

## Unashamed Part 1 – Nik Spasovski

Good morning, Church, it is such a joy and a gift to get to be together with you all today. It is a big day today, I really think it is. Because we are kicking off our Unashamed Series as you heard about already. Which will be a 4 part series that we hope will represent God's heart and design in creating humans as relational and sexual beings. The series will explore and provide guidance for our church regarding biblical teaching on sexuality and gender.

And just wanted to give you a quick overview of the series as a whole:

So today we're going to look at sexuality through the lens of creation, fall, and redemption. That our sexuality was created as very good but marred by sin. And that the grace of Jesus brings healing and freedom from all shame and holy sexuality is restored in us as we submit to Him.

Next week, we will be speaking to the glorious purpose of both singleness and marriage, both of which were created to bring glory to Jesus either as a picture of His sufficiency here and now, that's what singleness points to, or else of His ultimate, consummate union with His Bride, the Church, which marriage points to.

I really see these first two weeks as more foundational, we're going to kind of zoom out and look at things from a big picture perspective.

And then the last two weeks:

Week 3, February 16<sup>th</sup>, will speak to same-sex sexuality in light of a biblical picture of marriage, shed light on how gay Christians can bring glory to God through holy sexuality, and how God and His church can meet needs for intimacy and family for all people

And then our last week will speak to a biblical vision for masculinity and femininity that both gives us direction for our gender expression and frees us from unnecessary hindrances placed on us by the surrounding culture.

These last two parts will delve more deeply into present day questions and matters. Ok, we'll kind of zoom and take a look at these things very closely.

I need to take a second, forgive me, I forgot to take out my Invisalign. So I'm going to take that out, I know these are serious matters, this is important... thank you, thank you for the applause, praise the Lord.

Ok, getting back, bringing us back...Our hope and our prayer, really I've been praying, I've been crying out to the Lord for this series, maybe more so than I

ever have for a series we've ever done, that it would present a beautiful vision for sexuality and gender that enables greater freedom for us all and clarity that allows us to navigate our sexual strengths and weaknesses in light of the gospel...in other words how to walk unashamed with Jesus despite our sin and struggles.

And I also want to say as we walk through these topics today and really this whole series, we're going to be talking about things that are really vulnerable and I want to encourage you to pay attention to how you're doing and throughout this whole message and we're going to be having a slice later too and if you need to tune out for a second or minute, that's ok. If you need to step out of the auditorium for a period of time, that is completely ok as well.

Lastly, I and the rest of our Elder and Minister Team want to acknowledge to you all that we don't believe that we have not led you all well as our church publicly regarding these questions and matters. I just want to name that. And we apologize to you for falling short in this area and for the affect that may have had on you. Whether that be confusion, whether that be feeling a bait and switch at times, or feeling isolated, or wondering if you can even talk about certain sexual struggles, or anything along those lines. We're sorry, for that we apologize. Would you forgive us for that? We've been looking at these matters and trying to study them deeply for the past couple of years but I wish I could go back 10 years honestly and study them then and speak publicly about them then and build support teams for sexual minorities and be more clear about our beliefs. We repent and want to do better and this series is an attempt to walk out that repentance.

Let's pray: Dear Jesus, we invite you into this space, we invite you in and we ask you, please Lord, please would you speak to us. We need to hear your voice. These are hard topics and sensitive ones, and we cry out to you, that you would bless our church as we talk about them. Would you bless, would you bring more freedom and healing? And would you help us to walk unashamed in light of your gospel, Lord? And we pray these things by the power of your name, amen. Amen.

We're going spend time in the book of Genesis throughout this series, not a ton of time today. But I wanted to start there with a few.

This is right after God has removed the rib from Adam and he's created Eve and Adam has this great reaction which is essentially, "Yes! Finally! One like me, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh...like me!"

Then Genesis 2:24-25 (CSB) says

*<sup>24</sup> This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.*

And what I want to point out right here right now is that God created sex and it is good. God's created it, it's so awesome. The man and woman were together physically, intimately and they felt no shame. This thing we call sex, it's God's idea, it was His idea to begin with, He's the one who designed it and made it. Which I think is so important for us to remember.

And really sex is about intimacy and connection, right? And we're going to get into how this applies not just to married couples but also to single people in future parts of our series. But for now, I just want to try to debunk this churchy notion that sex is dangerous, or even bad, and needs to be avoided at all costs and not talked about that much lest our young adults get tempted into a life of sin and debauchery!

No! No! We ought to talk about sex. And as Christians, since we believe God made sex and blessed it in the context of marriage, we should feel no shame talking about it!

And this series is really about way more than just sex, it's about relationships and our longings for true heart to heart intimacy and connections with others and all our desires to belong and be part of family.

Sex is a good thing...and yet it has also gone wrong, hasn't it? There is tremendous sexual sin in our world is there not? So much pain, addiction, betrayal, loss, and grief that's connected to sex in some way shape or form. And so many false promises about sex in our culture.

Now I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit, I'm going to come back to some of those things...

I would love for us to look at a famous passage of Scripture, ok. And this one is actually a little controversial. It's the story of Jesus and the adulterous woman who was thrown before him by some of the religious leaders of His day. And we find this story in John 8, if you want to begin turning there in your bibles that would be great, if not it will be up on the screen. If you need a bible, we've got free ones at the info desk if you want to grab one, we'd love to give you one as a gift.

And we find the story in most modern bibles in a footnote or maybe sectioned off with a couple horizontal lines and it says that the earliest manuscripts don't include these verses.

And to be honest I felt like maybe I should just avoid this passage to avoid that controversy, but as I was just praying and seeking the Spirit what He would have for us this day, I just felt drawn back to this passage a few times. And so I looked more into it. And yes there is some controversy about where this story should be, it doesn't quite fit the narrative here in John 8 and the surrounding chapters and some manuscripts have it a few verse later, some at the end of John, some after Luke 21.

Yet in spite of this, there is widespread conviction among textual critics who's job it is to determine these things, that this narrative represents a factual episode in Jesus' ministry. One says, "the account has all the earmarks of historical veracity." So after looking more into it I believe we can accept this story as a historically reliable as part of Jesus' ministry and that it belongs in Scripture.

So now let's see what we can learn from it...

John 8 verse 2

*At dawn he went to the temple again, (the temple where they worshipped in Jerusalem) and all the people were coming to him. He sat down and began to teach them.*

*<sup>3</sup> Then the scribes and the Pharisees (the religious leaders of that day) brought a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center. <sup>4</sup> "Teacher," they said to him, "this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup> In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" <sup>6</sup> They asked this to trap him, in order that they might have evidence to accuse him.*

What a scene, right!? Can you imagine this? Can you even picture yourself in the place of this woman...what if you were brought before a crowd, really a mob, and having exposed your deepest, darkest secret, or the thing you didn't want anyone else to know about you. And the only person standing between you and those stones is Jesus. That'd be terrifying, right!?

And the background for this and some of their accusation is Lev. 20:10 or Deu. 22:22, which basically communicate the same thing.

This is Lev. 20:10 (CSB)

<sup>10</sup> *“If a man commits adultery with a married woman—if he commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.*

Should be noticing something here immediately, right. Now I find this curious and also infuriating to be honest, to think about where is the man, right. Where’s the man who she was committing adultery with? The law says they should both be put to death. So why didn’t they bring him out as well? I think that fact alone reveals their lack of genuineness and their kind of fake outrage. And their self-righteousness.

You see self-righteousness is dangerous. Self-righteousness is so dangerous. And what happens with self-righteousness you begin to think I have it all together. You know I don’t have much sin, or any at all, but that person sure does. And oh boy that person has it wrong and that group of people. They deserve punishment!

Self-righteousness it leads to beginning to “us vs them” anyone who doesn’t agree with you. Instead of We...We are all broken...We are all sinful...the pronoun We is so powerful and so lacking in our cultural discourses nowadays. And that’s exactly what Jesus does in our passage isn’t it?

John 8:6 continues to say this:

*Jesus stooped down and started writing on the ground with his finger. <sup>7</sup> When they persisted in questioning him, he stood up and said to them, “The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her.” <sup>8</sup> Then he stooped down again and continued writing on the ground. <sup>9</sup> When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. (Probably cause they were the first one to realize they’d gotten got by Jesus again.) Only he (only Jesus) was left, with the woman in the center.*

Have you ever wondered what he was writing on the ground? I think it’s going to be like one of the first questions I ask in heaven, what were you writing, Jesus?

Some commentaries said maybe it was the sins of the men around him, which would have been like a total boss move. I kind of hope that’s what it was, that would have been so awesome and totally like Jesus. Maybe it was simply the 10 commandments, He started listing them out one by one, to reveal their sin or maybe even Lev 20:10, just writes out that verse, I know He had it memorized, and then they began to recognize their hypocrisy.

Tony Evans points out in his study bible that just as the ten commandments were “inscribed by the finger of God” (which is what Ex 31:18 says) whatever Jesus was writing was a subtle way of communicating that he himself was the divine author of the law. And that writing in the dirt was a reminder of

that law that was given to humans who were made from the dust and thus vulnerable to weakness and sin.

And I want to pause here for something really important you know as we're talking about the divine author of the law. And talk about the authority of God and the authority hence of Scripture as well. Now authority is not a popular concept nowadays, actually don't know it's ever been a popular concept. I think humans naturally push away from it. We believe though that, as followers of Jesus, that Scripture was inspired by God and that it is trustworthy and true! All Scripture is breathed out by God and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, that's what 2 Tim 3:16 says. And those are very authority laden words aren't they? This is so important! Even going back to Genesis 3, the first thing the serpent says to Eve is "Did God really say?" "Did God really say?" And man do we get similar sorts of messages at times do we not, as far as Jesus, did God really say that? He causes her to question God's words and His authority. And the authority of Scripture could probably be a whole other sermon, honestly. But I wanted to make sure we touched on it because it's so important for framing today, and for framing in this whole series. Choosing to follow Jesus means just that, right, following Jesus, no matter where he leads, even when we don't like where He's leading or what He's saying, probably especially when we don't like where He's leading or what He's saying.

We can think at times God is holding out on us with his commands, I've been there with His commands at times, but He's not. Our God is the very definition of goodness. So He's not holding out, what He has for us is for our best. It's like when we tell our kids, my wife and I, just little things like don't stick things in the electrical sockets, you've probably never seen what happens, but it's not good, it's bad, it's for their good, for their protection. And yes obedience involves sacrifice, but it's a sacrifice of lesser things for better things, I believe.

Coming back to our story...

He says, Let the one without sin be the first to throw a stone. And I just love that. What a statement, what strength in the face of a mob right, that's Jesus for you, that's His brilliance, and His power and His strength.

Who of you is without sin? That's a piercing question, isn't it? Who of us is without sin?

All of us are sinful.

Romans 3:10 says  
*There is no one righteous, not even one.*

When I first became a Christian, when I was teenager, this verse like kind of bugged me when I first read it, honestly. It's like really, no one, not even one? I didn't realize it then, but I later learned I'm an enneagram 1, which is a perfectionist. So I was like maybe I'll be the first one, I don't know? Which I've come to realize no that's not what this verse is communicating, I see the truth in it now.

We are not righteous on our own, we can't be because of our sin that we all have.

If you're not convinced, look at how Jesus ups the ante to show it's not just our actions that are sinful but our thoughts and our inner life as well...

On the sermon of the mount in Matt 5:27-28 (CSB)

*<sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. (one of the ten commandments) <sup>28</sup> But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Man that's convicting isn't it?

Quick definition of lust: wanting to possess or even consume someone for your own selfish reasons

I didn't become a Christian until I was 17 and when I first started reading the bible, I remember this verse as well and it bothered me. And the reason it bothered me is because I realized I have done this so much! I was really addicted to pornography, I went from one girlfriend to another, dating each one for less time, just looking for the next sexual high and ultimately just using women. Just a few months after I accepted Christ, I slept a woman who I had convinced myself I was in love with so it's ok. Have you ever heard that cultural message? I have tremendous sexual sin in my life, not to mention other areas of life. I had a relapse into pornography my first year of marriage and had to confess that to my wife and that was a tough road for us to walk through. A very kind of tenuous part of marriage when you're first beginning. And a big part of that relapse was a lot of deeper lies and insecurities about myself were getting pressed in marriage because marriage is challenging. Relying on God in this struggle has gotten easier over the years, but I still have to work to not objectify women in my thoughts.

All of us have sexual sin in our lives, and maybe it isn't lusting after another person, but maybe it's lusting after other things or lusting after marriage itself, or your own image or a certain body image. No matter our story, or our background, no matter our orientation, we are all just as broken and sinful as the next person, especially compared to our God, right? And what you run to is far less important than why you run to it!

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Like I mentioned with my sexual struggles in high school I think why I was running to some of those things was because of deep pain from my past and some physical abuse in my family that created this black hole of always questioning am I was worth others time and love? And sexual gratification would begin to fill that hole, but it was never enough. It never came close to answering those questions, only Jesus did.

We all have deep relational needs, we all do. Think about when you feel lonely, or like I don't belong, or maybe I don't matter, or I feel invisible. These triggers can cause many of us to act out sexually, which again is almost always disappointing because we don't realize that sex is symbolic. It's a way to connect, yes, but it's ultimately symbolic of intimacy and relational closeness and yes physically that happens in marriage, but the real need we all have is relational closeness, real intimacy with others and belonging.

And our culture is filled with so much pain and suffering and confusion in this area. With soaring divorce rates, marital unfaithfulness, addiction to pornography, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, trafficking. I just want to ask you to just pray for the women and potentially men as well, who are trafficked during the Superbowl, I've read it's the highest time of trafficking in our country this week, leading up to it. There's also direct links between the pornography industry and trafficking as well, few of those woman want to be doing that, they are being forced into it.

Do you know that 1 out of 3 women in our country experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. 1 out 3! That makes want to weep every time I say that. And the stats say it's 1 out of 6 men as well. Date rape is still a huge problem on college campuses and beyond.

I read a NYT times article just a couple weeks ago on the importance of consent which is so huge and so important. And the questions that some of the college men that they surveyed were asking in this article basically boiled down to what do I need to do in order to be able to hit it and quit it without getting in trouble. How drunk is enough drunk for both of us to be ok but not too drunk that I get in trouble. And then the article kind of spoke flippantly about sexually experimenting by yourself, this was the antidote they presented, with pornography and missed that maybe all these things connected actually.

So often sex leaves people feeling empty and not satisfied. And maybe not necessarily bad or guilty, but empty and not satisfied. People who are drinking and hooking up with strangers are not having good, satisfying sex.



Because it's the opposite of real intimacy, it's just using another physical body.

And in this greater conversation about consent, if you're looking for very clear movement toward consent, how about the marriage vow that says I will spend the rest of my life with you, if you will with me, right? And I fully acknowledge that consent is still important absolutely necessary in marriage, too.

You see sex is a good thing, and it's gone horribly wrong among all of us in humanity. We need repentance, repentance individually and corporately.

Our cultures' messages about sexual freedom have been so damaging, doing whatever you want, whatever you think is right, whatever you think will make you feel good has led us to feeling very wrong and feeling very bad about ourselves and tremendous shame, I think.

I have heard this kind of message or this movement, you know well yeah we can just live together and say we're "married", we don't need a legal process or we don't need a piece of paper or you know we love each other so then everything we want to do is ok, right? And yet in my 20 years of being involved in college ministry, it's the couples who have been the most sexually active when they do break up, that have the hardest times recovering from that, because those physical and emotional bonds are meant and designed for marriage, for the safety of marriage.

1 Cor 6:18-20 (CSB) says

*<sup>18</sup> Flee sexual immorality! (It's like saying, run away! Run away! Because it leads to so much pain and destruction.) Every other sin<sup>[d]</sup> a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup> Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you (God is living within us!), whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought at a price (the blood of Jesus). So glorify God with your body.*

This is so important. And while sex is good, it is not the end all be all, like our culture communicates as well. You don't need sex to flourish as a human being. There have been countless people who throughout history who have been single and haven't had sex their whole lives and have had full lives. It's not like food, I feel like our culture communicates that, "it's like a need like food." Or like relationship connection and intimacy, those are real needs we all have.

And now if you have been a victim of sexual abuse, I just want to take a moment and acknowledge you. I am sorry. I am so sorry if you have been. It is not right and it is not your fault, no matter what someone or anyone has

communicated to you about that. If and when and I stress if and when, cause if you are never ready to talk about it that's ok. But if and when you're ready to talk about it, we want our church to be a safe place for you. Statistically, we know many of you are survivors of abuse and our church staff we've been taking trainings and becoming more educated on how to support you and walk through this with you. We'd love to help you with university or community resources or counseling resources as well for help and recovery.

And I know some of you may have been affected by the news of sexual misconduct allegations that came out about a week and half ago with the provost and executive vice president of student affairs here on campus. We are so saddened that this has happened so close to home. If you could use to talk about that, we'd love to support you.

And there may be some of you who have wondered am I an abuser? Or you've been able to admit to yourself that you are one and are filled with shame and self-contempt. Jesus offers you healing and forgiveness and redemption. His word says, "My grace is sufficient for you"! That applies to you as well. There are potentially some hard steps of repentance and making amends that He may call you to. If and when you are ready to talk about that, we have church leaders who you can talk to as well.

If you are dealing with your own sexual sin and shame and regret, whether it's current or in the past, if and when you are ready to talk about it, We want our church to be a safe place for you. We want to walk side by side with one another, not casting stones, but carrying burdens as Scripture calls us to! Would you consider confessing and repenting of your sins to God, first and foremost, and to trusted brothers and sisters in the church.

Sex is a good thing that has gone wrong and we need Jesus together to reclaim, to redeem us, to rescue us, then that frees us up from shame, so that no matter your story, you can walk in your the light, no matter your questions, no matter your struggles, we can all share them about them and share them with one another without shame.

Do you all see if you really believe that, it makes all the difference in the world. If you do that, brothers and sisters here, I believe you will receive not condemnation but grace and compassion, after all, that is the example we see of our Lord...

Our passage closes by this, John 8:10

*<sup>10</sup> When Jesus stood up, he said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

<sup>11</sup> *"No one, Lord," she answered.*

*"Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."*

You see, Jesus offers us all forgiveness, not condemnation!

And what compassion He has! He has so much compassion because He walks in our same shoes and was tempted in every way and He knows how hard it is.

Romans 3:22, a little after that 3:10 passage

<sup>22</sup> *The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ<sup>[a]</sup> to all who believe* (To all, there are no qualifiers there), *since there is no distinction.* <sup>23</sup> *For all have sinned and fall short of the<sup>[d]</sup> glory of God.* <sup>24</sup> *They are justified* (justified means made right, made right) *freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

Our God delights in forgiving sin, that's like His nature, and that includes all sexual sin! And there's something about sexual sin, and we kind of talked about this earlier with that 1 Cor. passage, that for some reason, shame just sinks deeper with it, I think, but it's an opportunity for God's forgiveness to deeper as well into our hearts, amen?

You can't out-sin his grace!

He calls us to walk in holy sexuality, holy sexuality, to sin no more, which is far more about our heart posture and humility and attitude than perfection, He knows we're not going to be perfect, and that's only possible as we walk in the gospel, that Jesus died for all of us. You see Jesus could stand there before that woman and not worry about the Levitical law calling her to her death, because He knew He was about to die for her and all her sins anyway. Which is just as true for you and for me, for all of us, Jesus can stand before us and not worry about our sin because He has died for it, He has died in our place and allowed His blood to be spilled to wash us clean. To make us new. To redeem us. It's not just about forgiveness, it's about redeeming and making new and healing and making right.

Do you believe God can redeem all your sexual sin? And transform it and make it new and beautiful? That's what He does. We're talking about the God who can raise the dead back to life so of course He can do all things, nothing is impossible for Him.

And whatever your story is, there is room for you in the kingdom, whatever you're bringing into this space, Jesus wants you. You could be just beginning your spiritual journey of discovery and this is all a little overwhelming for you, or you might be an abuse survivor, you might be questioning your sexuality, or maybe you feel something burdening you about your sexuality. No matter what your story is, Jesus wants to meet you where you are and love you and lead you abundant life.

Let us all examine ourselves and confess and repent for our self-righteousness. All of us are sinful and sexually broken and we serve a God who is eager to forgive, and redeem because we are his sons and daughters, his special dear ones, who He loves and He holds for all of eternity. Let's pray.

Lord, I thank you, I thank you for your Word, that shows us your heart, and who you really are, Jesus, your heart and your longing to forgive and to redeem and to make us new. We cry out to you, we need you, Lord. We need your help in this area. Would you help us to hear your voice and to follow your leading in your lives? Build conviction in us that's from you, Lord, and we need you in dependence. Amen.