

(Radical Jesus) 42 Radical Conclusion

by Glenn Meldrum

Radical Christianity is about being transformed into a reflection of Christ to live, love, talk, and act like Jesus.

Duration: 28:03

Scripture: Psalm 116:12-14, Philippians 3:13-14

Topics: "Radical"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having an all-consuming devotion to God. He uses the analogy of a long-distance runner striving to win a prize, highlighting the need for strong exertions and a singular focus on the goal. The speaker shares a powerful story of a pastor who lived out his faith by serving dying prisoners with compassion and humility, demonstrating the character of Christ. The sermon concludes with the speaker discussing the concept of being radical and hints at a new study to come.

Transcript

This message by Glenn Meldrum was originally produced by In His Presence Ministries for the Radical Truth Podcast. You can listen and subscribe to the Radical Truth Podcast by going to www.ihpministry.com. You are welcome to reproduce this message for free distribution. This message is part of a series entitled, The Radical Jesus.

Last week we finished up the section on the radical nature of biblical discipleship in our continuing study on The Radical Jesus. For the last 41 weeks I have been using my book, The Radical Jesus, as an outline for this study. I have strove throughout this study to make The Radical Jesus the prize and focus of these Bible lessons.

I have also tried to bring practical application to these studies on our wonderful Savior so we can apply these truths to our lives and live out the victorious Christian life. We now come to the last chapter of my book which is titled, Radical Conclusion. Today I will close out this study on The Radical Jesus and begin a new study next week.

What does it mean to be radical? As you may well know, the name of my podcast is The Radical Truth, and this particular study is on The Radical Jesus. So you can tell that I have placed emphasis upon the idea of being radical for Jesus. The word radical in these days can hold some very diverse meanings and can even evoke strong emotion for those that see it from a negative point of view.

In the secular realm, the term radical is most always presented in derogatory ways, so the use of the word can make people very uncomfortable. I understand the reason for this because there are dangerous and destructive movements that are labeled as radical, such as radical Islam, radical Hinduism, and the radical homosexual movement, just to name a few. But the dictionary definition does not always paint the word radical in undesirable ways.

The word radical implies something that is outside the norm for a given society, so this can either be good or bad. Governments in all of its various forms want to keep the people within the confines of what they deem normal, so anything that is outside of the government's concept of normal is viewed as negative or destructive. When you look at the persecution of the church throughout the ages, you will see that the government perceived the church as detrimental to society, so they attacked it.

When it comes to the culture, we can observe very similar dynamics, as you can see with governments. As long as people stay within the boundaries of what a government culture or subculture has established as acceptable, then everything is okay. But step outside of the boundaries of their defined little box, and you are now considered radical.

This is also true in the church, whether it be a local congregation, the citywide church, a denomination, or a fellowship of churches. So the word radical can have both negative and positive meanings, depending on how it is used and who is using it. We normally don't have a problem saying that the youth pastor and youth group is radical, but you will probably never find a seniors group being labeled as radical, and that's a very sad thing.

What may be considered radical in the church today may not have been radical in the days of the early church. Like governments, the church most often wants people to be somehow in the middle of what they consider normal. They want the people to behave themselves, to stay within the boundaries of the box they have established as the acceptable behavior.

The motto is that as culture changes, the criteria of what is acceptable changes as well. So what was normal at one time can be considered radical at another. For this reason, we need a firm standard to define the true meaning of radical and not be driven by the blowing winds of change that are forever changing direction.

Let me give a brief dictionary definition of the word radical, and then we will get a little deeper into how I have been using the word throughout this study. Radical means going to the root or origin. This is where we get the idea fundamental, such as making a radical difference.

It also means thoroughgoing or extreme, especially as regards change from accepted or traditional forms, then is used in relation to drastic political, economic, or social reforms, such as radical ideas or ideologies. It also refers to a person who holds or follows strong convictions or extreme principles. This can be either good or bad, depending on the person and the situation.

