

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
June 3, 2018

Things That We Shall Lay Aside
Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

1. Surrender

Dr. Swindoll wrote a book titled, “So, You Want to Be Like Christ? — Eight Essentials to Get You There.” In his book he listed eight lessons; “intimacy with God”, “simplicity”, “silence and solitude”, “surrender”. “prayer”, “humility”, “self-control”, and “sacrifice”. We have already learned about the first three lessons, that were “intimacy”, “simplicity”, and “silence and solitude”. Today, I would like to proceed to the fourth lesson, “Surrender”.

We were saved by receiving Jesus Christ as our Savior into our hearts. But at the same time, we received Him as the Lord of our life. We show that we received Christ as our Savior and Lord through baptism. In other words, we confessed the following two things when we were baptized. First, “I am a sinner without hope, but the Savior, Jesus Christ has saved me from sin and destruction.” Secondly, “I will accept Christ as the Lord of my life, and I will live as his servant.”

However, when we are not alert, we may misunderstand ourselves and say, “I am a great person. Since I have repented at my baptism, I

have nothing to repent anymore.” Usually we become able to recognize our sins more as we grow in faith more. But, if we walk by faith which is just superficial, we forget that we are sinners, and lose the joy of repentance and forgiveness of sin.

There is a church called “The Village Church” near Dallas. The church’s web page says, “We aren’t just a building or an event. We are a people, the body of Christ, sinners saved by grace.” It is said that they are “sinners saved by grace.” Of course, this does not mean “being good as a sinner,” but it also includes meaning that growing from “Sinners to Saints” by the grace of Christ. Christians are those who live in the joy of forgiveness by Christ’s grace, constantly repenting without forgetting that we are “forgiven sinners.” Let us also remain in the grace of Christ by repentance and faith.

We received Christ as the Lord of our life when we were baptized. However, we may forget it in several years and don’t actually live as His servant even when we call Him “Lord.” Even in the church where Christ is the Head, sometimes we become a head instead of the Lord by giving high priority to our own desires, opinions, and circumstances, but not to focus on Christ (Third John 1 : 9-10). It is the “surrender” that we realize our sins and repent them, trust the Savior and dedicate ourselves as His servants, and return to the confession that we said, “Jesus is my Savior and my Lord” at our baptism.

2. Clinging Sin

Today’s verse Hebrew 12:1 teaches us “Surrender” In the time of new testament, there were so many huge coliseums, which reminds us of

today's stadium in Roman Empire territory, and there were so many sports activities happening there. The participants had never wore the long dresses or heavy jackets because they disturbed the participants' physical movements. "Race of Faith" is the life where you worship Christ as your "Savior" and follow him as "Lord." We shall remember that we need lay aside the unnecessary things.

What should we lay aside during the race of faith? Hebrew 12:1 says, "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely." Simply saying it is "Sin." Any kind of sins will disturb the race of faith. In the original language the word, "Sin" has a definite article, "the." The article shows a particular "sin", that is "the sin" which the person has not overcome for a long time.

For a certain people, the sins mean complain about their situation. Other sins could be being fury and accusing other people or feeling anxious and being shy. Having despair or giving up could be sins as well. We can say that being capricious and irresponsible is sin or materialistic desire and monetary desire is sin. We should identify what kind of sin it is in order to lay aside the sin which clings so closely. We wish that the Holy Spirit searches our heart and life and help us to admit and repent our sins.

And, "the sin" could mean "the sin of sins" when we use the definite article for "sin." For example, the meaning of "Bible" is "book"; however, if we put "the", the meaning changes and it becomes "book of books," "the best book," that is "The Bible."

What is the "sin of sins?" It is the your mind's attitude such as being "Self-Centered," "Selfish." In the center of the word "SIN," there is "I." The life which not seeks the "Savior" or not follows Him

as “Lord,” and lives according the person’s will. This kind of life is the sin in sins, “The Sin.”

You must be cautious. This “Self-Centered” or “Selfish” does not always appear in the form of “Self-Assertion” It could be apparent in the attitude of modest or humble. “like me...” (Japanese people often say this in order to show he/she is inferior to other people and look like being humble) Basically, you are staying in your own shell and do not come before Christ. This is self-centered. Being arrogant is the sin; however, self-abasement or self-pity could be the sin.

Also, there is good-will “Self-Centered.” When we feel the responsibility for a certain thing, you might feel “I need to do for this project” or “I am the only who can do this.” The responsibility is great and making effort for it is wonderful. However, you must be careful because that could be the reliance on myself, not God. Consequently, you become “Selfish.”

When you stumble or loose power during the race of faith, you shall check yourself who might be proud of capital “I.” You shall surrender yourself to Christ and become lower case “i” and then serve the Lord. That is how you lay aside “the clinging sin.”

3. Race Set Before Us

In this way, we should abandon things to throw away and we should run on the race of faith. Hebrews 12:1 encourages us saying, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

What I’d like you to notice here is “the race that is set before us”. We do not decide which course we will run but the course that God has. No matter how we can be envious of the other people's life, we

can not live the life of other people. The most important thing in the race of faith is that you run the God's appointed course faithfully to the very end.

At the Boston Marathon in 1980, Rosie Ruiz won the first prize in the girls' division. But, after running a full marathon, the other marathon runner noticed that she was hardly tired and found that she was running only the last 0.5 miles. No matter how fast you get to the finishing line, you will be disqualified unless you run through the approved course. The Bible teaches that "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." (2 Timothy 2: 5)..

The important thing in "the race of faith" is to run your own given course. In "the race of faith", there is no one else who runs the same course as yourself. Each of us run on our own given course. If each of us finish running to the end, we win the first prize. And we can win the prize of crown that will not decay. No matter how long it takes, crowns are prepared for us who finished running through the path to run. While some people's faith grows very fast in a few years, others' faith grows slowly over the years. But the faith that grows slowly but surely is better than the faith grows fast, if the growth stops and your faith remains undeveloped.

While some people run a race in Christian life of fifty years, sixty years after becoming Christians, others are called to heaven in just a few years after becoming a Christian. The long faithful life is a blessing and grace of God, but even a few years, days, hours of faithful life are also precious to God's eyes,. The Lord Jesus said to one of the robbers crucified with himself that "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23: 43). This robber

believed in the Lord Jesus just before his death. His life of faith was only a few hours. But, even in the few hours, he listened directly to the seven words on the cross of the Lord Jesus and witnesses the moment of death of Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20) This is the deepest experience in the life of faith and this robbery literally took the cross with Christ. In this way, even if the time is short, you can live in deep fellowship with God.

An elderly person said, “Since I came to this old age, I am too late to become a Christian.” Never too late! It is neither too early nor too late to become a Christian. The journey of faith on the earth, whether it is long or short, is not a problem if compared to spending eternity in heaven. The important thing is to run as hard as possible on the course given to you.

After this, we will be on the Lord’s Supper, but I think that Lord’s Supper is the second baptism in a various way. First, in this Lord’s Supper to remember the salvation of Christ, we renew our faith to confess that Christ is my Savior as if we had baptism. Secondly, in this Lord’s Supper where the body of Christ was dedicated, we confess that Christ is my Lord and we dedicate ourselves to the Lord. Let’s make this Supper ceremony and worship service as the time of re-entering to “race of faith” when we surrender to the Lord.

(Prayer)

Father God, you have given us this “race of faith,” that is, we trust Christ as our Savior and we live a life to obey. Please help us to surrender yourself and abandon clinging sins and run through to the

end the course you set for us. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ.