



Global Access Conference 2015 Keynote

Isaiah 49:6: 'I Have Made You a Light Unto the Gentiles'

Joseph D'Souza



Our text for today is a prophecy from Isaiah about Jesus Christ. And this whole text, which is really verses one to seven, but we have verse six on board, which we are going to look at and how it impacts us, impacts me, impacts you, impacts the whole world. Jesus is presented there in that great Messianic prophecy as One who will come as the servant of the Lord. And in these days we have looked at that.

And He's also presented as the One who is the sword and the arrow of God. Referring to the prophetic ministry where Jesus would cut across sin and evil and right and wrong, and enter into the world of darkness and bring light, the truth, in the lost humanity.

And then, of course, He's presented here as the Light for the Gentiles and the Light for the nations, not just Light for the people of Israel, but the people of the whole world. Before I unpack for you what it means in that prophecy for Jesus to be Light for the Gentiles, I need to say a thing to you about the reading of Scripture.

We all read Scripture from our different cultural framework, and growing up and raised in a Western educational system, et cetera, et cetera, I also was taught to learn Scripture from a Western framework. And then years later, as the Dalit movement erupted, I began to read the Scriptures as the Dalits read it. One of the most beautiful things that the Dalits said to me many years ago was, "When you talk about Light, why do you always refer to Light as words?" And I said, "What do you mean?" "Yeah, whenever you talk about Jesus being the Light of the World, you're talking about the verbal communication, but for us light is not verbal. Light is seen, not heard. We never hear light. We always see light."

Huh, that's true. None of us hear light, do we? We see light. And so the Dalits, and I have written my book, have become my educators because when my journey began with them and I have a personal side to the journey and a social and a spiritual side to it. I was a preacher of the gospel for the first 10, 15 years of my life, preaching in India and the different parts of the world. Then I married a wonderful woman who came from one of the outcasts of Indian society. A tribe called Bhil. And as I've been hearing you all and reflecting, you know how it's God's providence, how He takes you from your world into another world. And my wife took me into this world which I, as part of the privileged caste, never knew about. And I never knew it existed, I was so secluded and protected from it.

And she, as she brought me into that world and kept on saying, "What's the gospel going to do for us? Two hundred fifty million people, today 300 million people. What is the gospel going to do for us? Not what the gospel is going to say for us. It's said enough. What is it going to do for us?" I didn't have the answers. And sometimes I shielded myself and had the great escape. God

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has called me to preach the gospel, not to deal with this lifeblood issues of slavery, degradation, disability.

And then years later, in '90s, when I was living in North India, India erupted in a massive caste upheaval and violence, the after-effects of which continue 'til today. And there I was, a secluded, isolated preacher of the gospel, not knowing what was going on in the streets of India, where young people, they're pouring canisters on themselves and burning themselves to death, wanting freedom, wanting hope. And I said, "What on earth is going on here?"

And as that erupted, in a very fateful meeting with the leaders of the Dalit people across the nation, I ran into a pivotal meeting. And they said, "This thing has been going on for 2,000 years, and we have not had freedom. This time, one way or another, our people are going to find freedom." But many, many, many of them feel their freedom can come from Jesus Christ. This is without any evangelist being among them. This is without any church figure being among them. These are all non-Christian Dalit leaders saying this. "Many, many of our people who have been exposed have heard or read or seen something about Jesus, feel Jesus is the One that can give them a way out of their dehumanization."

And they turn to about half a dozen of us and straightforward ask the question, "If they turn to Jesus, will you bring Jesus to them?" They didn't say, "Will you bring the gospel to them?" Sorry. They said, "If they turn to Jesus, will you bring Jesus to them?" I was not the only evangelical leader who was there. There were others. We had a big meeting later on. We called them to the center where we lived, to Hyderabad, 700 plus leaders from around the nation. Many Dalit men and women. And we said, "Explain to us what do you mean."

Before that, I began to understand how this thing worked, and I've been hearing stuff here about some people think of disability as a curse. Some people think that God is punishing you. But, here is the story, my beloved brothers and sisters, of the Dalit people for 2,000 years. The story of my wife's people. The story that's going on for 300 million people for over 2,000 years. And this is not hearsay. This is not make-believe. This is what they have been taught and believed and society teaches them, and it teaches them that, in creation, "God" did not create human beings equal.

