

## Together #forSalem A Better Way: Part 1

### Step One- A Better Way to Think

Romans 12:1-2

#### I. ME

A. Are you like me? Trying to sift through feelings, thoughts and what to do?

#### II. WE

A. Division/Chaos- Protestors shouting at each other

B. Often (no matter the specific issue) feels like two sides pulling at us... fighting for our loyalty

1. You must pick one! NOW!

2. Be completely loyal to your side and completely against the other side

3. Blame on the other side; "it's THEIR fault" We are in the right

**4. Our prolonged polarization has turned into a chaos of division.**

5. Turned neighbors against each other

6. Turned families against each other

7. Even turned Jesus-Followers against each other.

#### C. But it's a lie.

1. It's NOT us v. them...,

2. Me v. You

3. "The only way we win is they lose."

D. It's a false dichotomy...

1. There's a better way... a way forward that makes room for everyone.

E. I think the answer has been in front of us all along

F. There's a way that changed the world 2000 years ago.

1. A way that stripped the Roman Empire of its power and terror... (ichthys or cross in colosseum?)

2. A way that destroyed religious oppression (Cleansing the temple)

3. A way that obliterated deeply entrenched racial and social divisions

4. A way that even ended the worldwide slave trade... abolitionist pic

5. And it's the only way that can truly and lastingly change things now.

6. It doesn't say, "We are in and you are out" ...it says "everyone is welcome"...

7. And it has nothing to do with winning and losing

G. It's a way that allows YOU individually to make a difference

1. A way that we, as a group, can truly transform society...

H. **JF or Not**- This is what you are invited to. This is a way that is offered to everyone!

#### III. GOD

A. Paul/Romans- AD 57

1. Roman Empire much like today

a. Social divide- Pompeii deaths...

b. Racial divide- Jews/Gentiles- with factions in each that were antagonistic to the views, lifestyles, beliefs of the others.

c. Writing to JF's living in center of world power.

## B. V. 1a

***And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God...***

1. Plead- Urge/Beg- "This is important!"
2. Give your bodies- Everything you are, everything you do
3. **A JF's identity isn't a political party/politician/nation/ or race... it is Jesus.**
4. A JF's loyalty is to God and his kingdom... Why?

## C. V. 1b

***Because of all he has done for you***

1. This is a JF's motivation and empowerment! GRATITUDE!
2. God gave up his rights as God, became human, sacrificed himself daily and ultimately for us... so hard to believe...
  - a. That's the core of Xianity.
  - b. The Core of Xianity- God gave his rights and life for us.**
  - c. God loves you so much... is so for you that he gave up all of himself for you.
3. So in response we are able to...

## D. V. 1c

***Let them be a living and holy sacrifice- the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.***

1. B/c of our gratitude... Everything we are and everything we do... is given to him for his plans and purpose.
2. That is WORSHIP.
3. Not singing songs that make us feel good, not going to study after study, learning more and more, not just trying really hard not to do naughty things... none ultimately bad But that's mostly for us.
4. True holiness? True wor ship? Living a life that reflects Jesus' love.
5. **True holiness and worship is living a life that reflects Jesus' love.**
6. Paul digs into HOW we can actually do this... it's not trying really hard, disengaging from the mess, sending positive vibes, or simply voting differently, etc...

## E. V. 2a

***Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world***

1. Behaviors and customs?- A lot there, but at the core/root is a way of thinking...
2. Their cultural thinking- Look out for yourself and your kind, might makes right **Roman soldiers**, religion is for getting what you want.
3. Our culture- Everyone is labeled in a group, Pick a side, What I want is what matters most. Polarization= Hate
4. What does our culture do to those they disagree with?
  - a. Try to destroy the other side... reputation, focus on the facts that make them look bad and you good. Mock, belittle, insult, dehumanize... attaching a label- liberal, conservative, racist, homophobe, republican, democrat, far right, far left... **Don't copy that!**
  - b. **Me**- In teacher's lounge **old pic of Jon?**
  - c. Next is KEY

