



INTRO:

Man it's good to see you all. As Matt shared last week, this is the first time since we started Hub Church 9 years ago together - Can you believe that? 9 years worshipping and serving God in this community? - But first time IN those 9 years that I've taken 3 weeks away. And I'll tell ya it was good! The first week, I spent in NC meeting with a number of different churches/business leaders, who were interested in learning more about what God is doing in our midst. And what was so encouraging is almost all of em expressed wanting to get behind us both financially and in prayer. Had one Pastor tell me that initially he wasn't gonna meet with me - large church/ myriad of requests come his way - BUT when he heard that we've been here 9 years and in that time seen 4 other church plants come and go, he couldn't say, "no," because in his mind slow and steady faithfulness rather than big flash-n-the-pan ministry was all he needed, to know that God is with us! So just a really encouraging week. And then the second two weeks, I spent with the family at the beach. Because of the incredible generosity of a friend, who lent us their home, I got to spend a lot of time reading my Bible; taking the family to worship with one of our partner churches - Seven Mile Road Hyannis; and of course...dominating my daughters in various beach games. So, really was a great time THAT/and I'm not pandering here: I have to thank you for. Cuz were it not for Harry and Matt stepping up to preach, Gregg hosting our Order of Gathering last week, many of you pitching in to help with setup, teardown, kiddos, among other things, it just wouldn't have been the same. So thank you. And can we also thank Harry and Matt for not just TEACHING us God's word these last 3 weeks, but helping it get into our hearts...(CLAP)

Cuz ya know that's what's gotta happen. The word of God has to get into your heart. Up here in your head, it's just a history lesson/maybe some inspiration. But if it gets in your heart, then it goes home with you...And if it goes home with you, it can help you in real life. And if it helps YOU in real life, then YOU become an agent of LIFEchange for those around you!...It's really that SIMPLE! CHURCH is really that SIMPLE...And that's what I want you to see today as we get back into our **"What Church Can Be"** series/Want you to see **that church really can be SIMPLE**...So if you would, let's STAND and follow along, as we hear the reading of God's word!

TEXT:

You might remember, back in 2015 or so there was a documentary that launched a trend in everything from architecture and design to journalism and science. It was called "Minimalism." And it examined the benefits of/as it sounds, living a more SIMPLE life. Incredibly popular and from it came things like the Netflix show "The Home Edit;" Marie Kondo and her famous Japanese organization principals; even the "Tiny House" trend. And really what made all these things popular...is their promise to bring SIMPLICITY in an increasingly complex world! Cuz of course there's something undeniably appealing about living SIMPLY right? That's certainly true in church, since unfortunately, church can often be the OPPOSITE of simple, with church/ church involvement/maybe you've felt this, feeling more like keeping up with a never-ending list of religious events and to-do's than anything else. And to be clear, that's not a new phenomenon. Paul, you recall, is writing HERE to a community of Christians, who were in many ways just PLAYING church, while failing to understand the simplicity OF church. And so having spent the

last 9 verses of our text reminding the Corinthians of all that the church can be - the things we've seen throughout this series - he now moves to conclude/you see the word "*therefore*" in our focal verse/**v.20** - conclude by telling us **2 Things** that get to the heart of, let's call it, "**simple church.**" Not simplistic church, but "**simple/lightweight/life-giving church.**" **2 Things:**

First if you're taking notes, he tells us we have a **Simple Message/a simple message:** If you've ever wondered what the irreducible message of Christianity is, Paul gives it to you there at the end of **v.20** when he says, "*be reconciled to God.*" "*Be reconciled to God!*" That's the simple message of Christianity - that you, me, everyone of our neighbors needs to "*BE reconciled to God.*" Now, that of course assumes a few things right: **First**, it assumes that there is in fact a God to whom we need to be reconciled. And to be honest, for the majority of human history, that's been a universal assumption. It wasn't until about the 1950's-70's that people, at least in the West, stopped believing in God. Atheism is not only an acquired taste; it's a new taste. BUT it's worth pointing out that even today among those who assert that there IS no God, you still find trace elements of belief IN God. As John Gray said, "*even though Christianity is dismissed as fairy tale, it's assumptions underpin our modern secular world.*"¹ I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but assumptions like the value of science? That comes from the uniquely Christian idea that because there IS a God, the world He's created is worth exploring. Or take our culture's pursuit of justice - racial justice, economic/even environmental justice. You understand, were it not for the uniquely Christian view that a good God created a good world - then as historian Tom Holland says, "*no one would've ever gotten woke.*" These values of science, justice, personhood, equality, even if taken for granted by secular thinkers, were placed at the heart of western civilization BY the Christian belief that there IS a God.

