

Series: I Love Sundays	Reference: <i>Various Passages</i>	Title: Sundays Can Change Your Eternity	Date: 11.24.2019
Website Writeup: Why does the Church exist? How did it come about? What is God's plan for the world & for you?			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Memory Verses for this Series

Exodus 20:8 - ⁸“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Mark 2:27 - Then He said to them,
“Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

Psalm 100:4 - Enter his gates with thanksgiving & his courts with praise;
give thanks to him & praise his name.

Sundays can change your eternity. If you turn in your Church Bibles to p509, a little bit past the middle of the Bible...we've been reading weekly from Isaiah 58:13-14, who said...*If you call the Sabbath a delight & the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way & not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land.*

We've been talking about finding order in life by resting, refueling & refocusing all beginning with Sunday worship - what we're calling our Sabbath, our day of rest. Let's begin today by asking...why is the whole church experience so important & powerful? Why does Church exist? And how'd it come into existence?

Church was God's idea from the beginning. When we understand why God loves the Church, we not only love the Church, we love God even more. God wanted there to be a Church because God loves *you*. Church, the ecclesia, the gathering of God's people for worship, word & fellowship is a good healthy thing.

Pick up a Bible. Hold it & look at it. That's an ancient document. Its earliest chapters were written by the Jewish-Egyptian leader Moses about 3,500 years ago. The story spans much more time than that. In fact, it spans *all* of time. The story of the Bible *is* the story of the Church. Sixty-six books written over a 1,500 year period of time, from three different continents, in three different languages, by more than forty unique authors whose backgrounds ranged from prophets & peasants to apostles & kings.

Just look at the first four writers of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke & John... Matthew, a government employee, Mark, we know as a missionary, Luke was a medical doctor & John was a fisherman. There's an incredible chasm between the background, culture & education of these authors, yet the Bible stands as one story, one thread, one theme running through it from Genesis to Revelation.

Open your Bible to Genesis 1 for a minute, the very first book & chapter of the whole Bible. I won't read it to you, I'll just summarize the story. It begins with Creation. After crafting the sun, moon & stars in the sky, God constructs a perfect place on earth & populates it with animals & plants.

In the midst of this paradise He placed the first humans: Adam & Eve. Our first parents. God's building a family - the man & woman are part of it. At the end of chapter 1, when God made Adam, He said, "Very good." In the middle of chapter 2, when God made Eve, Adam called her, "Woman!" - this bone of his bone & flesh of his flesh.

Adam & Eve lived in perfect paradise. They were intimate with each other - naked & unashamed. That intimacy extended to God Himself, as part of His family. Turn a few pages to Genesis 3:8 where it says God walked "*in the garden in the cool of the day,*" apparently He did this on a regular basis just to be with them.

Genesis 3 is only the third chapter of the book, but it's the defining moment of the story. It's the rising action which makes the rest of the story necessary. Adam & Eve, who had freedom to choose anything they wanted, chose the one thing God asked them to avoid. If you turn back to Genesis 2:17, it says they ate from the tree God had labeled '*the tree of the knowledge of good & evil*', which was an act of willful disobedience. We've all been willfully disobedient in some way, at some time, as have our children.

Adam & Eve willfully disobeyed which fractured their family, along with the perfect relationship they had with God. Suddenly, they were naked & ashamed. And if you turn back to Genesis 3:8, it says when God came to walk with them, they hid from Him.

Because of their sin, their family relationship with God was broken & there was nothing they could do about it. God is perfect, what the Bible refers to as 'sinless'. And they were now sinful. Like oil & water the two can't mix. Once you've become imperfect, you can't ever become perfect again. It's like getting a question wrong on a test. You can get the next nine questions right, but you've still only got a nine out of ten. If I spit in your iced tea, there's only a small percentage of my saliva in it, but you'd still pour it out. That saliva can't be extracted from the iced tea - and the iced tea no longer serves its purpose. God's family was now fractured, and there was no changing that.

Fortunately, God cared about His family, and since they couldn't repair their loss, He set about repairing it for them. That's the rest of the story from Genesis ch4 through Revelation. The story of God restoring His family to Himself - and Revelation is the story of God restoring His family to a perfect world.

