

## HE SAID WHAT?!?!

Title: Part 4 – “What Grace Says Next”

Date: May 3, 2026

As we continue in this moment of worship and prepare our hearts for God’s Word, let’s take a minute and make some space for God to work in our lives. One of the practices we often incorporate into our services is a chance to pause and give God all our cares and worries. For some of you this might be the first time you have really done this in a few days so let’s pause now and give God EVERYONE and EVERYTHING. Close your eyes and just say that under your breath, “God I give you everyone and everything...” Now as the band plays softly just take a few moments and give God all the things and all the people on your heart. Lovingly detach yourself from the cares of this world.

### [PRAYER TIME]

Hey before you grab a seat take a :30 seconds and say “Hi” to some people around you. While everyone here in the house is saying “Hi” to each other I want to say “Hi” if you are joining us online or on our app, thank you for spending some time with us! We consider you a part of our church family so let us know how we can pray for you or serve you—we’d love to walk alongside you in any way that we can.

Well, happy May! It won’t be long until school is out now. How many of you have some kids in your house who are ready for summer to begin TODAY! That’s my house right now for sure.

If you have a Bible with you today or on your phone, let’s head to **John chapter 8**. If you don’t have a Bible, no worries, we’ll put everything up on the screens. But I’m going to ask you to do something a little different today. When we read this passage, I want you to put yourself in it. Don’t read it like a story that happened to someone else 2,000 years ago. Read it like it’s happening to you. Right now. In this room. Got it?

Here we go John 8, starting in verse 2:

<sup>2</sup> At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. <sup>3</sup> The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup> and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” <sup>6</sup> They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. <sup>7</sup> 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, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” <sup>8</sup> Again

he stooped down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” <sup>11</sup> “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Can you enter into that scene, can you get a feel for the emotions, so much to unpack today.

BUT to get us all back in the flow, we are in week 4 of a collection of messages called “**He Said What?**” where we have been trying to get to know the real Jesus in His own words.

Week 1, Jesus asked the only question that matters: “Who do you say I am?” Week 2, Jesus said something amazing or insane, He said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” We discovered that many of us have been looking at the wrong God, right? Then last week, Jesus diagnosed the thing that keeps us stuck: spiritual comfort. We prefer the old wine of religion because we're afraid of the new thing Jesus is doing. If you missed any of those I can't encourage you enough to go on our app and website and get caught up on what you missed... Has this been helping anyone get to know Jesus a little better?

SO, today we are going to dive into what Jesus says to a woman in the worst moment of her life that holds two things in perfect tension—and if you can receive both of them today, it might change what your faith looks like moving forward.

Because here is what I know about this room—about those of you watching on a screen right now—the number one thing that keeps people from experiencing the freedom Jesus offers is not intellectual doubt. It's not theological confusion. It's not even willful rebellion. It's shame. Plain and simple. People are stuck because they're convinced they are what they did. They've built an identity around their worst moment, and they can't see past it. And the tragedy is, they think God sees them the exact same way.

BUT what if He doesn't? What if the way Jesus handles the worst version of you is nothing like what you expected? Today I want to preach a message I am calling:

## **What Grace Says Next**

Because it does say something next.

SO, here's where I want to begin. I think there are two kinds of people from our text AND this message is going to land differently depending on where you sit.

The first group is the people who are carrying something. Something you did. Something done to you. Something you've never told anyone. Maybe it happened last week. Maybe it happened twenty years ago. But it's still there. It's heavy. And you've been carrying it for so long that you've started to believe that this thing—this failure, this shame, this secret, this sin—is who you ARE. It's not just something you did. In your mind, it has become your identity.

And you are not alone in that. The American Psychological Association has noted that shame is one of the most powerful and least discussed emotions in modern culture. We'll talk about anxiety. We'll talk about depression. We'll post about those on social media. But shame? Shame stays hidden. Which is ironic because hiding is exactly what makes it stronger. Shame grows in the dark. It feeds on secrecy. The less you talk about it, the more power it has over you.

