

## **ACTS**

The Church's Blank Check  
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## **THE CHURCH'S BLANK CHECK** **Acts 1**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, then I invite you to open with me to Acts 1. While you're finding Acts 1, I just want to express my gratefulness to God for His grace in you. The picture last week that we finished up reading the Bible through for a year, and I've heard so many stories from among you, and many of you were reading the Bible through for the first time and seeing God and knowing God through that, so thank you. Thank you for your zeal for the Word, and your zeal for the world.

Last year we, as a church, in our budget set out to give more than we have ever given as a church to needs in Birmingham and around the world, and, obviously, this last year was tough economically. There were points in the year where we were kind of looking at giving, and we weren't sure how it was going to all end up in the end, all the way up until a couple of weeks ago; to see if we were going to be able to give to the budgeted needs we had. We were pretty far behind, but I want to give God glory for the reality that, at the end of this last year, you ended up giving about 99 percent of our budgeted needs from last year, which is a few hundred thousand dollars more than you gave last year in total. The reality is when you take away what you ended up giving to the offering like the regular budget this last year; the Global Offering, which ended up being more than what you had given last year, and you add in what you have spent, even just through church, maybe you've gone outside of the church, and then a variety of different things through the church on short-term missions around the world. The reality is we, as a faith family, have given over \$9.5 million dollars towards the advancement of the gospel.

So, I have praise God for His grace in you. Thank you for praying for me last week as I was in Atlanta speaking, one day to a group about 6,000 college students crammed into a convention center, and then the next day to about ten to twelve thousand college students in an arena preaching the Word and telling them about God's grace in you as a church. You know, I was praying this morning and could not help but to think of you, and as I was praying for you as a church, I couldn't help but to think of 2 Thessalonians 1:8, which talks about how the church in Thessalonica and their faith had gone forth everywhere. What is encouraging, brothers and sisters, in all kinds of different contexts...I had a note, even this morning, that was sitting on my desk, and I want you to listen to it.

This is a couple who said, "Dear David, we want to say thank you to your church. We read the Bible together as a couple." So, this is somebody outside of our faith family. "We read the Bible together as a couple aloud for the first time in 34 years of marriage. This experience has truly blessed our lives in an awesome way: our relationship together, our individual relationships with Jesus, and our relationship with Him as a couple. Additionally, we have been blessed by listening to the study of the Word every week. We have attended some with our daughter who goes as a part of your faith family, and listened to the others online. We're looking forward to continuing with you in 2011. Can't wait to study Acts in depth. Please use this love offering as the Lord leads you," and they included a check for \$1,000 to our church. So, I read this just to draw a picture...a small, a really small picture

in the big scheme of things...of how your faith is encouraging brothers and sisters in many different contexts.

## **A Blank Slate ...**

So, this morning, what I want to do is I want us to come aside from our normal weekly diet of in depth study, and one particular text of Scripture, and an exhaustive outline to walk through, and really dive in. I want us to come aside and have kind of a heart-to-heart, so to speak. We do this every once in awhile. Just coming aside from what we need to do every week, and just deep study the Word; to step back and say, "Do we really believe what we're studying? Do we really believe this book?" To make sure we guard against the tendencies, certainly, that are so prevalent in our culture just to play games and to go through monotonous routines.

So, to step back, periodically, and say, "All right. Are we really willing to order our lives around this book? Are we really willing to order our church around this book?" There are some things God has been doing in my heart recently and over a while, but I just want to share with you this morning pastorally. I want us to start with this blank page, so pull out that blank page, okay? I want you to think about this with me. I want you to imagine a totally blank slate. I want you to imagine us as a people called The Church at Brook Hills, about 4,000 strong. So, 4,000 people called The Church at Brook Hills, imagine that there's nothing else attached. Imagine no building, no programs, nothing; just 4,000 people called The Church at Brook Hills, which is what the church is, a gathering of people.

