

## “Unwanted Calls”

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It was on a relatively clear day on April 18, 1942, that a group of bombers got together. They were going to fly into Japan and try to drop bombs upon the Japanese. Lt. William Farrow was the pilot. There was a co-pilot, there was a rear gunner, and there was a navigator and another gunner - a corporal named Jacob DeShazer. Corporal DeShazer told the story about how they took off on that flight. They flew over Japan and dropped the bombs, and as they were coming back, they were told that they would receive further instructions, but no further instructions came. They continued to fly, waiting for those instructions to happen, but when they didn't - they knew they were running out of fuel. Lieutenant Farrow said, “We are going to have to jump, boys,” and they all jumped out of the plane and parachuted down.

Corporal DeShazer didn't know what happened to the other men on that flight - if they lived or not. He never saw them land. But Jacob DeShazer landed safely from that parachute. He wrapped it up and tried to hide, but the Japanese found him. First they dragged him to an encampment and they tortured him to find out what, if any, information he had.

They further dragged him to a confinement cell where he was alone - almost always - for almost two years. Except for the guard, he never saw another American. He never spoke English. He couldn't relate to anyone except for the guards who were often brutal to him.

One day he heard that one of the other prisoners outside of the confinement cells had dysentery and died from it, so the guards decided they needed to give the prisoners a *little* bit more food so that none of the others would die.

They decided to keep their spirits up so they would have some hope. They allowed them to have reading material from what few English books the Japanese had, including a Bible. As they were passing around the books, one day it was DeShazer's turn to get the Bible. He started to read that Bible. Each one would have a few weeks with each book and then the guards would make them rotate.

Jacob DeShazer read that Bible over and over again - day and night. He had nothing else to do. He was raised in a Christian home, but he didn't really believe. But, there wasn't another thing in his life, over 23 and 1/2 hours a day. (They let them out for just a few minutes a day.) All he had was the book that he had in his hand to keep his sanity during that time, and he read every aspect of it.

Then, one day they took the Bible away from him. That very same day they let him outside for that half hour, for a little bit of exercise in the yard by himself. As he was going back into the cell, the guard pushed him in, slammed the door, but caught his [Jacob's] foot in the door. Rather than open the cell door so he could get it back in, the guard kept kicking Jacob's foot and leg with his steel-toed boot until it popped back in [the cell], permanently damaging the foot with no medical care. He sat there, Jacob DeShazer sat there, enraged at

the guard, watching his foot, worried that he would lose it, or die, because there was no medical care for him.

He looked at that guard with such *anger* and, all of a sudden, his mind went totally blank, he said. All of that reading of that Bible, that had been taken from him - he had tried to memorize as much as he could because he knew it would be taken away.

The first thing that God planted in his head, as he sat there in his rage, was, "Love thy enemy. Forgive them, for they know not what they do." And the other memorized words of that Bible kept streaming into his heart, over and over again, reminding him of how he should react.

He bowed his head and he called on God for forgiveness, and asked God into his heart for the first time. It was like the whole world - *his* whole world, as small as it was - transformed in that moment and he began to see that God was with him. That even though the Bible had been taken away, there wasn't another decent human being in his life and he probably would never see another warm face the rest of his sorry life, he knew God would be with him now. It lifted him up, and the first thing he realized was that, "I cannot live with this rage. God does not want that. If I am to be a Christian then I need to live differently." And he realized that he had to be friendly and nice to the people around him, and the only people around him were the guards.

So, the next day when the guard came to bring his food he smiled and greeted him in Japanese. He had picked up the words along the way, because he heard them over and over again. The guard looked at him and sneered and walked away.

Later, when the guard picked up the tray, Jacob greeted him again, and the guard just looked at him apathetically and walked away. This went on day after day, the same thing - the greeting. He [Jacob] asked about his family and the guard just looked at him and walked away, but DeShazer would not give up.

Finally, one day the guard smiled back. The day after that the guard told him about his family. A few days later, the guard even asked Jacob about his family, and soon after that the guard would sneak in turnips - after that figs and candy. A relationship started.

A week or so after that, after over two years in that concentration camp in that solitary cell by himself, he was moved, only this time he was moved from Japan all the way to China - to Peking, which is now Beijing - and he spent more time.

