



[TEACHER NOTE: Any athlete with tangible and strict devotion works in this opening illustration. Use something that your students will relate to.]

Like him or hate him, quarterback Tom Brady is one of the greatest athletes to ever compete in professional sports. Besides playing in nine Super Bowls, and winning six of them, Brady has achieved incredible things both individually and with his teams. None of this happened by accident. Tom Brady routinely wakes up at 5:30 AM and has an intense workout that focuses on flexibility and strength. He drinks up to 25 glasses of water a day, refuses to drink coffee, and limits his white flour, sugar, and gluten intake. He also spends 15 minutes each day doing online brain exercises to stay sharp. He's completely and totally devoted to being prepared for football.

The idea of being devoted can be applied to many different things. You can be devoted to a skill, to an activity, to a person, a cause, and so on. Being devoted means being characterized by loyalty and dedication. To be devoted means you've given yourself to this thing, whatever it might be. It means you've given over your time, your resources, and more in pursuit of a deeper devotion.

Let me ask you, what are you devoted to? What are the things in your life that you've totally and completely given yourself over to? For Tom Brady, this thing is football. It is the thing that gets the most of his time and energy. What is that thing in your life? It could be a sport, a goal, a relationship, or something else.

One day during the life of Jesus, He revealed something He was devoted to. In Matthew 16, he was with his disciples, and he asked this profound question. Let me read Matthew 16, starting with verse 13.

*13When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" 14They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then Jesus turns it around to His disciples and asks: 15"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. – Matthew 16:13-18 (NIV)

“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Wow! That’s devotion. Jesus is telling us something He is all in for and completely devoted to, the Church.

In this moment, Jesus was all “Look Petey, I’m going to build this church on people like you, and the gates of Hades (meaning the power of death and Satan), are NOT going to stop this thing called the Church.”

This is the first time the word Church is used in the New Testament. The Greek word is *ekklesia*. Now you all want to say that out loud don’t you? So, everyone repeat after me. “*Ekklesia*.”

The literal translation of *ekklesia* is “called out assembly.” It means a group of people who are called out of the lives they were living and invited to be devoted together to this thing called the Church.

Jesus was devoted to the Church. He committed to it so much that He declared that nothing was going to stop Him from building up the Church.

Let me ask you, are you devoted to the Church? Part of loving Jesus is loving what He loves. Now there are two different types of churches to be devoted to. We are going to call them big “C” and little “c.” [TEACHER NOTE: Consider using a hand motion, using the whole hand to make a “C” for the big C and your thumb and pointer finger to make the little C.]

Big C Church means the global body of Christ. This is all of those people around the world who have devoted themselves to Jesus and His mission.

In Matthew 16, Jesus is talking about the big C Church. He is devoted to building up believers around the world to be an unstoppable force to make Him famous.

Woah. Isn’t that arrogant? Jesus wants to make Himself famous? Is His last name Kardashian?

Let me frame it this way. Who should be the hero of this story? Jesus, who is almighty God, the One who spoke the world into existence and holds all things together, the One who knows all and can do anything He desires, the One who has sacrificed Himself on the cross so that we might have life. Now imagine if Jesus said “Well actually guys, I’m no big deal. Let’s lift up [TEACHERS NOTE: Insert familiar person’s name here, maybe a pastor or youth leader]. I mean, they’re swell, so let’s focus on them, not on me.”

You see, Jesus knows He is great. He’s not arrogant because it’s true. He wants us to know Him in all His greatness. The Church exists so that everyone will know how amazing and wonderful our God is. If Jesus didn’t know this about Himself and didn’t want to lift Himself up in this way, then He simply would not be God. He’d be a fool which is something He is not. He knows only He is worthy of being famous forever all around the world.

Don’t believe for a moment that the big C Church can ultimately make this world a better place. That’s not why Jesus builds it. Because without Jesus, and what He does in the human heart, even our best attempts to change the world will fall short.

But we do believe that through what Jesus did on the cross and through what He does in the life of a person who puts their trust in Him, He already has made the world a better place.

Jesus is the hero. He is the solution. He is the point. We are not and never will be.

We are not called to make the world a better place, but to be the better place that Jesus has already made. That’s what the Church is.

There’s a real difference between making the world a better place and being the better place that Jesus has already made.

You may just try and make the world a better place; maybe through acts of kindness, or social justice, or racial reconciliation, or whatever it might be. When all you do is try and make your world a better place without Jesus, then your world doesn’t know that they really need Jesus.

But when you’re trying to be the better place that Jesus has already made, to be the big C Church, you’re not simply trying to make your world a better