So, just us as a people; to 4,000 people living in a world of sin, and rebellion, and suffering, and pain; a world where three billion people live on less than two dollars a day. One billion, out of that group, lives in absolute poverty; many in slums; hundreds of thousands of them dying right now of hunger because they don't have food; and preventable disease. I was joking around with the idea of the potential of snow and ice coming, like to see the grocery stores out there, "We have to get some milk and bread." Like, we probably have enough food stored up. We'll be all right, but there are a billion people who are not. Billions of people; billions are engrossed in false religions. Over a billion and a half have never even heard the gospel. They don't even have access to the gospel, and all of those billions are on a road that leads to an eternal hell; suffering forever and ever and ever and ever. If this book is true, there will be everlasting suffering for billions of people.

We know, you and I know, all 4,000 of us know that Jesus has come; He has come to die on the cross for our sins. He has come to save us from our sins. He has risen from the grave; He has given us hope. We don't have to fear anything in this world. We know that when we die, we're going to be with Him. We saw this last week in Revelation. We're going to be with Him forever. Fifty trillion years from now, we're going to be with Him and enjoy His glory and His beauty forever and ever and ever and ever. The Spirit of God has opened our eyes and our hearts to see Christ, and to believe in Christ. What grace, what mercy that we've been saved from sin, and we've been saved from ourselves! We've been saved from hell; saved to walk with God and to enjoy Christ and to have the hope of eternity in heaven.

So, here we are, 4,000 of us. The Spirit of God has not just saved us and opened our eyes. He's filled us; the Spirit of God is in every single one of us who has trusted in Christ. The very Spirit of God is dwelling in us, in each of us, and we as a people, 4,000 strong, have been charged to get this gospel to the ends of the earth. That's why we're here. That's why

we haven't just been taken up immediately. He has left us here for a reason, and that reason is to get this gospel to the ends of the earth.

So, here's the question: if we had a blank slate...4,000 people with the Spirit of God in us in a world of massive need, and we have the gospel; charged to get the gospel to the ends of the earth...if we had a blank slate, just us as a people, what would we do to carry out this charge? Where would we start? If there was nothing on the table, what would we do? Would we pull together our resources and spend \$20 million on a building? Would we try to find a way for us to get together so we could all hear one, maybe two, teachers out of the whole 4,000, and to organize it so that we can get the best music, and get us the staff to organize programs that will cater to us and our kids and our families? Would we spend our energy and time and resources on creating a situation that is most comfortable for us, most entertaining to us, and most pleasing to us? Would this be our strategy? I don't think it would be. Not if we realized what's going on in the world around us, and not if we believed the Word that's in front of us.

I don't think we would say...if all we have is the Word in front of us and the world around us, and we were thinking, "How are we going to get this gospel to this world?"...I don't think we would say, "Let's spend millions on a building." We would say, "This book, never one time, commands us as the church to build a building; not once." This book says there are better things to spend your money on. We don't have to build a house of worship according to this book; we are the house of worship. I don't think we would say, "Let's find a way for as many of us to get together here."

The reality is we want to get out there, right? If we have been charged to take this gospel to the ends of the earth, then we have to scatter. We ought to go; not them come to us. They're not coming to us. Most lost people in Birmingham are not coming to us. We have to go to them. We have to scatter and get where they are. Here's the cool thing: we don't even have to hire a staff to do it. We all have the Spirit of God in us. That's good. 4,000 people with the supernatural Spirit of God in them. That's power, and so, let's scatter. Now, as we scatter, as we go into neighborhoods, there are people in our neighborhoods and people where we work and people around us in this city and communities, like East Lake and Gate City, that we don't often go to. We have to scatter to the world, and as we do, we're going to need each other, right? We can't do this alone, so we're going to need each other in even greater ways than we need each other if we're all coming together organized around ourselves.

If we're going together after this world with the gospel, we're really going to need each other. So, we need to gather together. Now, we don't have to all gather together in one place, right? There are places we can gather together. We have houses. We have big houses. We have offices. We have places where we can get together, and we can encourage one another. We can share life together. We have to care for each other's kids and support each other's marriages and maximize each other's singleness if that's the case. We have to care for widows. We don't have to get together just to listen to one teacher. I mean, among 4,000 people, there are a ton of teachers here. The reality is, as long as it's the Word, that's what we need, right? We don't need a certain teacher; we need the Word. If it's God's gift that somebody must teach, it doesn't have to be in front of a couple thousand people; it could be with 20 people. We want the Word. We want to equip one another to go into the world. I think that's more the way we would think if we had a blank slate.

So in that, I want to give you a picture of the book of Acts. You read through the book of Acts...and we'll read through the book of Acts over the next eleven weeks...and we're not going to see a lot of the stuff that we associate with church in the book of Acts. We're going

to see a much different picture. Now, I want to be careful here because not everything in the book of Acts is prescriptive. In other words, not everything is intended to say, "You must do this thing this exactly this way forever." We're going to talk about that as we go along, and we study. Not everything in here is perfect in the book of Acts. It's not perfect; it's not easy.

The reality is we're going to see people who are losing their lives, getting beheaded. We're going to see a people at the end of Acts 2...and catch this...a people that were smaller in number than The Church at Brook Hills. There are a little over 3,000 people at the end of Acts 2 living the chapters that follow. We are going to see communities and cities and scattering to nations; starting churches all over the world in a way that Acts 17:6 will say, "These people are turning the world upside down." I'm just wondering, if we have the same Spirit in this room, if our numbers are even greater, then why can't we be a part of something like that? Why not?

This is where I want to challenge us this morning as a church to give God a blank check. We talk about giving God a blank check with our lives, and I've mentioned that numerous times before. To say to God with each of our lives, "Lord whatever you want me to do, wherever you want me to go, however you want me to live, I'll do it." To give God a blank check with our lives, this is what Jesus demands and deserves.

## **A Blank Check ...**

What I want to challenge us to do, and of course in the days ahead, is to give God a blank check with our church. To say to God, "God, if you want us to sell the building, we'll do it. God, if you want us to eliminate every single program we have, we'll do it. God, if you want us to totally reorganize our community of faith, we'll do it. Here's a blank check; no strings attached." This morning, I want to give you ten reasons why we must give Him that kind of blank check. Now, feel free, if you want to, to mess up the blank check on your sheet here. There's not going to be anything on the screen, and we're going to walk through most of these really quickly, but I want to show you, especially in Acts 1 and 2, ten reasons why we must give God a blank check as a church.

### **Jesus is worthy of absolute surrender.**

So, start with number one. If you turn to Acts 1, the first reason why we must give God a blank check is because Jesus is worthy of absolute surrender. That's the first reason; because Jesus is worthy of absolute surrender. Now, Acts 1:1 says, "*In the first book...*" Pause. What's the first book? The book of Luke is first; there's another book that Luke wrote called the book of Acts. Good, I'm glad we got that. You have Luke and Acts, kind of a two-part series, and this is the sequel to the book of Luke.

So, I want to remind you, from the very beginning, of what foundation has been laid in the book of Luke. The foundation that has been laid is the portrait of a Savior, Lord and King who is worthy of absolute surrender. You remember? In fact, turn there with me. Luke 9. Let me just encourage you to underline a couple of verses in the book of Luke. They remind us what it means to follow Jesus. Luke 9:23-24, and so this is the Savior that all 4,000 of us follow. The Savior who said in Luke 9:23, He said to all, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross*", which is an instrument of torture and execution "*daily and follow me.*" "Deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." "*For whoever would save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.*"

You have to lose your life. Christian, you have lost your life; you are dead to yourself. You get to the end of this chapter, Luke 9:57...this is what I was preaching on last week in Atlanta...Luke 9:57 says, "As they were going along the road, someone said to Jesus, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head.'" Jesus says, "You say you'll follow me. You have to realize you're not even guaranteed of the basic necessity of shelter. You follow me; I'm all you've got." We've come up with very strange strategies for worshipping a Savior who didn't even have a roof over His head.

"To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' And Jesus said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'" "More important than you going to your dad's funeral is the proclamation of my kingdom." "Yet another said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to those at my home.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hands to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'" In other words, don't even go back to mom and dad and say goodbye. Go. This is absolute surrender.

