

RESTORE
BILLY SUNDAY

Saturday, May 23

Reading: Matthew 4:18-22

William (Billy) Sunday (1862-1935)¹ had a rough childhood. His father was a Union soldier in the Civil War and died of pneumonia shortly after Billy's birth. His mother was so impoverished that she was forced to send Billy and his brother to the Iowa Soldier's Orphans' Home at the age of 10. It was there that Billy discovered he had a talent for sports, especially baseball. At the age of 14, he was on his own, doing odd jobs to earn a living. He would spend his spare time playing amateur baseball.

In 1883, Billy's athleticism was noticed by the Chicago White Stockings who signed him to play professional baseball. For the next 8 years, Billy would play baseball for Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. He was an average hitter but a good outfielder and was known for his speed. Over the course of his career, he batted .248 with 170 RBIs, 12 home runs, and 246 stolen bases.² He was loved by both fans and teammates.

During the 1886/87 baseball season, Sunday and his teammates visited a saloon in Chicago. As they left, they ran into a group playing music and preaching the gospel on the street corner. Billy was intrigued. He started attending meetings at the Pacific Garden Mission and eventually gave his life to Christ. The change in his life was obvious to his teammates and fans alike.

He soon began speaking at the YMCA and in 1891 was offered a position as Assistant Secretary of the organization. Feeling God calling him to preach, Billy turned down a baseball contract for \$500 a month to take the YMCA position that paid only \$83 a month. But Billy knew he was where God wanted him. He spent the rest of his life preaching at evangelistic meetings around the country.

Billy Sunday was not your conventional preacher. He had no formal education but made up for it in enthusiasm. Some called him a tornado on the platform.

"He used his whole body in his sermons (and other nearby objects, such as his chair, which he would sometimes fling around while preaching). As one newspaper wrote, "Sunday was a whirling dervish that pranced and cavorted and strode and bounded and pounded all over his platform and left them thrilled and bewildered as they have never been before.""³

He preached forcefully against sin, but always ended with the gospel. He would then invite people to follow Christ and walk "the sawdust trail." He preached to millions of people in his lifetime and saw an estimated 300,000 people come to Christ.

"Billy Sunday was a blue-collar everyman, plainspoken, honest, and driven, who reminded the church once again of the need for effective evangelism, social awareness, and dealing with the problem of sin."⁴

Ever the colorful speaker, one of Billy's most quoted lines is this: "I'm against sin. I'll kick it as long as I have a foot. I'll fight it as long as I have a fist. I'll butt it as long as I have a head. I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. And when I'm old and fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to Glory and it goes home to perdition."

¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/evangelistsandapologists/billy-sunday.html>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Sunday

³ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/evangelistsandapologists/billy-sunday.html>

⁴ Alton Ganskey. 60 People Who Shaped the Church, p. 283