The second group is the people holding stones. And you might not even realize you're holding one. You might think you're righteous. You might think you're just “standing for truth” or “holding someone accountable.” But if you're honest, there's someone in your life—maybe even someone in this room—that you've already sentenced in your head. You've written them off. You know what they did. And in your mind, they deserve whatever they get. You've become judge, jury, and executioner and you didn't even notice it happen.

Both groups need to hear what Jesus says today. Because He doesn't just speak to the woman on the ground caught in adultery. He speaks to every single person in the scene. And the order in which He speaks makes a huge difference because we get this backwards so many times.

SO, let's dive into this. Here's the first big takeaway truth I want to give you:

### **1. The voices that condemn you are not the voice that defines you.**

As we get to know the real Jesus in His own words I think this will become clear, the voices that condemn you are not the voice that defines you.

The setup of this story is critical. You have to understand what's happening beneath the surface because it is way more sinister than a group of religious people being mean. Here, let's go back to verse 3 and read it again:

<sup>3</sup> The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup> and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was **CAUGHT IN THE ACT** of adultery.

Think about that for a second. Caught in the act. That means they were watching. Or they set it up. Either way, this was orchestrated. And here's the dead giveaway—where's the man? Right? Last I checked it takes two to tango. Levitical law, Deuteronomy 22:22, is clear: BOTH parties are to be brought forward. Both. Not just the woman. If they caught her “in the act,” they caught him too. But he's nowhere to be found.

Meaning this was never about justice. This was never about the Law. This was a trap, verse 6 says so plainly. They were using her. This woman was a pawn in a theological chess match designed to corner Jesus. They didn't care about her sin. They didn't care about her soul. They cared about winning an argument. She was a prop. A tool. A means to an end.

And they dragged her—and I want to be sensitive here, but I also want you to feel this—they dragged her from wherever she was, probably barely clothed if at all, into the temple courts, into the most public place they could find, and they made her stand before the group. Exposed while they were covered. Named while the man went free.

Can we just stop and acknowledge how evil this is? They weaponized her worst moment. They took the most vulnerable, humiliating experience of her life and turned it into a public spectacle for their own agenda. And if you've ever been the person whose worst moment got broadcasted, whose mistake went public, whose failure got whispered about in circles you thought were safe, then you know exactly what she's feeling right now. It's not just guilt. It's shame. And shame is a different animal.

I've mentioned her before, but Brené Brown has spent decades studying this distinction. She says guilt says, “I did something bad.” Shame says, “I AM bad.” Guilt is about behavior. Shame is about identity. And Brown's research shows that shame is positively correlated with addiction, depression, violence, aggression, suicide—basically every destructive outcome you can imagine. Guilt, on the other hand, is inversely correlated with those things. Meaning guilt can actually be healthy. It's a check engine light. It tells you something needs to be addressed. But shame? Shame doesn't correct you. It crushes you.

SO, this woman isn't just feeling guilty for what she did. She IS her sin at this moment. She's been reduced to it. Her entire identity has been collapsed into one act, and every voice around her is confirming it. That's what shame does. It takes the worst thing about you and makes it the ONLY thing about you.

BUT now look at what Jesus does in the middle of all this. Verse 7:

**7 But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.**

He bends down and starts to write on the ground! This honestly is one of those moments as you are reading the Gospels that make you scratch your head. Even when you look at the original language of this, you don't get any more nuance. So, nobody knows for sure what He wrote or why.

Some scholars, including the early church father Jerome, suggest He may have been writing the sins of the accusers. Imagine standing around all amped up to trap Jesus—thinking you have the moral high ground—and then He draws an arrow at you and writes your darkest secret sin. That would change the mood, amen? Others connect it to a prophecy in Jeremiah 17:13 that says: “Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust.” Some contemporary scholars argue Jesus was following a Roman legal custom where a judge would write down a sentence or a charge before speaking it aloud. By writing it first, Jesus was assuming the role of the true Judge, signaling that He—not the mob—held authority over the situation. On a purely human level, some suggest Jesus was simply buying time and praying to the Father about how He should handle this. Whatever He wrote, it was devastating enough to make ALL of them leave.

