

Title: *Planted With a Purpose*

Texts: Jeremiah 29:4–7, Matthew 5:13–16.

Ohayō gozaimasu. Good morning,

It is a joy and privilege for me to be here with you here in Osaka this Sunday morning.

My name is Edward Lo, and I bring warm greetings to you from my home church in Singapore. I am here together with my wife, Lucy, and several members from our church. We are here in Osaka for a mission trip, partnering with Pastor Kathy in doing some outreach ministry work.

I serve as a lay leader in my church in Singapore, and even though I am now retired, I thank God that He continues to give me opportunities to serve Him in different ways. Truly, it is a blessing for me to be able to worship God with you here in Japan and to witness how God is working among His people in this city.

This morning, I am going to share with you a message; a message about God's purpose for His people – where we are, and where we may come from, whether from Japan or from other countries.

I am told this congregation is special.

You come from many different nations and backgrounds. Some of you are here in Japan as working professionals. Some are married to Japanese spouses and are building your families here. Some are long-term residents, and some may be here just for a short visit.

This beautiful mix reminds me of God's people in the Bible.

God's people were often *scattered* — living as foreigners in strange lands — yet they were always called to be *God's people*, wherever they were.

And that is the theme of my message today: **Planted with a Purpose.**

Friends, you may be here in Japan for work, for marriage, for study, or for just a season of your life. But according to the Word of God, you are not here by accident.

God has *planted* you here, and He has a *purpose* for your life.

1. God Places Us Where We Are — for His Mission

In Jeremiah 29:4–7, we read about the Israelites who were far from home.

They had been taken into exile in Babylon, and they were confused and discouraged.

They asked, “Why are we here? Has God abandoned us?”

But through the prophet Jeremiah, God sent them this message:

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.

Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

You know, when God spoke these words to His people, they were far from home. They were living in Babylon — a foreign land, with a different language, different customs, different food, and different gods. Everything around them felt unfamiliar. Many of them were probably very homesick. They wanted to go back to Jerusalem, back to the land that felt like home.

But God said something unexpected to them. He said, “Don't wait for life to get better. Don't live as if you're just passing through. Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Seek the good of the city where I've placed you.”

Friends, those are powerful words. You may be far from your homeland, far from your family, far from what's familiar. But listen — **you are not far from God's purpose.**

God has *brought* you here. You are not here by accident. Whether you came for work, for school, for marriage, or for a season of your life — God's hand is in it. He has planted you here like a seed. And seeds are meant to be planted, to take root, grow and bear fruits.

So what does it mean to “build houses and settle down” in Japan? It means — don't live like a visitor who's just passing through. Make a home here. Be present. Build relationships. Learn the language, learn to speak with the people around you.

“Plant gardens and eat what they produce.” Means be fruitful where you are. If you work in a Japanese company, work with excellence and integrity. If you're studying, study diligently. If you're raising children, raise them to love both God AND this country they're growing up in. Appreciate Japan's beauty, its discipline, its respect, its deep sense of harmony.

And then God also says, “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city.” The Hebrew word for “peace” here is *shalom* — it means more than just the absence of conflict. It means wholeness, well-being, flourishing. God is saying, “*Work for the flourishing of the place where I've put you.*”

Be the people who will bless Japan. Obey its laws. Respect its culture. Participate in your community. Be kind to your neighbours. Show God's love not just in words, but in the way you live every day.

And pray — pray for this land. Pray for Japan's leaders. Pray for its families. Pray for the next generation. Pray for revival — that hearts will turn toward God. Because God's promise still stands: “If it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Yes, when Japan flourishes, your life will flourish too. When you bless others, blessings will find its way back to you.

So, my brothers and sisters, don't just *live* in Japan — *love* Japan.
 don't just *stay* here — *serve* here.
 don't just *work* here — *worship* here.

You are not outsiders; you are God's ambassadors. You are here on a divine assignment. So build, plant, bless, and pray — and through you, this land will taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

2. Every Christian Believer Is a Missionary

1 Peter 2:9–10 says:

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

Notice that Peter did not write those words only to pastors or evangelists or full-time missionaries. He wrote them to ordinary believers — men and women just like us.

That means every Christian is a priest, a missionary.

Not necessarily one who crosses oceans — but one who crosses the street.

Not necessarily one who travels far — but one who lives faithfully where he or she is.

Your mission field begins wherever your feet are planted. Where God has planted you.

In Japan, we know that trust and relationships are built slowly.

So the good news of Jesus Christ is best shared, not through big events or evangelistic rallies, but through *friendship* and *daily life*.

So even if you will never stand behind a pulpit, you can still preach Christ every single day:

- When you treat others with kindness and respect, **you preach Christ's love.**

- When you forgive instead of retaliate, **you proclaim His mercy.**
- When you stand up for truth even when it costs you, **you bear witness to His righteousness.**
- When you offer to pray for someone in need, or invite a friend to church, **you are carrying out God's mission.**

Being a missionary is not about *where you go* — it's about *who you are in Christ*.

It's about living each day here where God has planted you, to answer to His call for your life.

3. A Christian's Calling — To Be Salt and Light

What else might God be calling you to be as foreigners here in Japan?

Matthew 5:13–16, Jesus said to His followers:

"You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

When Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth," He chose His words carefully. In the ancient world, salt was precious — sometimes even used as money. It wasn't just something to sprinkle on your food; it was essential for life. Because salt preserved food in a time before refrigeration, keeping it from decay. It also cleans and heals wounds. So when Jesus called His followers "the salt of the earth," He meant they were vital, important, not optional seasoning, but a necessary presence in a world to preserve goodness and truth.

Even today, a little salt goes a long way. Just a pinch can transform a bland dish into something exciting. Likewise, even one person who lives with the love of Christ can bring renewal and hope to his surroundings. Just as salt acts quietly and gently, your quiet act of kindness, your gentle word of truth, your steady faith — all of these can preserve what is good in the world and keep it from rotting to selfishness and despair.

In Japan, when food tastes rich and flavourful, we say it has *umami*, right? . You know, if Jesus were preaching here today, He might well have said, "You are the *umami* of this land."

Because *umami* brings out the best in food, God's people who are *umami* bring out the best in the world. Yes, even a little bit of Ajinomoto can transform the flavour of a dish. In the same way, even a small act of faith can transform a community. God's call is not for you to be impressive or powerful — but simply to be salt, be *umami* — preserving what is good, healing what is broken, and adding the rich flavour of grace to the world around you.

Japan is blessed with one of the most reliable power systems in the world — power failures are almost unheard of! But in other countries, like the Philippines or Myanmar, people know how precious, how useful and even life-saving a single candle can be when the lights go out. It doesn't have to be a big light — just one small flame can push back the darkness.

And that's exactly what Jesus meant when He said, "You are the light of the world." He didn't say, "Try to be light." He said, "**You are light.**" It's part of who you are as His follower. When the light of Christ lives in you, it naturally shines through you.

Light has only one purpose — to shine. Unlike salt that acts quietly, light is bright, it is flashy, colourful. It can even be hot. Light conquers darkness. Darkness cannot overcome it.

Think about it: in a dark room, you don't need floodlights to see — one candle is enough to show the way. In the same way, your kindness, your integrity, your faith, and your love can bring hope and purpose to someone walking in darkness. You may feel like your light is small, but to someone lost, that light might be the only thing leading him home.

Jesus also illustrated, "A city on a hill cannot be hidden." In ancient times, travellers used those hilltop cities as landmarks, especially at night. Their lamps shone through the darkness, guiding the travellers to their destinations. That's what God calls us to be — bright visible billboards of His love and truth in a world searching for direction.

In Japan, many people live surrounded by physical light — bright neon signs, huge LED displays, glowing cities — yet many still feel spiritual darkness inside: loneliness, pressure, exhaustion, emptiness. This is where your light matters most. When you live with joy, humility, forgiveness, and compassion, you become a gentle but powerful witness to the presence and peace of God. So, let your light shine. Point others to the One who is the true Light of the world, Jesus Christ. Don't hide your faith. Don't dim your hope. Don't let fear make you blend into the shadows. Be that city on the hill. Because when you shine, truth will be revealed, people are pointed to go in the right directions, people's dark and dull lives will be brightened up by yours.

So to the foreigners who are believers in Jesus Christ living here, I encourage you again, don't just survive here. Live. Flourish. Bless the city. Be God's people, even in a foreign land. Be the Umami, be the Light on the hill. Let your life bring hope and peace to those around you, your workplace, your neighbourhood, your family — they are your *mission field*.

4. The Invitation and Altar Call

To those among us today who have yet to believe in Jesus Christ, may I speak this to you also?

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5. Conclusion

Friends of Osaka International Church, I will end my message this morning by reminding us that we are not here by chance. Wherever we come from, and whatever brought us to Japan, **God has planted you here with a purpose.**

As believers in Jesus Christ, live as **salt and light** in this land — blessing Japan through your kindness, your integrity, and your love. Be the umami here — bringing out His goodness in the people around you.

And to my friends who have just accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, the angels in Heaven and all of us here, are rejoicing with you for your newfound faith in God. Join all of us to also live as salt and light in this land.

Amen.

Let us now stand to sing our closing song, as a response prayer to God's message for us today.

"Here I am, Lord. Send me."