

(Radical Jesus) 23 Radical Sacrifice

by Glenn Meldrum

Glenn Meldrum's sermon explores the radical nature of Jesus' sacrifice and its profound implications for compassion and salvation.

Duration: 26:12

Scripture: Hebrews 13:20

Topics: "Sacrifice"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the power and significance of Christ's radical sacrifice. Through his sacrifice, Christ accomplished the work of redemption and opened the doors of heaven for sinners. The preacher highlights the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector as a powerful illustration of the atonement and the way to obtain salvation and help from God. The sermon also discusses the importance of applying these truths to our everyday lives, emphasizing the need for sacrifice in living a life of compassion.

Transcript

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Last week we finished a section on radical compassion in our continuing study on the radical Jesus. This week we will begin a new segment on radical sacrifice. This section on radical sacrifice makes a smooth transition from our last one on radical compassion, because to live a life of compassion we must be willing to sacrifice.

In this fallen world there can be no real compassion without sacrifice. People may feel pity for the suffering others experience, but that does not mean that there is any real action that follows, just the emotion of pity or sympathy. When we looked at the radical nature of compassion, we saw that compassion always produces action.

What is the action that compassion produces? Sacrifice in one form or another. According to the need will be the required sacrifice when compassion is properly applied to its given situation. A friend that is having a personal struggle may only require a little time for some personal counseling or encouraging, whereas a

major disaster in a person's life will require much greater sacrifice to help meet the need.

When we look at our desperate need for divine forgiveness over our willful rebellion against God, we find that our need is so great that the sacrifice had to be greater than our crimes. Divine compassion required that God himself become the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. Such radical sacrifice was the only way the need could be met, the only remedy for the horrendous evil of our sin.

My thesis for this whole study is that Jesus is absolutely radical. The sheer fact that Jesus is God should be enough to settle the matter and prove my point. It is not just that Jesus is God, but when he became human he did not cease to be God in any way, shape or form.

So the God that spoke heaven and earth into existence walked this planet while still possessing his infinite power. That is absolutely radical. To top that off, Jesus fully retained the divine character he had in timeless eternity, because God is immutable, which means that he cannot change.

The glory of the infinite God was veiled in human flesh so that he could fully live a human life while still being fully God. Somewhere before time began, the Triune God chose to redeem mankind from their empty way of life through the precious blood of Christ. Let me quote what Peter said in 1 Peter 1, verses 18-20.

For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from your empty way of life, handed down to you from your forefathers. But with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect, he was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Long before Jesus was crucified, even before he spoke the words that caused the material creation to come into existence, the great sacrifice began.

The Lord had perfect foreknowledge before he created. There are some theologians that disagree with what I just said, because they espouse a liberal theology that promotes what is called open theism. They endorse the idea that God is a learning being, though morally perfect.

He does not know everything, which strongly implies that he is not infinite or perfect. They assert that since he does not know everything, he did not know that Lucifer would rebel against him or that Adam and Eve would sin. But that is not the way the Scripture describes God.

Open theism is an effort to deal with the problem of evil in this fallen world, but they miserably fail because their claims are not true. Peter declared that before the Lord created, he had already fully worked out the plan of salvation. The only way the Lord could work out the plan of salvation before he ever spoke creation into existence is that he has to be omniscient or all-knowing.

Open theism actually has a very low view of God. Christ's redemptive work will forever be a mystery to men and angels. The Lord has given us enough information about who he is and who we are so that we can be saved.

He has told us enough about his work of redemption so that we can be awestruck by his great compassion and sacrifice. But he has not told us everything, nor is he obligated to do so. His sacrifice was so radical that we cannot wrap our minds around it.

Sure, we have our various theories about what happened when Jesus died on the cross and what he did for three days when he was in the grave. Nonetheless, we still only know in part, and that will always be

the situation with rational beings that strive to know an infinite God. It is good and right for us to seek to comprehend the sacrifice Jesus made for us.

But we must also not be afraid to rest in the wonder of the infinite mystery that surrounds God and his work of redemption. When we look at God's immensity and then gaze upon the babe in the manger, then turn our attention to the crucified and resurrected Savior, we get only the briefest glimpse of the enormity of his person and sacrifice. When we try to explain the work of salvation, we still horribly fail to portray the miracles surrounding the incarnation and crucifixion and all the events that took place in between.

To help paint a graphic picture of the timeless radical nature of Christ's sacrifice, let me share with you the illustration I gave in chapter 9 of my book, *The Radical Jesus*. Imagine that a young scientist invented a time machine. After some preliminary experimentation, he was desirous to use himself as a human guinea pig to substantiate his discovery.

So he thought about the best time in which to travel. He did not want to go back in time and maybe alter the past, so he decided to go into the future. But how far in the future should he travel? To be safe, he decided to only go 25 years into the future.

