

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 4, Isaiah 6
© 2024 John Oswalt and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. John Oswalt in his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session number four, Isaiah chapter six. Welcome.

Good to see you again. It's a Monday night, so it's raining, but you came anyway. Good, thank you.

Let's pray together. Dear Father, we rejoice in your presence among us. Thank you that you are here.

Thank you that you give yourself to us. Thank you that you invite us into your presence. Thank you that you want to be known by us.

You don't want to hide in the mystery of your transcendence. You want to be known. And so, Lord, we would say we want to know you.

That's why we're here. So we pray that you will, again, by the power of your Holy Spirit, open the scriptures to us. Help us to understand, to appropriate, to apply, to live all that you reveal to us.

In your name, we pray. Amen. Well, tonight we have the luxury of one chapter, but it is a chapter that is absolutely jam-packed.

I always say to my students, there are no unnecessary words in this chapter. Virtually every word is significant. Even the ands and the thus are significant.

And so, I'm sure that we will spend all the time that we have. I've been saying that in chapters 1 through 5, we have this interchange, back and forth, between the Israel that is rebellious, arrogant, concerned with human greatness, the vineyard of bitter grapes, as we saw last week. That's this Israel.

And yet, between those pictures, we see it in part in chapter 1. Then we see it in chapter 2, 6 through 4, 1. We see it again in chapter 5, 1 to 30. Interchanged with that in 2, 1 to 5, and in 4, 2 through 6, is a very different picture. A picture of a pure and holy Israel to which all the nations are coming to learn God's way.

And so, as we come to the end of chapter 5, we are faced with a question. How in the world can this present Israel ever become that Israel? What's it going to take? Now, we've had some hints, particularly in chapter 4, the wind of fire, the wind of judgment. But not much else.

I believe that in chapter 6, Isaiah presents his own experience as the solution to this problem. I believe that's why he waits five chapters to give us the story of his own call. So, it's not a chronological order, it's a theological order.

And that's what I want us to look at this evening. The nature of Isaiah's experience and how that experience then relates to the nation. In most of these lessons, there's going to be a big chunk of background.

Because the prophets, to be understood, you need to know what's the situation that they're talking about. Remember that after Solomon's death, his kingdom broke in two. The northern part, which is the northern ten tribes, took the name Israel.

And you've always got to sort out when you're reading the Old Testament. Are we talking about Israel, the nation as a whole? Or are we talking about the kingdom of Israel, which is the northern ten tribes, between the years 930 and 722? Solomon died, give or take ten years, in 930. And that's when the kingdom divided.

The two kingdoms existed together, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, for these 200 years roughly, until Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, was destroyed in 722. Then Judah, the southern kingdom, was essentially the territory of that southern tribe of Judah, but you remember that the tribe of Simeon had its territory within Judah. So, you've got Judah, sort of like so, and here's Simeon in the middle of it.

So, there are two tribes there. They existed from 930 until 586 when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. Now, in the intervening years, the Judeans were able to push their northern border up into the area of Benjamin.

So actually, Judah, toward the end of this period, when both kingdoms were still in existence, Judah really comprised three tribes, or two and a half tribes, and the northern kingdom was sort of nine and a half. So, this is the situation when Isaiah begins writing. He begins writing, according to the date we're going to look at here in a moment, in 739.

That is 17 years before the northern kingdom was to fall. Years of chaos in every way. The northern kingdom and I'd better do one of my famous maps here, the northern kingdom was by far the more wealthy and more powerful of the two.

Judah's territory was sort of like that. Israel was that. And one of the chief issues here was the great highway that came from Mesopotamia going to Egypt came through Israel.

It did not go through Judah. Israel had more agricultural land, as I said last time. Judah was basically only good for growing grapes.

They had more commercial wealth. They had more military power. In every way, Judah was the weak sister.

But Israel was the first one to fall. And Israel is depicted in the Bible as apostate from the beginning and all the way through. Right at the outset, the first king, Jeroboam, set up golden bulls here at Bethel, of all places, and up here at Dan.

Now the scholars, I have to be a little careful not to be too sarcastic, the scholars who don't like the Bible very well say, well, that couldn't be true. This is obviously history written from a Judean perspective, and all Judeans hate all Israelites. But the Bible says there was not one good king in that 200 years.

Judah didn't do much better. Judah has five good kings in 350 years. And a couple of those are sort of on the razor blade edge of good.

But at least Judah experienced these notable revivals that sort of brought them back for a while before they sagged again into the old idolatrous apostasy. But that was enough, it appears, to keep a core of believers. So, this is the situation.

In 745, the Assyrians are waking up from about 50 or 60 years of quiet, and they are on the road again. And they are coming down this highway. There's another important highway that came up this way toward Damascus out here.

And so they're also coming down this highway as well. So that's the situation, and it's pretty scary. So Isaiah's ministry begins in the last years of the two kingdoms and then extends into the early years when Judah is alone after Samaria has fallen and Israel has been incorporated into the empire.

OK. The king, well, I should back up, sorry. I said there were about 50 years or so, 55 years, from about 800 to 745 when there were two successive weak kings of Assyria.

And Assyria pulled back. I've said before, I think Jonah had something to do with this. It fits.

But whatever the reason, you had about 55 years when after 100 years of struggle against the Assyrians, oh my. And so, you have a king in the north, the second man to be named Jeroboam. The first king of the north was named Jeroboam.

This man is also named Jeroboam. As I once said years ago in talking about this, Jeroboam the tooth. No, Jeroboam the second.

He is king of Israel and Uzziah is king of Judah. Both of them, have long, long reigns. Jeroboam's reign was about 46 or 47 years.

Uzziah's reign was 52 years. And this is a golden age with the pressure off. Both kingdoms were experiencing renovation as they had not felt it for 100 years.

Everything is wonderful. But there are two old curmudgeons in the north. One was named Amos and the other was named Hosea.

And they say, no, this is not the golden age. This is the last flush of a terminal illness. Within 50 years, this nation is not going to exist.

You can understand that those guys did not win any popularity prizes. Imagine somebody today daring to say that the United States will be wiped off the map within 50 years. I'm not a prophet nor the son of a prophet.

But, but, it's not at all impossible. You can only thumb your nose at God for so long. So those guys were saying, you think everything is wonderful? Oh, no.

No, no. It is shortly to change. And as I've said over and over again, in 745, it did change.

You got a new emperor on the throne, Tiglath-Pileser III, who said, I'm going to Egypt. So, it's in that situation that Isaiah's ministry unfolds. Now I say all that to get us ready for chapter 6. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.

There are very, very few dates in this book. So whenever you see one, you have to know it's there for a reason. Isaiah did not just throw this in for kicks.

So, why do you think he put it in? What's the significance of that? Well, definitely historical validation of his experience. Okay. Historical and spiritual validation of his experience.

Yes, he is certainly saying, this happened at a certain time and in a certain place. Maybe he was the Jeb. Uzziah.

And this was an idol of Isaiah's thinking, too. Okay. Okay.

That Uzziah had become an idol for the nation of Judah. Uzziah at Jeroboam appears to have been an excellent administrator and military leader. But the Bible gives him short shrift because it says he was a bad man.

Uzziah is depicted kind of yes and no. A good man. A believer.

A capable administrator. Gifted military leader. But somewhere about 750, he decided he was also a high priest.

Went into the temple and the priests were saying, no, no, don't do it, don't do it, don't do it. And offered a sacrifice. And was stricken with leprosy.

So, the Bible is kind of equivocal about him. It doesn't really pass the kind of judgment that it does on all of the northern kings and most of the Judean kings. But still, there's the issue.

He then was confined to the palace and his son Jotham was the front man. But it was quite clear Uzziah was the one running the show. So, this is now 739.

For six years, the Assyrian juggernaut has been bearing down. But hey, as long as good old Uzziah is on the throne, we'll find some way out of this. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.

When suddenly the rug is pulled out from under them. And the human leadership that they've been depending on is taken away. It's as though you've got this huge, huge oak.

And you're sort of resting under it, relaxing. And all of a sudden, a huge wind comes along and rips that thing up by the roots. And now you can see the sky.

And the sky is filled with black boiling clouds. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. I've told this story before, but it made a great impression on me.

