



40.DAY 2023

40.DAYS 40.VOICES 40.PRAYERS

DAY 2 | JULY 2

Light and Oil

BY BISHOP RENNIS PONNIAH
Retired 9th Anglican Bishop of Singapore
Honorary Director, Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches (GSFA) Secretariat

BIBLE READING

Isaiah 49:5-6

I believe the Lord has a word for us in Isaiah 49:5-6. *And now the LORD says, "He who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him — for I am honoured in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength — ⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

The verses are from the 2nd Servant Song in Isaiah. The emphasis is on how "the servant of the Lord" proclaims the Word of God not only to the people of God but to the far off nation.

Who is this "servant of the Lord"? In context, it refers to God's faithful remnant – those who are fully loyal to Him and committed to do His will.

It is embodied by the prophet Isaiah in his day; it is perfectly fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ and then the role is handed on to the Church, to you and me.

So, God is speaking to the faithful part of His Church in Singapore through this passage.

He wants us to be:

1. A light that calls our nation to the Living God.

The passage says that the faithful remnant is to "bring Jacob (that is, the nation) back to God".

For that to happen in Singapore, our churches themselves will need to be authentically living under the rule of God. That means that:

- We walk before God in holiness of life, in humility and unity;
- We serve our neighbours according to their human need;
- We share with the lost and broken the Good News of God's saving love in Jesus Christ.

Christians will need to be vessels of light in the public square that courageously speak for, and model, God's standard of Right and Wrong. We do so because we believe that God's revealed ways for human life are not life-defeating but life-giving.

To impact society, Christians need to be out there in the marketplace of everyday life – in our schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods. We need to be out there living out the Kingdom of God and sharing our faith in Jesus Christ with others.

We need to recognise that the contest for Gospel truth is getting harder. The world has changed very rapidly, the foundations of moral life are being shaken and the spiritual darkness is thickening.

There is resistance to absolute truth claims, there is an unbalanced premium on individual liberty, and our young people are growing up with a radically different worldview.

But God says in His Word in this passage that His faithful people must still vigorously and winsomely shine His light. By word and deed, they are to call

their society to turn to God and heed His Word. And the promise of God is that His light will shine in the midst of the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

To be LIGHT that impacts our society for God – that is not all! There is more to our calling! We are called to be:

2. A light that reaches the nations of the world.

For God says in Isaiah 49:6: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob ... I will make you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

The faithful in Singapore must get the Gospel out to the nations.

I don't need to tell you how much darkness and suffering there is in the world out there. Singapore Christians have a special calling to be “world Christians”. That is why there are Singaporean Christians serving in vocational schools in Timor-Leste, in refugee camps in Central Asia and running businesses in places as diverse as Ethiopia and Japan.

Just some examples, but the call to the Church in Singapore is to train, support and send out more cross-cultural workers for the Gospel. To be that light to the nations!

At the same time, the Church in Singapore is also entrusted to revitalise and resource indigenous churches in different countries to reach their own nation for God. The key is disciple-making.

There is one more element in this text that warrants our attention: The LORD says: “I will make you ... as a light for the nations.”

The power to be such a light both for our nation and the nations of the world is not within us.

The power is from God. We need oil, divine oil, to be such a light.

3. Oil to be such a light.

We need the oil of the Holy Spirit to be that radiant light that touches and transforms our nation and then reflects salvation and glory to the nations.

This “oil” is poured out by Almighty God in answer to fervent, united and beseeching prayer. So we need to come to God, broken and empty and desperate, that He might mend us and fill us with the oil that causes His mighty light to shine through us.

The story of Elisha and the widow's oil in 2 Kings 4:1-7 shows the way. The creditors are mercilessly after the widow. The only thing that she and her two sons had was a little oil left in the house. Elisha instructs her to borrow as many empty vessels that she can from her neighbours.

The power of God is such that the oil keeps flowing until every gathered vessel is filled. The widow is then told to sell the required amount of oil to pay her debts, and then she and her sons can live on the rest.

May this season of fasting and prayer, of brokenness and crying out to God, this season that's before our National Day, be a time of calling out to God for the oil of the Holy Spirit, so that the faithful remnant in Singapore can grow and be the bright light that calls our nation Godward and shines on the nations of the world.

Let us pray: *God, our Heavenly Father, Your calling is beyond us but it is our desire to be Your light. Pour out Your spirit that we might shine to touch our nation and even transform the nations of the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

REFLECT

- 1** Wherever God has positioned you in life, how and with whom can you share the Gospel of God's kingdom?
- 2** How can you participate in God's work to make disciples of all nations?
- 3** How will you daily ask God for more oil of His Holy Spirit within you so you can be His light?

PRAY

- 1** Pray for God to search your heart and see if there is anything that is preventing you from being counted among the faithful. Ask God for a heart that grieves over sin and is willing to be bent in repentance before Him.
- 2** Pray that your local church is able to worship authentically, serve its neighbours in humility and share the Gospel boldly.
- 3** Pray for the oil of the Holy Spirit to be continually poured into you so that you can live an empowered life that is a living testimony for Christ.