That "God" created human beings in a hierarchy of holiness, purity, and impurity. And some he created from the head of this "God" and he called them the Brahmins. Five percent of the population. Then some he created from the shoulder of the same "God" and he called them the Kshatriyas, the rulers, five percent of the population. Then, the same "God" created another 5 to 7% of the population from his belly and thighs and these were the superior, the forward, the upward caste. And they had all rights, all privileges. They were not sinners. They had lived life so good in a

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past life. Their karma in a past life was so good. In this life, they had all rights: spiritual, social, economic. They're the privileged 150 million or 175 million people of India today. And then the same "God" decided... and that itself would have been a terrible thing for any culture to deal with.

Those of you who don't understand India, you don't understand its filth, its poverty, and the way we treat people with disability. Here it is to understand what on earth is going on and why this mandate, why this prophesy, where it is said Jesus is going to become the Light for the nations and the Light for India, becomes so important for us. Because the creation story then goes on to say that this "God" created the next group of people from his feet, and there is no political correctness in the text of scripture where it is written. So it's not make-believe. It is written.

Created from the feet of "God," the ignoble, unholy part of "God," and they're called the slave caste. And by birth, not by who they are, what they do, what education they get, but birth, they are meant to be slaves. So, when you land into India and you see the rickshaw puller, most probably he's from the Shudra caste. The bulk of India, 40% and more, is from that caste, marked as slaves. And here is the tragic outworking of this. These three upper castes have all spiritual rights. This caste that come from the feet of God have some rights, but none of them can ever become a priest. In a temple, they can never touch the holy scriptures because by their very touch, they pollute their scriptures.

This, if it had stopped there, we have a monumental crisis. But it did not stop there, because the maths don't add up, right? What about the rest? The rest are the untouchables, the criminal tribes from whom my wife comes. They are not anyone connected to "God's" body. They're cursed sinners of a past life, bearing fruit, living this, and their very presence, life, pollutes human society. They were not allowed into the temples just before independence. If a Dalit, before independence, heard the Hindu scriptures, oil would be boiled and put in their ear and they would be made permanently deaf.

So, as I talk about disability, there's another kind of disability I have to bring before you, which is the tragic part of our story. They could not enter into a temple because by their very presence they made the temple unholy. As we've been in this movement for nearly 20 years, in 2002, the situation erupted in Rajasthan and we got involved in it when we heard that a Dalit family which works with their hands and they do all this unholy labor. They clean human excrement, they work with dead bodies and mud, and they make idols. And this family was making idols, and there was a young boy there and he's saying, "I made this idol and we have been making these idols, but we cannot go to the very temples where these idols are put, and we cannot go and worship God there. And this big idol, I really want to know where it is. I want to go and see. I want to go and worship."

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So, he goes into the temple when he's not supposed to go, and the Brahmin priests slaughter him in the temple, forgetting this is 2002. Our Dalit movement in India is putting together the life, and there are many stories, I just pick up one. Our daughter and our girl, Comlesh. Able-bodied girl. Delhi, not anywhere in the villages. There's another path for her because she is Dalit. She can't go to the main street in the slum. She has to go this way. She gets Delhi belly. That's stomach problems for those of you don't know. And she has to run to the toilet many times, and the toilet is this side. Poor girl, to evening, she's so much in pain. She runs, she breaks the rule. She goes in, comes out. A gang of men are waiting. She's only nine years old. They pick her up. There's a fire nearby. And they throw her into the fire for many, many minutes. She's permanently disabled. We're putting her life back together. Her crime? She's a Dalit. Impure, cursed, sinners.

That's the background against which the Dalit leaders are saying to me and to my colleagues in India, and then we had international observers, "If they turn to Jesus, will you bring them Jesus?" And here I am, who's been preaching, trained. My world has been turned upside down. I thought I was called to preach to the common man and God says, "No, this is not your vocation. This was just the training. From now on you're for the least of these in India and all over the world. Now figure out what they're saying."

So, we're talking. We're talking and we ask, "Well, what do you want us to do? How do we do it? We don't even know where to start. Two thousand year system, 250 million of you. Where do we begin?" And I'm astounded by their request, number one, when they say, "Free our children." You know, when I was called into the ministry, the farthest thing in my mind, in my head, was a ministry towards children, for me personally. I was called to work among adults. Right? And they say, "Free our children."

And then we have this discussion on the first day and we say, "Why?" And they tell me the stories. And they tell me by the time a Dalit child is 9, 10, 11, 12, it's all over. They are permanently disabled. The word Dalit will resonate with all of us here. What does it mean? This is not a word Gandhi gave them, which they hate. Because that was a nice whitewash about the problem in India. They don't like the word "untouchable." Untouchable of God. No, they say, "We are Dalits. We are the broken." That's the meaning of the word Dalit. "We are the dehumanized. We are crushed." And believe me, they say, "We are permanently disabled by a system."

