

Sermon Transcript from October, 2nd 2016
Jesus Is Love
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Today, I'm going to be talking about Jesus' love and I know sometimes, especially if you've grown up in the church, you hear that and it's kind of like, "Oh. Yeah." But, I feel like this morning, God has a new perspective, a new angle for us. So, we're going to read the Scripture and then we're going to pray and just invite the Holy Spirit to come and give us fresh ears this morning.

So, John 8:2: "At dawn he [Jesus] appeared again in the temple courts, where all 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. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They were asking him this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

"But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

"At this, 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. Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'

"'No one, sir,' she said.

"'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'"

Let's pray.

Father, I just thank You that You are hear by Your Holy Spirit this morning. I thank You that every single person in every single seat in here today is here by Your design, by Your intention. Because, Your desire is that they would know that they are loved by You. Father, I thank You, God, that You are not here to condemn us today. Lord, You're here to show us that we are Your beloved. We just welcome You, Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

So, a couple of weeks ago I was in New York City. I was there when the terrorist bomb went off just actually a few blocks away. And it was kind of a terrifying time. The city felt very fearful and stressful. A couple of days later, I was still in Manhattan. I had a meeting. After the meeting, I had a chunk of time before my plane. So, I went to a coffee shop and it was a very wet, rainy, New York day. I went to a coffee shop and it had no Wi-Fi. I was just sitting there with a nice cup of tea and my journal and preparing for this sermon knowing that I was going to be speaking about love and thinking of that in the context of the city that I was in and what had just happened and how it really feels like violence and fear are right at our doorstep all the time. It felt very tangible in that moment in New York City.

I was sitting there and I was thinking about love and I was thinking about like, "How do I even begin to approach a subject that is just so vast, so huge. How do I begin to get my hands around it? How do we feel about love? And, as I was sitting there, a song came on the radio. It was an old classic that I'm sure you're all very familiar with. It says, "I want to know what love is. I want you to show me."

Right? So, I'm sitting there and I'm thinking, "This is really kind of creepy weird. Like, here I am planning a

message about love and then 'I want to know what love is.'"

But, I stopped for a minute and I thought, "You know what? That's actually really true."

Like, we want to know what love is. Right? We want to know and we want someone to say, "Hey, this is what it looks like. I'm going to show you. I'm going to meet you in all that confusion and all that abstractness around love and I'm going to show you what love is."

And you see, love is confusing, isn't it? It's kind of somewhat elusive in some ways when you try and nail it down and say, "This is what love looks like," Or, "This is how love treats me," or, "This is how it should make me feel."

If we asked everyone in the audience today, we'd probably all have a different opinion; a different definition. We've probably all had different experiences with love. Some may be wonderful and some may be extremely disappointing. See, we're all kind of wanting that though, aren't we? We're not wanting an academic, bullet points, like, "Let's just define it." We want to know what it's like to actually experience true love. We want to feel it. We want to know what it's like to touch it.

I have a blogger that I like to follow. Her name is Hannah Brencher and she wrote this and it's kind of a lengthy quote, so I'm going to put it up. But, I feel like it kind of sums up a lot of that confusion and that wrestling with love.

She says, "Love is not some sugary, empty thing that looks surface-level pretty that fails to keep you full. If you keep meeting that sort of love, then I think maybe you're meeting an imposter; some other thing dressed up and pretending to be love. Take caution: I'm no expert. I'm not someone who's going to yell in your face and tell you about the love you deserve. I'm just going to take off my own mask and finally admit it. I've worshipped the wrong definition of love for far too long. There was a strange kind of comfort in worshipping my own definition of love. It meant it could never hurt me, control me, surprise me or wreck me. My own definition of love let me be in charge of urging, controlling, surprising and wrecking myself first. Love, to me, was this script on repeat: win people, be worthwhile, be the one that people want to love, do what it takes to please them.

"And if someone came to me and said, 'Listen, we need to borrow your definition of love. We want to print it in all the dictionaries,' then I would need to pity the world who would have to try and live inside my definition. Because, love to me was blue eyes that start looking in my direction. Love to me was begging to my own strength to try to get it all right. Love to me was hearing Scriptures like, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' and laughing as I whispered, 'That's so funny. I barely even like myself.'

