

Hey everybody. I want to welcome all of you to Christ Fellowship. My name is Rick and I serve as lead pastor here. We are in a study of the gospel of John: John chapter eight, to be specific; is where we are. We've been in this study for about a year and a half, and within John, chapter eight we started a new series last week that we entitled "Stand by Me". We are going to wrap that up today. If you have your Bibles, I want to encourage you and all of our campuses to open your Bibles to John, chapter eight, and if you don't have a Bible with you today, don't worry about it. You can follow along with the screen because the text will come up there and you can track along with us that way.

I want to begin today by reading from our text out of John, chapter eight; just a portion of it that says this. It says, *"When they kept on questioning him, he stood up."* Stop right there because I want to set this up by sharing this with you. A few weeks back I made a trip up to the Carolinas, because I wanted to take part in the funeral of my Aunt Doris. Doris was my mom's older sister. Now mind you, I hadn't done a funeral in years, because I try to reserve my energy for the weekends, like this. But I did do this funeral, because Aunt Doris was more than just an aunt for me. You see, all through my childhood, Doris stood by me, if you will, as the song says. She even stood up for me and my mother and my brother when it seemed like nobody else would stand with us, or by us.

Now, let me explain what I mean. Throughout my boyhood my father was an alcoholic. When my dad got drunk, he sometimes got mean at the same time, and then he would become very threatening and abusive. Mind you, my mother was only about five feet tall and weighed, maybe, a hundred pounds. My brother Mike and I were little children at the time. Mike is one year older than I am. But my point is, we were often at the mercy of an abusive dad, and we needed somebody to stand up for us. Stay in the story, because I will never forget one Saturday morning, Mike woke me up. We were about nine and ten years old at the time. But Mike woke me up and I could hear Dad yelling at Mom in the next room, and pushing her around and threatening her. So Mike goes over to the closet and gets his BB gun, his air rifle, and he loads it with a hundred and forty-four caliber pellet, and then pumps it up twelve times, at which point it could pretty much penetrate a beer can. At any rate, Mike and I were in our pajamas and we both start out of the room. Mike is in front of me with the gun and I am literally hiding behind him as we go out. As we step out into the room where Mom and Dad were, Dad sees Mike with the BB gun, the pellet gun, and he lets go of Mom and he has got this angry look on his face. He starts coming towards us.

Folks, I've got to tell you, I was terrified. I was scared out of my wits. But just about the time that Dad got close to us, all of a sudden I hear the gun go off. It was like "Pow!". Mike had pulled the trigger. I could hear that pellet ricochet all around the room, and I'm thinking to myself, "Oh no! He not only shot at Dad, he missed him." But all of a sudden I look and I see the place where Mike hit him with the pellet, right in his forehead, and there was blood coming out. But folks, far more than he was injured, he was furious. I remember thinking, "We're dead!" But folks, it was like Aunt Doris to the rescue. I remember hearing her car slide into the gravel driveway. As it turned out, Mom had called her, and she comes inside. What I loved about Aunt Doris is this: She stood up to my dad. Oh yeah! Doris was a big girl. She probably was six feet tall and weighed a couple hundred pounds, and for whatever reason, my Dad was afraid of her. But folks, not only did she stand up to my dad, she stood between Dad and me, between Dad and Mike and me. In other words, she stood between us and the danger. Let me tell you folks, she did that on many occasions. Any time my dad got out of hand, we would phone Doris. It was like Doris to the rescue. She would come over and stand up to my dad and stand up for us. I've just always been grateful to her for that, because she stood up for me at a time when I could not stand up for myself.

Christ Fellowship, let me turn a corner and bring all of that over to our study of the gospel of John. Here is my proposition today: There are people in this world, some adult, some children, who need somebody to stand up for them. Not just to stand up for them but to stand, as you are going to see in a moment, between them and persecution; to stand between a child and sexual child abuse; to stand between a child and starvation; to stand between a single mom and loneliness; to stand between a prisoner and isolation, and forgotten-ness; to stand between lost people and eternal death. You say, "Well Rick, how do we stand up for people like that? How can we do that?" Well, we are going to find out as we go back to the gospel of John: John, chapter eight. And we're going to wrap up this series called "Stand by me".

