

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Why Sunday Is the Lord's Day

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-380

It's good to be back to open the Word of God. When I'm not here, I miss being in the church profoundly. And I try my best to find some experience that will substitute for Grace Church. When I was confined at home and I couldn't really go anywhere, which is pretty much been the way it has worked out since surgery, I was sort of left to either have a member of my family set up a computer so that I could get the streaming audio from Grace, which I absolutely loved and didn't happen often enough for me. But on those other occasions, I found myself trying to find something on television that would fill in. And that was a very difficult challenge.

I want you to know that the Scripture in my mind is profound. It is just profound. It is unsearchably rich. It is deep as to excel all ideas, all philosophies, all opinions, all insights by all human beings put together. And yet I found it almost impossible to find anybody who would just mine the depths of Scripture.

Opinions, plenty of them. Insights, plenty of them. But it was almost impossible to find someone who understood the beauty and loftiness of Scripture. Superficial preaching betrays a weak view of Scripture, a superficial understanding of its great, great treasures. So it's good to be here, and it's good to be with those I love and by whom I'm loved here at Grace Church.

Now having said that about the profound things of Scripture, and there are many, one other footnote I need to say to add to that. I just read a book yesterday written by Leland Ryken. I would commend it to you. It's a book on English translation work. It discusses philosophy of translation, philosophy of translation. For example, why the King James, New King James, NAS, and ESV are word-for-word formal equivalency translations as opposed to all the other translations which are called "dynamic equivalencies." And that's a book worth reading if it's in the bookstore.

The author sent me a copy to read, but it's worth reading to understand that there are people even in the translation of the Bible who have a low view of the Bible. They feel that the prevailing power that reigns over the Scripture is the contemporary reader, rather than the author. So the idea of the translation is not to give us what the author intended, but to give us what the reader would want.

So you have translations like The Message, The Living Bible, The New Living Translation, The NIV, the TNIV, The Message, Good News for Modern Man, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. All of them make the reader sovereign and they want to put the Bible into the modern context and the

modern language, no matter what the author intended.

They're the popular translations, I would venture to say. They dominate the evangelical world out there, and they betray the same lack of understanding that when you go to the Bible you want to make sure you're reading what the author intended, what the Holy Spirit inspired, not reading something that is some contemporary committee's spin on what they think readers would want to read. So it's a very, very important issue. It comes all the way down to that.

And we're just very thankful, I'm very thankful, for influences in my life through the years, and influences in the ministries we've had together here at Grace Church that have led us to the conviction that we want to know what God meant by what He said, and we want to know what He said originally, the way He said it. We want Him to be sovereign over His Word, not the modern reader.

So we use a translation that is a literal translation. I preach out of the NAS, the New King James would be a literal translation. The ESV, English Standard Version, the new, perhaps more poetic, more beautifully structured translation is also "formal equivalence" they call it, word-for-word-for-word translation, rather than some form of a paraphrase. That's why we use the ones that we use, and that's why I use the NAS and the New King James, which is another excellent formal equivalency text.

So we turn to the Word of God and we can find all the things we need to know there. And we don't need a Bible that's in the contemporary mood. We don't need a Bible that's been updated for us. We can go back to the original and get everything that we need.

And one of the things we need to understand is the importance of worship and we, in looking at the importance of worship, want to understand how Sunday fits into that, how the Lord's Day fits into that. And I gave a message on the sabbath because there are people who are confused about the sabbath, and tonight I want to talk to you a little bit about the Lord's Day. It's not going to be along message, or a long service, for that matter, but I do want to let you know what the Scripture has to say because I think it's so important.

Now this is Sunday, right? And you're here. And we're always here on Sunday and there's a reason for that. It didn't happen by accident. It's a pattern. It's not only a pattern here at Grace Community Church, it's pretty much a pattern in churches everywhere in the United States. It's been the time-honored traditional pattern, and it goes back, and back, and back, and back, and back, and all the way back to the New Testament time. The people of God, the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, have worshiped on Sunday.

I have been a lot of places in the globe in my lifetime. I have been as far away as Kazakhstan in Central Asia, and the believers there worship on Sunday. They always have worshiped on Sunday, and they continue today to worship on Sunday. I've been many times to the U.K., to England, Ireland, Scotland and the believers there worship on Sunday.

I've been to Belarus, a remarkable, remarkable country that has recently come into prominence for its anti-Christian and even persecuting mentality being displayed by the leaders there and being hard on the church. The believers there meet on Sunday. And other countries in the former Soviet Union, Russia, Ukraine, believers meet on Sunday. They meet on Sunday in India. They meet on Sunday in China. They meet on Sunday in the Philippines. They meet on Sunday in New Zealand, Australia.