You get to the next chapter, Luke 10:3, Jesus is sending out 72 followers of His, and He says in Luke 10:3, "Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves." Not good news. If you're a lamb surrounded by wolves, you're not in a good position. You're in a dangerous position. This is not a call to comfort. This is a call to sacrifice.

Keep going in Luke 12:22, oh I love this. You can only imagine the disciples hearing words like this. We hear words like this, and we think, "Ah, what does this mean? Absolute surrender and sacrifice?" You start to worry what does that mean, and so listen to what Jesus said: "He said to his disciples," in Luke 12:22,

*[Therefore] I tell you, don't be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Do you hear what He's saying there? So, what I mean by Jesus is worthy of absolute surrender is you can let go of everything; let go of everything in your life, and you can trust He is good. Even when it seems crazy to the world around you, we can trust Him. When He says to do something, we can trust Him. He's worthy of that kind of surrender.

You keep going to Luke 14:25. Remember these words? "[Now] great crowds accompanied [Jesus], and he turned to them and said," verse 26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." That's bold. We're supposed to love Him in a way that makes our closest relationships in this world look like hate in comparison?

*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.*

Do you not hear what He's saying here? Jesus is saying, "Don't come to me casually." Surely, more than praying a prayer is involved in this thing; this is your life, surrendered to Jesus. He says in verse 33, "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has," some of your translations say "give up everything that he has cannot be my disciple."

When you get to Luke 18, remember this one? Luke 18:18, "And a ruler asked [Jesus], 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" Verse 19, "And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.'" Verse 20,

*You know the commandments: "Don't commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother." And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."*

Now, this passage does not mean that everyone who follows after Jesus must sell everything they have and give it to the poor, but it does mean that Jesus could tell anyone of us who follows after Him to sell everything we have and give it to the poor. Not one of our possessions is our own. They all belong to Jesus, and we have renounced, and we have given up everything to Him for Him to use. So, this is the picture of Jesus in the book of Luke.

So, when we get to Acts 1, we remember these guys, when all the crowds left, those who are still here are the ones who said, "Yes. Yes, He is worthy of absolute surrender." You look at these disciples here in the beginning. Judas is, obviously, not there anymore, so you have eleven. Ten of them would die martyrs' deaths. The one who wouldn't would die in exile because he had been put there because of his proclamation of the gospel. It cost every single one of these guys their lives.

I think about JD and JJ; and I don't want to overdramatize by any means, but I do want us to realize the gravity of where this couple is going to live. One of the most dangerous people groups in the world. I couldn't help but to think, as we were preparing to send them out, of the letter that Adoniram Judson wrote to his prospective father-in-law. He wanted to marry Ann, and he wanted to take her with him overseas to a people group to share the gospel with "the heathen," the way they would refer to it. So, he wrote this letter. He's asking for permission to marry Ann. Listen to what he writes,

I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring; to see her no more in this world. Whether you can consent to her departure and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life. Whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean. To the fatal influence of the southern climate of India. To every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this for the sake of Him who left His heavenly home and died for her and for you? For the sake of perishing immortal souls; for the sake of the glory of God? Can you consent to all this in the hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory with a crown of righteousness brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall resound to her Savior from heathens who have been saved through her means from eternal woe and despair?

Dads, what if you received that letter about your daughter? He said, "Yes," and they went, and Ann died on the field.

So, I look at this couple, and I see a couple that's willing to give up their lives. If they are willing to give up their lives, then surely, we would be willing to give up a building. If they are willing to give their lives, then surely, we would be willing to give up a program or a comfort. This is the inevitable result of a people who follow Jesus. Our lives are surrendered to Him. Therefore, when we come together, we hold on to nothing tightly. Everything is His; a blank check. There's no other option for us. If we are a community following after this Jesus.

### **Jesus is working to advance His kingdom.**

Reason number one, Jesus is worthy of absolute surrender. Two, because Jesus is working to advance His kingdom. Go back up to Acts 1:1. "*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach...*" Pause. Okay, see we're only in verse one, but listen to what Luke just said. He said in my first book: "Luke." The book of Luke; the story of the life of Jesus. His life; His death; His resurrection. He said, "*I told you all that Jesus began to do and teach.*" If He just began, that would seem to imply that there is more to come, right? He started in Luke, now Acts is the continuation of what He started to do.