When I was 10 years old, my dad made a rush trip from Mansfield, Ohio to Upland, Indiana to take my mother to Taylor University where my sister had been diagnosed with infectious hepatitis. And he turned right around and came back. There were no interstates in 1950.

He had cows to milk and chickens to feed. And as he came back toward Mansfield, a pea soup fog came in. But as he told it later, I figured that wasn't a problem.

I'd just move over to the center line and keep going. Except that there was a railroad overpass with a bridge abutment sitting on the center line. He saw it at the last moment.

We guess he has no memory of it, had no memory of it. He apparently swerved and the back of the car hit the abutment. No seat belts.

The front door sprung open. He was thrown out. And as he went out, that chrome door handle on the inside caught his thigh and ripped it open.

A bus was right behind him. And he could not stop. But he swerved and went through the other side.

Fortunately, no cars coming. And then got stopped. And they got my dad who was a hemophiliac to the hospital and basically gave him, well, they gave him four pints of blood.

His back was broken. And he spent the next six weeks in the hospital. And then came home to spend several months with a brace on his back.

My dad was a Christian. But his prayer at every meal was exactly the same. That Saturday when he came home from the hospital, he prayed a different prayer.

And one of the things he said was, thank you for showing me what things matter and what things don't matter. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. All right.

Now, what does sitting on the throne convey? Control of things. Who sits on the throne? The king. And look down now.

Notice what he says in verse five. My eyes have seen the king. In the year that the king died, I saw the king.

I would suggest to you that real sanctification cannot happen in our lives until the king dies. Whether that king is internal or external or whatever. There has to come to that point where we recognize the desperate nature of our need.

These days, of course, it's very, very unpopular to preach for conviction. But personally, I'm convinced that without deep conviction, we'll not see any need for personal holiness. Until we come to the end of our ability, our possibilities.

And again, this good land of ours has hurt us. God knows that when he says to the people. Now, when you come into this land where you live in houses you didn't build, where you eat from vineyards you didn't plant, where you gather fruit from orchards you did not set out, don't forget me.

Who needs God? High and lifted up is an important phrase in this book. Look, first of all, at chapter 57, 14. Actually, well, we'll start at 14.

What I want is 15. It shall be said, build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way. For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit. So here's the second place where high and lifted up is applied to God. Now, as

I say here in the study guide, it's possible that high and lifted up refers to the throne, but even then, it's the throne on which God is sitting.

Okay, now, look at chapter 52, verse 13. Somebody read that, please, real loud. Behold, my servant shall yield prudently.

He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. It's the same phrase here applied to the Messiah. He shall be high and lifted up.

I'll come back to that in a few months. But we have to ask, who is this servant we're talking about here? Three places in the book, high and lifted up appears. Two of them clearly referring to God and the other one to the servant.

I think that says something significant. All right, back to chapter 6. We're still in verse 1. And the hem of his robe filled the temple. How big was God? His hem, his hem is 75 feet high.

That's how high the temple was. Now, this is the only description of God in the chapter. Go back to Exodus.

We've talked about this before. Exodus chapter 24. We're told that the elders had a meal with God and saw him.

Verse 10, 24:10. They saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stone like very heaven for blueness.

That's it. No other description. I sort of see Isaiah coming floating out of the temple.

Somebody says, what happened to you? I saw God. Oh yeah? What did he look like? You should have seen the hem of his robe. Okay, what did his robe look like? You should have seen that hem.

What did his feet look like? You should have seen that hem. Words can only reach so high to the hem, to the pavement, and then they're useless. It is no accident that there is not one physical description of Jesus in the Gospels.

We humans are inveterate idolaters. Jesus did not look like Solomon's head of Christ. God is beyond description and beyond our control.

6-2, above him stood the, as I say in the note, probably seraphim means burning ones. These are probably twisting flames around God's throne. Each had six wings, with two he covered his face, two he covered his feet, and two he flew.

Now why are they covering their faces and their feet? Acknowledging their own lowliness. His holiness. His flaming servants can't look upon him.