They meet on Sunday in the mountains of Equador among the Indians in the village of Colta, where Patricia and I visited. They meet on Sunday in Brazil in the jungles and in the cities. They meet on Sunday all throughout South America. They meet on Sunday even in Israel.

How did this happen? Why don't they all meet on different days? Why don't some of them meet on Thursday, and some of them on Tuesday, and some on Wednesday, and others on Saturday? It's always been this way, and it's always been this way across the length and breadth of the whole of the Christian church historically.

And I remember this was a bit of a burden to me in my childhood because there were people who put all kinds of strictures on Sunday. Everybody met on Sunday. And when I was a little kid, they dressed me up in this little suit, and put a little white shirt on me, and clipped a little bow tie and made me stay that way the whole day, all of Sunday. And I remember there were very strong restrictions put upon what I could do.

I couldn't go out of the house. I couldn't play catch in the yard. I couldn't play ball. When we lived in Philadelphia I couldn't play step ball, which was a big thing to do on the steps of the row houses there. We just had to sit there. The one sin we could commit, and we could commit that like crazy was gluttony. I was one long meal. We got out of church about 12:30, we went home and ate until we went back at night.

But it was supposed to be a day when everything sort of came to a grinding halt, and we set it aside for contemplation of the Lord, reading of Scripture, reading of Bible stories, reading of Christian books or theology, talking about the things of the Lord, and most importantly bracketing the day in the morning and the evening with the worship at the church, and throw in Sunday School and maybe youth group before Sunday night, and it filled up the day.

It was pretty much the way it was across the nation, across the United States of America. I remember when I came to Grace Community Church in 1969, there was only one mall in the San Fernando

Valley and it was the first mall that was built here was the Panorama City Mall. Panorama City, this little city that we occupy a portion of, was a post-war city, where small little houses were built to accommodate veterans coming out of World War II.

And they built the first mall here and it was never open on Sunday, never open on Sunday. Neither was anything else open on Sunday. Stores were all closed. There were no organized events on Sunday. There were no sports for kids on Sunday. There were no planned activities in the community on Sunday. There actually were laws against that, laws passed by states and by governments.

Sunday was always very different from Saturday. Stores were open on Saturday. People were in motion on Saturday. All the events, all the sporting occasions were scheduled on Saturday, trips, recreation, work around the house. Sunday was a very, very different day, and it was recognized that way here. It was recognized that way by our forefathers in the U.K. and in Europe, going all the way back to the time of the Reformation and even back behind that.

I remember the year the local laws here in the San Fernando Valley were changed to allow stores to open on Sunday. Then eventually Sunday became like Saturday, with very little difference. But for literally centuries, Sunday worship and fellowship among Christians worldwide was the habit of the church.

And you could ask the question is this simply arbitrary? Did it just kind of happen that way? It would be pretty hard to sell somebody on that idea since you have all these different countries, all these different languages, and all these different centuries and it's an unbroken pattern.

How did it get started? Who started it? And why are we still conducting services on Sunday? And why do we still have a kind of a deference to Sunday in a five-day work week that ends on Friday? Did this just happen by accident?

Well, many churches had begun to whittle away at Sunday, this in the last 25 years or so. They have reduced Sunday to a one-hour non-intrusive experience you can have on your way to the beach in your bathing suit, if you want. They have minimized Sunday down to this one hour that you can get out of the way, and in order to accommodate people who don't even want to dent Sunday with that, they accommodate that with a Saturday night service. You can go to the Saturday night service, and you don't have to pay any attention to Sunday whatsoever. So you can have the whole day at the beach, and you can do the Saturday service at night when it's dark and you can't go outside and play, anyway. This is typical of the contemporary trend.

And people seem to make very little difference between whether people gather on a Saturday or a Sunday. It doesn't seem to be an issue. There are lots of folks who would like to leave Sunday completely free for games, recreation, and going to the mall, or wherever else they want to go, and

throw in a Saturday night service that just takes a little while, seems to accommodate them readily.

Well does it really matter? Is it important for us to do this on Sunday? Couldn't we just as well do it any other day or every other day?

Now let's kind of pick up where we left off last time in answering that question. Go to Colossians 2 for a minute. We're just going to follow through some scriptures and I'll kind of let you draw the conclusion. Colossians 2:16, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath day - things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

Remember what I told you last time about the sabbath day? It is gone, right? It is gone. So whatever we're talking about on Sunday, we're not talking about the sabbath. The sabbath was the seventh day of the week. It was instituted under the Mosaic law between the fall of man and Moses. There were no sabbath laws. There was no sabbath observance. That came in the Mosaic law. Centuries went by, none of the patriarchs had any kind of sabbath laws.

