

The Gospel of John (118): The Risen King reveals Himself to His Apostles (2)

Introduction:

John 20 records our Lord having first showed Himself to have risen from the dead to a woman, even Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had once cast out seven demons. She was first to the tomb that first Lord's Day morning. Perhaps because she had been forgiven so much that she loved Him much that she thought to show Him honor in His death by anointing His body. But upon arriving to the burial site she discovered the stone rolled away from the tomb, and she found the tomb to be empty. She first went to tell Peter and John what she had seen. They then ran to the empty tomb, discovering it to be empty but that His grave clothes were still lying where His body formally had been laid. But then our Lord first appeared to Mary. She failed initially to recognize Him. But upon the sound of her name by that familiar voice of her Master, she rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Her Savior was alive, having risen from the dead and He now stood before her and for her.

The next recorded event of the day that John recounted took place in the evening of that first Lord's Day. Our Lord Jesus appeared to all of His disciples, except for Thomas, who was not present with them (vs. 19-23). But then we read that when they gathered again a week later, on the next Lord's Day, that Jesus appeared to all eleven of the apostles including Thomas (vs. 24-29). This is what we will examine and reflect upon this morning. Let us read the entire passage before us—**John 20:19-31**.

¹⁹Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

²¹So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²²And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

²⁶And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" ²⁷Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

²⁸And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)

Last Lord's Day we gave an outline of these verses. There are two major parts-- verses 19-23 and verses 24-29--with the addition of a concluding word from John in verses 30 and 31. Here is that outline:

- I. Jesus appeared to ten of His apostles (vs. 19-23)
 - A. Jesus appeared and pronounced to them the peace of God (vs. 19, 20)
 - B. Jesus set before them their mission for God (v. 21)

- C. Jesus bestowed upon them the Spirit of God (v. 22)
- D. Jesus declared their authority in their service to God (v. 23)
- II. Jesus appeared again to His apostles, including Thomas (vs. 24-31)
 - A. The absence of Thomas from their first meeting (vs. 24, 25)
 - B. Jesus again appeared to them and again pronounced to them the peace of God (v. 26)
 - C. Jesus addressed Thomas directly and he responds to Jesus in faith (vs. 27-28)
 - D. Jesus pronounced those as “blessed”, who believe apart from seeing (v. 29)
- III. John gave an announcement regarding the signs of Jesus and the limited record he had provided of them in his Gospel (vs. 30-31).

II. Jesus appeared again to His apostles, including Thomas (vs. 24-31)

In this episode we first read of

A. The absence of Thomas from their first meeting (vs. 24, 25)

²⁴Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.”

So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

John described Thomas as the one “called the twin.” The King James Version (KJV) saw this Greek word as a proper name for Thomas. It reads, “But Thomas, one of the twelve, called *Didymus*.” Actually this probably translates better what John was conveying. Yes, the word means “twin”, which indicates Thomas was probably one brother of twins. But more is suggested. “Thomas” is Aramaic, which was the common (Semitic) language of the Jews of first century Palestine. “Didymus” is the same name, but in Greek. “Didymus” means “twin”, but so does “Thomas.”

Thomas (Θωμᾶς) is the Aramaic word for ‘twin’; *Didymus* (Δίδυμος) is the Greek word for “twin” (cf. 20:24; 21:2). The wording here and elsewhere suggests that in Greek-speaking circles Thomas was called *Didymos* (Didymus), just as Cephas was called Petros (Peter).¹

We might, therefore, question why newer translators choose to give the meaning of Didymus but not of Thomas.

We do not know why Thomas was not present on that first Lord’s Day evening when the risen Lord appeared to His disciples. Maybe he was despondent and withdrawn due to the death of his Master. Maybe he was not well? Maybe he had left town as the two disciples had done that morning to travel home to Emmaus. Perhaps due to his “fear of the Jews” that caused him to stay away? Or perhaps it was his own sinful neglect or failure; nevertheless, it was ultimately for the glory of God and for the spiritual benefit of all who have read or heard of the account of Jesus revealing Himself personally and individually to “doubting Thomas.” **Donald Carson** wrote this of Thomas:

In his previous appearances (11:16; 14:5) he has been less a doubter than a loyal but pessimistic and perhaps somewhat obtuse disciple. The rubric “doubting Thomas” is not entirely fair: had he been present when the risen Christ first manifested Himself to the disciples, doubtless he too would have believed. Why he was not present that first Easter day is not told us, but in the providence of God his absence and subsequent coming to faith have generated one of the great Christological confessions of the New Testament.²

¹ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 242. Both Peter’s Greek and Aramaic names, *Petros* and *Cephas*, mean “rock.” So both of Thomas’ Greek and Aramaic names, “Didymus” and “Thomas”, mean “twin.”

² Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 656.

Of course Carson was referring to the confession that came forth from Thomas when he was convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead. Thomas expressed his personal faith in Jesus when he said unto Him, “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28). And so, it was in the providence and goodness of God that Thomas was absent from that gathering on the first Lord’s Day.

But for Thomas himself it must have been a disappointment. By His absence he missed our Lord’s first appearance. He had not heard in person our Lord’s words to His apostles. This incident has served many preachers since this recording to admonish Christians not to miss the gathering together of our Lord’s people. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) drew this application: “*Note, those know not what they lose who carelessly absent themselves from the stated solemn assemblies of Christians.*” Now we are very grateful that we have the technological means to convey a portion of our worship service into the homes of folks who are not able to be with us in person. This is a great blessing to them, and to us. But I suspect that if we were to query each one who does so weekly, he or she would say, “Yes, it is good, but it is not the same as being in church in person.” Pastor Jason and I spoke with a friend this week who stated that very thing. Even as he expressed his pleasure and gratefulness having the technology to tune in, he lamented that he and his family were not able to be here in person. The fact is that the Lord has promised that He would meet with His people and manifest His presence to them in a unique and special way when they gather together in His name. Although we will always employ this wonderful technology, we look forward to the day when we can all gather together once again and experience and enjoy the fullness of our Lord’s with us.

Now Thomas failed to believe the witness of the other apostles who had seen and spoken with the Lord. We read in **verse 25a** of their witness to Thomas: “*The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’*” No doubt they gave some detail of what they had witnessed. Jesus had initially announced to them, “peace be to you.” Then He had showed them His hands and feet, in which the wounds of His crucifixion were evident. They must have told Thomas of this which had convinced them that it was indeed He. Jesus had also commissioned them, saying, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And then Jesus had breathed on them whereby they received the Holy Spirit to empower them for the mission to which He had called them. Thomas had missed out on this experience and hearing the words of his Lord.

But not only did Thomas fail to believe the testimony of his brethren, he seemed to be incredulous toward them. This was in spite of their credibility as his friends and the fact that they were now filled with joy and hope, and of the Holy Spirit. But Thomas had declared to them in verse 26, “*Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.*” I would think that his expression of unbelief troubled them. Why would they lie to him? Why would he not accept what they had testified to have seen and heard? However, these disciples had exhibited this same reaction of unbelief when the women had testified to them earlier. We read in Luke 24 these words:

Then they (the women) returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. ¹¹*And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.*

We tend to think ill of others for their failures, even though we have done, and tend to still do, the same things (cf. Rom. 2:1).

But this is actually a rather common way that people respond to a faithful witness of the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Even those close to us—our friends, and even members of our own family—do not immediately and readily believe our testimony of our Lord and Savior. Unbelief is characteristic of us all as fallen human beings. Paul wrote of us all, “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (Eph. 4:18). To believe something we have not personally seen or heard with respect to the true God and His Son occurs only due to the grace of illumination that God imparts to the soul. The Lord Himself must first open our understanding, but then incline our hearts to believe the truth of God in Christ. John would later write about the grace that God gives unbelievers to enable them to understand and know Jesus Christ.

And we know that *the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true*; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20).

And certainly not just non-Christians, but true believers are in need of the grace of God for spiritual understanding. Paul wrote to devout Timothy, “Think over what I say, *for the Lord will give you understanding in everything*” (2 Tim. 2:7).

But though it takes the grace of God to reveal to a soul the truth of God in Christ, we are, nevertheless, culpable and blameworthy in our ignorance and unbelief. The Scriptures speak of us being “willingly ignorant”, or deliberately “suppressing the truth” (cf. 2 Pet 3:5). And Thomas was to be faulted by his failure and refusal to believe the testimony of his fellow disciples. **Matthew Henry** identified several points of failure of Thomas.

(1) He had either not heeded, or not duly regarded, what Christ had so often said, and that too according to the Old Testament, that He would *rise again the third day*; so that he ought to have said, *He is risen*, though he had not seen Him, nor spoken with any that had.