"Love was promises we could not keep. Love was disappointments. Walls built to keep me safe. Love was moats around castles. It was writing notes to ghosts. It was hinging my worth on being chosen. Love is all I ever wanted and the one thing I still feel too insecure to admit that I don't want it; I need it."

Most of us could probably relate to something in that quote this morning. What Hannah is saying is we have all these different ideas, right? All these different definitions and all these experiences and a lot of them leave us disappointed. They leave us empty. They leave us self-protective and on guard and fearful. But, love is supposed to be more than disappointment. Love is supposed to make us feel treasured. Like we're special; like we're chosen; like we're adored. Love is supposed to be that way. But, rarely has this been our experience, right? Rarely have we grown up with this sense of, "I am loved and adored and chosen and wanted."

The reality is most of us can probably related more to an experience of separation than we can to connectedness. More to a sense of being unwanted and unloved and unwelcome and inadequate than we

can to feeling like we're adored and treasured for who we are. You see, when sin came into the world, it ushered in this experience for humanity that basically made separation the new norm. Right in the garden, we were there with God and we had this connectedness, this unity, this love, this unconditional love. And then sin came in and ushered in this new starting point that we're actually now born into a world where we experience separation as the norm from the get-go.

Separation from God, separation from each other, even separation within our self. So, there's this sense of something's broken, something's fractured, something's separate. And, instead of feeling love and acceptance as normal, we started to get suspicious of love and even resistant to love; second guessing the nature of God and choosing to hide behind those walls not really convinced that anyone could really love us or want us. So now, we're actually more comfortable feeling unloved than loved. And I know that's a strange thing to say and I want you to stay with me this morning, because what I'm going for is not the superficial here, guys. I'm going for your heart. I'm going for the real you. I'm going for you in those moments when things aren't going right or relationships fail and that stuff that's just down there and it's easy to be like, "That's right. No one wanted me. No one will even want me. There's nothing special about me. Nothing that's going to be chosen."

That's the stuff that I'm going for today. So, with the separation comes pain and loneliness and the sense of lostness. And that's what's familiar to us. And then what happens is somebody steps into that separation, someone steps into that pain and loneliness by choice, and His name is Jesus. He steps into that experience and now love actually looks like a person. Love looks like a person that has hands and flesh, that speaks to us and interacts with us. He steps into our pain, He steps into that separation, that experience of sin, and is present in the midst of it, in the midst of that separation. And He did that before we had anything to offer Him. Right? Before we even acknowledged Him, responded to Him, before we wanted Him, He chose to step into that experience.

Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

In The Message, it says this: "But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him."

We need that truth to sink in this morning, because some of us think that God loves us, that Jesus loves us because of the things we do. That if we do a little bit better, that if we work a little bit harder, we'll fill up that tank more. There'll be more love from God. But, what the Scripture is saying is He came before we could do anything for Him. He came before we even acknowledged Him. That's what love looks like. You see, divine love is attracted to broken things. Our humanness, we love new and shiny stuff, right? Like, I love Anthropology. I just love that store. It's so pretty. It smells so good. Some of you have no idea what I'm talking about, but you should go in. Because, I just want to live in there. Everything's new and shiny and smells good and lovely. And that's we we love, right? We love lovely things.

But you see, divine love actually loves unlovely things. It's actually attracted to broken things; broken people. And that's sometimes hard for us to get our head around, but that's who Jesus is. He comes, He steps into our separation and He says, "I want you and all of your brokenness and all of your sin. I'm actually attracted to that. I'm not repulsed by that. I'm not put off by that. I'm not deterred by that. There's something in me that's attracted to that."

And that's because Jesus is a restorer. By His nature, He redeems and restores. It's just who He is. So, He's looking for the broken things. You see, we have this idea in our head that we have to polish up and get shiny in order to come to church, and that's just not who Jesus is. He's just like, "I just want to meet you in your brokenness, in your shame, in the things that you're embarrassed about and the humiliation. I want to meet you in that place."

You see, Jesus is love, God's love, true love remains. It was risky for Jesus to step into our world. It was risky to come when we didn't want Him, when we didn't acknowledge Him. He stepped in and He took a risk with all the possibility of rejection. You see, God's love is not like the love that Hannah wrote about. It's not moats and castles. It's not self-protection. It's not at a distance. See, Jesus' love is risky. He'll step into all of your brokenness, all of the sense of like, "I don't even really want Him."

He'll step into that and say, "I still love you. I still want you."

God's love is vulnerable. He's the first one to say, "I love you."

When my husband and I – before we were married, before we were dating, we were friends. And I won't go into a long story. Our dating relationship, it's a long story. But, when we were friends, we were good friends. And I found out that my husband was interested in me and I have this gift, and it's called "blunt honesty."

So, I'm like, "I'm just going to tell him. I'm just going to tell him it's never going to happen."

Right? I mean, that's what you do. Right? So, I took him to coffee and I said, "Hey, I've heard that maybe you're interested in me and I just want to let you know it's just never going to happen."

I was kinder than that. I was. But, that's basically what happened. So, I'm sitting in this moment and I've said this and, in that moment, my husband now, Brian, could have said – Yeah. It's obvious how that turned out, right? He could have said, "Yeah. No biggie. I didn't really care anyway." Right? Or, "No. I don't have feelings for you." Or, "That's fine. It's all good." Avoided me or whatever. But, in that moment, he sat in that really awkward, vulnerable place, and he was like, "Are you sure?"

And I, at that time, was really sure. So, I kind of shut it down. But, here's the thing, guys. In that moment, he didn't avoid that vulnerability. He didn't feel that rejection and be like, "Psh. I don't care anyway."

He could have. But, he stayed in that moment. And I went home that night and you know what touched me heart and what actually was a thing that got me thinking about a relationship with him was that he didn't run away. He didn't say, "Oh, I feel rejected. Psh. I don't want you either."

He stayed in that moment and that vulnerability meant something to me. You see, in our humanness, we're all about self-protection, right? Like, we don't want to look stupid. We don't want to stay in what's uncomfortable when it comes to love. But, what touched me in that moment was that he was vulnerable and he was real and he reminded. You see, that's who Jesus is in our lives. He's the first one to come and say, "I love you. You don't want me? It's okay. I still love you. You're going to reject me? It's okay. I still want you. You're going to do all this stuff to try and prove that you're worthy of love? It's okay. I still love you."

You see, that's who Jesus is. He's the first one to put Himself out there and say that He wants you. And guys, it's not a kind of creepy, aggressive, like, "Well, I'm going to bother you," kind of thing. It's just this steadfast, remaining, vulnerable, "This is who I am. I love you, even in your brokenness, even in your bad choices, even in the relationships that keep failing, even in the striving. I still love you."

God's love remains and God's love is vulnerable. And you see, we all want that. We all want that experience, right? Where someone wants us even though we reject them and someone's consistent and someone's present. But, there's also this huge part of us that feels very suspicious of that; feels very resistant that that could actually be for us. "That's for everybody else, but it's not for us."

And there's that thread of the garden again. Suspicious, resistant, "Could God actually, really just love me just

because?"

So, here we are in John 8 and we've got this scene of this woman. And you know, this is an interesting story. There's lots of layers to this and lots of complexity to it that we don't have time to jump all into today. But, what we know is that she has been caught in the act of adultery. She alone has been brought in front of Jesus. Despite the fact that the Jewish law required that both her and the man should be brought, it's just her. Right? She is alone, she has been brought. No witnesses are mentioned. And here she is. It's like a spectacle. It's a trap. It actually says in the Scripture that it's a trap. They're just after Jesus. They didn't care about the woman. She's just a pawn. She's just part of the show. It didn't really matter about her. This was never about the law; it was never about the woman. It was about trapping Jesus.

