

I DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

INTRODUCTION

Do you remember the advert that went something like *a million people read the Nation Newspaper Daily. A million people cannot be wrong.*

And there are many more like this like:

- *Everyone else is doing it so it cannot be wrong*
- *Our community/tribe as always practiced this custom or rite for centuries so I cannot be the first not to do it*
- *Teenagers are always rebellious*
- *To be successful in business in Kenya, you cannot do without bribing your way out*
- *To climb the corporate ladder, a lady must have extended favors to her bosses all the way up*
- *There are no more virgins these days - male or female so why wait?*
- *Etc:*
- *Can you add some?*

Here is the twist: Where is the place for our faith influencing what we do or don't do? Is there a place to say NO for the simple and most important reason that you are a believer? PERIOD.

We begin a new series today entitled

STAND OUT: DARE TO BE DIFERENT

THE MAIN FOCUS INTHIS SERIES

The main objective is to nurture a Christian attitude and conduct in our members with a view to change and impact our personal walk with God, the community and by

extension, the nation of Kenya. We're living in a generation where it is hard to "see" the difference between a Christian and a non Christian in the way we talk, work, speak or live. It is time for the people of faith **TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED** and live for the cause of Christ, if need be, suffer or even die for it.

Can we count on you? Can the community count on you? Can the nation count on you?

Can we say NO to the BIG FIVE in our nation namely,

- *corruption,*
- *negative ethnicity,*
- *poverty and*
- *Economic and historical injustices?*

We want to take a long and hard look at the issues that bedevil us as a nation with the lens of the unchanging grids of Scripture. In particular, we'll go back to the teachings of Jesus in a portion of Scripture normally referred to as **SERMON THE MOUNT**. We have dubbed this series: **STAND OUT: DARE TO BE DIFFERENT**. And today, I want to explain the background of the series so that as we unveil each aspect on a weekly basis, you will be familiar with what we're talking about.

I invite you to engage both your mind and heart because these issues are not easy. In fact, my clarion call this whole series for each of us is this:

STAND OUT: DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

TEXT: MATT 5:1-2 [MESSAGE]

When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

NIV

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

When you read this portion of Scripture, you can't help but imagine the questions that were in peoples' minds then. The crowds were gathering daily to hear Jesus speak. They wanted to hear words of encouragement and healing. They needed help like yesterday.

And today, we are not any different.

In fact, as we begin this series, it is important to ask some of the questions about Christian conduct that I'm borrowing from Sturt Briscoe, a retired pastor now but somebody I've met and cherish his teachings.

In his book, *The Sermon on the Mount*, he rightly points some things about Christian conduct and I quote:

There is so much public confusion as to what basic moral and ethical standards really are. This is true not only on the personal, individual level, but we are seeing moral and spiritual confusion on the national and international level as well.

And he goes further to add:

Many people are asking, how are we supposed to behave? Where do we find a moral code to behave by? Where do we get the power and ability to live up to the moral and ethical standards that we have accepted?

These and some more are the issues we pray and hope that this series will address. One problem often mentioned by Christians is that we sometimes expect our society to behave as a Christian society just because statistics show that we are 80% Christian.

It is my considered opinion that this is not the main problem.

Here is the main problem: To get Christians to stop behaving like the fallen society.

Remember: We are not trying to make the fallen society to start behaving Christian. No.

If we as Christians were to maintain and sharpen our distinctiveness, then the society, however rotten, will have no choice but to notice that there's need for change.

It is my sincere belief that if we can find some believers who can stand out and be counted, who can dare to be different, we'll win back our national conscience towards sin and righteousness. Life will not be the same again whichever way you look at it.

Someone wrote and said:

**DON'T BE AFRAID OF BEING DIFFERENT,
BE AFRAID OF BEING THE SAME AS EVERYONE ELSE**

The idea of standing out to be different or to go against the grain does not come easy.

In fact, all through in Scripture, we find God's people refusing to be different. At some point, they even told God that they'd rather be like *all the other nations*.