All of a sudden, just a few months later he heard that the bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And, all of a sudden, in that concentration camp in China where the food wasn't as good - where the figs and candy and turnips were no longer available, where the conditions were even harsher - barely hanging on to his life, he [Jacob] heard God say to him, "It is almost over. Victory is yours."

Then he realized that his life just might continue, and he felt the presence within his soul that he needed to pray for the Japanese people, because as a bomber he watched what his bombs had done to the people far below, and he couldn't imagine what it was like for the

bomb that was being described by the Chinese in that moment – what it had done to great parts of Japan.

What would happen to those people? And he prayed for them, and God said, “You have a call to these people.” The war was over and he was saved; he was taken home.

He tried to get on with his life. He started [going to] church and he married a woman named Florence. Two and a half years later, he and Florence decided they would become missionaries through their church and that he needed to go back to Japan. He went back there with hardly anything in mind, but when he got there everybody started shaking his hand. They knew who he was. Here, immediately following the war, an Army chaplain wrote his story. They called it “A Man Jailed Forgives the Japanese.” That tract was sent out over a million times all over Japan following the war.

By the time Jacob and Florence DeShazer went back to be missionaries in Japan, thousands and thousands of people stood in line to meet this man who forgave his enemy. He started forming churches and he started preaching the Gospel. People came because they couldn't believe that someone could forgive them, because they knew how harsh they had been to their own enemies - the Americans.

How could this American want to go back after everything that had been done to him? Watching him limp up to the pulpit to talk about love and forgiveness and healing, and how we are all brothers and sisters of Christ. Churches grew, but Jacob still didn't feel that it was enough. So, in 1950, two years after he had arrived in Japan he decided to do a 40-day fast, so that God would somehow have the opportunity, through his actions, of transforming this island of Japan, for God.

When the 40 days were up, he started slowly eating again. Just a couple of days after he had stopped, there was a knock at the door and in walked a man who shook his hand, shook Florence's hand, and he said, “My name is Mitsuo Fuchida.” (Now, if you're my age or older you love the classic movie “Midway.” Go back and watch the movie.) Mitsuo Fuchida is one of the stars in the Japanese navy who was the commander and led the 360 planes that dropped the bombs on Pearl Harbor. He wanted to meet the man whose tract - whose story - he had read about who touched his life, who made Fuchida kneel down on his knees and pray to this new God he had heard about, who loved his enemy and considers everyone their neighbor.

He and Jacob sat down together in Jacob's living room. They prayed together as brothers. Jacob talked to Fuchida about what it meant to be a Christian, the need to be baptized - and he was - and Mitsuo Fuchida went on to become a missionary himself. He preached the Gospel all through Japan, went into the rest of Asia and went around the world.

I read this story and it almost seemed too good to be true, so I had to Google it to make sure that I cross-referenced everything. And, on Wikipedia, Fuchida says something about “Midway” - the movie - but spent more time talking about his missionary work than he did about Pearl Harbor, his fame in the movie, or anything else about his life. His missionary work for the bulk of his life transformed more lives than anything else he had ever done, to the day he died.

Jacob DeShazer stayed in Japan with his wife, Florence, until they died. They stayed there another 30 years, loving, caring for and teaching the people of Japan what it meant to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

I share this because of that call that is described in Isaiah 6:1-8. A calling is rarely easy. First of all, if I were Isaiah and I saw those 6-winged seraphims coming after me, man, I would run the other way. Then, one of them had the gall to take a tong with burning coal on the end of it and slam it up to his mouth.

A call is burning. A call is painful. Often it requires, and what it meant by that symbolic act, is that a call requires *sacrifice*. It calls us to do what we don't want to do and causes us to want to flee from that which is painful - and we all want a peaceful, happy, relaxed life. Yet, if you are a follower of God's - if you are committed to God - if you want to follow the call of God, it means doing the opposite. It means walking into the pain. It means smiling at the enemy. It means inviting the enemy into your living room, touching hands in prayer.

On this Memorial Weekend, we remember all of those - not just who died in the war - but also those who lived to forgive, to heal and to restore. May we remember to follow their example in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. Amen.