

Was the Lord's Supper a success

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[0 : 00] I want to ask you a question this evening, especially directed at those of you who were at the Lord's Supper yesterday. Perhaps some of you are visiting from other churches tonight.

Perhaps you can cast your minds back to the last communion you actually partook in. The question is this. Was the Lord's Supper a success?

Did it succeed? Perhaps that seems a strange question to you. If you had asked one another, as perhaps you have done, did you enjoy the communion service?

That's a familiar question. But I'm not asking you if you enjoyed it. I'm asking you if it succeeded. To answer that question, you'd need to know how to measure success.

What should the Lord's Supper do for us? What difference ought it to make in our life? Or to put it another way, what did God intend the Lord's Supper to do when he ordained it as an ordinance in the church forever?

[1 : 23] Have you ever asked yourself that question? Have you ever taken stock and seen whether the Lord's Supper succeeds in doing what God set it to do?

Let me give you one simple definition of what the Lord's Supper ought to do. It ought to make you more like Jesus.

The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 3 verse 18, for instance, that considering Jesus in the word, in the preaching of the gospel, by faith, transforms us into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

We know that Paul preaches to the Philippians, telling them what Jesus has done, the mind that Jesus had in laying aside the glory, and the application is, let this mind be in you.

Gazing at Jesus should make us like Jesus. Hearing about Jesus Christ should make us more like Jesus Christ. And quite simply, the Lord's Supper reinforces that goal of the word.

[2 : 55] The Lord's Supper is intended to make you and me more like Jesus Christ. It does it not by pointing us to a distant Christ, but by reminding us that Christ is with us and in us by his Spirit.

By bringing to all our senses, not just our ears with the preaching, but our eyes, our sense of smell, of touch, and of taste, the reality of Jesus Christ and his Passover death for us.

That was what we were doing yesterday.

If we were doing when we were trying to do, let that give us aodie verse for us to prepare for Christ. We're asking ourselves about our good HydeSean, who is ■■■■ Christ, which is not responsible for us to give us back to us. Even when we irdengewannviere tips what both we were doing? This happens, probably, our■■■ is unfaithful for us to be, but our honor so in our seats is to look at what we're going to do.

then the biblical way and the best way of showing our thankfulness is to become more like Jesus. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present yourselves as living sacrifices, acceptable to God.

[4 : 47] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. There you have exactly the same thing. We have seen and enjoyed the mercies of God.

Therefore, you be transformed, be changed, be metamorphosed. Into what? Into Christ-like men and women.

This is where the Lord's Supper plugs in to the whole Christian life. It is one of the power packs that God has given us, along with the preaching of the word, to send his spiritual power into every part of our living, transforming us, renewing us, making us like Jesus Christ.

Every part of your Christian living should be changed, changed to some extent by every means of grace that you enjoy.

It may be that in your life, unknown to me, there is some particular area where you are far from being like Jesus Christ.

[6 : 01] There may be some besetting sin in your life. There may be some wrong relationship. There may be some wrong activity that you've been engaged in.

I do not know what that may be. But I say to you, whatever that besetting sin, whatever that particular weakness in your life, the Lord's Supper was not a break, not a holiday excursion, well, forget about your troubles and let's have a nice spiritual weekend.

The Lord's Supper was God giving you power in your life to get to grips again with that sin. Maybe that sin has wrestled you to the ground many a time.

Maybe you've tried to tackle it and failed. The Lord's Supper says to you, get up and try again, remembering that Jesus Christ is in you to strengthen you.

As I say, the Lord's Supper should strengthen and help us for all duties. What I want to do tonight, though, is not to preach on all the duties of the Christian life, but to highlight one duty.

[7 : 17] And in the light of the Lord's Supper, to urge you to express your thankfulness to Jesus Christ by becoming more like him in this particular duty.

And the duty is the duty of evangelism. Jesus Christ commands his people to be witnesses for him, to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

Jesus Christ calls us to be evangelists. When I say evangelists, let me make it very clear at the beginning, I don't mean that Jesus calls you all to go and put a wooden box down in the marketplace or wherever the market is in Inverness and stand on it and preach to the multitudes.

No, only some of God's people are called to the duties of a preacher evangelist. But all God's people are called to have a lively concern for the salvation of unbelievers.

All God's people are called to pray for the salvation of unbelievers, to be a prayer evangelist. All God's people are called to show forth the reality of the gospel by their lives, to be a living evangelist.

[8 : 47] And all God's people are commanded to be ready to give a reason, to give an explanation to an unbeliever of the hope that we have.