You see, if Jesus has said, "Let her go," then they would have found Him guilty for not upholding the Law of Moses. But, if He had said, "Yes. Punish her. Stone her to death," He would have been found guilty in the hands of the Romans for encouraging this death sentence. So, we have Jesus in this bit of a quandary. But, we have a woman without any dignity, humiliated, paraded in front of a mob of men. We feel the weight of all this accusation, all this shame. This was probably the lowest moment of her life. The most humiliating, the most shameful moment.

And there's this angry mob and they have these stones. And these stones don't just represent the way that they want to kill her. They represent all the shame, all the condemnation, all the weight that she was under in that moment. We don't know what Jesus wrote on the ground. There's lots of theories and you can Google them later. But, we know whatever He wrote silenced her accusers. There's so much going on here. But, Jesus is interested in the woman. Not in her sin, not in condemning her, but in the woman. He cares for her. See, God always relates to us from a place of love. This is Jesus' default position. In that moment with that woman, He could have condemned her, He could have humiliated her. But, He didn't. He related to her from a place of love. And you see, most of us think that God relates to us from a place of judgment or condemnation or anger and we're working our way to kind of reposition Him towards loving us and wanting us. But, that's just a flat out lie.

The truth is that Jesus relates to you from a place of love first and foremost. That is His position towards you and there's literally nothing you could do to change that position. You are your most loved now than you will ever be. There's no getting more of God's love. You have it all right now in this moment. And guys, in your most shameful, humiliating, sinful moment, you still have it. He still relates to you from a place of love. But, we're hard wired to feel like we're condemned, we're separated. And this morning, what I think Jesus wants to do is just kind of shift that truth in us so that we can grab onto the fact that Jesus loves us regardless of our behavior.

There's something about these stones in this story that I couldn't get past this week as I was thinking and praying about this. You see, the stones don't just represent their attempt to kill her, they illustrate all the reasons she did not deserve compassion and love. All the accusations, all the reasons she'd failed, all the reasons why she should be punished. And yet, by the end of the story, the stones were completely powerless. They had no more power over her.

What I love about this chapter – it's really interesting and you can go check it out later – is it opens with that Scripture we read where the mob is trying to stone the woman and it actually ends with the mob wanting to stone Jesus. Isn't that such a prophetic image of the Gospel? That here we are deserving all the stones, all the condemnation, all the judgment of our sin. And yet, Christ steps in and takes our place to the point that those stones are powerless in our lives. You see, the truth is the enemy is intent on destroying us. He'd love to stone you with the accusation, with the condemnation, with the shame. But, God's love operates in truth. The devil will always call you by your sin and your shame. But, God will call you by a new name.

He will always call you by your sin and your shame. And it's not like you're going to hear the little voice of the

devil being like, "Hey, so and so," but it's what we call ourselves, right? It's that lie we buy into. "I am defined by this thing that I did. I am defined by this thing that I didn't do."

He will call you by your sin, by your shame, by your lowest moment. But, Jesus will enter in and say, "No. I'm going to call you by a new name."

You see, the end of this Scripture, He says, "Hey, no one's condemned you? Well, go and leave your life of sin."

I don't think He was saying, "Go leave your life of sin. Because, next time, I don't think I'm going to be here to rescue you."

Right? And I also don't think He was saying, "Yeah. No big deal. It's fine. Whatever."

I think what He was actually doing was saying, "Hey, go and leave your life of sin, because you're not who you think you are. I am calling you into a new identity. I am calling you into a kingdom that's different. You are not defined by what you do. You are not judged and condemned by what you do. I'm calling you by a new name. I'm calling you beloved. I'm calling you chosen. I'm calling you treasured. You might see yourself this way, but let me tell you who I see you as."

You see, Jesus doesn't relate to you by the stuff that you've done or the things that you think you are. He relates to you how He sees you. Loved and beloved and treasured and chosen. This is a new identity. Love calls us by a new name, and this is your unshakable identity. You are God's beloved. Jesus says, "I choose you. I choose every single one of you."

Now, that suspicious, cynical part of us goes, "Yeah. If everyone's chosen, then no one's really chosen."

Right? Like, "If everyone's special, then no one's really special."