(2) He did not pay a just deference to the testimony of his fellow-disciples, who were men of wisdom and integrity, and ought to have been credited. He knew them to be honest men; they all ten of them concurred in the testimony with great assurance; and yet he could not persuade himself to say that *their record was true*. Christ had chosen them to be His witnesses of this very thing to all nations; and yet Thomas, one of their own fraternity, would not allow them to be competent witnesses, nor trust them further than he could see them. It was not, however, their veracity that he questioned, but their prudence; he feared they were too credulous.

(3) He tempted Christ, and *limited the Holy One of Israel*, when he would be convinced by his own method, or not at all. He could not be sure that the print of the nails, which the apostles told him they had seen, would admit the putting of his finger into it, or the wound in His side the thrusting in of his hand; nor was it fit to deal so roughly with a living body; yet Thomas ties up his faith to this evidence. Either he will be humoured, and have his fancy gratified, or he will not believe; see Matthew 16:1; 27:42.

(4) The open avowal of this in the presence of the disciples was an offence and discouragement to them. It was not only a sin, but a scandal. As one coward makes many, so does one believer, one sceptic, *making his brethren’s heart to faint like his heart* (Deut. 20:8). Had he only thought this evil, and then laid his hand upon his mouth, to suppress it, his error had remained with himself; but his proclaiming his infidelity, and that so peremptorily, might be of ill consequence to the rest, who were as yet but weak and wavering.

But the Lord was merciful to Thomas, as He is to us. Even after an initial and bold statement of unbelief, Jesus would again appear to His disciples and assure that Thomas was present with them. Jesus then addressed Thomas in his unbelief, proving to Thomas that He had indeed risen from the dead.

B. Jesus again appeared to them and again pronounced to them the peace of God (v. 26)

We read,

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you.” (v. 26)

The Lord met with His apostles a second time, “after eight days.” Now when we read this reference of time, we would tend to think that “after eight days” would indicate the Monday, eight days after that first meeting on that first, “first day of the week.” But the expression, “after eight days” was an idiom—a common Jewish expression—that meant exactly one week later. They would have counted the same day that Jesus had first appeared unto them as day number one. “After eight days” would be exactly the following Sunday, the first day of the week, the second Lord’s Day after the resurrection.

The Lord was absent from His disciples for a week. Where was He? It is not wise to speculate. However, I believe we can say that He had not yet formally ascended into heaven, which seems to have occurred visibly and significantly 40 days after His crucifixion, 10 days before Pentecost (Acts 1:9-11). At the beginning of His ministry He had been 40 days in the wilderness without being seen. And now for 40 days after He had risen from the dead He appeared to His disciples from time to time until He ascended into heaven. But

here in John 20 we read of Jesus manifesting Himself twice, each time on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. This serves a purpose for His people.

This emphasis on the Lord's Day (cf. Rev. 1:10) may reflect peculiar theological interests of the writer. If the readers are Jews and proselytes interested in the Christian faith, it may be a subtle allusion to the origins of Christian worship on this particular day.³

By Jesus showing Himself to His disciples at these chosen and intermittent occasions, He was conveying that He had risen to a new life, a life that would be different in His relationship with His disciples from what they had formally experienced. Through his post-resurrection appearances He weaned His disciples from their relationship with Him with their physical experiences and in His physical presence. He was preparing them for their future ministry after He had finally and fully departed from them.

Why did He show Himself on "the Lord's Day" these two times? One wrote of a direct lesson to Thomas, and through doing so, to all believers.

That He might put a rebuke upon Thomas for His incredulity. He had neglected the former meeting of the disciples; and, to teach him to prize those seasons of grace better for the future, he cannot have such another opportunity for several days. He that slips one tide must stay a good while for another. A very melancholy week, we have reason to think Thomas had of it, drooping, and in suspense, while the other disciples were full of joy; and it was owing to himself and his own folly.

The historic understanding of Christians of the Lord's Day to be the Christian Sabbath is based upon the emphasis in the New Testament of significant appearances of Christ and significant events occurring on the Lord's Day. These coupled with descriptions of the churches gathering for worship on the Lord's Day provide the biblical basis for the Lord's Sabbath Day to have changed from Saturday to Sunday. We should step aside for a moment to address this matter:

Sunday, the Lord's Day, as the Christian Sabbath.

