

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas

April 2, 2017

The Love to the End

John 13:1-5

13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

13:2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him,

13:3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God,

13:4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.

13:5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

1. The Passover Supper

Almost the same period Christians celebrate Easter, Jewish people celebrate Passover. It starts on the fifteenth day of Nissan and ends on the twenty-second day according Jewish calendar. It is the period from April tenth to the eighteenth according our calendar. The most important ceremony of Passover is Passover Supper.

Long before Passover begins, the people clean their homes. Especially they clean kitchen carefully to rid their homes of bread, cake, beer which contains leavening agent (yeast). Even some non-food items, such as vitamins and cosmetics, may contain yeast and

will need to be disposed of or sold. They really clean their belongings thoroughly.

Leavening agent (yeast) represents evilness in human mind. Getting rid of leavening agent is a symbolic action of purge the evilness from our minds. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 reads, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” Apostle Paul taught Christians to be against a person’s immorality act so that the immorality should not spread whole church in these verses. Paul helped the readers of his letter understand his stern commendation by using an illustration that Jewish people cleaned out the leaven thoroughly.

Since we don’t have enough time to learn every one of Passover Supper’s fifteen steps, I’d like to mention only few of them. Four cups of wine are prepared on the table. The first cup is called “the cup of sanctification.” They drink it at the beginning of the Supper. The second cup is called “the cup of judgment.” They drink it after listening the exodus story. Then, they take a portion of bitter herbs, dip it in salt water and eat it. Bitter herbs represent the pains in Egypt and the salt water shows the tears because of the pains. Some other appetizers are also prepared, and all of them somehow relates to freedom from Egypt.

They set aside three pieces of unleavened bread for the later step of Supper. They piled up the three bread on a plate. The top one shows

God in heaven, and the bottom one shows men on earth. The middle one shows a priest who mediates between God and men. The middle one is broken in two. The larger piece is wrapped in a linen cloth and hidden. Children are looking for the bread after main dish and bring it to the head of the Supper. The head breaks it into small pieces and all eat it. Then they drink the third cup, called “the cup of redemption.” After singing psalms, they drink up the fourth and the last cup, and say together, “Next year in Jerusalem!” This concludes the Passover Supper.

Scholars say that the Passover Supper Jesus observed with his disciples was almost the same as the Passover Supper observed among modern Jewish people. If so, the bread Jesus gave to the disciples saying “Take this, and eat it.” must be the bread called “Afikomen” (means “dessert”) which was wrapped and hid during the meal and were eaten after meal. And the cup Jesus gave to the disciples saying “Take this, and drink from it.” must be the third cup, called “the cup of redemption.” The Bible concludes the account of the Passover Supper Jesus had with the words, “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” (Mark 14:26) This hymn singing must be the same as “Hallel”, the fourteenth step of the Supper. By the way, the hymn was Psalms 113 to 118 which were sung at the Passover Supper.

2. The Lord’s Supper

Lord Jesus wished to have the Passover Supper with his disciples before the cross. He intended to show us visually that he was the lamb of the Passover, would be a substitution for the sins of all humanity,

and would die on the cross for it.

It is very mysterious action that the “Bread of Priest” is broken into two pieces, and one of them is wrapped in a cloth and hidden during the Passover Supper. You don’t understand what it is according to the Jewish tradition. You need to understand about Jesus Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection to understand the meaning of this action.

The “Bread of Priest” indicates Jesus Christ. The original meaning of the word, “Christ” is “anointed person”. In the Old Testament, kings, priests, and prophets were appointed after their anointment. Usually, these positions can not be served by the same person; however, Lord Jesus is the king, priest, and prophet simultaneously. The priest stands between God and men. The priest needs the sacrifice for mediating between God and men. However, can we find the sacrifice in order to forgive the sins of all humanity? If you offer the all animals on the earth, it is not enough. Therefore, Jesus Christ, the Priest becomes the sacrifice by himself and offer himself to God. Splitting the “Bread of Priest” indicates Christ’s sacrifice. Also, hiding the bread in the cloth indicates burying Lord Jesus. Lord was wrapped in a linen, kept in a tomb in a bedrock, and the entrance of the tomb was covered with a huge rock. The same as the bread in the cloth, Lord Jesus was hidden from people’s eyes.

However, Lord Jesus was resurrected from the dead and showed his disciple that he was alive. Jesus Christ’s resurrected life, eternal life is given to us, who believe in Jesus Christ. The hidden bread comes back to the table, and everyone eats it. This means the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Forgiveness of sins, status of God’s children, and the eternal life;

this salvation has been brought by the noble blood of Lord Jesus on the cross. Therefore, Lord Jesus distributed “the Cup of Atonement” to his disciples and said “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” (Mark 14:24).

Lord Jesus kept the Passover Supper according the Jewish tradition; however, he changed it to the new one. The Passover Supper is the memorial of meal not only of the rescue of Israelites from Egypt but also the salvation of all people by His death on the cross and resurrection. The Passover Supper Lord Jesus observed is generally called “the Last Supper”. It is not wrong; however, it was also the first supper of the Lord’s Supper which Church has been observing until now. It was also ”the First Supper.”

“Passover Supper” has be given its meaning by the death on the cross and resurrection of the Lord, and “the Lord’s Supper” was came from it. Therefore, we want to observe “the Lord’s Supper” by understanding its rich meanings. We should not just repeat it as a ceremony. We would like to participate with the Lord’s Supper with appreciation and wonder of the salvation.

3. The Love to the End

Today’s scripture reading is John 13:1-5 and this is where Passover Supper of Jesus and his disciples is described. However, in John, there is no description of bread and the cup of the Lord Supper unlike Matthew, Mark or Luke. Why is that? That is because John tried to express the meaning of the Lord Supper through other events such as “feeding of five thousands”. Here, John tries to explain the Lord Supper through Jesus’ washing the feet of his disciples.

By washing the feet of the disciples, Lord Jesus taught them how to support each other, but this was not only done for the discipleship. As John 13:1 says, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end”, Jesus was outpoured by his love to his disciples that he could not help washing the disciple’s feet. This became a role model for the disciples, but it was not only to show model.

I am moved by the word in verse 1, “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” Indeed we love someone, but most of the time, we do so because the person is kind to us or he/she listens to us. The majority of us stop loving someone because of a small thing, such as he/she does not understand us, he/she does not do what we expect him/her to do. Conversely, we hold grudge against him/her or avenge them. But Lord Jesus loved them to the end. Today’s scripture describes the betrayal of Judas, but Lord Jesus washed his feet quietly even though he was about to betray him. The reason why the Bible described the betrayal of Judas at the same time as describing Jesus washing disciples’ feet is that it emphasizes Lord Jesus who “loved them to the end”.

I just told you that the bread wrapped in a cloth at Passover Supper referred to Lord Jesus, but as the matter of fact, it was described three times in the Bible that Lord Jesus was wrapped in a cloth. The first time was at His birth. Luke 2:6-7 says, “While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.” The next one is John

13:4 where it says, “so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.” And the third one is in Mark 15:46, “So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock”. The cloth that Lord Jesus was wrapped around refers to the fact that Jesus had become a servant. Even though Jesus was the Son of God, He abandoned the glory and became a servant of sinners and served for people as an “offering of redemption”.

In “Easter Devotional Series” that Brother Armour wrote, we see the word “samurai” many times. Samurai is the person who serves for others. Nobody has served others like Jesus. The Lord Jesus served for people without any hesitation, and people were saved because of His ultimate love to the end. Although John did not mention anything about the bread and cup at the Lord Supper, it instead described His “love to the end” toward humans by becoming a servant and offered Himself and His blood. This description of Jesus as the servant is the invitation for us to receive and taste the love of Christ at the Lord’s Supper.

Let’s thank Him that all believers are invited to the Lord Supper. We would like to be filled with his “love to the end” together with the mystery of salvation that the Lord revealed right at the same time.

(Prayer)

Dear Heavenly Father, you change Passover Supper to the Lord Supper and give it to church through your Son Jesus. Please help us understand the mystery of salvation as we receive the Lord Supper. The Lord Supper is a form of Jesus’ love to us. Help us touch and feel

His love, and live by the love. We pray this in the name of Lord Jesus.
Amen.