I mean, how many of us like that kind of [garbled] when we start talking about being chosen? But, here's the thing about God's Kingdom that's different. Our chosenness in the Kingdom of God, our belovedness, it's not a comparison game. See, when we start thinking about chosen, we start remembering junior high and high school when we're in sports teams, right? This is certainly my experience. And you're waiting there hoping to be chosen first for the team and you're not. Like, that was my experience. I was never chosen first for the team. And when someone else was chosen, it meant that I was rejected, that I wasn't as good as that person, that I wasn't as wanted as that person. There's something about us. We need to try and stand out so we can stand out in the crowd and be chosen and be wanted.

But, being chosen in God's Kingdom is different. Here's a quote from Henry Nouwen's book, "Life of the Beloved." And guys, if I could just encourage you one thing after this message it's to get this book. It will change your life. So small, so easy to read, so good.

It says, "When love chooses, it chooses with perfect sensitivity for the unique beauty of the chosen one. And it chooses without making anyone else feel excluded. To be chosen does not mean others are rejected."

You see, God chooses you and He's able to choose you because every single one of you is unique. It's incomparable. You see, we grow up and live in a world where everything is compared. We're compared to our coworkers or our friends; our peers. But you see, in God's Kingdom, you are so unique He chooses you because He wants you. In your uniqueness, in your specialness. And then He chooses the person next to you, because that person is so different. There's not this sense of like, "Mmm... who's better?"

Both are so unique; so wanted. And that's how God feels about every single one of us. Henry says, "From the

moment we claim the truth of being the beloved, we're faced with the call to become who we are."

You see, we're working our way out of something here, guys. It's like God's saying, "You're beloved. Now, become the beloved."

But, we've got this whole kingdom that we're living in, this worldly kingdom that's just kind of saying to us, "There's nothing special about you. You're not really wanted. You're not really loved."

So, we're trying to work our way out of what we've been burst into in humanity and this idea of being separated from God, work our way into this sense of, "I'm beloved and I'm loved just as I am."

So, we have this tension. We have this tension that you come to church and you hear a message like this and it literally pushes up inside of you against all the insecurity and all the reasons why you're not chosen and you're not loved. See, for most of us, this new identity as the beloved feels like a dream, doesn't it? It feels like a fantasy and with dreams things feel so far away. And yet, the reality is we're going to walk out of church this morning and we're going to go back into a world that feels very real. And what our boss says to us and what our spouse says to us and what our friends say to us, that feels so real. This moment, this truth, can almost begin to feel like a dream.

So, we have to do something with that. We have to do something with the sense that that feels like a dream, but I'm still so hungry for love. I am still so desperate to love. And it's not like – I mean, maybe if you're really emo you do this. Like, you sit and you're journaling like, "I'm so desperate for love."

Like, maybe some of us do that. But, probably most of us aren't thinking this way. But, it's like this little thing, "tick, tick, tick, tick, tick," inside of us that's driving us. We're so hungry to be chosen. We're so hungry to be wanted. We're so desperate. But, God's sense of us being the beloved, that feels like a dream. So, what do we do in that space between? Well, we start pursuing other ways to feel loved. We take matters back into our own hands just like the garden. Just live Eve. There's this sense of like, "Well, I feel like God's maybe untrustworthy. What He's saying is not true. Maybe He's not loving. I don't know. I'm going to take matters into my own hands."

And we still do the same thing today. We're still taking matters into our own hands and saying, "I can find this intimacy a different way. I can shortcut it. I'll find my own way there. So, we've built these identities that work for us. We've built these patterns of behavior that work for us. Some of us are on the performance treadmill, aren't we? We're working really, really hard. We're desperate to stand out. We're trying to please our parents and our peers. We're making good grades in school. We're having the best jobs. We're having these incredible lives on social media that just look beautiful. Everyone wants to be like us and that feels really good. We're holding down a really challenging career. We're volunteering at church. We're killing our self just to hide our flaws. Image, image, image. Everything's saving face. Never getting too real. No weaknesses. "I don't need your help. I got this."

