

THE OBSERVATION OF THE SABBATH IN THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak at this conference, especially to Mr Craig White who has slotted me in at the last minute. My name is Esther Wee . I am a lay worker of The True Jesus Church. We are a church that keeps the seventh day Sabbath.

Introduction to The True Jesus Church.

The True Jesus Church has a rather recent history in Australia. The Melbourne congregation commenced in 1982 and the Sydney congregation in 1983. Both have congregations of between 70-80. Brisbane has a congregation of 115 and the rest are in Perth, Auckland, and Christchurch in New Zealand. The Church has her beginnings between the years of 1910-1917, the years that straddled the troubled transition of Imperial China and Republican China. The True Jesus Church however officially set up in Peking, in northern China. The church had three early workers, Paul Wei, Lingsheng Zhang and Barnabas Zhang. In the archives of our church, the biographies of these three men describe them as having received the Holy Spirit and the revelation of the truth of Salvation ; including that of the baptisms of water, spirit and Sabbath keeping. This was the first independent church of China and the only one that was and remains Sabbath keeping. By the written records of the church she grew, between 1917 and 1949 to a total membership of 200,000 before the fall of China to the communists. A distinct feature of our church was that of powerful spiritual manifestations. The 20s and 30s saw the church moving into Taiwan, the countries of South East Asia , Korea and Japan. In 1949 the bamboo curtain fell upon China but the term bamboo curtain understates the intense persecution that befell the church. All of the church ministers who remained faithful to Christ were imprisoned. Majority died in prison. Few were finally released as recent as 1982 . Meanwhile in the free world, the True Jesus Church was brought to every major continent of the world. Of the 80000 members in the free world, 40000 are in Taiwan making the church the third largest in terms of membership. The rest of the 40000 are found in all the continents including the western countries-USA, UK, France, Germany. Recent inroads have been made into the former eastern bloc countries. . Nevertheless by far the biggest bulk of the members of The True Jesus Church remains in China where 200,000 believers pre communist days have multiplied into a conservative figure of 1,000,000 by the grace of the Lord despite the attempts of the communist to annihilate God.

In 1926 the headquarters of the church was in Nanjing, later moved to Shanghai with another move to Taiwan following the communist takeover. Presently, the organisation that unites all the congregations of The True Jesus Church all over the free world is The International Assembly of The True Jesus Church with its office presently in Garden Grove , California. Amongst its 10 Articles of Faith of our church, the 8th reads like this, “Believing that the Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week, commonly called Saturday, is a Holy Day blessed and hallowed by God. It is to be observed under grace for the commemoration of God’s creation and salvation, with the hope of eternal rest and Sabbath in the Kingdom of God.”

Why we keep the Sabbath?

(a) A divine institution

We recognise that the Sabbath is a divine institution. " God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because that in it He rested from all His work which God created and made (Gen 2; 3). After the fall , the next mention of the Sabbath was in the wilderness journey. The Lord enshrined it as the Fourth commandment in the Decalogue, which the Scriptures state, albeit anthropomorphically, as written by God's own finger. When the Jews violated this commandment as they did the 1st and the 2nd, the Babylonian captivity ensued.

We hold the 10 commandments as morally binding on Christians, the fourth being no exception. When Jesus made a reply to the rich young ruler (Matt 19:16-22)-If you would enter life keep the commandments, there is no doubt in our mind that Jesus meant the 10 commandments although he quotes only 5 to represent the all.

(b) Remembering God's creation

When we keep the Sabbath we remember God's creation(Ex 20:11) The creation of God tells of God's love and provision for His children. Adam was put in the garden of Eden to keep and to dress the garden and to have dominion over all the earth. The Sabbath is a provision of physical rest and spiritual revitalisation for Adam. The generation of Adam who keep this day shall not be confronted with the hardships of life, this being evident in the provision of manna in the wilderness. One also remembers the order of creation that man is created and that God is the creator. . This order is mandatory if anyone is to maintain relationship with God.

All of mankind is God's creation-not just the Jews alone. We, in the True Jesus Church, though majority Chinese bow down to this One God.

