

FROM
DARKNESS
INTO HIS
MARVELLOUS
LIGHT

DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR LENT 2016

From Darkness into His Marvellous Light

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Foreword

Lent is very different from all the other seasons of the church calendar. Advent, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, Kingdomtide all have celebratory and joyous elements about them. During Lent, the mood is sombre, and the tone more contemplative. It is a time to look up in order that we can look within.

The tough questions of life are considered mostly during the readings in this season. The answers are not easy to come by, and when they do, pain is often experienced in part of the process.

It is, however, a preparatory season, not one where we dwell forever. In between the revelations of Epiphany and the joy of Easter, we spend this time in anticipation of victory, knowing that God has already provided us with the way out. We just need to examine deeper to know what they are.

May you be blessed with the meditations in this devotional during this season.

Rev Dr Wee Boon Hup
Bishop, The Methodist Church in Singapore
President, The National Council of Churches of Singapore

Preface

“The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shined”
Isaiah 9:2 (ESV)

The Lenten season is an important time for Christians to take steps towards the sorrow of the Cross, as well as the great hope of the Resurrection. As we reflect on our own lives and meditate on God’s Word, we receive stark reminders of our own sins and the abounding grace of God, preparing ourselves for Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

The Bible Society of Singapore has been commissioned by the National Council of Churches of Singapore (NCCS) to publish a collection of Lenten readings and reflections every year since 2006, making this the 11th year of producing this devotional. Last year, 22,000 copies of the devotional were printed and distributed, and it was made available online in English, Chinese and Tamil. For the first time, we also produced audio recordings of the devotional materials in Hokkien and Cantonese, enabling us to reach out to an even wider audience. It has been a great privilege to bless so many Christians through this effort, and we thank God for every opportunity to touch more lives. We will continue to work towards making this devotional available in more languages and media platforms.

This devotional would not be possible without the participation of contributors representing clergy and lay leaders from various denominations. Our heartfelt thanks go to all of them, especially Revd Canon Dr Louis Tay. We thank him for his invaluable guidance

and contribution towards the scriptural readings and apt titling of this devotion.

This year's theme is "From Darkness into His Marvellous Light". We are prompted to remember the crises of the past year - the terror of the ISIS situation, the hard-hitting economic downturn, and the devastation of natural disasters in so many places. Amidst these difficult situations, the reminder for us is to look towards our God who is faithful, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments. He inspires us to move from the world's darkness into His marvellous light, helping us to look to new beginnings with true optimism that can only come from the truth of the Gospel.

In Lent, we make the same journey from the darkness of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, into the light of resurrection hope on Easter Sunday. May this devotional guide us all in our journey ahead.

Rev Ezekiel Tan
General Secretary
The Bible Society of Singapore

Introductory notes

Through the traditional Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, the church seeks to be renewed in the likeness of its Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This booklet aims to foster such renewal by providing a series of readings and meditations focused specifically on Lenten themes.

Drawing on the *Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings* (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), the biblical passages in *Daily Devotions for Lent 2016* have been selected because of their thematic connection to the Sunday readings of the *Revised Common Lectionary*. The Sunday Gospel Lessons of RCL are the central foci to which our weekday Lenten readings will point. Users should be mindful of the major themes and motifs encountered in the readings of *Revised Common Lectionary* and *RCL Daily Readings for Lent*:

First Sunday - What does the Lord require of you?

Second Sunday - Great is your faith

Third Sunday - Come to the waters

Fourth Sunday - I am the light of the world

Fifth Sunday - I am the resurrection and the life

Palm Sunday - The passion and death of Jesus

Following the RCL *Daily Readings* pattern, this booklet's readings for Thursday, Friday, and Saturday are considered "Preparation for Sunday," and those for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are "Reflection on Sunday." The former group looks forward, the latter backward. (An exception to the pattern will be the readings for Holy Week, all of which will constitute a preparation for both Good Friday and Easter Sunday.) It is hoped that this system will provide a sense of unity and focus and enable users to appreciate the Sunday

lectionary readings within a broader biblical context.

