

How can Christianity be the only way to God?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 November 2015

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] Who has ever watched Oprah Winfrey before? Raise your hands. Wow. Okay. Lots of people. Oprah was the host of one of the most popular talk shows ever on TV, which covered a huge range of topics that people came together to talk about.

Oprah has always said that she's a Christian, interestingly enough. And yet in one of her shows, she said this, and I quote, One of the mistakes that human beings make is believing that there is only one way to live.

People don't accept that there are diverse ways and many paths to what you call God. There can't possibly be only one way. That's Oprah Winfrey. Secondly, Joel Osteen, you may have come across him if you've watched maybe Bible TV on cable networks.

He's a pastor of one of the largest Protestant churches in America. And in an interview, he said this, with Larry King, in fact. He said, It's wrong to say to someone, You're not going to heaven because what you believe is not my way.

If they don't want to believe Jesus, that's their choice. God knows your heart. Here's another one. U.S. President Barack Obama, you may know of him. He once stated that he's a Christian.

[1 : 1 8] And he said this, talking about God, But I believe there are many paths to the same place. Coming closer to home, Archbishop Desmond Tutu once stated this, If you think that God is going to reject the Dalai Lama and tell him, You're a good person, but sorry you're not a Christian, then I say rubbish.

You see, there are lots of people who call themselves Christians, And yet they say that Christianity is not the only way to get to God. That every religion is valid in its own right, And God is not limited to just one religion.

And that's a very, very popular view, both outside and inside the church. And anybody who says different, anybody who says, No, there is only one way, is considered arrogant at best, And a bigot at worst.

Arrogant to say that their way is the only way. And so the question I want us to look at this morning, And consider seriously, is do these leaders have a point? You know, is it arrogant and wrong for Christians to say that there is only one way to God?

Well, let me begin by saying, No, it's not arrogant for Christians to say that, Because Jesus says it quite clearly. In John 14 verse 6, he makes it very clear.

[2 : 3 7] I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Now you can't get more clear than that. Jesus is saying that there's no way to God apart from him.

And so when Christians say that, They're not being arrogant, They're just passing on what Jesus said. But secondly, There's really nothing inherently wrong with saying there's only one way.

If you think about it. Has anybody visited Southfield Library recently? Just up the road here. Yeah, Southfield Library. Nice library. But I went there and I discovered there's only one way to get in.

And I was really bothered by this, Because I was wanting to climb through the window, But I found that there were bars on the window. So I was really put out. I was so offended.

No, not really. I wasn't really offended. The truth is I wasn't bothered at all that there was only one way into the library. I didn't find the librarian and complain that they were being arrogant to have only one way in.

[3 : 36] I accepted that that's the way that they provided. And so I went in that way. This morning, right now, there is only one way to get into this building. We've locked the kitchen door as we normally do.

So the only way you can get in is through the back door there. And if visitors outside come and one of the stewards is there, And the steward says, sorry, you have to go through that door, They're not going to turn around and say, You're so arrogant that you've only got one way into your church.

No, they'll accept that that's the way that's been provided. Now think about this. If we've got a right to decide the way people come into our building, Then I think God has a right to decide how people come into heaven.

And he's decided that that way is through his son, Jesus Christ. And so if you think about it, I don't think that the problem is so much that people are against their being only one way.

I mean, God's perfectly entitled to make only one way. I think what people are against when they ask this question Is the idea that there has to be a way at all.

[4 : 36] That's what offends people. I don't think people understand why we're separated from God in the first place. But it's only when we understand that, That we can begin to understand why Jesus can be the only possible way.

But for that, we've got to go back to the beginning, Like we so often do in Scripture. And we've got to go back to Genesis. And what we find, When we start reading Genesis, And we look at how the world started, We find it wasn't always like this.

See, in Genesis we read, There was a time when people weren't separated from God, Like we are today. A time when humans knew God intimately.

They could see Him. They could talk to Him as easily as you can talk with your friend. Humans didn't have to find a way to God, Because they were with Him already. And that's what God originally intended for humans, right?

To know Him personally, intimately, And to find their greatest joy in being with Him, In being always in His presence. Psalm 1611 says, In your presence there is fullness of joy.

[5 : 45] In your presence there is fullness of joy. You know, the reason today that people are constantly searching for happiness, But never finding it, Is because they don't have the one thing that they were made to find their ultimate happiness in, Which is the presence of God.

The human race has been separated from the presence of God. And that's why we are like we are today. But why is that? What led to that? Well, if you know Genesis, you'll know.

Because in Genesis we discover that humans decided, That they didn't need to listen to God. That they were quite okay to live life by themselves.

And so that they could just do what they wanted. And so they disobeyed God. They sinned. They decided to do things their way and not God's way. Okay, so what? You know, so what if humans want to live their way?

