

ONLY ONE

Week #1 of a 4-Week Series, "Jesus' Greatest Teachings"

March 8, 2023

Rev. Richard Rogers

Okay. So I want to start with: Do you have a spiritual goal? [Silence] One person; thank you!
[Congregation laughs] One person! Thank you!

So I want us to start right there. Because many of us have financial goals or we have career goals or we have family goals or we have health goals. But I want to challenge you tonight to have a spiritual goal. And I want your spiritual goal to be on the edge of what you can believe. Because I believe spiritually that you are far more than you've ever allowed yourself to believe. That you are greater, more amazing, more enlightened than you've ever allowed yourself to be. And I believe that, as we allow ourselves to have a big spiritual goal, things begin to move in new ways.

Tonight I'm beginning a four-week series on what I consider to be "Jesus' Greatest Teachings." And it's kind of hard to pick sometimes! It's like, would you pick this one or that one? Or which one do you pick?

And so I'm going to do a four-week series. And the first thing we're going to talk about is Jesus' understanding of oneness. Next week we're going to talk about love. We're going to talk about non-judgement. And the fourth week we're going to talk about forgiveness. Because I believe forgiveness is the one [laughs] that, when you mess up the first three, that we practice forgiveness to kind of clear the slate.

So let's talk about oneness. I believe that Jesus taught and demonstrated oneness at multiple levels. In Jesus' Jewish tradition -- in Deuteronomy 6:4 -- we hear, "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord Our God, the Lord is One.*" Judaism, Christianity, Islam all recognize Abraham as the first prophet; they're all Abrahamic religions. And the basis of all Abraham's religions is that God is one.

And in Unity, our very first principle, the first principle of Unity, is that there's only one Presence and one Power -- God the Good -- in our universe and in our lives.

And our mind has a hard time with oneness. Because our mind wants to see differences and separation and spends time in judgement. And the idea of oneness -- non-duality -- is a bit of a stretch for us. Because we look for things to compare and contrast.

How many -- when you were in school -- learned to compare and contrast authors or ways of thinking? Right? And the whole premise of this idea is critical thinking. And critical thinking is the idea that, if you take something apart, you can know it better.

The problem with this way of thinking is that it doesn't allow you to really embrace all of it. And Jesus invited us to embrace all of it. He claimed himself to be one with God in John 10: "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. For I and the Father are one.*"

Now, in Jesus' time, that made people nuts! Right? Because you weren't supposed to claim a special relationship with God. You weren't supposed to say that God was your Father. God was the Father of all people, not individually anyone. But over and over again, Jesus claimed his oneness with God. And he danced this line of always acknowledging that "*God and I are one, and God is greater.*"

And I want you to really hear this as part of your spiritual journey. That you literally are one with God, and God is still greater!

You know, there was ... There were so many times in early Christianity -- not Jesus' early Christianity, but the Christianity that came after him -- where there was this idea that, if we made people look smaller, God would look bigger. And the reality is that, when you feel small, you feel distant from your Creator.

And part of our journey into oneness is looking at yourself from a new point of view. And willing to entertain the possibility -- the experience -- of knowing your oneness with God.

John 14: *"Believe me when I say to you that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe in the evidence of the miracles themselves. For I tell you the truth: anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. And he will even do greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."*

And I really -- as part of journey here -- I want you to think about, in your lifetime, having the goal of knowing complete oneness with God.

Now, you can have all your other goals taken care of. You can have the financial goals and the career goals and the work goals and all the goals you want. But I think the ultimate goal in life is to come to know complete oneness with God. And who would you be if you experienced yourself completely one with your Creator?

John 5: *"Therefore, Jesus answered them saying, 'For truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself unless it is something he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.'"*

It is a wild moment when you begin to tell yourself that, *"In this lifetime, I will know oneness with God."* Because it sounds so egotistical! Right? It sounds so enflamed or outrageous or arrogant. That who are you to claim your oneness with God? And the reality is: I want you to see that it is the transformative moment when, not out of ego, but of the deepest cry of your soul, that you're willing to claim that you are one with your Creator. And your Creator is still greater!

But it is in this experience of knowing your oneness with God that literally everything makes sense! Where your purpose -- your destiny -- has been fulfilled. For the very reason that you've come!

