

# (Gaining God's Approval) 2. Well-Pleasing to the Father

by Zac Poonen

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*God's approval is not based on external accomplishments, but on our faithfulness in the temptations that we face in daily life.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 8:4, Psalm 105:37, Matthew 3:17, Matthew 7:22-23, Romans 15:3, 1 Corinthians 10:5, Philippians 2:5-8, Hebrews 2:10, Hebrews 3:17, Hebrews 4:15

**Topics:** "God's Approval", "Faithfulness in Daily Life"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the contrast between the Israelites, with whom God was not well-pleased despite witnessing miracles, and Jesus, who was approved by the Father due to His faithful life and resistance to sin. The Israelites' unbelief led to their disapproval, while Jesus' character and obedience, even before His ministry began, earned Him God's favor. Poonen highlights that true approval from God is based on our character and faithfulness in daily life, rather than external accomplishments or miracles. He encourages believers to seek God's approval through integrity in their homes and workplaces, just as Jesus did. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a shift in focus from seeking recognition to valuing faithfulness in the face of temptation.

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## Transcript

In the New Testament, we read of One with Whom the Father was well-pleased, and also of a group of people with whom God was not well-pleased. A study of this contrast is most interesting.

### God Was Not Well-Pleased With Them

Of the 600,000 Israelites who perished in the wilderness in their unbelief, it is written that "God was not well-pleased with them" (1Cor. 10:5).

Those Israelites had been redeemed out of Egypt by the blood of the lamb (symbolic of our redemption through Christ), they had been baptised in the Red Sea and in the cloud (symbolic of baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit) (1 Cor.10:2). Yet God was not happy with them.

God was nevertheless very good to them, in that He provided all their physical and material needs supernaturally. "Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years", Moses told them at the end of their forty years of wanderings (Deut. 8:4).

God healed all their sicknesses too. The Bible says, that "there were no sick and feeble folk among them." (Psa.105:37 - Living).

God did many miracles for them. In fact, no single group of people in the world's history has ever seen as many miracles as those unbelieving Israelites did, with whom "God was angry for forty years" (Heb. 3:17).

This teaches us that God answers the prayers of carnal believers too - and that He provides them with their earthly needs, even supernaturally if necessary. The fact that God does a miracle for us proves nothing about our spirituality. It only proves that God is a good God Who makes His sun shine on the righteous and the unrighteous alike!

Jesus also warned us that in the final day of judgment, many who had done miracles in His Name would be rejected and disqualified because they had lived in sin. He said, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness.'"(Mt. 7:22,23).

He was obviously referring to Christian preachers and healers who did genuine miracles in His Name. From the words of Jesus, it becomes clear that MANY of these men (not just a few and not all, but many) who have these miraculous ministries are not free from sin in their private lives and in their thoughts and attitudes. This will be exposed at the judgment-seat of Christ.

This teaches us very clearly that the working of miracles, by itself, is no indication that a man is approved by God. Have we understood this thoroughly? If not, we will be deceived.

#### God Was Well-Pleased With Him

In contrast to the Israelites in the Old Testament with whom God was not well-pleased, we read of Jesus in the New Testament that the Father was well-pleased with Him.

When Jesus was thirty, the Father spoke these words about Him publicly from heaven, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased." (Mt. 3:17). And that was at a time when Jesus had not done a single miracle or even preached a single sermon!

What then was the secret of His being approved by God? It was obviously not because of His ministry, for He had not even commenced His public ministry. It was because of the type of life that He had lived for thirty years.

We are approved by God not on the basis of the success of our ministry but rather on the basis of our faithfulness in the temptations that we face in daily life.

The only two things that we are told about the hidden thirty years of Jesus' life (apart from the incident in the temple) are - that "He was tempted in all points as we are and yet did not sin"(Heb. 4:15), and that "He never pleased Himself" (Rom. 15:3).

He had faithfully resisted temptation at every point and He had never sought His own in any matter. This was what delighted the Father.

Our external accomplishments may impress worldly people and carnal believers. But God is impressed only by our character. It is our character alone that can bring us God's approval. And so if we want to know

what God's opinion of us is, we must deliberately erase from our minds what we have accomplished in our ministry, and evaluate ourselves purely by our attitude towards sin and self-centredness in our thought-life. That and that alone is the infallible gauge of our spiritual condition.

Thus, the world-traveling healer/preacher and the busy mother who is never able to leave the confines of her home, have exactly the same opportunities to acquire God's approval.

This is why we shall find at the judgment-seat of Christ that many who are first here in the Christian world will be last there and many who were considered last here on earth (because they did not have a well-recognised ministry) will be first there!

### Faithfulness At Home and At Work

Jesus is our Example in all things. The Father had arranged for Jesus to spend the first thirty years of His earthly life in two places basically - His home and His place of work (the carpentry shop). It was Jesus' faithfulness in these two places that brought forth the approval of the Father. This is a matter of great encouragement for us, for we all find ourselves in these two places constantly - our home and our place of work. And it is in these two places basically that God tests us.

Jesus's home was a poor home. Joseph and Mary were so poor that they could not even afford to offer a lamb as a burnt offering. The Law had commanded that "if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons....."(Lev.12:8). And Joseph and Mary took "according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons'." (Lk.2:24).

Jesus had at least four brothers and two sisters, younger to Him living in the same house. Mark 6:3 tells us that the people of his home-town remarked concerning Jesus, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?"

One can imagine the pressures and struggles that Jesus faced as He grew up in that poor home.

To top it all, his younger brothers were unbelievers. It is written that, "not even His brothers were believing in Him." (Jn. 7:5).

They must have taunted Him in many ways. He had no private room in his house to retreat to, when facing the pressure of temptation from others in the house. There must have been the fighting and the squabbling and the scolding and the selfishness (common to all homes) in that home too. And amid such circumstances, Jesus was tempted in all points as we are; and He never sinned even once in deed, word, thought, attitude or motive or in any other way.

If Jesus had come in some different form than us, in some flesh that was incapable of being tempted, then there would have been no virtue in his living in purity in such circumstances. But He was made like us in all things.

The Word of God says, "He HAD TO BE MADE like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God" (Heb.2:17).

He has undergone the pressure of every temptation that we can ever face. This is what gives us great encouragement in the moments when we are tempted, that we too can overcome. This is the hope that Satan seeks to rob us of, by trying to hide from us this glorious truth that Christ came in our flesh and was

tempted exactly as we are.

As a carpenter in Nazareth, Jesus must have faced the temptations that all who engage in any form of business face. But He would never deceive anyone to whom He sold anything. He would never demand too much for any article and He would never compromise on any point of righteousness, whatever the cost (or loss) to Him may have been. He was not in competition with the other carpenters in Nazareth. He only worked to earn His living. Thus, through buying and selling and the handling of money (as a carpenter), Jesus faced all the temptations that we face in the area of money. And He overcame.

Jesus lived in submission to imperfect foster-parents for so many years. This must have exposed Him to various forms of inward temptations (in the realm of attitudes); and yet He never sinned. Joseph and Mary were still under the old covenant, and so they certainly did not have victory over sin. They must have raised their voices and argued with each other, just like all married couples who don't have victory do. Jesus, on the other hand, was living in perfect victory. Yet He never despised them. If He had, He would have sinned. He respected them, even though He was far purer than them. There we see the beauty of His humility.

Thus we see, that far from living an uneventful life during those thirty years in Nazareth, Jesus was in the midst of a conflict against temptation all the time - a conflict that increased in intensity as each year went by - for the Father had to take the Captain of our salvation through the entire range of temptations possible to human beings, before He could become our Saviour and our High Priest.

God's Word says, "It was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings."(Heb. 2:10).

There were still a few temptations (such as the ones that come through nation-wide fame etc.,) that Jesus would face in the last three and a half years of His earthly life. But the common temptations that we all face at home and in our place of work, He had encountered and overcome in the first thirty years. And the Father gave Jesus His certificate of approval at His baptism.

If only our eyes were opened to see the basis on which God gives us His approval, it would revolutionize our lives totally. No longer would any of us covet a worldwide ministry but rather faithfulness in the moments of temptation in daily life. We would stop admiring physical miracles and start admiring transformed lives. Thus our minds would be renewed to have our priorities right.

What a tremendous encouragement this is, to know that God's greatest rewards and His highest commendations are reserved for those who face temptation with the same attitude that Jesus faced it - that is: "I would rather die than commit a sin or disobey My Father at even one point."

This is the meaning of the exhortation in Philippians 2:5-8, which says, "Have this attitude in you which was in Christ Jesus...Who became obedient even to the point of death."

Thus all of us have the same opportunity to be overcomers and to be among the called, chosen and faithful, irrespective of our gift or our ministry, and irrespective of our sex or our age.

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