

GRANDMA'S FUNERAL

Grandmother's Funeral

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It was almost midnight when the phone rang and Masashi heard about his grandmother's death. "Come quickly," his mother said. "The funeral will be day after tomorrow." Masashi had expected the call, for he had visited his grandmother a week before and seen that she was very frail. Much to Masashi's joy, she had accepted Christ during that visit. He had sat by her bed and told her about the gospel and invited her to believe. Though she was weak, she had nodded her head, and her peaceful smile convinced Masashi that she was a believer. But that had only added to his anxiety about what he would have to do at her funeral, which he knew would be conducted according Buddhist tradition.

During the three-hour train ride to his parents' home the next day, the young seminary student recalled the events that had led up to this moment. He had grown up in a small village with two Shinto shrines and a Buddhist temple. There were no Christians in the area. Masashi's father worked in a nearby chemical factory and in his spare time worked a small farm. He was proud when he had completed his new house, and even more so when he was elected president of the village and made responsible for the village religious activities.

Masashi had gone to Tokyo for his education and had graduated from Waseda University. While there he had heard about Christ through some young people. He had experienced the power of God and the support of a Christian fellowship during some difficult experiences in his life. Masashi had become a disciple of Jesus. Back home, the villagers had commented on the change that had taken place in his life, now that he was a Christian. Later, after he had prayed for his mother

when she was ill and she had recovered, she had become sympathetic to his new faith. He had led one of his brothers to Christian faith. They were the only Christians in the village. The other brother had remained skeptical of Christianity.

It was afternoon when Masashi arrived at his father's house. The relatives were already making preparations for a Buddhist funeral. After greeting his parents, he said, "Father, Grandmother became a Christian when I was here a week ago. She should have a Christian funeral." But Masashi's father had refused. He did not want any criticism from the relatives or villagers. Masashi had helped in the funeral arrangements out of respect for the grandmother he had loved dearly, but he knew that he would face a difficult decision when the funeral took place.

The next day the men of Masashi's house association placed the body in the coffin they had made, dug the grave, and prepared the altar for the Buddhist funeral. The women had helped feed and entertain the more than two hundred guests who arrived for the burial.

At the climax of the ceremonies, Masashi stood in line as a member of his family. His father was first, his mother second, and he as the eldest son was third. Behind him was his Christian brother, watching to see what he would do. Each in turn was expected to offer burning incense to the dead. All were watching Masashi as his turn came to venerate his grandmother. As he approached the coffin, Masashi. . . .

ISSUES: Grandmother's Funeral

- **what is the difference between worship and showing respect?**
- **what does bowing mean to the Japanese?**
- **what effect does bowing have on new Christians?**
- **what effect does bowing/not bowing have on evangelism?**
- **what should change now, and what can be done over time?**
- **how can Christians show honor to their parents?**
- **who should make the decision?**
- **what long term actions need to be taken?**