When you look at the synonyms of radical, the two most common are extreme and fanatical, which denote that which goes beyond moderation or even to excess in opinion, belief, and action. I have not used the word radical in the common sense of the dictionary definition, other than that it is the means of going to the root or origin, and that it is thoroughgoing. The biblical faith is radical in this world only because we have become such a twisted mess of sin and rebellion that we cannot even comprehend what we were originally created to be and do.

We are far removed from how Adam and Eve lived in the garden before their great rebellion. It is not just that time separates us, but we are vastly different from them spiritually, morally, and intellectually when they were in their sinless state. When they sinned, the consequences were far more than being thrown out of the garden, but their relationship with God was drastically changed in the negative because sin always separates man from God.

Something happened on the inside of Adam and Eve the moment they sinned. A type of spiritual, moral, and intellectual degeneration took place that mutated them into a subnormal condition. In that degenerated state, they became enemies of God through their rebellion, and what was normal in the garden was lost for mankind.

A new normal began in their fallen condition that was not of God's making, but of sinful mankind's. God's standard for mankind has not changed, but their ability to live out that standard has. Jesus died on the cross so that we could be forgiven of the crimes we committed against Almighty God.

A new process could then begin, the healing of our degeneracy, so that we could have fellowship with God. Paul stated it this way in Romans 6, verse 4, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life. Jesus does not want to remodel our old life because it is not worth remodeling, since it was corrupted by the fall and through our own practice of sin.

Jesus is out to kill our old sinful nature so that he can give us new life that comes through Christ alone. When the power of Christ's resurrection is operating in people, it gives them the supernatural ability to live a new life through divine grace that could never be otherwise obtained. What is this new life? It is the transformation of who we are to become more like Jesus, more like what we were originally created to be and do.

In the beginning, mankind was made in the image of God so they could walk with God in unbroken fellowship and live solely to do His will. We know the story. Sin changed all of that.

In the New Testament, we are given clear definition of that new life, and it is to be like Jesus, to be Christ-like, to have His life living in and through us. So being created in God's image is really all about Christ-likeness. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they were enough like God so that they could have real meaningful fellowship with Him.

When sin entered the world, it so twisted and perverted us that we could no longer walk with the Lord in unbroken fellowship. Jesus died on the cross and rose again so we could be transformed from glory to glory, to use one of Paul's phrases, and be restored to sweet fellowship with God by being conformed to His image, which is Christ-likeness. Jesus was the most radical person this world has ever known, and He did not come into this world to reap havoc upon it, but to rescue mankind.

Jesus is the ultimate and final definition of radical. He is also the ultimate and final definition of what it means to be human. Jesus was the only perfect normal person that ever walked this planet, except for the time Adam and Eve lived before their rebellion.

Since He is the only normal person this world has ever known, He was perceived by the world to be radical because all of mankind is so subnormal that they cannot comprehend what normal really looks like. The normal that Jesus brought into this world was so radical that it offended people to such an extent that they killed Him over it. Christ's normal literally traumatized people, because His perfections exposed just

how evil, twisted, and subnormal we have become through sin and rebellion.

According to the world's standpoint, Jesus is absolutely radical. But according to God's perfect viewpoint, He is the only normal that there is, the only normal by which we can define normal. If we want to become more normal, then we must become more like Jesus, and the more like Jesus we become, the more the world will consider that we are radical.

The opposite is also true. The further we get from Christ, the more abnormal and perverted we will become, but the world will think then that we are normal. Radical Christianity is about people being transformed into a reflection of Christ to live, love, talk, and act like Jesus.

When we look at the early church, you can see that Christ's likeness was the goal they were striving to live, and as a result, people could perceive that they had been with Jesus, such as what is recorded in Acts 4, verse 13. Jesus told us in John 13, 16, If the world hated Jesus, then the more Christlike we become, the more the world will hate us. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3, 12, Godly here is just another way of referring to Christlikeness.

Our goal is not to make the world hate us, but to become more like Jesus. Yet whenever we become more like Jesus, the world will hate us, and if the world loves us, then there is something very wrong with our faith. The greatest good we can do for our family, friends, and the world at large is to become more like Jesus.

It is true that some will hate us because we are growing more like Christ. Yet it is in being more like Jesus that we can do the greatest and truest good for others. Jesus stated in John 3, verse 34, For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives him the Spirit without limit.

