

FORGIVE EVERYTHING

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

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Alright; so the last four weeks I've been doing a series based on what I believe are Jesus' four greatest teachings.

We began with the idea of oneness: that Jesus taught and lived his ONENESS WITH GOD. But then he went further and said that we, too, were one with God. And that really is a radical thought! Even though it doesn't sound like a radical thought; we hear it so often that we're one with God ... *"Yeah, yeah, yeah; what else you got?"* It really is a radical thought to believe that we could be one with the Infinite. And not just from an abstract place, but from a conscious awareness that we could be consciously one with the Infinite. It's a radical thought. And he told us that we could be.

And then he went on and described that relationship that he called "the kingdom of heaven." And over and over again, he would say, *"The kingdom of heaven is like ..."* And he tried to use words to describe something that was non-linear, non-physical.

And it's interesting to me when people say that the Bible is the literal word of God. It's interesting to me because Jesus' greatest teachings were non-linear. They weren't literal. You can't say, *"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast placed in bread,"* and that be literally true. It's a story! It's an allegory! It's a metaphor! The kingdom of heaven is like that rising activity. So when we just make everything literal, we kind of suck all the goodness out of it. So the first one he taught was oneness with God.

The second one he taught: He taught LOVE. Love God; love your neighbor; love yourself. And that was just pretty plain and straightforward. Love God; love your neighbor; love yourself. Now, the implementation of that can be much more difficult! But the teaching is pretty simple: Love God; love your neighbor; love yourself. That was the whole story! It doesn't matter who they are; it doesn't matter what they believe. Doesn't matter how they act; doesn't matter whether you agree with them or disagree with them; doesn't matter what political party they're in or if they vote or don't vote. Doesn't matter what their income is; doesn't matter about their past behavior. It's pretty simple: Love God; love your neighbor; love yourself. Story over.

And then last week he talked about: DON'T JUDGE. He said, *"Don't judge."* Don't judge anybody; don't judge anything. Don't judge yourself. Don't judge! But he said if you do choose to judge -- however you judge, that's how life's going to come back at you. So [laughs] ... Right? So the case is: Go easy on judgment and your life will be better. Go hard on judgment and people will start backing away from you. Because they know the lightning bolt is coming, right? Because as you judge another, that judgment is proclaimed on you ... so he said, *"Just don't do it! You don't need it! You can actually go through your whole life without judging anyone for anything. And just don't do it!"*

And then he gave us the fourth great teaching: And that's FORGIVENESS. And the idea is that, if you mess up on the first three, you just come back to forgiveness. Over and over again, you come back to forgiveness.

But forgiveness: it's not a simple theological understanding. Like, the whole idea -- as you give so shall you receive -- I can teach that to a five-year-old. And a five-year-old understands that whatever you put out into life, it's going to come back to you. Right? *"As you give, so shall you receive."* That's a pretty solid, simple spiritual concept.

Forgiveness is different; it's actually harder. Right? And I'm going to muddy the waters tonight. [Laughs] I am! And if you need your theology simple, leave the room now. [Congregation laughs] Because this is not a simple concept. This is a bit of a brain scratcher. Like, how do we understand forgiveness? Because there's other things going on! That sometimes spiritual laws or principles are in conflict with one another. And how do we hold them all together?

So tonight, if I'm going to talk about forgiveness, then I also have to talk about grace. And I have to talk about the law. And how grace and the law work together. And then, if I'm talking about Grace and the law, we might as well get karma in here. And let's just talk about the whole mess. Alright? Because it's complicated!

And it would be easy for me to say tonight that you're all forgiven. [Laughs] *"Well, wait a minute, Richard; that's the promise, right? We're all forgiven?"* Because it feels good! It sounds good! It's great! But is it true? Like, is it really true that -- no matter what you've done in the past -- it's all forgiven? Like, clean slate; you're done; thank you very much; go home? Right?

Because we have free will. And how does free will play into this whole idea of forgiveness and karma and the Law? Because free will: Is it complete and absolute? Meaning, do you literally have complete and absolute free will? That means that you have free will ... If it's absolute and complete, you have absolute free will to do anything -- anything!!! *"Well, Richard, you've got to be good."* No! That's not what absolute free will says. If you have absolute free will, you can absolutely use it in any way you choose.

Like, if you're a parent and you're watching your children's play ... And when I wrote this, I wrote "cops and robbers," and I realized that's about a 150-year-old concept, right? Kids actually playing cops and robbers? I said, *"Well, maybe it's drug dealers and DEA agents now."* [Congregation laughs] Right? And like little kids don't go out and play stuff like that any more, right? It's gotta be ... It's gotta be with their thumbs. And if they don't play with their thumbs, they don't play it. Right?

So imagine if kids still went outside to play. And they wanted to play cops and robbers, or DEA agents and the Feds and drug dealers, or whatever. Right? Just imagine that they still did that, alright? Now, at the end of the day of playing cops and robbers, does the parent have to forgive them for being a cop or a robber? Who wants to say, *"No"*? Right? Because the child was out there just playing a game, right? Playing a game. And they made a game up and it was, *"Bang, bang; you're dead."* *"No, I'm not dead. You missed me."* *"No, no; I shot you."* The whole concept, right? The whole deal.

And it seems like that maybe they should have asked for forgiveness, because they were breaking the law. *"Well, Richard, they were just kids. And it was just pretend; it didn't count."* And it's like: Okay. So there's some things that are pretend that just don't count. Right? And so it just gets muddier and muddier.

But then we come back to this whole idea that, if you really have true free will, then you should be able to do whatever degrading, disgusting, inappropriate, terrible thing you want, and there should be no consequence for that. How many believe that's true? How many wish it were true? [Congregation laughs]

So Newton's Law of Physics says that, for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. For every action -- for every force in nature -- there's an equal and opposite reaction. So if Object A exerts force on Object B, the Object B then exerts the equal and opposite force back on Object A. In other words, the force results from interaction.

So, many of the laws of physics are similar to spiritual laws. So the spiritual law is: That as you give, so shall you receive. Right? That whatever you put out there comes back to you.

Now, forgiveness is defined [Laughs] I went to the Internet and looked up the first definition of forgiveness. It says, "*Forgiveness is the action or process of forgiving or being forgiven.*" How many of you, when you were in school, were taught that you couldn't use the word in the definition? Anybody remember that idea? Like, you can't say, "*What is ice?*" "*Ice is ice.*" Right? Because it's absolutely true, but it's not really very informative for somebody reading your paper when you say, "*Rain is rain.*" Because, so what; give me more than that! Right?

So I went to Berkeley. Right? The Psychology Department of Berkeley said, "*Psychologists generally define forgiveness as the conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment and vengeance toward a person or group who may have harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness or not.*"

You've got to love a sentence that has vengeance in it, right? [Congregation laughs] I mean, vengeance, right? And it's this whole idea that forgiveness is letting go. But we still have free will. So how do we hold both of those together? Like, how do you hold the fact that we hear that we're forgiven; that we have free will. With free will, there seems to be a consequence: That whatever you put out into the world has to come back to you. So how does this all fit together? It's rather complicated!

Because we want to believe in this simplistic look of forgiveness. That, whatever you've done, you're instantly forgiven. But this whole idea of free will says that, "*Yes; I can do whatever I want to do. I can put whatever I want out into the universe.*" But whatever I put out into the universe ... the teaching is that it comes back to us.

Now, that's a spiritual law. The spiritual law says, "*As you give, so shall you receive.*" So how do we muster that? How do we bring that into the context of forgiveness? That forgiveness says, "*No, it doesn't. Put out whatever you want to put out, and you're forgiven and, you know; it's all good.*" Is that really true? That you can throw whatever stuff you want to throw out in the universe and then say, "*Ooops!*" And it's all forgiven? I mean, we would love that if it was true! But is it true?

You know, the idea ... I brought a little rock. The idea that, if you throw a pebble up in the air, right? And it lands on your head ... [Congregation laughs] Is that the fulfillment of the law? Is gravity part of the fulfillment of the law? That whatever you put out comes back to you? Like, if I throw this up -- if I knock myself out, I really ... Ow! [Congregation laughs] Right? Did that hurt a lot or a little? A little, right? If you're a child and you throw a rock up in the air ... How many of you can ever remember doing that? Throwing a rock up in the air and it hit you in the head? Right? That's the law, right? "*As you give, so shall you receive.*"

Now, as you get bigger, and the rocks that you can hold get bigger, is it a good idea to know that -- if you throw a pebble up in the air and it hits you in the head, that if you throw a big, old rock and it's going to hit you in the head ... Is that an appropriate outworking of the law? Because, if it's not -- and you throw a pebble up in the air and it comes back, but God swipes it out of the air and it misses you -- how do you learn that lesson?

Because the idea is that we're supposed to be spiritually mature. And the idea is that I want to actually see what I put out into the universe. Because the universe is infinite! So I actually need to see what I'm putting out into the universe; so that I can see what's coming back to me; so I can see if I want to make a new choice.

You know what Shannon's Law is? Shannon's Law made it illegal to fire a gun into the area in any Arizona city or town. In June of 1999, 19-year-old Shannon was talking on the phone in her backyard when she was killed because somebody shot a gun up into the air, and the bullet came down and hit her on the top of the head and killed her. Somebody didn't get the memo. Like, how many times have you

heard -- Fourth of July or New Year's Eve -- people going out into their yard or their street and shooting guns in the air without any thought that what goes up must come down?

