

“Be Great”

Matthew 20:20-28

8/24/25

Is Jesus' life successful? This maybe the most important story ever told. It's a story of defining the meaning of life. Its applicable to every time and place. James and John's mama only want what is best for her sons. She attempts to secure their future with Jesus. A lesson here is even when you are best friends with Jesus, even if you are as close to Jesus as this mother is, it's is easy to become blind.

It's easy to be blinded by wealth. It's easy to be blinded by violence. It's easy to be blinded by celebrity. A successful 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestinian looks like a successful 21<sup>st</sup> century American: well paying job, lovely spouse, well-adjusted children. But what about the soul? Jesus wants to give us eternal life, abundant life, the life of generosity!

Today, we are going to try something a little different because of the power of Paul's words in Philippians. This week's homework is to read the four chapters of Philippians and to define what it means to “Be Great!”

When Paul write Philippians, he is in jail for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. Why is the good news of Jesus Christ worth imprisonment? Why is the good news of Jesus Christ deemed a threat to society in 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome? Because it redefines what it means to “Be Great” in any generation, in any society.

So let's back up a few verses to gain context for our second Scripture reading starting in Philippians 1:12. “I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me (my imprisonment) has actually helped to spread the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard (Elite soldiers who serve the emperor himself. The Gospel inspires questioning whom we serve and why.) and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; 14 and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. (The life of Christ inspires us to act from faith, not fear. Jesus calming the storm for the disciples illustrates faith, not fear(Mk 4:35-41). James and John's mama asks from fear. Fear blinds. Faith opens eyes.)

15 Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. 16 These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; 17 the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. 18 What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice. (Even if we think some Christians are believing or doing the wrong this, the most important act is to proclaim Christ. We must trust the Holy Spirit will lead people to the Truth. The Christian mission and understanding of the meaning of life is to tell people about Jesus and to serve in Jesus' name.)

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will result in my deliverance. 20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. 23 I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to die and be with Christ, for that is far better; 24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. (This might be the most instructive of all Scriptures. Here is a person rotting in prison, longing for death because of extreme adversity and yet Paul knows that Christ suffers for us and is our example. Pain and suffering are not the goal, but we can experience joy amid pain and suffering when dedicated to Christ to better others. Jesus shows us the way to experience joy in any moment.)

25 Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, 26 so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. 27 Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, 28 and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. 29 For God has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— 30 since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. (Encourage each other with the Words and stories of Jesus. The yard signs that you see out there has this goal in mind. We desire to spread the positive, world changing message of Jesus Christ. It's easy to become blind even for those closest to Jesus, as James and John's mama illustrates. Jesus' Words open eyes!)

Philippians 2:3-11

On Monday, our Outreach Ministry served 70 families for *Fresh Express*. The Outreach Ministry inspired 9 teenagers to help deliver fresh produce. Judy and Susan helped two families this week in significant ways through your generous giving.

We witnessed Katie this last month inspire you to donate to *Foster Love Project* collecting a garage full of items. We are going to hear James next Sunday encourage us to donate gently used shoes to raise funds for *Loaves & Fishes*.

This is who we are at NPC. Proclaim Christ. Practice humility. Serve others. Look not to your own interest but to the interests of others. Be Great!

Love,  
Pastor Curtis

1. Humility
2. Willingness to Serve
3. Focus on others: love.