Now, the problem is, when you get to Acts 1:11, Jesus is gone. Jesus is gone. Eleven short verses into heaven, Jesus is gone. He ascends into heaven, and here's the beauty: all throughout this book, Luke is intentional to show us that Jesus is in heaven for a purpose. He is in heaven for the advancement of His kingdom on earth. What you see is Jesus doing all kinds of things all throughout this book. Specifically, you look at Acts 1 here and look at verse 24. They were praying about who should replace Judas. "*And they prayed and said, 'You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.'*" "*You, Lord, know the hearts of all; you show us.*"

You go to Acts 2:32. Listen to this, "*This Jesus...*" in Acts 2:32, "*This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.*" Now, listen to verse 33, "*Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*" Who poured out the Spirit in Acts 2? Jesus did. It's Jesus who did that, and you get down to verse 36, it says that Peter is preaching, and he says, "*God has made him...*" We're talking about Jesus, "*both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.*" He's the Lord, and so, when you see "Lord" mentioned throughout this book, who is that a reference to? Look down in Acts 2:47. They are "*praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number*

*day by day those who were being saved.*" Who's adding to their number those who are being saved? Jesus is. He sent the Spirit; He's advancing the kingdom.

You get to Acts 9:3, you have Saul who's persecuting Christians walking on a road, and it says, *"Now as he went on his way..."* in Acts 9:3, *"...he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"* That is a deafening moment. Jesus says, "You..." and I love this...I don't need to preach Acts 9. We'll get there. So, this is Jesus confronting Saul on this road.

You get down to Acts 9:10, it says, *"[Now] there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying..."* and this is Jesus telling Ananias to go. Then, you get over to the same chapter, Acts 9:32, and listen to this; this is the story of Aeneas,

*Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.' And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*

The picture is, all throughout this book, Jesus is advancing His kingdom. All the way to the very end...Acts 28:30-31, which is where it says Paul was there in Rome, in the center of the ends of the earth, proclaiming the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is doing all of this. He is all throughout the book of Acts advancing a kingdom, and He's doing the same thing today. Jesus is still at the right hand of the Father. He has still poured out His Spirit on those who trust in Him, and Jesus is advancing His kingdom in Birmingham. Jesus is advancing His kingdom to the Arundo. Jesus is orchestrating the whole thing; He's doing it all.

So, I say we join Him—with no strings attached. We don't want to say, "Here's how we will join you." We join Him and say, "How do you want us to join you? Whatever you say, we'll do it. You know better how to advance this kingdom than we do. So, we're going to trust in you. We're going to fall on our faces. We're going to pray to you, and we're going to be in your Word, and we're going to ask you to do this among us."

### **Jesus has clothed us with His power.**

Number three: we have to give a blank check of a church because Jesus has clothed every single one of us with His power. You get down to Acts 1:8, and you know this verse; it's our memory verse this week that we're going to be memorizing together, and I'll talk about that later. Verse 8 says, *"Jesus says to his disciples, 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'"* Jesus had told His disciples at the very end of the book of Luke, Luke 24, "Wait. Wait in Jerusalem until you have been clothed with power from on high." It's a great word, meaning, literally, clothed as in to have a garment put on you, and this is what's happening. He said, "You're going to receive power."

When you get to Acts 2, the Holy Spirit comes down. These guys start speaking in all kinds of different languages with boldness that they never had before and with power that had never been seen before. They proclaim the gospel; 3,000 people are saved because of the

power of the Spirit, and it's astonishing everybody. At first, everybody thinks they're drunk because they're speaking all these weird languages. Then, you get to Acts 4:13, and you see a verse that says, "The people were astonished, and they realized these were unschooled ordinary men, and they took note: these guys had been with Jesus." We are a church full of ordinary people. This is the danger; even though we have designed this whole thing to put one person or a few people in front of everybody else...it's the ones who are gifted to do this or that. No, we have all been gifted with the supernatural Spirit of God. You, believer in Christ, you have the Spirit of God in you.