That Saturday was the Old Testament Sabbath Day is clearly biblical and acknowledged to have been so by both Jews and Christians. But several matters should be understood regarding the Old Testament Sabbath day.

1. The observance of the Sabbath is a law of creation for all humanity through all of history.

Some argue that Sabbath observance was for the nation of Israel only, and is not for others, even Christians. But the Bible teaches us that the observance of the Sabbath Day has implications for all human beings. This is based on the fact that the observance of the Sabbath is a creation ordinance, not only or merely a ceremonial law. God Himself sanctified the seventh day when He "rested" after six days of the work of creating. We read of this in **Genesis 2:1-3**:

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. ²And 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. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

And when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments as recorded in Exodus 20:4 and 5, God resting on the seventh day after six days of creation is said to be the reason for the day of rest was established on Saturday.

³ Carson, p. 657.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

In this way the Sabbath Day is binding upon all humanity for all time. This is why our *Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* stated the matter this way:

As it is the law of nature, that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God, so by his Word, in a positive moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy unto him, which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week... (Article 22, paragraph 7)

But not only is the Sabbath Day to be recognized and observed by all people everywhere because it is a creation ordinance, we also read that...

2. The observance of the Sabbath on Saturday was a sign of the Mosaic covenant, for the nation of Israel it related to God according to that covenant.

When God established His covenant at Mt. Sinai with the nation of Israel, the Sabbath Day took on an additional meaning and quality. This is clear when we consider the way that Moses repeated the Ten Commandments after 40 years of wilderness wandering before the new generation of Israel entered the Promised Land. When Moses asserted the Fourth Commandment in Deuteronomy, he gave a different basis for its observance other than God's initial creation, which was set forth 40 years before in Exodus 20. Moses declared,

‘Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵***And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*** (Deut. 5:12-15)

God had redeemed Israel from bondage in Egypt and had set His people free, bringing them into the Land of Promise, the land of “rest.” This was the reason that Israel *as a nation* was to keep the Sabbath. In this way, as stipulated in the Mosaic Law, ***Sabbath observance became the visible sign of the Mosaic covenant between God and Israel.*** Israel's Sabbath observance with its rigid requirements and strict enforcement was to distinguish that nation from all the Gentile nations of the world. Sabbath Day observance by Israel was a visible, perpetual covenant sign for Israel as God's covenant people. Moses declared this forthrightly:

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹³“Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. ¹⁴You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. ¹⁶Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. ¹⁷It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’” (Exo. 31:12-17)

Sabbath Day observance was a covenant sign “forever”, in other words, as long as the Mosaic covenant continued as the basis of relationship between God and Israel, Sabbath observance with all its strictures and severe penalties for transgressing the Sabbath were in force. But that changed when Jesus Christ was crucified and was raised from the dead. Christ’s death on His cross brought a full end of the Mosaic covenant and inaugurated the onset of the new creation, the first day of the week, Sunday. And in time Christians came to recognize and acknowledge Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. This is why the rest of that statement of our confession regarding the Lord’s Day states the following:

As it is the law of nature, that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God, so by his Word, in a positive moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy unto him, which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week, **and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week, which is called the Lord's day: and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week being abolished.** (Article 22, paragraph 7)⁴

Whereas the Saturday Sabbath of the Old Testament commemorated the first (old) creation, the Sabbath of the first day of the week of the New Testament commemorates the onset of the new creation. Where Saturday Sabbath looked back historically, our observance of Sunday Sabbath looks forward to the future, even to eternity in which we will dwell with God in the new creation of the new heavens and the new earth.

3. The recognition and transition of Christians to observe Sunday as the Christian Sabbath.

Christian observance of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath occurred in the first decades of the Christian era. It was probably not immediately recognized and observed as such by the early Jewish Christians. They continued to observe Saturday as the Sabbath Day. But whereas Israel practiced observance on Saturday, the seventh day of each week, Christians early on began to observe their day of rest and worship to be on Sunday, the first day of the week, commemorating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Again, whereas the seventh day Sabbath observance was based on the **creation** of this world and the **redemption** of Israel from Egypt, the New Testament Sabbath (Sunday) celebrates the **new creation** which Christ inaugurated upon His resurrection and the **redemption** that He secured for His people.