"I got this" is our mantra of like, "I can do this. I can perform. And when I do, what I get back feeds this deficit inside of me."

When I perform really, really well, someone's going to say, "Good job. Wow. You're incredible."

Oh, thank God. That just feeds that black hole. If I perform, people will love me. I'm the good one. I'm the capable one. I'm the spiritual one. And we've built our personalities around receiving approval. It's like a dancing monkey in a circus. We're always working. Always performing. But, it's not satisfying. It's not meeting that need inside of us. We're still aching. For some of us, it's pleasure. Whatever dulls the sense of emptiness, right? Substances, sex, relationships, late night texting with men or women that we don't want, but we want them to want us. Quick flings, porn, highs, double lives, thrills, parties, kicks. More circus, but this time you're

the ringmaster. You're in control. Everyone's doing what you want them to do to feed you; to feed this empty place inside of you. Using and abusing people and our own bodies. Looking for ways that we think love is supposed to make us feel. That high of like, "Oh, yeah. I'm loved. I'm wanted."

When that text comes in. "Okay. Great. I'm wanted. I don't really care for that person. But, that person wants me."

That feeds something inside of us that's so hungry. It's just these cycles of pain, disappointment, trying to get love, feeling dissatisfied, suspicious of love. We just have no idea how to do love, do we? And then we get to this place and Shauna Niequist, an author, calls it this: "In a thread of violence," where inside of us we begin to reject our own self. Now it's the sense of like, "I can't get love anywhere. It's not satisfying me. What's wrong with me? What's wrong with me that I'm not wanted? What's wrong with me that I'm not loved? What's wrong with me?"

And it begins to build this world of self-hatred, self-harm, suicide. All those stones like the woman was facing. These big rocks. It's like we live under them and they just keep pounding, don't they? They just keep pounding on our lives. Sometimes, we're even pounding them on ourselves. Because, deep down, we all believe that we're loved for what we do and we can never do enough. But, Jesus. But, Jesus steps into all of that stuff and He says, "I still want you. I still want you."

See, Jesus sees all of that. It's not hidden from Him and He's not repulsed by our efforts to find this counterfeit sense of intimacy and love. He steps into that sense of separation. He steps into that brokenness and says, "I'm right here."

And this morning, I feel like God wants to say to us in this room, "I am right here and I am not leaving. And all your efforts to be that dancing monkey in the circus to get the love and get the approval, all those efforts to dull that pain and that ache, I still love you. I still want you."

Scripture is filled with God's position towards us.

Jeremiah 21: "I've drawn you with everlasting love and unfailing kindness."

Micah 7: "He delights in mercy and unfailing love."

Zephaniah 3: "The Lord will take great delight in you."

This is His position towards you. He delights in you and calls you His beloved. Henry Nouwen says, "As long as being the beloved is little more than a beautiful thought or a lofty idea that hangs about my head to keep me from becoming depressed, nothing really changes. What is required is to become the beloved in the commonplaces of my daily existence and bit by bit to close the gap that exists between what I know myself to be and the countless specific realities of everyday life. Becoming the beloved is pulling the truth revealed to me from above down into the ordinariness of what I am. In fact, thinking of, talking about and doing from hour to hour."

What he's saying here is that we can talk about this in church and it's this lofty idea that sounds really great and we can "rah-rah-rah," but it doesn't change anything until we pull it down into the ordinary parts of our life. When we're waking up in the morning, when we're checking our email, when we're on social media, when we're at work, when we're raising our kids. These ordinary, mundane places of our life, the beloved has to enter in and redefine us in those moments. This isn't something we get right now and then we just walk into this cloud of belovedness. This is something that we're going to work into our lives to become the beloved in every moment. And this is really hard work, guys. Because, there's a lot of places in our lives where we don't

feel very beloved; where we don't feel very wanted. Places of sin, places of shame, places of lostness. So, this is a challenge that we face today.

See, you can't tweak the performance behaviors and you can't tweak the ways that we seek pleasure. We have to totally give those up. This is a life transformation. This is that new identity that Jesus is calling us into today. And I just want to stop for a moment and ask you to consider: where are you attempting to just tweak those behaviors, to just be more moral or more good?