Charles Fillmore, the co-founder of Unity, said this: *"Jesus Christ -- Christ is the perfect idea of God for man. Jesus is the perfect expression of the divine idea of man. Jesus Christ is the union of the two: the idea and the expression. Or, in other words, he is the perfect man demonstrated."*

Fillmore goes on: *"Jesus' prayers were answered because he always dwelt in the consciousness of perfect harmony with the Father. When we ask in his name, it is with an earnest desire for that consciousness which Jesus possessed. The Christ within each of us is ever seeking perfect expression, and it should be our earnest effort to have our mind and hearts clear and open channels in order that he may more perfectly work through us."*

"When we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask in that consciousness that is, in reality, the perfect child of the Father. This harmonious relationship between God and man is attained through prayer and meditation and by constantly affirming God's presence and God's power. If we would have God manifest through us, we will endeavor to raise our thoughts and feelings to the standard of God."

We must endeavor to raise our thoughts and feelings to the standard of God! See, I believe that we can pray. Like, if you're about to hit the wall in your car, right? I don't think there's anything wrong with praying, *"God, help me!"* Right? I think some of the most earnest, serious prayers are when you're about to have a major meltdown. And your heart and your soul absolutely mean, *"God, help me!"* And in those moments, things change! Miracles happen!

But I also believe that it's even higher -- and a better desire -- to pray before you even get in the car! To ask that the Spirit of God lift you into a higher level of consciousness.

Now, let me tell you a story. When I was about 23, 24, 25, I was a salesman working in southern California. And I was honestly pretty darn good at it. And by the time I was 25, I bought a Porsche Targa. And my family wasn't very excited about me buying that car. They just didn't think a 25-year-old needed a Porsche Targa. And I was pretty convinced I did. [Congregation laughs]

And so one of my favorite things to do on a Sunday was to go to church in our little Unity church in southern California, Orange County. And then have lunch with family or friends -- whoever was at church that day. And then I would drive the back roads of Orange County when they still had back roads. And I was known to drive rather quickly. [Congregation laughs] Right? And that was my Sunday; that was my Sunday therapy. I'd go to church. I'd eat. And then I'd drive in a very God-centered way, right? [Congregation laughs] In a ...

One Sunday afternoon, I was driving through the back country and, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a sign that looked to me like it said "Hindu Monastery." When I could finally get the car to slow down, I pulled a U-turn, went back. And they were doing a tour of this Hindu Monastery. And I thought, "*Well, I'm up for it!*"

So they gave me a tour. And it was a monastery. People lived there, and they spent a number of hours each day in deep prayer and contemplation. And they had a room in this monastery that I think was probably made out of concrete. It was about 25 feet high and it was in the shape of an egg.

And when they would all get into this room and chant and pray, the sound was amazing, because it would just roll over. It was like ... It would create this incredible sound. And in the inside of that room were all the gurus -- all the teachers -- of their order. And about halfway around the room, there was this painting of Jesus. And I said, "*What?*" [Congregation laughs] "*Like, he's my guy!*" Right?

And they said, "*Well, he's one of the gurus of this monastery.*" And I thought, "*A guru?*" Right? Because I never really looked at Jesus as a guru, right? As an enlightened teacher come to lift others up. And I realized in that moment that's exactly what Jesus was! Right? He was an enlightened master who came to alleviate the suffering of others. He's a special teacher. And I realized my life was different because of him.

And I thought about how most of us were taught to have a relationship with Jesus. And most of us were taught to have a relationship with Jesus -- that we're broken and Jesus could fix us. Right? From a spiritual point of view, how many of you heard or learned something like that as you were growing up in your church? That you were broken -- probably profoundly broken -- and that Jesus could fix you and you'd be okay. Right? That no matter how much you've messed up, you're going to be okay. Jesus can fix you. Right? And that concept is really based on the fact that you're profoundly broken. And that the only way you can get better is because of Jesus.

And at that moment, I realized -- at a deeper level -- that Jesus is really here, not to save you from being broken, but to help you know your fullness.

See, when I was in seminary, I went to the largest Unity churches in the country, because I wanted to learn from the people who were doing it at a very high level. And what I learned was: Those ministers gave me a huge amount of time, because they wanted to pass on what was working in their ministry to people who were actually receptive to learning it. And that's really been a philosophy for my whole life is that people who are doing a high level of work -- whatever that work is -- they're really eager to share it with somebody else so that they can do a high level of work.

And I really believe that, for many of us, the moment we take on a big goal that we're not sure how we're going to do it -- how it's going to be accomplished -- I believe that we need a spiritual teacher to help us along.

Now, because we have free will, we can absolutely do it on our own. Right? We have free will. We can take whatever spiritual goals and desires we have, and we can do it on our own. And there's absolutely nothing wrong with that process. Right? And it can take as long as it takes. And we'll do the hard inner work. And it will get there.

But what I really want you to see today is: I believe that we can know oneness with God and that Jesus is available to assist us in that.

And it's like, "*Richard, you're going too far.*" Well, okay; maybe. But I want you to see today that, if you have a big spiritual goal, I think you need a spiritual coach. And I think Jesus is the best. That's not thinking bad about any other enlightened beings that have graced this planet. But I want you to see that we have the ability to ask for help. But because we have free will, we actually have to ask for help. Not to fix you from your brokenness, but to help you know your oneness with God.

See, I don't believe any of us were born broken. I believe that we have all been created in the image and likeness of God, but that we don't fully realize that. We haven't really fully experienced the full depth of that. And that, as we ask for help, we actually change and transform our awareness of who we are.

Because I think it's actually easier to believe that you're messed up than that you're whole and complete and lacking in nothing. That there's more evidence. It's actually easier for us to believe what's wrong with us than what's fully right with us.

And tonight, what if you took on oneness as your spiritual project? That you could actually know complete oneness with God?

Because the more broken you believe you are, the more your ego steps in to want to fix you. Like, the more you know that you are, the more your ego says, "*Well, we can fix this! We can do this and we can do this and we can do this.*" But the reality is: If you hold and entertain the idea that, from the moment you were created you were whole and perfect and lacking in nothing, there's really nothing for your ego to do. There's really just this activity of Spirit that wants to lift you higher so that you can stand and be that incredible man or woman of God that you were created to be from the beginning.

In Hinduism and Buddhism there's this teaching that enlightenment takes 100,000 lifetimes. Who has time? [Congregation laughs] Right? I mean, I get that life is eternal, but really: Who has time? I think the world needs us to wake up now. I think the planet needs us to wake up now. To no longer be asleep to the full potential of every man and every woman to who we've been created to be from the beginning of time.

Jesus, help me wake up. Jesus, help me wake up! Help me wake up to the truth of who I am. Help me see myself beyond my brokenness. Beyond my mistakes. But help me see the truth of who I am. Help me see myself the way that God sees me: whole and complete and lacking in nothing.

See, I believe that oneness is possible. And just because we don't believe it's possible, nobody claims it. Nobody asks for it. Nobody really moves in that direction. I believe that we do -- and can be -- assisted by enlightened beings who have come to this world to show us a different way. Who have come to show us what it looks like to live from our oneness with God. That you've never been broken. You've believed it. You felt like it. You made bad choices. But you were never broken. You were created in the image and likeness of God. And now, if you choose, you could actually claim it and know it for yourself.

"I am whole and complete and lacking in nothing."

Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: *"I am whole and complete and lacking in nothing."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"I am whole and complete and lacking in nothing."*

So tonight, I'm going to invite you to claim your oneness with God. To claim a new experience of yourself. And to claim the fullness of who you are, and to allow that claim, even if you have no idea in the world how it's going to be realized. To have the courage and the faith tonight to claim it as a possibility. And then ask for help. And to see how far you can awaken to the truth of who you were born to be. That you are the full and complete promise that God made from the beginning of time. That, when you accepted life, you accepted every promise that God has ever made. That it was going to be made manifest in you. That you're the one! And as you claim yourself one with the One, everything in your life changes.

"I am one with God."

Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: *"I am one with God."*

Look, nobody's head exploded! [Congregation laughs] I don't see anybody's head exploding, right? That we can actually claim ourselves one with God and then listen to how your ego -- if your ego goes wild with that statement! *"Like, who are you to claim that? Why is it okay for you to claim that? You shouldn't claim that! Don't let anybody know you claimed that! How egotistical are you to claim that?"*

And I believe it's a spiritual calling that has been placed deep within your soul. That one day you would wake up and claim that you are tired of being less than in the image and likeness of God. That you would claim it! And that claim would be fulfilled, because you spoke it into existence.

"I am one with God."

Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: *"I am one with God."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"I am one with God."*

Will you take that into prayer with me?

And I want you to be able to see all the dopey things you've ever done. I want you to see all the mistakes you've made; all the places where you've fallen short; all the places you've acted out. And I want you to see that, even with all that, you are completely whole. Completely created in the image and likeness of God. That you are actually divine.

And as we claim that tonight; as we ask for the presence of God; as we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our way shower and our teacher, we can ask for help. Let me be more than I've ever been before. Let me be the truth of who I am. Let me know complete oneness with God. I am God's beloved. I am God's beloved. And today I want to know that with every cell of my body: that I am one with the One. And that all is right and good and holy through me.

So thank you, God. And so it is. Amen.

Copyright 2023 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Rogers