

Sundays Can Change Your Eternity ***I Love Sundays, Part 3***

NEED:

For the past two 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?

Pick up a Bible please, for a minute. Or, if you've got one on an electronic device, turn it on and see if you can just try to picture the cover for a minute.

BACKGROUND:

The document you are looking at is an ancient one. 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, it was written on 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?

Open your Bible to Genesis 1 for a minute. I won't read it to you, I'll just summarize the story for you.

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 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 that? (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'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.

Have I lost you yet? 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.

Turn over to the second book of the Bible, the book of Exodus.

Exodus opens with a large group of people living in slavery in Egypt. God is going to use this group of people to re-introduce His family to every nation of the world. So in Exodus 3, He calls Moses to liberate the people and lead them to a land they can call their own.

God uses Moses to lead the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt and into the wilderness of Sinai. There, at Mount Sinai, God delivers the law to Moses. It's God's Law: the Ten Commandments. You want to know why God gives them these laws? Because He wants them to learn to live like a family again.

His first commandment is, "**I am the LORD your God, . . . you shall have no other gods before me**" (**Exodus 20:2-3**). God wants a family, and He wants to be the Father of it.

Turn over to Leviticus. That's the next book. Then Numbers, then Deuteronomy. Then Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. **All of these tell the history of God re-creating His family.**

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).

Have you ever stopped to think why Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is called “God’s Son”? **It’s because of this family theme. God is restoring his family again.**

The Christmas Story:

You know this 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. Turn there in your Bible for a minute. 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, saying, “and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

After reading Matthew 16:18 in your Bible, drop your eyes down a little farther to verse 21. 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 humanity. 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.

I told you all that to explain how the Church came about and why it is so important to God and to you.

The Importance of the Church:

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 two things. Listen to this.

John 1:12 says,

To all who did received 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 two things:

- 1. Believe.**
- 2. Receive.**

The best part of all of this is that you can become part of God's family today. Right now. This is how Sunday can change our eternity.