that fellowship. The Holy Spirit's sanctifying process can only take place in the lives of true disciples. The unsaved can have no part of this work.

Sanctification is a supernatural work whereby we are set apart for God and set apart from sin. This supernatural work of the Spirit transforms the character of people so that they can be more like Jesus in thought, word, and deed. I would say that the greatest benefit and blessing that comes out of the work of sanctification is that we become more like Jesus so that we can fellowship with him in a deeper way.

The very fact that we need the sanctifying power of the Spirit to become more like Jesus tells us that in our natural condition we are so dissimilar to him that we cannot fellowship with him. As Christ is formed in his followers, the Lord commands them to reproduce his radical character in others. This is how biblical discipleship works.

The Savior's motto for Christian discipleship is that radicals should be reproducing radicals. But if we are not radicals as defined by Jesus, then we cannot reproduce Christ's radical nature in the lives of others. We must first be possessors of a Christlike character before we can reproduce a Christlike character in others.

It is a fact that we produce only in others what we are. Christlike people reproduce a Christlike character in the lives of others, while worldly people reproduce the passions, morals, and desires of the world in others. I think it would be very helpful if you asked yourself a question here.

What are you reproducing in others? What are you reproducing in your children? What are you reproducing in your spouse or friends? We can only give to others what we ourselves are on the inside. If we are not Christlike, then what are we reproducing in others? Jesus not only defined the terms of discipleship, but made himself the perfect model by which all believers are to live. So let's look at a couple of examples so I can clearly illustrate my point.

In John 4, verse 34, Jesus told his disciples, My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work. Then in John 6, verse 38, he declared, For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me. We see in these two verses the essential substance of true discipleship that Jesus was modeling for us.

In the first account, Jesus is teaching his disciples that the only way we can fulfill the will of God is when we have a holy determination through the grace of God to be faithful to the end. The idea that Christ's food was the Father's will, of which he ate every morsel, corresponds with what we studied last week in John chapter 6 when Jesus taught that he was the bread of life and that we must eat him to have life. This is the all-consuming nature of true discipleship, and Jesus is our perfect example of it because he lived it out to the fullest.

In the second verse I read, the idea of discipleship is that we do the will of Christ in everything just as he did the will of the Father. True discipleship includes the giving up of our will to embrace the will of the one that is the teacher. You can see in these two verses that obedience is an integral part of true discipleship.

Those that followed Jesus but were still rebels did not last long because the demands the Savior placed upon his followers would eventually expose the rebellion and cause them to flee from Christ. We can then see that true discipleship can only happen through the purposeful effort to follow Jesus no matter the cost, and that we must consume him so that we can be consumed by him. Here is something else we can glean from these two verses about discipleship that Jesus modeled for us.

Jesus had his eyes and ears fixed upon the Father so that he could do everything the Father commanded him to do and to do it exactly the way the Father wanted it done. In like manner, believers must have their hearts, minds, eyes and ears fixed upon Christ or they cannot do his will. By fixing our eyes on Jesus, which is really speaking about our spiritual desire, we can become more like him, and this is the only way we will be able to know his will and accomplish it.

Now I want to look at motives as they relate to discipleship. The motive behind the act determines everything. Jesus gave a parable of two men that went to the temple to pray.

One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. Though they both prayed, the motive behind their prayers were vastly different. The Pharisee prayed out of self-righteousness, while the tax collector prayed out of brokenness and repentance.

When Jesus closed this parable, he said that the tax collector left the temple justified, while the Pharisee left with the stain of sin still upon his soul. The motive determined the outcome, and according to our motive will be how we act. What is the correct motive to be a disciple of Jesus? The greatest and most

powerful motivator for being a disciple of Jesus is to fulfill the greatest command, which is to love the Lord with all of our being.

Love is at the center of true discipleship. It must be the motive, or we cannot be a disciple of Jesus. When people first come to Christ, they can only come out of selfish desires.