But **Second**, to "*be reconciled to God,*" assumes that a rupture has occurred between us and this God who exists - a rupture the Bible of course calls "sin." And you can define sin any number of ways, but one that's been really helpful for me is simply thinking of it in terms of: character assassination of God, in our hearts. Cuz think about the original lie Satan told in the garden - the lie that brought about ALL the sin and brokenness we experience today. Remember what it was? It was, "*Adam/Eve, if you obey God, you won't be happy!*" God's not a good God. Trusting and obeying Him, will be bad for you! Character assassination! And it's that character assassination of God, you understand, that's ruptured our relationship and brought about a need to be reconciled to Him! **What if**...your truest sin this morning/the BASIS for ruptured relationship with God/the SOURCE of all the frustration in your life, isn't so much your dark deeds against God/ya know, the things you do wrong and don't want anyone to know about, BUT your dark thoughts ABOUT God/the lies you believe about who He is and who He's not! Like: that He's not Good, so you live in a perpetual/even if low-grade state of fear about what He might do or allow to happen to you...Or that He's not Gracious, so you assume you CAN'T approach Him as you are...That He's not Great, so it's on you to tirelessly control life. Or just that He's not Glorious, so you need to find something outside of Him for happiness!...Character assassination!

¹ Why the liberal West is a Christian creation - John Grey (Review of Tom Holland's Dominion - The Making of the Western Mind).pdf

When Paul says, *“be reconciled to God”* here, he’s reminding us that the *simple message* of Christianity includes the existence of God; and a need for you and me to be reconciled TO this God, BUT/and here’s the best part: that reconciliation has already...been...made...possible. Cuz notice what Paul says? He’s says, *“BE reconciled”* right? So NOT *“reconcile yourself”* or *“make reconciliation happen,”* but *“BE reconciled!”*...Friend, you gotta see how radical this is! It’s been pointed out by numerous scholars through the years, but in every other religion - even what you might call the “non-religion” religions of scientism, progressive politics, conservative Christian nationalism - in every other religion, the founder/leader in some way, POINTS to eternal life - ya know, things you need to do to earn salvation/reconciliation, bring about utopia, or just find happiness. They all POINT to eternal life. But did you know: only Jesus points to Himself? Only Jesus/only Christianity/only the Gospel says, NOT *“earn salvation or reconciliation,”* but *“RECEIVE it!”* Not, *“Jacob climb UP the ladder to God,”* but *“Jacob, behold God descending to you.”* God, in the person of Jesus, having come down to us!

So you know what this means? It means, when it comes to being reconciled to God: there’s nothing else to DO but believe, BECAUSE it’s already been DONE! *“BE reconciled!”* So reconciliation doesn’t come to you because you morally outperform others. No! It comes to those who are willing to admit their failure and acknowledge their need FOR that reconciliation.²

Listen: While every other religion says, *“obey and therefore be accepted;”* only Christianity says, *“you’re accepted, therefore obey.”* This is why Buddha - who outside of Jesus, has long been considered the most influential religious-man in history - this is why Buddha’s final words on earth were/***listen:***, *“strive unceasingly!”* But Jesus’s final words? *“It’s finished!”*

You see the difference? Cuz it makes all the difference in the world. If your reconciliation to God is predicated upon doing something, earning something, or working in ANY way, then when you’re successful, it’ll always go to your head. And when you’re NOT, it’ll always go to your heart! You’ll always be toggling between either destruction or despair. The reason some of you are all over the place today - emotionally/psychologically - is because you still think there’s something you can or need to do to make life work for you/to be reconciled-to and have God’s acceptance. You’re like a shark rather than a bear...My girls have these books about unlikely animal kingdom matchups - you know like an orca against a moose or something - and the books are cool cuz they show you the similarities and differences between two very different animals. So we have this one called “Shark vs Bear” - Whenever I’ve had my nails painted one too many times, I pull out “Shark vs Bear.” But I was intrigued to learn that one of the things that the bear has going for it that the shark doesn’t is that bears hibernate, while sharks perpetually swim. Actually if a shark stops swimming...it dies. Bears, though, are able to rest and recuperate... Some of you are not only spiritual “sharks,” you’ve made BEING a “shark” a virtue...by believing/even wanting to DO something to earn God’s acceptance rather than believing-in what’s been already been DONE by Jesus. Listen to what C. Baxter Kruger says about our infatuation with “doing.” He says, *“What if our noble causes turn out to be mostly entertainment for our own latent sorrow? What if our wonderful passion to help turns out to be a narcotic? We*