It is granted that the Jewish Christians of the earliest decades of the Christian era continued to observe the seventh day Sabbath, as they continued to observe all of the Old Testament ceremonial days and feasts. But that practice came to an end when the Christian faith became a world-wide faith, comprised of Jews and Gentiles all over the known world. The New Testament reflects the early church practice of meeting on Sunday, the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week. In time Sunday observance came to be seen as the Christian Sabbath, having supplanted that which had existed and been practiced before.

Here are several **Scripture references** that speak to the importance of the first day of the week and of the practice of the early churches.

- 1) Christ was raised on Sunday, the first day of the week. (Mark 16:2ff; Luke 24:1ff; John 20:1ff)
- 2) The Lord appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week, including twice in the Gospel of John (all four Gospels).
- 3) The Day of Pentecost occurred on the first day of the week. The word Pentecost itself means “fifty.” It was to occur the day after the Sabbath (Saturday) fifty days after the feast of the Firstfruits (Lev, 23:10f, 15f). Pentecost Sunday, an annual day observed by Israel through many centuries always was on the first day of the week—Sunday.
- 4) The book of Acts records that churches met for worship on Sunday, the Lord’s Day. Acts 20:7 records, “**And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread**, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight.”

⁴ Scripture references cited in the confession include Exodus 20:8, 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; and Revelation 1:10.

5) Paul addressed the church at Corinth assuming that they would gather collections during worship that would take place on the first day of the week. 1 **Corinthians 16:2** reads, “Upon *the first day of the week* let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.”

6) In the book of Revelation the risen and glorified Lord Jesus appeared to John on the island of Patmos on “the Lord’s Day.” Here is **Revelation 1:9-11**:

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last...”

In addition, in *the writings of the early Church Fathers* we have much testimony to Christian worship on Sunday, the Lord’s Day. Some who teach that Saturday should still be observed as the Sabbath maintain that the Catholic Church changed the day of worship from Sabbath to Sunday, starting with a Sunday law enacted by Constantine the Great (306-337 A.D.) in 321 A.D. They would say that the change from Saturday to Sunday was the result of pagan influence; that it was not the will of God that churches do so. But Constantine did not enact a Christian law, but a civil one. Christians had been meeting together for worship on the first day of the week since the first century.

The early Christians referred to Sunday as the Lord’s Day, in honor of Christ’s resurrection from the dead and the observed this day for meeting together to worship God and fellowship with one another. The early Christian Church fathers of the 1st and 2nd centuries did not consider Saturday to be a day all Christians were obligated to observe as their Sabbath. They gave a different testimony. They met and worshipped on Sunday, the Lord’s Day. While the following epistles and statements are not in Scripture and should therefore not be considered canonical, they help to provide useful historical information regarding prevalent beliefs of the early churches in its first centuries.

1) **Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians*** (a. AD 110)

Ignatius was bishop of Antioch in Syria (1st-2nd century A.D.) and was martyred in Rome by “beasts” (a. 105-116 A.D.). On his way to Rome, he visited and wrote to various churches, warning and exhorting them. He also wrote ahead to Rome to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. He wrote these words:

Do not be deceived by strange doctrines or antiquated myths, since they are worthless. For if we continue to live accordance with Judaism, we admit that we have not received grace. For the godliest prophets lived in accordance with Christ Jesus. This is why they were persecuted, being inspired as they were by His grace in order that those who are disobedient might be fully convinced that there is one God who revealed Himself through Jesus Christ His Son, who is His Word which came forth from silence, who in every respect pleased Him who sent Him. *If, then, those who had lived in antiquated practices came to newness of hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath but living in accordance with the Lord’s day, on which our life also arose through Him and His death* (which some deny), the mystery through which we came to believe, and because of which we patiently endure, in order that we might be found to be disciples of Jesus Christ, our only teacher, how can we possibly live without Him, whom even the prophets, who were His disciples in the Spirit, were expecting as their teacher? Because of this He for whom they rightly waited raised them from the dead when He came. Therefore let us not be unaware of His goodness. For if He were to imitate the way we act, we are lost. Therefore, having become His disciples, let us learn to live in accordance with Christianity. For whoever is called by any other name than this one does not belong to God. Throw out, therefore, the bad leaven, which has become stale and sour, and reach for the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted with Him, so that none of you become rotten, for by your odor you will be examined. It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, in which “every tongue” believed and “was brought together” to God.

