

INTRO:

I'm assuming, most of us are, at least, tangentially familiar with TedTalks - those slick, consumable speeches on a seemingly infinite number of topics that've REALLY, for the last decade or so, have defined whole industries. Well, among the top 5 most popular TedTalks of all time is one by Leadership Expert Simon Sinek entitled "*How Great Leaders Inspire Action*" in which he explains that "defining the why," as he calls it, is what makes the difference between good and great leaders, and ultimately good and great organizations. And "the why", he says, is that "*compelling higher purpose that inspires us and acts as the source of all we do.*"¹ In other words, why we exist? Let me ask you this morning? **Why do we as a church exist?**...Not how did we come to be or what do we do, but why are we here, or maybe a better: Who do we exist for? **Think about that for a second...**

What I wanna show you this morning, as we continue our new series entitled "**What Church Can Be,**" in which, as I shared with you last week, we're looking at the optimistic vision **2 Corinthians 5:11-21** gives us about church - what I wanna show you is that WE/any healthy, God-honoring church EXISTS to be **Outward!** The reason we're here/the default posture we're to have in everything is to be moving toward those outside of us RATHER THAN in anyway withdrawing into a kind of closed community FOR us. One of the hardest tasks before us is to always fight against the tendency to be inward!...SO...let's follow along together as we hear the reading of **2 Corinthians 5:11-21** and what the next phrase in it, shows us about how "**Church Can Be ___ Outward.**" **(PAUSE RECORD)** **John** reads...

TEXT:

Pastor Matt Kruse in his book, "*What Church Can Be,*" from which/full disclosure I stole the title of our series, because it just perfectly captures what **2 Corinthians 5:11-21** is all about, he says this: "*Every nation, school, business, family, condo association, golf club, and political party must decide: 'How do those of us who are 'in' feel about, think about, speak about, and engage with those who are 'out.'*"² When Paul says in **v.11** there, "*knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others...*" - and that word "*persuade*" is our focal word today - when he says that, he's reminding us that, while we can have all kinds of postures toward those outside of us - ignoring, avoiding, blending in, even sadly villainizing em - OUR posture is to move toward em. WE are to seek to "*persuade!*" So if you're taking notes: 2 Things Paul tells us here with respect to this **outward** posture of persuading: **1. WHAT We're Seeking To Persuade About;** and **2. WHY We Move Out To Persuade In The First Place.**

So **First, WHAT We're Seeking To Persuade About:** Now, if you recall last week, we saw Paul attempt to recalibrate the division and deviation-from-the-Gospel, which the Corinthian church had sadly fallen into BY/right before our passage here, reminding the Corinthians that they - like ALL of us - will one day have to stand before the Lord, and give an account for, not only how we lived, but in whom we ultimately trusted. The seriousness of that/of our need for a savior, BUT

¹ <https://circlein.com/defining-your-why/>

² *What Church Can Be: An Optimistic Vision With Some Blueprints* - Matthew Kruse - p.127

of God to, in Christ, MEET our need,³ is what Paul calls/as we saw last week, “*knowing the fear of the Lord.*” That because we know that all people will, one day, stand before a holy and righteous God, and be judged on the basis of whether or not we received salvation in Christ - we therefore seek to persuade people to receive Christ. In other words, what moves us **outward** is an understanding of ***the surpassing greatness of God*** - both our desperate need for Him AND His willingness and ability to meet our need! Cuz as Dr. D.A. Carson said, “*If God had perceived your greatest need was economic, He woulda sent an economist. If He’d perceived it was entertainment, he woulda sent you a comedian or an artist. If He’d perceived it was political stability, a politician. If it was health, a doctor. But He perceived that your greatest need and mine involves your sin, your alienation from Him, your rebellion, and your death. And so He sent you a Savior;*”⁴ who on the Cross, shows you the fierceness of God’s hatred of sin, but ALSO His tenacity to love you and me as sinners - To not just rehab you and make you happy, but restore you and make you whole! THAT’S ***what we’re seeking to persuade people about!***

Now, that’s important, because, let’s be honest: if the church is known for *persuasion* of any kind, sadly, it’s not usually this ***is it?*** Just the other week, I was speaking with someone who mentioned that they’d often been in churches, but sadly, MORE OFTEN than not, were made to feel like - their words - “*a leper.*” Which is to say, the thing those churches/intentionally or not, were putting forth/*persuading* with was some form of: You need to look more like us, be more like us, act more like us, which of course is how you can begin to feel like a “leper” if you don’t. Sadly, THAT’S the kind of stuff churches can be known for *persuading* people with...But you understand, when Paul speaks of *persuading* here, he's reminding us that our primary message is NOT one of “*be better/do better,*” or even “*get on board with this tradition, perspective, or practice,*” but RATHER: awaken and surrender-to the greatness of God - this God who knowing that we’ll stand before Him one day/but could never on our own merits, Himself became a man...was once dead...isn’t anymore...and therefore makes it possible for lepers to be loved and sinners to become saints! THAT’S ***What We Seek To Persuade People About!*** - The surpassing greatness of God, lest we give our lives, to people and things incapable of holding us up.

