

# Japan In Our Jerusalem

BY Alicia Crowe

## **Our Kingdom**

“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?”

Jesus had just risen from the dead! He had defeated death and the kingdom of evil. He had walked out of the tomb and, for 40 days, taught His disciples about the Kingdom of God. Not the kingdom of Israel. And yet they asked Him, as they always had, thus, revealing their lack of understanding and belief. Just before He rose into Heaven, He answered them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. BUT you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:6-11 ESV).

I am often so distracted in life by wanting to see my kingdom restored. Politically, spiritually, personally, the kingdom of me for my peace and comfort. Yet, as Jesus told His disciples, He also tells us, it isn't for you to understand the plan or the timing. But you will be MY witnesses. I have truly witnessed Who He is. He is love. He is holy. He is faithful, merciful, powerful, good, kind, and so much more. Here's my witness account.

## **My Witnesses**

I was 12 years old at Camp Albemarle on the banks of Bogue Sound, North Carolina, when I stood at the front of the service and made my commitment to God public. I would go where He wanted me to go. This began my journey of understanding God's call for us to be His witnesses EVERYWHERE.

Donnie McDonald captured the attention of all the young people that circled him after his mission presentation. He stopped fielding questions about Japan and asked me what I planned on doing now

that I had graduated college. What about a one-year internship in Japan? That conversation reminded me of my vow to God 10 years before at Camp Albemarle, and I ran like Jonah. Jonah's story isn't about the prophet, his obedience, the people to whom he was sent, or their response. It is all about God and His faithfulness to us. One year turned into two as I served as an English teacher for the northern churches in Japan. Hokkaido, Japan, the frigid, snow-covered arctic tundra that mirrored the cold hearts of the people towards God. God had brought me to the uttermost parts of the world to be His witness and to also witness a people He dearly loves.

For a few months in Japan, Shannon Little was my roommate. When she returned to the United States to pursue her master's degree, she met Josh Crowe in Chicago at Northwest Church. He shared his desire to go to France, and as she recounted her time in Japan, his heart began to turn towards Japan. Shannon initiated our 'meeting' with each other via email. God is faithful.

A little over a year later, back at Camp Albemarle, we were married and vowed to each other and to God to go where He sent us. Eventually He sent us (and five-month-old Ruby) to Japan. The next four years marked a season for our family that felt like molding and bending metal before it can be purposed into use. It is no coincidence that our last name, if sounded in Japanese, is Kurou—the Japanese word for trials and difficult situations/seasons.

Our shipping container somehow was punctured and for a month it sat and collected ocean water, humidity, and rain. All our meticulously packed possessions were lost (and we had not even said goodbye to our families and home yet). All except one lone box was ruined—the box containing my grandfather's precious Word of God and our wedding album. A symbolic reminder to us that nothing but His Word and our marriage would last.

Two months later we began language school, and our thrift store-furnished apartment was robbed. Soon after that, we had to pause language school because of the economic crash of 2009. We witnessed His faithfulness.

One year later, I began hemorrhaging in the middle of the night while attending a women's Bible retreat at a remote hostel across the island. On that 1-hour ambulance ride, I prayed for God not to take the life within me. Debbie Griffin and Nathan Snow went with me to the hospital and were praying also. God spoke to me during that ride, and I knew my baby would survive, and I would name her Hope. All I could do was praise Him for showing me this. (I didn't find out she was a girl until five months later.) Despite the doctor's words that the baby was gone, God showed us her heartbeat leaving us and even the doctor speechless. Ellie Hope was born a month early and a month after the March 11 tsunami. God is faithful.

We had survived the trial season and were beginning to put down roots. With our three daughters, we started our second term in Saitama, a suburb of Tokyo. It felt more like our home! Almost two years into our term, we heard God calling us separately and then collectively that it was time to follow Him...back to the United States. I felt like I was giving up my life dream! We resigned from IM in the fall of 2016, and with it came grief that followed us for years. We would not get clear direction from God until February 2019. We waited. God is faithful.

### God's Times and Seasons

Giving up our lifelong dream was extremely difficult. Why would the Good Shepherd lead us as a family across the world, just to lead us back to North Carolina? God took us to the uttermost part of the world then brought us back to Jerusalem. He led us from loss and resignation to surrendering with acceptance and belief. God is faithful.