The overall theme of “From Darkness into His Marvellous Light”, challenges us in two ways pertaining to our walk with God: firstly, to humbly consider the current condition of our relationship with God, confess and repent where we fall short, and secondly, to encourage and build each other up, unified as one, in knowing, living out and sharing Christ’s love for us and all people everywhere.

Some suggestions for your daily devotions:

Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted or distracted.

Choose a fixed time and begin with a short hymn or song of worship to prepare your heart for receiving the Word of God.

Take your time in meditating on the truth contained in the Scripture passage. As you read the Bible passage at least twice, meditate on the life-changing truth contained in the God’s Word.

Make a sincere commitment to the Lord (you may wish to modify the suggested commitment statement, or even make your own), and then spend some time praying.

If you were particularly touched by an aspect of the reading that day, try to share your insights with at least one other person.

Keep a journal that records significant insights.

As you begin each series of “Preparation” lessons, consider reading the Sunday lesson so that you get the “big picture.”

Consider reviewing the Sunday lesson as you begin the “Reflection” series.

May you draw yourself closer to the Lord, and enjoy His peace and joy always.

Revd Canon Dr Louis Tay
Associate Vicar
St Andrew's Cathedral

Sin No More

10 February • Ash Wednesday

John 7:53—8:11

⁵³They went each to his own house, ¹but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ⁶This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

Meditation

All of us can identify with those who had brought the “woman who had been caught in adultery” (v4) “to test” (v6) Jesus — when Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground [Was it a quotation from the Torah?] and then as Jesus stood up He said, “Let him who is **without sin** among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” (v7).

We identify with the scribes and the Pharisees who “heard” (v9) Jesus’ explicit qualification for passing the judgement of capital sentence and inflicting execution, as being “**without sin**”, on witnessing Jesus bent down “once more” (v8) and wrote on the ground, “went away one by one, beginning with the older ones,” (v9). Paul went on to state, “**ALL have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23; Jn 1:14) and “the wages of sin is **death**,” (Rom 6:23).

“Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up” (v10a) and asked her, “Has no one condemned you?” (v10b). Only Jesus who went on to be our “high priest” is able “to sympathise with our weaknesses”, being “one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet **without sin**.” (Heb 4:15). Only He, the sinless Son of God and “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29) could declare to the woman caught in adultery, “Neither do **I** condemn you;” (v11). As the sinless God/Man, He alone can forgive, save and judge (Acts 17:30-31)!

Lent gives us the opportunity to turn from sin and turn to God and “bear fruit in keeping with **repentance**.” (Mt 3:8; Lk 3:8). Jesus’ intention for all forgiven saints is explicit — “Go, and from now on **sin no more**.” (v11b; Rom 8:11, 14, 17; Gal 5:1, 19-21; Eph 5:5)!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Help us daily to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus. Amen.

Action

Reflect on the fact that there are not only sins of commission eg. adultery but also sins of omission. Because God is the only God, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” And “you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

*Revd Canon Dr Louis Tay
Associate Vicar
St Andrew's Cathedral*

I Have Set Before You Life and Death

11 February • Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Meditation

The complexities of life are often man-made. We drown in commercial and worldly decisions such as what to buy and what to consume. These prevent us from searching the depths of our hearts for the real direction of our life and life's destiny. Therefore, God constantly brings us to the heart of every matter. It is a simple choice between life and death (v15). We see this relentless call to dissect all our choices to this binary reality of the ultimate choice (Ps 1; Mt 7:13-27).

Before the Israelites entered Canaan, God reminded them of the ultimate choice behind every choice - life or death. They would choose life, if they chose God and reject all that threatens to take God's place (v17), for God "is your life" (v20). To choose God is to choose to love and obey Him and to hold fast to Him (v16, 20).

The Rhine and Rhone rivers flow through Europe in different directions, but they both originate from the same Swiss mountains. The Rhone ends in the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea while the Rhine's destiny is the cold North Sea. The water in the Swiss Alps can end in two very different destinations. What makes the difference is how they begin their long journey. Likewise, our destiny begins in the deepest recesses of our hearts, where we make ultimate choices concerning God and His ways. Our destiny comes from deep within us.