(c) Remembering God's Salvation

" And remember that thou was a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee thence through a stretched out hand; therefore the lord thy God hath commanded thee to keep Sabbath day"(Dt 5:15)

Man's memory of God is short. The Sabbath then is a weekly reminder to his people that God has delivered from bondage. The deliverance of God in the Exodus typifies a greater salvation that was to come through THE deliverer, Jesus Christ. The Sabbath therefore reminds the Christian of God's marvellous salvation.

(d) To let man know that God sanctifies man.

" I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them"(Eze 20:12)

The Sabbath day is simply different day from all other days because God sanctified this day, He hallowed it and made it Holy. On this day He wants His people to be reminded of the need of holiness, without which none may see God. He wants His people to consecrate this day unto the holy things, that man may abstain from the

secular and the common, perhaps even the profane, and to draw near to the deity who sanctifies us.

(e) To Anticipate the Eternal rest and Sabbath in the Heavenly Kingdom.

“there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he hath also ceased from his own works; as God did from His.”(Heb 4:9-10)

The Sabbath is a type of the eternal rest in the kingdom of Heaven, there being no true and permanent rest in this world. . Jesus came to give us rest. The rest that Jesus gives us shall be final, complete and eternal in the Kingdom Of Heaven. Until the time , the Sabbath reminds us continually of this rest.

Why we do not keep Sunday?

(a) The Traditions of Men

The observation of Sunday as the so-called Christian Sabbath or the Lord’s day to supplant the Seventh day Sabbath has no scriptural sanction. It appears that pagan converts to the Christian faith were not averse to grafting old practices of sun worship to the new faith. There is certainly evidence that the sabbath had been changed in the apostolic age. In post apostolic times, in the mid 2nd century, it appears that most christians gathered on the first day of the week. Tertullian and Cyprian spoke of the Lord’s day as Sunday but this is not the equivalent of Rev 1:10 and we do not recognise post canonical writings as inspired. In 321 A.D., Constantine who himself had some attachment to sun worship made Sunday a public holiday. The imperial law facilitated christian worship on Sunday which christians now termed “ the day of the sun of righteousness.” Both apostolic tradition and state compliance were quoted. The Council of Laodicea formally condemned Sabbath keeping as Judaizing and commended the “ Lord’s Day” as its replacement. Further prohibitions on the “Lord’s Day” were pronounced in papal decretals and the councils of Carthage and Orleans. The True Jesus Church does not recognise any rule of authority over our faith other than the Holy Scriptures. By observing Sunday, one bows down to the authority of man. One alters the word of God. By this one creates huge untenable cracks in the foundation on which the church is built-that of the apostles, prophets and Christ the cornerstone, Jesus observed the Sabbath day, It was his custom. (Lk 4:16, 4:31)When he warned of the destruction of Jerusalem, he said , pray that it was not in winter on a Sabbath, that is he expected the Sabbath to be kept (Mt 24:20). The apostles kept the Sabbath day- Paul and Barnabas at Antioch(Acts 13:14, 44) Paul and Silas at Philippi(Acts 16: 44), Paul and Silas at Thessalonica(Acts 17:1-2), Paul at Corinth (Acts18:4) . The True Jesus Church bows to the example of Christ and of the apostles. .

(b) The House of Cards

Having changed the Sabbath from the seventh day hallowed by God without any biblical sanction, the Sunday keepers then built their arguments on a few NT passages

which when put under the microscope, cannot be construed as a biblical evidence that the transfer has occurred in the NT. They have built a house of cards.

The foremost argument that the Sunday keepers put forth is that Sunday being the day of the resurrection should be set aside as the Christian Sabbath. In the four gospels, the 'first day of the week' is recorded in six places (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2, 9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1, 19) but none of these record that the disciples gathered to commemorate day of the resurrection. These few records of the Gospels point out that the prophecy concerning the resurrection have been fulfilled. Jn 20:19 cannot be regarded as proof as the Lord appeared to the disciples not only on the first day of the week but also eight days later (Jn 20:26). In Jn 20:19 the disciples were assembled for the fear of the Jews. Thomas did not even believe in the resurrection at the beginning. How could they at this time be observing the resurrection day?