After three years, Josh worked for his boss and friend—the man who led him to Jesus and who watched Josh leave his dream of being a Chick-fil-A Operator to pursue missions in France. Josh never made it to France, but 20 years later, he applied to be an Operator.

The grueling interview process lasted two years. One day we were praying in the uncertainty of our future and marking out states we didn't think lined up with where we could live. I put an 'x' through one I knew had no Japanese representation. We prayed that whether a 'yes' or a 'no,' our move would lead us back to Japanese people. But it is not for us to know the times and seasons. In January 2019 we visited a possible store in Dublin, Ohio. As we walked the streets of downtown, it felt like God had sent every Japanese family out at the same time. The place I had marked was God saying 'x' marks the spot! A Honda plant was located nearby, and with it came Japanese families for two five-year stints. Chick-fil-A said 'yes', and our family of six moved that summer into 'Little Japan.'

We began attending a Japanese chapel and helping with English classes and International Bible Discovery classes. Simultaneously my dream was fulfilled, and Josh's prayer was answered! I was a missionary/teacher of Japanese people again and he was now a Chick-fil-A Operator. On the first day of ESL (English as a Second Language), in a class full of Japanese ladies, I shared with tears about God's faithfulness. They were an answer to my prayers!

While in the frozen isle of Hokkaido, I had also prayed another prayer— "God, please let us open U.S. homestays for Japanese people. We know their hearts are more open to You when outside their culture." Many people we met in Japan had become believers when away from their culture. God knows the plan and the time and seasons. Although He did not lead us back to Japan, He answered the prayer He had put into our hearts. He knew best and

brought us back to America where we found Japan in our Jerusalem. God is faithful.

### **His Kingdom Come**

His purpose is for all to know Him. And He promised that He would come back just as He went, and He will call us home. He left us with His power, presence, purpose, and promise.

Our story is not about failure, a missed calling, or a lost dream. It is not a missionary story. It is a Kingdom story about surrendering to His great Kingdom call over our own desires. We are witnesses to His faithfulness. We must learn and relearn this as the disciples did. You may not think you have a mission story, but God does. He has us all on mission as His witnesses.

God does not want our ministry, sacrifices, service, and good deeds. He wants our hearts. Our surrender. He doesn't want to restore our kingdom for us as the Jews wanted then, and as we want now. He is bringing His kingdom to us; we have the uttermost parts of the world surrounding us here.

Do you believe God? Are you staring up into Heaven with questions of now, Lord? Will you restore to me what I want? When? Or are you full of His Spirit's power, on a mission to share what you know about Him? Rely on Who He is though you may not understand what He is doing. Are you willing to go wherever He sends you or takes you? To give Him your heart again and again? It is not about our faithfulness. It is not about getting it right as we have planned. God is faithful, and He will be exalted in the nations! His kingdom come; His will be done.

## **For Further Study:**

Read Acts 1:6-11 and Matthew 28:16-20.

Write down what Jesus tells us we have been given. Then write down what Jesus tells us to do with these gifts.

What practical ways can you and your family follow this biblical basis for witnessing from home to the ends of the earth? List those and pray that God would direct you to take the next step with His presence, power, purpose, and promise!

When the 'no' comes to your plans/prayers, ask God to show you what He may be doing in and through you. Ask Him to help you trust Him as He takes you beyond your limited understanding and forms a deeper intimacy with Him and dependence on Him. Look for His 'Yes'!

Read Jonah 4:1-11 and Genesis 45:5-8, 50:19-20.

Compare and contrast the two different responses of Jonah and Joseph to being God's witnesses. Jonah said, "But God!" in anger versus Joseph's "But, God..." in gratitude.

Read Luke 22:41-46.

Note Jesus' perfect response to God's plan for Him to be His witness. We often say, "But, God. What about my plans/my wishes? But mine." Instead, Jesus shows us, "Not my will, but thine, be done."

Write out a prayer of surrender (acceptance in relinquishing and releasing someone/something) to God's will and your part as His witness. Ask Him to use your life for His good and His glory so that many will believe.

### *About the Writer:*

Alicia Crowe and her husband Josh are missionaries who served formerly in Japan and now reside in "Little Japan" in Dublin, Ohio.

She loves sharing God's story as she wanders through life in wonder of Her Maker and Storywriter! Her biggest adventure has been homeschooling and growing alongside her four kids, Ruby, Ellie, Josie, and Jude and meeting other travelers from "The Land of the Rising Sun" and telling them about the Risen Son.