Jesus stood up for people. Now, with that in mind, I actually want to go back to the end of John, chapter seven today. We are going to get a running start on John, chapter eight. So I'm going to the end of John, seven: the last verse. Listen to what it says: Verse 53. It says, "*Then they all went home*". Now listen to the next verse – John 8:1: "*But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.*" Stop right there. Folks, at the end of the day when Jesus finished talking, at the end of the day when everybody else went home to their families, to their food, to their fireplaces, to their bed, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. You say, "Why?" Because that was His home. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew, chapter eight, He said: "*Foxes has dens, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has*

*no place to lay his head.*" Folks, make no mistake about it. Jesus allowed himself to enter into the suffering and the pain and even the loneliness that is so often a part of the human factor. But my point in this text is that Jesus stood up for people, and specifically he stood up for people who could not stand up for themselves. Example in point: Look at verse two. You remember this from last time.

John 8:2. *"At dawn, He - that is Jesus - appeared again in the temple courts, where all of the people gathered around him and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery, and they made her stand before the group."* You recall from last time, she had been set up. This was all a trap for her. Then verse four: *"They said to Jesus: "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now, what do you say?"* Stop right there, because folks, if you were not here last weekend, I want to encourage you to go online and listen to that talk from that text last week, because it is so necessary in terms of what we feel when it comes to oppressive shame, especially when we feel like we have been shamed before God. So, please, whatever you do, go online and listen to that talk. The point I want to make today is this: This girl had been set up. She had been put into a trap that would lead her into adultery; and, once she was caught in the trap, she is now in a helpless place, and she is at the mercy of evil; because folks, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees were the ancient equivalent of the Taliban today. They were standing over this helpless girl, ready, wanting, not to cut off her head. That would almost have been merciful compared to what they want to do. They are wanting to stone her to death.

I want you to put your thinking caps on, because in ancient times when a girl like this was going to be stoned, what they would do is they would drag her out of town and they would throw her down into a pit that had been dug. The pit would be about right feet deep, and then a leader of the religious party, a priest for example, would take a boulder, a huge rock, and he would throw it on the woman until he hit her with it. The goal would be to incapacitate her, to debilitate her, so that she could not move. Once she was debilitated, then the entire crowd would pound her to death with rocks. It was a slow, and horrifying, and excruciating way to die. Folks, this is what they were going to do unless somebody had the guts, unless somebody had the compassion to stand up for her. Somebody did stand up. Listen to verse seven.

*"When they kept on questioning him, that is Jesus, He stood up and he said to them: "Let any one of you who is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her."* I love it, because Jesus didn't just stand against these evil religious leaders, He stood up for this girl. Get it: He stood between her and evil. If there is one thing we can take away from

this story, folks, it is this: Evil would have triumphed had Jesus done nothing. Evil would have triumphed had Jesus done nothing. By the way, aren't you glad Jesus stood up, because had He not stood up, we would not get to read verse nine. Listen to what it says: "*At this, when Jesus stood up, those who heard began to go away, one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left with the woman still standing there.*" Folks, you mark it down: Had Jesus not stood up for her, we would not read that she was still standing, because she would have been lying in a pool of blood. But she was not lying in a pool of blood. She was still standing there alive, because Jesus had the guts, and Jesus had the compassion to stand up for her.

Folks, I want you to mark my words, because there are people in this world, some adults and some children, who are going to be persecuted, and maybe even lying in a pool of blood unless somebody has the guts to stand up for them. There are going to be children, little girls who are going to be sexually sold into slavery, unless somebody has the compassion to stand up for them. There are going to be little children lying in a bed of starvation, unless somebody has the compassion to stand up for them. There are going to be prisoners, there are going to be single mothers, isolated and left alone unless somebody stands up for them.

