

Proclaiming the Lord's Favour  
Luke 4:14-21

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I recently read an article about what it took to be a so-called “good Christian.” The article was titled “Fundamentally Christian,” and in it the author made this claim:

“The Bible is the infallible word of God...God created heaven and earth in six literal days, and on the seventh day he rested. The Son of God was born of a virgin.... Heaven is attainable by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. Every man has sinned against God, and there is but one escape from the just sentence of hell, and that is in the person of Jesus Christ”.

Then the author wrote these words:

*“Those are the fundamentals. It’s impossible to be a good Christian without them.”*

It’s impossible to be a good Christian without them!

We might want to debate some of those fundamentals, most I don’t have too many issues with, but what alarmed me more was what was lacking. I couldn’t help but notice that absent from this list of “fundamentals” was the greatest of all the commandments (or, if you will, fundamentals), to love God and each other.

Of course, if we start down the road of making lists of what it means to be a “good Christian” we might find that our lists are surprisingly longer than we might expect. If I was to ask everyone here what it takes to be a “good Christian” you’re likely to get a different response, even more so if you were to ask a brother or sister from a different Christian tradition. So, how do we answer the question? What does it *really* take to be a “good Christian”?

Maybe I should ask a different, less personal, question. “What does it take to be a good church?” Ah, now there’s a good question, and one with a more definite answer, right?

- Well there is good prayer, good teaching, friendly, and of course my kind of worship (a good church has good music).

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At the end of the day, the truth is you’d likely receive just as many opinions about what it takes to be a good church as you would when it comes to being a “good Christian.”

Is there a definite answer to either of these questions? Is there some expression, some phrase or confession, we can point to and say, “this is what it means to be a good Christian; this is what it means to be a good church”?

Perhaps there is, but it may be below the surface, behind the answer to yet another question, a more perplexing question, a question that may seem to have an easy answer... that is until we really seek the answer: “Who is Jesus?”

**Who is Jesus?** Well there’s a question with as many answers as one can imagine! For nearly two thousand years people have pondered, discussed, and fought over the answer to that very question—who is Jesus?

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Who is Jesus? The answer, it seems, depends on who you ask, and I’d bet that if you were able to ask the gathered crowd in the synagogue in Nazareth on that day when Jesus sat in on a service, you might get a surprisingly plain answer.

To them, Jesus was simply Mary and Joseph's oldest son, the carpenter, the one who had been gaining a reputation for teaching in the synagogues of Galilee after making some sort of scene at the Jordan River with his cousin John. He was the same carpenter's son who had come with his family to the synagogue to recite the *Shema*, offer prayers, sing psalms, and listen to the Scriptures and the teaching that followed. If they saw him as anything more, it was with the same vision they saw the countless other wannabe prophets that sprang up and gathered a following in Judea. "Who is Jesus?," one might ask them. The gathering in the Nazareth synagogue would tell you he was simply Mary's boy...that is until the day he came in and read from the scroll of Isaiah.

Now, it's unclear whether Jesus chose to read from Isaiah or if it just happened to be the reading for the day, but either way Luke tells it like this...

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<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. <sup>15</sup> He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

<sup>16</sup> When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. <sup>17</sup> The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,  
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,  
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<sup>19</sup> and that the time of the LORD's favour has come."

The passage Jesus read was from Isaiah 61, it was a passage that used the familiar language of the year of Jubilee, that's what the time of the Lord's favour is referring to.

Now, the year of Jubilee is mentioned in the book of Leviticus and was to be observed every fiftieth year. It was a time when the land was to rest, debts were to be forgiven, people were to return home, and slaves were to be set free. It was meant to be the Sabbath of all Sabbaths, a time when both the people of God and their land would rest. It was a time you might think the people would look forward to—but interestingly there is no recorded account of the year of

Jubilee ever being observed. And the Jews today comment about not observing the festival say;

the Jubilee year is only celebrated when the majority of Jewish people live in the land of Israel, and since there are so many Jews still in exile, the Jubilee year is not celebrated. Also, since the Holy Temple has been destroyed and the great Sanhedrin dissolved, we have suspended calculating the Jubilee year.

That could be the case, or maybe it was too much to ask of an agricultural people to leave their fields alone for an entire year. Perhaps it was too idealistic to think that one's debts could be forgiven simply because it was the fiftieth year. Maybe (likely) people are just too greedy, and the idea of returning land, freeing slaves, and cancelling debts just didn't sit well with them.

Whatever the case it seems the year of Jubilee became less of a reality called for in Scripture and more of a hoped-for, spiritualized time when God would bring his own sort of "Jubilee" to his people, freeing them from their captivity under foreign authorities.

The passage from the scroll of Isaiah captured this sort of language about the year of Jubilee; the liberation of captives and the freedom of the oppressed. I can imagine it was the sort of passage that stirred up feelings of hope in the hearts of those who heard it in the synagogue there in Nazareth...that is until what happens next.