Here we are told that the anointing of the Spirit was given to Jesus without limit because he was without sin and sought only to please the Father. When true followers of Jesus are striving to be Christlike, then the anointing will flow through them in greater ways. Through the anointing we can do the greatest good for those we love and for a perishing world.

It is Christlikeness that makes people true radicals. It is through such saints that the spiritual and moral revolution Jesus began 2,000 years ago can continue in our day and age. Even as Christians, we can have some very wrongheaded views about what constitutes radical Christianity.

Let me give a few examples here. One time I heard a deacon seriously say from the pulpit that the church was radical because they took the offering at different times in the service. If that is all radical is, then we are in really big trouble.

Another time a pastor boasted about how radical he was because he brought his Harley motorcycle into the sanctuary and used it as a sermon illustration. And if that is all it means to be radical, then we are in really, really big trouble. Some pastors are considered radical because they acclimated themselves comfortably to the pagan culture so that they can reach the culture.

That may sound noble, but it is a lie from the pit of hell. We win the world by being like Jesus, not by becoming like the world. One pastor claimed he was radical because he tattooed his whole body with skull and crossbones and then painted his Harley motorcycle to match.

In his arrogance, he thought he was so radical, but he proved by his actions that he does not have any idea of what it means to be truly radical from a biblical point of view. That pastor boasted that he tattooed himself up just to shake up the religious folk. But if that is what radical means, then I do not want any part of it because it has nothing to do with Jesus, but is a clear expression of being full of self.

Then you have the beer-guzzling, wine-sipping pastors that believe they are radicals because they are supposedly relating to a group of people that are untouched by the church. What a pathetic concept of Christianity. Such practices like these have nothing to do with the radical holy Jesus, but is like the world.

Many church folk allege that their youth pastor is radical. What criteria are they basing their claim upon? Is it that he has become so much like Jesus that the youth are growing in Christ-likeness? Or is it that he or she is acting as goofy as the teenagers? No offense meant, of course, to you teenagers. Are youth pastors radical because they have pizza parties and sleepovers? Or encourage young people to watch carnal movies and listen to worldly music so that he can use them as sermon illustrations? When youth pastors use compromising methods to grow a large youth group, they are praised for their success.

But that is not success by God's standard. Youth groups and the 20-something crowd are commonly perceived to be radical simply because they dance and jump during worship services. Now, I'm not condemning that.

This does not prove, though, that they are radical believers, only that they can dance and jump during worship. And that can take place in secular concerts as well. It is not how high you jump that makes a person radical, but what they are like when their feet touch the ground, how they live.

Youth camps, Christian concerts, and short-term mission trips are not reliable indicators that people are radical disciples of Jesus either. To be a true radical of Jesus is something far deeper. Another class of people that are commonly touted as radicals are missionaries because they minister in foreign lands.

But the word missionary is not a synonym for radical. There have been many radicals that were missionaries, but there have also been many that were not. History is full of accounts of missionaries who lived out the radical faith by giving their lives away so that others could be saved.

There are also a lot of missionaries that live in luxury in a nation that they have entered to supposedly win to Christ. That is not radical according to God's definition. That is worldly.

In our modern times, pornography has become such a big problem that many missionaries have gotten their lives bound up in this devil-inspired sin. People that are in the practice of sin cannot be radicals for Jesus, even if they are missionaries. I know from some firsthand accounts where missionaries have disgraced the name of Christ by their greed, bigotry, contentious pride, and lack of compassion.

One of my daughters went on a short-term mission trip and said how discouraged the team was because the missionary was so obese that he did not get out of the van to do evangelism with the group. I guarantee you that that missionary was not a radical for Jesus. Now, I'm using these examples only to show that because someone fills a position does not mean he or she is radical.

When we come to individual churches, some are occasionally labeled as radical, but is this label legitimate? I have been in churches where the people claim they were radical for Jesus, but in the end they were only bizarre. They thought they were radical because they waved flags, danced around the church, and gave people personal prophecies. The problem is that Scripture does not say that such

actions make people radicals.