Acts 20:7 is also taken as a basis of the change of the Sabbath. Here Paul gathered with the believers at Troas to break bread together. It is necessary to take note that in the apostolic age, the breaking of the bread was not on a fixed day. It could be held everyday in the temple, or at home. (Acts 2:46-47) The Troas meeting was held in the evening as the bible states clearly that "there were many lights in the upper chamber" (Acts 20:8). Paul's sermon was until midnight! The gathering was a farewell service for Paul who intended to part the next day.

I Cor 16:2 does not give convincing evidence either. Paul indicated to the believers to put aside contributions from what they had gained the previous week so that all the contributions may be ready for Paul to take as a gift of love to Jerusalem when he next arrived at Corinth. It made sense that the believers start taking account of the earnings from the previous week on the first day of the following week and not on the Sabbath of the previous week, for it would not be appropriate to count money and to take stock of your earnings on the Sabbath. Besides if they had gathered together on the first day of the week then it would have made more sense for the contributions to be collected, not put aside. Paul would not have contradicted his own actions - keeping the Sabbath - and instructing others to do so of the first day of the week.

Rev 1:10 The Lord's' day is not the first day of the week. That it is often understood so is another tradition of man, a pure speculation and an elaborate interpretation of a later period attached to this verse in order to validate the change of the seventh day Sabbath to the first day of the week. The Lord's day is referred to as Sunday in later writing but this alludes to and reflects the spreading vogue of celebrating the first day of the week and cannot be presented as equivalent as the Lord's day in Rev 1:10. The Lord's day in Rev 1:10 is either the seventh day Sabbath as Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath or it may mean the great and terrible day of the Lord as John saw in visions the things of the end time.

Some claim that the Sabbath is for the Jew, the OT elect. The Sabbath was made for man, not the Jew alone. In the beginning Adam was not a Jew. Isaiah tells us that the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord in the messianic age has the privilege of keeping the Sabbath (Is 56:6)

Other claim that Christians are saved by grace, and therefore do not need to keep the commandments. We believe that salvation does not come from the deeds of the law

but absolutely from faith in the cleansing blood of Jesus. But living under grace means the Christian upholds the moral laws of God in a higher and more spiritual manner (Mt 5: 17-31; Rom 3:31; Mt 19:17) not just an adherence to the letter of the moral law but also the spirit. The carnal ordinances of the law however has fulfilled and these are that which have been taken away by the cross. In Col 2:16-17 for example, the food and the drink o the festival of the new moon or a sabbath which is the shadow of what is to come refers to the carnal ordinances that govern the things in the OT. In the case of the Sabbath, it is the legalistic rules, especially the subsequent Rabbinic rules, both oral and written, that bound and stifled man. These are that which have been abolished, not the Sabbath itself, in the same manner that the dietary laws were that governed food and drink were abolished and not food and drink itself. Gal 4:10 and Rom 14:5-6 do refer to the Sabbath. The context of the passage in Romans is that which dealt with "eating" and the observation of "days", that is the rules of meat and drink and the observation of feasts and fasting (Heb 9:10; Lev 16:29-61, 23:27-32; Es 9:31; Zech 8:19; Jere 39:2, 52: 12-13). In the primitive church there were many Jews believers who kept these legalistic practices as necessary unto salvation, Galatians and the passage in the Romans were written to refute the Judaizers and not to abolish the Sabbath. From the beginning to the end the canonical Scripture, there is not demonstrable evidence that the Sabbath has been changed. If there had been one would have expected a great controversy in the apostolic church, something on a far greater scale that the circumcision controversy stirred byte Judaizing party. The Scripture is silent on this for no such controversy existed. The only controversy that existed was that in the time of Jesus - this was about how to keep the Sabbath rather than what day the Sabbath was.

How Do We keep the Sabbath?

At the time of Jesus, the manner and attitude with which Jesus observed the Sabbath was noticeably different from that of the Jews , in particular the legalistic Pharisees. The Post Exilic period Nehemiah to ensure that the Sabbath was not broken as he saw the violation of the Sabbath as one of the reasons of the Babylonian exile(Neh 13:15-22) Later in the intertestamental period, the Sabbath observation developed as the Jews struggled to maintain their distinctive identity as the people of God. Apart from the prohibitions already present in the Torah i. e. No labour allowed(ex 20:10), no fire to be kindled (Ex 35:3), cessation of all agricultural activities(Ex 34:21), the penalty of death(Ex 31:12-17, Ex 35:2, Num 15:32-36), the book of the Jubilees and the Damascus Document provided for further specific prohibitions on the Sabbath. --prohibition of food preparation, drawing water, carrying objects into and out of one's house, sexual intercourse, sailing, riding and animal. In the Mishnah, the rabbis and the Pharisees in interpreting the law codified 39 different works forbidden on the Sabbath. But it is necessary for us to see what the Lord of the Sabbath thought about and acted on the Sabbath and contrast it with the severity that the Pharisees wanted to see enforced.

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(a) Mercy triumphs over judgment (Mt 12:1-8; Mk 2: 23-28

The son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath. He determines how the Sabbath is kept and because he came to bring grace, he required mercy over judgment . Jesus quoted the precedent of David and his men eating of the bread of prescence in the temple that

were forbidden to all but the priest. The priests did a great deal of manual work in the Sabbath. In both cases God considered their actions justified. One greater than the temple is here. A new priesthood of believers is here. How much more would God justify the disciples in what they did in attendance of Jesus

(b) It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Mt 12:12, Mk 3:4).

Jesus demonstrated this by healing the man with the withered hand who was more precious than a sheep and healing the daughter of Abraham who was stricken with Kyphosis for 18 years, at the same time calling the legalistic Jews hypocrites. (Lk 13:10, 16)

(c) It is lawful to do service for God on the Sabbath. (Mt 12:12, Mk 3:4)

Priestly service and circumcision on the Sabbath was evidence of this.

The Lord Jesus has given a new meaning and significance to the observation of the Sabbath_ carefree, joyful and filled with gracious blessings from God , as opposed to the stifling , fearful, burdensome and judgmental ways of the legalists. In the True Jesus Church, we therefore teach and encourage the believers to:

(i) Put away all secular activities on the Sabbath.

“ . . . thou turn away thy foot on the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words”(Is 58:13)

. (ii) Attending worship services

“ . . six days shalt thou labour but the seventh day is a day of rest a holy convocation(Lev 23:3) Also (Lk 4:16, Act 13:44)

(iii) To do good, charitable and evangelistic works. (Mk 1:21, , Act 16:13)

The Sabbath is reckoned from “even to the even” (Lev 23:32)

How Did The True Jesus Church come to Keep the Seventh Day Sabbath?

The True Jesus Church was able to develop in China relatively free of the influence of institutionalised church that featured so prominently on the history of Europe. Though the Nestorians and the Manicheans came to China in the 6-7th century, the Jesuits in the 17th Century and the mainly British and American missionaries in the 18-early 20th century, Christianity never did have a stronghold in China the it did in Europe According to the biographies of the early workers of the church, the basic doctrines of the church did not come by means of councils, theological discussions but by revelation. In the case of the Sabbath, the church records state that Lingsheng Zhang, a native of Shandong province, in the morning of the 31st January 1910, received the Holy Spirit while he was praying at home , spoke in tongues and was revealed by the Holy Spirit to keep the seventh day Sabbath. Quite independently, the other early worker of the church, Paul Wei native of Hebei province, stated that he had received the Holy Spirit in 1915 but it was in the 30th May 1917, that the Spirit revealed to him, amongst other things that the seventh day Sabbath was to be

kept and that Sunday must not be observed as the Sabbath. Ling Sheng Zhang only met Paul Wei in the spring of 1918 in the city of Tianjin.

In conclusion

Sabbath keeping in the True Jesus Church is in keeping with our professed mission to restore the beliefs, practises and the faith of the apostolic church. In this short 20 min I may not have adequately explained the position of the church, but I am more than happy to answer any queries that may arise in your mind.

Thank You for your time.