On the seventh day, after creation, you remember God rested and God blessed that day. Why? As a day that would always be a memorial to the fact that God had created the universe in six days. And so the seventh day was always going to be a reminder of God as our Creator. And we worked through that in our last session. Every Saturday that comes along, which is the seventh day of the week - Sunday being the first day of the week - every Saturday that comes along is a good day for us to remember, first of all, God is Creator.

And we have that in our heritage. That's why people didn't work on the weekend because Saturday could be a day when you could enjoy the creation, when you could have recreation. You didn't have to go to work. This was all a Christian kind of structure. You could go out, and take your family, and have a picnic, or play a ball game, enjoy the outside, enjoy the creation of God. That was part and parcel of remembering God as Creator.

We also suggested to you that when the Mosaic law came along, God ordained a sabbath day for the people to observe and to obey God, and put some restraints on them to remind them of their sinfulness. So every Saturday that comes along kind of has a two-fold role. It causes us to remember God as Creator, and to remember how sinful we really are, and truly we are sinful.

But the sabbath is gone. Colossians 2:16-17, "Don't let anybody hold you to a sabbath day." It's gone. It is part of Judaism that has been replaced by the new covenant. And the new covenant has a completely different day. Saturday, as I said, reminds us of God as Creator and God as law-giver, and it reminds us of the beauty of God's creation, the magnificence of His creation, and the sinfulness of our own hearts.

But when you come to the new covenant, you have a new kind of observation, not observing God as Creator, not observing God as law-giver, but in the new covenant God is defining Himself as what? Savior. So the new covenant has its own day, a day in which we focus on God as our Savior.

Now let's see how this kind of all kind of happened. Go to the end of the gospel of Matthew, end of the gospel of Matthew. Suffice it to say, the argument from history is that the church has taken this seriously, that the church has made an issue out of Sunday since the New Testament times. Here we are 2,000 years later and the church is still meeting on Sunday. I would say it's pretty deeply embedded.

But in Matthew 28, it's the day after the sabbath, that would be Sunday - sabbath on Saturday. "As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of Him and became like dead men.

"The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; for I know that you're looking for Jesus whose been crucified. He's not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly, tell His disciples He is risen from the dead; and behold, He's going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold I have told you.'

"Then they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. And Jesus said to them, 'Don't be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.' "

It is dawn on Sunday morning, familiar scene, right? This is the Sunday when Jesus arose and appeared to Mary Magdalene, to Mary the mother of James. This is resurrection day.

Verse 7, "Go quickly and tell His disciples He has risen from the dead." Tell them quickly because there's a lot that's going to happen in this day. This is right at daybreak, you remember. Before this event, Sunday had no place in a Jewish calendar, no important place. None. It was not identified as a special day in any sense, religiously or socially. It was like every other day.

But once the Lord rose from the dead on the first day of the week, the first day of the week would never be the same again because if you memorialize the creation on the seventh day, and if you memorialize, as it were, the law on the seventh day, you certainly want to memorialize the resurrection, don't you? If you celebrate God as Creator and God as law-giver, you certainly want to celebrate Him regularly and even more joyfully as Savior.

By the way, you have the first Sunday worship service in verse 9. They came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Small service, but a service of worship.

Turn in your Bible to Luke 23 and we're just kind of constructing the scene, and I'm not going to go into all the detail. We covered it as we closed out the book of Luke, all the things that are happening. But the key thing to think of in that verse, verse 7, is "quickly," get the message out because this day is going to be packed full. We've got to get this day going early.

Luke 23:55, "The women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, saw the tomb how His body was laid. Returned, prepared spices, perfumes. On the sabbath day they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, - " Luke 24:1 " - at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, they entered, they didn't find the body of Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; as the women were terrified, bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He's not here, He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee saying the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'

"And they remembered His words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. There were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James; other women with them telling these things to the apostles. These words appeared to them as nonsense, they wouldn't believe them. Peter got up, ran to the tomb; stooping looking in, saw the linen wrappings only, went away to his home, marveling what had happened."

You remember Peter and John went to the tomb, as the other gospel writers tell us, and they realized the resurrection had taken place. Again, it is dawn on Sunday. The women are first. They go back, they report. And more come, and the Apostles come, and it becomes apparent very, very early in the morning that the Lord is risen and He is alive, which means that He has accomplished redemption on the cross. He has been raised for our justification. He has conquered sin, and death, and hell. He has borne our sins in His own body on the cross, been made sin for us, and He has risen from the dead in triumph.

And it's still early. Again the same day, verse 13, "Two of them are going that very day - " it's still first day, still a Sunday, " - to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. Talking to each other about all these things that had taken place. And while these two disciples were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. Their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, 'What are these words that you're exchanging with one another as you're walking?' And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, 'Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things that

are happening here these days?' ” How can you not know what’s going on?