Upon successfully arriving at the desired time, he desired to do a little research into his personal history. He came across a woman that he had married in the future and the two children that they had. He came across some of his scientific discoveries that made him both famous and wealthy.

To his shock and cringe, all of a sudden, he comes across his obituary. He was dead at that time. While seeking to learn the facts surrounding his death, he stumbled across the horrifying truth that his son, who had not yet been born, would brutally murder him.

Further investigation into the crime uncovered the fact that his death was a slow, torturous ordeal inflicted upon him by his own son. How do you think the scientist would handle this information once he returned to his own time? Would he still choose to bring into the world the son that would eventually cause his agonizing death, or would such knowledge cause him to remain childless? Before the voice of the Lord spoke through the emptiness of nonexistence, he knew that the only way he would be able to redeem the human race yet to be created would be for him to be crucified as the Lamb of God. This is love and compassion that we cannot fathom.

It was there, in the limitless mind of God, where the designs of creation were envisioned, that Christ's sacrifice really began. The Lord willingly created the very people he knew that one day would brutally crucify him. Why would he sacrifice himself for us? Why would he pay such a tremendous price to redeem such rebels as us? Hebrews 12, 2 gives us part of the reason.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. What was the joy set before him that he would endure the agonies of the cross? What did he consider of such value that he would pay the ultimate price to obtain? It was me, and it was you. It was every person that would come to saving faith.

Jesus thought that the cost was worth the prize. That is absolutely radical and should instill in us such undivided devotion that we would lay down our lives for him. Jesus knew the price that would have to be paid, yet he chose to pay that price to redeem that portion of mankind that would own Jesus as Lord.

When we look at Christ's sacrifice, we see that it possesses the same infinite power that he himself possesses as God. Paul talks about the power of sacrifice in Hebrews chapter 13, verses 20 and 21. The first thing that we need to touch on is the challenge that interpreters have concerning these two verses.

The difficulty has to do with the phrase, the blood of the eternal covenant or everlasting covenant. Where that phrase is placed in these two verses determines what the verses are actually teaching. Some commentators believe the idea is that God raised Jesus from the dead because he shed his blood to procure the everlasting covenant.

Others claim that the Lord Jesus became the great shepherd and savior by shedding his blood to confirm the eternal covenant. I like how Adam Clark translated these two verses, which makes them easier to understand. In Clark's translation, the everlasting covenant is between God and man and it possesses infinite power through which we can fulfill the will of God.

Paul tells us it is an everlasting covenant that includes the past, present and future. Though Jesus is the timeless creator that died at a specific point in human history at one particular location, what he did on the cross was an everlasting work spanning all of space and time. In this sense, it could be said that the covenant existed before creation itself.

Add to all this the fact that since Jesus is the God of infinite value and power, his blood possesses that same quality and the covenant is as strong as God himself. Christ's atoning blood has more than enough power to atone for the sins of mankind and the covenant he ratified with his blood is strong enough to accomplish the work of salvation in the lives of rebels. All this shows us that the atonement is limitless in power.

There are some theological camps that make the erroneous claim that the atonement is limited, that it is only for the elect. In one sense this is true, but in another it is seriously wrong. Since it was a limitless God who made the sacrifice, how could anyone consider his atonement to be limited? Salvation in the New Testament is offered to whosoever, which tells us that anyone can be saved because the atonement is not limited in that sense.

The only way that the atonement is limited has nothing to do with the atonement itself, but with mankind's response to the atonement. Though the atonement superbounds with divine power to save people, the atonement is only of value to those that will appropriate it to their lives. This is a very important point.

This infinite power is available to every sinner, but only those that will repent of their sins and put into practice a life of holiness will experience its power. Though Christ's atonement and blood are infinite in power, they are not universal, so they will not save everybody, as the universalists falsely claim, only those who fall at the Savior's feet in heartfelt repentance. Jesus was the perfect sinless sacrifice.

Peter said it wonderfully in 1 Peter 1, verses 18 and 19. For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. As a lamb of God, Jesus' blood contained infinite power to cleanse sin.

The only sins that he will not forgive are the ones that people do not repent from. As Paul told us in Ephesians 1, 7, in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. God, who is rich in grace, is not stingy in giving his grace away.

He is waiting for us to want it bad enough that we will fall at his feet, seeking him with all of our heart. When Jesus rose from the dead, he was free from all the sins for which he took responsibility. Death could not hold him and had no claim upon him.

It is in theological situations like this that we see the limits of our understanding, because we cannot fathom the full ramifications of the atonement. Through Christ's own blood, sin lost its power to condemn the Savior as our substitute. The same blood that freed the Savior from our sin will most assuredly conquer the power of sin in our lives.