So the law -- the human law -- is that that's now illegal in every city and town in Arizona. That you're not supposed to do that. It's too dangerous. No matter what your culture is; no matter what your practice is; no matter what your daddy did; you're not supposed to go in the backyard and shoot your gun up in the air on holidays to celebrate, because what goes up, must come down.

You know, every time somebody blows up a plane or a building or something, somebody always says, "Why does God allow that to happen?" And it takes us back to free will. And it takes us back that there is a spiritual principle that says what you put out has to come back to you. And it's our way of maturing so that we see the consequences. That whatever we put out -- good or bad. Whatever we put out into the universe has to come back to us.

So does God forgive the person? Well, we can clearly know that God loves us all. Is that true? Is God's love a spiritual principle that applies to all of us? No matter how we use free will; no matter what the choices we are, God's love is the dominant spiritual principle. That each and every one of us is loved.

But then it really asks the question: Does God forgive? And then we have to decide what that means. Does it mean that whatever you put out no longer exists? Because the law is also a spiritual principle. And the law is actually here for our good so that we can learn and grow and see that, when our life isn't working at the level we want it to, we can actually ask ourselves the question: What am I putting out into my life? And if that's not what I want to come back to me, I need to change what I'm putting out into my life.

Ephesians 2, 8 and 9: *"For by grace, you are saved through faith. And not of ourselves; it is a gift of God. Not by works, lest any man should boast that he saved himself."*

So what does grace have to do with the law? And how do we understand grace in relationship to the law? Because the law is: Whatever we put out is what comes back to us. Love is: That we get to be loved --even if we're the biggest scoundrel in the world, putting out awful things, awful things, awful things -- God loves us. So what is the role of grace?

And I have to ask you: Do you believe that life is an evolutionary process? Do you believe that you're not the person you were maybe 10 or 20 or maybe 30 years ago? That you've actually spiritually evolved over the last 10 or 20 or 30 or 100 years? Or however long you've been around? Right? You see that?

Now, the way grace was defined to me was: Imagine you're throwing a ball against the wall. And that law says that, as you throw that ball against the wall, it's going to come back. Right? And that's the definition of karma. Karma is: Whatever I put out comes back to me. And in karma, it doesn't matter how many lifetimes; it's going to come back. Right? I mean, that's the whole thing of karma. Like, you can't get away from your past; it's always coming for you. You throw it out there, it's going to come back.

Now, the difference with grace -- and why this is important and how this relates to forgiveness -- is: Grace says that, when you throw stuff out, if you spiritually evolve, it still comes back but you're no longer at that place. You're actually at a higher position. You're at a higher level of life. You're at a higher place. So that it comes back, but you're no longer there!

So whatever you throw out in the universe does come back, but you don't have to stay in that place. The moment you get the "Aha!" experience like, "Oh! If I cheat people over and over and over again, it's not going to work for me," and you actually rise to a new level. That ball comes back, but you're no longer there!

Now, the poor guy behind you gets it, but you don't get it! [Congregation laughs] Just kidding. Right? That's not how it works at all. [Congregation laughs] Right? But I just think it's funny. Sorry.

Alright? So grace says that, if you learn from your activity, your activity no longer impacts your life at the same level.

How many of us can see an area in our life where we're no longer making a choice that used to be so easy for us to make, even though it didn't make sense to make that choice? Right? Can everybody see that? That you've actually risen to another level. You're on higher ground.

So what I want you to see is that love always works! It always works! The law always works! But grace says: When you've risen to another level, you are no longer impacted by your past mistakes. Because you are no longer that person; you've actually ascended to a new level of life. So God doesn't hold grievances and expect us to experience it.

I want to read from A Course in Miracles, Lesson 68. And it's titled, "Love Holds No Grievances."

"You who were created by love like itself can hold no grievances and know your Self."

I want you to really hear that!

"You who were created by love like itself can hold no grievances and know your Self."

That we can't hold grievances for others and truly know our Self as created in the image and likeness of God. That we can't be holding all of the grievances and resentments and the upsets about others and clearly see ourselves as a divine expression of God. Going on:

"To hold a grievance is to forget who you are. To hold a grievance is to see yourself as a body. To hold a grievance is to let your ego rule your mind and condemn your body to death. Perhaps you do not fully realize what holding a grievance does to your mind. It seems to split you off from your Source and make you unlike God."

It says, "Him." But God.

"It makes you believe that He is more like you, the way you think and you become. For no one can conceive of his creator as unlike himself."

