
ZION NEWS

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“Come let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God.” Jeremiah 51:10

Sunday Worship

by Pastor Nathanael Mayhew

Many people talk about how the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday. In reality, the Sabbath has never been changed. The Sabbath has always been the seventh day of the week (cf. Genesis 2:2-3 – Keep in mind that the Hebrew word “sabbath” literally means “rest”). So while the Sabbath was never moved from one day to another, after Christ’s resurrection, the day of worship was changed from Saturday (the Old Testament Sabbath) to Sunday. Let’s take a look at how this happened.

The Greek word Shabbath (Sabbath) occurs 68 times in the New Testament. In Acts we often read that followers of Christ would go into the synagogues on the Sabbath and “reason” with the Jews (cf. Acts 13:14, 44; 18:4). Keep in mind that the Jews did not have names for the days of the week as we do today. They marked all the days by how they related to the Sabbath. So in the New Testament we also read about another day called the “mia sabbaton” in Greek –

And on the seventh day
God ended His work
which He had done, and
He rested on the
seventh day from all His
work which He had done.
(Genesis 2:2)

literally, “the first (day) with reference to the Sabbath” (cf. Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19; Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2). This “first day of the week” (as many Bibles translate) would have been Sunday. It was on this day that the disciples came together to hear the word of God in public groups (Acts 20:7). This became known as the “Lord’s day” because it was the day the Lord rose from the dead. One of the early church fathers, Ignatius, who was a personal disciple of the apostle John wrote this concerning the early Christian’s worship:

If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death ... how shall we be able to live apart from Him, whose disciples the prophets themselves in the Spirit did wait for Him as their Teacher? And therefore He whom they rightly waited for, being come, raised them from the dead (The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians).

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We continue our “Hymn writer” series with a feature on Paul Gerhardt – a faithful and dedicated Lutheran pastor who taught and encouraged the members of his church through the Scriptural songs he wrote for congregational singing. We pray that our readers will benefit from his short biography.

Hymn Writer: Paul Gerhardt

Adapted from *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*

Born near Wittenberg, Germany, on March 12, 1607, Gerhardt attended Wittenberg University where he was mentored by professors who exposed him to the beauty of hymn writing. While attending Wittenberg University, the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) ravaged Germany. It appears that Gerhardt remained at Wittenberg until 1642. In fact, Gerhardt's family house and the family church were both destroyed during the war.

After leaving Wittenberg, Gerhardt lived the next nine years in Berlin. In Berlin, he began writing poetry. Soon after, his musician friend, Johann Crüger, published the first collection of Gerhardt's poems, poems now sung by worshipers. His poems gave worshipers a deep assurance of God's guidance in the war's aftermath as well as confidence in the life of the world to come. Later in life—at age 44—Gerhardt was ordained as a Lutheran minister and pledged his support of the Book of Concord. He first served as provost, a position which entailed supervising clergy in Mittenwalde. A few years later, Gerhardt married Anna Maria Barthold; the couple was blessed with many children.

Though the protracted conflict of the Thirty Years' War had ended, life was far from easy. Disease ravaged the continent. All of the Gerhardts' children died in infancy except for one son. In Berlin, where Gerhardt began

service in 1657, the city was full of strife between Lutheran and Reformed clergy. Government officials favored Reformed theology. Tension between the two groups was so serious that in 1666 the local government official issued an edict mandating that Lutheran

and Reformed clergy refrain from referring to doctrinal differences in their sermons. Gerhardt, being the steadfast Lutheran that he was, refused to abide by the terms of the edict. As a result, he was dismissed from his congregation. Sadly, two years later, his wife died. Eventually, he was called to a new congregation in Lübben, where for seven years he faithfully preached the Gospel until his death in 1676.



Paul Gerhardt.

Because of the many hardships in his life, Paul Gerhardt knew much

persecution and suffering. Upon his death, the Lutheran congregation he was serving placed a portrait of their beloved pastor with the inscription: “Theologus in cribro Satane tentatus” (“A theologian tested in Satan's sieve”). Considered in this light, his hymn texts are all the more meaningful.

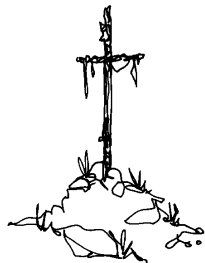
Building on the Reformation's emphasis on singing the Christian faith, and following Luther's example in writing texts focusing on God's grace through Jesus Christ, Gerhardt wrote 133 biblically faithful and Christ-centered hymns.

While Gerhardt built on Luther's hymnody, his writing style differed from Luther's. Both were grounded in the objective truth of salvation, yet Gerhardt expressed more human feeling and emotion than Luther. It is his deep Christian feeling, devotion, and conviction based in God's redemptive work that make Gerhardt's hymns so enduring and comforting to those experiencing times of both joy and sorrow in the 21st century.