God calls you and me to stand up for people, and specifically, we must stand up for those people who cannot stand up for themselves. Christ Fellowship, this is what I love about being your pastor. That is because you are already doing this. In other words, you have made a formal commitment to stand up for people who cannot stand up for themselves. Again, that is what I love most about being your pastor. So what I want to do for the rest of our time today, and for all of our campuses, this is what I want to do. I want to take the next twenty minutes or so and brag on you, because I brag on you everywhere I go. There is nothing like bragging on somebody when they are standing here. So I want to brag on you for the rest of the message, for the way that you stand up for people who cannot stand up for themselves. I want to give you as many as I can get in of the people you stand up for.

Number one: You're standing up for the persecuted. You are standing up for the persecuted. I don't have to tell you that there are certain hot spots in the world, particularly in the Middle East, where our brothers and sisters in Christ are being persecuted simply because they love the same Jesus that we love; and these dear people are being targeted by terrorism. They are pushed out of their homes, pushed out of their land, and every day they are harassed and beaten, and many of them are murdered simply because they love Jesus like you and I love Jesus. Here is what I want to say: If somebody doesn't stand up for these people, they are going to die. They are

going to die and they are going to be lying, as we talked about, in a pool of blood. Christ Fellowship, what I love so much about you is that you are standing up for these people. In fact, just this past Easter, you sent fifty seven thousand dollars to a hundred persecuted Christians, to help them with housing; who had been driven out of their homes with children and family, to help them with their homes, to help them with food, and to help them with shelter. What I love is Frank Hopkins – this guy just goes after things – Frank is pursuing a mission for Christ Fellowship where we are going to help far, far more than a hundred people. We will be telling you more about that as the days go by. But folks, here is what I am saying: Because you give so generously, we have the power to help these people. Because you give so generously, because of that, we are able to stand between these people and the terrorists who want to destroy them because they love Jesus like we love Jesus.

You might be thinking, “Rick, that is the hundred that we are able to help. What about the tens of thousands that we can’t help; that we don’t help. What about them?” Well, that is a fair question and I’m going to answer it at the end of the message. For now, look at number two. You are also standing up for children, and specifically you are standing up for two at risk kinds of children. First of all, you are standing up for little girls who are being sexually sold into slavery. For example, in Italy where prostitution is legal, little girls are taken as children, as tiny little children and sold into sexual slavery, and their little lives are decimated. Their little lives are destroyed before they even get a start in life. Many of those little children probably feel like nobody cares. Nobody even knows what is going on with them. But Christ Fellowship, you do care, and because of your compassion, we now have placed a missionary in that area. In fact her name is Christina, and as a matter of fact, she is a Christ Fellowship girl. She grew up as a little girl here herself. But now she has felt a calling of God in her life. She has gone to Italy to where these little girls are to spend her life there. In fact, she is about to get married to an Italian man over there. But she goes out with a team every night into these areas where these little girls are positioned, and she reaches out to them, and tries to pull them out of that slavery. Then she shares the gospel of God’s love to them. Christ Fellowship, she does that because you give so generously. By the way, last month a team of you went over there to Italy and went out at night with Christina. My wife was one of them, and reached out to these little girls. Rhonda came back and cried for a week after she saw what she saw. But I’m telling you, because of your generosity, because of that, we are able to stand between these little girls and the pimps who want to destroy their little lives.

Not only are you standing up for little girls who are being sexually trafficked, you are also standing up for children who are hungry, and you are doing that both on a global scale and on a local scale. Globally through packing meals, and you have packed hundreds of thousands of meals through our "Feed my starving children" initiative. Because you have done that, you have stood between a child and starvation. Because of your faithfulness, you have stood up for them. Not only are you standing up for children on a global scale, but every week, every week you are feeding twelve hundred kids in Miami Dade County through our "Back Pack" program. Check this out: Let me tell you who is helping pack these meals. I know you are packing them but guess who else is helping pack these meals. Are you ready for this? Hold that thought and I'll come back to it.

You are also standing up for the forgotten. Folks, I'm talking here about the eight thousand seven hundred and ninety prison inmates, right here in Miami Dade County. I can think of no other sector of society that is any more out of sight, out of mind, and forgotten than those precious people who are behind bars. Many of them are serving out a life time sentence, without any glimmer of hope. But here is what you know. You know that no matter what they did, no matter what they have become, you know that God loves them. Amen? He loves them and cares for them, and wants to put a plan for their life into place. Christ Fellowship, you are now involved in five prisons in Dade County. We are preaching the gospel there. We are starting small groups. Many of you are serving in this ministry, and because of our love and compassion that you show, because of that, we are gaining favor with the entire prison community in Miami Dade County. They are wanting us to do more of these. Mind you, our goal is to raise up leaders in the prison system; to raise the prisoners to Christ, to train them to be leaders so that they can minister to other prisoners every day.

Check this out: Just a few weeks back many of these prisoners in one of the women's prison facilities; these prisoners, some of them as I said, in prison for the rest of their life, they got the opportunity to do a "Reach Beyond". Just like we do a Reach Beyond, to reach out to people. The prisoners did a "Reach Beyond" the prison walls. Do you know what they did? They packed back packs for hungry children. One of the prisoners in that group told us that while those ladies were packing those bags, many of them were sobbing; were literally in tears, because for the first time they were doing something with meaning to it. They were doing something with purpose; in fact, that particular inmate wrote us a letter. She writes this: "I just wanted to take a moment to write this and let you know what a blessing it was for you to bring your ministry to the Homestead Correctional Institution. You allowed us the opportunity to be nurturing

and caring for those children in your program. She says, "I've been incarcerated for sixteen years, and I've been in Homestead for twelve. I know a lot of these women who were there that day. Some of those women would never come to programs, church, etc. They have completely cut themselves off, but packing those bags and making those cards, the whole experience deeply touched them. You could not drag them to a God experience in the past, even if there was a reward like coffee or cake. But the women who came that day could not resist helping children. Hardened hearts were watered that day. Thank you for bringing us this joyful experience. Gratefully, " Wasn't that great?

I want you to clap for you, because I don't know too many other churches, if any, that are doing what you are doing in terms of standing up for people who can't stand up for themselves. One of the ironies about these ladies packing these bags, some of them knew that they were probably packing a bag that was going to their own child. Jesus said this: *"I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me."* What a picture of you guys.

You are also standing up for the lonely, and I am talking here to all of our single moms. Throughout scripture God challenges his people to take care of the widows and the orphans. Right? Listen to what James says: James 1:27 says, *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: To look after orphans and widows in their distress."* In Bible days if a woman's husband died, she didn't work so if her husband died, she was completely at a loss in terms of taking care of herself and her children. She would immediately be in distress. Now today our government takes care of orphans and widows. But folks, I'm telling you, the modern day equivalent to the widow and the orphan is the single mom, because many times a single mom feels like she is all alone in this world. My mother was a single mom for much of my childhood. My bed was against the wall where her bed was, and many nights I could hear her sobbing from the bed just on the other side of the wall. So it is tough, it is lonely. Those of you who are single mothers, I want you to know there a lot, there are hundreds of single moms at Christ Fellowship, so you are not by yourself. Not only that, we have a ministry to single moms, run by single moms, because they know how to do it. I want to challenge you, if you are a single mom and you are not tapped into that ministry, please, we love you and there is one of the ways that we are going to be able to stand up for you.

You are standing up for the unwanted. By that I mean the thousands of illegal aliens. I hate that title, but that is what they are called. Migrants who live in Dade County, and I don't have to tell you that many of these people are considered outcasts and even

unwelcome in our city. But Christ Fellowship, what I love about you is that you have reached out to these people and shown them the love of God. You have reached out to these people and shown them the compassion of God by taking our medical mobile unit that we have, and you go out there, some of you are physicians and nurses and dentists, and some of you who aren't physicians at all, you just want to be a part of it. We roll that truck out there with all of that equipment and you go out there, and you love on those people and you give them dental care; you give them medical care, and then we are able to tell them about the love of God. You are standing up for those people who are unwanted, and even unwelcome.

