

Series: I Love Sundays	Reference: <i>Various Passages</i>	Title: How Sundays Changed the World	Date: 12.01.2019
Website Writeup: Today we explore how the church Jesus established has and is changing the world!			

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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.

Once a week, God designed us for a day of rest & refocus. The pace & priorities of life can be governed by God’s rhythm in recognizing Sunday as that day of rest. We’ve learned Sunday can be the best day of our week. Sundays make better Mondays. Sundays build families. And Sundays change eternities (and two people prayed to that end last Sunday). And today we’ll see we see how Sunday’s have changed the world.

Throughout this series we’ve been reading the words of the prophet Isaiah in chapter 58 verses 13–14, p509 in your church Bible in front of you, where God promises...*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.*

It is possible to ride in triumph on the heights. Open your Bible to Matthew 16 starting in verse 13, p669 in the church Bibles - and bookmark that for a minute. While you’re turning there, let me say, I believe the Church, God’s Sunday people, have done more good for this world than any other group in history.

People who can see the future & shape the world in positive ways are impressive. Charlemagne, for instance, created the first public education system. Patrick Henry fomented a revolution by declaring, “Give me Liberty, or give me death!” Abraham Lincoln led the United States through the Civil War & ended the tyranny of slavery in the wake of a spiritual awakening in America. And Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned people being judged by the content of your character, not the color of your skin, birthing the civil rights movement.

The ability to imagine a better future & foster its creation is a gift, and when people use it, they bless the world. History’s rife with such people, but the greatest foreseer & shaper of the future was a carpenter from Nazareth named Jesus. No one has given the world a greater gift than Jesus. In the closing days of His life on earth, Jesus boldly announced He’d build His Church. Let’s read His exact words in Matthew 16:13-18...

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh & blood, but by my Father in heaven. 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.”

If you'd been there to overhear those words, you might've thought Jesus delusional. He's speaking to twelve young men, in an out-of-the-way place, in a backwater nation, under the oppressive thumb of the Roman Empire. How could one Rabbi with twelve guys establish a great movement? Not to mention he'd soon die horribly at the hands of the Romans not long after this. Yet, the Church He birthed has improved our world more than anything else. The story of Jesus & His Church is an underdog story.

The author of the *I Love Sundays* book we're reading points out, thirteen times Jesus says, “Follow me.” His most frequently repeated phrase which urged His followers to imitate His values & actions. “Follow me. Do as I do. Think as I think. Love as I love.”

The disciples took His request seriously, caring for people & proclaiming Christ far into Greece, Turkey, Spain, Italy, India, Africa & parts in between. Within a century, Christianity had spread throughout the Mediterranean Basin. Wherever they went, they loved people so authentically their faith was contagious.

New religions being illegal in the Roman Empire, meant Christians were persecuted. Belongings seized, Christians burned, fed to lions & used as gladiator practice in the Colosseum. Instead of deterring Christianity, this drew people to the Church. No one could argue about the sincerity of Christian belief & the movement grew.

Jesus rose from the grave on Sunday, so His followers began gathering for worship & refreshment on Sundays, making it their Sabbath. **Jesus taught His followers to love their neighbors. Turn to Acts 2:44–45, 47b on p744 of your church Bible... In the fledgling weeks of the Church, it says, *All the believers were together & had everything in common. They sold property & possessions to give to anyone who had need... (then 47b) And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.***

Jesus taught His followers to care for the hungry. Turn one page more, to Acts 4:34–35 where it says, *There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales & put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.*

No wonder so many were attracted to these Sunday people! As they spread to other parts of the world, from Israel to Syria, they started a church in Antioch. **Listen to this description of what Antioch was like before Christianity arrived: “[It was...] a city filled**

with misery, danger, fear, despair & hatred. A city where the average family lived a squalid life in filthy & cramped quarters, where at least half of the children died at birth or during infancy, and where most of the children who lived lost at least one parent before reaching maturity. A city filled with hatred & fear rooted in intense ethnic antagonisms...¹ Once Christianity did appear, its' superior capacity for meeting these chronic problems soon became evident & played a major role in its ultimate triumph."²

That story repeats itself yearly in every country & place where Jesus's people dwell. For example, in AD 260 the entire Roman Empire was hit with a plague which killed somewhere between one-third to one-half the people. Historian Rodney Stark writes, "Dionysius [a bishop at the time] wrote, 'At the first onset of the disease, [the pagans] pushed the sufferers away & fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead & treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert that spread & contagion of the fatal disease.' BUT...followers of Jesus "nursed the sick & dying & even spared nothing in preparing the dead for proper burial."³

In AD 362, Emperor Julian lamented that he & his pagan friends needed to imitate the virtues of Christians for reasons he stated, "*their benevolence toward strangers & care for the graves of the dead... [they] support not only their poor, but ours as well.*"⁴ Julian was bothered that so many were converting to Christianity because of their loving actions he launched a campaign to create pagan charities in an effort to match them. It failed miserably. After all, only Sunday people have the motivation to risk their lives for others. Since the Sunday Jesus rose from the dead, Christians have been serving & caring in the name of their Savior.

On the Sunday Jesus rose from the dead, He reunited with His disciples in the Upper Room. After training them forty days, He ascended to heaven. Then on Pentecost Sunday the Holy Spirit came down & Sunday people were born. Sunday became "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10). As Christians huddled on Sundays, they grew in faith, then went out & served anyone who needed it.

According to Dr. D. James Kennedy, Sunday people invented the modern hospital, the university, gave literacy & education to the masses, created free enterprise, representative government & civil liberties. Sunday people were the ones who abolished slavery in England & the United States (in the wake of a spiritual awakening), elevated the status of women, and invented the very concepts of charity & benevolence.⁵

¹ Rodney Stark: *The Rise of Christianity*, HarperCollins, 1997, p. 160.

² Rodney Stark: *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 162

³ Rodney Stark: *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 83

⁴ Rodney Stark: *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 84

⁵ *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born*, Thomas Nelson, 2001, p. 3

A majority of people groups on earth today had their languages codified by Christians, who created their alphabets & translated the Bible into their languages. The reason Russia has a Cyrillic alphabet is because Saint Cyril created it for them to have the Scriptures. That story has been repeated in languages & people groups across the world.

Take an art or music history class, and you'll find that many of the best & most famous pieces were painted or composed by Christians. We've been Jesus's hands & feet in transforming the hurting into helping, takers into givers & seen countless souls saved for eternity. Sundays infect people who celebrate them, who in turn infect the world with good! God's Sunday people have & are changing the world with intentionality through institutions & random acts of kindness every day.

As I said, people who see the future & shape the world in a positive way are impressive. Historically most have been Christians. Charlemagne, founder of an Empire, was motivated to create public school education because he wanted every person in his realm to be able to read the Bible. Patrick Henry, the one who shouted "Give me liberty or give me death," the cry that launched the American Revolution, did so while standing in a church in Richmond, Virginia. Abraham Lincoln, the emancipator of slaves, was a committed Christ follower. Martin Luther King Jr. was a Baptist minister.

History confirms, the Church has affected more positive change on our world than any other entity because of the efforts of Sunday people.

In your reading this week, there's a story of a church planter named Francis Kamau, who felt called to plant a church in his hometown of Nairobi, Kenya. When choosing a site for his church, Kamau decided to locate it in one of the worst districts he could find. His church bought land two blocks off a main boulevard that was home to bars & brothels. Within two years of Francis moving in, most of the bars & brothels were closed, because people found Jesus seeking better & healthier professions.

The story of the Church...wherever Sunday people go, God goes. Lives change. Hope abounds. That's what Jesus had in mind when He announced, "I will build my church." In his mind, Jesus saw His people reaching out with love & kindness to help others. Jesus's vision was, His people would gather on Sundays to rest, refresh & refocus, and scatter on weekdays to take His love to their neighborhoods & communities.

Bill Hybels said, "The Church is the hope of the world." He's right! Jesus, working through Sunday people, has altered our world. Two thousand years ago, Jesus announced nothing was going to stop Him from building His church. And nothing has. Today, the church of Jesus is 2.3 billion strong & growing. But world history isn't over, and we know where it's headed. There are two events to anticipate for people who love Sundays & live them out on weekdays. **I want to show them to you before we close this series. So turn to Revelation 19 on p847 in your church Bible.**

Revelation 19:6-9 depicts a day in the future when Jesus will be married to His people in the great marriage supper of the Lamb. The apostle John describes it this way: *6 Then I*

heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters & like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice & be glad & give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright & clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

When God was looking for a way to picture the joy & excitement of the day when Christ will be joined to His people, He described the greatest event available: a wedding feast. The wedding supper of the Lamb will be the greatest day in history. A real day, which is really coming. The Bible says we'll be dressed in fine linen representing *the righteous acts of God's holy people*.

How do you get the fine linen to wear to that wedding? You do good deeds in the name of Jesus. Don't miss this. People get to heaven because of grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). In a first-century wedding, the first act of a groom was to pay the bride price. Jesus paid that price on the cross of Calvary. You are the Bride & you've been paid for.

Once the bride price has been paid, the bride returns home to prepare for her wedding. She makes everything for her new home, including her wedding garments. If you're a Christ follower, your price into heaven has already been paid. Now is the time to create your clothes. You do that by doing righteous acts, like Sunday people have always done.

Let me read you one more passage. It's on p677 in your church Bibles, and begins in Matthew 25:14 & ends at v30. Jesus, just before going to the cross, told the Parable of the Talents. A *talent* was a huge sum of money. Follow along as I read:

[The kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants & entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest."

"So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Don't miss this important lesson...When life's over, there'll be a moment when you're united with your Master. You'll see Jesus face-to-face, and He'll tell you what He thinks of the efforts you put toward advancing His kingdom. According to this parable, those who do an outstanding job will hear, "Well done!" and be given incredible rewards. Those who do well will hear, "Well done!" and be given good rewards. And those who serve themselves instead of the king will hear, "You wicked, lazy servant!" Notice, all responsibility has been given to ability, so it's not an unfair advantage.

I want to all of us to hear 'well done' from Jesus, and be dressed in fine linens & present the Lord with bags of gold. **So I have one simple suggestion...Be the Church. Take your place in history beside the Sunday people of every generation.**

- Being the church means we seek to get out & love our neighbors.
- Being the church means we listen well, take risk, act selflessly & with humility.
- Being the church means we value life in all ways from the unborn to the aged.
- Being the church means we value all peoples in their ethnic & cultural diversity.
- Being the church means we support cross-cultural initiatives as a body such as what we've committed to in Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, and through YWAM.
- Being the church means we love each other well, encourage, keep short accounts & serve one another internally as a body. *(By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35)*
- Being the church means we intentionally think about how we use our time, talent & treasure (10% tithe to the local church - Alms above that) making distinctive choices to further the kingdom of God according to our abilities.
- Being the church means we're secure in our position with Jesus under grace, as found in Ephesians 2:8-9...⁸ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. And that...we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10...)*