² Insight about moral performance from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CJhwSbFAJas/>

*stay busy for others, but could it be that our busyness is actually for us? Could our sacrifice be another way of saving ourselves...a pat of affirmation on our own backs?"³...Ouch! **Are you a spiritual shark?** OR do you see that BECAUSE you're more sinful than you ever dared believe, there's NO shark-like striving that could ever make you reconciled to God. BUT at the very same time, because in Christ, you're more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope, there's a bear-like hibernating and abiding in Christ available to you! **"BE reconciled to God!" THAT'S the simple message of the Gospel!***

So **Second and Finally**, "simple church" not only understands that we have a simple message, but that those of us IN the church - You/Me - are simply **Messengers** OF this message/**simple messengers**. You see, Paul says, *"we're ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us."* **You know what an ambassador is?** It's someone who represents the desires and wishes of another. So the U.S. Ambassador to Sweden, for example, is someone who communicates the desires and wishes of the President of the United States, to those in Sweden. When Paul says that we're *"ambassadors for Christ"* that's what he's talking about. And it means a few things: **First**, it means: If you've been transformed BY Christ, then you've necessarily been commissioned to SHARE Christ. There's no distinction between a disciple and a disciple-maker/a follower of Christ and a friend of sinners. Every church member...is a missionary. **Do you see your life - where you work, the networks of people with whom you interact, your hobbies/norms, as spaces into which God has placed you to be His "ambassador?"** If you have a job, you understand, God's given you that to essentially be HIS paid missionary. The street or block you live on, bus route you take, groups you're a part of it. They're all spaces into which God has sent you to represent Him. **Is that how you see your life?** Cuz as a child of God, by definition, you reflect the Father and represent His family.

Second, being a simple messenger/"ambassador" means: You can't pick and choose what of God to obey. An ambassador that represents the President on some things, but not others, maybe cuz they find those other things hard-to-swallow - you understand, that's not an ambassador; that's a traitor. Likewise, as *"ambassadors for Christ,"* your obedience TO Christ, is not a buffet. You don't get to, for example, share with people about God's love, but leave out sin and the need for repentance. Or talk about His grace but negate His sexual ethic. Cuz as the old cliché goes, *"Jesus is either Lord of all...or not Lord AT all."* As God's ambassador, **where are you, maybe, picking and choosing with Him today?**

Third, being a simple messenger/"ambassador" means: You're not alone! You're not alone! Cuz notice, Paul says, *"WE are ambassadors"* and *"God is making His appeal through...US!"* So it's not just that YOU get reconciled to God and are then sent out, solo, to the represent God - that's not a missionary; that's a mercenary - Rather, it's you get reconciled to God, and are then INCLUDED, as an ambassador within an embassy...known as the church... Years ago, when God first called me into vocational ministry, He did so by, in part, showing me from Scripture, the high value HE places on His church and how local churches, as His embassy's throughout the

³ C. Baxter Kruger, *Across All Worlds* - cited in *Reclaiming Church*, Kindle loc. 183 of 265

world, are not only the greatest agent of change the world has ever seen, BUT in the economy of God's kingdom, they're His plan A FOR changing world... and there is no plan B! And one of the first verses I learned to this end was **John 13:35** in which Jesus after having just taken His last supper with His disciples and knowing that He was about to be betrayed by Judas nevertheless turned to them and said/**listen**, "*By THIS all people will know that you are my disciples, IF you have love for one another.*" And of course what He's saying is that our mutual love for each other is how our neighborhood/our city will see who Jesus is.

