

Chapter 4 of Radical Sermon

G3 Church

10/1/17

Good morning. My name is Bob Richardson, and I am the assistant pastor here at G3. Thank you for the blessing of being able to worship with you this morning.

**SLIDE ONE-PHOTO OF DEAN CRADDOCK**

This is a picture of a guy named Dean Craddock. Dean was a pilot, photographer, Sunday School teacher, lay leader at Main Street United Methodist Church, father, husband, just an all-around wonderful man. One of my great laments in life is that when Dean approached me out walking back from the store in Reidsville where we both lived at the time, (you see, I didn't have a license-the result of that addiction thing I've talked about) and asked if I wanted a ride, I said no, being ashamed and not wanting to be a bother. I should have taken the ride, for it would have afforded me a few minutes in the company of Dean and grace and goodwill. I should have taken the ride.

Dean was also my Disciple Bible Study teacher one year. Disciple is a 32 week, intensive study of Scripture that rose to popularity several years ago. I'm not sure of its status now, but it was an experience I wouldn't trade for anything. One week of the class spoke to the subject of Jesus' "Radical discipleship", focusing on the almost counter cultural aspect of the Sermon On The Mount as chronicled in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5-7 for those of you keeping score at home. (I don't even know where that one came from). There are a couple of things I remember from that section of the study: One, it described our human condition in these terms: **SLIDE TWO**

**We are anxious, tied up in the status quo. We conform to our culture, knowing all the while that it is sick and riddled with brokenness and confusion. We walk in spiritual blindness.**

Secondly, the chapter really crystalized for me just what Our Lord was getting at in, not even arguably, I would argue, the most important sermon of all time, in deference to Pastor Ron's "Give the wheel to Jesus" sermon of a few weeks ago. I'm teasing. But the authors of the study wrote that the Sermon On The Mount, in a nutshell as it were, could be summed up this way: SLIDE THREE:

**Speak only the truth.  
Do not lust even in your hearts.  
Root out rage from your emotions.  
Forgive without measure.  
Love your enemies.  
Pray privately.  
Wash your face when you fast so no one will know.  
Give without getting credit.  
Avoid being judgmental.  
Work for peace.**

Now, let's return to Dean. Dean adored Scripture, devoured Scripture, abided in Scripture. All the things suggested to me as ways and means of following Scripture, Dean embodied. And Dean knew his Scripture. He'd taught

Sunday School for more than a quarter century, and it showed. Dean had game. But when he read the summation of the Sermon On The Mount that the study offered, his whole body changed. He wasn't just excited, he was ecstatic. He wasn't just convinced, he was convicted. I think he read us his students the passage half a dozen times, and then there was this extended moment of silence in the room as Dean just stared at the words on the page. After a few more moments I looked at him and said: "Dean, you radical you". It was just an attempt to break the silence, but I don't think I've ever paid a person better tribute. In the years that followed we always greeted each other the same way: "Hello you *RADICAL* you!" Dean was it; I was just trying to follow his lead.

After a long battle with cancer, Dean died on March 12, 2016. About a week before he passed Susan and I went to see him and his wife Norma. We all knew that we were coming to say goodbye to Dean. He didn't have long. Susan and I kinda' prepped each other on the way, and Susan wanted to be sure I called us all together to pray when it came time to leave. It was one of the few times when I dreaded having to pray. We visited for a time, and then it was clear that Dean was getting weary, and we should go. We hugged, fought off tears, and then I stammered, trying to get my throat unlocked enough to offer a prayer. Dean beat me to the punch. "Let's say a prayer", he said, and then this man who was riddled with cancer, struggling, laboring, with but a few days to live, thanked God: for letting him teach Sunday School, shoot a thousand photographs, fly amongst the clouds. In the midst of physical torment his faith would have him say thank you. That's radical folks. Radical. Radical.

As Pastor Stephanie said, today we continue our discussion of the book "Radical" by David Platt. By way of a recap, Pastor Ron spoke a few weeks ago that being a Christian means being the biggest loser, and being cool with that. He urged us to consider, and be concerned, that we've moved from a radical faith to a comfortable one, a watered down Gospel. To quote a line from *The West Wing*, we've become a people who settle for the lesser of who cares. We've lost our commitment to Christ, and Ron reminded us that nothing should come between us and commitment.

Two weeks ago Ron said that healthy and wealthy is not of Scripture, despite the proliferation of prosperity preachers (I'm pretty sure I just exceeded my alliteration quota with that one) who would tell us otherwise. Ron spoke of three different benchmarks of God's grace bringing about our redemption: Prevenient grace, where God comes before us, woos us, even before we are aware of His presence. Justifying grace, where we are made right with God, but we have to receive this grace, and it has to be evidenced in our actions. Finally, there is Sanctifying grace, the lifelong process of God cleaning us up from the inside out. Ron said that Sanctifying grace understands that while sin no longer reigns, it remains. All of these gifts of grace are free, except they will cost us everything.

Last week Ron asked if we, who call ourselves Christians, are being conditioned by the American dream to become religious consumers instead of committed followers of Jesus. Church is like Golden Corral, we side up to it and take just what *WE* want. He asked us to remember that nowhere in Matthew 16:24 does Jesus talk about creature comforts like coffee bars or free wifi. Put more convictingly, (yeah, I think I just made up a word) American Christian Leaders think we have found the secret sauce of building the kingdom of God, when in fact we have simply discovered the blueprint for building our own little kingdoms. Ouch! We depend on our own wisdom and abilities in pursuing the American dream instead of depending on the abilities that God has given us to pursue and fulfill what is called the Great Commission of Christ: to make disciples of all nations.

