

Be the Greatest Christian!

- I. With a faith centered on Christ crucified and risen.
- II. With a life of humble service to others.

Dear Christian friends,

A while back the Army had a recruitment program with the theme, “BE ALL that you can be!” it was a challenge to PUSH yourself – to not be content with a MEDIOCRE life.

Jesus here calls us to **be all** that we can be AS CHRISTIANS. Some people are content with a HALF-HEARTED Christianity – a “let’s not take this TOO SERIOUSLY” attitude. **Those people don’t want** their Christian faith to INTERFERE in their lives or INCONVENIENCE them. **Those people don’t understand** that our Christian faith makes us TOTALLY NEW, DIFFERENT people with a **totally new, different outlook** on life.

Some people think it’s a sin to **want to** BE THE BEST. Jesus here doesn’t nail ambition but a SELFISH, MISGUIDED ambition. Jesus challenges each one of us to BE THE GREATEST CHRISTIAN! **Be the greatest** Christian 1)with a faith focused on Christ **crucified** and **risen** and 2)with a life of humble service to others.

I. With a faith focused on Christ crucified and risen.

Jesus and the apostles were heading back to Capernaum taking the BACK ROADS of Galilee. Jesus deliberately avoided the BIG CITIES and big CROWDS. Jesus wanted this time away **for teaching** the apostles. Time was running short. The cross was now **just months** away.

There’s something to remember here. The **apostles** were ALREADY Christians. For the past 2½ years or so they had followed Jesus around and had received a SOLID, CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. They had heard Jesus **preach** and teach. They had witnessed His miracles. They had had plenty of PRIVATE – PERSONAL – ONE-ON-ONE talks and **classes** with Jesus. What an opportunity it had been for them to LEARN and GROW in their faith. And so they did!

But they still didn’t know everything. They didn’t know ENOUGH either. They had come a LONG WAY but they still had a **long way** to go. They had grown much but there was still plenty more room to grow.

That’s the way it is with the GREATEST Christians. Jesus challenges each one of us to PUSH OURSELVES – **challenges** each one of us to CONTINUE to learn and grow in our faith. It doesn’t matter how OLD or young we are – if we’re confirmed or not. There’s ALWAYS MORE to learn – and **yes** to REVIEW too. We can become very familiar with the stories of the **Bible** and the facts of Jesus’ life but we can NEVER OUTGROW them. There is ALWAYS MORE comfort and strength and lessons to DRAW from those **familiar facts**.

BE the **greatest** Christian with a faith centered on Jesus **crucified** and **risen**. **“Jesus told them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. But three days after He is killed, He will rise.’”** That is the heart of our Christian faith, isn’t it? Jesus is **“the Son of Man”** – a true human being and yet NOT JUST ANOTHER guy. Jesus is the eternal Son of God Most High born a true man – our **flesh-and-blood** brother.

Our Christian faith centers on Jesus **crucified** and **risen**. That’s WHAT IT TOOK to pay for our sins and keep us from **spending eternity** in hell’s banishment and punishment. Christians face up to the UGLY REALITY of our **sin** and **guilt**. Sin is not just a MISTAKE – a POOR CHOICE. Sin is defying God’s will for our lives – ignoring and breaking God’s DIRECT ORDERS. The Bible calls it being **“stiff-**

necked and stubborn” – “God can't tell me how to live my life – what to believe.” A Christian drops the excuses for his sins and instead prays, ***“God, have mercy on me, a sinner!”***

Our Christian faith centers NOT ON OURSELVES but on **Jesus crucified and risen**. Jesus took our place under God's law and took care of everything to save us. With **His holy life** Jesus perfectly obeyed every commandment for us. Then Jesus went to Jerusalem. Judas betrayed Him. The chief priests and Pilate condemned Him. Jesus was nailed to His cross. That was NO ACCIDENT but God's plan – God's GRACE! **On Calvary's cross** Jesus was punished for the sins of the whole world. The **sinless Son of God** paid for EVERY ONE of our sins with **His own** innocent sufferings and death.

Our **Christian faith** doesn't leave Jesus hanging on His cross. Jesus died. He was buried. And JUST AS He had repeatedly promised ***“on the third day”*** He rose again. We have a RISEN, LIVING, TRIUMPHANT Lord Jesus. In Jesus **crucified and risen** we have God's FULL and free forgiveness of **all** our sins – we have a whole new relationship with God – we have eternal life in heaven the moment we die. WHAT A BLESSING to be a Christian! The GREATEST Christians never outgrow those **simple basic facts** and **truths** of the gospel.

