

## Unashamed Part 2 – Kyle Chase

Good morning, Church, how are you doing this morning? It is a gift to be with you and it matters that you are here this morning. Now if you were here last week as well then you know that we are embarked already on an exciting, treacherous, beautiful journey into God's good design for our sexuality and gender.

Now this is Unashamed series and our prayer really has been that in some sense that God would be drawing us out of the darkness and into the light of His truth in a way that both challenges us into greater freedom and holiness, but always without shame, always in a way where we basking in the sunlight of God's boundless mercy. He is here today, Jesus is here today. And he loves us. And he's so patient with us.

Still I know sexuality and gender are really personal topics and so be kind to yourself. As we walk through this if you need to take a moment to tune out and not think about these things or step out for a minute that is fine too.

Last week, Nik rightly named the blessed goodness of being created as sexual and relational beings by God and he talked about how our relationship with our sexuality was been marred by sin and that only through our relationship with Jesus is our sexuality reclaimed and restored for good. In the coming weeks we'll talk about masculinity and femininity as expressions of gender, and in some sense distinct from and also rooted in our sexuality as male and female. And we also home to offer kind scriptural guidance in how to at least begin to navigate these very personal aspects of our being whether we are straight, gay, bi, or otherwise questioning our sexuality, our orientation, or our gender.

And as for today, in part 2 of 4 in this series, we're going to be exploring some important context for sexual and relational expression, namely singleness and marriage and what Scripture has to say about sexual and marriage as modes of being, as modes of life. We may live single, we may live married, in either case we are created for life, to live. So if we would understand the meaning of singleness and marriage, we must first understand a more fundamental question, what is the meaning of life? Good thing you came today, huh? That's right, you've been waiting for that book to come out. Thank goodness! Why on earth are you here, on earth? Perhaps we will catch the slightest scent of an answer today like a spring breeze pouring in through an open window, but first let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thanks that you made us very good. And thanks that you aren't willing to let go of us, that you come after us, you find us, you are after our redemption and for our good, make us fully alive today. We want to

hear your voice. Help us to know what we're doing here. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

What is the meaning of life? What are we doing here in this blink of an eye and why? Are we rolling a boulder uphill to answer such a massive question in such a short period of time? Yes, probably! Except that we answer this question everyday whether we know it or not. Throughout the course of our day we make choices, hundreds of little choices. We choose things all the time.

And when we choose things its like typing something into search engine and pressing enter and then a hyperlink comes up and we can click on that. And see if pretty much an image, the very thing, that in that moment, we find to be the meaning of our life, the reason we are here, in this moment. We have hundreds of moments like that, and we don't usually realize it in the moment, but our life is little more than a collection of moments strewn together across time. The sum of all moments if you will. A veritably history of everything we have ever searched for. So if you want to the lived meaning of a life, look at the search history, what would we see and find in your search and what would you find in mine?

What are you searching for? Really, what are you searching for?

The search bar metaphor probably makes you think I'm talking about pornography, but I'm trying to say something more than that, deeper than that. We don't even search for pornography because we want that, we search for it because we want something else. We want to feel comforted, or delighted in, or accepted, or desired, or important, or in control. It's the same with sex, and I mean sex as in physical sexual activity, designed by God as a good symbol that points to something more. So in that sense, sex isn't even about sex, it points to something beyond itself. And if you humbly consider your own sexual activity, whether alone or with another person you will find as I have that when you choose sexual activity what you are searching for in actuality is something like belonging, intimacy, to be known, rest, to find relief, and connection. In a word, love.

And if those are the things we really want, then sexual activity divorced from God's good design will only leave us feeling disappointed, restless, ashamed, and alone. We did the physical act of sex, but we entirely missed the more important reality to which that symbol points. So in that sense pursuing sexual activity apart from God's good design is like eating a flash card with an apple on it expecting it to taste like an apple. Alright, physical activity apart from real belonging.

<chewing flashcard noises>

A real experience of belonging, or intimacy to be known, rest and connection, with or without sexual physical activity.

<chewing apple noises>

See sexual activity by itself can never give us what we are actually searching for. Why not? Because sex is not the meaning of life. The meaning of life is not to have sex, experience sex, or to indulge in sex. There are plenty of people in the world who don't want to have sex at all. And plenty more who do. But the ones who do feel that desire like hunger pains, but unlike food sex is not required to live. And just like food, if you have sex, the best sex won't leave you feeling full for long. And the worst sex will make you sick to your stomach.

