

## Japan in 1701

Asano Takumi-no-Kami Naganori, Lord of Ako Prefecture was a most honorable and devout Confucian who stood on precepts very similar to those in the Bible, but in 1635, an edict by the Shogun of Japan kept Christianity out of the country. This made it impossible for Lord Asano to hear the Gospel or to even hear of someone named Jesus.

In 1701, Lord Asano was ordered to appear at the Shogun's palace to perform a few ceremonial duties. He was to be instructed in court etiquette and protocol by the Shogun's Chamberlain, one Kira Yoshinaka, a greedy and lecherous old court official who expected to be bribed for everything he did.

Lord Asano hated court corruption and refused, so Lord Kira continually browbeat Lord Asano, who kept his temper until Lord Kira insulted him publically. That was something no proud Japanese warlord could tolerate so Lord Asano drew his sword and attempted to kill Lord Kira. He was prevented from doing so by nearby retainers.

Now drawing a sword in the Shogun's palace, regardless of provocation, was no minor misdemeanor. In fact, it was an automatic death sentence by seppuku (the public ritual slitting of one's own stomach). Lord Asano knew he would be dishonored, have his lands seized, his samurai made homeless and that he'd die for his action, but his honor permitted him to do nothing else. He accepted the Shogun's judgment and committed seppuku.

Forty-seven of Lord Asano's samurai knew this to be an unjust sentence and they loved and respected their liege lord, so they bound together in a blood oath to avenge their master's death and restore his honor. It took them two years of careful planning, but in the winter of 1703 they stormed Lord Kira's palace, took his head, stuck it on a pole, and marched it through Edo, Japan's capital city. Then they laid Lord Kira's head at the grave of Lord Asano, said a Shinto prayer and surrendered to authorities.

From the outset, those forty-seven samurai knew they would be ordered to kill themselves for beheading the Shogun's Chamberlain, but to restore their liege lord's honor they gave their lives anyway. One at a time, each of the forty-seven samurai committed ritual seppuku in front of the usual witnesses. From their knowledge base, they had done the most honorable things they could.

Now let's cut to 2014 and visit any church in the land. Here we'll find John Pew-warmer, and man, does he have his evangelical doctrine down pat. He believes the Bible, or so he claims, accepts election by sovereignty or whatever, says the sinner's prayer, was baptized, goes to church twice on Sunday, take communion and debates all the above ad nauseam. But John is an arrogant closet druggie who sleeps with his neighbor's wife. So let me ask two questions:

- 1. Is John going to heaven despite his wicked life because he's said the right words and has the right doctrine?*
- 2. Are those 47 samurai going to hell because they didn't have the right doctrine, but did they best they knew how?*

Those samurai didn't know the first thing about Jesus, but followed what He said anyway, "greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend." Then as God told Samuel, "The Lord seeth not as man seeth. Man looketh on the outward appearance (*i.e., the doctrine*), but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Could God be simply looking for people with the right kind of heart, regardless of doctrinal flavor? In Jesus' day, there were plenty of Jewish priests with good doctrine, but the Lord chose to be around the Joe-six-pack, no-pretense types . . . the publicans and sinners.

We can know volumes about doctrine and debate our traditions endlessly, but still know very little about the heart of God. Point being: Wouldn't it be better to stand before the Lord knowing nothing, but be found doing the best we can, rather than know the Gospel, but be found holding it in unrighteousness?