

July 22, 2018 Preaching at Crosswalk Church in Orlando, Florida.

Bible scripture: Jeremiah 1:1-12

Preaching Title: I will be with you

## 1. Introduction

**(Slide 1)** Thank you for this opportunity to join your worship today. I appreciate the kindness and hospitality of Pastor John and Brenda, and Allen and Esther, Craig and Aelyn, Maria and Calrose, and other men who had a fellowship for Saturday breakfast prayer meeting for this week.



We are the representatives of Rengo for researching Missionary Assessment Center at this time. We have a lot of learning for helping missionaries who will be sent to Japan from Converge.

I would like to share our burden, our vision for evangelism in Japan.

## 2. Outlook of Japanese Evangelism

**(Slide2)** When you hear the word “Japan,” what kind of image do you have? First, I hope that you know where Japan is; it is close to Korea and China. Perhaps you have some images of our country: Mt Fuji, Cherry Blossoms, Sushi, and so on.

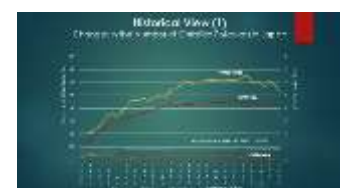


**(Slide 3)** However, today, I would like to share the specific image of the spiritual situation of our country. So, I will explain the Japanese Christian Church Outlook from a historical view, and then a structural view.



### 1) Historical view

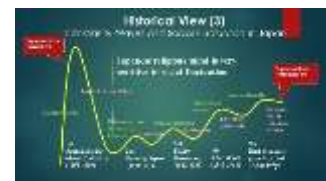
**(Slide4)** This shows the changes in the number of Christian Followers in Japan, from after WW2 to 2014. We have four lines; the upper yellow line is the number of protestant followers. Second red line is catholic followers and bottom orange line is orthodox followers. The blue line is population ratio; we have a population of almost 120 million in Japan now and the Christian population is only 780,000 (Seven hundred eighty thousand) total, less than 1% of the total population (.65%).



**(Slide5)** Next, I would like to show the changes in the number of protestant churches and believers from before WW2. In 1865 Japanese had first contact to Protestant Christianity in their history. Catholic had contacts in the 16th century a while ago. Anyway, After the first contact, the Japanese Christian population gradually increased. We have three lines; the upper red line is the church number, second blue line is number of followers and bottom yellow line is population ratio. Here, the period WW2, Japanese churches are merged by Japanese government, so the number of churches greatly decreased. Then, please look at these lines carefully. After 1865, we have many crusade-type evangelism events, and it was very effective until 1970's (nineteen seventy's). The effectiveness gradually decreased; then the church growth movement became popular as a means of evangelism. I think it was effective for some churches. But many pastors and members became fatigued using the methods of management and marketing for church growth, so after 1990's Japanese pastors and members moved to the spiritual movement, which was to nurture spiritual deepness, rather than continuing the church growth movement. Then, I want you focus at this point (yellow two vertical arrows). After the church growth movement, the number of churches increased, but not the number of church members. This means there were a lot more churches, but most had very few in attendance. In addition, the emphasis on spiritual growth and counseling served to comfort the pastor and the congregation, but it did not necessarily strengthen the power of the church or lead to evangelism in their communities.



**(Slide6)** So, next slide explains what happened when Japanese evangelism increased or decreased. Japanese current population rate of Christianity is less 1% of total population. However, in late 16th century, when Catholic churches came to Japan to evangelize, it sharply increased to more than 3% of the population.



Portuguese traders came with the Catholic Missionaries; they brought new weapons which the regional rulers acquired. This radical social change frightened the Japanese leader, Hideyoshi, who controlled all of Japan. So, he issued anti-Christian edict in 1587. He thought the Daimoyo, the regional rulers who converted to Christianity, might no longer be loyal to him. As a result, total suppression of Christianity began.

Then, roughly, I would like to point out the five waves of increasing of Christianity. The reasons are: new weapons, being released from the unequal treaties we experienced when we opened our country after 200 years of national seclusion; then, Democratization in 1912; MacArthur arrives after WW2; and Internationalism after 1970 resulting in high economic

growth periods. Then the decreasing reasons are Anti-Christian Edict; the emergence of State Shinto; Militarism before WW2; University upheavals after WW2 which split and damaged Japanese churches. Finally, the Subway Sarin Incident which especially caused parents to be very wary of the religion; it became a new barrier for children to attend church schools. We can say that the Japanese religious mind is very sensitive to social fluctuation. I think right now is not bad timing for evangelism. We have some worries, but the atmosphere of internationalization presents a good opportunity to give the Japanese access to the church.