But before He writes, He BENDS DOWN. Don't miss this. The woman is likely on the ground. She's been thrown there. The Pharisees are standing over her. And Jesus—the only sinless person in the room, the only one with any right to throw a stone—gets low. He puts Himself at her level. He doesn't tower over her like her accusers do. He gets down in the dirt with her.

If you missed week 2 we said that if you want to see God and know what He is like then just look at Jesus, so watch this pattern. Jesus bends down, He gets low. Then He stands up and faces the accusers. But then He bends down again, He goes back to her level. Then He stands up again and this time everyone's gone. So, two times He gets low with her. Two times He rises up for her. Before He ever speaks a word to this woman, His body language is preaching a sermon. He's saying, “I'm with you. Not them. You!”

BUT also notice that when He stands up, look at where He is. He's standing between her and them. He is physically shielding her from the very people trying to destroy her. The God of the universe uses His own body as a barrier between a broken woman and the voices that want to crush her.

Come on, someone here today suffering in shame needs to feel this! This is the One True God; this is what He does! This is what He is like! Amen?

SO, now Jesus drops the line that clears the room. Rest of verse 7 now:

When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Most people read that as a moral gut check. “Nobody's perfect, so you can't judge.” But it's actually deeper than that. Under Deuteronomy 17:7, in a capital punishment case, the witnesses—the ones who saw the crime—were legally required to throw the first stone. They had to start it. So, Jesus isn't just saying “check your hearts.” He's actually enforcing the Law MORE strictly than they are. “You want to use the Law? Let's use the Law. The witnesses go first. Which one of you is clean enough to start this?”

Verse 9 now:

<sup>9</sup> At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, [because they had the most to hide, right] until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. [Then here is the beauty of Jesus, what makes the Gospels so powerful in the first century and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, verse 10] <sup>10</sup> Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

Before Jesus says a single word about her sin or her future, He makes her LOOK UP and NOTICE that the voices of condemnation are gone. The stones are on the ground. The crowd has dispersed. Every accuser has walked away. And Jesus doesn't just tell her they're gone. He makes her SEE it for herself.

AND if I can be pastoral for a moment, some of you are carrying stones that people dropped years ago. The people who shamed you have moved on with their lives. They're not even thinking about you anymore. But you're still standing in the temple courts replaying their words. Still hearing voices that stopped speaking a long time ago. And Jesus is asking you the same question: “Where are your accusers? Look around. Has no one condemned you?”

Maybe it was a parent who said you'd never amount to anything. Maybe it was an ex who told you no one would ever love you. Maybe it was a so-called friend. Maybe it was a church. MAYBE it was your own voice. That internal narrator that replays the failure every time you try to move forward.

Whoever it was, wherever it came from, those voices have no authority over your identity! Not then! Not now! Not ever! Because there is only One voice in the universe qualified to define you. And that voice just said, “Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?”

The voices that condemned you are not the voice that defines you. AND... number 2:

**2. Grace doesn't ignore what you've done; it refuses to let it define who you are.**

I want you to see this. Grace doesn't ignore what you've done; it refuses to let it define who you are. Grace isn't Jesus walking around covering His eyes to sin like it never happened. No! Jesus has her look around; no one is left to condemn her. He looks her in the eyes waiting for her response, verse 11:

**"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared.**

Now, this does NOT mean Jesus is saying what she did was OK. He's not winking at sin. He's not being permissive. He's not saying, "No big deal, everybody makes mistakes, you do you." We'll get to that in a minute. But before He addresses the sin, He addresses the shame. Before He calls her forward, He establishes that she is SAFE with Him. Before He gives her a new assignment, He gives her a new identity.

See here is what Jesus knew:

***You cannot call someone to holiness until you've first established that they are safe with you.***

Write that down. Underline it. Memorize it. Because that is a principle every parent, every spouse, every pastor, every leader, every friend on this planet needs to understand. Safety before standards. Grace before expectations. "I'm not going to destroy you" always comes before "now let me help you change."