And yet we sort of rush into God's throne room and say, How are you doing old buddy? Need any help from me today? With two they covered their feet. You can get a lot of arguments about this in the commentaries. But the majority, including me, believe that feet are symbolic of the body.

Not only do I not want to look at God in the face, I don't want God to focus his sunlight blaze on this poor mortal body either. So again, in two different ways, stressing the awesome transcendent holiness of God. And with two they flew to serve him.

In this third verse, a famous statement, two things are said. The first one, as again I mentioned in the note, is a superlative. The absolute holiest one is Yahweh of heaven's armies.

Holy? Yes. Holy? Yes. Oh, there's no one holy like him.

Every time you hear me I'll say it. Holy basically means other. But the Old Testament tells us there's only one being in the universe who is other.

Yahweh, the creator. And therefore his character determines what a holy character looks like. So this is not merely a statement of transcendent essence.

It's also a statement of transcendent character. What's the point of the second statement? The whole earth is full of his glory. Everything that's good reflects him.

What else? All right, everything that is here is reflective of him and nothing else. What else? God desires to share his glory. Yes, he puts his glory into this cosmos.

He does not hold it back and say, yeah, that thing, that's a dim reflection. No. This cosmos shares, as I say in the note, his reality, his significance, his solidity.

That's what glory means in Hebrew. It's not an evanescent glow. It's reality.

To run into God's glory is like running into a brick wall. And God has put that in his creation and wants to share it with us. So, this is a profound statement.

The only transcendent one is Yahweh of heaven's hosts. And the earth in its existence is reflective of his glory and no one and nothing else. In this day of inclusivity, that's an awfully exclusive statement, isn't it? Yes.

Yes. So how loud was the seraphim's voice according to verse 4? It shook the building to its foundation. Talk about decibels.

I can't even imagine it. The thresholds, and the foundations of the doorways shook. And what happens next? Yes.

This vision says the pinions shook. No matter what pinions, there's a lot of pins. Yeah, pins.

Yeah. And what happens next? The house was filled with smoke. What's the effect of that? What's the feeling tone? What's the emotive tone that that phrase carries? Like the column of smoke during the exodus? Whether there's smoke, there's fire.

Okay. Like incense? Suppose this room slowly began to fill up with smoke. How would you feel? Scared.

I'll be at ease. Sense of mystery and awe. There's a sense in which what's happening here is, yes, yes, we can reduce God's reality to words.

Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of heaven's armies. The whole earth is full of his glory. We can reduce him to cognition.

But in the end, the house fills with smoke. This is not a little manageable concept or set of concepts we're dealing with. That's what the builders of the cathedrals were trying to convey.

And that's why I personally have a little difficulty with worshiping God in an auditorium. The awe, the mystery, the wonder. Now, I have good friends who would say, yeah, all that churchy architecture gets in the way of really feeling a sense of worship.

I can understand that. But the point here is, when it's all over, it's a mystery that cannot be forgotten or gotten away from. Now, Isaiah reacts in a very strong way.

Why do you think he does that? I need to hear from the back rows back there. I know you can hardly see me up here. Yeah.

Why does he feel unclean? God didn't say anything about that or the seraphim didn't say anything about that. Why does he have that sense of uncleanness? Because he's Jewish. There's such a great contrast between him and God.

Remember that first day when Jesus met Peter? And after he was done using Peter's boat as a pulpit, he said, okay, Peter, let's go fishing. Again, I hope there are instant replays on some of these. I want to see it.

I want to see Peter say, look, you know about preaching. I know about fishing. You don't fish on Galilee in the daytime.

That's number one. Number two, we have just fished all night and caught nothing. Nevertheless, if you say go fishing, we'll go fishing.

Remember what happened. The nets filled up. And what did Peter say? Depart from me because of what? I am a sinner.

Jesus didn't say anything about that. But when we humans come in contact with the living God, the immediate recognition that comes to us is not finiteness, not mortality, but uncleanness. There's something about me that cannot exist in your presence.

Now, again, and I've got to confess as much guilt here as any other preacher. When was the last time you heard a sermon on sinners in the hands of an angry God? When's the last time you were brought so much into the presence of God that you had to say depart from me? In myself, I can't live in your presence. As I said last week, the word woe is a word of the funeral.

