

**Come, Let Us Join With One Accord***Charles Wesley (1707–1788)*

Come, let us join with one accord  
 In hymns around the throne:  
 This is the day our rising Lord  
 Hath made and called his own.

This is the day that God hath blessed,  
 The brightest of the sev'n,  
 Type of that everlasting rest  
 The saints enjoy in heav'n.

Then let us in his Name sing on,  
 And hasten to that day  
 When our Redeemer shall come down,  
 And shadows pass away.

Not one, but all our days below,  
 Let us in hymns employ;  
 And in our Lord rejoicing, go  
 To his eternal joy.

**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ***In the Nick of Time***No Church on Sunday? Part 3: Cancelling Scheduled Meetings on the Lord's Day***Jeff Straub*

Life is full of ironies! These short essays came about in response to the recent cancellation of Sunday services at a Baptist megachurch. I wanted to challenge those who read the *Nick* that what was done was—perhaps—out of harmony with the Word of God. The first essay stressed the importance of corporate *gathered* worship as the New Testament model and expectation. Essay two suggested that while house churches may have a limited role, they are really neither the New Testament expectation nor the universal preference of the Church. Just before I sat down to pen this third essay, a response came from a brother who prefers his small, family house church because the money saved on salaries and air conditioning can be used to fund Christian refugees and feed college students who joined his little family gathering. It was an interesting idea but hardly biblical. Not a thought was given to world evangelism or discipleship.

In this final essay, I consider the appropriateness of cancelling church services, whether on the Lord's Day or otherwise. I remember hearing an old preacher encourage the congregation that "it takes three to thrive," referring to the Sunday morning, evening, and Wednesday night services. It is four if the Sunday School is added. So, how many services should the Christian be expected to attend in a week and is it ever acceptable for the church to *cancel* a regular service?

The irony of this third essay is that as I write, the temperature is -27 and much of Minneapolis is closed: no schools or mail service, malls are closed, some businesses and many/most churches with activities are shuttered. Also, last Sunday the weather forecasters predicted a major snow event of 5-8 inches beginning at 3 PM and lasting through the night. Our pastor announced that the evening service would be cancelled. As it turned out, the snow didn't begin until 7:30. Finally, this week is Super Bowl Sunday—a day which a good many churches alter their corporate worship practices to accommodate the game.

I have tried to make the case that Sunday is the Lord's Day and it has become the Christian day of worship. The day is set aside as the one day in seven when we assemble together to celebrate His person and work. We



*In the Nick of Time* is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centalseminary.edu | info@centalseminary.edu  
 900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

need to hold the idea of the Lord's Day as important if we wish to follow biblical models. But just what should be done on that day is a matter of debate.

In the Victorian era, Sundays were a day of multiple services among Baptist churches. Spurgeon saw that many visitors from across London showed up at his Sunday evening meetings because other churches didn't have them. Moreover, in answer to the question "How is the Sabbath<sup>1</sup> to be kept?" Spurgeon's catechism responded "The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days (Lev 23:3), and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship (Psa 92:1-2; Isa 58:13-14), except so much as is taken up in the works of necessity and mercy (Mat 12:11-12)." Wow! We have certainly come a long way if we think that cancelling a church service for a sporting event is acceptable.

Even if we hold to a similar view as Mr. Spurgeon, we still have not answered the primary question—can services be canceled on the Lord's Day? The answer is a qualified *yes*. Biblically, we ought to make every effort to carry out the spirit of the New Testament by having a Lord's Day service, but there may be times when this is simply not possible due to weather, political chaos, community disasters, and the like. The California wildfires certainly affected how churches functioned as the countryside blazed. Our snow event, while missing the mark as to the timing, could have been otherwise. We still met on the Lord's Day morning, fulfilling the spirit of the New Testament.

A second question to ponder is whether we really need *multiple* meetings on the Lord's Day. Getting back to the brother's email that house churches are a better use of resources, it does seem rather expensive that we build massive structures for a one-hour meeting on a Sunday, if this is all we meet. Pushing back, can we really do an adequate job of corporate discipleship in one or two hours per week? For this reason, at least, most churches offer multiple services for multiple opportunities for Christian growth and discipleship—times dedicated to fellowship, times dedicated to instruction, times dedicated to worship and the observance of the ordinances.

I have never felt that the church services, any of them, were primarily aimed at evangelism, though evangelism may certainly take place within a church meeting. If we use Acts 2:42 as an indication of the early Jerusalem church, it met for the study of the apostle's doctrine, for fellowship, for the breaking

<sup>1</sup>I recognize the issue of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath is problematic, but this would take another essay to reply to. For the sake of this *Nick*, I grant that Sunday is not the *sabbath* as such. But let's not lose the bigger issue Spurgeon is addressing: Sunday was a day set apart for devotion to God. Are we the poorer if we fail in this regard?

of bread (the Lord's Table), and for prayer. Can we do all of this in an hour or two? Likely not. Multiple diverse services allow us to accomplish these important objectives.

It used to be that churches had regularly scheduled times of prayer: prayer for the lost, prayer for the pastors, prayer for the ministry of the church, and prayer for the saints. The Moravians had their 100-year prayer meeting. The point of the meeting was prayer. A prayer meeting was held in Spurgeon's church *while* Spurgeon was preaching, and he attributed to these gatherings the source of the power of his pulpit. His people prayed for him. Today, prayer meetings of that sort are seldom held.

It seems to me that before we cancel any particular meeting, we need to ask ourselves why we meet in the first place. If we understand why, then perhaps the question of cancellation is clearer. Services that are ancillary to our stated goals may be and perhaps should be cancelled. Meetings that go to the heart of why we exist as a church may need to be held, even when inconvenient, as a matter of priority. We all make choices and we make them all the time. Churches make choices. The *why* of the service will drive the *when* and *how often*. Perhaps we cancel too lightly because we don't really grasp the *why*.

Finally, part of the reason we have church is to build up the saints. If we aren't really doing this, then we need to step back and evaluate our ministry to ask afresh what it is that we are seeking to accomplish. Simply having services for services' sake is hardly biblical. In the end, there is no easy answer to the question of cancellation. I think this is how the Lord planned it. We should serve Him, worship Him, and follow Him out of devotion, not merely by checking off a list of things we do to please Him. What we value with our time says more about who we are than most anything we say.



---

This essay is by Jeff Straub, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

---