What's so bad about that? Well, we've got to understand that humans who disobey God Have absolutely no place in God's world, in His presence. And so because of that disobedience, Because of wanting to live our own way, Humans became separated from God and His blessings.

[6 : 52] And so death and pain and toil entered into our world as it is today. You see, the Bible makes clear that all of that, All of the difficulty and pain of this world, Is a result of our sin against God that led to our separation with Him.

The same sin of the first humans that we all have inside us. Let's not deny it. Our tendency to disobey God. To live how we want to live rather than how He wants us to live.

We all do that. And that is sin. And that sin is what separates us from God. You know, by default, You are separated from your Creator.

By default. You were born separated from God. We all were. We live separated from God. And if nothing changes, We will die separated from God And go to what the Bible calls hell, Which is eternal separation from God.

And everything good. And that is what people don't realize when they ask this question. People don't realize that by default, We have no place in the presence of a holy God.

[7 : 56] Listen to what Isaiah 59 says. Your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

Those are terrible words for any creature to hear of their Creator. That they have been separated from the source of life and everything good. But that is true because of our sin.

And that is humanity's biggest problem by far. It's not climate change or inflation or crime. It's separation from God, Which is our biggest problem. And that's your biggest problem.

It's not arthritis or cancer or unemployment. Your biggest problem is your sin that separates you from your Creator. But people don't get that.

People don't understand that today. And that's why people don't like Jesus saying that He's the only way back to God. Because they don't think they need a way back to God at all. People think that God is freely accessible just through religion.

[8 : 57] But He's not. You know, just through going to church or mass or saying prayers, People think that they can access God. But just those things won't. But they're not enough to access God.

You see, we've got to realize that reaching God is not as easy as we think. Reaching God is not as easy as we think. Has anybody read Leviticus recently?

Put up your hand. Okay, well done. Well done. But I thought most people haven't read Leviticus recently. It's a really tough book if you've read it.

If you've tried to read it. Because it lists in great detail all the requirements that the Israelites had to fulfill. To even gather together to worship God, let alone to have a relationship with Him.

It lists what they had to wear, how they had to clean themselves, what they had to present to the priest, what sacrifices they had to bring. And even then, after all that rigmarole, the closest that an ordinary Israelite could get to the temple, to the dwelling place of God that represented heaven, was outside.

[10 : 01] That's the closest they could get. The high priest, only the high priest, could go on their behalf, and only once a year enter the place of God. And you see, all of this, in all of this, God is trying to make a point, isn't He?

And the point He's trying to make is that it's much harder for sinners to approach a holy God than we tend to think it is. Our sin separates us from Him far more than we know.

But what you find in our world, if you look around, is that religions pretend that it's far easier to approach God than it actually is.

You've still got to do something. I mean, all humans feel that they want to earn their way to God and do something, but it's much more achievable than it was in the Bible. Islam, for example, will say that you reach God through giving alms, and daily prayers, and fasting, and going to Mecca, and walking around Iraq seven times.

And wearing a little hat will help as well. But if you do these things, then you're good. Judaism is similar. It's also a bunch of rules, also a dress code, also little hats involved.

[11 : 12] And people really believe that by doing these things and wearing these things, they'll somehow bridge the gap between us and God. But honestly, who do they think God is? I mean, do they really think that God is impressed with little hats?

And reciting rote prayers and walking around a rock and totally ignore the huge separation that still exists between us and God. But that's exactly what human religion does, you see.

It makes God reachable. That's what it tries to do. It makes God attainable when He's actually not, by giving you a list of silly things to do that's not going to impress God at all in reality.

You know, it's the equivalent of convincing people that they can reach the moon by climbing a hill. You know, the only way that you can convince someone of that is either by convincing them that the moon is closer than they think or that the hill is much bigger than they think.

And in the same way, religions try to convince people that they can reach God either by saying that God is less holy than He actually is and He doesn't really mind your sin that much or by saying that you are less sinful than you actually are and you can make up for your sin by doing a few good things.

[12 : 28] Do you see how religion actually reduces God? Human religion actually takes away from the holiness of God. Well, that right there is the difference between religion and what Jesus came to tell us.

Because Jesus doesn't reduce the holiness of God. Not once. Listen to what He says. From Matthew 5, 48, He says, You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Nothing less will do for God. God won't tolerate anything less in heaven than perfection. Otherwise it wouldn't be heaven. Otherwise it would just be another earth. Listen to what else Jesus says.

If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. See, He doesn't mince His words.

Any sin will separate you from God for eternity. Jesus doesn't reduce the holiness of God to make Him reachable. And neither does He reduce the seriousness of our sin.