Alas for me, it's all over. And this, I've got the English Standard Version here. It says, for I am lost.

King James, if I remember correctly, says I'm undone. Some other versions say I'm dissolved. And that really is what the word means.

It means to melt. Just bloop. Like a pat of butter in the sun.

My identity cannot exist in the presence of your identity. Now, why doesn't he say I'm a man of unclean heart? Out of the heart proceeds. Jesus said that.

Yeah. Jesus said out of the heart. Out of the abundance of the heart, a man speaks.

But I still wonder, why unclean lips? Is he not identifying with all the people? Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But again, again, I think I would say I'm a man of unclean heart and I live in the midst of a people of unclean hearts.

What do you think? Lips and not tongue. Lips and not tongue. Yes, yes.

James can get the tongue. Yes? If he's a prophet, then his main job is to use a literary term and then point that down to myself. Okay.

I think that's very possible. I think he already, number one, he has heard these seraphim through lips of fire speak these amazing words. And I can sort of hear him in his own heart saying, I wish I could do something like that.

But, oh, God. Out of this mouth? I think that's a real possibility. I think the other thing is what you've all been hinting at, and that is you can babble on and on all you want to about your clean heart, but the expression of your life is where the rubber hits the road.

If the expression of your life is not clean, that gives the lie to anything else we might say. That's the reality. So, I suspect both those things are in play here.

I wish I could say something wonderful like that, but I can't. My lips, my life is filthy. Yes? The Douay version says I have held my peace.

That's interesting. I've kept quiet. Next question.

Why does he include everybody else in this? Isn't it enough that he is unclean? He's a prophet. He's been speaking to. He's been the translator, if you will, from God to the people, and from the people back to God.

Yeah? Yeah? Yes? People were told ever since Exodus that they were a chosen people, a little priesthood. And I think that Israel in some ways claimed that in almost a haughty way. And here you have a situation where Isaiah is standing before the Lord, seeing what's going on around him.

He's saying, man, these people, your people, can't even tell the truth of what is real. Yeah? Yeah? Yes? Could it be that he's really carrying them? He's really bearing them in his heart? Yeah. I think so.

People can't see your heart, but they can hear what you say. They can't see your heart, but they can hear what you say. Yes? Yes? I think all of these have real possibilities.

The only thing I would add is this, that he's saying, it's not just me as one example of a messed-up life. I am part of a whole messed-up culture. You know, we couldn't solve the problem just by taking care of me.

Because I probably would fall back into the mess unless we can change the people too. This is a big problem. This is not just an individual problem.

This is a national problem. Didn't most of the prophets lead this way? I mean, it wasn't just Isaiah feeling this way. They all identified.

Yes. Yes. The prophets, as a guild, the Hebrew prophets, identified with their people.

They identified with God and they identified with the people. We get to chapter 59, one of the darkest chapters in the whole Bible, where Isaiah speaks for the people, confessing how deeply sinful they are. There's no light here.

There's no justice here. If somebody turns away from evil, they become a prey. And that's Isaiah speaking long years after this, but speaking for the people.

Yes. Yes. And again, I have seen the king.

I've seen Yahweh of hosts. And that means I've seen myself. So, to this point, Isaiah has had a vision of human inability.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He has had a vision of the Holy God and he's had a vision of his unclean self. That's a pretty good formula.

Now, this is a trick question. What doesn't he ask for? He doesn't ask for cleansing. He doesn't ask God, oh, please cleanse me so I can serve you.

Why not? Yeah. I'll use the word hopeless. I mean, how could I ever live in your presence? How could I, being who I am in the midst of whom I am? It's useless.

There's no point in it. I'm just gone. I'm like a grease spot on the terrazzo floor.

It's over. Not with God it isn't. Not with God it isn't.

I may see my situation as hopeless. Not even worth asking God to do anything about it. One man said I'm so low I have to look up to see the worms.

But what does God do? Verse 6. One of the burning ones flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he'd taken with tongs from the altar. Now, how hot is that coal? If the seraph has to have tongs to handle it, it's hot. Now, one of my questions for Isaiah when I get to heaven, and I'm a little afraid of meeting him.