**(Slide 7)** This statistic shows the comparison of the number of church members vs. the number who actually attend worship services from 2004 to 2014.

Apparently, I think the Japanese church is exaggerating the numbers of those involved. So, the statistics of worship number is closer to the actual situation of the Japanese church. So, the mode is 20 members and 60-70% of churches have less than 30 in attendance. It shows Japanese attendance is shrinking compared to ten years ago.



## 2) From structural view

**(Slide 8)** Next, we would like to look at the Current situation of Japanese Christianity from structural views. You can see each denomination, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant number of churches, Pastors and Believers. Please look and compare Catholic and Protestant. The number of believers is almost the same, but there are overwhelmingly more Protestant churches, pastors and believers



**(Slide 9)** This shows population distribution by size of residential area by religion.

Christianity is prevalent among people in large cities, but less so in local cities, towns and villages. This means that we are not successful in winning those the soul in smaller population areas.



**(Slide 10)** Next is population distribution by educational level by religion. Christianity is widely accepted by those with a university level and above education, but not with those from lower educational levels.



(Slide 11) And population distribution by income level by religion. Christianity is prevalent in the middle-class income level, but not in lower income levels.

So, I can summarize, Intellectuals, city dwellers, middle-class income-level Japanese are more open to Christianity in Japan. In other words, Christianity is limited to very specific groups in Japan.



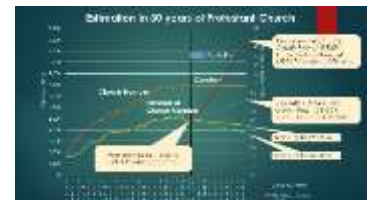
(Slide 12) In addition, I would like to add a couple of things regarding the current situation of Japanese Christianity.

- 1) 60% of 8000 churches (almost 4,800 churches) have not baptized any persons each year. More than half of the churches are dysfunctional about spiritual harvest.
- 2) The average Number of Baptisms is 0.79 person per church every year.



3) Some churches are growing by conversion, but many are not. Most increase in numbers is from believers moving from one church to another. That means the growth potential is weak for the future of the church.

(Slide 13) So, this shows the forecast of Japanese Christianity over the next 30 years. the upper orange line is the church number, and yellow line is Number of church members. Provably, the church number will not change over the next 30 years. But the Number of church member will be reduced naturally for Mortality rate which is higher than baptism rate.



It is said that mortality rate of Japanese is 1.0% and 1/3 (one third) of the population of Japan will be elderly in 2030.

In addition, the church is a community where elderly people gather more than the general society. So, I set the mortality Rate in the general church is from 1.5 to 2.0%. Therefore, the challenge for Japanese Christianity is, if we aim for over status quo, we have to set the growth rate at 4.5 to 5.0%. That means, specifically, we must baptize at least 1 person in less 30-member churches and 5 persons in 100-member churches every year.

### 3. How we progress our evangelism—think through three elements

**(Slide 14)** The outlook of Japanese Christianity suggests that Japanese evangelism is not an

easy ministry. Many missionaries and Japanese pastors are unable to raise spiritual results. Japan is said to be the graveyard of

missionaries. So, first we need Grace of God and more prayer of our brothers and sisters. Then, we must tackle three elements of the issues for evangelism in Japan to seize the opportunities which are

given to us by God to guide spiritual seekers to faith. So, we think through and tackle three elements: the Church as sender (subject), Japanese society as receiver (object) of the gospel, and transmission (means of communication) between them.



**(Slide 15)** For example, as the sender, we must think practical continuing education to

supplement the academic training of the pastors, discipleship of spiritually immature and profit-oriented believers, and effective strategies to retool 60% of churches which are powerless, and not connected to their communities. There is also institutional (denominational) fatigue for effective evangelism



**(Slide 16)** Next is the problem of receivers; as a people, we are characterized by group

thinking, syncretism, and are profit-oriented (materialistic). Then, the characteristics of community: closed and rigid and company-oriented, especially for businessmen. For our society as a whole, Nationalism is a cultural barrier to the Religious Seeker; we have a performance-based system; and we need to expand the Christian market (Christianity is not widely accepted culturally).



