



## INTRO:

A couple years ago, a buddy of mine shared with me his experience of going to see an Off Broadway production of “the Passion of The Christ.” And I know we have some theater aficionados in here, so correct me if I’m wrong, but apparently the deal with Off Broadway plays TENDS to be that the acting troop OF a particular play will travel all around the country for like a year performing 2/sometimes 3 times a week for 52 straight weeks. Grueling! And my buddy/ Kennon is his name, tells me, “*I think I went to like week number 48’s performance,*” which is TYPICALLY supposed to be one of the best times to see a play, cuz by week 48, the actors, of course, know their lines perfectly. So Kennon’s telling me about his experience and he says, “*so we get to the crucifixion part of the play. And everything leading up to this has been awesome. The crowd’s laughing, crying, yelling, experiencing every emotion there is.*” And he tells me. “*So he we are! The lights get dimmed. Jesus is raised up on the cross, the crowd’s silent, and as Scripture tells us, Jesus, with one last breath/arms stretched out proclaims, ‘It is Finished!’ And with this amazing realism drops his head and dies.*” Crowd’s just in awe... Well, according to Kennon, about 15 seconds/from what he could tell of complete silence go by. And so the crowd starts to get a little restless, cuz ya know in the Bible account, a Roman centurion is supposed to then come out and thrust a spear into Jesus’ side to confirm his death before taking him off the cross and to the tomb. But nothing’s happening. No centurion/nothin... As it turned out, the actor playing the centurion, who’d now performed this play for 48 straight weeks felt like he knew his lines and the timing so well that he really didn’t have to pay much attention. So, get this, instead of waiting to come on stage, he’s BACKstage playing Poker and completely misses his cue... And so Jesus, doing what only Jesus could ever do, brings Himself BACK to life and THIS time yells louder. “*It’s Finished*” and re-dies... Well at that, the centurion realizes he’s missed his cue, jumps up from the Poker table, and runs to the prop rack to get his spear. HOWEVER, instead of getting the cool retractable spear that was intended to make it look like he’d completely thrust it into Jesus’ side, he mistakenly grabs a real spear which was used in other scenes, runs on stage and with all the passion an actor could ever muster, thrusts the real spear into Jesus’ side... Which as you can guess... meant Jesus not so dead anymore. Jesus is now screaming at the top of his lungs as blood, Kennon tells me, is literally pouring out of his side, which of course meant that for the next 30 minutes or so ALL that climactic silence had turned to chaos with ambulances, paramedics, everything... UNTIL after seemingly getting everything taken care of, the Director of the play comes back on stage and says, “*Folks, we are so sorry, but OF COURSE, the show must go on, so we’re just gonna jump right to the resurrection scene.*”... Well back stage is Jesus’ understudy. Mind you this guy has been traveling with the production for 48 weeks, having YET to actually act in a live performance. So when he hears “*the show must go on,*” he’s like, “*this is my big chance.*” So here comes Jesus #2 on stage. And they start to strap him to this really sweet pulley system which produced the affect of making it look like he was actually rising from the dead. HOWEVER, there was a problem. **(HAVE 2 PEOPLE STAND UP)**... ***Let me ask the rest of you:*** Do you see any obvious difference between these two individuals... Exactly, one’s much bigger than the other. Well apparently Jesus #1 was like 6’5” 250 and for 48 weeks had been the guy. Jesus #2 though is like 5’5” 150. So when Jesus #2 gets strapped into the pulley system and the stage hands go to “resurrect” him, they forget to compensate for the weight differential and Jesus literally shoots up into the rafters, nails his head on a wood beam and is totally knocked

out...**(AMBULANCE NOISE)** Here we go again...UNTIL the Director comes BACK on stage and in complete and utter humiliation says, “*Uh Folks...Again we’re sorry, but sadly, we are out of Jesi/Jesuses and therefore must stop the play. Feel free to stop by the box office on your way out if you’d like a refund.*”...And Kennon tells me - no one moved! The crowd just sat there dumbfounded, like did all that just happen! And Kennon thinks to himself. “*If this is the one chance these people get to hear about Jesus, Christianity, Church, they’re leaving thinking it is ALL TOTALLY ridiculous!*”

Sadly, that IS how much of our culture views church/maybe even how YOU view it. And I don’t mean that you’d say it’s “ridiculous”/after all, you’re here, but perhaps you ALSO wouldn’t say that church is the “**Hub**” out of which you live - ya know, **the Plan A** of your life and thing around which you orient your life, rather than simply incorporate INTO your life. Which is odd, cuz listen to they way Scripture speaks of church - **Ephesians 3:10** - “*It’s through the CHURCH that the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the world.*”