See, this morning, I think Jesus wants us to exchange them. He's offering us something brand new that will change our lives and will change the way we feel about ourselves and will change the way we relate to other people. We're going to go into a time of response in a moment and we're going to do it a little bit differently today. In a moment, I'm actually going to ask you to respond very specifically. Now, I know that some of you, as soon as I said that, fear gripped your heart. So, I just want to say to just calm down and stay with me. Okay?

This morning, I feel like Jesus wants us to respond very specifically. Because, there is an exchange that needs to happen here this morning that's very real and needs to be very intentional. See, some of us relate to this. We've been really disappointed by love. We've been left really dissatisfied and empty by love, however we define that; whatever our experience has been with that. And Jesus wants to meet you. Jesus wants to meet us this morning. You see, sometimes when I talk about love, people say, "Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. Give me the bullet points of how I become the beloved."

There are no bullet points. It's an encounter with Jesus and an ongoing encounter with Jesus. It's a life of intimacy that we nurture and it begins in moments like this where we respond to Jesus and it's continued by pulling it into every moment of our lives. This morning, some of you may be really disappointed. There may be some of you that relate to that whole idea of moats and castles and self-protection and you know you've just built so many walls that it's like Jesus can't even get in to wrap His arms around you because you're just like, "I just can't go there again. I can't be disappointed again. I can't be left feeling empty again."

Some of us in this room are driven to perform. It's like we're hard-wired. We've been that way since we were about two years old. We're just performing. We're working. We want to show everyone that we're worthy. "Look at me. I can do this. I'm capable. Approve of me. Please just approve of me."

And this morning, guys, God wants to break that off of our lives because it's such an exhausting place to be in, isn't it, where you're working for love constantly. Some of us are here today and we've been seeking pleasure and some of us feel intense shame about that. See, the beautiful thing about the adulteress woman that's brought before Jesus, that was her most humiliating and shameful place and Jesus entered right in and said, "I don't condemn you."

There was so much love available for that woman in that moment. This morning, I feel that some of us are really heavy laden with sexual sin and shame attached to that and I feel like this morning Jesus wants to say to you, "I don't condemn you. I love you. I still want you."

This morning, as we were praying in pre-service prayer, I just felt like the Lord gave me a word that there's someone here, maybe more than one person here, and you're struggling with the weight of having had an abortion or maybe you're a man here that was complicit to an abortion. And I feel like the Lord wants to say to you, "I'm not condemning you. I love you."

And this morning, what God wants to do with our shame is He just wants to life it off of us. He wants to make those stones powerless in our lives. And we have the opportunity to respond to Him this morning and receive that. And, in case you haven't heard me say it, I'm going to say it again: there is not condemnation in this room today. Jesus is positioned towards you from a place of love. He's not looking to stone you. And if you feel

stones, it's not Jesus throwing them at you. See, the devil is a liar and he's an accuser. And some of you this morning, even as I've shared those things, it's like your hearts racing and your palms are sweaty and you know that the Holy Spirit is just pressing on you right now and you feel afraid.

And I want to speak right into that fear of man this morning. Jesus loves you and He can free you from that. But, you're going to have to respond and say "yes" to Him today. And some of us are in this room today and we are just dried up. We're just like, "I've been coming to church, I've been reading my Bible, I've been doing this thing maybe for decades."

And you are just so desperate for a fresh touch of the love of God in your life. I can remember a very specific moment when I was 16 years old and I was in church and it was literally this kind of scenario where someone encouraged me to respond. And guys, I was so sweaty and my heart was pounding and I feel like I was shaking. And I ran out to the bathroom and I looked in the mirror and I was like, "It's now or never. I have to deal with the stuff in my life. I have to respond."

And I walked back in and I walked to the front of the church and I had such an encounter with the love of God that literally, the next day, I walked around school and I thought, "Oh, boy. This is a whole new world. I'm seeing through a whole new lens; a whole new perspective."