2) **Author unknown, *The Didache or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*** (early 2nd century)

This writing contained ethical instruction and community rules for liturgical practices and leadership conduct, ending with a short apocalyptic section. While some of the material might go back before the year AD 100, it is generally dated to the first quarter of the 2nd century. This document contained this statement:

“On the Lord’s own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.”

3) Epistle of Barnabas 15:8-9 (c. 130 A.D.)

This was an early writing attributed falsely to Barnabus; nevertheless, it reflects the belief and practice of some who professed to be Christian.

Finally, He says to them: “I cannot bear your new moons and Sabbaths.” You see what He means: it is not the present Sabbaths that are acceptable to Me, but the one that I have made; on that Sabbath, after I have set everything at rest, ***I will create the beginning of an eighth day, which is the beginning of another world. This is why we spend the eighth day in celebration, the day on which Jesus both arose from the dead and, after appearing again, ascended into heaven.***”

4) Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, (a. AD 155); chapter 67 --weekly worship of the Christians.

And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things. And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost. ***And on the day called Sunday***, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given... And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. ***But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.*** For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.

4) Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (c. 178 A.D.). “*The duty of celebrating the mystery of the resurrection of our Lord may be done only on the day of the Lord.*”

5) Eusebius, the Church historian, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 27 (c. 315 A.D.)

The Ebionites (an early heretical group) cherished low and mean opinions of Christ. For they considered Him a plain and common man, and justified only by His advances in virtue, and that He was born of the Virgin Mary, by natural generation. With them the observance of the law was altogether necessary, as if they could not be saved, only by faith in Christ and a corresponding life. These, indeed, thought on the one hand that all of the epistles of the apostles ought to be rejected, calling him an apostate from the law, but on the other, only using the gospel according to the Hebrews, they esteem the others as of little value. ***They also observe the Sabbath and other discipline of the Jews, just like them, but on the other hand, they also celebrate the Lords days very much like us, in commemoration of His resurrection.***

Also in **Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, Book 5, Chapter 23 (c. 315 A.D.)**

The churches throughout the rest of the world observe the practice that has prevailed from apostolic tradition until the present time, so that it would not be proper to terminate our fast on any other but the day of the resurrection of our Savior. Hence there were synods and convocations of the bishops on this question; and all unanimously drew up the ecclesiastical decree, which they communicated to all the churches in all places, that ***the mystery of our Lord's resurrection should be celebrated on no other day than the Lord's day.***

Eusebius was a contemporary of Constantine, but wrote these words years before Constantine made Sunday an "official" state-imposed Sabbath. The conclusion is that Christians observed the Lord's Day from the earliest of dates.

Returning to the record of the Fourth Gospel, John very precisely identifies our Lord first appearing to His disciples on the first day of the week, the day of His resurrection. And then one week later Jesus again appeared to His disciples on the evening of the first day of the week. John was reinforcing for His readers that Christians highly regarded Sunday as the Lord's Day due to our lord's resurrection and the fact that He appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week on these two occasions. **Matthew Henry** wrote of this:

That He (Christ) might put an honour upon the first day of the week, and give a plain intimation of His will, that it should be observed in His church as the Christian sabbath, the weekly day of holy rest and holy convocations. That one day in seven should be religiously observed was an appointment from the beginning, as old as innocency; and that in the kingdom of the Messiah the first day of the week should be that solemn day this was indication enough, that Christ on that day once and again met His disciples in a religious assembly. It is highly probable that in His former appearance to them He appointed them that day seven-night to be together again, and promised to meet them; and also that He appeared to them every first day of the week, besides other times, during the forty days. The religious observance of that day has been thence transmitted down to us through every age of the church. This therefore is *the day which the Lord has made.*

I have asserted in the past that there is an Old Testament prophecy that the formal worship of God's people would one day take place because that would be the day in which the promised Messiah would rise from the dead. Here is **Psalm 118:21-24**:

I will praise You,
For You have answered me,
And have become my salvation.