**(Slide 17)** Finally, we must develop transmission (communication) methods for promoting evangelism.

- ▶ Connect and build relationships to other people groups: Educational and Income levels, and Geographical areas.
- ▶ Speak into people's needs by culturally relevant means
- ▶ Deep commitment to infiltrate the closed community mindset

**(Slide 18)** The task before us can be very overwhelming. Although Japan is said to be the leading country of the world in technology, it is one of the most spiritually unreached countries in the developed world.

However, we do not attempt to reach our country by our own power, but we tackle these issues with God's power. When I was a student at Bethel seminary, a friend said to me. "You are from Japan and I heard it is a difficult country to evangelize. However, I always pray with the words of Act 13:48 in my mind. It is said that, 'When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.'" He said there are people who are appointed for eternal life in Japan.



#### 4. God is with us

**(Slide 19)** I want to share one more thing, that is, case of Jeremiah; Jeremiah was given a calling to the ministry just before the Babylonian destruction of Israel in BC586. It was also a very tough period in Israel to proclaim the word of God. So, when Jeremiah heard the calling of God, he was very troubled and hesitant to obey; look at verse 6.



**(Slide 20)** In addition, God gave a word play to Jeremiah to encourage him for His ministry. There is an interesting word play in Jeremiah verse 11 and verse 12. In Verse 11, The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?" "I see the branch of an almond tree (שָׁקֵד)," I replied. In verse 12, The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching (שָׁקֵד) to see that my word is fulfilled." The Hebrew for <watching> sounds like the Hebrew for <almond tree.> Shake-do Shoke-do. There is a word play, but I didn't understand why God gave this word play to Jeremiah. Just word play without context? When I knew the geographical background where this word play occurred, it helped me to know the warm heart and solid support of God as related in verse 7 and 8.



(Slide 21) This is the map of Israel and Anathoth where was Jeremiah born and raised; it is famous for almond trees. We have so many almond dishes

these days, and it was the same in Jeremiah's day. Jeremiah was born among almond trees and grew up smelling the blossoms, watching them grow, and tasting the nuts throughout his entire life. So, it can be said that



he grew up with almond trees watching over him, as God has always watched over him. So, Verses 5, 6 and 7 are all connected with this word play. It is said "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." This picture of God watching over him like the almond tree gave him the confidence and assurance that God was with him from infancy until now for his profit ministry.

(Slide 22) So, this word play reinforced that God had been always with him and prepared him for this very difficult ministry just before the destruction of Jerusalem. God didn't call him suddenly; he was known to God before he was born as well as he became a prophet. Paul said that God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose. (Phil. 2:13). We should know every will and ministry is well planned and prepared by God whether we see the final outworking of it or not.



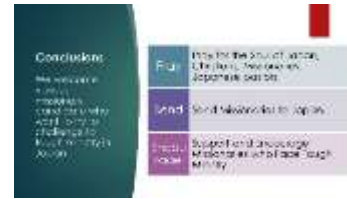
(Slide 23) Conclusion, I hope some of you are becoming interested in sharing in the evangelism of Japan. For example, in my town, Futakotamagawa, the Rakuten company, one of the biggest internet business companies, moved and built their headquarters near our church three years ago. They hired 8,000 employees who speak English, including native English speakers. In addition, this area, Futakotamagawa, has many people who have lived elsewhere internationally, and have returned to Japan. They have similar overseas life experiences, and are seeking ways they can help their children experience what they experienced abroad. We have the opportunity to provide places for that to happen. One way is by holding summer English camp programs for children by bringing in American brothers and sisters to facilitate these experiences. We also wish to reach the English-speakers of the Rakuten company by providing English-speaking activities where we can communicate the gospel.



(Slide 24) We have the burden and the passion, but we need brothers and sisters who will accept the challenge to provide this tough ministry in Japan.

We know that it is not only those who are the intellectual, middle-class income city-dwellers; we must evangelize Japan in various ways to reach all aspects of society for the Gospel.

Therefore, there are many types of missionaries we need, not only church planters, but those sharing Christian music, dance, teaching English, drawing, children's camps and clubs, and so on. Just having short-term missions' teams as well as long-term missionaries is so beneficial.



Pray for the Soul of Japan, Christians, Missionaries, Japanese pastors. Send Missionaries to Japan. Support and Encourage Missionaries who Face Tough Ministry.

Thank you.

Lets' pray

Father, thank you for this opportunity to share our burden and your needs in Japan. Please send servants who want to engage in tough ministry in Japan as well as in U.S. Thank you for your help and Grace. In Jesus name, Amen.