2 Corinthians 5, 21 tells us, For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Through Christ we can overcome the condemning power that sin inherently possesses and know the righteousness that comes alone from God. Now if he who bore the sins of every human being was raised by the blood he shed, how much more will his blood cleanse and raise up those who are troubled only by the sins of their own making? There is infinite power in Christ's sacrifice.

If people do not overcome sin, it is not because there is a flaw in Christ's radical sacrifice, but the root of the problem is in our corrupt will and love of sin. When Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world, he paid the penalty those sins deserve, which is death and hell. Yet because Jesus is perfect in holiness, hell had no claim on him, so death could not keep him in the grave.

When the sacrifice of the Lamb of God satisfied the just requirements of the Father, resurrection power ensued. This is a very important point, because it is on this point our hope as Christians should reside. It is good to be forgiven of our sins, but what value is it to be forgiven if we have no hope of eternal life? Christ's resurrection speaks to us an encouraging message, telling us that since Jesus was raised from the dead, all who are genuinely his will know that same resurrection power.

That is good news. Christ's radical sacrifice is of infinite power, so it can offer us the power of his resurrection. In glorious angelic language, Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true, death has been swallowed up in victory.

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God. He gives us a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

In these beautiful words, we are given great hope. Christ's radical sacrifice accomplished the work of redemption and opened the doors of heaven to otherwise hellbound sinners. Christ's resurrection power will transform these earthbound, mortal bodies into ones that are immortal, imperishable, that will be able to stand in God's holy presence.

The sting of death has been broken, all because of Christ's radical sacrifice. Now heaven awaits those that will fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life. This is only a brief look at the infinite power of Christ's sacrifice, the blood he shed, and the mystery of the new covenant.

Now we must learn how to apply these truths to our everyday lives. For the rest of this lesson, I want to highlight a very powerful parable Jesus gives us that is all about the atonement. I want to look at the

parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector that is found in Luke, chapter 18, verses 9 through 14.

Before I expound on this parable, I would like to read it. To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself. God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God have mercy on me, a sinner. I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. First, I want to make a few introductory points on the parable. Though there are various ways people interpret this parable, its primary lesson is about salvation by grace versus salvation by works.

To accomplish this, the atonement is central to the story, which you will see as we progress. Many incorrectly think that the parable is primarily about pride or prayer, but it is really about how we obtain salvation and help from God. The parable ultimately points to Jesus as our atoning sacrifice.

The setting of the parable takes place in the temple during the public prayer, which would have been either 9 o'clock in the morning or 3 p.m. in the afternoon. Verse 10 tells us that two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. It is interesting to note that the order of the two men are switched in the story, which is significant.

In the Bible, the more important person in the story or in authority is mentioned first, with the lesser coming after. The Pharisee is first mentioned because they were prominent figures in Jewish culture of 2,000 years ago, whereas tax collectors were considered the scum of society. Jesus purposely switched the order at the end of the parable to illustrate that the tax collector was accepted by God, while the Pharisee was not.

Both men stood to pray, which was the custom of the day. The NIV says, the Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself. This implies that he was extremely self-absorbed and that he prayed to be seen of others.

Young's literal translation reads a little different. The Pharisee, having stood by himself, thus prayed. This is a posture of a self-righteous man that is filled with pride and looks down upon everyone else.

The name Pharisee means separated ones, and it describes how they lived, separated from all that they thought was evil. The sect first came into existence during Israel's Babylonian captivity. In the beginning they were a group of people striving to live wholly unto the Lord, but in time they morphed into a self-righteous dead religious denomination.

They had come to view themselves as superior to the rest of Israel in wisdom and piety. Pharisees believed that they could not touch an unclean person without being defiled, so this is one of the reasons why he stood apart from the people. Jesus makes a very powerful contrast in the parable, but the tax collector stood at a distance.

The word but establishes a contrast to the Pharisee. The tax collector stood at a distance because he felt unworthy due to his sense of guilt that produced authentic repentance. Let's take a few minutes and look at the Pharisee.

Public perception of Pharisees in that day is that they were keepers of the Mosaic law and faithful to the nation. The Pharisee stood and prayed out loud so others could hear him. He was really preaching to all the sinners in the temple.

His prayer did not consist of the basic Jewish prayer that was taught in synagogues, being that it was a prayer of self-advertisement because he thought of himself as spiritual. I want to make a note here that public prayer is acceptable to God when it is done with a right heart in a right situation. This is not the case with the Pharisee.

Verse 11 outlines his prayer. God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, or even like this tax collector. His statement that he was not like other men, robbers, evildoers, or adulterers was a gross generalization of people outside of his small circle of self-righteous friends.

It was also a boast of his seemingly high moral character. It most certainly was a statement of his glaring ignorance of the human condition, including his own. The Pharisee purposely contrasted himself with the tax collector when he said, or even like this tax collector.