The most important choice we make everyday answers the question "Who" more than "What", though we are often overly concerned about the latter. Love for God, loyalty to Him, and to turn every thought, emotion, attitude and action as worship of Him and service to Him, should be our deepest concern and the origin of true life welling up within us.

Prayer

Lord, help me to dig through the man-made clutter in my life and find the deep springs where you invite me to make the right decision to build my life on you, for your Word convinces me that "He who has the Son has life" (1 Jn 5:12, NIV). There in the depths are the secrets of my motives and pursuits. Save me from using a religious exterior to hide a pagan core. Cleanse me of anything

that will corrupt or loosen my grip on you or make me drift away from you, so that your glory and my joy may be full.

Action

God may see our daily choices differently. Get to the heart of every choice you make. Choose God each time. Always choose to be faithful to Christ, at home, in the office, in the marketplace and neighbourhood. Remember that your destiny is born and maintained in the depths of your heart, and God works in your heart.

*Bishop Emeritus Dr Robert Solomon
The Methodist Church in Singapore*

False or True Fasting?

12 February • Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1-9a

- ¹“Cry aloud; do not hold back;
lift up your voice like a trumpet;
declare to my people their transgression,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
- ²Yet they seek me daily
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that did righteousness
and did not forsake the judgement of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgements;
they delight to draw near to God.
- ³“Why have we fasted, and you see it not?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no
knowledge of it?’
Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,
and oppress all your workers.
- ⁴Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high.
- ⁵Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?
Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the LORD?
- ⁶“Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
- ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
⁸Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
⁹Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'

Meditation

In today's lesson we can see how fasting whilst a good spiritual discipline, can also have its spiritual dangers. For it to be a celebration of a spiritual discipline that pleases God, it has to transcend personal piety to that of being sensitive and mindful of the needs of others around us.

The words of the prophet Isaiah awakened in me a passion to spend and be spent for the good of those in dire need. To do that, I need to pray that God will open my eyes to see, my mind to understand, my ears to hear and my heart to respond compassionately to those around me.

There is the danger of substituting religious practices for righteous living. We are reminded of the Lord's case against His covenant people in empty ritual rather than in heartfelt obedience (Mic 6:8): "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

No worship - no preaching, no singing, no praying, no fasting, however intense or beautiful - that leaves us harsh with our workers on Monday, or contentious with our spouses at home, or self-indulgent in other areas

of our lives, or angry enough to hit somebody, is true, God-pleasing worship.

So, again, what kind of fasting should we observe?

Father John Powell, S.J., in his book *A Reason to Live, A Reason to Die* (Argus Communications, 1975), describes the kind of fast we can practice this Lent:

“Somehow I feel sure that the most direct route to (a spiritual) experience is to ask for the grace to give, to share, to console another, to bandage a hurting wound, to lift a fallen human spirit, to mend a quarrel, to search out a forgotten friend, to dismiss a suspicion and replace it with trust, to encourage someone who has lost faith, to keep a promise, to bury an old grudge, to reduce my demands on others, to fight for a principle, to express gratitude, to overcome a fear, to appreciate the beauty of nature, to tell someone I love them, and then to tell them again.”

Prayer

Lord, help us to fast in mindfulness of the needs of others, so that they may feast on the bountifulness of your love. Amen.

Action

To begin with, prayerfully observe a fast from one meal and ask the Lord to sensitise your senses to someone in need and to follow up with the appropriate action that will help meet that need.

*Rev Henry Hong
Mission Minister
Glory Presbyterian Church*

Take Delight in the Lord

13 February • Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:9b-14

- ^{9b}If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
¹⁰if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.
¹¹And the LORD will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters do not fail.
¹²And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in.
¹³"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,
from doing your pleasure on my holy day,
and call the Sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honourable;
if you honour it, not going your own ways,
or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;
¹⁴then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Meditation

Lent is associated with prayer and fasting. Yesterday's reflection was the contrast between false and true

fasting, according to God's prophetic word through Isaiah. Today we consider God's conditions for spiritual renewal and social restoration.

