

Sundays Can Change Your Eternity ***I Love Sundays, Part 4***

Good morning, everybody! Welcome to week four of *I Love Sundays!* We are learning these days how to make Sunday the best day of our week. Three weeks ago we learned that Sundays can surprise us and be the best day of our week. Two weeks ago we learned how to honor the Sabbath and prepare for Sunday as if it's the highlight of our week. Last week we learned how to use Sundays to build better families. This morning I want to talk to you about how Sundays can change your eternity.

Let's pray, and then get started. Father in heaven, we have come here today to hear a word from you. So please speak to us now. We're listening. In Jesus's name, amen.

NEED:

For the past three weeks we've been talking about getting our lives back in order through resting, refueling, and refocusing by participating in church on Sundays. What we haven't talked about yet is why the whole "church" experience is so powerful and how there ever came to be a church in the first place.

Why does the Church exist? And how did it come into existence? I want to talk to you about this today, because way back in the beginning, Church was God's idea, and it still is His idea. And when you understand why God loves the Church so much, I think you'll not only love the Church, you'll love God more. Because, really, when you scrape away all the details, God wanted there to be a Church because God loves *you*.

BACKGROUND:

When you pick up a Bible you come to realize that you are looking at an ancient document. Its earliest chapters were written by a Jewish-Egyptian leader named Moses about 3,500 years ago. The story spans much more time than that. In fact, it spans *all* of time. And the story of the Bible is really the story of the Church.

This book is actually a compilation of 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 and peasants to apostles and kings. Just look at the first four writers of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew was a government employee, Mark was a missionary, Luke was a medical doctor, and John was a fisherman. There's an incredible chasm between the backgrounds, cultures, and educations of these authors, yet the Bible really is one story, one thread, one theme that runs from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. Can I tell you the story? It is both God's story and our story

The Garden Story:

The story starts in Genesis 1 with the creation of the world. After carefully crafting the sun and the moon and the stars in the sky, God constructs a perfect place on an orb called earth and populates it with animals, plants, and wonder. In the midst of this paradise He places the first humans: Adam and Eve. These are our first parents. God is building a family, and the man and 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 said, "Wo-man!" because he was attracted to this one who was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

Adam and Eve lived in perfect paradise. They were so intimate with each other that the Bible says they were naked and not ashamed. That intimacy extended to God Himself, because they were part of His family. Genesis 3:8 says that God was so close to them that He walked "**in the garden in the cool of the day,**" apparently 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 in the story. It's the rising action that makes the rest of the story necessary. You've heard the story. Adam and Eve, who had freedom to choose anything they wanted, chose the one thing God asked them to avoid. They ate from the tree that God had labeled "**the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**" (**Genesis 2:17**). It was an act of willful disobedience. Have you ever done one of those? (Yeah, we all have.) Have your children ever been willfully disobedient? Everyone's have.

Adam and Eve willfully disobeyed. It fractured their family, along with the perfect relationship they had with God. Suddenly, they were naked *and* ashamed. When God came to walk with them, they hid themselves from Him. Because of their sin, their family relationship with God was broken, and there was nothing they could do about it. God is perfect, or what the Bible calls "sinless." And they were sinful. Once you've become imperfect, you can't ever become perfect again. God's family was fractured from the bottom up.

Fortunately, God cared about His family more than His family cared about Him. And since they couldn't repair their loss, He set about repairing it for them. That's the story of Genesis 4 through Revelation. It's the story of God restoring His family to Himself. Revelation is the story of God restoring His family to a perfect world.

You with me so far? Because this is your story, and my story. We're in this together.

This is 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, and to each other in love. It's the story of an incredible God who "**so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life**" (**John 3:16**).

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Genesis 1 sets the context of the story: God made us and placed us in a perfect world. We unmade ourselves and that perfect world by doing the one thing God asked us not to do.

Fast-forward all the way to the New Testament book of Galatians, where the apostle Paul explains that . . . **When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law . . . that we might receive adoption to sonship** (**Galatians 4:4–5**).

The Christmas Story:

You know this story! It's the Christmas story.