This is why so many marriages are stuck. One spouse is demanding change from the other spouse who doesn't feel safe enough to be honest about what's actually going on. You're leading with standards instead of safety. You're demanding behavioral change from someone who hasn't been given relational grace. It doesn't work. It has never worked. It will never work. Jesus shows us a better way.

And parents, can I speak to you for a second? This goes for your kids too. When your teenager comes to you with the thing they're ashamed of, what comes out of your mouth first will determine whether they ever come to you again. If the first thing they hear is condemnation, they'll spend the rest of their lives hiding. If the first thing they hear is, "You are safe with me, and I'm not going anywhere..." THEN you can have the conversation about what needs to change. The order matters. Grace first. Always grace first.

This principle is why I believe the local church should be the safest place on the planet for broken people. Not safe meaning we don't talk about sin. Safe meaning you can bring your mess here and not get beat to death. You can walk into this building carrying the worst thing you've ever done and hear the voice of Jesus say, "I don't condemn you." If a church isn't doing that, it's not doing what Jesus did! Period. Full stop.

Brennan Manning (which if you have never read *The Ragamuffin Gospel* you really need to) but he spent his whole life trying to get people to understand this. He wrote:

"Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion."

That's what Jesus is doing here. He's not defining her by her adultery. He's not defining her by the worst five minutes of her life. He's defining her by His posture toward her. "Neither do I condemn you." You are not what they called you. You are not your sin.

Some of you have been living under condemnation for years. And I need you to hear me, condemnation is not from God. Conviction is from God. Those are two very different things, and you need to learn to tell the difference. Conviction says, "This behavior doesn't match who you really are in Christ." Condemnation says, "You're garbage and you'll never change." Conviction points you toward the exit. Condemnation locks the door. Conviction builds a bridge. Condemnation burns it. The Holy Spirit convicts. The enemy condemns.

The Apostle Paul says it clearly in Romans 8:1:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So, come on, if Jesus—the only sinless person who ever lived—looked at a woman caught in the very act of sin and said, "I don't condemn you," then who in the world are you to condemn yourself? Who told you that you're too far gone? Who told you God is done with you? Who told you there's no coming back from what you did? Because it wasn't Jesus! That voice is not from Him!

Yes, grace doesn't ignore what you've done; BUT it refuses to let it define who you are. Last one:

**3. Real grace doesn't just free you from your past; it frees you for your future.**

AND this is so huge! Because if you look at verse 11, if Jesus had ONLY said "Then neither do I condemn you," this passage would still be one of the most powerful in all of Scripture. But He didn't stop there. He adds eight more words, look at it, this is the one-liner for today:

Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

These eight words are just as important as the first six words, because without them, you've got cheap grace. You've got a Jesus who pats people on the head and sends them back to the same mess that destroyed their souls. AND that's not grace. That's actually what we call **enabling**.

But again, the order matters. Jesus doesn't say "leave your life of sin" first and then "I don't condemn you." The order is grace first, then calling. Freedom first, then direction. Identity first, then behavior. "You're safe with me" first, then "now go live like the person you actually are."

And to be honest this is the tension that the church has been wrestling with for 2,000 years. And, most of us fall off on one side or the other. There are churches and Christians who are ALL grace, no truth. Come as you are, stay as you are, nothing needs to change, God is cool with everything, He just wants you to be happy. BUT that's not what Jesus does here, is it?

AND there are also churches and Christians who are ALL truth, no grace. Shape up or ship out. Get right or get out. Performance is the price of admission. AND that's also not what Jesus does here.

NO! Jesus holds both in perfect tension. In one hand: "Neither do I condemn you." Radical, scandalous, undeserved grace. In the other hand: "Go and sin no more." Holy, loving, empowering expectation. And He doesn't drop either one. He holds them together because real love always does.

Grace without expectation is permissiveness. Expectation without grace is legalism. Jesus is neither. He's something the world has never seen—a love so deep it accepts you completely as you are AND a love so strong it absolutely refuses to leave you where it found you.

Jesus says, "GO!" That's a commissioning word. That's a sending word. Jesus isn't just forgiving her. He's releasing her. He's saying, "You have a life to live. You have a purpose. What happened in the temple courts today is not the end of your story. It's the turning point. Now GO."