Do you know WHY we're able to enjoy the privilege of meeting in this space every week after having been turned down 8 years prior, not to mention having been in close to 10 other spaces in the last 10 years? Because YOU and those who called Hub "home" for a season that came BEFORE you, understood that if we aren't great family to each other, we'll be terrible missionaries to others. And so when I called up the director here at the Ollie to inquire about renting THIS space - knowing that we'd been shot down 8 years prior because of being a religious organization - the response was, "*we'd love to, because everyone we've ever known from Hub these last 8 years has always been so loving, kind and generous.*" **Think about that!** The greatest apologetic for the Gospel is the church - how we show up for each other, are committed to each other, generous with each other, table our preferences in favor of serving each other, aren't critical-of each other - Because the church is an embassy, the way we love and care for each other necessarily gives people cause...or not...to believe in the message OF this embassy. So that means, not only, that you can't in any meaningful way be an ambassador for Christ and NOT be committed to His "embassy," known as a local church, BUT WHEN you're apart of an embassy/like Hub, you're therefore never alone! ***Are you committed to this church family - in the way you give, serve, invite, participate - with the same vigor and zeal as an ambassador would be to their embassy? Or is this just an additional activity on your calendar?***

Fourth, being a simple messenger/"ambassador" means/get this: You can be you! ***Cuz again, at a baseline level what do ambassadors do?*** They build relationships/friendships in hopes that those with whom they're IN relationship will be persuaded by their message right? Or as Paul says, in hopes of "*imploring*" people. In other words, you can be you, because as an ambassador, you're not tasked with making a religious case - like say an attorney - or even coordinating a religious program/advancing a religious cause - like say a community organizer. You're simply building friendships and inviting/"imploring" people to take an honest look at who Jesus is and the reconciliation He's accomplished for em! So you're safe/people should be safe with you to question and doubt. You're given time/people can have time to move through a journey of learning to trust and rest in Christ. Cuz again, ambassadors simply represent. YOU are to simply help people see that Jesus Christ is both useful and beautiful: That in being our resurrected savior, He gives us infinite hope to DEAL with life's challenges - useful. BUT in being our CRUCIFIED savior, He gives those who trust in Him, infinite joy NO MATTER life's challenges - beautiful! So you can be you!...***Are you using your unique talents and treasures to represent Jesus and help THIS, your embassy, better represent Jesus?***

And then ***Fifth and Finally***, being a simple messenger/“*ambassador*” means/and I love this one: You can’t fail! Cuz as we’ve already seen: If we’re reconciled to God by simply RECEIVING Jesus’ reconciliation/the simple message, then there’s nothing for people to do, but BELIEVE, in order to BE reconciled. And if there’s nothing to DO - and by “do” I mean earn/nothing to earn, cuz of course while the Gospel’s opposed to earning, it’s not opposed to effort. We still work hard, and trust and obey, and achieve. Christianity requires picking up our crosses, not sitting on a couch and just “passively” believing.⁴ - But if there’s nothing to DO in terms of EARNING reconciliation then by definition, you can’t fail except in not OFFERING this reconciliation to others. It’s like giving someone a gift. The only failure in that is not giving the gift...But too, notice Paul says here, “*it’s GOD making his appeal through us.*” God speaking to people’s hearts as you share the news of His reconciliation. ***Think of that!*** If that’s true/and it is, then it means... friend the pressure’s off! Cuz even if people reject you/and they will, especially here in Boston, which by almost every statistic is considered the 2nd or 3rd LEAST Bible-minded/LEAST churchd city in America⁵/if people reject you, it’s ok, because they aren’t actually rejecting you. They’re rejecting GOD making His appeal THROUGH you! Which is why Jesus said, in ***Luke 10:16***, “*the one who rejects you rejects me.*” You can’t fail! Actually we could say that success is not effectiveness, but faithfulness. Not perfection in sharing, but simply participation!

Can I just tell you/as I close here: THIS is how the early Church miraculously went from 120 scared people, gathered in an upper room, in Jerusalem to a global community in record time. NOT because of a tiny group of uber-talented priests, preachers, ministers or varsity Christians, but because everyday, unnamed people/like you and me, who’d been transformed by the simple message of Christ, owned their identity as simple messengers together FOR Christ. And frankly, that wasn’t just how it worked in the early church, it’s how it’s worked throughout human history, such that there’s no reason to think, God has changed His method. He wants YOU to BE reconciled, as you simply trust in Christ. And THEN He delights to USE you to see others come to be reconciled to Him as well. Cuz as John Newton said, if God has already GRACIOUSLY made it possible for you, me, everyone to be reconciled AND has seen fit to share the news OF that reconciliation through YOU, then Friends, “*(we) art coming to a King. Large petitions with thee bring. For his love and power are such that none can ever ask too much.*” ***Church is as simple as that!...Let’s Pray!***

⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/p/ChHqCqbryXZ/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY%3D>

⁵ <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-most-and-least-religious-places-in-america-2015-1?op=1> + <https://www.barna.com/research/churchless-cities-where-does-your-city-rank/>