Chapter four of Pastor Platt's book is titled "God's Global Purpose From the Beginning to Today". While I don't necessarily want us to get hung up on the word "Global", I don't want it to far from our radar either. Let's pause there for a moment to look at just what Jesus tells His disciples, and us(?) in Matthew 28:19-20, His divine marching orders to them, and to us(?). Hear these words: **SLIDE FOUR**

### **Matthew 28:19-20 New Living Translation (NLT)**

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations,<sup>[a]</sup> baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

I must share with you that I have wrestled for a long time with just what “all the nations” means. Platt is under no such struggle, positing that it means what it says it means. We are to go to all nations, all corners of the Earth, leave our home...GO! I’ll try and return to that in a bit.

Platt is asking us to consider why God formed us in the first place. It’s not like God needed to. It’s not like He needed to get the band back together since, after all, He’s the music. Platt writes that: **SLIDE FIVE**

**“We were created by God to enjoy His grace. We alone have the capacity to enjoy God in intimate relationship with Him.”**

But God was quick to piggyback a command onto the blessing of this relationship, this intimacy. Since we have been made in His image to enjoy His grace, from Genesis 1:27, we are to be fruitful and multiply. And I don’t think God’s just talking about birthing babies folks; He’s talking about the future recipients of His grace. Put another way, as Platt writes, God parted the Red Sea for two reasons: One, to bless the Israelites with their very survival and Two, so that future generations would know of that grace and glory. God did not pluck Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace solely for themselves, although I’m sure they were mighty pleased. God displayed His grace and glory for King Nebuchadnezzar, who had gone from a tyrant calling for the three to be executed for not bowing down to him, to a ruler declaring his allegiance to the one true King, who insisted, in no uncertain terms, (I’m not kidding-you can look it up) that his people do the same. Finally, in Genesis 12:2 God forms His people by telling His boy Abraham: **SLIDE SIX**

### **Genesis 12:2 New Living Translation (NLT)**

<sup>2</sup> I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.

But, as Platt writes, “Then God connects His promise to Abraham with a deeper purpose”, when He says, in the next verse, Genesis 12:3: **SLIDE SEVEN**

### **Genesis 12:3 New Living Translation (NLT)**

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

Put another way, God blessed Abraham extravagantly, but that extravagance would have meant nothing if Abraham had not heeded God’s command to be a link between the Father and His children.

I have a degree in Bible and Pastoral Ministries from a really good school in Oregon called Multnomah University, but lately I’ve been getting some of my best theological lessons from this place: **SLIDE EIGHT-PHOTO OF PLANET FITNESS** One of my fellow gym rats is a woman named Rose. I asked her, in preparation for today’s sermon, what came to mind for her when she heard the word “Radical”. She said “far reaching”, and golly did she hit the nail on the head for me. We’re called to be the far reaching proclaimers of God’s glory and grace.

**SLIDE NINE-PHOTO OF JANE** This is a picture of my mother in law Jane. The greatest gift she ever gave to me was a gift she gave to Susan. She introduced her child to Jesus, and in doing so played a massive role in redeeming my days. Anyone here had the blessing of crossing Susan’s path? Then Jane gave you a gift too. That’s far reaching.

But what about that “all nations” matter? Platt argues that yes, we are all called to go to all corners of the world to make disciples. I am called to go to Haiti, Guatemala, Russia, China, North Korea, the list goes on and on. And you’re called to go too. Okay? Everybody ready for a road trip? I part company with Platt on this. I may be wrong, I may be engaging in a giant rationalization, but here’s what I think. Number one, all nations in the time of Christ is not all nations now, what with the simple and sheer proliferation of population (in case I didn’t exceed that alliteration quota). Number two, and for me this is more fundamental, I think Christ is commanding us to jettison borders, be they concrete or more metaphorical, from our minds as we seek to take his Gospel to all nations. What’s getting in our way of sharing God’s grace and glory? He’s calling us to overcome whatever hinders.

Another gym rat’s name is Erin. In a remarkable turn of events, she led her grandfather to Christ, though for much of her life she did not know he was her grandfather. Her grandmother had divorced him because he was abusive, offensive, and violent. Erin told me that he had hit her the first time they met! It’s a long and extraordinary series of events, but Erin eventually, after much prayer and fear and confusion, made a disciple of her grandfather. And I would suggest to you that she had to traverse boundaries as treacherous as the Alps or the Amazon to do it.

Some of you know that I am a member of the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, whose foundation of recovery is called The Twelve Steps. In three of them you are not asked to do anything; it is suggested that you consider it, it asks if you are willing. Maybe, just maybe, Christ is calling you and me to consider it, asking if we are willing. Maybe.

But that lets us off a little too easy for me, whose theology may not be as, dogmatic, as Platt’s. But I do know this: the consequences of going to all nations, whatever that means, are divine and eternal. The stakes are not just high, not just far reaching, they are infinite.

**SLIDE TEN-PHOTO OF LURAY CAVERNS** This is a picture of Luray Caverns in Virginia. We went there several years ago and took the tour. At one point the guide turned off all the lamps, and I cannot begin to describe the darkness except to say that I know I put my hand in front of my own face, and yet had no sense it was there. *That’s* dark!

I have a quick video I’d like us to see: **SHOW CLIP**

A man colorblind for all his days is given a pair of glasses called EnChromes, and for the first time all of God’s palette is his to behold. And I cry right along with him.

I think those are the stakes folks. Darkness where you can’t even sense a hand in front of you, or all the rainbow’s colors, where before there were only shades of gray. Will you consider? Are you willing? Ready to be radical?

Let’s pray.