So at some point, they wanted a king to rule over them even though God had promised to be their King. And he was their King. Well, they cried out to Samuel to allow them to choose their king. Samuel warned them of the consequences of having an earthly.

Guess what they told Samuel? Listen this:

1 Sam 8:4-10, 19-22

4 So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." 6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. 9 Now listen to them; but

warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights." 10 Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king.

[So they were warned of all the bad things a king would do to them like – increase taxes, make them do slave labor, take their daughters and sons, etc.....]

But look at vv 19ff

Vv 19-22

19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. 20 Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." 21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. 22 The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the Israelites, "Everyone go back to your own town."

Friends, the resolve to be different is not easy. If a people who had been told that they were chosen and loved by God still decided to go against the expectations, then who are we to think it is easy to STAND OUT and be different? It is not easy.

Many people including Christian leaders have abandoned the walk of faith in search of what everybody else is doing.

You and I may have bumped into people who though used to fear God are now living in sin and pursuing the pleasures of this world.

The Bible says in

1 John 2:15-17

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

This text gives us some clue on why people find it hard to STAND OUT AND BE DIFFERENT. I see three:

WHY IT IS HARD TO STAND OUT

We struggle with three realities:

I. SELF PRESERVATION

Self-preservation is the desire to make sure you survive at all costs.

It is the natural or instinctive tendency to act so as to preserve one's own existence. This desire to survive is not bad in itself. But to push for survival at any cost is what John calls the LOVE OF THE WORLD. You see it all the times. Sometimes we act as though we're constantly fighting to stay alive. And when this gets to dangerous levels, people tend to live as though God does not exist. In some places, people have insurance for everything imaginable of course except the insurance for eternal life.

Friends, the tendency towards self-preservation is a denial of the fact that there a divine designer and that we are not a product of some random Big bang theory some where. You and I have been uniquely designed by God. We are a product of his workmanship. We belong to him in totality. He watches over us like one watching over his own children. We are precious to him.

You and I therefore do not need to live as though we're in charge of our own lives. Someone else is..... AMEN.

2. SELF GRATIFICATION

The Dictionary defines self gratification as *:the act of pleasing or satisfying oneself, esp the gratifying of one's own impulses, needs, or desires.*

To gratify the desires of the flesh is to love the world and what it offers. In fact John puts it well – *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes.* If this is used to describe a none believer, there should be no problem. But a Christian must not be caught gratifying the flesh in this way.

But what's the reality? On a daily basis, we're all fighting to restrain the flesh so as to please our commanding offer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So to be different, you have to say NO to self-gratification. And it is HARD. We need the power of the Holy Spirit and personal discipline to help us.

And may be some of us need deliverance from things that are stumbling the Holy Spirit of God in our lives.

You have heard it sad that the idea of delayed gratification is not noble anymore.

People want pleasure and more pleasure. And they want it fast and regularly.

Can we count on you to STAND OUT AND BE DIFFERENT?

Say NO to self-gratification.

3. SELF GLORIFICATION

Here is how the dictionary defines it: *a feeling or expression of one's own superiority.*

Self-glorification is also known as *the pride of life* which John says is an enemy to our faith. It is the tendency to have a boastful attitude.

We are living in a generation that's so focused on fame and celebrity mentality. This goes against the teaching of the Christian faith that demands humility and giving glory to God. And by the way, our God is a jealous God. He does not share his glory with anyone. Not at all.

There is a paradigm we are seeing every day in the world that we live in today. We are producing people who have been taught that anything is legitimate if it makes "me" happy.

You and I know that this is not going to take us far. In fact, it will make us move far away from God.

This is the season to STAND OUT AND BE DIFFERENT in our pursuit of godliness. These 3 tendencies – self preservation, self-gratification and self glorification seem to sell like hot cakes in the world we're living in. And some of us are caught up in them just playing ball as opposed to standing out and different.