But even with regard to food, what does Scripture say.

In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus has been fasting and He's hungry and Satan is tempting Him to prove Himself and His identity by using His power to turn stones into bread and Jesus said,

*"It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.'"*

He's quoting there from Deuteronomy chapter 8, when the Israelites are in the desert and they're hungry and I wish we could go back to slavery and get some food at least. But Scripture says

*[The LORD] humbled you (at that time), causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8:3 NIV)*

That manna was also called "bread from heaven," the bread of heaven, the heavenly break. The gospel of John, John calls Jesus what? The Bread of Heave, true Bread of Heaven. John also calls Jesus, The Word, the Word Who became flesh and lived among us. And so Jesus is going around and saying look if you eat this bread over here, you will hunger again, but if you feast on me you will find life. Why? Because He is the Heavenly Bread, The Word.

Jesus is life. Jesus is life.

And what does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 5:15?

*[Jesus] died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ who died and was raised*

*for them.*

(2 Corinthians 5:15 NLT )

Remember we're talking about the meaning of life. For Whom will we live?  
For Christ who died and was raised.

And Paul says it even more strongly in Galatians 2:20, in this beautiful verse, he says:

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

(Galatians 2:20 NIV)

Why do I live by faith? Because He loved me and gave Himself for me.

All of our longings, our longings to be known and loved, for real unconditional love and all of our longings are a yes in Jesus.

The whole of our brief life is meant to speak a single word...Jesus.

We are here to know and to show people Jesus.

That is the meaning of our lives. Jesus' life and to know Him is to know life to the full. To know real unconditional love and as we soak and bask in that love, we become more like Him. That's what it means to be disciple, we learn and we imitate. And we see the character of Christ formed in us and then we make disciples. We show people Jesus, we love them like He loves us. And they begin to be transformed as well.

A life that shows people Jesus is a life that glorifies God! And what does that mean to glorify God?

To glorify something is to shine a light on it and lift it up for all to see. Sometimes I think we don't...we scarcely grasp the meaning that we are made in the image of God. Because we weren't raised in ancient Mesopotamia.

But if we had been, we would have seen some weird stuff. And some of the stuff that we would have seen is that people were worshipping lots of different gods who were invisible and they didn't want to worship an invisible god so what they would do is they'd get some metal or clay or wood and build it into something like an insect or an animal or a maybe a tiny human and it's so they can see what they were worshipping. They would make this little image and they would bow down and they would worship it. But the LORD God who made the universe, this of the revolutionary truth, who made

the universe, said you're not going to do that. You're not gonna worship little images that represent me, because I made you in my image, so that when the world looks at you, they will see what I am really like. The glory in that is incredible and yet sin has muddied the water that was supposed to reflect His face.

We were like dirty mirrors in need of cleaning, broken beyond repair.

But then Jesus came, the one whom the Scriptures say is the exact representation of the Father. Jesus Himself said, "If you've seen me you've seen the Father because I and the Father are one." He the pristine mirror perfectly reflecting the heart of God, and He made a choice to exchange His clean, clear reflection for all our shards and smudges. Lost and wounded we were, searching for a thousand false lovers and pressing enter, and He entered in and came searching for us...so that all that accept His generous grace find that life that is truly life and made clean and whole again in the body of Christ, which is His church.

Church, we are the body of Christ on this campus and in this city. When people see how we are with one another, are they encountering Jesus? Do they see Jesus in the way that we are with one another and with them?

We are here to know and to show people Jesus. That is the meaning of our lives. And I have to say, everything else that I have beyond this point, presumes this truth. I just have to be clear about that.

This is truth, but it is not an easy truth all the time, because if that's the meaning of our life, that means the meaning of our life is not to be happy. That means the meaning of our life is not to find a life partner. Its not make money and retire well or to accomplish a lot or do community service or random acts of kindness. None of those things are bad things, those are wonderful things. They make great gifts, but they are poor gods.

There is a throne on our hearts, and it is meant for Jesus alone. And this truth, the meaning of our lives that is found in Jesus is like a deep root that nourishes even the tops of the trees and if that's the meaning of our lives, then it impacts and nourishes the meaning of singleness and marriage.

So now if we can hold that truth in our minds we're ready to receive singleness and marriage as gifts and not as gods.

But I have to confess some idolatry personally because we as New Life, and really a lot of Protestant traditions have made an idol out of marriage to the detriment of singleness. Talked about the glory of marriage and almost like it's just desirable for everyone to be married and yeah of course everyone's going to be married and all of this to the neglect of the glory of singleness

and what Scripture says about singleness and Scripture is our foundation. Some of this is a reaction to an overemphasis or an idolatry within more liturgical and in the Catholic tradition of overemphasis on singleness and celibacy, particularly among clergy, which is itself true to the breadth of what Scripture teaches.

But in either case we need to get back to the Scriptures, what does Scripture say?

And our home base today is a passage with Jesus in Matthew chapter 19 starting in verse 3, the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with this question...

<sup>3</sup> *[The] Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?"*

<sup>4</sup> *"Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.'" (So He's quoting Genesis 1 here) <sup>5</sup> [Then] he said, "'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' (He's quoting Genesis chapter 2 there) <sup>6</sup> Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together."*

<sup>7</sup> "Then why did Moses say in the law that a man could give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away?" they asked.

<sup>8</sup> Jesus replied, "Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not what God had originally intended. <sup>9</sup> And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery—unless his wife has been unfaithful."

<sup>10</sup> Jesus' disciples then said to him, "If this is the case, it is better not to marry!"

There's a lot in this passage, but one thing that's easy to miss is this: The Pharisees are a strict, legalistic religious sect, and they are often put off by Jesus' freedom...freedom to heal on the sabbath, freedom to feast when others fast, freedom to not follow all their traditions for ritual washings, freedom to forgive sins. But here on the matter of marriage and divorce, it would appear that Jesus is stricter than the Pharisees and frankly stricter than any other rabbinical school of thought at that time. And that seems noteworthy.

The Pharisees are focused on the Mosaic law and the allowances of a man to divorce, but there was considerable debate at that time about what reasons were sufficient. I mean, men were divorcing their wives left and right for things like burning their food at supper. To divorce a woman left her socially and economically vulnerable. Jesus cares about this, and He cares about pre-

Mosaic, covenant nature of marriage as God designed it. God is the one who instituted marriage, so man should not take it apart.

It should inform our understanding of marriage that Jesus emphasizes Genesis 1 where God makes humanity as male and female. He doesn't have to emphasize this to make His more particular point about divorce. He could have just simply mentioned Genesis 2 by itself. Ultimately Jesus elevates the discussion of marriage above just reasons for getting divorced and He takes us back to the God ordained joining of two sexually different person in a life-long covenant unity.

We will explore more next week, but this is why at New Life we teach the historically Christian view of marriage and sexual expression; namely, that marriage is a life-long covenant union between two sexually different persons (male and female) from different families and that any pursuit of sexual relationships outside of marriage is a sin.

So marriage then, is the context for holy sexual expression. And sexual activity should not be separated from marriage. Why? Because it is a covenant relationship, a holy union, a mutual offering of one's whole life within the protection of a promise. This is God's good design for sexual expression. The act of sex is to be one of covenant renewal between a husband and wife, a mutual offering of the one for the sake of the other.

Obviously hook up culture is the exact opposite, an offering of one's body to a stranger while the person's soul is disengaged in some sense. The whole charade is often shrouded in a question: "Is this consensual? Does this person want this? Do I even want this? Does this mean anything?" There is no protectino of heart and soul and rarely of body either in such an exchange.

But maybe you would say, I'm not married, but I am in a committed relationship. We live together because we love each other and are trying to figure out if we want to get married. I understand this sentiment and some of the heart behind it. But I humbly offer to you that this is a little like subjecting someone you care about to a job interview where she has to live at.

If you are not ready for marriage, I propose to you that you are not ready for sex, which is an expression of the marriage covenant. And if you haven't offered your life to a person in the covenant of marriage, you should not expect them to offer you their body. To do so is not loving. But if this is your situation today, I'm not saying this to shame you. You can live unashamed in the light of the gospel. But I am offering you an invitation.

Men who would be married, I invite you to offer the woman you love the honor of vowing your life to her in marriage before ever again inviting her into the awesome vulnerability of sex. Women, you are worthy of honor, and your sexuality is sacred and it is yours to give. Until a man has demonstrated he is willing to uphold a marriage vow before you and God to sacrificially love you for life, he is not worthy of your sexual expression.

But lest we forget that unholy sexuality can happen in marriage too, we must be reminded of what marriage is and why it exists.