“And He said, ‘What things?’ And they said to Him, ‘The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. And we were hoping that it was He who was going to be the Redeemer of Israel. Besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.’ ”

And that mattered, of course, you remember, because He said He would rise on the third day and they didn’t have that information yet. Well at least they didn’t believe it yet.

“Some women amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and didn’t find His body, they came, saying that they had a vision of angels who said He was alive.” They hadn’t really owned that. They hadn’t believed that. “He said, ‘O foolish men and slow of heart - ” verse 25 “ - to believe in all the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for Christ to suffer these things, enter into His glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them things concerning Himself and all the Scriptures?

“They approached the village where they were going, He acted as though He was going to go further. They urged Him saying, ‘Stay with us, it’s getting toward evening, the day is now nearly over.’ So He went in to stay with them. When He had reclined at table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, breaking it, He began giving it to them. Their eyes were opened they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.”

Quite a day. Quite a day. In the morning He appears to the apostles and the women. In the afternoon He appears to these two on the road to Emmaus, two disciples unnamed, except for Cleopas, the other one unnamed. But there’s more yet. There’s more yet.

According to verse 32, “They said to one another, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scripture to us?’ And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, ‘The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.’ And they began to relate their experience on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.”

Boy, this is some Sunday. And by the way, you had the first Sunday worship, and you also had the first Sunday sermon. It’s in verses 25-27, “ ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets had spoken! Was it not necessary for Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’ And He began with Moses and all the prophets, expounding to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” The first sermon was an expository sermon on the first Sunday.

First worship service, the first Sunday, and it's not over. It's not over. They, having come to realize Jesus was alive, "run back to Jerusalem - " the seven miles " - and they found the eleven and those who were gathered with them, and told them, 'the Lord had really risen.'"

Then it got really interesting, verse 36. "While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be to you.' They were startled and frightened and thought they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. And while they couldn't believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave Him a piece of broiled fish; took it and ate it with them." And now they know. They know "that all the things written about Me and the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms are being fulfilled."

John's chronicle is also quite interesting. Turn to John chapter 20, and again we're not trying to cover details, but just give you the big picture. John 20:1. "The first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, just before dawn, saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. Ran and came and told Simon Peter and the other disciples." They go through the same wonderful story. This is the account of Simon Peter who arrive, they find the face cloth and the linen wrappings. This is the occasion when Mary Magdalene is confronted by Jesus and says in verse 18, "I have seen the Lord."

Now we pick up the story in 20:19, that we left off in Luke 24. "When it was evening on that day - " the two from Emmaus have come back to the upper room where the eleven are. It's the first day of the week. Note that, would you? In verse 19, "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week." No wonder Jesus said, "Go quickly and tell everybody," because by all the running back and forth, time is elapsing. It's important that all these occasions of the visible Christ manifesting Himself be able to happen on that first day.

So it is "the first day of the week, and the doors were shut." You remember that Luke said they were afraid and startled when He arrived? Of course, because the doors were shut. He came through the wall. "He came and stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' " And He said, "Peace be with you," because they were no doubt in a state of panic when He appeared - panicked because they thought He was dead, and panicked because the door was locked.

"He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' " He gives them a reiteration of the commission. And then "He breathes on them and says to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' " And this is a preview promise of the reception of the Holy Spirit. What a day. What a day.

By Friday night when Jesus is dead, their hopes are smashed, and crushed, and dashed. The best that they can imagine is that they can rest on the sabbath because they can't do any work or take any kind of trip, so even the women who were going to anoint His body have to wait till the sabbath's over and they'll go and do it. It will be a nice thing to do, anoint the corpse of Jesus. That was the best that they could have hoped for was some act of kindness to the dead body of the one they had put their trust in.

By the time that Sunday is over, they all know Jesus is alive from the dead. Peter knows it, John knows it, Mary Magdalene knows it, the other Marys, the other women know it, other disciples know it. And by Sunday evening, all the disciples know it with one exception, who was absent? Thomas. Thomas was absent.

Pick it up in John 20:21, "Jesus said to them, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I send you,' breathed on them, said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' " Verse 24, "But Thomas, one of the Twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came." Such a doubter, was probably off in the corner saying, "I was right. I had every reason to doubt."

"So the other disciples were saying to him, 'We've seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hand the imprint of the nails, put my finger in the place of the nails, put my hand into His side, I won't believe.' " This is fabulous. Verse 26, "After eight days His disciples were again inside." What day would that be? Sunday. Nothing happened in the seven days in between. It is not until that eighth day that the disciples again are gathered together.