So when you believe that it's right and good for you to hold a grievance, you actually believe that God would do that. You actually reduce your concept of God to something as small as you are! So when we hold grievances, it actually keeps us at the level of cause and effect. It keeps us at that man-made level of situation after situation where we have to struggle. Where we put it out there and it comes back to us.

And I want you to see that, as we advanced spiritually [laughs] we actually move closer to the wall. And I hope you've experienced that: That as you awaken spiritually, whatever you've put out -- good and bad -- comes back to you very rapidly. Has anybody ever judged somebody, and you maybe don't judge anybody anymore. And you judge somebody and it's like, "Boom!" Like, it comes back to you so quickly! *"Oh, I can't say that anymore; I can't do that anymore. I can't even think that anymore."* Because the moment I put that out, it comes back to me.

Now, does God forgive that? Yes! But you actually need to experience the consequence of inappropriate behavior so that we stop doing it! That as long as we hold grievances, we have to experience grievances. But the moment we free ourselves and move to a higher level of consciousness where we no longer hold grievances, we actually set ourselves free from all grievances. Because we're not at that level anymore!

If your life is not working, I do believe that you need to forgive everyone for everything and clear your path. Clear all the grievances out of your life so that you no longer hold any grievances for anyone. *"But Richard! There are truly bad people in the world. And if I don't judge the heck out of them, who's going to do that?"* [Congregation laughs]

Trust the law! Trust the law! Whatever people are putting out into the world; it's going to come back to them. And you don't have to chase after them to make sure they get their share. [Congregation laughs] You are not the policeman of the universe. Sorry! Right? But you're not!

Tonight, I want you to see that there are three things that are going on in your life all the time. The first one is: God loves you. No matter how weird, distorted you are, God finds you adorable. Right? Whatever choices you make; whatever behavior you involve yourself in, God just love you, loves you, loves you and thinks you're adorable.

The second law is the law that says, *"As you give, so shall you receive."* Whatever you put out, it is going to come back to you. Pretty much, most of the religious communities around the world -- regardless of faith -- believe in some form of, *"As you give, so shall you receive."* It's universal.

But what's different about Christianity is this concept of grace that says as you're spiritually evolving, the old ways pass away. That you're not responsible for everything you've ever done; you're responsible for what you're putting out right now. That who you are right now is what counts, not what you did 20 lifetimes ago. Not when you were a pirate or a princess or whatever you were, right? The only thing that counts is right now.

So here's your homework. You ready? I want you to make a list. And this may be a short list; it may be a long list. I want you to make a list of everything -- every person, every situation, everything you've ever done -- that you still need to forgive yourself for. I'm serious! I want you to make a forgiveness list. And every day, I want you to forgive yourself for whatever you've done. Because the quickest way to clean up all your past is to forgive it. Literally forgive your past for every jerky thing that you've ever done and every jerky thing that anyone's ever done to you.

Now, why do we not do this? Well, sometimes our past looks so jerky we actually go unconscious. We don't want to see it; we don't want to remember it; we don't want to acknowledge it. Our shame and our guilt is so high that we just hope that we never have to see it. Is that the same as forgiveness?

Forgiveness is when you can see it; when you can acknowledge it and say, *"Please forgive me. Please forgive me! In that moment, that really was the best I could do, and I'm so sorry for any way that impacted your life. Please forgive me."*

And it's the same when you offer that to anyone else who may have been a jerk to you. *"I forgive you. I literally forgive you for whatever you've done to me, and I hold no grievances. I hold no grievances."*

Now, when Jesus taught this forgiveness, he taught it over and over again. And he taught it to people who were really having a hard time. Like, there was this woman that the whole village was getting ready to stone. And he said, *"Those of you without sin be the first to throw the stone."* Then he starts doodling in the dirt, and he looks up and says, *"Where'd they go?"* And she said, *"They all left."* Right? They had all gone. Because the reality is: We've all messed up.

So tonight, I want you to dive into forgiveness. Not with shame or with guilt, but dive into forgiveness with just pure love for yourself and others. That we hold no grievances to anyone.

Will you pray with me?

And I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. Today we just forgive. And we imagine this whole level of life -- the whole level of cause and effect. The whole level of karma and drama and, *"He did this and she said that, and I'm upset about them, or they're not nice to me."* This whole level of life we choose just to forgive.

And then we live in grace. We live in the infinite goodness of God that is infinitely greater than this. That we have a God-given right to live in cause and effect for as long as we want to, and play out the drama one after the other over and over and over again. But there's a moment where our soul just tires of the drama and just says, *"I'm forgiven. And I forgive everybody else. Let the drama be over. Let all the craziness stop. I forgive everyone for everything."*

Together: *"I forgive everyone for everything."*

[With congregation]: *"I forgive everyone for everything."*

In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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