This phrase reveals that the Pharisee was all the time referring to the tax collector whom he characterized as a robber, adulterer, and evildoer. Tax collectors were also called tax farmers because that is how governments collected much of their taxes. They did not have the sophisticated ways of collecting taxes as we do today.

Tax collectors extracted more than their required tax for their own profit. This was totally legal for that is how the Romans paid for their services. This is why they were called robbers, swindlers, evildoers, or scoundrels depending on what translation you read.

In verse 12 we are told that the Pharisee fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of all that he got. He went beyond what the Mosaic law demands. There is only one yearly fast that is required by the law.

Everything else was voluntary. His giving was down to the penny, which does not speak of a frugal man, but a fastidious legalistic one. The self-righteous Pharisee was blind to the truth about himself.

He did not comprehend that he was a sinner in need of atonement. Nor did he realize that the law could not make him righteous. He had no idea what constitutes personal holiness, and he did not grasp that the atonement only has value to the humble.

In the end, he could not see that the tax collector whom he despised was the one receiving the benefit of the atonement while he himself was being rejected by God. Now let's look at the tax collector. Public perceptions of tax collectors were very low.

They were considered breakers of the Mosaic law, immoral and traitors to the nation because they served the Romans. This tax collector had a more accurate self-understanding than the Pharisee did. Verse 13 paints the picture, but the tax collector stood at a distance.

Here is a strong contrast between the humility of the tax collector and the arrogance of the Pharisee. The tax collector stood at a distance because he did not feel worthy to stand with the congregation. Brokenness and humility was entering into the man's soul.

Smith Wigglesworth once said, To be poor in spirit is when the human has been brought into helplessness, and this is what was happening with the tax collector. Then we are told that he would not even look up to heaven. The tax collector had come to fear God, where the Pharisee did not.

The fear of God comes about because we begin to comprehend that God is holy and that we are not holy. The logical and biblical conclusion is that God is just when he damns guilty sinners to hell. The conscience of the tax collector is growing tender towards God.

He was experiencing shame over his sin, which is a healthy response to conviction. Jeremiah rebuked Israel because they could no longer blush over the evil they practiced, and this is the condition of our nation and much of the church today. In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul addressed the differences between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow.

Godly sorrow brings repentance and creates a hatred for personal sin because of the growing love for righteousness, while worldly sorrow is only sorrow over the consequences of sin or of being caught. The Lord not only wants us to hate the consequences of sin, but to cease loving sin. The tax collector beat his breasts, which is an expression of deep, heartfelt grief or anger.

Many ancient Jewish commentators portrayed this as an acknowledgement that the heart is the source of all evil. It is common for Middle Eastern women to beat their breasts, but rare for men. This shows us that the tax collector had deep, profound knowledge of his sin that produced healthy guilt and shame.

The Old Testament does not give a single account of beating of breasts. The New Testament records two such events, both of which are recorded in Luke. The first is this parable that speaks of intense anguish over sin.

The second is in Luke 23, 48, when all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. Only the cross could produce such anguish. The tax collector said, God have mercy on me, a sinner.

This is not a generalization or formal prayer for mercy. To understand what is being prayed, we need to look at the Greek, which would more accurately be translated as, God, make an atonement for me, a sinner. Some translations read, God be propitious to me, a sinner, or be a propitiation to me, a sinner.

The ancient Syriac and Arabic translations read, make atonement for me. The Greek clearly refers to atonement. The tax collector knew he was a sinner in desperate need of atonement, because he knew that God is just and holy and that he would stand before the judgment seat.

So he became a man desperate for the benefits of atonement. Everything in this parable points to the atonement. The time the prayer was offered was either during the morning or evening daily atonement sacrifices.

The slaughter of the sacrificial lamb was offered as a sin offering, and his cry for God was to make atonement for him. Jesus said in verse 14, I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be

exalted.

This statement relates to our offer and reception of salvation. Atonement is a gift from God, who gives forgiveness and righteousness through the atonement. This is a very important point.

The benefits of the atonement belong only to the humble and broken. This truth should not be ignored or downplayed. Only through humility and understanding our neediness are the benefits of the atonement made available to us.

Pride is absolutely hostile to God, because it is blatant defiance against his person and word, and a claim that the proud sinner does not need God's atonement. Solomon told us in Proverbs 8.13, To fear the Lord is to hate evil. I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech.

Whenever people love and fear the Lord, they will hate evil and strive with all that is in them not to partake of it. When people practice sin, there is definite proof that they are not lovers of God, but in prideful rebellion against the Lord. Both Peter and James stated that God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

These two apostles gave us clear warning that God actively fights against the proud. This is a very dangerous position for people to find themselves in. The same atonement that gives life to one person will inflict death upon another.

It all has to do with what we do with Jesus and the atonement he purchased for us through his radical sacrifice.

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