When the time had fully come, God sent His Son. Through a virgin named Mary. To a town called Bethlehem. The Son came to earth as the absolute Son of God and the absolute son of a woman. He was fully God, so He could pull off miracles and communicate to us about God 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 blind, deaf, and lame people, walking on water, feeding thousands from mere table scraps, and teaching with unparalleled wisdom and authority.

Crowds flocked to Him and affirmed Him. After training the twelve men we know as the disciples, Jesus announced that He was going to "**build my church**" (**Matthew 16:18**), predicting that the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

You know the next part of the story too. It's the Easter story.

The Easter Story:

Jesus's announcement about the Church happens in Matthew 16. 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 that He is going to build His Church. Can you see the continuation of God's theme here? The Church is God's family. It's the group that will spend eternity as brothers and sisters in heaven. Jesus is so adamant about building His family when He announces, **"and the gates of hell will not overcome it."**

Matthew 16:21 says . . . **From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.** On the heels of announcing the building of His Church, Jesus then predicts His soon and coming death.

On Good Friday morning, Jesus was crucified on a hill outside of Jerusalem. He died there, proclaiming, **"It is finished" (John 19:30).** What was finished?

With His dying breath, Jesus was saying that through His death, God was completing the work He needed to do to rebuild harmony with humans. The fracture that 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 again.

This, my friends, is a GREAT story! How do people get restored to God's family? By what God's Son, Jesus, did for us.

By coming to earth and living a perfect, sinless life, Jesus was able to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Adam and Eve couldn't undo their sin, so instead of us working our way back into God's good graces, Jesus paid the price for our sins, like someone might pay the fine for a friend who's in jail and can't afford to pay it themselves.

This is why John 3:16 says, **God so loved the world that he gave his one and 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.

The Importance of the Church:

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

Listen to this. John 1:12 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'll do three things:

- 1. Believe.**
- 2. Receive.**
- 3. And then Celebrate.**

To believe in Jesus means to believe that He was and is the Son of God who came to earth and died for your sins. Do you believe that?

To receive Jesus means to invite Him into your life to live in and through you as your Lord and Savior.

The best part of all of this is that you can become part of God's family today even if you aren't. Right now. This is how Sunday can change your eternity.

On Easter Sunday morning, Jesus Christ rose from the grave because He was the Son of God and He was conquering death on our behalf. Jesus did that because He knew we couldn't get right with God on our own. We've sinned (which means we've done some things that were wrong). Is there anybody here who's never done anything wrong? If so, raise your hand. Yep, we've all sinned, and Jesus came to pay for our sins.

When you believe and receive, all the junk that once separated you from God gets covered by Jesus's payment on your behalf. I want to invite you to pray a simple "believe and receive" prayer that opens your heart to become a child of God. Maybe you've never prayed a prayer like this. But, even if your faith is full, it reminds us who are, who God is and what He's done for us. I'll pray it line by line for you, and you can repeat it after me. Here we go:

Lord Jesus, (Lord Jesus),
I admit, (I admit),
I am a sinner, (I am a sinner),
In need of a Savior, (in need of a Savior),
Come into my life, (Come into my life),
And live through me, (and live through me),
And I will live for you, (and I will live for you),
For the rest of my life, (for the rest of my life),
In Jesus's name, amen. (In Jesus's name, amen.)

What do we do next? The very fact that what God has done for us in Jesus now makes us a child of God. Well, we should celebrate that! And we do celebrate that each and every Sunday. That's why I love Sundays. Repeat after me: *I Love Sundays.* ("I Love Sundays!")

APPLICATION:

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

1. Thank God that you are part of His family.

Tomorrow morning when you wake up, tell the Father how grateful you are to be His son or daughter. Celebrate being in His family now and for eternity!

2. Share your story with someone not yet in the family.

Ask God to give you a chance to share how you became part of God's family with someone who isn't yet a part of God's family sometime this week. If you ask, He will oblige you, so be ready to share! And then invite them to church next week. We've got one more great week in this series, and you're going to love the message next Sunday.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for doing so much to bring us into your family. Thank you for sending Jesus. We are so grateful! Use us this week to enlarge your family. We love you and we love Sundays. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.