If you’ve been with us, you know we’ve spent, now, 15 weeks in a series entitled, “**What Church Can Be,**” and through it considered ALL these really optimistic things ABOUT church. What I wanna do today is conclude this series by looking at a passage, which makes EXPLICIT what we’ve IMPLICITLY seen throughout this series; namely, **that church IS God’s Plan A for your life and there is no Plan B**...His **Plan A**. My hope being that after today, you’ll not just be involved or even contributing to the life of this church family, but be DEVOTED to it. *Devoted!* **And you know what the difference between contributing and devoted is?** If you’re eating bacon and eggs for breakfast, the chicken contributed to your breakfast, but the pig?...devoted.<sup>1</sup>...SO with that in mind: Let’s STAND and follow along as we hear the reading of **Acts 2:40-47** and what it says about **being devoted to God’s Plan A, known as the church!**

#### TEXT:

So we’re talking about being **devoted to God’s Plan A, known as the church!** And 2 things in this passage here: **First, HOW We Can Say That Church REALLY Is God’s Plan A/How can we make such a bold claim?** Well, **Acts 2**, like all Scriptural passages, is written with a specific context in mind - in this case detailing the beginning of the church. And the short of it is that: By the time you get to **v.40** of OUR passage, about 2 months have passed since Jesus’ death and resurrection. And IN those 2 months, Jesus’d appeared to His disciples multiple times and given them a commission/a mission together of MAKING disciples through, essentially, planting churches. And He told em He was gonna send the Holy Spirit to help em accomplish that mission. Well, with Jesus now ascended and gone, the Holy Spirit’s come, AND come in pretty dramatic and confusing fashion - something we call Pentecost - such that Apostle Peter, at Pentecost and at the beginning of **Acts 2**, stands up in the midst of this huge crowd of people - many of whom mind you, had just 2 months earlier, demanded that Jesus be crucified - and he explains that what’s going on is that they didn’t actually get rid of Jesus. Rather, Jesus fulfilled God’s eternal plan and died for the sin of humanity. And we’re told in **v.37** right before our

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<sup>1</sup> Joke from “Devoted” - Cannonball, Message #2 - Acts 2:42–47 - J.D. Greear

passage that in hearing this, the crowd is quote, “*cut to the heart*”/literally convicted that THEY need to be saved, to which Peter tells em to believe in Jesus and be baptized as a sign OF their belief...And as **vv.40-41** of our passage say, “*with many other words (Peter) bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*”

**Here’s the point of all that context and WHY we can begin to say the church is “God’s Plan A”:** Because the first thing God did to accomplish His mission of spreading His Gospel message...was plant a church. Plant a church! AND plant it in the midst of, as it says, “*a crooked generation.*” He established a community - albeit a large 3,000 person one - that was to be a counter-culture to the “*crooked generation*” around em.<sup>2</sup> THAT’S what church is to be: As J.D. Greear says, “*we’re to be a right-side up community in the midst of a mostly upside-down world.*” **God’s Plan A for communicating the MESSAGE of the Gospel, both to you and those around you...is the Medium...of Church!**...And in case you’re thinking, “*that still feels like a bold statement to make off one passage;*” understand that what’s happening in **Acts 2** here is simply what Jesus desired would happen all the way back in **Matthew 16**, when He told Peter and the disciples that the natural result of their believing in Him would be that He’d build the church FROM that belief! As Jesus said, “*I tell you Peter, on this rock - meaning Peter’s profession of faith in Jesus, as “the Christ/the Son of the living God” - “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*” **God’s Plan A for bringing His Gospel message to the world has always been the medium of church!**

**So very simply, let me ask you: Is that how YOU see church?** Do you see this as what you’re to orient your life around, like say, a “hub” on a wheel OR do you see it merely as an addendum/accessory to your life - like say a “spoke” on that wheel. **Church is God’s Plan A and there is no Plan B.** After all, it’s ONLY the church that Jesus promised to “*build so that the gates of hell won’t prevail against it.*” Or as C.S. Lewis said, “*the only thing that will outlive the universe and share in Jesus’ immortality*”<sup>3</sup> is not your job, house, health, or hobbies, but the church!

So **Second**, if that’s *HOW We Can Say That Church Is God’s Plan A*; **here’s WHY it’s the case:** And the short answer is: Because only the church - meaning the family of those, who as we saw in **2 Corinthians 5**, are reconciled to God and given the ministry of reconciliation - only the church, has the ability to accurately and holistically display the rule and reign of King Jesus! Cuz take a look at **vv.42-46**. What you see there are a bunch of beliefs, affections and actions that characterized this newly established church plant and subsequently allowed it to show off the Kingdom. Take a look at these/I see 4 big ones! **First** it says, “*they DEVOTED themselves to the apostles’ teaching.*”...In other words, **the Word of God was central, and teaching and learning the Word together was a big deal.** This is why by the way, despite the pleas of many, for me to do more hot topic-sermons on whatever issue seems to be at the forefront our the cultural moment, I try my best NOT to do that UNLESS the Scriptures address it. And it’s not because topics like CRT, voting rights, race relations, etc aren’t important; they are! It’s just that **Number 1:** I wanna keep God’s Word central to everything we talk about. **Number 2:** Because,

<sup>2</sup> Insight adapted from “Devoted” - Cannonball, Message #2 - Acts 2:42-47 - J.D. Greear

<sup>3</sup> The Weight Of Glory - “Membership” (1945) - para. 16, p.116

even if you think you want it, you don't NEED a front-page Pastor. YOU need a Pastor who ISN'T swayed by the issue of the day, but rather is willing and able to direct you to the Scriptures as your foundation for how to think ABOUT the issue of the day. And **Number 3**, because I know that at the END of the day, anything I teach you that isn't rooted in the Scriptures, no matter how snappy it might sound, is worthless!...After the Protestant Reformation Martin Luther was asked how he was able to pull it off. He said this/*listen*: "*I only urged, preached, and declared God's Word, nothing else. And yet while I was asleep...the Word did it all...I did nothing, the Word did everything.*"<sup>4</sup>...I got permission from Momma Teresa over here to share this with you, but she did me the great honor of coming up to me after last week's message and telling me that, for her whole life she thought she was a good Catholic. But that for the first time in 86 years, last Sunday, she believes finally awakened to the Gospel. And then she pumped her fist...And look I tell you that, because we ALL know that Momma Teresa has one of the sharpest minds among us. So for her to say that NECESSARILY means...it couldn't have been me! That kind of understanding can only be God awakening His Word in a person, which is WHY by the way, our Order of Gathering here each week is always word-centered; and WHY we encourage our Missional Family Meetings to be about discussing and applying the Word... **The Word of God was central** and a church that's filled up with the Word is an unstoppable force, because only God's Word has the ability to change people from the inside out.

**Second**, you see, it says, "*they DEVOTED themselves to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*" And then down in **vv.44 and 46**: "*And all who believed were together and had all things in common...And day by day, they attended the temple together and broke bread in their homes.*" There was a **steady-state of togetherness** that characterized their lives. So it wasn't, "*hey, good to see you*" on Sunday and then, "*Maybe I'll see ya in a couple weeks,*" but rather a **steady-state of togetherness**. They had each other's emails and phone numbers. Had a group text going so they could pray for and support one another. They were in each other's homes, hosting parties, throwing baby showers, eating meals together...which RIGHT THERE would foster all kinds of togetherness when you consider the fact that most Americans eat anywhere between 14 and 21 meals a week, which basically means, you have 14-21 opportunities...to be **together**.

But ya know what's even more amazing than just that this church was **together**? They were together but VERY different from each other! If you were to go back up before our text - to **v.5** - you'd read that these were people from, quote, "*every nation under heaven, who all spoke different languages.*" So we're talking about an incredibly diverse people, who aren't just existing together, but THRIVING by BEING together. Friend, you understand, that is foretaste of heaven, since **Revelation 7** says, "*there'll be a great multitude...from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne...crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne!'*" Where else you gonna get a taste of that kind of perfect, harmonious diversity, but in church?...You wanna help the cause of social justice? Promote race relations? Engender equality in society? Let me encourage you: Be a devoted member of church that sees itself not just as a gathering, but an expression of God's family. **They were together!**

<sup>4</sup> Luther quote from Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume VII, Modern Christianity, The German Reformation*, 494. Cited in "Devoted" - Cannonball, Message #2 - Acts 2:42-47 - J.D. Greear

**Third**, you see, it says in **v.45**, “*they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*” In other words, they were exceedingly **generous**...with each other AND those in their community!...Can I correct a theological misnomer for ya, that we Americans especially, tend to believe? And that is that it’s all about “*a personal relationship with Jesus/You need a personal relationship with Jesus.*” And, in part, that’s true! Jesus knows you personally; loves you personally; invites you personally receive the news that He’s lived, died and resurrected to save you...personally. But you gotta understand, “personally” doesn’t mean “individually,” and certainly not “privately.” When you enter into relationship with Jesus, you necessarily enter into a relationship with others who BELONG to Jesus - His church. That’s why the church is called the “Bride of Christ” - because there’s a symbiotic relationship between being in union with Jesus and united to others who follow Jesus!