They are sick of their sin, or do not want to go to hell, or they want God to fix their marriage, or get them out of jail, or they want God to get them out of a terrible situation they got themselves into, and the list goes on and on. Now I'm glad that the Lord will accept us in this condition, because he knows that there would be no hope of us coming to him any other way. But all those who become true followers of Jesus will find that he will not leave us in the condition that he found us.

This is what the sanctifying work of the Spirit is all about, to so thoroughly transform us that the motive for which we serve God becomes one of selfless love. Jesus stated in John 14, 31, that the world must learn that I love the Father, and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Why did Jesus obey his Father? Because he loved the Father perfectly, and his love was proved by how he lived and through what he did.

I have heard way too many people that make the bold claim that they love Jesus while they are in the practice of sin. Words are cheap, and it is easy to say things that we do not have the ambition to live out. But it is a whole different thing when we put them into practice so that they define our lives.

If we do not obey Jesus, it is because we do not love him. And if we do not love and obey him, then we cannot be one of his disciples. It is far better that you learn this truth now, so that you can get your life right with Jesus, than to hear it when you stand before God, and all hope of repentance and salvation is totally lost to you.

It is a very strange thing when people claim to love Jesus, but refuse to live a life of obedience to his word. They are thoroughly deceived by a false belief system that cannot save them when all is said and done. Just the other day I was ministering to an alcoholic that is dying from his addiction, and he knows it.

Yet he loves his sin so much that even though he is killing himself, he will cling to his sin with all of his might. He said that he once knew the Lord and wanted to return to the Father's house. But the truth is that even though he is a homeless beggar, he has not eaten enough of the pig's food to become sick of his sin and run home to the Father.

He claimed that he loved Jesus even though he was reeking from the smell of booze, and his life was in total hostility against God. He is self-deluded in thinking that he loves God when there is absolutely no evidence of love for Christ in his life. The Apostle John made it clear in his first epistle, chapter 2, verse 4, that the man who says, I know him, but does not do what he commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

I gave the man information on a Christian rehab and offered to pay the bus fare to it. All he had to do was call me, but I have never heard back from him. It is easy to say we love Jesus, but is the mark of Christ stamped upon our characters? Are we growing more like Jesus, or do we still reek with the stench of the world? As I said earlier, discipleship is totally relational, and the verse I read just a moment ago demonstrates this.

The quality and depth of our discipleship will be determined by the quality and depth of relationship we have with Christ. Jesus loved the Father, so He fully and completely obeyed the Father's every wish and command. The relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit is perfect.

Love within the Godhead is absolute. So when Jesus became human, it was His joy to obey the Father in everything. Look at Jesus and learn from Him.

According to the depth of the relationship we have with Jesus will determine the depth of our obedience to Him. And together these will reveal our true spiritual condition and what type and quality of disciple we have truly become. If you want to be a better disciple, then you must determine in your heart that you will love Jesus with all of your being, and prove that love through greater obedience.

A sure sign that someone truly loves Jesus is that they are striving to be like Him in every way possible. Let me quote again John's first epistle, this time in chapter 2, verse 6. Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. This one verse makes it clear what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus.

And if we miss this, we miss what the Christian faith is all about. A disciple is to be like Jesus, and that settles the matter. The idea of walking like Jesus has to do with our life's journey.

It is a thought in the present tense, where we walk with Him on a constant basis through all that life can dish out, whether good or bad. There is no greater praise that can be given to another than to emulate them. So when we make it our life's goal to be like Jesus, we are giving Him one of the greatest expressions of praise that we could ever offer Him.

The other side is true as well. Could there be a greater insult against the person and dignity of Almighty God than to claim to be one of His followers, and yet refuse to make it our life's goal to be like Him in everything? To make anything other than Christ the object of our affection, and the one we choose to emulate, is to say with the life that He is not the greatest of all gods and kings, but there is another you hold higher than Him. Compromise and lukewarmness are far more evil than what we first thought, because their implications are vast, far-reaching, and very dark, for they are an attack against God Himself.