Acting strange and weird does not make a person or church radical by God's standard. An authentic moving of the spirit is not about making people act strange, but about empowering believers to rescue a world that is hell-bent towards destruction. Being radical is not about experiences, tattoos, body piercings, dancing, personal prophecies, or the host of other ways that some try to define radical.

Being radical is something more, something far deeper. So what really makes a radical Christian? There is only one thing, and one thing only, and that is Christlikeness. The more we resemble Jesus, the more radical we will be according to God's standard of radical.

Let me give you an example here. Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was in prison for his faith for 14 years in communist Romania. In his autobiography, he gave an account of a Christlike pastor he met in prison.

This man of God was locked away in a facility for dying prisoners. He constantly spoke to the men about Christ and served them sacrificially. One day a young man said to him, You have told us many things about Jesus, but I still wonder what he was like to know as a man.

The pastor replied in simplicity and humility, Jesus is like me. The young prisoner who had frequently received compassion from this pastor answered, If Jesus is like you, then I love him. What was the pastor saying to the young man? If you want to know who Jesus is, then look at me because I am striving to be like Jesus.

This is an awesome testimony, and it is a testimony that every follower of Jesus should have. That humble pastor lived out the true faith. He was a servant to those dying prisoners.

He washed them after they vomited and defecated upon themselves and performed acts of kindness and mercy on them. So people saw the mark of Christ's character burned into the life of this pastor. How many American pastors would act like that Romanian pastor did in prison? How many have the mark of Christ's character truly burned into them? Is Christ's character burned into our very being? Do we radiate his life? Are we living out a life of radical mercy and kindness like he lived for us? We need to be like Jesus in love, sacrifice, humility, holiness, obedience, and surrender.

We need to be like the radical Jesus who is bold yet meek, fiery yet lowly, zealous yet patient. He is the standard and definition of what constitutes normal for the human race and most importantly for any that would call themselves Christian. When we are like Jesus, unbelievers and worldly Christians alike will consider us extreme.

But are we not wanting to hear from Jesus, well done thou good and faithful servant, so who are we going to obey, Christ or this world? Paul revealed to us a little about his approach to living out the true faith in Philippians 3, verses 13 and 14. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. By grace we have been given a high calling.

To attain that high calling Paul said that we must first understand that we have not yet finished the race and have not yet attained all that we could be in Christ. Therefore we forget those things in the past which include our successes and failures, our sins and our victories, our disappointments and those times when our expectations were fulfilled. We cannot live in the past, but must press on toward the prize.

We cannot let anything hinder us, drag us down or weigh us down. The phrase reaching forward speaks of strong exertions that are necessary for a long distance runner competing for the prize. Every muscle is laboring to win the prize.

The entirety of one's focus must be consumed with that prize. Paul is not talking about half-hearted devotion here, but about an all-consuming devotion that has filled the person with a drive to cross the finish line to win the race. Nothing else matters.

Nothing else could capture the heart and mind. One thing and one thing alone consumes and drives a person on, and that is a passion to win the prize. What is the prize? For we must know that for which we fight against men and devils, for which we are called to crucify our sinful nature and turn our back on this world.

Before I give the answer of what the prize is, let me quote what Paul said in verse 12. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Paul said that Jesus had taken hold of him.

Why did Jesus take hold of Paul? Is it that he was special? No. Is it that the Lord only wanted to use him to spread the gospel to the Gentile world? No. Jesus wanted Paul.

He pursued Paul so that Paul could know the depths and heights and riches of Christ's love. The prize Jesus was seeking after through all of his earthly ministry and his work on the cross was you and me. He wants us to be with him forever.

So to Jesus, we are the prize. But what is the prize Paul was pressing on to obtain? He states in verse 10, I want to know Christ. Jesus is the prize Paul was pressing on to obtain, reaching to lay hold of, seeking with all of his might to gain.

The prize of the high calling is to know Christ, and could there be any greater prize than to personally know the King of kings and Lord of lords? We have not fully attained this prize, but we have tasted of it, and the taste is sweeter than honey and it makes us yearn for more. We will not have the fullness of this prize until we cease to breathe the air of this world. But the prize is set before us.