And...this is our story. We're in it together. The story of the Church. The theme of the Bible is God restoring His family. He's restoring His family so that we can relate to Him, personally in faith & to each other in love. Turn to P725 in your church Bible - look at John 3:16 which sums up the story for us (the verse on all the signs in the end zones of football games)...In this verse we see it's the story of an incredible God who "*so loved the world that he gave his one & only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish*

but have eternal life.” Genesis 1 sets the context of the story: God made us & placed us in a perfect world. We unmade ourselves & that perfect world by doing the one thing God asked us *not* to do.

Turn to the second book of the Bible; Exodus - p38 of your church Bible. A lot’s happened in the chapters of Genesis. God’s chosen His people beginning with Abraham. He’s blessed them & said that He wants them to be a blessing to all nations of the earth (Gen 12). And without going into more history, Exodus begins with God’s people living in slavery in Egypt. But as promised to Abraham, God’s going to use His people to re-introduce His family to every nation of the world. So in Exodus chapter 3, He calls Moses to liberate the people & lead them to a land they can call their own.

The story is so dramatic, Hollywood has re-made it a few times at least - *The Ten Commandments*, *The Prince of Egypt* to name a few. God uses Moses to lead the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt & into the wilderness of Sinai. There, at Mount Sinai, God delivers the law to Moses. God’s Law: the Ten Commandments. Given because He wants them to learn to live as a family again. Remember last week we heard that the Ten Commandments are found in Exodus chapter 20.

And on P52 of your church Bible we find *Exodus 20:2-3*, His first commandment, which is, *“I am the LORD your God,...you shall have no other gods before me.”* So, God wants to be the Father of His family. Then it goes on to Leviticus, the next book. Then Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings & Chronicles. All of these tell the history of God re-creating His family. First, He teaches the Israelites what it means to live with God as their Father with no other gods before Him. Then God introduces the other nations to Israel, as they’re taken into captivity in Assyria, then Babylon, then Persia. Under the Persian king Cyrus, they’re allowed to return to their own land, where they’re conquered by the Greeks, who bring their language to the region as a universal trade language. Then they’re conquered by the Romans, who bring their roads for rapid transportation & communication.

Turn to p796 in your church Bible, these are important verses - we’re fast-forwarding all the way to the New Testament book of Galatians, specifically *Galatians 4:4-5*, where the apostle Paul explains...⁴*But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,* ⁵*to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*

I like that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, bears the title, *Gods Son*, it fits the family theme as He originates from God the Father. God’s restoring His family. And after centuries of preparing Israel, and then the almost universal language of Greek & with Roman roads & the peace of that empire, God introduced His Son to the world. The stage was set, it was ripe to explode in color across the world canvas.

We know the Christmas story. When the time had fully come, God sent His Son through the Virgin Mary to a town called Bethlehem. The Son came to earth as absolute Son of God & absolute son of a woman. Fully God, miraculously communicating to us about,

and for God. And...He was fully human, so He could identify with us in every way, and we could identify with Him. During His ministry on earth, Jesus proved His divinity by healing the blind, deaf & lame, walking on water, feeding thousands with a few leftovers & teaching with unparalleled wisdom & authority.

Crowds flocked to & affirmed Him. After training the twelve men we know as the disciples, Jesus announced He was going to *build His church*, predicting the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

You know the next part, the Easter story. Jesus's announcement about the Church happens in *Matthew 16:18*, turn there for a minute, p669 in your Church Bibles.

Matthew is the first book of the New Testament, and it's the first to introduce us to the climax of the story. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus proclaims He's going to build His Church, He says... 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." Do you see the continuation of God's theme? The Church is God's family. It's the group which will spend eternity as brothers & sisters in heaven. Jesus is so adamant about building His family He announces, "*and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*"

Drop down a little from Matthew 16:18 to verse 21. Matthew 16:21 says, *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem & suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests & the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed & on the third day be raised to life.*

On the heels of announcing the building of His Church, Jesus then predicts His coming death. And on Good Friday, Jesus *was* crucified on a hill outside of Jerusalem. He died there, proclaiming, "*It is finished*" (*John 19:30*) then He died! What was finished? If you were standing there you might have said, "AHHHH! No. No. No. Jesus, come back, don't die! What did you mean, 'It's finished?'"