“But they did not understand the statement and were afraid to ask Him about it.” We can wonder how the disciples **missed** Jesus' point. But **rather** than JUMPING ALL OVER them let's look at our own lives. Are there **things in the Bible** – things about God – that WE DON'T understand? Sure there are! God doesn't answer all our questions. **Other times** we don't grasp the answers God **does give** us. **Sometimes** we don't like what God says – we don't want to hear what God says - so we JUST IGNORE it. God's Word has so much to say about our FAITH **and** our LIFE – about our marriages and **families** and raising children – about our priorities and **goals** in life – how we make decisions, etc. It's ALL RIGHT HERE in the Bible!

BE the **greatest** Christian with a faith centered on Jesus **crucified and risen**. There's ONLY ONE WAY to stay focused on Jesus and to keep growing in our faith. It's what we have right here – TAKING TIME AWAY with Jesus – **time** for daily devotions at home – **time** for church every week – **time** for Bible class and Sunday school. Our **sinful natures** don't want to MAKE THE EFFORT or TAKE THE TIME to **be the greatest** Christians. Jesus challenges us to PUSH OURSELVES to be the greatest Christians.

II. With a life of humble service to others.

It wasn't just Jesus BUSY TALKING along the way. **During some** of the LULLS the apostles were busy talking among themselves. ***“They had argued with one another about who was the greatest.”*** Sadly this wasn't the **only time** they argued about this. Recall for example, **Maundy Thursday** evening. Everybody was TOO GOOD to wash the others' feet UNTIL Jesus got down and did it. ***“I have set you an example,”*** Jesus then told them, ***“that you should do as I have done for you.”***

We aren't told what prompted that **heated** discussion. We do know that **shortly before** this Jesus had TAKEN ONLY Peter, James and John with Him up on the **Mount of Transfiguration**. It was also only those three who had witnessed Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. Were Peter, James and John somehow GLOATING about this? Were the other apostles JEALOUS? Were there some hurt feelings – some toes that had been stepped on – some WOUNDED PRIDE **showing up** among the apostles?

Since we don't have ALL THE FACTS we must be careful about **passing judgment** on any of the apostles. But that shouldn't stop us from judging OUR OWN hearts and actions. Do we get caught up in the ***“who's the greatest”*** game? Are there some times we see some **jealousy** – **envy** – **resentment** ON OUR PART? We don't get noticed – **our help** isn't appreciated – our ideas got SHOT DOWN. That happens, doesn't it? That can happen AT WORK – at **home** – even **at church**. Do we then pout with **wounded pride**?

Jesus knew what they had been arguing about. He gave them a **chance** to COME CLEAN but they **“kept silent.”** Jesus had another lesson to teach them. **“Jesus called the Twelve, and said to them, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he will be the last of all and the servant of all.’”**

Christianity doesn't operate according to the WORLD'S RULES – the higher up the ladder you are the more important you must be. The more people UNDER you that you can order around the MORE POWERFUL you must be. That's the way it is in the **military** – at **work** – in **government**.

BEING the **greatest Christian** is following Jesus' own example of HUMBLE SERVICE to others. Paul wrote in Philippians 2, **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves. Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Though He was by nature God, He did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, rather, He made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!”**

Jesus doesn't measure greatness by HOW MUCH POWER or MONEY we have or HOW POPULAR or SUCCESSFUL we may be. Jesus measures greatness by PEOPLE HELPED – by humble service to others. The great Christian recognizes that **humble service** to others is not a BOTHER or a PAIN but a PRIVILEGE. The **greatest Christian finds satisfaction** in HUMBLE SERVICE – NOT the **satisfaction** of being appreciated or noticed but of SIMPLY BEING ABLE TO HELP somebody else. The **greatest Christians don't worry** about BEING TAKEN ADVANTAGE of – they just want to help HOWEVER they can help.

Jesus illustrates His point. **“Taking the (little) child in His arms, Jesus said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in My name welcomes Me. And whoever welcomes Me, welcomes not just Me but also Him who sent Me.’”** The world might not see MUCH GLAMOR in a mother singing Christian lullabies to her children – in parents regularly bringing their sometimes FUSSING children to church - in parents and grandparents sacrificing so their children and the children of their congregation **can receive** a solid Christian education – most Sunday School and CDS teaches are often taken for granted – but JESUS SEES all that as humble service YES TO THE CHILD but ALSO to Him and His heavenly Father. What an encouragement to be the **greatest CHRISTIAN** parents and grandparents!

Jesus wants – He CHALLENGES us! – to be the greatest Christians. **Normally only one person** can be FIRST – the BEST. Only one team can **win** the Superbowl. But not in Jesus' kingdom. EVERY ONE of us can be the greatest Christian **“by being the last of all and the servant of all.”** Amen.

APOSTLES' CREED