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### Jesus at the Center

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## Jesus at the Center

BY TIM GILLESPIE

Jesus. All.

It's that simple. But it's not just simple. It is Perfect. That is, the Savior is perfect; the saying is just okay.

It's elegant in its simplicity. It's like the children's song, "Jesus Loves Me." Simple and to the point.

I know, you can't build a theology, a denomination, a faith, around a children's song. But what if you could? What if the totality of what Jesus means to us was summed up by a child's understanding of the fact that Jesus is the mark and measure of our faith? What if, like the old hymn, we surrendered all to Jesus? Would our fellowships look the same, would our lives look the same? Would our families look the same? Would our worship look the same? Would we continue to be easily offended by people? Or would we become those who could not get offended because we were too busy being about the Jesus business we have been called to? Would we cease to be defenders of the faith, and become disciples of Christ in a more palpable and palatable way?

What if we actually took seriously the idea that Jesus is coming again? Rather than being focused on the events leading up to the Second Coming, we might be safe in the knowledge of the Second Coming—and maintain a focus on who is actually coming.

What if we actually took seriously the idea that Scripture is God-breathed and that every word reveals who Jesus is, not simply how we are supposed to speak of Him.

What if we believed that the greatest gift to the world might be summed up in the name of *Jesus*, which supersedes any label or loyalty that we might have?

What if the special message that we have for the world is Jesus? What if our peculiarity was formed from the exalted place that Jesus had in our theology, worship and fellowships? What if our lives reflected the highest Christology?



“Jesus. All.” came out of a deep frustration from the seemingly “Jesus. And...” theology that many of us have fallen into. I know, I know, “Jesus is a good starting point, but the destination seems to lie somewhere else. We have to mature past a faith that can be summed up in one word, in one name, in one person.” This is too often the sentiment I hear.

“Get to the meat,” I’m sometimes told. But Jesus is the milk and meat of our faith. He is also the flesh and bones.

Paul knew the importance of the supremacy of preaching Christ:

“And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:1–5 NIV).

The first century Christians figured it out.

When I was about nine or ten years old, my father was associate director of the Caesarea Maritima archaeological dig run by Drew University. I was blessed to grow up on the sand dunes that overlooked the Mediterranean Ocean. On one particular day, the archaeological team excavated a series of grain storage units that ran south from the crusader fortress at the site. There were a number of these units, and the team was working on the first one. Interestingly, they had discovered a Mithraeum, which included an altar to the bull god, Mithra, one of the competing religions in the first century Pantheon of Illustrious Sailors.

I was the smallest person at the site that day, so when they created a small space to crawl through they sent me through it. As I made my way into the storage space that had not seen new air in at least a few hundred years, I was asked what I could see. My answer was less than brilliant, I’m sure. In fact, as I remember it, I just said something about scratches on a wall.

As the archaeologists made their way through the hole, which they had enlarged, and brought much more brilliant lights, it became clear that there was a first century fresco on the wall. It was a fresco of The Lord’s Supper, painted crudely, with the disciples taking a secondary place to the larger figure of Jesus.

While I don’t know the archaeological significance of the discovery, there was one thing that was and continues to be clear:

Jesus was the center of the fresco. And for the first century Christians, He was the center and circumference of their faith. In other words: Jesus. All.

In 2,000 years, the wall has been covered with graffiti. The wall has been tagged by people seeking to make a name for themselves amongst the halls of faith. It has been defaced by those who would rather us focus on something other than the figure of Jesus. It has had pictures painted and repainted, many of which were meant to enhance the figures that were so carefully drawn 2,000 years before.

But perhaps it is time for us to strip the wall of all the extraneous work and go back to the simple picture of Jesus and the community of believers.

What if we took Jesus at His word in John 12:32: “I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself” (NKJV).

What are we lifting up today? “Jesus. All.” or “Jesus. And...” or “Jesus. Maybe?”

Jesus said two words that changed Peter’s and Andrew’s lives: “Follow me” (Matthew 4:19). In those two words, their lives were changed, their priorities fixed on Him—a certain shift from what they were working on previously—and their trajectories were vastly skewed.

I guess I would say it like this: The good news is not simply about Jesus. The good news is Jesus. And Jesus is all.

I, we, desperately want a church that seeks the heart of Jesus. We want a church that can unite on at least one thing, and only Jesus can be that thing. We long to hear those who represent our Church cease creating boundaries and begin to speak of Jesus in a way that lifts Him up and draws us in. We long to see Jesus lifted up above everything else.

I long to be part of a people whose greatest identifying marker is nothing short of Jesus Christ and Him crucified!

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Tim Gillespie is the pastor for young adult ministry at Loma Linda University Church and a co-founder of the 1 project ([www.the1project.org](http://www.the1project.org)). Tim was the keynote speaker for the opening chapel service this year at Andrews University to launch “The Way.” This article was adapted from his sermon with permission.

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Photo (above): This first century fresco of The Lord’s Supper at Caesarea Maritima was first glimpsed through a small opening by young Tim Gillespie when his father, Bailey Gillespie, was associate director of the archaeological dig run by Drew University.

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Photo (facing page): *Christ Teaching the Apostles*. Ca. 300 AD. Fresco. Public domain.