Luke tells us in **verse 20**:

<sup>20</sup> He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently.

You get the feeling that they are all expecting Jesus—who remember has gained a reputation for teaching in the synagogues—to blow their minds with some amazing word about how the Jubilee was this spiritual existence, or maybe they were waiting for him to say something that would reinforce their feelings about how the Romans were holding them back from this promise of Jubilee. You get the feeling that since *the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him* that they were eager to hear his words about what he had just read, some stirring discourse that would propel them towards feelings of hope, comfort, and possibly peace, and in some ways he doesn't disappoint.

In **verse 21** we're told:

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At first I get the feeling that they were confused. “Did you hear that, did he say what I think he said, no, surely not, this is just Joseph’s boy?” But it doesn’t take long for them to catch on to what Jesus meant when he said, ***“The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”*** They knew he was making a statement about himself. They realized he was claiming to be the fulfilment of their expectations. They heard his words as a claim to be the one of whom the prophet spoke—the Messiah.

They didn’t catch it at first for Luke continues on to tell us that they were amazed and in awe of what Jesus was teaching, but when he continued to speak of the examples of Elijah and Elisha, they became angry.

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As Jesus revealed in his teaching that the words of Jubilee were for more than just the ethnic people of God, they became angry and sought to throw him off a cliff! Isn’t it strange how the real words of Christ tend to create that reaction in some people! I imagine if you were to ask the people in that synagogue in Nazareth “who is Jesus?,” *after* he read from the scroll of Isaiah, *after* he spoke those words, they might have a different answer.

“Who is Jesus? He’s that troublemaker who thinks Gentiles are even a part of God’s coming Jubilee...he’s that one who thinks he’s the Messiah, but he wants to offer salvation *even* to those people outside of our kind!”

“Who is Jesus?” Well the truth is Jesus is the one

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He proclaims release to those who are held captive by sin, by their brokenness; He gives sight to those who are blind, those who are blinded by selfishness that distract us from the needs of others;

He frees those who are oppressed by the ways of a corrupt and fallen world, those who are oppressed or burdened by their past, oppressed by the hand life has dealt them;

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Who is Jesus? He is the one who brings God’s Jubilee, Gods favour, and he is the one who calls us to do the same.

So, when you are asked, “What does it take to be a ‘good Christian’?” may you respond by saying “being like Jesus” - ***bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favour.***

When we, as Otumoetai Baptist church, are faced with the question, “What makes a good church?,” may we respond by “being like Jesus” and ***bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favour***

One simple way we do this as a church family is through our support of those who are working directly with the poor.

With Tranzsend well established in areas of the world where there are literally millions of these poor, oppressed, and blind prisoners, it makes sense to get behind them! Let’s make it a priority! Please keep up with the process of filling those little bags and you can start bringing them in from next week.

But at the same time, let’s remember that although they may not look like it, there are many people around us who are poor, oppressed, blind or imprisoned – they need to hear the good news too!

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### **Luke 4:28-30**

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As Jesus revealed in his teaching that the words of Jubilee were for more than just the ethnic people of God, they became angry and sought to throw him off a cliff! Isn’t it strange how the real words of Christ tend to create that reaction in some people! I imagine if you were to ask the people in that synagogue in Nazareth “who is Jesus?,” *after* he read from the scroll of Isaiah, *after* he spoke those words, they might have a different answer.

“Who is Jesus? He’s that troublemaker who thinks Gentiles are even a part of God’s coming Jubilee...he’s that one who thinks he’s the Messiah, but he wants to offer salvation *even* to those people outside of our kind!”

“Who is Jesus?” Well the truth is Jesus is the one

- who ***brings good news to the poor,***
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He proclaims release to those who are held captive by sin, by their brokenness; He gives sight to those who are blind, those who are blinded by selfishness that distract us from the needs of others;

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Who is Jesus? He is the one who brings God’s Jubilee, Gods favour, and he is the one who calls us to do the same.

So, when you are asked, “What does it take to be a ‘good Christian’?” may you respond by saying “being like Jesus” - ***bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favour.***

When we, as Otumoetai Baptist church, are faced with the question, “What makes a good church?,” may we respond by “being like Jesus” and ***bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favour***

One simple way we do this as a church family is through our support of those who are working directly with the poor.

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But at the same time, let’s remember that although they may not look like it, there are many people around us who are poor, oppressed, blind or imprisoned – they need to hear the good news too!

Let us pray...

Proclaiming the Lord's Favour  
Luke 4:14-21

If I were to ask you, “What does it take to be a ‘good Christian’?” I wonder what you might say. Some might say something about church attendance, Bible reading, and prayer, or maybe something about tithing and volunteering your time to the church. Perhaps the more theologically inclined might respond with something about believing in the deity and humanity of Jesus, the Trinity, or some strict expression regarding the nature of Holy Scripture.