Note, first of all, the call for personal and social repentance. As individual believers and a community of faith, we must look within us for sins of commission and omission. These include a proud attitude, fault-finding and tongue-lashing (v9b), and a failure to help the needy and afflicted (v10a). The whole Gospel comprises Good News and Good Works, as Ronald Sider put it.

Second, if we obey God's call, the promised consequence is His enlightenment, guidance, strength, and refreshment (v10b-11). The theme of this year's devotional is "*From darkness into His marvellous light*". Here we have a picture of God bringing light from dawn till noon, as we turn toward Him and from evil ways. It is a fulfillment of what God had promised His people through Solomon (2 Chr 7:14).

Third, God promises a new construction for His people: "your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in" (Is 58:12). As we study the history of ancient Israel, we find occasional glimpses of national repentance leading to revival and restoration, but also many lapses and relapses which serve as a warning to us as Christians and the church today. Yet God's promises are perfectly fulfilled in and through His Son, Messiah Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost and to build His Church through all generations.

Finally, there is the challenge of applying the principle of Sabbath-observance faithfully, in giving priority

and pre-eminence to “the Lord of the Sabbath”, who relieves our work burdens and gives us true rest (Mt 11:28-30 and 12:8). As we ponder Isaiah 58:13-14, we find that the essence of the Sabbath was to “take delight in the LORD”. The psalmist promises that when we take delight in Him, our heart desires are truly fulfilled (Ps 37:4). Every day is “the day that the LORD has made” (Ps 118:24). Let us give each day to love and serve Him.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, help me by Your Spirit to see You more clearly, love You more dearly, and follow You more nearly — today, and all my days — to the Father’s glory. Amen.

Action

Ask God’s Spirit through these Scriptures to discern what keeps you from taking delight in the Lord, and to give you greater sensitivity to the needs of others. Thank God for these precious promises.

*Dr Ernest Chew
Advisory Elder, Bethesda (Frankel Estate) Church
Vice-President, The Bible Society of Singapore*

What Does the LORD Require of You?

14 February • First Sunday in Lent

Micah 6:1-8

¹Hear what the LORD says:

Arise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

²Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

³“O my people, what have I done to you?
How have I wearied you? Answer me!

⁴For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

⁵O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”

⁶“With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

⁸He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Meditation

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk **humbly with your God?**” Micah 6:8

Much had been said and written about doing justice and loving kindness in this day and age, but what about walking humbly with our God?

I remembered a conversation I had with someone and he said, “I believe I am the most humble person on earth.” I laughed. I thought he was joking but he was dead serious. Recognising that the Lord exalts the humble, he had tried to be humble. He would willingly do for others what most would not, and he truly prided himself for being able to do that. The irony is that, unknown to him, his “humility” was lost when he made that claim. It was Martin Luther who said, “True humility does not know that it is humble. If it did, it would be proud from the contemplation of so fine a virtue.”

What does it mean “to walk humbly with your God”? How can it be done? I believe it begins with our acknowledgement that we are sinners in need of the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus. There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. In the text above, God reminds us that it is He who brought them out from the land of Egypt (v4) and it is He who redeemed them from the house of bondage.

Secondly, I believe we need to focus on what God did for us rather than what we think we can do for God. In fact, what we think we can do for God is possible only with His help. The good news is that God delights in our coming to Him for help. God declares in 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV), “If my people who are called by my name, will

humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Prayer

Lord, humble me so that I may say “Let it be with me as according to your will.” In Jesus’ name, amen.

Action

Take time to reflect upon our need of God’s grace. Thank God for His grace in Jesus and His forgiveness and acceptance of us in Him.

When receiving the Holy Communion, remember to receive in humility, thanking Him for His grace that receives sinners such as us.

*Rt Rev Terry Kee
Bishop
Lutheran Church in Singapore*