When the early church was scattered by persecution in the book of Acts, the apostles were left behind for some unexplained reason. The ordinary church members went everywhere, and as the phrase is sometimes rather inappropriately rendered, but nonetheless it makes the point, they went everywhere gossiping the gospel.

They went everywhere, not preaching, but talking, proclaiming, telling people, telling out what Jesus Christ has done. Evangelism is our Christian duty.

Turn with me then to Luke chapter 7, and to the passage we read from verse 36, and let's look at Jesus, our evangelist.

Here you see, we're going to look at a duty, not as something that Christ up there in heaven shouts down to us. You go and see to that.

[10 : 01] No, Jesus is not far away telling us that you've got to evangelise. Jesus is very near. Look, he himself is an evangelist.

Here we see him walking this earth, meeting people, human beings, very like the sort of people we meet day by day. Jesus was an evangelist.

He has set us an example. He's there for us to follow. And the supper assures us that he's actually in us to help us to follow the path that he has set before us.

By showing us how broad that duty is. For we see in these verses, in this story of Simon the Pharisee and the woman who was a sinner, that Jesus Christ reached out to everyone.

Here we see him in a Pharisee's house. The Pharisees were a very strict, devout religious sect of the Jews.

[11 : 06] The Pharisees could be from all walks of life, but it's quite clear that Simon was a well-to-do Pharisee. Perhaps by the look of things, he was, let's say, a wealthy middle-class Pharisee.

He evidently had a house. He evidently could give a banquet. He evidently had so big a house with an open courtyard that people wandered in off the streets, as was the custom in that part of the world.

Jesus is here seen visiting the Pharisee. Here in this story, we also see Jesus talking to a woman who was a sinner.

Luke doesn't tell us that she was a prostitute, although that's commonly understood from the way he refers to her. Certainly she was, in some way or another, a degraded woman.

She was a woman despised, a woman who was not good company. She was not a respectable woman.

[12:12] But Jesus speaks to her. Jesus deals with her. The story of her anointing him and so on implies very strongly that previously she had heard him.

Previously she had been blessed by his ministry. But anyway, here she is. She anoints his feet and wipes them with her hair. And Jesus speaks to her.

Just take that very simple fact. Jesus spoke to the wealthy, lordly Pharisee. Jesus spoke to the degraded, despised woman.

Jesus Christ evangelised everybody. He didn't despise the poor and the degraded. No, he had time and will to speak to her.

Nor did he despise the wealthy and the self-righteous. He shows us by his example that all men are equal in God's sight in terms of their need and in terms of our duty to offer salvation to them on equal terms.

[13:36] It's a great danger, isn't there? That we'll think of evangelising those who are like us, those whom we like. Doesn't James warn about that in his epistle where James says, look, if a rich man comes into your church, you say, good to see you.

Especially if you're a deacon, you think, my, he's got a good fat bank account that'll boost the sustentation fund. Would you like to come and have dinner with us? What about coming to church tonight?

But if a ragged, rather smelly, a tramp comes off the streets, well, you don't show him the door.

I did hear of somebody who went to a church once and they were asked by the man on the door, are you sure you don't want the Baptist church down the road? I'm sure you wouldn't do that in the free north. But, you know, we don't naturally respond in the same way to such a person.

It's not pleasant. We have in London one or two of the down and outs who come into our services sometimes. One who sleeps on a bench right beside the church is a very polite and well-kept tramp.

[14:51] He, uh, evidently washes himself and looks after himself as well as he can. Another one who comes regularly, regularly, sometimes really smells.

And it's very, very difficult to show patience to such a man. Oh, it doesn't mean you've got to simply tolerate his smell. We, uh, give him money for a bath and try and arrange for him to have a clean-up.

But the point is here, Jesus Christ, what would he do? He would speak to the one as readily as he would speak to the Lord Provost of Inverness or whoever else should come in their grandeur.

Jesus ministered to the down and outs and to the up and outs. He went out of his way to reach Simon, the Pharisee, even though it was already clear that Simon gave him a rather poor welcome, very little hospitality.

Jesus went. He didn't walk out. He dealt with this woman, though she was despised in the city. Jesus reached out to everyone.

[16:02] My friends, let me ask you, do you who love Christ, who feasted at his table, who want to be like him, are you like him? Do you see everyone around you as someone who needs the message of the gospel if they are not already a Christian?

Sometimes we tend to think of evangelism as something we do as a church. We go out putting leaflets through doors or we put a notice up and posters everywhere and hold a meeting.

That can be part of evangelism. But evangelism really is simply you and me being concerned for our next door neighbours, for the people we work with, for our family and relatives, for the people we know and taking every opportunity to show them kindness in the name of Jesus and every opportunity to speak to them about Jesus Christ.