Were they gathered together in the other days? You better believe they were. I mean, they were hiding. "Jesus came, the doors having been shut - " again " - stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you.' He said to Thomas, 'Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; reach here with your hand and put it into My side; do not be unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.' "

Many other signs than the ones written here, John says, could be written about the work of Christ. But the point that I want you to notice is Sunday all of a sudden became a very, very special day. Jesus makes two miraculous post-resurrection appearances to the disciples, both of them on a Sunday, both of them on a Sunday. It is on a Sunday that they know He is alive from the dead. It is on a Sunday that they know the Old Testament is being fulfilled. It is on a Sunday that they know the Father has affirmed His redemptive work on the cross. It is on a Sunday that He pledges to them that they will receive the Holy Spirit to be empowered for ministry in the future. It is on a Sunday that all the past of His ministry and His death comes to make sense, and what a Sunday.

Jesus rose from the dead on that Sunday. Appeared on that Sunday in the morning. Appeared on that Sunday in the afternoon. Appeared on that Sunday in the evening. Showed Himself alive to the women on that Sunday. They had the first worship service on that Sunday. Jesus preached the first sermon on that Sunday. Met two disciples on that Sunday. Broke bread with them and disclosed Himself to them and miraculously vanished.

He met that night with the eleven, minus Thomas, on that Sunday, and twice pronounced peace on them and ate with them. He must have taught several times on that Sunday, not only on the road to Emmaus but no doubt in the upper room again, as He told them that He had indeed come to fill the Old Testament promises.

On that Sunday, He told His disciples that forgiveness of sins was now available through what He had accomplished, and it was available to all who would repent and believe. On that Sunday, He stated the great commission that they were to go out and proclaim the gospel. He launched, as it were, the unlimited worldwide mission of evangelism by commissioning His disciples and apostles to take the gospel and proclaim it to the ends of the world.

And on that Sunday, as I said, He pledged to them that they would have the power of the Holy Spirit. The great new covenant had been ratified. Forgiveness of sins for all sinners of all ages who came to God was accomplished. What a day. What a day. And it was a Sunday, and prior to that, Sunday had absolutely no significance, none. But from that day on, Sunday took on a completely different meaning. Sundays would never be the same again.

Sunday became new covenant resurrection day in their minds because God had chosen that day. If the seventh day was designed by God for delighting in Him as Creator, and then having been corrupted by the fall, if the seventh day was also designed by God to put fear in the heart because of the violation of His holy law, here was another day. This was not a day to celebrate creation or to celebrate sin, or the sinfulness of sin, this was a day to celebrate salvation. Resurrection was the dawning of a new day, and so the new covenant has a new day. The sabbath is gone, and the new day has come, and it is the day of celebration of the work of Christ.

Now it doesn't end there. Why eight days later? The Lord was saying something about Sundays, instituting a new covenant day of commemoration. Turn to Acts 2 and let me reinforce that a little bit, Acts 2. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a rushing violent wind, and filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire - " not actual fire but looked like fire " - distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit was giving utterance." This was the coming of the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus had promised when it says “He breathed on them” in John 20, that was a promise. That was a pledge that was fulfilled on the day of pentecost. Here is a monumental fulfillment of prophecy.

By the way, go back to 1:8, “You will receive power - ” Acts 1:8 “ - when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” He’s coming, and it was not long after Jesus made that promise that the Spirit did come. And the Spirit came, as we all know, to empower believers to fulfill the commission of proclaiming the glorious gospel, as well as to affirm their faith, to seal their faith, to give them assurance and confidence, to give them internal testimony to the validity of the gospel.

Jesus had made this promise repeatedly. John 14:16, “I will ask the Father, He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world can’t receive, because it doesn’t know Him or see Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Literally, “I will come to you in the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ.”

Jesus makes this promise John 14, John 15, John 16, again, and again, and again. The Spirit’s going to come. He’s going to take up residence in you. He is literally going to baptize you into My body, making one the church. He is going to give you gifts, spiritual gifts, and enablements. He’s going to give you power for evangelism. And the Spirit did come as promised.

And fascinating, isn’t it, that it happens on the day of pentecost? This is when the church was born. This is when the disciples were empowered. This is the first baptizing work of Christ as He baptizes believers by means of the Spirit into His body. This is the day when the kingdom comes to life. This is a glorious, marvelous day.

And you remember that in 2:14 Peter stands up, gives this great sermon concerning the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He says in verse 23, “This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men, put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”

Then he goes on to preach from Psalm 16 an exposition of the promised resurrection of the Messiah. And it has a phenomenal impact. “When they heard it - ” verse 37 “ - they’re pierced to the heart. He says, ‘Repent, be baptized for the forgiveness of sin; receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ ” Three thousand people are converted.

Why am I bringing this into the discussion? Did you ever wonder what day of the week it was on pentecost? Do you know what day of the week it was? Just happened to be Sunday. It just happened to be Sunday. According to Leviticus 23:16, the feast of weeks, pentecost, was designated to

dedicate the firstfruits of the harvest of wheat, that would be May, June. It is called pentecost, "pente" meaning "five," because it occurred 50 days after the sabbath, preceding the feast of firstfruits. So you have a sabbath, plus 50 days. Simple calculation. A sabbath plus 7 sabbaths, 49, would fall on a sabbath, right? So 50 would be the first day of the next week. It's Sunday again.

Pentecost happens on a Sunday. As unique as this is, all these references are short of commanding us to observe the first day of the week as if it had some special sort of Mosaic significance. We don't have any New Testament commands regarding the first day of the week. We just have the very obvious fact that God filled that day with the most significant events in the founding of the church, namely the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the arrival of the Spirit of God.

The events of the resurrection, and the birth of the church, and the empowerment of the church, the completion of salvation, the coming of the Holy Spirit; these glorious foundational realities that are at the very heart of our redemption, these are the realities that replaced the shadows and the forms of the sabbath. They happen on a Sunday and the Lord, then, has picked out His own day.

And just as I told you this morning, when He appointed twelve apostles, He left the leaders of Israel behind. When our Lord established the first day, He left the seventh day behind. The Mosaic law for the seventh day is passed away.

It is the worst thing possible for people who call themselves Christians to take restrictions intended for the Mosaic sabbath and try to impose them on Sunday. That's opposite the intention of our Lord. Don't let anybody hold you to a sabbath day. You're not under the Mosaic law anymore. You're not under the constraints, and ceremonies, and restrictions, and restraints of the Mosaic law.

We have a new day. We left Judaism behind. We left the sabbath behind. We left the leaders of Israel behind. We have a new covenant. We have new ministers of that new covenant and we have a new day. It's not like the Mosaic sabbath, not at all.

Oh, you can still, I think, think of the seventh day, Saturday, in a sense as the day that reminds us that the Lord created everything in six days. I think that's a wonderful thing to do. You can still be reminded it was the law of God that came down on people's heads with regard to the sabbath, and it's good to remember that you're a sinner. But there's nothing in the New Testament that takes old covenant restrictions and restraints from the Mosaic sabbath and imposes them on the first day of the week.

Keep in mind, please, that from Genesis 2 where God rested until giving the Mosaic law, hundreds, centuries, centuries later, through all that period of time, there were no restraints on anyone's behavior on Saturday. It was just the day that you remembered God as Creator, even though men were sinful. There were no restrictions and no restraints. That didn't even come till Moses. It started

with Moses and it ended with the abolishing of the old covenant and the establishing and the ratifying of the new covenant.

New covenant Sunday, then, is kind of like old sabbath from Genesis. You remember God blessed the sabbath day, made it a day of blessing to remember your Creator. Well, He's blessed the first day and made it a day to remember your Redeemer. When God instituted a day of rest originally, it was a day of rest. Under Moses, it was a day of anything but rest. But the Lord's Day for us is to be a day of delight. It's to be a day of blessing. It's to be a day not fraught with external regulations. I guess, in a sense, in Christ the rest originally identified in Eden is recovered.

What is the point of the first day? The soul is to be refreshed. The soul is to be refreshed with joy, peace, with spiritual delight. The soul is to be refreshed with divine truth. The soul is to be refreshed in worship, with teaching the preaching of the Word of God. This is a sweet gift from God.

We ought to be very thankful that we live in a country that still has vestiges of commitment to Sunday. Fast passing away, aren't they? But it was always intended to be a day of rest. It's not a day to be infused with restrictions and restraints borrowed from the Mosaic law. That's always the issue with covenant theology. They don't know where things end and where new things begin.

In Galatians 4:9, "Now that you have come to know God, to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?" You don't want to go back to that. "You observe days and months and seasons and years." Don't do that. "I fear - " Paul says " - for you, perhaps I've labored over you for nothing." I mean, have I wasted my time setting you free in Christ? Are you going to go back to observing days, sabbath days, months, seasons, years? We're not under any sabbath law at all.

Well, the Sunday of resurrection was a very special Sunday. The following Sunday was a very special Sunday. Pentecost was a very special Sunday. Certainly after pentecost, Sunday was very well established in the hearts of the people of God. Did they worship only on Sunday? No, no. They worshiped how often? Every day. Acts 2:46, "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, breaking bread from house to house, taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, having favor with all the people."

You know, they were experiencing that every single day, and that is what Sunday should be. It should be a day of coming together. It should be a day of devoting yourselves to the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer. It should be a day of taking meals together with gladness, sincerity of heart, praising God. It should be a happy, joyous day. It's not a day of restraint. It's not a day when we come under the fearful threat of the law. It's a day when we celebrate our redemption.