But the epitome of discipleship is to be like Jesus, to love what He loves, and hate what He hates, to think as He thinks, and love as He loves, to be holy as He is holy, and to be compassionate as He is merciful. And should not this be the driving force of those that are true disciples? Should this not be the passion of our lives? For anyone to say no to either of these two questions, they either do not know God's Word, or they do not want to be one of Christ's disciples. The best and truest motive that should define every disciple is that they are striving to be like Jesus, because they have come to love Him more than anything else in all of creation.

We cannot escape the fact that those who do not love Jesus will end up redefining discipleship according to their own selfish desires. The selfish are always striving to get God to agree with them, but they are certain to fail in that endeavor. A vast number of self-professing Christians refuse to make it the passion of their life to be like Jesus, because they have bowed their knee to another God.

That God may be the God of self, or some other God they have created in their own imagination, but they will never be able to please God. This leads us into another statement Jesus made that speaks about the all-consuming nature of true discipleship. Jesus stated in John 5, verse 30, What Jesus said here is

another one of His many radical statements.

If we do not understand who is talking in this verse, then we will miss the power of His statement. It is Jesus, the Creator God made flesh, and He said, by myself I can do nothing. Was Jesus telling the truth here, or did He stretch the truth to make a point? Or was He giving a hyperbole to teach a spiritual principle? Since Jesus was the truth in flesh and blood, and since He loves the truth and hates all lies, He only told the absolute truth without exaggeration or manipulation.

Yet it is important that we strive to understand why He made such a statement. There has never been a time when Jesus was not fully God, for that would be impossible. He did not make that statement as if He ceased being omnipotent and needed the Father's help in fulfilling the Father's will.

If this was the case, then Jesus would have ceased being God because He ceased being all-powerful. So that could not have been the meaning of His statement. When Jesus said, by myself I can do nothing, He was referring to the choice of His will, that He would not do anything through His own divine right as God without it being done through the direct guidance of the Father.

Jesus never operated through independence or self-rule, but through absolute loving obedience to the Father. There are probably many reasons why Jesus operated in this fashion while He walked this planet, but there are two I want to touch on before I close this lesson. The first centers upon Jesus being the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world.

The plan of salvation that was laid out before the creation of the world began included the perfect and faultless sacrifice that would satisfy the justice of God. For Jesus to live a fully human life, He had to make the choices not to operate in His divine right as God while He walked this planet. This way He could live an authentic human life.

The first Adam sinned and brought death upon all of mankind. The second Adam, which Paul refers to as Jesus, brought redemption to all who trust in Christ. Paul said it this way in Romans 5, verses 18 and 19.

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For justice through the disobedience of one man, the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous. Jesus was the only man that ever walked in total obedience to the Father, the only one that perfectly loved the Father.

The significance of this fact is seen when Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world. The just and holy one died in the place of those suffering under the weight of their condemnation as sinners. Death could not hold Jesus because it had no claim for Him, for He was without sin.

He walked in perfect loving obedience to the Father and became the conqueror of death. Everything Jesus did, He did solely through the will of the Father so that He could be the Lamb of God, the Savior of all those that would surrender themselves to Him. The second point I want to make about Christ's statement, by myself I can do nothing, has to do with the nature of true discipleship, which is to lay aside our will, agenda, wants, and ambitions to take as our own Christ's perfect will.

Jesus lived this out. He was the perfect example of how a disciple should live and of what true discipleship looks like. Here is where we Americans have so much trouble.

We do not want to renounce and surrender our rights and will to walk in loving obedience to Jesus. We want to define our destiny. We want Jesus to do the saving part, then leave the rest of our life to our own decisions.

All those who wish to direct their own lives cannot do the will of God. They may even find themselves outside of salvation. It is imperative that we restore the biblical teaching on discipleship or a great many self-professing Christians will not make heaven their home.

To water down the standard of discipleship to gain more church attendees is an absolutely evil thing because it keeps from the people the very truths that they need so that they can be saved. For those that long to know Christ, they will find the life of loving obedience to Jesus the greatest source of joy in this life because it is the path that leads us directly into genuine fellowship with Him.

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