### **Jesus has given us the same purpose.**

God, in all of His fullness and all of His power in you; 4,000 of us going with that power. Why would we want to hold back in any way? No, a blank check. He clothes us all with His Spirit, and, fourth, because Jesus has given every single one of us the same purpose. He has clothed every single one of us with His power, and He's given every single one of us the same purpose. "*You will receive power when the Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my...*" what? "*...witnesses.*" This is probably where I'm most convicted. I put this whole system that we designed to say, "How are we going to lead people to Christ?" "Well, let's get a big place and have music and have somebody that's gifted to speak, and they'll do this; that's how we're going to lead people to Christ." The only problem is, if that's how the gospel is going to spread to the ends of the earth, then we're going to have to replicate this all over the world, but the beauty is we don't have to do that.

I'm not the only preacher in this room. You're all preachers. Now, that doesn't mean that you have to come up with a 55-minute sermon every week, but it does mean that you are on this earth, Christian, for one purpose; to preach this gospel, but we get trapped. We get trapped in this mentality that this is what a couple of people do; we come and listen, and we grow and struggle, this or that. No, we're all preachers of the gospel, and if we come here Sunday after Sunday, and we don't all leave here preaching, we're missing the point. We're wasting the gospel; we're wasting our lives. We're all preachers, proclaimers of the gospel, and God has put you in places that I'll never go among people that I'll never be, and the same thing in my life. The beauty is He has this thing rigged; He has 4,000 of us.

We're not the only Christians in Birmingham or the world, but He has 4,000 of us, and He's designed every single one of our lives to preach the gospel wherever we go. He's given us all the same purpose, so give Him a blank check.

### **The world is our goal.**

The fifth reason to give God a blank check is because the world is our goal. We give him a blank check because the world is our goal, and to be "*witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the end of the world.*" That was the goal. The Spirit wants the world for Christ. He wanted the world for Christ then; He wants the world for Christ now. I have to share this with you really quick.

I've had the privilege of pastoring here four and a half years, and not too far into that I was reading all this stuff about church growth, this or that, because I hadn't pastored before; didn't know what in the world I was doing, still don't, and I read stuff about, "Well, you need to pick your target audience in your community. Like, who is your church going to reach? Brook Hills Bob, and that's who you're going to go after." Maybe it's somebody, some kind of business...middle class, upper middle class businessman or business woman with income and family. So, how are we going to reach that person? That is what they said. I'm reading that, and I'm like, "No." So, we talked about we're not going to go after Brook Hills Bob, not that Bob isn't important; Bob's really important. We want Bob to come to know Christ, no question. We're going to work for Bob to come to Christ, but we're going to

work beyond Bob for Brook Hills Broody. That's what we said, looking back at my notes, Broody.

What we talked about was Broody is a man in Africa, and Broody lives in total poverty. Broody lives among a people group that has never heard of the gospel and likes it that way. Broody lives among a people group that is hostile to anyone who tries to bring the gospel to them. Broody knows somebody in his tribe, when they converted to faith in Christ, they were killed by their parents, and we said, "We're going to reach Broody, and it's not through the exclusion of Bob." So, we're going to reach people right around us here, but if we just focused on people surrounding around us here, we'll disobey what Christ has commanded us to do, which is to get the gospel to the ends of the earth.

So, what we're going to do is we want to lead Bob to Christ, and then when he does, we want to say, "Hey, your life is intended to get the gospel to others, Bob. Your life and your resources and your family." How can we get the gospel to those who've never heard it? We going to focus so we get to Broody and, once we get to Broody, we're going to go to the next people group that hasn't heard until the word "unreached" is no longer in the vocabulary.

So, here's the deal. So, a couple years ago...and I won't use names...but someone who fits the profile of Bob in our faith family came to know Christ through the ministry of this church, and he was saved. He and his wife began a small group, and began leading couples in this small group. One of the couples that was in their small group was JD and JJ. Brook Hills Bob has been reached for the sake of Brook Hills Broody, and that's our goal. The world is always our goal when we have the Spirit of God in us, because the Spirit wants the world for Christ. That's why we have to give Him a blank check because the world's our goal, and because the Word is our guarantee.

### **The Word is our guarantee.**

Number six, the Word is our guarantee. You look throughout the book of Acts, what you will see is over and over, it says, "*the Scripture was fulfilled*." It said this, even Jesus dying on the cross, was to fulfill what Scripture had said. You see in Acts 1:16 and the beauty is Scripture, the Word, is our guarantee. This Word has promised that this gospel is going to go to every people group on the planet, so we're guaranteed success. That's why we're giving a blank check because we don't have to worry about whether or not putting resources in this stock is going to work out in the end; it's going to work out in the end. Put all of your money there; put all your resources there because this mission is guaranteed to succeed, and that's number six, because the Word is our guarantee.

### **The Spirit is here.**

Number seven, because the Spirit is here. Acts 2:1-13, and you see the Spirit come, and the whole picture there is the Pentecost. The Spirit of God comes; there's so much tendency in our day to say, "We want the Spirit to come and do this or that." The beauty is the Spirit has come. The Spirit's here. The Spirit is in our midst. Now, we don't have to wait. They needed to wait in Acts 1. In Acts 2, the Spirit came; the rest of the time, no waiting; running. So, we don't have to wait for the Spirit. The Spirit's here, so let's give Him a blank check. He's here. Spirit is here.

### **The stakes are high.**

Next, number eight, because the stakes are high. That's why we have to give God a blank check with our church because the stakes are high. You get to the end of Acts 2:37, and they heard what Peter said. "*They were cut to their heart...*" They asked, "*What should we do?*" "[And] Peter said to them, '*Repent and be baptized every one of you...for the*

*forgiveness of your sins.” It says in verse 40, “And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them...” So, just feel the passion in Peter here saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” Brothers and sisters, the stakes are high.*

What we’re talking about this morning is so much bigger than who wins the game tomorrow, right? These are lives for all of eternity going to everlasting joy in heaven or everlasting suffering in hell. Do we realize that’s what’s at stake? That the people around us in Birmingham, if they don’t come to Christ, they’ll burn in hell forever; those people in the Arundo who, everyday, are dying without access to the gospel, and they haven’t heard? You see what I mean? Do you really believe this? Because if we really believe that this is what’s at stake, then comfortable 280 church culture just doesn’t make sense, not if we really believe the stakes are this high.

### **The glory of Christ leaves us no other option.**

Reason number nine is because the glory of Christ leaves us no other option. “*God has made him, this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ,*” Acts 2:36. He is the risen Savior, and He is the exalted Lord. Jesus is the Lord, and we want His glory more than we want our comforts. We want His glory more than when we want to do things the way they’ve been done before. We want His glory more than we want our traditions. We want His glory more than we want our preferences. We want His glory in all nations, and that’s why we’re going to give a blank check because we are consumed with a passion for His glory in Birmingham. We’re consumed with a passion for His glory in the United States and consumed with a passion for His glory in all nations. The blank check just makes sense; the glory of Christ leaves us no other option.

### **The coming of Christ leaves us with eager anticipation.**

Number ten: because the coming of Christ leaves us with eager anticipation. “This Jesus, whom you’ve seen raised up into heaven,” Acts 1:11, “is coming back.” He’s coming back, guys. He could come back today or tomorrow or next year; 2011 could be the year, and we know in Matthew 24:14 that He’s going to come back when the gospel of the kingdom has been preached to all the nations. So, He’s coming back at the fulfillment of the Great Commission, and we’ve talked about this before. So, do you think we could see the fulfillment of the Great Commission in our day? We have the resources, and, most importantly, we have the Spirit of God. Could we actually see the fulfillment of the Great Commission in our day? Brothers and sisters, I say we die trying. That’s why...that’s why we give Him a blank check.

Now, I want to be clear here, there’s not a “For sale” sign that I’ve planned to go up outside this building. There are not plans behind the surface to do this or that. There’s nothing specific even. This is us, as a faith family, saying are we willing to put a blank check on the table, and then see what God does.

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