In Ephesians chapter 5, Paul tells us that marriage is to be emblematic of the relationship between Jesus and the Church. He says, women – wives, submit to your husbands as the Church does to Christ...and then he says, husbands, love your wives like Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. And too many women in marriage and in the marriage context, have been hurt and harmed and disrespected because insecure men focused on that first commandment and ignored the one that was actually intended for them. Husbands, love your wives and lay down your life for them like Christ did for the Church. Love in a such a way that inspires their trust. And all of you, Paul say, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. A healthy marriage is a picture of Christ's love for His Church and her love for Him.

The purpose of marriage, this is important, is not to make us happy. We hurt each other so many times in marriage because we get insecure, upset because this person is not fulfilling me. They're not giving me what I want right now. But marriage doesn't exist for our happiness. The purpose of marriage is to make us holy – more like Jesus. And this makes sense because the purpose of marriage is to show people Jesus and to put His love for the Church on display. To you see how Jesus and the Scriptures elevate our view of marriage for the sake of the Kingdom, His Kingdom. This is why in our passage the disciples are essentially like, "Whoa, marriage is hard and people should not do that!"

But then Jesus turns a corner into a really fascinating place, He says:

<sup>11</sup> “ (Well) Not everyone can accept this statement,” Jesus said. “Only those whom God helps.

<sup>12</sup> Some are born as eunuchs, some have been made eunuchs by others, and some choose not to marry for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. (And then He says) Let anyone accept this who can.” (Matthew 19:11-12 NLT)

And it's interesting because I don't know whether He's talking about accept the high elevation of marriage or if He's saying accept the giving up of marriage to live single for the sake of the Kingdom and I'm inclined to say, “Yes, both.”



In ancient times, a eunuch was a castrated male whose job it was to guard the king's harem. But Jesus is using the term at least in part metaphorically here as someone who is celibate and unmarried. He says some are born to live this way, some have been made this way by others (as when the Babylonians took Jews into exile and made many of the young men eunuchs, a hero of the faith, Daniel, was most likely a eunuch), and some choose not to marry (and thus to remain celibate) for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

So now Jesus is elevating singleness for the sake of the Kingdom. This is reminiscent of Isaiah chapter 56 when the Lord God says to the eunuchs who live for Him and to please Him, He will give a name that is better even than sons and daughters. What an honor. And here in Matthew, Jesus says let anyone accept this who can.

The Apostle Paul draws out idea of singleness for the sake of the Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 7 when he tells everyone in the Church he wishes that all were like him — single. And he's not just talking about people who are in vocational ministry. He's talking to all the Christians in the Church. He's not requiring it, or commanding it, but man, I wish you were all single like me. And he gives us the reason: "those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that." "I want you to be free from anxieties to focus on pleasing the Lord, but the married man is anxious about...how to please his wife" And inverse is true, the wife is anxious about how to please her husband. But Paul is just devoted to the Lord.

Jesus too is single in His earthly ministry. He lived single, and He tells us that, in heaven, no one will marry or be given in marriage. Why? Because the Scripture tells us there's only one marriage in heaven, that of Jesus — the groom, and His bride — the Church, that's us.

Do you see how every marriage in this life is just a weak shadow, a signpost pointing to the true marriage that will happen in heaven, and these marriages will pass away and that one will stand. But marriage in this life uniquely testifies to that future glory. And the single person in this life uniquely testifies that only Jesus can bring life and only Jesus can satisfy, so I wait for Him!

Both singleness and marriage are profound gifts and we can flourish in either mode of life. But we have to understand that flourishing does not mean we do not suffer. I have been single and I am married and I can say if you get married, you will suffer. I love my wife, but she is not designed me to fulfill all my needs. She is not designed to be my god and I am not designed to be hers. If you are single, you will suffer. Everyone suffers, but not everyone suffers for what is good. And not everyone suffers well. There's a lot of ways we can suffer, but how do we suffer well when it comes to our sexuality, to

our sexual desires? You see to hunger for physical sexual expression, whether in singleness or in seasons of marriage and to not have that hunger satisfied is to suffer. That's real, that's real suffering and the temptation in that moment is to move in one of two unhealthy directions. It's either to indulge our lust, to grasp and to make ourselves fulfilled in an unhealthy way. Or to repress our sexuality, that sort of purity culture, I can't look at this, I can't talk about this, I hate this, I'm never going to allow this to be something that I consider is a part of me. That's unhealthy too.

And so if we're moving away from indulgence and moving away from repression, what else is left? And our suffering, I propose to you that we are to have a healthy integration of our sexual desires. What does that mean practically? Remember that sexual activity is a symbol that points beyond itself, so whenever we feel that draw and we're in that moment, the goal is not to indulge quickly without thinking or to repress, it is to acknowledge and look beyond that desire, to what lies beneath. I'm lonely, I long for some connection, I'm bored, I want my life to count for something, I'm so exhausted and stressed, I need rest, I'm just hungry, physically hungry, I need to eat. All of these different things are real and legitimate things and so when we look past that sexual desire to what's beneath it then we can take those things to Jesus and to the church community in a way that healthy and deeply relational. So what began with a lust that maybe wanted to burn hot and then lead to isolation and shame, instead ends with us acknowledging that, picking up the phone and calling a friend. "Hey, can we hang out tonight, watch a movie and laugh together, can we play a game and laugh together." Maybe it's I just want someone to talk, can I just share what's going on with my life. So instead this ends real connection, real connectedness, shared memories with people who care about us and care about the church. It's the love of Jesus that makes this possible.

"Life without sexual intimacy is not a deficient life. Life without Jesus is a deficient life." - Bruce B. Miller

Because Jesus is love. He is what we are looking for.

"What if, in the end, celibacy is all about love? What if the gift of celibacy is the gift of loving well, loving differently, loving in ways that are outside the purview of the married life?"

"While married people can also engage deeply in building loving churches, (one author writes) we need single men and women of profound spiritual depth who will represent Jesus to a dying world and show us how to love one another in true biblical community."

Please don't default to marriage if you are single. We should train ourselves not to look at each person we meet as a potential spouse, but as a child of

God. And whether you are talking with your kids or talking with your friend about marriage, let's not say "when" but "if". If I get married. If you get married. In the course of our life, what we need to do is stop in any given moment, God, how are you asking me to trust and obey you today? Where I am in life right now/ How can I not cling for the thing that think if only I had this, my life would be better. If only I was married, if only I wasn't marriage, my life would be better. But if instead, we say God how would you have me trust and obey you, right now, just today?

We'll explore this in greater depth next week, but I would remiss to not say at least this much now. If you consider yourself to be a gay Christian or a Christian experiencing same-sex attraction, you are not alone and you are not destined for loneliness. You are a part of this family, this church is your family, and it our collective job to answer and to help you answer and to answer with you, "God, how would you have us to trust and obey you today?" "And how can we love and support each other in that?" We are in this together.

Recently met Laurie Krieg, amazing woman, passionate about the gospel...she is gay and in a mixed-orientation marriage with her husband. Her husband is straight. She didn't go into marriage repressing her sexuality. Rather, with eyes wide open, she and her husband felt called to show people Jesus in this way. She'll be the first to tell you the challenges they face and the first to tell you about the beauty of showing people Jesus through their unique love for one another. God's not gonna call everyone to that, but He's called her.

And for gay Christians who are living single, this is your spiritual family. Spiritual kinship and deep friendships with men and women and families in the church are vital for your flourishing and for the flourishing of this community. Your unique experience and suffering and hunger and questions are not only welcome here; they are essential notes in the symphony of suffering and redemption that we as the Church compose together as we tune our hearts to King Jesus. We need each other.

Do you see that, the whole of our lives, Church, is to show people Jesus. In a polarized world that can't live in the same space what an amazing testimony marriage is to diversity in unity, pointing to the relationship and the diversity in unity that should be Christ and His church. And what an amazing testament to a give-me now, a soulless, immediate gratification culture that a single person is and who says you know what, there is one who can satisfy and I wait for Him.

What if we lived differently, Church? What if we loved one another in a way that showed Jesus to the world. And all the while, knowing Him more deeply through the way that we love one another. And in this, we find our ever-

present, deep and abiding purpose to know and to show people Jesus, the very meaning of our lives.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, there are aspects of this message that are deeply difficult and hard. We hunger, we long, we suffer. Thank you that you suffered first. Thank you that you suffered for us. And I pray that in our own suffering, we would not find ourselves alone but in good company, knowing you more fully and trusting you more deeply. May we find life in you, in real relationship and community and safety in this church, as we turn to you and trust you with our whole lives. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.