

# Experiencing Japan's 9.0 Earthquake



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One of the biggest news stories of this year is the earthquake that took place in northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011. The destruction created by the earthquake, tsunami and damaged nuclear reactors is almost unfathomable. My wife, Barb, and I were in Japan at the time of the earthquake and we will never forget our experience.

After landing in Tokyo, Japan, on Tuesday, March 8, we flew to Misawa on March 9. Upon our arrival at the home of BIMi missionaries Sammy and Joan Popwell, we encountered a 7.2 magnitude earthquake. Having experienced many earthquakes during our time in Alaska, we knew what was happening. There was no damage from the quake and life continued on as normal. That night we began a missions conference at Faith Baptist Church, pastored by Brother Popwell. God gave us good meetings on Wednesday and Thursday, with one young lady surrendering her life to missions. On Friday afternoon the ladies were finishing their Bible study while the men and children waited in the lobby of the church. Without

warning, the earth began to shake. After realizing that this earthquake was lasting for an extended period of time, we evacuated the building. We found it difficult to keep our balance as we waited in the parking lot for the quake to stop. Finally, more than two minutes after things had begun to shake, everything was still.

Upon reentering the church, we discovered that we had lost electricity. Not only did this mean we had no source of heat but it also meant it was impossible to know what was happening in the rest of Japan. Eventually, after many aftershocks we drove back to the Popwell's home. Throughout the neighborhood we could hear public announcements being made. One of those announcements was for people who were at the seaside only a few miles away. They were to evacuate immediately because of a possible tsunami that could arrive in less than 30 minutes. Because of the elevation and location of Misawa (approximately 200 miles from the epicenter), we did not experience the effects of the powerful ocean wave. However, we wondered about the welfare of others in Japan.

Since the conference was already planned, we prepared for the Friday night service. We dressed as warmly as possible because of the cold weather and lack of heat. Finding as many candles as we could,



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we had a candlelight service. The message I preached was not the one I had originally planned to bring, and it was also abbreviated due to the conditions. In spite of the circumstances, God blessed our time together and another young person came forward to make public her call to full-time missionary work. After the service, we returned home, piled blankets on the bed and crawled under the covers, hoping we would not have to leave the house in the middle of the night because of aftershocks.


After an interesting night's rest due to aftershocks, we began another day without electricity. On Saturday afternoon we had a modified international banquet. Someone brought a Japanese newspaper to the banquet. This was our first opportunity to learn about the devastation caused by the tsunami. Our hearts went out to those who had lost everything. What we were experiencing was only a minor inconvenience compared to the major tragedy that had taken place to the south.

By Sunday morning we had electricity and joined together for the final day of the conference. Before and after the services the conversations now focused not only on the earthquake and tsunami but also on the nuclear reactor crisis. It was a blessing when in the midst of all of this, a father gave the testimony that his daughter had received Christ the night before. God had used the present tragedy to help her realize she had never been saved. Interestingly enough, when we arrived at our next stop in Okinawa, Japan, we learned that as a result of the three-fold tragedy, nine young people there had received Christ as Savior.

Experiencing a situation like this caused me to stop, think and focus on several truths. First, we do not know what a day is going to bring forth (Proverbs 27:1; James 4:14–15). Second, our hope is in the Lord, *which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is* (Psalm 146:6). Third, God is in control and thus we have no need to fear (Psalm 46). Fourth, mankind is so very small compared to this universe (Romans 12:3; 2 Corinthians 3:5; Galatians 6:3). Fifth, safety is of the Lord (Psalm 121; 127:1; Proverbs 21:31). Finally, the things of this earth are only temporary (Matthew 6:19–33).

In addition to the above truths, I would like to mention two thoughts that involve missions. First, as I remember those who only had 30 minutes notice about the arrival of the tsunami, I am reminded of the short time we have to tell others about salvation. Truly, the fields are *white already to harvest* (John 4:35). We must not delay in telling others about the destruction that awaits those who die without Jesus Christ. There are many in the world who are on the brink of eternity—not necessarily because of a tsunami but because life is just a vapor. We must do everything we can to quickly tell the world about the salvation found in Jesus Christ.

My second thought concerning missions is the great need for laborers. The message of salvation needs to be proclaimed, but that means there must be those who are willing to carry that message into all the earth. At the time when Jesus said, "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few*" (Matthew 9:37), there was a tremendous need. Since that time the need has not diminished but may have actually increased to a higher level than ever before. We must pray that *the Lord of the harvest...will send forth labourers into his harvest* (Matthew 9:38). Then we must be willing to "Go" ourselves. The need is immeasurable, not only in Japan but also in the rest of God's harvest field.

For Barb and me, our experience in Japan was life changing. My prayer is that Japan's earthquake will make Christians stop, think, and focus on doing what they can for those who are not saved. Consequently, I trust many people in Japan—and in the rest of the world—will come to know the life changing experience of receiving Christ as Savior. 



our first news of the quake/tsunami