Christ. I know applications are supposed to come at the very end of sermons. Let me give you an application now. Just a suggestion.

Why not make a list tonight, take a scrap of paper, a piece of paper and write on it the names of six people that you meet with or see every day or every couple of days.

[17:38] That neighbour along the street who lives on her own. That person at work who seems rather a lonely person. Think of six people that maybe you could invite for a meal at your home.

People that you could show some act of kindness to. Somebody that you could especially begin to pray for that God would give you the opportunity to speak to them or to invite them to church.

Maybe you're already praying and thinking of so many people. Then don't you worry about such a little list. But maybe you've never deliberately thought of and prayed for any particular person. Oh yes, you've prayed sometimes, Lord, make me more evangelistically minded. Lord, may our church reach out to people. Good. But here's one simple thing that you can do. Write down half a dozen names of people that you can begin to pray for and begin to evangelise. Start to pray for them.

[18 : 48] Evangelism, Jesus shows us, is our Christian duty. Jesus also shows us by this story that evangelism is a difficult duty.

That's what's so wonderful about the Bible. it's not like too many Christian books which suggest that everything's easy. Here's the formula to follow.

Say these things and you'll be a Christian and life will be wonderful ever after. Do these things and every problem in your evangelism or in this duty or the other will vanish away.

Life's not like that, is it? We get concerned to do something. We try to do it in the Lord's service, we pray about it and maybe subconsciously we think because I've prayed about it this is going to be great and then we find that it's not easy.

We find that it's not plain sailing and so often we crumple like a prick balloon. The problem, we had a naive expectation and the Bible so clearly shows us that no duty done for Christ comes easy in this world and that evangelism, why, even Jesus found it a difficult duty.

[20 : 11] Do you realise that not everybody Jesus spoke to and visited as an evangelist became a believer? Jesus, in that sense, failed.

Jesus preached and spoke to the house of Simon the Pharisee and there's no evidence that Simon became a believer.

Jesus Christ did not please everyone by his evangelism. He did not succeed with everybody that he spoke to, nor will you.

And also, see this, that in speaking to this woman, Jesus also earned the extra displeasure of Simon.

Not only is Simon clearly not a believer, he's saying, if this man really were a prophet, he would have known that this was an immoral woman and he wouldn't have spoken to her. That shows what Simon's attitude to Jesus was.

[21 : 12] It also shows that in speaking, in reaching to that woman, Jesus had to face the displeasure, the misunderstanding and the misrepresentation of Simon.

That's a fact. Jesus was rejected when he spoke to Simon, when he preached to many other people. He was rejected when he preached in Nazareth.

It's a fact. You may make your list, you may pray for someone, you may so thoughtfully help them and invite them to your home, only to find that they are more stubborn than ever in rejecting any suggestion of Christianity.

That the more you get close to them, the more they seem to pity you for your Christian commitment. That's a fact. It will very likely happen to you. But we see in the case of Jesus that it was a fact that he had digested.

Jesus had evidently reckoned on the fact that men like Simon often rejected his witness. Jesus isn't surprised.

[22 : 30] He isn't dumbfounded or staggered by Simon's attitude. He isn't embarrassed into saying, look, Simon hasn't given me even basic hospitality. He's muttering about this woman, but I'll ignore it.

I'll pretend that I don't notice and soon I'll get out of this house. If we're shocked and surprised by the difficulty of evangelism, we may react in that sort of way.

Jesus Christ didn't. Nor did he fly off the handle. He didn't turn round in rage and indignation. He speaks reasonably, firmly, but graciously to Simon.

Jesus Christ knew that his work was a difficult one. He endured the contradiction of sinners. If we're going to do our duty, we must recognise that it is a duty that involves rejection.

Thirdly, we must not only see the duty, what it is, to reach to everyone. We must not only accept that there is going to be difficulty. we must go on despite that difficulty.

[23 : 44] We must not be stopped from doing it. You may say that's easier said than done. Let me ask this question.

How could Jesus cope with opposition from men like Simon? How could he endure that contradiction of sinners against himself?

It can't have been easy. These Pharisees were the devout ones of the land. They were the ones that all the people respected. And they were the ones who were constantly sniping at Jesus Christ. It must have been depressing in its impact upon him. It must have nagged away at Jesus. How was it that he could cope with that sort of rejection and opposition?

I think there's one very simple answer to that question. Jesus could cope with the attitude of men like Simon because he did not crave their approval.

[24 : 55] approval. Jesus could cope with their opposition because he did not crave their approval. Let's put it like this.