One more: You are standing up for the lost. The North American Mission Board's latest statistics are telling us now that ninety seven percent of people in Dade County are either un-churched or lost, which means they are either turned off to God or turned off to the church. Ninth seven percent! That means they are on their way to separation from God to eternal death. But Christ Fellowship, what I love about you is that you try to stand up, stand between these people and eternal death. You have been aggressive at this. You have been aggressive by starting Christ Fellowship campuses all over Dade County. You did this by purchasing campuses, the latest one, West Kendall, which gives us more and more beachheads, outposts, and these outposts are making us now a strong sending core. Not only are you doing that, now we are going to start planting churches that won't be Christ Fellowship. They won't bear our name, but we are going to financially resource them and train them so they can go and help us reach this city. I keep telling you: It is not about Christ Fellowship, it's about reaching Miami Dade County, Amen! That is what it is always about. It's about turning this city around for Him.

Not only are you reaching out to Dade County, we are now reaching out to the countries from which you came to this country. Many of you are from Cuba, and we have just started Christ Fellowship Santiago last year. Already that church is just exploding, and not only are they exploding, they are starting other churches like we do. We are planning too to soon start a Christ Fellowship Columbia. Just before this service, there was a pastor from Columbia, and his wife, sitting right there, and we are going to be partnering with them and start Christ Fellowship Columbia, and Christ Fellowship Haiti, and Christ Fellowship Jamaica, and Christ Fellowship Puerto Rico. Now, I've got to interject this note, because what often happens when people see so much need, they think it is too much. When people see so much need, they think it is too much need. In other words, "There are so many people, Rick, that are hungry, and so many children being abused, so many children hungry, and so many single moms,

and so many people in prison, so many people, how can we help them all?" Listen, what happens is that tension often paralyzes God's people. "It's just too many to help. How can we help them all?" What happens with many churches is they just do nothing. They just don't do anything, So, here is our motto going forward. It has already been our motto, but we are going to put it in a statement. This is not original with me, but it is good. Here is our statement going forward. "We will do for some, but we cannot do for all." Amen? "We will do for some, what we cannot do for all." Put another way: "We will not do nothing. We will do something." Evil triumphs when God's people do nothing. Evil triumphs when God's people do nothing. So, Christ Fellowship, I love what you are doing. We will do for some, but we cannot do for all, because we will not stand by and let evil triumph over people.

Here are two factors that make you such a strong force in the Kingdom of God.

Number one: You serve. By that folks, I mean you are not consumers. What I love about you people is that you don't show up and say, "Hey, what can Christ Fellowship do for me?" You show up and say, "What can I do for God through Christ Fellowship?" In other words, just like Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve, that is your posture, and I love that about you. You are servants. You have a servant's heart.

Number two factor that makes you a strong force is you give generously. Listen, you show me a church where the people are not generous to God, and I will show you a church that is weak. I will show you a church that wishes they could do something but can't do something. Transverse, you show me a church where the people are generous to God, like you are, and I'll show you a church that can stand between evil and people and have the power to stand up for people's lives.

Here is what I want to challenge you to do. If you are not serving, you need to know, you are the exception in this church. We think it is weird if you are not serving here. In most churches, it is a few people doing everything. It is the opposite here. Here everybody is pretty much doing something. So, if you are not serving, we think that is odd, and we want to encourage you to come along with us. We can use you. So here is what I want you to look at. Even if you are already serving, think about this: If you are thinking, 'I would love to help some of these local ministries, I would love to get tapped into that prison ministry. I would love to help single moms. I would love to get into that back pack program. I would just love to help out, making Christ Fellowship whatever it could be. Maybe you would like to go global. You might be thinking, "I would love to take a mission trip. I want to go where over there to Italy and help those little girls. I want to help that pastor in Columbia. I want to go and help that church in Santiago, or wherever.

Or give. If you are already giving, think about being even more aggressive in your giving. If you are not giving, it is odd here. We are not one of those churches where twenty percent of the people give for everything. Everybody here gives. So if you are not giving, we are not going to point a finger at you. We say, come on in. We need the help. We want you to start giving. so we can do what God is calling us to do