As an example, consider the hymn "If God Himself Be For Me" (TLH 528). This hymn, based on Romans 8:31–39, is thought to have been written around 1666, about the same time when Gerhardt was ordered by the government to sign the edict. In this hymn, Gerhardt shares his faith and courage that, despite his trials, nothing can separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. After nearly 400 years, Gerhardt's words have not lost their significance for those who presently face trials and persecution.

Another example of the deep devotional tone of Gerhardt's texts is perhaps his most famous hymn, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (TLH 172). In this free translation of a poem by the 12th-century monk Bernard of Clairvaux, Gerhardt focuses on Christ's crucifixion. Throughout, he draws out the personal implications of this ultimate act of God's mercy and grace while pointing the singer to his or her own death day.

*What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever!
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never,
Outlive my love for Thee.*



*Be Thou my consolation,
My shield, when I must die;
Remind me of Thy passion
When my last hour draws nigh.*

*Mine eyes shall then behold Thee,
Upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfold Thee.
Who dieth thus dies well.
(TLH 172:8, 10)*

Borne out of personal suffering and loss, Gerhardt's hymns express the hope and joy Christians have that, despite hardship and adversity, Christ Jesus came to earth to save sinners. Gerhardt expresses his deep faith and trust in this objective truth as he writes texts full of personal devotion.

Four hundred years after his birth, the Christian church still sings the hymns of Paul Gerhardt. His words of faith are now our words of faith. In a world full of sin and chaos, Gerhardt's hymns continue to comfort us and point us to Christ and his redeeming work.

Hymns of Gerhardt

Of the 123 hymns that Gerhardt wrote, 21 can be found in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

- 25. I will sing my Maker's praises
- 58. O Lord, how shall I meet Thee
- 77. All my heart this night rejoices
- 81. O Jesus Christ, Thy manger is
- 90. Come, your hearts and voices raising
- 108. We sing, Immanuel, Thy praise
- 122. Now let us come before Him
- 142. A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth
- 171. Upon the cross extended
- 172. O Sacred Head, now wounded
- 192. Awake, my heart, with gladness
- 228. Oh, enter, Lord, Thy temple
- 349. Jesus, Thy boundless love to me
- 520. Commit whatever grieves thee
- 523. Why should cross and trial grieve me?
- 528. If God Himself be for me
- 535. Rejoice my heart, be glad and sing
- 554. Now rest beneath night's shadows
- 569. O Lord, I sing with lips and heart
- 581. All ye who on this earth do dwell
- 586. A pilgrim and a stranger

†

Meet the Church Fathers

Ignatius (30-107 AD)

Little is known about the early life of this Church Father. It was told that he was the child that Jesus placed in the midst of his disciples, and while this is probably not true, it gives us an idea of the age of Ignatius at the time of the ministry of Jesus. Tradition also holds that Ignatius was a disciple of the Apostle John, and learned under him. In his later years Ignatius became the bishop of Antioch (in Syria) at the close of the first and beginning of the second century.

Ignatius was condemned to death by the Roman emperor Trajan because he professed his faith in Jesus, and was taken to Rome where he suffered martyrdom at the Colosseum. During his transportation from Antioch to Rome, Ignatius wrote letters to six congregations which had supported and encouraged him on his journey and one letter to Polycarp who was the bishop of the congregation at

Smyrna (from Smyrna he wrote to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians and the Romans, and from Troas he wrote to the Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans, and to Polycarp).

In these seven letters, Ignatius emphasizes the divinity of Christ and the reality of his sufferings, death and resurrection; he encourages respect in the congregations for the bishops and elders; he protests the heresies of Judaism (legalistic use of O.T. laws) and Docetism (Jesus only “seemed” to be human).

In his letter to the Ephesians he writes, *“For there are some who make a practice of carrying about the Name with wicked guile, and do certain other things unworthy of God; these you must shun as wild beasts, for they are ravening dogs, who bite secretly, and you must be upon your guard against them, for they are scarcely to be cured. There is one Physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and yet unborn, who is God in man, true life in death, both of Mary and of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Ignatius to the Ephesians 7:1-2).*

As we read the writings of this early church father we can be thankful that the Lord used men like Ignatius to faithfully proclaim and preserve His Word of truth even in the face of great danger. †

Sunday Worship

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Several hymns in the “Lord’s Day” section of our hymnal (hymns 7-12) also emphasize the connection between the resurrection of Jesus and our worship today (cf. Hymn 8:2; 10:2; and 12:2). These verses remind us of the reason for our worship on this “*mia sabbaton*” – the Lord’s Day.

Finally, we hear the words of the apostle Paul himself on this issue. In his letter to the Colossians he writes: ***“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17).*** What a blessing to have such freedom! What a privilege to be able to celebrate our Savior’s resurrection every week! †

For your consideration:

The Third Commandment is the only commandment that is not repeated in the New Testament. We are commanded not to steal, etc. but not to remember the Sabbath Day.

The New Testament speaks about the importance of worship and time set aside for God, but it does not direct that a certain day was be set aside, nor does the New Testament speak about the necessity of abstaining from one’s work.

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