You and I all too often are desperate for people to like us, to say nice things about us, to approve us. and if people criticise us, attack us, reject us or even pity us, we feel almost physically ill. We get so upset. Do you realise what a temptation that is to any preacher of the gospel? There's a terrible temptation to the preacher to have an ear open afterwards and to just catch people walking away from the church saying to one another, did you enjoy the sermon?

Was it good? And he listens, yes, it was good, wasn't he good? And the preacher says, oh that's good, I've pleased them. But the preacher is not here to please the people.

The preacher must not consciously or subconsciously allow what he says to be controlled by that desire. He may be called by God to send the people away angry and indignant.

[26 : 18] he may be called by God to send the people away deeply convicted. He is called to do what God wants and to give God's message to the people.

But all too often preachers, because we are human beings, with that weakness that so many of us have of the desire for approval, that becomes the dominant thing.

And then, if we know that there's somebody who is a Guinness, somebody who's critical, we go home and we chew our hearts out how miserable we become.

And that can happen to anybody who seeks to witness for Jesus Christ. There is a great danger that you will be more afraid of those people despising you.

Why are you so reluctant to speak to people at work about your faith? Why are you so embarrassed to think of asking anybody to church? Is it not, in many cases, because somewhere deep down you're afraid that they might despise you?

[27 : 26] Hmm, didn't realise he was a wee free. And you'll think, well, my stock in the office will drop a bit. Or, you know, I might take them to church and it might be a rather poor service and then they'll think I'm a bit of a fool for going to a place like that.

Or, I might try and explain the gospel to them and they might ask me a question and I might be unable to answer it. And, I'll be shown up, I'll be embarrassed.

What you're really saying is, I am more concerned that that person respects me, thinks of me as a sensible, intelligent, person, I'm more concerned for that than that that person should be confronted with the grace of God in the gospel.

Jesus Christ was not ruled by a desire for approval. He did not crave the approval of the Pharisees. He was grieved by their refusal.

He wept over Jerusalem because it rejected his gospel. but that wasn't a weeping that sort of came out of a sense of psychological inadequacy and the need for self-affirmation.

[28 : 50] It was an objective grief for them. we must face to the reason why we so often fail as witnesses.

Sometimes of course the disapproval can come not from the unbeliever that we're witnessing to but those other believers, those rather pharisaical believers who were watching us.

Dr. Thomas Chalmers in one of his lectures to his students warned them in their preaching of the gospel to sinners to be more concerned for the salvation of the sinner than they were for the approval of their fellow ministers.

He said because of all the arguments and debates over the doctrine of the atonement and the extent of the atonement. There are too many ministers, he said, who when they preach the gospel are afraid of being thought a bit Arminian, being afraid of being thought a bit unsound.

And as they preach, they're more concerned with what the brethren are going to say about them afterwards than they are with whether the sinner will grasp, will understand what Jesus Christ has done for sinners and what Jesus Christ calls them to do.

[30 : 24] Now Chalmers is not advocating laxity of doctrine, he's not advocating erroneous preaching, but he is pointing to a very great reality.

And that is the danger that the preacher will be more concerned for the approval of other ministers, more concerned to avoid questions in whatever places, than he is concerned to faithfully urge Jesus Christ upon the sinner.

And that goes for the individual too. We may find that in speaking to the down and out, in accepting them into our homes, we face disapproval from other people.

It's hardly surprising because such faithfulness in witnessing will make other Christians feel guilty. And one way of dealing with a guilty conscience is to try and shift the blame and to hide it by saying, hmm, they shouldn't be doing that, look what they're doing wrong.

Face up to it. Don't be stopped from doing your duty by the painful realities of this problem.

Recognise that danger.

[31 : 39] Of course, not everybody is affected by that desire for approval. Some seem positively to relish disapproval. Maybe that's a problem that needs to be dealt with also.

But Jesus, Jesus was not frightened of the Pharisees. Jesus was not depressed because they didn't approve of him. how can we become like Jesus?

How can we keep going at this duty? Well, we have to face up to ourselves. Have you asked yourself why you're so shy at witnessing?

Is it because you're desperate for approval and frightened to be thought a fool for Christ's sake?

Remember what Paul says, we're counted the off-scourings of all things.

we're counted rubbish, refuse, pig swill. That's what they say about us. But Paul glories in that infirmity. He glories in that ridicule.

[32 : 43] Paul is concerned to be faithful for Jesus Christ. My friends, do you need to take the plunge? Have you been like that reluctant swimmer dipping their foot or their toe into the water and feeling how icy it is?

Haven't you had the experience of plunging in? And yes, though it is icy for the first few moments, how quickly you find that you don't feel cold anymore.