With His dying breath, Jesus was saying...through His death, God was completing the work He needed to do to rebuild harmony with us. The fracture which resulted from the disobedience in Paradise was being mended. The God who created our first parents was making it possible for His children to return to family relationship with Him once again.

That's a GREAT story! How do people get restored to God's family? By what God's Son, Jesus, did for us. He came to earth & lived a perfect sinless life which enabled Jesus to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Adam & Eve couldn't undo their sin, so instead of us trying desperately to work our way back into God's good graces to no avail, Jesus paid the price for our sins, like someone might pay the fine for a friend who's in jail & can't afford to pay it themselves.

Turn back again to P725 in your church Bible - this is why John 3:16 says, *God so loved the world that he gave his one & only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* Jesus's sacrifice gives us access to God once again, forever. I tell

you all that to explain how the Church came about, and why it's so important to God & to you. The Church is God's forever family - the community in which He gathers His children. The Bible says this family, the Church, is open to everyone who's willing to do two things...

Turn a few pages back to John 1:12 on P723...which says, *To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* You can become a child of God - part of God's family - if you simply Believe & Receive. To believe in Jesus means to believe He is the Son of God who came to earth & died for your shortcomings. To receive Jesus means to invite Him into your life to live in & through you as Lord & Savior.

You can become part of God's family right now, which is how Sunday can change our eternity. I wonder how many of you right now would say, "I don't know if I'm a child of God, but if I'm not, I'd like to become one today"? I'm going to give you the opportunity to do that in a moment. On Easter Sunday, Jesus Christ rose from the grave because He was the Son of God conquering death on your behalf.

He did that because we couldn't get right with God on our own. We've sinned, we've done things which are wrong. We've all sinned, as a matter of fact we have a sinful nature & Jesus came to pay for our sins.

I came to Christ at 21 after trying to find meaning & solace in many other ways, from a lifestyle which was destructive & selfish. I was aware of my need for a savior, aware that I could not reach God on my own, that my sin stood in the way of the relationship. I needed Him to reach down & save me - to do for me what I could not do myself.

When you believe & receive, all the junk which once separated you from God gets covered by Jesus's payment on your behalf. You can be covered in that way right now. I'm going to invite you to pray a simple believe & receive prayer. In doing that, you acknowledge your desire to become a child of God. It's not magic, it's an acknowledgement, even a surrender. It's a marker which says today you were born again into God's family forever. So if this is something you'd like to do, then pray this prayer after me right now, quietly. I'll pray it line by line for you, and you can repeat it after me silently. Let's pray...

"Lord Jesus, I admit, I am a sinner, in need of a Savior. I invite you, to be mine. Come into my life, live through me, and I will live for you, for the rest of my life. In Jesus's name, amen."

You may not want to do this, but if you prayed that prayer, would you raise your hand so we can celebrate with you right now? If you'd rather talk with me alone about that later that's fine, but please grab me right after the service. I'd love to meet with you! The Bible says that whenever one sinner comes to Jesus, the angels in heaven throw a party on their behalf. So we are all partying in our hearts with you right now.

And let's learn from this, it's not a complicated thing to lead someone to understand how to give their lives to Jesus - today may be just be preparing you to lead someone else to salvation in Christ - Pray for those opportunities.

Some of you have been around the church for a long time. You've grown weary in your walk. You feel like you've lost your way, you cannot see straight any longer. Let me pray for you right now to find your desire for Jesus once more. You also can repeat after me if you'd like...

"Jesus, I feel lost. I feel numb. I want to continue to follow you but I feel indifferent. My sin stands in the way of our relationship, please take it, and crucify it one more time. Uncover my desire. Clear away the debris of my life which has been piled on top of my desire for years now, uncover it & ignite it once more for the sake of your glory in my life. Make me once again joyful & willing to walk closely with you. In Jesus name, Amen!"

I want to suggest four things to you all before we leave this morning.

1. Welcome these new members of God's family, or encourage & pray for each other in your desire to walk with Jesus.

2. Thank God you are part of His family.

3. Share your story with someone not yet in the family. Ask God to give you a chance to share how you become part of God's family with someone who isn't yet a part of God's family sometime this week. If you ask, He'll oblige, so be ready to share! And then invite them to church next week.

4. Read chapters 6 & 7 in *I Love Sundays*.