And "leave your life of sin" isn't punishment. It's freedom! He's saying, "That pattern you were in? That cycle that brought you here? That thing that's been running your life and ruining your relationships and stealing your peace? You don't have to go back to it. You're not trapped in it. I've just demonstrated that the people who condemned you don't have power over you anymore. The stones are on the ground. So why would you go back and pick them up?"

Come on, somebody is hearing this today and the chains are coming off! You've been going back to the same sin, the same cycle, the same destructive pattern because you thought that's all you were! You thought you couldn't change because you ARE the mistake! But Jesus says you are NOT the mistake! You MADE a mistake! There's a difference! And today He says neither do I condemn you—now GO! Go live! Go be free! Go be who you were always meant to be before shame rewrote your story and told you that you couldn't!

The same Jesus who bends down in the dirt with you is the same Jesus who stands up and sends you out with a new assignment! He doesn't just rescue you FROM something. He rescues you FOR something! Your past is forgiven, yes. But your future? Your future is commissioned! You have somewhere to go! You have something to do! You have a life to live that is defined not by what you've done but by what HE has declared over you!

The great English preacher Charles Spurgeon once said:

“Where he cannot destroy, Satan's object is to worry. He does not like to see God's people happy... if he can make them hang their harps on the willows, and go about with miserable faces, he reckons he has done his work very completely.”

Church, the enemy knows your potential. He knows what you could become. And that's exactly why he's been using shame to keep you down. To keep you going about with “miserable faces.” Because a person freed from shame is a person the enemy can't control. A person who knows they're not condemned is a person who will get up off the temple floor, leave their life of sin, and go change the world.

This isn't about just feeling better about yourself. This is about stepping into the life God designed you for—a life the enemy has been trying to keep you from through the weapon of shame. And today, Jesus disarms that weapon in His own words: “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”

SO, if you're someone who has been carrying shame, maybe you walked into this room today with something heavy on your chest, something you've never told anyone, something that wakes you up in the middle of the night, I want you to hear the voice of Jesus today. Not the voice of your accuser. Not the voice of the people in your past. Not the voice in your own head that replays the failure on loop. The voice of Jesus. And He says: “Neither do I condemn you.”

He's not ignoring your sin. He's not saying it doesn't matter. But He refuses to let it be the last word on your life! You are more than your worst moment! You are more than your secret! You are more than what they called you! And if you want to hear a different voice

today—one that knows everything about you and still says, “You're not condemned”—Jesus is speaking. Right now. In this room. You just need to listen!

SO, here's my challenge for you this week. Ask yourself two questions. First:

***Where have I been extending condemnation instead of grace?***

Is there someone in your life you've written off? Someone you've sentenced in your head? Jesus dropped His stone. So, have you dropped yours? Second:

***Where have I been offering cheap grace without any call to grow?***

Have you been enabling someone by never speaking truth because you're afraid of the conflict? Have you confused love with silence? Jesus didn't just say “you're not condemned.” He also said, “go and sin no more.” Real love offers both. This week, have one honest conversation with someone where you offer them what Jesus offered: safety AND truth. Grace AND expectation. A hug AND a challenge. That's how Jesus loves. And that's how He's calling us to love.

Next week is Mother's Day. And we're looking at another woman who was criticized by everyone in the room. And Jesus' response, what He said about what she did, might be the most beautiful sentence He ever spoke. Moms, you especially are not going to want to miss next Sunday so bring your people.

But for now, I want you to sit here for a moment. In fact, everyone close your eyes and take a deep breath...

Picture the scene. The temple courts are quiet now. The accusers are gone. The stones are scattered on the ground. And it's just you and Jesus. He looks at you. He knows everything. Everything you've done. Everything done to you. Everything you've hidden. Everything you've been afraid to say out loud. And He says two things. “Neither do I condemn you.” And then, “Now go. You're free. Go live the life I died to give you.”

That's what grace says next, it doesn't leave you where it found you.

**[PRAYER TIME]**