Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The French philosopher and atheist, Voltaire, lived in the 1700s. And he once boastfully predicted that in 100 years Christianity would be a relic of the past. But he added that for his prediction to come true, one thing was needed; He said, “There is no hope of destroying the Christian religion so long as the Christian Sabbath is acknowledged and kept by men as a sacred day.” Very astutely, he recognized that one of the anchors of a robust Christianity is the observance of the Lord’s Day. Weaken or remove Lord’s Day observance, and you weaken Christianity. Now, Christianity will endure until Christ comes again, but the idea of observing a Christian Sabbath has taken a hammering in recent decades. So, what do we see in churches?

* We see what I saw in a recent video, which was of a woman about to be baptized in a mass baptism ceremony at a mega church, being asked by the pastor, “Why are you getting baptized?” And her response was along the lines of: “Because God is calling me to lead a worldwide team of people and angels to protect animals. And I need God on my side to do this.” So, no mention of sin or repentance or faith or even the name of Jesus. And did the Pastor halt proceedings, and say, “You need to go to a membership class and learn about the meaning of baptism”? No. He asked the congregation to give her a round of applause and then proceeded to baptize her.
* And in another video, one church did an Easter play where the Disney character, Belle, took the place of Jesus and was crucified. She spoke the words that Jesus spoke while on the cross. And there was lots of laughter from the congregation as she and the two comedy character thieves on either side went back and forth. And then Belle died, and the lights went out. But when the lights came on again Belle was ‘resurrected,’ in a very beautiful yellow dress, to the cheers of the congregation!

And sadly, this is typical of what is going on in many churches. And I can’t know for certain, but my guess is that these churches do not care about observing the Christian Sabbath.

So, last Sunday afternoon, we heard **seven reasons why New Testament believers must observe the Christian Sabbath**. And if you were not here, I can easily send those to you. And in connection with the installation of elders, we saw that a most important part of Lord’s Day observance is gathering for public worship, as we are doing now. And it is the duty of elders to call, to teach at, and to oversee public worship. But there are two more aspects of public worship that we want to consider in connection with the Fourth Commandment; they are **the second service** and **tithing**. And we will look at tithing next week. But Answer 103 says that God’s will for us in the Fourth Commandment includes that “[we] regularly attend the assembly of God’s people.” And I trust we all agree with that. But we assemble twice on Sundays; we have two public worship services. And this as per our church order or the book of rules for our Reformed churches, which says, “The session shall call the congregation for corporate worship ordinarily twice on the Lord’s Day.” But there is no explicit command in the Bible to gather for public worship *twice* on the Lord’s Day. So, why do we do this? And our text in **Hebrews 10:25** warns believers to not neglect “*to meet together, as is the habit of some*.” And the public worship of the Lord’s people is in view there. So, are our elders justified to refer to this verse with those who make it their habit not to attend the second service? Or is this just a man-made tradition that we can freely ignore?

Well, I preach this sermon under the following theme: **We believers ought to praise God for two opportunities every Lord’s Day to praise God**!

1. Our main question is: Why do we have two services on the Lord’s Day? And in some respects, this is kind of a ‘duh!’ question.
   1. One song in our hymnbooks that we often sing near the beginning of our services is number 22c.

*Amid the thronging worshippers Jehovah will I bless.*

*Before my brethren gathered there, His name will I confess.*

It is a Psalm that celebrates the most wonderful thing that is public worship.

* 1. **Psalm 35:18** says, Lord, “*I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you*.” And last week we sang Psalm 84 which celebrates the beauty of public worship. And there are many other Psalms that speak of the joy of and beauty of congregational worship.
  2. And we see this also in the New Testament church. For example, in **Acts 2**, we see New Testament believers gathering daily for worship. And in **Acts 19:8-9** we read about Paul teaching “*daily in the hall of Tyrannus*.”
  3. And **Ephesians 5:19** and **Colossians 3:16** call on believers to teach and admonish one another with “*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart*.”
  4. And worshipping as a congregation is what we will do in the new heavens and new earth, also. **Revelation** is full of descriptions of the great multitude in heaven singing in praise of God and the Lamb.
  5. And all of this is why, for Christians, nothing compares to public worship. It is the best thing that we can do to glorify God, and it is the principal way that God instructs and assures and equips His children. So, if we have two opportunities to do this on the Lord’s Day, why wouldn’t we? Right?
     1. I expect we all have a favourite band or singer. Well, imagine that they were in Auckland and they put on a concert for special fans and you received an invitation to attend. So, you go the concert, and you hear favourite songs, and you even get to talk with the band members. Wow! But then you find out that they are doing another concert later that day and you can attend that one as well. And there will be more of your favourite songs and another meet and greet. Would you say … nah. Once was enough. Probably not.
     2. And so, as someone else has put it, if this is where the Lord Jesus meets with His congregation in the most special way, again. Where else would we rather be?