So here’s what this means: When you get saved/GOT saved, you didn’t just get a ticket to heaven; you got a commission to roll up your sleeves and become concerned about giving those AROUND you a TASTE of heaven. And, in part, that happens through **generosity**, or more specifically, “concentric circles of **generosity**,”<sup>5</sup> since **Galatians 6:10**, building off Acts 2 here, says, “*Let us do good to all men, but ESPECIALLY those of the household of faith.*” **Generosity!** That starts inside the church and then moves outside it!

And can I tell ya, YOU guys/this church have always done both those so well! I mean, THAT I can serve as your Pastor, in this city, this neighborhood, without having to work 3,4,5 other jobs, is a testament to your **generosity**. But more importantly, THAT our neighborhood is beginning to know Hub Church as a community ready and willing to give, is again, BECAUSE of your **generosity**...If you follow us on social media, you know, back in July we hosted a “Coffee For Charity” event in partnership with Deja Brew over on E. Broadway. And next month we’ll be hosting a Community Supper at the Broadway and then a Charity Bike Ride outside the city? You know the reason we’re doing all that?...It’s because we were asked. Back early summer, The Ollie came to Matt and I and asked if Hub would be willing to provide 8-10 volunteers to man a water station for the bike ride, in which the proceeds go to support their work. So of course we said, “yes.” - And if you wanna volunteer, details are on our website - But then I got to thinking. “*I bet we could do more than that...also raise some money for em!*” And so I started having conversations with friends and neighbors that lead to the creation of things like next month’s Community Supper from which 30% of the Broadway’s proceeds will go directly to the Ollie; LAST month’s “Coffee For Charity” event, which raised - I found out this week - \$349 already sent to the Ollie. Because we wanna be **generous!** And by the way, those things are over-and-above the 15% of our total budget we give directly to church planting and benevolence. **Generosity!**

Then **Fourth and Finally**, it says in **vv.46-47**, “*they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God.*” And I love this one, cuz what’s it’s saying is that: They were **content**. Now, I wanna be careful with this because, as one person pointed out to me, the backbone of our

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<sup>5</sup> Idea adapted from insight in “Acts 2.42-47 - All In” - Bill Hybels

culture, is of course the “American Dream” right? - this idea that we have the right to always pursue more. And the good thing about that is that it’s, of course, propelled us to be a nation of people never satisfied with the status quo. So we invent things, discover things, change things... We go to the moon! The downside is though: we’re never *content*!<sup>6</sup> We battle fear, anxiety, burnout and all kinds of other psychosis as a result. That’s why the Apostle Paul said, in *1 Timothy 6:6*, “*Godliness with contentment is great gain.*” Because one of the greatest gifts God can give you is not more stuff or more experiences, but *contentment* with what you DO have and experience; knowing that even if you had NOTHING, you’d still have Him!<sup>7</sup> A church that lives with that kind of *contentment*, necessarily shows off the surpassing greatness of loving and being loved-BY Jesus. *They were content!*

***Centrality of the Word, Togetherness, Generosity, Contentment,*** NOTICE, before I close here, what it lead to: It says in *vv.43* and *47*, “*awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles...and having favor with all the people...the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*” Awe, favor...salvation! Because of course, God’s Plan A was declaring and displaying, in the way they lived together, the surpassing greatness of Jesus’ rule and reign. **The mission of God was furthered...because the message of the Gospel went out...through the medium of church as a family!...Amazing!...It’s kinda like what astronomers tell us about stars - that when you see a star, what you’re ACTUALLY seeing is light generated from a really long time ago...In a way, that’s what church/YOU and WE are: Light in a present time...shining forth about a future time...BUT which was generated a really long time ago, when on the Cross, the “*Light of Man*” as *John* calls Jesus, saw fit to die and descend into darkness, so that you and I, who were IN darkness, could not only be brought into the light, BUT together/through this thing called church - be a beacon OF that light to those around us! THAT’S *Why Church is God’s Plan A for your life, and There Is No Plan B!*...*So let me ask you: What would it look like for you to decide to be devoted today, to this thing called church, KNOWING that Jesus didn’t just create it and let it be, but died to MARRY it, given that it’s always been The Father’s Plan A!...Let’s Pray!***

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<sup>6</sup> American Dream insight adapted from “Devoted” - *Cannonball*, Message #2 - Acts 2:42-47 - J.D. Greear

<sup>7</sup> Insight about contentment adapted from “Life is Absurd... Now What?” // Ecclesiastes 1-12 // Full of Nothing 2 - J.D. Greear