

A legend.
A legacy.
A lifetime of inspiration.



Reference Document

Sunday as the Sabbath for Christians

Eric Liddell was a Christian and most of his family were missionaries. Christianity began as a part of Judaism. And even after it became distinct, it kept a lot of very important Jewish ideas and beliefs. For Jews, the Sabbath was a special day once a week where you didn't work and spent time focussing on what is important with your family. In Christianity this idea was adopted on Sundays. The central idea was that taking time out to remember what's most important is essential. For some, the rule was a strict one and included sport. Despite Eric Liddell's famous refusal to run on a Sunday, he was certainly clear that his faith was not primarily about keeping rules.

The Core of Christianity

At the centre of Christianity there is a human being that we know lived 2000 years ago called Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe that this human was fully human and, in some sense, 'God' too. Since the Fourth Century CE, Christianity has taught that Jesus was fully God and fully human. The idea that God can become a human is a difficult one. Especially as most religious people think God is not physical.

Incarnation

The word 'incarnation' has the same root as 'carne' which means meat in Spanish/French/Italian. The idea is that Jesus was what God looks like 'with meat on'. Another way to say this is that the human Jesus is understood by Christians to *reveal* both what God is like, but also what humans can look like when they reach their full potential. A human being, showing us God, by entering into our world. Fully God, fully human.

A Revelation

The early Christians believed this incarnation revealed what God was like. Jesus took time to live alongside the outcasts of his time. He challenged the religious rules that he thought created an 'in' group and an 'out' group, a 'them' and an 'us', divisions that stopped people loving each other in the way that God loves everyone.

Jesus' message

Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?"

When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.'"

Jesus' compassion

Jesus returned, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

"Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law says to stone her. What do you say?"

They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!"

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

"No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

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Jesus working on the Sabbath

Then Jesus went over to their synagogue, where he noticed a man with a deformed hand. The Pharisees asked Jesus, "Does the law permit a person to work by healing on the Sabbath?" The Pharisees were hoping he would say yes, so they could bring charges against the man.

But Jesus answered, "If you had a sheep that fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you work to pull it out? Of course you would. And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Yes, the law permits a person to do good on the Sabbath."

Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored, just like the other one! Then the Pharisees called a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus.

Eric Liddell working on the Sabbath

One of the hardest decisions Eric had to make in the camp was what to do about Sunday games. No, he said, there were to be no games on Sundays; it was a principle from which he had never deviated. But many of the teenagers protested against the Sabbath ban and decided to organise a hockey game themselves - boys against girls. Without a referee it ended in a free fight. On the following Sunday, Eric quietly turned out to act as a referee. It is a most illuminating detail of his life: he would not run on a Sunday for an Olympic gold medal and all the glory in the world but he refereed a game on a Sunday, breaking his unbreakable principle, just to keep a handful of imprisoned youngsters at peace with themselves.

Incarnation - becoming Jesus for others

Later Christians came to believe that they could be an 'incarnation' of God for others. They could show others what God was like, simply by following Jesus' example.

They could be like God 'with meat on'.

They could show people that they were loved, just as Jesus did. They could transform the lives of others in the way that Jesus had transformed theirs.

They could 'be' Jesus for other people.

Eric Liddell's compassion

There are many stories about Eric Liddell that show him as a highly successful 'Christ figure' who strived to treat everyone he met with the same compassion. One of these moments happened when Eric was imprisoned in the internment camp. Some of the Christian missionaries Eric had been interned with withdrew into their own group and focused on not breaking the rules of their community. But not Eric. There was a Russian prostitute, whom Eric put some shelves up for. The Russian lady said that the only man who had ever done anything for her and did not want to be repaid in kind was Eric.