[13 : 37] In fact, He shows us how even our hidden sins that we didn't even know about are far more serious than we think. He says, Whoever looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in God's sight.

Whoever hates his brother is already a murderer. You see, when we begin to understand what Jesus is saying here, that even our thoughts condemn us before a holy and perfect God, when we begin to grasp that, then we begin to realize the question isn't how can there only be one way to God, but how can there be a way to God at all?

That's what the real question is. How can there be any way to God? And it's when we're asking that question, the right question, it's then that we start to understand why Jesus went to the cross, why He had to go to the cross.

The night before He died, He was alone in the Garden of Gethsemane praying to His Father, and He said this, My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me.

See, Jesus knew what was about to happen the following day. The cup that He was talking about was the cup of God's wrath, God's intense justice for human sins, that Jesus was going to have poured out on Him for the sins of others as He hung on the cross, separated from God.

[15 : 06] And He knew that's what was about to happen. And so the night before, He was in agony, and He desperately asked, is there no other way? You see, even Jesus wanted to find another way for people to come to God.

But there was no other way. And the reason is, because God is too holy, too perfect to overlook human sin. He won't.

And we are too sinful to ever come to God in our own steam. And so the only way we could ever be with God like we were made to, the only way, is if someone else paid for those sins on our behalf.

And that is exactly what Jesus came to earth to do. That is expressly what Jesus came to earth to do. Jesus was born to die. Think about that. That's the reason He was born.

He came into this world for the express purpose of being punished for the sins of other people. And He knew it. He didn't want to die. We see that in Gethsemane the night before.

[16 : 05] He was in agony. He didn't want to suffer on a cross and experience separation from His Father. And yet He still went through with it. He walked into it knowing full well what was going to happen.

I mean, we see at the end of that account that Rowan read for us, He's praying. He's praying. Is there any other way? Is there any other way? He knows there's not. And so at the end, He walks straight into the trap that's been set for Him.

He says, Here's my betrayer. Come. And He goes and gets arrested. Why? Because He knew there was no other way for sinners like you and me to be in a relationship with the perfect God.

No other religion, you see, can offer you what Jesus offered you that night in Gethsemane when He decided to go through with it. There's no other way in all the world for you to be forgiven and for God's perfect justice to be done at the same time, apart from Jesus dying on the cross for your sins.

And that's why Jesus says, No one comes to the Father but by me. And so in closing, if you're a Christian this morning, if you've come to God through Jesus Christ, I want you this morning to realize just what an amazing, immense privilege that is to approach such a holy and perfect God, something that you should never have been able to do.

[17 : 28] God is more perfect than you've ever imagined and you are more sinful than you can ever admit. And yet through Jesus, not only can you approach this perfect and holy God as freely as a child can to a father, but you can know for eternity that you will enjoy His presence unending forever in heaven all because Jesus was willing to take your sins on Himself.

Now, if that doesn't make you want to worship Jesus every day with all of your heart, then I don't think you've realized just what He's achieved for you in bringing you to God. But then secondly, if you're not a Christian, if you've not given your life over to Jesus and you know it, maybe you've been coming to church for ages, but you know in your heart of hearts that you've not submitted your life to Jesus, then you must know that you are separated from God because of your sins.

And I must warn you that God won't just sweep your sins under the carpet. Don't make the mistake of thinking that He'll let you off because you've lived a decent life or you've gone to church a few times.

That's not going to cut it with a holy and perfect God. You can't hide your sins from Him. And the Bible says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

His justice is terrifying and it's absolute. But you should also know that God has made a way for you to escape that. He has made a way by sending His Son to die for you.

[18 : 56] And so you have a choice this morning. You can either live your own way and try to reach God your own way which will never work or you can find God the way He has made, the way He has opened up by following Jesus, by giving your life to Jesus and by entering the relationship with God that Jesus died to give you.

There is no other option. And if you want to know how to do that, please come speak to me after the service. I'd love to put a booklet in your hand that will explain that to you. But let's pray.

Yes, Father, we are surrounded by so many claims to reach You, so many different religions and so many different ideas.

But Lord, help us to understand why none of them will work. Help us to understand just why we are separated from You. And help us, Lord, to come back to You through the way You have made through Jesus Christ.

Lord, I do pray that You would help each of us here in this place to leave this week with a fresh understanding of what Jesus has done for us so that we would respond to it in worship and praise of Jesus.

[20 : 10] I pray for those who are here who haven't submitted their lives to Christ. I do pray, Lord, that they would realize there is no other way to get to You but that You have opened the way so that anybody can come through Your Son, Jesus.

Help us, Lord, to follow Him, to obey Him for the rest of our lives and bring us safely to Your presence in eternity one day through Him. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.