1. But we probably need to say a bit more than that. For we still have not seen why we *ought* to have two services on Sunday from the Bible. And this is the perfect place for us to recall an important principle of Bible interpretation, which is that **we learn God’s will not just by the explicit commands of Scripture, but also by what can be concluded from Scripture “by good and necessary consequence.”** For example, we do not find the word **Trinity** in the Bible. Neither do we find these exact words: There is one God who exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But that is what all the Scriptures teach. And we also do not find an explicit command that **the children of believers ought to be baptized**. But that is what all the Scriptures teach. And it is similar with the second service. Very soon I will walk you through five scriptural reasons or principles for a second service. And by the end, I trust you will see that elders ought to call the congregation to worship twice on the Lord’s Day. And if we are physically able to attend, we ought to be there. And in terms of why these five principles, well, in the Lord’s providence, the New Plymouth congregation will soon become an instituted or stand-alone church of our federation. And many in that congregation do not come from a tradition of two services. And so, alongside some other matters, pastor Josh wrote down a biblical rationale for this practice. And I have borrowed and added to and adapted his explanation into the following five points. So, with the remainder of our time, we will work our way through these five brief points, and then finish with a couple of comments about what is at stake here.
   1. The first Scriptural principal or reason is that **it is the Lord’s *Day*, not the Lord’s morning**. Throughout the Old Testament, the principle of morning and evening sacrifice is well attested. In Leviticus, God said there were to be morning and evening sacrifices. David spoke about this as his devotional practice also: **Psalm 92:1-2**: “*It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night*.” And as we come into the New Testament, we see the same language used: For example, in **Hebrews 13:15** we are commanded to “*continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*.” So, there is this established biblical principle of morning and evening worship.
      1. It is not surprising then that **this was the common practice of the early church**. All the way back through church history, right to apostolic times, we find records of morning and evening worship. And did you know that morning and evening worship was the practice in pretty much every denomination, all round the world, and even here in New Zealand, up until the 1950s. It is only that recently that more and more churches have ditched evening worship. And I sometimes talk to people who remember evening worship back in the day, but in their church, it does not happen anymore.
      2. And in terms of good spiritual habits and disciplines, morning and evening worship **better helps us to keep the *whole* Lord’s Day holy**.
         1. When you talk to home-schooled children about what they like about home-schooling, you often hear that they like it because they can get their work done in an hour or two and then they have the whole rest of the day for themselves! Have you heard that?
         2. Well, similarly, if all you have is morning church, it is so much easier to feel like the rest of the day belongs to you. So, it is church in the morning, and then the café or the shops or the rugby match or the movie in the afternoon and evening. And I know many former members of our churches who would never have considered such things but have now joined other churches and who now have no problem with doing these sorts of things on the Lord’s Day.
      3. But the first reason for a second service is the established biblical principle of morning and evening worship.
   2. The second Scriptural principle is that **a second service answers the cry of a Christian’s heart which craves the presence of their God***.* We were created to worship God. Sadly, sin makes us desire everything else but the worship of God. But when the Holy Spirit gives us new birth, we long for fellowship with God above all else. In **Psalm 63:1-2**, the Psalmist cries out, “*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*” So, the Psalmist missed experiencing the presence of God, so much, that he felt like he was dying of thirst in a desert. Why? We see why as he continues: “*So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory*.” So, the Psalmist was in exile and unable to worship at the temple with the Lord’s people. For that is where he experienced God the best. And you might be thinking, but isn’t God everywhere? Yes, He is. But as we saw last week,He reveals Himself and draws near to us the best in public worship. That is simply how He has designed it to be. And brothers and sisters, one service is simply not enough to satisfy the craving of a Christian heart to draw near to God.
   3. Our third Scriptural principle is closely related to the second, and it is that a second service **also serves to strengthen the body of Christ**. Ephesians 4 tells us that Christ has given the church pastors and teachers to equip us for the work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ. Paul said to minister Timothy, “*Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with compete patience and teaching*.” “*Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching … Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers*.”
      1. If you were training for something at work that would lead to promotion and an increase in income, and your employer put on a second training session, alongside the first one, would you miss that second session? Not on your life! You would be there with bells on!
      2. If your doctor said that upping your chemo treatments from one a week to two would dramatically increase your likelihood of surviving, or that taking two tablets a week instead of one would increase your general health, would you say, “Nah. I’ll stick to the one, thanks.” Of course not.
      3. Well, given the value that God Himself placed on worship and especially preaching, it seems appropriate that we would desire to benefit from it *more* often rather than *less* often.
   4. A fourth Scriptural principle is that **the busier life gets the more we need to have our eyes fixed on Christ**. Since the Fall, the devil has continually baited us with earthly things. Some of them are outright sinful, but many aren’t sinful in themselves (e.g. wealth, family, career). But the more we have to fill our days with, the more urgent it is that our souls are reminded to keep perspective.
      1. God’s Old Testament people Israel were slaves in Egypt. They had to work long hours for cruel taskmasters. So, do you remember why God rescued Israel from slavery? It was *so that they could worship Him*, not simply so that they could recover from physical exhaustion.
      2. This is the underlying principle of Christ saying that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. We need to be able to worship our God not just because He deserves it, but because we need it! We need to have our eyes and hearts filled with Christ and all His benefits! We need to have time to sing His praises and pray and be nourished by the Word.
      3. Almost every time I have to get new tyres on the car, the technician asks, “When did you last get a **wheel alignment** done?” And I will have to admit that I can’t remember because who has got time or money to get regular wheel alignments? But the fact is that if you get a regular wheel alignment your tyres do not wear out nearly as quickly as they would without them.
      4. And public worship is like a spiritual wheel alignment. It keep us from wearing out! And we need it even *more*, now, with our often-hectic busyness, not *less*.
   5. The fifth and last Scriptural principle is that attending a second service **testifies to the world regarding the value of God and salvation in Christ**. Public worship has two aims – the edifying and equipping of believers *and* the conversion of unbelievers.
      1. So, whether they attend themselves, walk past the church at 5:30pm and hear singing, or hear that you did not go to the Blues game or watch the Australian F1 race or that you missed the Farmers sale because you were at church, for the second time in a day, that speaks volumes to them about how important God is to you!
      2. And **1 Corinthians 1:21** says that “*it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe*.” The preaching of God’s Word is the primary means by which God saves the lost. As such, two worship services provides double the opportunity to invite your neighbours to be confronted with sin and salvation in Jesus Christ.
2. So, there you have five biblical principles for why we ought to have two services on a Sunday and why, if we are physically able to do so, we ought to be at both. And they are also why it is right for Elders to refer to this verse in Hebrews 10 in relation to continued non-attendance of the second service. And I have tried to be positive; to hold before you the many good reasons why we ought to have and attend two services on the Lord’s Day. But we must end by seeing that **this is a matter can have serious negative consequences if it is ignored**.
   1. Last Sunday I gave you part of a quote from a recent Ligonier Conference. The quote is from Dr. Sinclair Ferguson. The part I gave you was about the Sabbath Commandment. But now I want you to hear the first part of his answer. And the question he was answering was this: What has weakened local churches the most? And it is a fascinating question, isn’t it. I wonder what your answer would be? There were various speakers on the stage who gave different answers. But here is what Dr. Ferguson said:

*I think the loss of the second service has had a monumental impact on the evangelical church, for a number of reasons: One is that most of us aren't really spiritual enough to use that one day in the week well if the church isn't helping us to. That's one point. The second point is that we have an extraordinary arrogance if we we think we can live the quality of Christian life that Reformed Christians have lived in the past, on the basis of a fraction of the diet of ministry that they have had. I mean, I see churches in our tradition kind of putting themselves forward as being right churches because, for example, they may have the Lord’s Supper every week. And the question I always ask is, “Why do you not have a second service? If you think you've got back to Geneva, why is your minister not preaching, when he's strong enough to do it, every day of the week? Why do you not have Wednesdays given over to prayer?” We are so undernourished, in terms of the Christian character that we are producing, partly because we have assumed we can do it like a [McDonald’s] in an hour on a Sunday … Our Reformed tradition that built real character was never without those helps to all of us to be garrisoned by a thorough ministry of the word, fellowship with God’s people, opportunity to linger with them, and the climax of worship being not the first service but the second service. I've had ministers telling me that they've had experts who’ve told them the quality of their morning worship is outstanding, and I think I've probably lost the possibility of friendship with them because I've said I've got a litmus test for the quality of morning worship and it's whether people want to be back again in the day*.

* 1. Brothers and Sisters, I am very thankful that our forefathers wrote the requirement for two services into our church book of rules. And when I heard that a sister church voted at a recent synod to take the requirement for two services out of its church book of rules, I was deeply grieved. For this ‘downgrade’ is nothing new. It has been happening in most denominations, as I said, since about the 1950s. And it has happened in some Reformed Churches around the world, including sister churches. And the result has not been church members with a deeper devotion to Christ, and growth in knowledge and wisdom, and a more courageous and biblically faithful testimony to a dying world. What has resulted has been the opposite, to the point that we have even cut ties with once sister churches because of biblical unfaithfulness. That is what is at stake here. Voltaire was right that if you weaken or remove the idea of observing a Christian Sabbath, you will weaken Christianity. And when you take away the second service, you weaken the observance of the Christian Sabbath.
  2. And so, a final word to parents and grandparents. Already when I was a young lad, I remember hearing it said that ‘the children of oncers often become none-cers.’ The children of those who only attend once, when they could attend twice, often stop attending altogether. Why? Because their parents have set an example of valuing other things more highly than public worship, of ignoring the call of the Lord Jesus, through His elders, to gather for worship, twice. And so, sadly, their children have ‘gotten the message’ – afternoon church is optional. And if afternoon church is optional, then maybe morning church is also.

Now, I hasten to add that no one is saved through second service attendance. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Hallelujah! But experiencing Christ and salvation in Christ and instruction in Christ happens best in public worship. So, let us be those who love a double dose of public worship! Let us be those who make the most of the two opportunities that we have gather for public worship. Let us be those who praise God for two opportunities every Lord’s Day to praise God! Amen.