

TESTIMONY

Akira Hatori

Can you see me? When I interpreted for Dr. Billy Graham in Tokyo in 1967, they elevated me one foot-and-a-half. This time, only eight inches.

Forty-some years ago I was a Buddhist. Being the firstborn of the family it was my duty to worship at the Buddhist altar every morning. I offered a bowl of freshly cooked rice and a glass of water and chanted before the altar. There was also a Shintu god shelf in my house. There were many paper gods there. There were many, many gods in my household but no joy, no happiness, no laughing, no communication because there wasn't Jesus in my house. We used to eat around the table, but there was no communication between the man and his wife or the parents and their children. No communication!

Some years back I had a telephone call after midnight. It was from Boston, U.S.A. "Are you Mr. Hatori?" the party said. "Please speak anything about Japan for five minutes. We are ready to broadcast you all over the United States." I had been in radio evangelism for twenty-three years. That was the first time for me to preach in pajamas.

This is the day of communication but we didn't have any communication of love between the parents and children in the family because there was no love, no Jesus. My father and mother used to fight against each other day and night, every day. As a young boy, I wondered, "What is life's purpose? What is life for? We are born alone, hate each other, fight against each other, discouraged and frustrated, and die alone. What is life's purpose?" I didn't know. As a sixteen-year-old boy, I was a boy with an empty heart. I hated God. I hated my parents. I was empty myself.

At that time, I was going to high school. There was a teacher who hated Christianity there. He used to say that Christianity is the enemy of Japan and the emperor. One morning he came to our classroom and said, "Are there any Christians in this classroom? Raise your hand. I'll fix you." I didn't expect anyone to raise his hand, of course. But one gentle, quiet boy stood up and said, "Teacher, I'm a Christian. I believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ who died for my sins and rose again for my righteousness." That short, but great testimony struck my heart very deep. We became very close friends because I wanted to know his heart's secret. Then he invited me to a country church. It was a rainy day, the first time for me to get into the Christian church. There I met a very large, old missionary lady. She was not too beautiful, but her love was as large as her body. She loved me and she communicated Jesus Christ to me so lovingly and kindly. She said to me, "Akira, murder, stealing, fornication — these are nothing but your sin. Inside you is a darkness which shuts out the God of creation, the God of salvation." She said, "Nothing can chase away the darkness but the light. Akira, open your heart and receive Jesus Christ as the light of the world. That light will chase your sins away and you will be a new creature today." By the grace of God I opened up my heart that night and received Jesus Christ as my own personal Savior.

And then this meek Miss Bennett, the lady missionary, said to me, "Akira, you go home tonight and you say to your father that you became a Christian tonight." I said, "Yes."

I went home, and all of a sudden, fear came upon me. My father was a stubborn man. He used to kick and beat his wife. He also hated Christianity, so before I entered the house I knelt down and I offered, for the first time, my own prayer, "God, help me." I went into the house to my father and said, "Daddy, I became a Christian tonight." He got angry and threw me down harshly on the floor because he knew judo. He took me by the neck and led me in front of the Buddhist altar and pushed me down and said, "Worship, worship." That was the first night that I became a Christian.

It wasn't easy. I went into the Japanese army and I was the only Christian there. Because I professed that I was a Christian, I was beaten, I was kicked, and I had a great many persecutions there. But I've never regretted that I became a Christian and received Jesus Christ as my Lord, because after I became a Christian, my mother, my sister, my father, and even my Communist brother became Christians. They all have the assurance of eternal life and I have a happy home; loving, singing together, reading the Bible together, praying together, and laughing together.

Also, I have a burning heart! I know what I am living for now. To live is Christ! To die is gain! I'm happy with Jesus Christ. I invite you to open your heart and receive the wonderful, loving Jesus, your Lord. Let me say I love you all here.

Thank you.