And so, now they turn around and say, "Free our children," and then of course they begin to tell all of the stories about the plight of their children and how society, home, society, Dalit-thinking within the home. We are not like the rest of the human beings. And they program their children. They go into a school, and they're very careful that they don't go where the upper caste go because if



a young kid went to where the upper caste go, they break his legs and hands, and maim him for life. So, they're saying, "Free our children."

Some years ago, you must have read, 2006, New Delhi. There's still court cases going on. It's a mess. The court case is a mess. A couple of men were kidnapping children, raping, abusing, and then killing. And then taking body parts and sending it around the world. Just outside of Delhi, 31 kids. That year was a big year, and there was a calculation that there are 1 million missing children in India that year. Every year, by record, 50,000 children go missing and these are mostly Dalits and criminal children who go missing.

When you saw the movie *Slum Dog Millionaire*, that was not just a movie. Those of you who've seen it, the taking of young kids by drugging them, taking them, blinding them. Can you imagine being born with eyes and then eyes being taken away from you so that you serve some other caste? Amputating them. What kind of a system dehumanizes another part of our own human family and says they're less than animals, they are less than us? It's the way God has made them. So they said, "Free our children."

They asked us to do 100 centers in the first year, in 10 years, where we would bring their kids, prevent disability from happening. Are you with me? Prevent their eyes being gouged out. Prevent them being sold. And then as we enter into the Dalit population, the government says only 2.8% of them have disability. Rubbish! It's over 10%! Born with disabilities. So, this journey begins. And the Dalit leaders say... and that's my first point, Light for the nations, what it means for today and for today's messed up, broken world.

Point number one, Jesus restores your human dignity. One of the big mistakes we made in our preaching of the gospel for 200 years, if it's the modern missionary movement, or for 2,000 years, if you take from St. Thomas, is that we did not begin the gospel with Genesis one, two, and three and say God made you in His own image. That's point number one. Point number one is not, "You're a sinner." That comes later. These are people who have been told for 2,000 years, "You are sinners." It's gone into their genes. And we come on, pile on, and when I say, "You're a sinner," they think, "Oh yes, it's true. I'm an untouchable."

So, here the Dalits telling us to do this and we do this, and we love them. And here is the great wonder of Jesus being the Light of the World. He does not only restore to us because of the Fall, the lost divine nature, but He also restores to us our full humanity back. Amen? Our full humanity. He makes us fully divine in the resurrection, but He also makes us fully human. Not just some ghost. He came to give our dignity back.

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So, we love the Dalit children. We embrace them. And we embrace their mothers. We embrace their neighbors and we get among them. They invite us into their communities. This is, remember, non-Christian world and a Christian movement now getting entangled with one another. And the first question is not whether you're going to come to Jesus Christ. When we do that, if they don't come to Jesus Christ, yes, we will still love them. We'll still care for them. We'll still tell them God created you in His image.

And I've said this categorically in my book, we will love the Dalits whether they receive Jesus Christ or not. Our loving them is not dependent upon them joining our faith. Our loving them is because of their intrinsic value as human beings. So, we go among them, we love them, and I get this story years ago. A group of our women bring about 300-400 Dalit women, with their children and everybody. They're all untouchables, and they're having a four-day conference. And they're loving them and kissing them and bathing them, bathing their children, et cetera.

And now, of course, we are wiser. We are told, we tell them just the Genesis story about how God created them, because it's an alternative to another "God" they heard about. And what happens? And this has happened many, many times now. Many times. At the end of the conference, all of the women turn to Jesus Christ. We don't even have to go to the gospels. We don't even have to go to the Cross. This is our God. They turn.

And the story began to unfold as we began to see, huh, I, the first job. If I am to be liked like Jesus, Jesus came to reveal God to us. Yes? He came to die for us, true. But the Bible, the St. John says He came and revealed God to us, who God really is. And you and I are in the business of revealing our God. So, that's the first one. When it is said, "He'll be the Light for the nations," He'll come into this broken world and tell everybody, "If you're the only one that was on this earth, I would still come and die for you." That's the first point.

Today I proudly say all over the world, "I am a Dalit. How are you?" That's a slogan we have taken. It's a great slogan. "I am a Dalit. How are you?"

The second thing that they said to us, and by the way, this also, as we talk about the billion disabled people and others, this has got its own demographic implication, is when the Dalit said to us and turned around and said, "Second thing is free our women." So, here I was, a preacher of the gospel, wanted to be an evangelist, taking up and saying to God, "Yes, we'll put our lives for the children."

