

Is Japan Ripe for Revival? Gospel Resistance Thawing

Japan is one of the most orderly societies in the world. In terms of global economy, the people of this nation are advanced, tech-savvy, and wealthy.

However, Japan is also at a point in its history where it is experiencing unprecedented social upheaval, which creates anxiety and uncertainty throughout the culture.

For example, Japan has the oldest and the most rapidly aging population of any country in the world. There's been a rapid disintegration of the youth culture, where few young adults seem to navigate life by a moral compass. Those caught in the middle are caring for aging parents and despairing over their children. All of those issues have shaken Japan to its core.

The strength test on Japan's government came in the form of a triple disaster in 2011: the earthquake, the tsunami, and the nuclear disaster.

An Operation Mobilization ship staffer (unnamed for security reasons) says they saw that shift firsthand in their recent visit to Japan. "This visit was significant in the fact that we expected to find coolness toward the Gospel, and one of the big differences that we experienced was a very warm response to the Gospel."

How did they get that impression? Nagasaki was the entry point for missions into the country, also a place of persecution and even martyrdom. But, notes the OM ship staffer, that was hundreds of years ago. While the overt hostility has tempered historically, there has been a chilly reception to Christianity and the Gospel message. Although OM Ships have stopped in Japan 21 other times, this was Logos Hope's first visit to the ports of Nagasaki and Kanazawa (where 80,000

people visited the ship).

This time, there was a definite thaw. "There's, of course, great insecurity within the country, within the population. People are questioning their future and questioning why their developed society is vulnerable to natural disasters." Nationally, Christians number only 1/2 of 1% of the population. However, this staff member noted, "As we shared about our project and about our lives, we found that many people were very anxious to hear about the hope and the security we have in our relationship with God." In fact, "anxious" might not be the right descriptor. "During the two weeks that we were in Nagasaki, we reported 50 people who made decisions to follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior."

He goes on to explain that part of the Visitor Experience Deck on Logos Hope is an exhibit called "Journey of Life." A series of pictures tells the story of the prodigal son, and many visitors are hearing it for the first time. "In every port that we go to, there are people everywhere that are searching for hope, searching for a sense of confidence and a relationship with God. Many have not even heard the name of Jesus Christ."

What's more exciting is the shot in the arm this event gave the local church. The staffer explains, "The churches are very small. During our visit, there were perhaps 20 churches. The average size of a church was maybe 30 people." After seeing how open people were to the story of Christ, "Many of the churches, the older churches in Nagasaki, were very encouraged by this. They had never really seen or experienced such a strong response to the Gospel in their history."

Logos Hope crew members helped connect these new Christians with people who could help mentor them in their new faith. "Those that did respond to the Gospel are being followed up by local churches. We have heard from a number of these people who wrote to us and were very thankful for the message that

they heard.”

The greatest need in Japan, as is true in many parts of the world, is for expressions of authentic friendship and genuine witness among those in the church. This OM staffer sums up their visit to Japan with this request: “We just keep praying that the Lord will open our eyes to be aware of those around, in whom He is already at work.”

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