The late Swiss physician Dr. Paul Tournier described our lives like hanging from a trapeze, in which the trapeze bar is all the things we look to for security, lifestyle, even our salvation - so sex, money, power, control, even religion and morality in which you assume God accepts you because you’re living a good life. Whatever it is Tournier says, because we’ve gotten so familiar with it, we’ve come to believe we can rely on it for everything...unfortunately, failing to see that the bar/that is these things is rusted and certain to break. And so knowing our impending doom, God has graciously and powerfully swung another trapeze into our view, that’s more than strong enough to hold us, and is even now, inviting you to release your grip on your bar, and by faith,

³ *What Church Can Be: An Optimistic Vision With Some Blueprints* - Matthew Kruse - p.131-132 + David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 270.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 109.

grab onto His.⁵ THAT is *what we seek to persuade people of* - The surpassing greatness of God in Christ!

Now, in saying that, I know a number of objections get raised: *For example*, that seeking to *persuade* people about God/His greatness/the Gospel is **arrogant** - akin to claiming a monopoly on truth. But here's the thing: Arrogance would be saying that we've arrived AT the truth because we've somehow thought-it-out or received it better than others. *But you understand*, the truth we wanna *persuade* people of, has nothing to do with OUR greatness, but rather everything to do with GOD'S greatness! And so in that way, our claims/our attempts to persuade actually undermine ANY ability to be arrogant/if you're arrogant in the way you share Christ or interact with others who don't yet know Christ, it's cuz YOU don't understand that the only thing you bring to the table with God is sin - as one person said, *the big "I" problem*, since you can't spell sin without an "I" in the middle of everything. There's no way you can be arrogant when you understand that God's grace is his acceptance of you when you deserve it. And your faith is simply your acceptance of God's accepting you. You can't be arrogant!

Or other times, people'll say, "*well it may not be arrogant, but it IS pushing personal preference*. You know the whole, "*that might work for you, but it doesn't work for me*" thing. Or for those of you more philosophically-inclined, what Immanuel Kant meant when he said that, "*No religion is objectively true, but all are subjectively helpful*." So, according to him, we oughta see Christian claims like God being great and faith in Jesus being the only way to salvation, as simply subjective/personal preference. But the problem with THAT claim is it's making an objective truth claim about the thing you're saying is subjective. It's actually going against the logic that it's proposing.

Or still *Finally*, people'll say that seeking to *persuade* others about God/His greatness/the Gospel is **divisive, intolerant, even cruel**, since other's may not agree that God is great! Now to be sure, others MAY NOT agree. But here's the thing: Disagreement doesn't equal cruelty. Think about it like with a pilot: You may not agree with how a pilot lands a plane - maybe you think that having to abide by an "objective standard of landing procedures" is intolerant and cruel, cuz ya know, people should be able to land any way they want - That's fine! But you understand, neither you nor that pilot are doing anyone any favors by saying there're multiple ways to land a plane. No! What would be cruel is, if in fact, the pilot agreed, threw off all objective standards, and landed however he wanted...thereby killing everyone on the plane...It's actually the OPPOSITE of cruel to believe you know the truth and to wanna guide others in it!...It's like the well-known comedian and atheist, Penn Jillette, said after a man, who attended his show kindly gave him a copy of the New Testament. He said, "*While I may not agree with him, I respect that man, because how much do you have to HATE somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell em about it?*"⁶...The surpassing greatness of God in Christ, for life now and eternal, is **WHAT we wanna persuade people about**.