Secondly, they're telling us now to get involved in a women's - I know evangelicals in America don't like this word - women's liberation movement. But, we Indians love it. Doesn't

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mean the same, you see. You working out of your evangelical context. We are working out of oppression and slavery, and we like to talk about liberation because Jesus is the great Liberator. And very quickly it becomes clear. They say, “Look, we are the two, three time oppressed. We are oppressed as a woman. Then we are oppressed as a Dalit. All of you are oppressed as a Dalit and then we are oppressed as a woman. Our life is over.”

And then they tell and unpack the story, and we know where it will end up. There's a belt in India, 200,000 women, girls, and women sold into sexual slavery. Not sold. Offered by custom. Every Dalit family has to take a girl child, pre-puberty, and offer it to the temple, offer her to the temple. And then an elaborate act of purification. She's untouchable in every way. They are polluting in every way. But, when it comes to sex and maiming them for life, then they are the most desired. The priest drugs her and then rapes her as an act of purification, and then she's put in the village. And then for the rest of her life she's servicing all of the pilgrims and everybody else. And this has been going on for 300-400 years in this belt. And it has called temple prostitution. Go ahead and Google it. BBC, everybody's doing.

And these women are saying, “We want Jesus to free us.” And here when they rape, there's no such thing about a desirable girl or a normal girl. They're all victims. And they're ruined for life. And they're saying, “Help us.” So, we turn to our women in India and around the world and say, “Come help us do something about this.” And they're saying, “Bring Jesus to us.” And so to go into this belt and they start organizing, it's about a 10-year old story now. And they go in and they love these women. They hold these women. They don't go in and go and tell these women you are a sinner because they are the sinned against. They don't want to do it. It's been done to them.

And they love them and they organize them and they still stuck there, and we are figuring out how to get them out with a multiplicity of program, and here is the big story: Thousands of them have been organized. Many of them have come to Christ. And here is something for you to think out of the box. Many, many of them have come to Christ. They come to worship in a church, but my brothers and sisters, there's still practice because there is no complete, real, social way out. We can't take a woman out, then leave her children, her family. It's a messy situation. But, they love Jesus. And they're coming to know Jesus. And they're working.

And so what has happened? Many stories. Last year, in one year, in one belt, 1,500 girls were prevented from being offered as a prostitute. One year. Here's what I believe. I believe... I'm really, they call me crazy, but I do believe by 2025, we will bring down this whole system of temple prostitution which is going on for 200-300 years. And these 200,000 women will be freed, because I have met with them. I've talked to them. They have been in our churches. We love

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them. They want freedom. They love Jesus Christ. You should see how they love Jesus Christ, what they say about Jesus Christ. It's an incredible thing.

And I just wonder, man, this Christianity, this thing that's happening among our Dalit women freaks out normal evangelicals. They can't understand, "What's this?" Because we got all things tidied up, right? Everything is tidied up. It's not so easy. They take some of their small girls who are born without fathers and they send it to us, and we have 50 angels who have grown up, and some of them graduating from schools with a full life. It's going on. "Bring us Jesus."

What I've experienced here - and I don't say this to flatter anybody or to make Joni and Friends, um, you know, power or anything - but, I want to say to you with the depths of my heart, I met Jesus here these days. I saw Jesus here these days. And this is the same Jesus that's among the Dalits that I experience day after day. And the mandate that we follow is from Isaiah, when Jesus again, quoting that in Luke chapter four says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He's given me the Spirit to preach good news to the poor, to preach freedom for the captives, deliverance for the oppressed, healing for the blind, for the disabled." Everybody's covered, the least are covered.

And what Doug said the other day is true. When the house of God is filled with these, the world will know our Jesus is true. And I close with one little announcement for Joni. I consider Joni a great and huge - and I'm going overtime, I won't go more than a minute - but, a giant of the faith. You know, the movement in India now, we have seen millions come to Christ. Tens of thousands of churches and everything. And we are building a huge cathedral in Hyderabad. I would love to get Joni out there one day. But there's a huge cathedral. And I need to tell you this. But, this is a different kind of church. We are making this church, building our cathedral, but we are putting plaques around of people, Christians and non-Christians, whom we think were giants among the human race.

So we are putting a plaque for Mother Teresa, 'cause she did something for the dying. Putting a plaque for William Wilberforce, slavery. Putting a plaque for William Carey, who banished sati. We are putting up two plaques for two Dalit leaders, Ahmed Kur and Mark Mafulay. They're not Christians, but they opened the keys of the kingdom, to guard for us on earth, and let God judge them where they are. But, we owe it to them.

But Joni, what you have started, what you have done, is enormous. There's going to be a plaque for you. Because this is not about just this generation. What we are doing, this is, this is for generations to come 'til Jesus come. And we want to show to the world that this is Jesus. This is the Light of the World. God bless you.