And so they met every day, but it didn't take long before they landed on a special day. Turn to Acts 20, Acts 20. This is just a little bit more of the history. Luke writes that - along with Paul - "We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, came to believers at Troas within five days; stayed there seven days." Now look at this, verse 7, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread - "

Isn't that interesting? No law has been given to establish this. But here we are well into the ministry of the apostle Paul. Years have passed since the resurrection of Jesus Christ and it's not remarkable. It's matter of fact, "When we were gathered together to break bread on the first day of the week." That's what they did. They're still meeting.

And by the way, they had an evening service. I think they probably met all day. How do you know it's an evening service? Because he preached "until midnight." Preached "until midnight. And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together. And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window - " his name means "good luck." "Eutychus is sitting on the window sill - " not a good place if you're going to fall asleep. "Sinks into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking - " look, even the greatest of preachers put people to sleep, the man was " - overcome by sleep, falls out of the third floor and was picked up dead."

Now that is an evening service that went on, and on, and on, and on. This poor guy couldn't take it any longer. "Paul went down, fell upon him, embracing him said, 'Don't be troubled, for life is in him.' " Raised him from the dead. And you know what? "Went back up, broke bread, ate, and kept talking until daybreak." I like that. The man knew no ending to what he wanted to say. If somebody fell out of the window and died, you raise him and bring him back. I'm not through, and you're not through listening. "And they took the boy alive and they were greatly comforted."

So what they did, they're meeting on a Sunday, and the meeting goes on, and on, and on, because they're praising God and they're loving what they're hearing. It's the apostles' doctrine. This is not a drop in, one hour deal on the way to the beach, folks. This is people hungry for the things of God. This church at Troas is exemplary of the pattern of Sunday worship in the early church and ever since.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 16, 1 Corinthians 16. Paul writes to the Corinthians, he's writing about the offering, the collection. "Concerning the collection for the saints." Paul was trying to collect some money for the poor saints in Jerusalem and some of the Gentile churches had money that they could send to provide some relief for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

What happened was there were pilgrims in Jerusalem when pentecost happened, and many of them were converted. Well, they didn't want to go back to their town. What would you go back to? There was a Jewish synagogue there, and there were pagan temples, but there weren't any churches there.

There's only one church in Jerusalem, so they stayed.

So how would they live? There were believers in Jerusalem who, when they embraced Christ, were kicked out of their houses. Somebody had to take them in. So providing some relief to care for these people was challenging. Remember, some people sold land and took the money and gave it to the apostles to be distributed to care for these people, as we learned in the early chapters of Acts.

So Paul has this notion of collecting money for the saints in Jerusalem in the same way as he directed the churches in the region of Galatia to do it, he wanted the Corinthians to do it, as well. So here's what he told them.

"On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." I just want you to make it a matter of course in your Sunday worship. Offerings were taken on the first day of the week.

It's not a day when we're more holy than others. It's not a day when there are some restraints on how we are to behave. It's a day when we celebrate our salvation. It's a day when we glorify God, when we focus on what Christ has done for us. That's why we come together and pray. That's why we come together and sing hymns. That's why we come together and read Scripture. That's why you hang around in the patio and talk about the things of Christ and fellowship with each other and share what you're learning. It's a day when you look at the most important reality in your life, and that is your salvation.

Well, eventually this first day became so precious to the church that it got its own name. Turn to Revelation chapter 1. Got its own name, Revelation 1:9, John, is on the isle of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, because he's been exiled there by the enemies of the gospel.

And he says in verse 10, "I was in the Spirit on - " what? " - the Lord's day - " "On the Lord's day." Some people think this means "the Day of the Lord," the eschatological day of judgment. Hardly, hardly. John did not experience the final Day of the Lord judgment on the island of Patmos. Besides, the Day of the Lord, t hmera tou kuriou is a distinct phrase, the Lord's Day is t kyriak hmera, completely different phrase used only here. This is not the eschatological Day of the Lord. This is a non-eschatological statement. This is the Lord's Day and he doesn't even give an explanation.

Now when is John writing? Well he's writing 30-40 years after Paul. He's writing in 96 A.D. at the end of the first century, and by that time this was no longer called Sunday, or whatever other forms that day had been called. It was for believers now "The Lord's Day." It doesn't even need a further explanation.

There are all kinds of testimonies in the second century which would have been just a few years later since John's writing in 96, all kinds of testimonies to the fact that in the second century this was the customary way to refer to the first day of the week. First day of the week was the Lord's Day, the day that we honor the Lord. This title for Sunday is commonly found in many, many early Christian writings, has continued through all church history even down to the present.