²²***The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.***

²³This was the LORD's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴***This is the day the LORD has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.***

Most Christians quote verse 24 by applying it to every day, which in a sense is true of course. The Lord has made every day. But the psalmist is speaking of a specific day, the day when the rejected stone becomes the chief cornerstone. This day would be so significant that the people of God would thereafter worship on this day, which is what the words mean in verse 24, "***We will rejoice and be glad in it.***" We know, of course, that this is a prophecy of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter quoted this verse accordingly. Here is **2 Peter 2:4-10**:

⁴Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, ⁵you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

“Behold, I lay in Zion
A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,
And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

⁷Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient,

***“The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone,”***

⁸and

“A stone of stumbling
And a rock of offense.”
They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

⁹But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Now frankly, I have not given a great deal of emphasis to this matter that Psalm 118:24 is a prophecy of New Testament worship on the Lord’s Day. One reason for my hesitation is that I have not read any of the “big boys” assert this truth in books I have read. This changed this week, however, when I read this quotation from Matthew Henry that we cited above. Again, he wrote of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, “The religious observance of that day has been thence transmitted down to us through every age of the church. This therefore is ***the day which the Lord has made.***” The italicized words are his, in which he is quoting that phrase of Psalm 118:24 as prophetic of Christians worshipping on the Lord’s Day, commemorating His resurrection and exaltation from the dead.

C. Jesus addressed Thomas directly and he responds to Jesus in faith (vs. 27-28)

²⁷Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

²⁸And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Thomas missed the first occasion when Jesus had appeared to the disciples. Even though he had been skeptical, it would seem that he would not want to miss the next occasion. The disciples had again gathered on the evening of the first day of the week, and Jesus again appeared to them, even though the door to their room was locked.

We read in **verse 26**, “***Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’***” This is the third time in which Jesus assured them of “peace” (vs. 19, 21, and here, v. 26). He assured them that all was well between God and them, His disciples. He could declare this because of His death and resurrection on their behalf. And His words are equally true to you and me if we are His disciples. You are at peace with God and He is at peace with you through faith in Him. Romans 5:1 and 2 state this reality:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Here Jesus was in His resurrected body. Heaven would have readily received Him and myriads of saints and angels would have sung praises upon His entrance into heaven and upon Him formally receiving His authority as King from His Father, but He chose to be in the midst of His disciples, still cowering in a locked room, seeking to assure them of their state of peace with God. Jesus Christ was always interested most and delighted most in bringing blessing to others rather than glory to Himself.

But upon appearing it would seem that Jesus immediately turned to Thomas and addressed him. By His words He reveals that He knew full well what had transpired between Thomas and the other disciples when he had refused to believe their testimony. Jesus repeated Thomas' very words of unbelief that he had spoken to the others a week before. It was an implied rebuke of Jesus and Thomas was probably shamed, in a measure, and probably humbled as well. And so it is that the Lord knows all of our defections and expressions of unbelief, and of our little and weak faith in Him. Jesus has heard every word of your unbelief spoken. He has "read" every evil and wretched thought of your mind and the illicit affections of our heart. And He has His ways of revealing to us ourselves and our weakness and failings. But Jesus was wonderfully condescending to Thomas. He did not rebuke him, but He dealt with him tenderly with the purpose to lead him to full faith in Him as his resurrected Lord and God. And He so deals with you, tenderly restoring you, again, if you are a true believer, a committed disciples of Him.

Jesus said to Thomas in **verse 27**, "*Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.*" So the Lord would affirm Himself to you, even if your are doubting, even as He did here for doubting Thomas, bringing him to place his full faith in Him as Savior. Jesus Christ is a gracious and merciful Savior of sinners. It is prophesied of Him in Isaiah 42 and fulfilled by Him in Matthew 12,

He will not quarrel nor cry out,
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.
A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench.⁵

We "have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak" (Rom. 15:1). But when we do so, we only do what the Lord Jesus always does for you and me.

Jesus permitted Thomas to touch His nail-pierced hands, to thrust his hand into His side where the Roman spear had pierced Him. And apparently even while Thomas was about to do so, Jesus said, "Be not faithless but believing." John does not tell us if Thomas actually did so. Whether he did or not we do not know. But I suspect that at this point Thomas did not see the need. We read in verse 28, "And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and My God.'"

And with that confession...

D. Jesus pronounced those as "blessed", who believe apart from seeing (v. 29)

We read in **verse 29**, "*Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'*" We have not seen Jesus, except with the eye of faith. Jesus declared that we who believe are more blessed than Thomas, for his faith was based on sight, what his physical eyes beheld. Faith is the instrument through which God brings sinners to experience the forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life. We will address this more fully next Lord's Day, Lord willing.

And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ
and love one another, just as He has commanded us. (1 John 3:23)

⁵ Cf. Isa. 42:1-4 and Matt. 12:18-21