I want to make some suggestion on what, we as believers can commit to do on a regular basis so that we can be different from the world.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO STAND OUT

1. START WHERE YOU ARE

You need to identify which sector of society God has placed you in for such a time as this. And that's where you need to STAND OUT and be different for the sake of Christ. I don't think God is going to ask you what happened in the field of science and medicine if your sector is Arts & Media.

Please concentrate on what he's given you and plan to thrive there. You may even go ahead and identify others in the same sector and form an accountability or pressure group. You don't have to do it alone.

But first, know which sector God has placed you in.

We have identified 6 sectors of society that we must influence in our generation. In each of these sectors, we sure must find a Christian. And if we do, we'll COUNT ON THEM TO STAND OUT AND NOT BE ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL. You don't have to be a majority in that sector. You just need to stand out as a believer and leave the rest to God.

Here are the 6 sectors of society that we must make a difference in:

- 1. Art & Media**
- 2. Business & Commerce**
- 3. Church & Religion**
- 4. Education & Family**
- 5. Politics & Governance**
- 6. Science & Medicine**

Please take a moment and identify which area of society the Lord has placed you in either by training or practice.

2. SPEAK OUT

You are I must commit to speak out against some of the evils that are so rampant in our society today.

William Wilberforce had to speak out against slavery

Rose Parker spoke out against discrimination

Martin Luther King Jr spoke out against racial discrimination

Mandela spoke out against apartheid

Wangari Maathai spoke out against deforestation

Isaiah the prophet also spoke out against injustice in Israel

Esther the Queen spoke out too

Mututho has been speaking out against illegal alcoholic drinks

It seems to me that God is waiting for us to SPEAK and in so doing we'll be

STANDING OUT

Are you willing to speak out?

Can we count on you to speak out?

Quote:

In Germany, they came first for the Communists, And I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist; And then they came for the trade unionists, And I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist; And then they came for the Jews, And I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew; And then . . . they came for me . .

Martin Niemöller

May I suggest to us that some sins are thriving in this nation just because there is no one to SPEAK OUT. No one wants to be a whistleblower. No one wants to look different. No one wants to be seen to stand out.

Listen to me people of God, sin thrives in privacy & silence

Esther had to confront her fears after her uncle urged to SPEAK OUT to the point of risking her life

Esther 4:11-16

11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has

but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." 12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" 15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Esther risked her all to go to the King. There were only 2 options – death or life
Where are the Esthers of our generation who will risk everything and SPEAK OUT
against corruption, against negative ethnicity, against economic & historical injustices
in our land? Where are they?

Example: A parent buys a leaked Exam paper and gives it to their son who ends up
getting an A and now spends time congratulating the same son for a “job well done”.

Do you think that young man will grow up hating corruption?

How can we STOP this mess?

Someone must be willing to “Bell the Cat” for us

Someone must be willing to say NO

ILLUST: Current Project X targeting our youth next weekend. **[SHOW SLIDE]**

3. STAY THE FULL COURSE

One other way is to have the mentality of not quitting.

We are called into this full time and for eternity. So we cannot start and not finish.

We must join Paul in making this our passion like he did:

2 Tim 4:7-8

I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous, which the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

So those are some of the commitments that I'd like us to make at a personal level.

From the pulpit during this series, here are some of the things we'll do corporately to reinforce our personal commitments:

Here is how we are going to handle this series:

- 1. PREACHING:** The preaching text will be from the Sermon on the Mount or Beatitudes. I will highlight that specific aspect and bring out some questions for reflection
- 2. INTERVIEWS:** We will interview people in some of these sectors so people can hear life testimonies. *And by the way, if you know someone being used of God to make a difference in their field as a Christian, let us know. We'd like to highlight their contribution here at church.*
- 3. ACTION GROUPS:** I'd like us to combine forces as people from similar sectors of society and form like actions group which will also double up as an accountability group. I believe in the power of numbers. We are better together. We will not walk alone. Besides, some of the evils we will be addressing that are ailing of society cannot be fought and won in the comfort of our offices or homes. It may call for being in the streets and in the by ways of our cities and county HQs and sometimes, the bigger the crowd the easier it is for anyone to listen to us.

If it calls for forming pressure groups, we will. If it calls for political action, we will do it. If it calls for confronting issues through the media, we will.

Listen to me folks. We will do whatever it takes to reform our society and leave a Christian legacy in our land. Time has come for you and I to STAND OUT and be counted. Men, we will be men enough – 123 – AHU. Ladies, you will be Queens

and Princesses like Esther and be willing to use your beauty to influence the kings positively - not negatively . Our Father, the King does not bring forth anything less than Queens and Princesses. *Do you believe in this? Then get ready to STAND OUT - DARE TO BE DIFFERENT.*

4. WRITE DOWN CONVICTIONS: By the end of this series, we will articulate some common convictions for which we'll be willing to live or if need be, die for. We will write them down and agree to corporately STAND OUT for them no matter what it takes.

These will become our *modus operandi* of sorts. This act will give us some courage to make reference to what we stand for. So if anybody asks you why you don't bribe, for instance, you can tell them without batting an eye lid.

You see, if you don't know what you stand for, you will fall for anything. If our teenagers come to ask us why sex before marriage is not allowed, we will have an answer for them. If your cousins asks you why you're not giving up on the "black sheep" in the family [every family has a black sheep], you will have an answer for them. It will be so clear in your mind why you are doing what you are doing.

5. EGROUPS: We will also study these convictions in our eGroups. Brothers and sisters, it is one thing to have a conviction but is quite another to gain some courage to STAND for it. At the eGroup level, we will keep each other accountable. We will also find a platform to share how we're doing in our pursuit of DARING TO BE DIFFERENT. You see, when you're cornered by a Police Officer and they want a bribe, you can ask them to give you a minute so you can make a quick phone call. Take that time to call your eGroup buddies about what you are about to do. They will rebuke you and then stand with you. I'm looking forward to hear testimonies about some of these experiences.

And I can imagine how people will be sharing stories of how they withstood the temptation to drink or to fall into sexual sin or to quit their marriage or to fight back inappropriately. This is the time to STAND OUT. This is the time to *beat our bodies*

as Paul says. This is the time to let go and let God. This is the time to move to the next level of spiritual growth. It is time to **STAND OUT AND BE DIFFERENT**.

But: Do not think for a second that it will be easy. **NO**. In fact, I sense that some of you will resist some of these actions to death. I even think some of you will not like the series at all because every Sunday will be a reminder to you of how badly you are doing.

But guess what? If you didn't hear some of the things we're about to tackle in church, then where else? The church should be more than a social club. For sure, we should not be in competition with chamas and Golf clubs. Should we?

6. CELEBRATE MILESTONES: Finally, we will be celebrating some "small victories" as we go along by way of testimonies or thanksgiving reports. Meaning if the Lord gives you some victory in a certain area, please come and share with us.

At the end of the series, we will have a testimony Sunday dedicated to celebrating what the Lord is doing in our midst.

By the way, the Bible says that our God is a jealous God and he cannot share his glory with anyone. We will therefore be giving him glory by sharing our testimonies. I'm therefore looking forward to hear both big and small testimonies like - bribe free lives, families reconciled, Businesses thriving because their owner are committed to Christian business ethics, etc. We will find time to celebrate all of them.

As you can see, we will do everything to make sure we **STAND OUT...**

CONCLUSION

Before I pray for us, please listen to this song: **I PLEDGE ALLEIANCE TO THE LAMB**

.....

Here is a commitment that I'd like you to make

I. I Dare to be different for the sake of Christ and for the sake of my generation

2. Yes it will cost me something but since I've my allegiance to the Lamb, I will do what it takes
3. Though none may go with me, still I will follow this unbeaten path. Yes, my companions may be few, I commit to finish the race
4. I Dare to be different because this is what Christ expects of me. I seek to honor the commands of the King of kings. He is my all.