I recently read an article about what it took to be a so-called “good Christian.” The article was titled “Fundamentally Christian,” and in it the author made this claim:

“The Bible is the infallible word of God...God created heaven and earth in six literal days, and on the seventh day he rested. The Son of God was born of a virgin.... Heaven is attainable by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. Every man has sinned against God, and there is but one escape from the just sentence of hell, and that is in the person of Jesus Christ”.

Then the author wrote these words:

*“Those are the fundamentals. It’s impossible to be a good Christian without them.”*

It’s impossible to be a good Christian without them!

We might want to debate some of those fundamentals, most I don’t have too many issues with, but what alarmed me more was what was lacking. I couldn’t help but notice that absent from this list of “fundamentals” was the greatest of all the commandments (or, if you will, fundamentals), to love God and each other.

Of course, if we start down the road of making lists of what it means to be a “good Christian” we might find that our lists are surprisingly longer than we might expect. If I was to ask everyone here what it takes to be a “good Christian” you’re likely to get a different response, even more so if you were to ask a brother or sister from a different Christian tradition. So, how do we answer the question? What does it *really* take to be a “good Christian”?

Maybe I should ask a different, less personal, question. “What does it take to be a good church?” Ah, now there’s a good question, and one with a more definite answer, right?

- Well there is good prayer, good teaching, friendly, and of course my kind of worship (a good church has good music).

- Others may comment about programs, service hours, social opportunities, or even comments about location.
- A good church, one might say, is comfortable and filled with people who like each other and enjoy spending time together.
- Then, of course, there are those who want to be more serious and may answer such a question by pointing to the missional activity of the church and the ways in which the church does evangelism in its surrounding community.

At the end of the day, the truth is you’d likely receive just as many opinions about what it takes to be a good church as you would when it comes to being a “good Christian.”

Is there a definite answer to either of these questions? Is there some expression, some phrase or confession, we can point to and say, “this is what it means to be a good Christian; this is what it means to be a good church”?

Perhaps there is, but it may be below the surface, behind the answer to yet another question, a more perplexing question, a question that may seem to have an easy answer... that is until we really seek the answer: “Who is Jesus?”

**Who is Jesus?** Well there’s a question with as many answers as one can imagine! For nearly two thousand years people have pondered, discussed, and fought over the answer to that very question—who is Jesus?

Video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=johNLhZ5y48>

- Is he simply a figure from ancient history,
- a great moral teacher who inspired a movement that has reshaped the world?
- Is Jesus the imagined hero of a people who so desperately needed one?
- Is Jesus the conservative, Western figure who preaches of prosperity and self-reliance?
- Is Jesus the poster boy for social rebellion and political uprising in the face of oppression?
- Is he the prototype hippie with long hair and sandaled feet, preaching love, peace and tolerance,
- or is he the stern judge who seeks to weigh every person in the balance of sin and righteousness?

Who is Jesus? The answer, it seems, depends on who you ask, and I’d bet that if you were able to ask the gathered crowd in the synagogue in Nazareth on that day when Jesus sat in on a service, you might get a surprisingly plain answer.

To them, Jesus was simply Mary and Joseph's oldest son, the carpenter, the one who had been gaining a reputation for teaching in the synagogues of Galilee after making some sort of scene at the Jordan River with his cousin John. He was the same carpenter's son who had come with his family to the synagogue to recite the *Shema*, offer prayers, sing psalms, and listen to the Scriptures and the teaching that followed. If they saw him as anything more, it was with the same vision they saw the countless other wannabe prophets that sprang up and gathered a following in Judea. "Who is Jesus?," one might ask them. The gathering in the Nazareth synagogue would tell you he was simply Mary's boy...that is until the day he came in and read from the scroll of Isaiah.

Now, it's unclear whether Jesus chose to read from Isaiah or if it just happened to be the reading for the day, but either way Luke tells it like this...

**Luke 4:14-21**

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. <sup>15</sup> He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

<sup>16</sup> When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. <sup>17</sup> The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,  
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,  
that the blind will see,  
that the oppressed will be set free,  
<sup>19</sup> and that the time of the LORD's favour has come."

The passage Jesus read was from Isaiah 61, it was a passage that used the familiar language of the year of Jubilee, that's what the time of the Lord's favour is referring to.

Now, the year of Jubilee is mentioned in the book of Leviticus and was to be observed every fiftieth year. It was a time when the land was to rest, debts were to be forgiven, people were to return home, and slaves were to be set free. It was meant to be the Sabbath of all Sabbaths, a time when both the people of God and their land would rest. It was a time you might think the people would look forward to—but interestingly there is no recorded account of the year of

Jubilee ever being observed. And the Jews today comment about not observing the festival say;

the Jubilee year is only celebrated when the majority of Jewish people live in the land of Israel, and since there are so many Jews still in exile, the Jubilee year is not celebrated. Also, since the Holy Temple has been destroyed and the great Sanhedrin dissolved, we have suspended calculating the Jubilee year.

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