That's what happens when we encounter Jesus. And finally, one more word this morning that I felt like the Lord said that there are those of us here that have been in relationships, specifically marriages, where we've been left abandoned. Someone walked away from us and left us abandoned and we feel like that's always going to be how it is and that you'll get to that place and someone will just say, "I'm done," and walk away. And I feel like this morning what Jesus wants to say is, "I will never leave you. I will never abandon you. I am here for you."

So, what we're going to do is I'm going to have the worship team come back up and in a moment I'm going to ask you guys to stand if you relate to any of those things. Now, I know this is out of the box for us here at Reality and we don't normally do this, but sometimes when we respond with our bodies, it breaks something in the spirit. It just says, "You know what? I'm in. I'm all in. This feels risky and this feels vulnerable, but that's what love is and I'm going to get up and I'm going to respond and say, 'Jesus, I need this. I'm so desperate.'"

And some of us are going to experience tears. We're just going to feel the tears coming. And transformation happens through tears. I don't know how that happens. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. But, don't feel like you have to wipe those away. Don't feel like you have to hide them. Let the Holy Spirit just come and meet you. Some of you, as you're standing there, you're going to be hearing the music and you're going to have words or images come to mind. The Lord just wants to speak truth over you this morning. Just soak that in. Just receive it. Some of you need to imagine those stones being lifted off of you and pushed away. Some of you, I feel like God wants to break condemnation over your life, accusation over your life today.

So, we're going to take a moment and, as they begin to play, I want to pray over you this morning if you feel like you related to any of those things that I shared at the end there. And as you're sitting here and thinking, "Oh, should I stand? Should I not?"

If you feel like you should stand, you should probably stand. Right? Now, the lights are really dark and I know that we're always thinking like, "Oh, what if my CG sees me? What if this person sees me? What will they think?"

You know what, guys? Let's be in this spirit like, "I don't care what anybody thinks today."

It's just you and Jesus right now in this moment. It's just you and Jesus because He wants to come and meet you. He wants you to encounter Him in a powerful way. So, if you related to any of those things this morning, I want to ask you to stand up. Go ahead and be brave. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus.

If you feel like you need to stand and you're like, "Oh, it's too late now. They'll see I'm standing late," I want you to stand up. Like, don't worry about what anybody thinks about this this morning.

Jesus, I am so thankful that You are here and that You are not a God that condemns us. Father, I want to pray for every single person in this room today that stood, that's saying "yes" to You in this moment. Lord, I want to specifically pray for those in this room that are struggling with the condemnation of abortion, whatever their involvement has been. And I just want to speak over you this morning that Jesus says He doesn't condemn you. He's not weighing you down. In fact, He wants to life that weight off of you this morning and He wants to wrap His arms around you and say, "I love you. I still want you. I accept you."

Come into this identity that you are believed. You have not disqualified yourself. You are not going to miss out for the rest of your life. I feel like the Lord is saying that some of you feel like, "Because of this thing, I'm never going to get this other thing. I'm never going to get this relationship. I'm never going to feel special."

And the Lord's saying, "That is a lie over your life."

And we break that this morning in Jesus' name. Lord, we pray for those here that stood because they're just feeling dry. They're feeling like it's been so long since I felt the love of Jesus in my life in a really tangible way. And I speak to your hearts and your souls this morning and I say, "Come alive. Be awakened. Receive the love of Jesus this morning."

For those of you who are standing because you feel the weight and the regret of sexual sin in your life, the Lord says, "I don't condemn you. I love you."

He says He's got a new thing for you. He cherishes you. He adores you. For those of you in the room that have been left disappointed by broken relationships, I break the spirit of abandonment over your life in Jesus' name. Break the spirit of rejection. For those of you in this room that can relate to feeling hating yourself, self-harming, eating disorders, thoughts of suicide, in Jesus' name I just break that off of you this morning.

Lord, would You come and meet us? If you want to just lift your hands up and just begin to quietly say to the Lord, "Lord, I want You. I need You. Come meet me. I'm so desperate for Your love."

Jesus, we need You. We can't do this without You. We love You, Jesus. Come and meet us in a powerful way today, God. You are so faithful. Thank You, Lord.