And in fact, it is exceedingly pleasant and warm after all. Sometimes it feels an awful lot colder just dipping your toe in than it does when you're actually in.

Maybe we're much too frightened of evangelism. Maybe we've stood there dipping our toe in and bracing ourselves to the pain that we know is going to come.

When if we had the faith and the courage, if we were given the stimulus to one another, we would plunge in and find that it was not so bad after all.

[33 : 53] we might even find that that conflict, that opposition, that ridicule, that suspicion, that misrepresentation becomes an encouragement to us.

George Whitefield wrote this letter to his brother on the 16th of November 1739 from New York. Last night God brought me hither in health and safety.

Here is likely to be some opposition and consequently a likelihood that some good will be done. There is trouble in the place.

People are against me. People are already ridiculing me. There is going to be opposition. That means I am sure that some good will be done. The devil's nest is being stirred.

Satan is awake. Therefore it suggests that Christ is at work. You see instead of being frightened and depressed. Oh dear, I am sorry, I did not mean to make them dislike me.

[34 : 56] I wish there was not on the opposition. He sees that it is an inevitable consequence. Where Jesus Christ is at work, Satan is raging.

Recognize it, accept the fact. And when you do find opposition, when you do find difficulty, don't give up. What would you think of a boxer who entered the ring and stood there and the belt started and the first punch was thrown and he turned to the referee and said, he hit me, he hit me.

The referee would say, where do you think you are? And my friends, if you find it difficult to witness and you want to give up for that reason, where do you think you are?

Where do you think you are? Has not Jesus Christ put you in this world in order to be witnesses for him? Is it not a world in which there's a battle going on?

Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom. The world, the flesh and the devil are against us. Of course we'll get hit. But we must go on fighting.

[36 : 13] We need to grow a thicker skin. Do you know what a sensitive man Paul was? He wept over the evils in the church of Corinth.

Do you weep? Do you shed literal tears? Paul was a very emotional man, a very sensitive man. He groaned, he had continual sorrow and heaviness of heart.

But did Paul's sensitivity stop him from being faithful? No. Why? Because his eyes were fixed on Jesus Christ. He looked not at the things that were seen.

He didn't count his reputation among men worth bothering about. He was concerned that God had accepted him, that God had approved him, that he was Paul the off-scouring of all things.

Yes, but Paul the child of God, the heir of glory. And do you see where the Lord's supper comes in?

[37 : 19] When you go out there, maybe tonight, to an unbelieving family. When you go out there tomorrow to unbelievers at work, and you begin, I don't mean that you should plunge in tomorrow and preach in the office or tell everybody they've got to come to church next Sunday.

evangelise with wisdom, with tact, with care, with sensitivity. But do pray, do work. And when they ridicule, when some of them mock, you can say to yourself, I feasted at my father's table.

I have a seat at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Jesus Christ has set his love upon me. Why should I fear what men can do unto me?

Fear him, you saints, and you will then have nothing else to fear. Make you his service your delight. Your want shall be his care. May God give you grace to be witnesses for him, and may you find not just that some object and mock and reject.

[38 : 36] But may you also find that where that seed is sown, there will be that which finds ground prepared by the Spirit of God and brings forth amazing fruit.

Amen. Let's pray together. O Lord, we ask your forgiveness tonight if we have been so ready to enjoy the privileges of the gospel and so slow to obey the commands of the gospel.

Forgive us if we have selfishly enjoyed the privileges of your house and never thought or tried to share them with others. May the wonder of communion with Jesus Christ fill us with confidence and with a desire to tell others of him.

May all of us be faithful in prayer, even those who are housebound, and if there be anyone here who never meets an unbeliever, may even they be urgent in prayer that this glorious gospel that we rejoice in may reach into the lives of all the thousands of people in this town, that you will gather in your elect, that you will build the church, that you will glorify Jesus Christ, your Son.

Amen. Well, as we witness, we do so with confidence, for as we now sing in Psalm 72 from the second half of verse 16, the last four stanzas, we have the assurance that though the gospel is often like sowing a handful of seed on the top of rocky mountains, it seems a futile and hopeless exercise, the city shall be flourishing, her citizens abound in number shall, like to the grass that grows upon the ground.

[40 : 50] Sing from that verse to the end of the psalm, the tune is Winchester. The city shall be flourishing water ■ Mark ■ ■ ■ the rules upon our ground.

This nature has fallen you, the sky for sun to.

This child has been blessed on this earth's sun and moon.

Now blessed is the Lord our Lord, the Lord of His Father, for He on the wondrous works in glory that excels.

And blessed is His glory of sin, to all eternity.

[42 : 37] The Lord of His glory is filled. Amen. So let it be.

Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen.