

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Who's Worthy to the Lord's Supper

Matthew 8:5-8

8:5 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him,
8:6 "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly."
8:7 And he said to him, "I will come and heal him."
8:8 But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.

One of our church member asked me a question. She said, "Pastor, am I worthy to the Lord's Supper? The Bible says, 'examine yourself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.' But, how can I examine myself?" She asked me this question because she valued the Lord's Supper. And, she honored Christ whom the Lord's Supper pointed and cherished the Word of God which commanded us to observe the Lord's Supper. I was glad to hear such a question.

Unfortunately, the Lord's Supper had not been cherished among us. Though we hear the announcement that the Lord's Supper would be celebrated next Sunday, we forget it immediately, and find it at the church on that Sunday morning. If so, how can we have time to examine ourselves as the Bible teaches us. The Lord's Supper may become just a ceremony without spirit.

When I was asked, "Who's worthy to the Lord's Supper," I replied, saying, "I'll preach about it on tone of he Sunday which we celebrate

the Lord's Supper." I'd like to follow through with my promise today.

1. Faith

Who's worthy to the Lord's Supper? The person should be baptized with faith in Jesus Christ. What we do at the Lord's Supper is confessing our faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, if we don't believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was resurrected for our salvation, we cannot celebrate the Lord's Supper. Without the faith and confession through baptism, the Lord's Supper cannot be celebrated.

We can compare baptism to circumcision in the Old Testament, and the Lord's Supper to the meal of passover. Uncircumcised people could not eat the passover meal. It's written in Exodus 12:48. "If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it." Like this, the Lord's Supper is eaten by the baptized believers.

There is a historical document called "Didache" which described the first century church. It also wrote, " But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptised in the Lord's Name." (IX-5)

However, very lately, people began to insist, saying, "It's a discrimination to limit the Lord's Supper only for the baptized believers. It should be eaten by everyone in the worship service." If so, the Lord's Supper becomes the act of faith no more. It becomes the means to remember the Lord no more. It becomes just a symbol of oneness of humanity, or a sign of friendship. We neglect the command

and his heart. Jesus broke bread and pured wine into the cup and gave them saying, “This is my body.” “This is my blood.” “Take this in remembrance of me.” on the night when he was about to be crucified. If you eat and drink from the Supper without faith in Christ, your eating and drinking never becomes your benefit.

Let us keep praying that everyone will have faith and confess it through baptism and come to the table of the Lord and observe baptism and the Lord’s Supper with sincere heat.

2. Repentance

The person who is Worthy to the Lord’s Supper is “Person who repent”. What’s needed for repentance is “to examine ourselves.”

When you become a certain ages, you need a health check up every year. Likewise cars need a check up every 30,000 miles. For a transcontinental rally or severe auto race, there is a check up pit. Equivalent to this, we check up our faith at the Lord’s Supper; therefore, the Lord’s Supper is very important to us. According to 1 Corinthians 11:28, “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” It suggests us to check ourselves before the Lord’s Supper.

This word “to examine” means “to check thoroughly”, and it is used in 2 Corinthians 13:5 and Galatians 6:4. (2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test! Galatians 6:4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.) We shall spend a certain

time for checking our relationship with God and other people.

Of course, the checking criteria is the word of God. When you check yourself with your own criteria, the result could be too permissive or too strict, and you can not check yourself correctly. In Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. And in Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! As they say, we shall have a moment to ask God to check our faith at the Lord's Supper.

For examining ourselves, we should know what kind of sins we are supposed to repent. There are several types of sins. "Transgression," this one is very obvious. God says we shouldn't do it but we don't follow his instruction. Other one is "Omission." We are not doing any sinful activities but it does not mean you are not sinful. God expects us to do things based on our gift but we don't do it. This probably happens frequently. Even though you are doing it to the best of your ability, but if the purpose or motivation for it is different from what God expects, it also could be sin, and we can call it "irrelevant". We need to check what we are doing because we need to know it comes from the love of God, and it's for God's glory, or for our self satisfaction/self realization. And, there is a sin located in our rationality, emotion, and will. For the rationality, we need to examine that we have the solid view of life and the world based on the Bible. Some of us just follow the secular world view. We also need to examine that our anger and jealousy are processed properly and not carry them over. Lastly, we need to examine that we have a strong will to seek the Kingdom of God and its righteousness first.

This self-check up sometimes really tough; however, when we are led by it and repent before God, we can experience joy and peace that no words can explain. The repentance is blessing. We can experience the forgiveness of sin and be led to the deep fellowship with God. By the repentance, we will be healed, changed and renewed.

Dallas Baptist Association provides “In His Presence Retreat” for pastors. Pastors have an opportunity of self-check at the retreat. Spiritual check-up is a little hard when you do by yourself, but you can do it through personal or small group based guidance. I really hope that all of our church members have such opportunity and experience the grace of repentance at least once a year in addition to the monthly Lord’s Supper.

3. Grace

Those who are worthy to the Lord’s Supper are those who trust in the grace of Christ more than anyone else.

Baptism and the Lord Supper are the action of our faith, but at the same time, they are means of God’s grace. Baptism and the Lord Supper are a path to deliver our faith to God as well as a path through which God gives us His grace in response to our faith. In other words, our faith and His grace meets in Baptism and the Lord’s supper.

Martin Luther tossed himself in the fierce religious reformation and experienced temptation from devil. But in that situation, he defeated temptation by writing “I’ve been baptized” on the desk. Baptism is through which we express our faith that we believe in God and follow Christ, but at the same time God guaranteed us that believers are children of God and possess eternal life by baptism.

The Lord's supper is the same. Jesus Christ gives a guarantee that "He is with them" to those who eat bread and take the cup by faith. Those who repent from their heart and come to the Supper will hear the voice of Christ saying, "My Child, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace." Therefore, getting baptized and having the Lord Supper are absolutely necessary for our faith.

However, the Lord's supper does not come to us when we are filled with gratitude. When we are in the middle of suffering or we are very much aware of our sinful nature, the Lord's supper might come. In that situation, we wonder if we are worth of eating the bread or drinking from the cup. Sometime, you may feel that you would rather stay away from the Worship Service with the Lord Supper. But remember, the Lord's supper is not a human invention, but the Lord had placed it for us. The Lord's supper is not something you take it when you feel like it, depending on your mood. Lord Himself orders us to do it in remembrance of Him, saying that it is His body for us. Therefore, it is important to obey His order. Faith is to be obedient to Him and His word. When we are down and sad, painful and confused, we have to overcome these feelings and follow His word "Take it and eat". Then our faith will revive.

Those who Lord invites to the Lord's supper are not the "perfect Christians" who think they are worth for the Lord's supper. Rather, those who worry whether they are worthy for the Lord's supper. When we ask ourselves whether we are worthy for the Lord's supper, we can examine ourselves and repent our sins. Then, that is where the grace is poured.

Today's reading describes a centurion who came to Jesus for

healing of his servant. Jesus said "I will come and heal him." "But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." Although according to other Gospel book, this centurion was praised by Jewish leaders as Luke 7:4-5 says, "And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue", the centurion said " I am not worthy to have you come under my roof", and he asked for his words instead of his presence. Jesus praised the centurion's faith and said "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

This centurion's word was included in the order of the Lord's supper and became a prayer immediately prior to receiving the Lord's supper. In the prayer, we pray as if we are the centurion and his servant, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed". Those who receive the Lord's supper, they express through the prayer that there is nothing but His grace that allows them to receive the Lord's supper. Since His grace means "God's love poured onto those who are not worthy of receiving it", those who think worthy of receiving the Lord's Supper are not worthy for it, and those who think are not worthy of receiving the Lord's Supper are worthy for it.

In Heidelberg Confession written in Germany in 1562, this is described as follows; "Question: Who should come to the Lord's table? Answer: Those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of

Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and to lead a better life.” This beautifully describes the teaching of the Bible. Let’s have the Lord’s supper, trusting the grace of Christ who made the unworthy to the worthy.

(Prayer)

Dear Father, we are not worthy for the Lord’s supper. Every time we come to the table, we are moved with the grace of Lord’s Jesus who forgives our sins and cleans us. Please change us so that every time we come to the table, we trust your grace and spread it to other people. We pray through the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.