## F. V. 2b

***But let God transform you into a new person by changing... the way you think.***

### **1. 2 Cor 5:17**

2. When become JF- changed into a new person... someone who is constantly transforming to a clearer and clearer, brighter and brighter reflection of Jesus.
3. Starts with thinking... (how we judge reality /feelings/perceiving)
4. Start seeing people, the world, arguments, culture, society differently

5. Start thinking through things with God's eyes.
6. Start assuming the best not the worst.
7. See people as they can be not as what they do in their lowest points
8. Benefit of a doubt
9. There's not a political motive or answer to everything.
- 10. Just b/c they win doesn't mean I lose.**
- 11. You can be FOR them before they are or even if they are never FOR you.**
12. Your goal isn't to win but to listen, understand, and love.
13. You'll be amazed how your opinion starts to matter and be listened to the more you listen to and love others.
14. Then the question of... "What do I do" will come...
- 15. Transforming our individual thinking is the first step to transforming our society as a whole.**

### G. V. 2c

*Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

1. God's will for you?
  - a. Not what your major should be, who you should marry, what job to apply for...
  - b. Law of LOVE
  - c. God's will for you is to love him and love your neighbor as yourself.**
  - d. You can't love God and not love those he created and died for... [healing pic?](#)
  - e. Their pain is your pain, their success is your success, their hopes and dreams are your hopes and dreams...
2. Let God transform your mind/thinking and you will know the answer to **What Does Love Look Like?**

### H. JF

1. When people see you do they see your culture or your King? [Words of each on each side?](#)
2. Ancient Romans hated Xians bc they refused to swear loyalty to particular culture/empire/emperor... ([persecution pics](#))
3. Though they submitted to authority... their allegiance was to one King...
4. Their motives were to honor him b/c of his love... not to promote their views or exert their power.
5. Why they stayed in plague infested cities to care for the sick
6. Why they adopted babies left to die to the road side
7. Refused to be defined by class/race/nationality- defined AND united by loyalty to the King of Love and the Kingdom of heaven.
8. Laws and politicians important... blessing to have a choice to bring change but are not the ultimate deeper answer- hasn't worked yet
- 9. The answer is people, transformed by the love of Jesus, living out that love to their neighbors.**

Where do we start?

### IV. YOU

- A. **Allow your thinking to be transformed**- little exercise.
  1. Not JF- Still helpful... welcome to try this, too! **Read Jesus' words (Matt 5:3-10) once a day for a week.** Downloadable card?
    - a. Bonus- Jesus is telling us how to be happy (blessed are)

Then...

- 2. Lovingly engage with those who are different than you.** Try it...
  - a. START by being FOR them- asking and listening FIRST and talking SECOND
  - b. **Seek out** and Listen to viewpoints that are different from yours.

- c. What are they saying? What is their experience like? How is it similar to yours and what can you learn from them?
  - d. People who were nothing like Jesus loved being around Jesus b/c they KNEW Jesus was FOR them
  - e. Buy them a meal. (Ventis pic? : ) )
3. Side thought- What do your SM posts say about your love?
- a. This is the new public square...
  - b. Before you hit post- Ask... Is this what love looks like?**
  - a. Take an hour, ask a trusted person.
  - b. Liz and me**

## V. WE

- A. It might start slow and small but...
- B. There is a way forward...
- C. There is a better way than Us v. Them; than hatred and tribalism
- D. There is a love that has the power to turn enemies into brothers and sisters and helps us recognize the value of every single other person. (forgiveness pics)
- E. There is God who calls every one of us his children, who created all of us in His image, who showed the worth of each and every one of us by choosing to die for each and every one of us.
- F. No matter what race, culture, we can stand together in loyalty to our King of love and to each other
- G. We can either be part of the problem or we can BE the solution... it starts with transforming our thinking through the love of Jesus.

## H. The most powerful force for change in the world are individuals choosing to love like Jesus

- I. It's this powerful love that let a former Slave Ship Captain write these words in 1772...  
 Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
 That saved a wretch like me.  
 I once was lost, but now am found,  
 Was blind but now I see.

**God give us your eyes to see.**

## Questions

1. In your experience, what are the effects of an "us vs. them" mentality?
2. Read Mat 5:3-10. What are your initial thoughts? How do you see this applying to what we see around us today?
3. What steps/actions do you feel you were challenged to take as a result of this week's passage?