

STANDING UP FOR JESUS

God loves you! Here's how I know, the Bible tells me so! 1

John chapter 4 beginning with verse 7 says:

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."

If there is any scripture that defines the Church, I believe that this is the best definition! God poured out his love upon us and caused us to realize that love through the

atoning death of Jesus Christ. Now that we believe God and follow Jesus as baptized Christian disciples, we learn how to love others compellingly until they realize God's love for them as well. This is our only goal in life as Christians: to love people as Christ loves us so that these beloved children of God come to accept the love of God in their life.

Therefore, Jesus teaches his followers sitting on the mountainside, "People are going to do the same thing every day, we love routine and rules and boundaries, it is only when people choose not participate in the daily grind, to step outside the box, that is when people begin to take notice. But what are they going to see, a giant advertisement for you or the God who loves you. If you choose to step outside the box, be sure to be so filled with

the love of God that people do not see you but only see your Heavenly Father and give him the glory."

So if someone asks you for your outer cloak because they feel they are superior to you, give them all of your clothes and walk with them naked telling them that you do this in the name of God who loves you and gave His only Son to die for you, and I guarantee it will get their attention and many others. If someone wants to dominate you by striking you with the back of his hand on the left cheek, turn the other one also so that they will have to either hit you as an equal or give up the fight. Then you can tell them that Jesus was struck many times for our sake, and demonstrated the love of God for you and me when he gave up His life upon the cross. If a Roman soldier forces you to carry a message or his heavy gear for him for a mile, go with him the second

mile, this will not only get the soldier in trouble but they will have to listen to you talk for two miles about the love of God, how Jesus died demonstrating the love of God, and how the risen Christ wants them to believe in God's love too. Jesus tells his disciples that you must be a like a broken record, with one message to share about God's love for every person, with many different examples to show people, demonstrate to people, and give to people until they either stop trying to dominate you and persecute you and look at you as a equal member of the human race with a valid opinion, an authentic view of life backed up by deeds of God's love. Or they repent and believe the good news for themselves that God loves them. Whether or not that person believes in Christ, either way you will have succeeded in standing up for Jesus, because now they will treat you as an

equal and stop riding your back, or they will become a brother or sister in Christ.

In this whole Sermon on the Mount, it occurs to me that Jesus is not trying to add another burden of law upon his disciples, but that every good Jew dutifully follows the Law of Moses and gets stuck in the same routine day after day until the Law is sucked dry of meaning and spirit, and all that is left is the shell of duty and rote words. Jesus' disciples must act and talk in such a way that it makes people perk their ears up and listen to God whom they serve in the Law of Moses. But instead of filling that shell of duty and rote words with talk of "taking back our country and religion", Jesus fills the Law with the love of God who sends rain upon the righteous and the sinner alike. Instead of being bent over and having the Law of Moses ride them like

a donkey, Jesus says that they need to stand up, to speak and act with all the freedom that God gives through His great love poured out in them. And as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said the night before he was killed, "...Whenever men and women straighten their backs up, they are going somewhere, because a man can't ride your back unless it is bent."

All over this world, people are straightening their backs up and not allowing themselves to be ridden by the lifeless, rote, and suffocating routine that society demands. Millions of people are stepping out of the box and not cooperating in the daily grind anymore. Now most of what we hear on the news is for freedom, for the rights that are so plainly evident that all men and women are created equal by God, that

everyone should be given the ability to strive for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

But Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is talking about straightening backs and standing up to proclaim and demonstrate the love of God to friends, neighbors, and total strangers until they come to believe God or at least give you the freedom to be a force for good and healing to all you meet and witness to.

So I guess the last question is up to you and your life situation, "How are you going to go that extra mile with someone and consistently tell them and show them God's love poured out for them through Jesus Christ? How are you going to give not only the requirements of your outer cloak: your prayers, your Bible study, your worship, and accountability group participation, but go to the extreme of

giving up all your clothes, so to speak, in order to make a point that Jesus gave it all to demonstrate God's love, and you are giving your everything to witness to the love of God poured out in radical ways upon the people you meet?

How are you going to straighten your back and not allow that dominating person to ride you anymore, that dominating, dutiful, and dull daily grind to ride you, that dominating so-called Christianity that says Jesus is off limits in conversation, that God has nothing to do with a normal person's life? Jesus says, confront that domination head on, refuse to cooperate any longer, turn the other cheek and dare that person or that lifestyle or those societal rules of conversational etiquette to treat you as an equal, and stop letting them hit you over and over with the back of their hand, but head on, with an open hand, challenge that

authority that keeps you from sharing and demonstrating the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For that is our only goal as baptized Christian disciples: to love others so compellingly that they must accept God's love for themselves, because we constantly and consistently point to God's love poured out for all people through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

Now I know we have a long way to go as Christians, as a church, we still sin and fall short of being consistent for Jesus, we allow society and friends and family to ride our back and tell us where we should go and what we should do, but God hears our confession, God forgives our burden of sin and lifts them from us, God gives us the yoke of Christ that is easy and light because it is God the Holy Spirit who works in each heart, it is God the Son who is present and

changing our world, it is God the Father who continually creates and renews people in His image and for His glory. We just have to swim in God's wake, walk along God's narrow path, following after Jesus our Lord. Stand up, stand up for Jesus and let nothing, not even death, ride you again! Amen!