It is now for us to run a good race to the end so that we may receive the prize from the hand of the one that is the prize himself. Jesus said it this way in 1 John 3, verse 2, But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. There it is, Christ's likeness completed in us when we see him as he is in his glorified state.

So an integral part of our high calling is to be like Jesus, for it is Christ's likeness that makes it possible that we can have fellowship with him. All this comes through the atonement and the power of divine grace. Take a fresh look at Jesus and you will see beauty beyond anything you could ever see in all of God's good creation.

Look at Christ and you will see that he is beyond radical, for we do not have words that could even begin to describe the wonder of who he is. One day every eye will look upon him, both the righteous and the wicked. The righteous will look upon him in loving adoration, in worship deeper than we have ever yet experienced.

The wicked will look upon him in fear, dread, hatred, and horror. All of mankind will see him as he is. They will see that he is the Almighty, who alone is God.

Yet it is only those who strove to be like him in this life that will be like him in the next. And only those who are like him will be able to dwell with him forever. I believe each true follower of Jesus will suffer some degree of shame when we first see him seated upon his throne.

At that moment we will come to know he is greater than we have ever imagined. And we will then realize that we failed to live out the faith that he deserves from us. All of our excuses for not living out the radical life of Christ's likeness will be seen for what they are.

Excuses, worthless excuses. Half-hearted devotion will become to us an intolerable thought when we gaze upon the Savior in all of his glory and splendor. Only in this life has the Savior offered us a phenomenal opportunity to amend our hearts and lives so that we are ready for the day we stand before him.

We must not foolishly squander such a gift or trample it under our feet. I would like to close out this teaching series on the radical Jesus by looking at Psalms 116, verses 12-14. How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. Can we repay the Lord for all he has done for us? Is there even the remotest possibility that we could pay the debt we owe him? No, absolutely no. I do not think the psalmist was trying to convey the idea that we could pay back the insurmountable debt that we owe God.

The Hebrew word the NIV translated as repay was translated in the King James Version as rendered. I think render is closer to what the psalmist was striving to communicate, but I do not think that is the best word to use. The Hebrew word that was translated as repay and render can also be accurately translated as return, and this is how I think the word should have been interpreted.

It is a sheer fact that we cannot repay the debt we owe God, and to think otherwise would either be an expression of gross arrogance or complete ignorance of who God is and the evil nature of sin. To return offers a very different idea than to repay, because it is giving God that which he already owns and has given us on loan. What has he given us? He has given us life as rational beings, and so at the very least we are obligated to return to him the entirety of our life and devoted service.

Then the psalmist mentions the cup of salvation, which addresses all those that are genuine followers of Jesus. The Lord has given us eternal life and all the riches of his great and precious promises, which obligates us to return to him all that we are in body, soul, and spirit for time and eternity. So we are not only to give him our earthly life, but our spiritual life as well, which includes our worship, praise, and loving devotion.

We must give him everything and nothing less. Is this not what it means to fulfill the first and greatest command, to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength? The psalmist then states that we are to call upon his name, which speaks of total dependency upon the Lord as our healer, protector, counselor, and king. Finally, the psalmist declared that we would fulfill all the vows we have made to God and men.

Jesus deserves the reward of his suffering, which is the surrender of our entire being to him, the whole of our affections, the sum of our intellect. This is why Jesus shed his blood on Calvary, so he could have the entirety of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. How can we give him anything less when he has done so much for us? He deserves the reward of his suffering, so do not give him anything less.

Paul told us in Hebrews 12, 29 that our God is a consuming fire. He is a fire that will terrify all the enemies of God, but to those who belong to him, to those that are sons and daughters of the king, he will be a purifying fire to them out of love and compassion. He will burn out everything that makes us like the world, everything that keeps us from nearness to him, and everything that makes us ugly, and it is sin that always makes us ugly.

Out of love for us, he will be a fire to his children, to burn into us everything that will make us like him, everything that will make us beautiful to him, everything that will cause us to draw near to him. There is only one thing that can make Christians bona fide radicals, and that is Christ's likeness. This is a fact that we must not forget and must not get confused.

It is time to be true followers of Jesus, to be like the radical Jesus.

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