

The Importance of Standing Up for Jesus

Steve Kramer, September 15, 2019

Luke 12:1-12

When was the last time you grabbed an opportunity to stand up and speak up for Jesus? If you can't think of a time, it's not too late. Let's get started on some homework. God can use you in a great way.

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A young man decided he wanted to work at a lumberjack camp on summer break. It was hard work but good money and would help him pay for college. However, his parents did not want him to take the job. They worried about what might happen to his faith and his morals. *He is such a good boy, raised in the church to trust Jesus and follow Him. Can you imagine what might become of him in a rough place like that? What will he be exposed to?* It could be so hard on him. They prayed and prayed for his spiritual welfare to stand up under the pressure.

When the young man came home one weekend in midsummer, his mother expressed her concern for her son's faith and mentioned how she had been praying for him. When she asked how he was being treated as a Christian, he replied, "Don't worry, mom, I'm okay. They still haven't figured out that I'm a Christian."

One of the hymns I love to sing in worship is, "Standup, Standup for Jesus." It is so inspiring. Another song I love to belt out is, "I Love to Tell the Story." The volume and enthusiasm of the singing in church go up when we sing those two hymns. But when the worship service is over, I wonder – do we actually stand up for Jesus? Do we really love to tell the story?

It's fairly easy to do these things in a worship service when we're with other believers, but outside of the church building, it can be a bit intimidating. Things can get in the way of standing up for Jesus. Things like,

- Fear. We fear being rejected and ridiculed by others, and losing precious relationships.
- Spiritual laziness. *Why should I get so deeply involved with someone?*
- Bad theology. *It doesn't matter. We all worship the same God anyway. We are all saved.*
- Inadequacy. *I don't know what to say to that person. I don't want to mess it up. What if they ask questions I can't answer?*
- Shyness. Some are very intimidated about sharing their faith around others.

You can probably add a few more reasons to my list.

Many of us cringe at the thought of speaking up for Jesus. But Jesus tells us in today's passage, *I'm counting on you to go public for me, to speak up for me, and share the news of what I've done for this world. Testify to the difference I've made in your life. Show my love and*

compassion to those who need to be touched by My love. Speak out against injustice and values that clash with my kingdom.

Jesus doesn't sugarcoat the task in our passage today. He says it won't be easy. In fact, it will be difficult. At times, you will be tempted to hide, run away, or hold your tongue from speaking on my behalf. You may even deny your faith in me before other people when the pressure is on. Some people will speak against me; others will blaspheme the Holy Spirit by calling this kingdom talk evil and opposing the gospel message. Therefore, they will be hard on you. You could be rejected by loved ones and persecuted for speaking up for Him. You could be brought before rulers, synagogues, and other authorities on charges of blasphemy for sedition against the government.

So Jesus lays out some important facts for His disciples to consider. His first bit of instruction is a word of warning, a heads-up. *Remember whom you're playing for, no matter how frightened you may be of others. Who is your most important audience?*

At the beginning of this story, thousands of people were crowding around to listen to Jesus. But He speaks to His disciples first, not to the crowd. This is a teachable moment. Perhaps the disciples liked popularity too much. Maybe they were acting extra-religious before the crowds. Success can bring about pridefulness and it can become tempting to play for the crowds. When you find yourself willing to do anything or say anything in order to be popular, it can become a playground for Satan. Jesus knew that. So He cautions the disciples to beware of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

In Luke 11, Jesus fearlessly takes on the scribes and Pharisees. He pointed out that they are shallow, religious showoffs who play for the crowd and for themselves but not for God. They may look good before others on the outside, but God knows the rottenness lying inside of them, which needs to be cleansed.

Jesus also told them that they are dangerous to other people's spiritual health. They have rules but no relationship with God and no love for people. Jesus tells His followers, *I know it's tempting to be prideful when all these people are looking up to you as they come to me. But don't fall into the trap of loving attention. Be on guard against hypocrisy and pride. Be more concerned about how you appear before God than how you appear to others. Commit yourself to humbly serve your audience of one who knows all and sees all – God. Make it your number one priority in life to honor Him and please Him.*

Then Jesus points out that after all, He is in charge. History is His story. The day is coming – the final judgment day – when everything about you – every thought you've ever thought, or word you've ever whispered behind closed doors – will be revealed and brought into the open for all to see.

Remember who has the last word over you and everyone else. Make up your mind to be God-fearing – not people-fearing – followers.

People can scare us. They can make us miserable in this world but this is where it stops. There is an eternity, and God is in charge of it. He is the final authority over everyone. Only He can cast someone into hell for eternity.

These exhortations of Jesus are a bit unnerving for many of us. Understandably so. But He offers some encouraging words of assurance for his nervous, fearful witnesses.

First of all, remember, you are valuable to God and will never be forgotten by Him. “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. Even the hairs on your head are counted! Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows (to your Father).”

Your heavenly Father sees you, knows you, and values you. Nothing can ever separate you from Him.

His promise to you and to me is this:

“If you stand up for me in this world no matter what,
I will stand up for you on the last day before the heavenly court of angels.”

When you think about it, Jesus has already stood up for you and me. He sacrificed Himself to save us from our sins.

- He stood before a kangaroo court and allowed Himself to be judged and executed by sinful men.
- He stood and suffered the beatings and humiliation.
- He stood and carried the cross up a hill called Golgotha where He was nailed to a cross and lifted up on it to suffocate to death.
- He stood in your place and mine before the wrath of God – all for you and me so we might have a restored relationship with God.

I will stand up for you, so you stand up for me.

By the way, the message we are speaking will be rejected by many. But Jesus reassures us that they are actually rejecting Him, the Son of Man, and the Holy Spirit. Some will turn and eventually believe in Him. They will find forgiveness and a place for them in God’s kingdom. I’m reminded of the conversion story of Saul – who became Paul – in the book of Acts. He was a very hostile opponent of the Christian faith but became a great apostle.

Those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. In other words, those who reject the gospel message, which is the tool of the Holy Spirit for conversion – those who call it a lie of the devil himself will miss out on receiving God’s forgiveness.

When the pressure is on (and it will come), you will be dragged before people who don’t want to hear and won’t like what you’re saying. But remember, you not alone. You are armed with the Holy Spirit of God. He will teach you what to say. He will be with you.

In the book of Acts, we find those inarticulate disciples becoming quite bold and eloquent. For instance, when Peter and John stand before the Sanhedrin council on charges, their opponents marveled at the bold eloquence of these uneducated men. And when they were told to be silent about Jesus, they said, “We cannot stop. We must obey God first. We play for an audience of one” (Acts 4:1-22). These common, Christ-following people, powered by the Spirit of God, turned the world upside down for Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, while a personal relationship with Jesus is important, it’s not meant to be kept private. Christ is counting on us to go public with the good news, to be God-fearing people who humbly play for an audience of One. Stand up and speak up for Jesus in a world of people who desperately need Jesus to rescue them.

Allow me to get personal. When was the last time you grabbed an opportunity to stand up and speak up for Jesus? If you can’t think of a time, it’s not too late. Let’s get started on some homework. God can use you in a great way.

First, I would have you think of three people in your life whom you question whether they have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Write their names down on a piece of paper and began to pray for them. Pray for an openness to receive Jesus.

The second thing I would have you do is to check out the website for Evangelism Explosion. It is EEworks.org. Get on their newsletter where you will find wonderful teaching and tips on being a personal witness right where you are.

Finally, start looking for opportunities and open doors to speak the name of Jesus and tell what He has meant for your life. Look for opportunities to stand up for the kingdom of God. When you see something that is wrong and needs to be made right, ask God to open those doors for you. By the way, I’ve learned He loves to answer this request.

I am reminded of a story that inspired me. It was written by Alec Hill in an article from “Christianity Today.”

At age 26, Ken Elzinga joined the faculty of the University of Virginia. After a tenured colleague warned him that being explicit about his faith could hinder his career, Elzinga was stunned to see a flyer with his face on it placed at a prominent campus location. A campus ministry had posted it to advertise a talk he had agreed to give. A relatively new believer, he worried. Would fellow professors think less of him? Might this harm his tenure chances? He experienced a dark night of the soul returning to campus and secretly taking the poster down.

But the next morning, Elzinga put the posters back up. After hours of soul searching, he concluded that his life was not about career ambition but about faithful discipleship. Being private about his faith was not an option for him.

In the four decades since, Elzinga has been named professor of the year multiple times and is still a speaker in high demand. He will be the first to tell you that serving only one master has been liberating for him. And why is that? Because pleasing an audience of one makes us less anxious,

less sensitive to criticism, and more courageous. Because in doing so, we become more secure and compete less for our own honor.

My dear friends, Jesus is counting on us to go public for Him. Don't make your faith a private matter. As you step out for Him, remember Jesus' promise that you not alone in this task. You have promises to count on that reach all the way into eternity. You have a Father who is watching over you and will not allow anything to separate you from His love as you play for this audience of One.

Remember, you are armed and dangerous, filled with the Holy Spirit of God. He is with you, and He will teach you exactly what you need to say. He will give you the needed courage and strength to say it. Amen.

Pastor Steve Kramer