I don't call Sunday Sunday. I call it the Lord's Day. You hear me say that a lot. The Lord's Day, the Lord's Day. It was on the Lord's Day that John received his vision, his first vision was of Jesus the Lord of the church, right? What does he say there? "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, the sound of a trumpet." He turns around and sees Christ ministering in the candlesticks, Christ ministering in His church. This is the Lord of the church serving His church, and he got the vision of the Lord moving in His church on Sunday. The Lord is the one who initiated that vision and He initiated it on a Sunday, on the Lord's Day.

John had a lot of visions in the book of Revelation. None of them is identified with a day, none of them, this is the only one. This is the Lord's Day because this is resurrection day, this is Holy Spirit day. It's not the Lord's morning. It's not the Lord's afternoon. It's not the Lord's evening. It's not the Lord's hour. It's the Lord's Day.

What does that mean to you? There's a reason we don't have a Saturday night service. Would it be wrong? No, not law, not necessarily wrong. I don't want to be the guy that breaks the tradition. I don't want to be the guy who breaks this marvelous, glorious tribute to the risen Christ. Christ should be exalted 24/7, right? And He should be exalted Saturday morning, and Saturday night, and every other day. But it just seems to me that God has placed His almighty hand on the first day of the week and said, "This is My Day. This is My day."

And Sunday night services are disappearing all over the place, if they exist at all much anymore. You'd be hard pressed to find one. But as I said, it's not the Lord's morning. It's the Lord's Day and we want to make sure that we do not, according to Hebrews 10:25, "Forsake our assembling together, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching." As we get closer to the return of Jesus Christ, we ought to ramp up our fellowship, not diminish it, right? We're going in the wrong direction, folks. Services are shorter, more superficial, and fewer, at a time when they ought to be deeper, longer, and more frequent.

But again, we're back to what I said earlier. Superficial preaching betrays the profound realities of Scripture. The church is full of superficial people and a superficial understanding of the high priority of worship. So as long as I have life and breath, there will be a Sunday morning set of services and they'll be a Sunday night service.

And we've accommodated you on the Sunday night service by not having a second floor, so you don't need to worry about falling out and dying. The worst that could happen to you is you'd hit your head on the pew on the way down, and we can deal with that.

What does the Lord expect of us on His day? All I can say is that what He would expect of us would be obvious, wouldn't it? That we would celebrate Him as Savior, that we would rejoice in His cross, that we rejoice in His resurrection, that we would pray together, fellowship together, break bread together around His table and that we would listen to the apostles' doctrine, and hear the preaching of the Word, and embrace its glorious truth. I'm not talking about legalism. We're not talking about some kind of old covenant sabbath laws imposed upon us. But grace certainly doesn't require less than law, does it?

I guess the question is how much do you love Christ? How strong is your desire for worship? We're not going to drop any external rules on you. Everything about the new covenant is better than the old covenant, everything, including the day, including the day. Because this day is not burdensome. It is joyous.

And I know you feel that way because when Clayton gets up here on Sunday morning and packs this place with all the musicians, you sing with all your might out of the joy of your heart. I never want to see people come to a service as a stop off point on the way to whatever else they need to do. That doesn't mean you can't do some work in the afternoon. That doesn't mean you can't enjoy some recreation, some fellowship, and do some other things. It just means there's a day that God Himself has ordained for you to focus primarily on the glory of your salvation. Take every opportunity you can to fill it with worship, and praise, and fellowship, and divine truth.

We're not under the old covenant regulations. We're not under a system of condemnation. We don't need shadows. We have the reality, the true rest in Christ. And this is a day to rest, not to rest in the sense of celebrating creation, but to rest in the sense of celebrating new creation, salvation.

So, rather than ask what shouldn't I do on Sunday, ask what should I do? What is my love for Christ ask me to do? What does my heart for Him ask me to do? I'm not forbidden to work. I'm not forbidden to play. But the high ground is to say this is a day of all days in which I will find my greatest delight. And what is my greatest delight? My greatest delight is to worship and fellowship with God's people. And you can't do that if you just bring your body here without your heart. Search your heart. Is this really the Lord's Day for you? I hope so.

Father, thank You again for Your Word, for the refreshment of it, the beauty of it, the simplicity of it, and the richness of it, the consistency of it really overwhelms us. And even though we study it week after week, year after year, it comes to us with a kind of freshness that brings joy to our hearts. This is

Your day. We want to fill it with all the things that focus on You, delighting on You, loving You, loving Your people, loving Your truth, setting our hearts aside from the things of the world, setting our affections on things above, to be determined, of course, not by what we don't do, but what we do, to be determined by what we're not allowed to do, but what our hearts long to do.

I look over this audience tonight and these people are here tonight because this is where they want to be. Of all the places they could be, this is where they want to be because they love You, they want to honor You. This is Your day.

May all of our lives be filled with a special, special understanding of how wonderful is the weekly reminder of our eternal salvation built in to the Lord's Day. Give us a love for it because there's a love for you built into it. We thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).