⁵ Illustration adapted from *Search for Significance*, Robert McGhee

⁶ <http://www.radicallychristian.com/what-atheist-penn-jillette-taught-me-about-evangelism>

Which brings us, **Second and Finally**, to **WHY We Persuade**: And the short answer is: Because how could you not?...Let me explain: When Paul says, “*we persuade others*,” he ties it, you see, to “*knowing the fear of the Lord*” **right**? He’s saying, BECAUSE “*we know the surpassing greatness of God...we persuade.*” Knowing God’s greatness is **WHY we persuade**. Now, here’s the thing about knowing God’s greatness: The Scriptures are clear that if you do/if you in anyway, understand God to be great; the Gospel to be good news; Jesus to be the solution to your greatest need; it’s BECAUSE God has GIFTED you with that understanding. Listen to these:

- **John 6:44-45**: “*No one can come to me*” - that’s Jesus - “*UNLESS the Father who sent me draws him...Everyone who’s heard and learned FROM the Father comes to me.*”
- **Ephesians 1:18**: *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be ENLIGHTENED, so that you’ll know the hope of HIS calling, and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.*”
- **John 14:26**: “*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, HE will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*”

You see? If you know the surpassing greatness of God, it’s not because you were smart enough, cultured enough, moral enough, or any KIND of enough TO know it. It’s cuz, by His power/in His grace, GOD awakened you TO His greatness. That’s why we can say, as one person did: In a nutshell the Gospel is/**listen**: “*we’re all complete idiots and unhinged rebels, both by nature and by choice, BUT our future is super bright cuz of Jesus, and anyone can get in on it.*”⁷ If you know the surpassing greatness of God in Christ, quite simply, it’s cuz God has GIFTED you with that knowledge. And one of the most basic principles in Scripture is that what God GIFTS you, He intends to share THROUGH you. In the ways God’s blessed you, He intends for you to be a blessing. That MEANS: to the degree to which you’re *persuaded* of the surpassing greatness of God, God intends you to seek to *persuade* others!...This is why Charles Spurgeon declared with such certainty that: “*if you have no wish for others to be saved*”/you’re not actively sharing the Gospel and seeking to “*persuade*” those around you WITH the Gospel, then as he said, “*you can be sure you’re not saved, since every Christian, he said, is either a missionary or an imposter.*”

Now again, I know we hear that and immediately objections come to mind. I’ll just give you a few that I consistently hear and have even had myself about sharing our faith:⁸

- **First**, is that we think: “**I don’t have what it takes.**” Maybe you don’t feel you have the knowledge, experience, personality or what-have-you to share the Gospel. But honestly, you don’t have to have “what it takes”! The charge here is not to convert anyone. Conversion is God’s job. Your job is persuasion. And perhaps not ironically, the Greek word Paul uses there for “*persuade*” is the verb *peithō*. It has the force of trying really hard to convince, but not necessarily being successful.⁹ In other words, your job and mine is not to produce results, but to be faithful. So you’re right...you don’t have what it takes...And it doesn’t matter. Faithfulness is the key.

⁷ *What Church Can Be: An Optimistic Vision With Some Blueprints* - Matthew Kruse - p.134

⁸ Objections adapted from “*Evangelize? I’d Rather Not*” - J.D. Greear

⁹ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 270.

- Or *Second*, people'll say, "**Well persuasion/evangelism, like you're talking about, isn't my gift.**" And to be sure, Scripture does seem clear that some have been given a particular gift for evangelism. Frankly, I don't think I'm one of those. I know guys and gals who I think ARE cuz it's like every time they talk about Jesus people are like, "*What must we do to be saved?*" That's not me. HOWEVER, I'm encouraged to know that a spiritual gift given to a few doesn't eclipse the assignment given to all of us. Just because some people have a special effectiveness in bringing others TO Jesus, doesn't negate the fact that the Spirit of God helps ALL of those IN Jesus, testify TO Jesus. Gifting is not the same as assignment. We're ALL called to this.
- Or another I hear all the time is: "**Talking to people about Jesus makes me feel weird.**" To which I would say, "*Yeah. You and me both!*" But here's the thing: Isn't the message of the Gospel - the truth of God's greatness in Christ - important enough to endure a little awkwardness? Like if you knew that the one thing that stood between a person enjoying eternity with Jesus or eternity separated from Jesus was just whether or not you were gonna SHARE Jesus with em, wouldn't you be willing to risk a little awkwardness? Of course, because what you know to be true, makes that awkwardness completely insignificant.
- Or finally, we've probably ALL thought this at some point: "**I just don't HAVE time.**" And it's true, we're all busy. I remember complaining about this to a friend years ago, who just looked at me and said, "*Oh, you're busy? Yeah, Jesus was busy, too. But HE was busy with people.*" And it's true. You read about Jesus in the Scriptures and it's so evident that He lived His life WITH people/had this kind of, what we've called before: **Go, Connect, Pause** rhythm of life, in which He saw His comings and goings - ya know time on the T, walking the dog, errands - as opportunities to meet/listen to/even serve people in His path...And THEN, you see a lot of times, those He met, He ended up **connecting** with more consistently - over drinks/a meal, watching a game, at a party - And it's in THOSE times of **Connection** is which He was able to be more intentional about sharing good news. Incidentally, this is one of the reasons Missional Family Meetings are SO important for us - because they provide a regular get-together, as we say, "*of friends eager to connect around good news and help others do the same.*" They're like your diet plan in conjunction with your exercise routine. Cuz if your "**going**" is your exercise, then Missional Family Meetings/those times of **connection** and application are when you get nourished to KEEP going well. Jesus had this **Go, Connect...**but THEN **Pause** rhythm - He obviously set aside regular time to be with and instruct those with whom He'd **connected**. - You see it in the Sermon on the Mount, Last Supper, and just those regular times of prayer with His followers. For us, that's what THESE Brunch Church gatherings are intended to do: Provide regular times of **pause** in which, God willing, "*just the simple hospitality and surprising grace of Jesus collides for your encouragement*" - like a personal trainer to your exercise routine and diet plan...**Go, Connect, Pause...**So you say, "**I don't have time.**" That's ok/none of us do. But the call here isn't to add anything to your schedule. It's to be more intentional with the things already IN your schedule...Because, again, as those who've been *persuaded* about the surpassing greatness of God in Christ, how could we not want to *persuade* others?

Hub, if there is anything I could plead with you to understand this morning, it's that we exist to be **Outward**. Everything we do as a church oughta have THIS as the tip of the

spear. So Gathering here? That's great! But it's to prepare you to be sent out to those around you! That's why we end every service with: "*You are sent together!*" ...Prayer? When we pray here in service, on Zoom on Fridays, once-a-month around the neighborhood? Great! But it's to unite you to God's heartbeat of bringing Him glory and going out to show-off His surpassing greatness!...Missional Family Meetings? Awesome! But they're not just so you can eat a meal and hang out with friends. No! That **connection** is intended to help you be sent OUT together for the good of those who AREN'T yet connected to Jesus!...**You see?** We exist, not for ourselves, but for those who aren't yet a part of us. We exist to be **Outward**.

CONCLUSION:

So I'll close with this. This week, I read some of the story of Southwest Airlines,¹⁰ who you might know, when they came into existence, only about 15% of the American population actually flew, cuz air travel was too expensive and complicated. So everyone in the airline industry was competing for a share of that 15% of people who were already "in." Well, here comes Southwest, who says, "*we're not here for the 15%. We're going after the 85% who DON'T YET fly.*" And so when industry insiders asked Southwest who their fiercest competition was - ya know, Delta or American - ya know what Southwest said? "*The car and the bus.*"...Hub, THAT is how we HAVE to think about church - That other people/ certainly other churches are NOT competition. Rather, our competition is ANYTHING that competes with the surpassing greatness of God in Christ; perhaps ESPECIALLY our tendency to be...inward rather than **outward**! Are you *persuaded* about the surpassing greatness of God in Christ?

- **If not**, that's ok, but there is no more important thing you need to do than to get acquainted with who Jesus is:
 - Read the Scriptures/If you don't have a Bible, take one of our table Bibles free of charge and start reading/we'd LOVE that...
 - Get into and COMMIT to a Missional Family/we make that really easy to do on our website/all ya have to do is send an email...
 - And Be HERE every week ready to learn and familiarize yourself with who Jesus is, what He's done and His greatness for you!...
- **And if you ARE persuaded** about the surpassing greatness of God in Christ today, because you've come to see that Jesus Christ is this lamb-like Lion-figure AND lion-like Lamb-figure.
 - This glorious conjunction of both power, as seen in His resurrection AND love, as seen in His crucifixion - that were he only power, we'd despair coming to Him. But were he only love, we'd never be inspired to see our lives count for something great; namely, the call to, as Jesus said, "*Go therefore and make disciples.*" If you're persuaded about the surpassing greatness of God in Christ today because you've seen that, let me ask: are you giving your life, in ALL facets, to helping those around you see and become persuaded by it too?...

¹⁰ Illustration adapted from *What Church Can Be: An Optimistic Vision With Some Blueprints* - Matthew Kruse - p.133

“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.” We move **outward** church!...
Let's Pray.