For fear he'll say to me, where did you get all that stuff? I didn't mean that at all. That's a little frightening. But anyway, one of my questions will be, which altar? There are two altars in the temple.

In the holy place, there's an altar of incense. The book of Revelation tells us that's symbolic of the prayers of the saints going up continually. So it's possible.

Remember, the temple is not just the building. The temple is the whole thing, including the court. So, when he says he saw the Lord in the temple, it doesn't necessarily mean he was in the holy place.

He might have been. But there's another altar in the temple, isn't there? The great high altar out in front. My head tells me it probably was a coal of incense.

My heart tells me it was a chunk of seared burning lamb flesh. This has touched your lips. Now, what do you think Isaiah said? Don't you think he said, oh, that's so fun.

Let's do it again. I think he cried. God, it burns.

It burns. The seraph did not come with a rose petal and sprinkle holy water on his lips. He came with fire.

Now, what's the significance of fire? We've talked about burning ones. We've talked about smoke. Here's this burning coal.

What's the significance of fire? Purification. Fire burns away the dross. It was fire that was burning, but not burning that bush that Moses saw.

It was a pillar of fire that rose over the Tabernacle at night. The burning bush. It was the holiness.

It was the holiness of God was the fire, yes. On Sinai, they say they found it. Have you heard about that? Yeah.

Yeah. I mean, it's still today. It's black.

They said the only thing that could do that would be intense heat coming down on it. I don't know if that's true or not, but I just. It's a theory.

It's a theory. Fire cleanses. Fire consumes.

Fire transforms mass into energy. Fire is endlessly fascinating. Start a fire and you'll get a crowd.

Fire. Isn't this sort of symbolic of what the Holy Spirit does to us when we are filled with him? Yes. Yes.

Yes. Tongues of fire on every head. Yes.

But again, what I want to convey to you is this business of becoming God's man, God's woman. It's not just a little trip through a field of clover. Jesus said it's a cross.

So far as I know, there are no velvet-covered crosses. That was certainly true for him. Okay.

Now, for the first time, in verse 8, he hears the voice of God. What do you think the significance of that is? Why hasn't he heard the voice of God before now? He was still in sin. His ears had been opened as well as his lips touched.

I think that's right. Again, it's speculation. The text does not say.

But it's very interesting that it's only after this experience that he hears God's voice. Well, isn't burning where he is changed? Yep. Not just sin, but many, many other ways of making him capable of serving God.

Yep. Fire cleanses. Fire also transforms.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Now, why doesn't God speak directly to Isaiah? Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Why doesn't he say, Isaiah, I've been waiting for this moment to get you? Now, get going. Why doesn't God do that? Pardon? Puff him up.

It may make him cry. Yeah. Yeah.

God spoke directly to me. Gave him free will. Gave him free will.

Yeah. He wants commitment. He is the only one there.

Is it? Don't you deserve it? Yeah. Yeah. The seraphim are saying, we'll go.

We'll go. We'll talk to him. Won't he be the only one there? He's the only one aware, probably, of what's happening.

For the first time in his life, he has a relationship with the Lord. And they're in communication. He hears.

And it's, you know, again, I've said this before. God is always consistent. But he is never predictable.

Other prophets, he did say, you, go. Pretty much that's what happened to Ezekiel. Jeremiah tried to say, I'm too young and too dumb.

And God said, never mind. But here, once again, God resists being put into a box. This is the way every call will occur.

No. Calls are individual. I do love this indirection, though.

I long at Asbury Seminary, someday, to hear a testimony like this. All I ever wanted to do was preach the gospel. All I ever wanted to do was be God's man to preach.

And God said, no, you'll be an orthodontist. And I said, oh, God, I don't want to be an orthodontist looking at people's mouths all day. God said, no, you'll be an orthodontist.

So I'm going to be an orthodontist. I hate it, but I'm going to do it. You know what I'm talking about.

All I ever wanted to be was an orthodontist. And God said, no, you'll be a preacher. So, all right, here I am.

I'm going to be a preacher, I guess. But I sure would like to be an orthodontist. It seems to me that Isaiah has had such an unexpected, unbelievable experience of grace that God wants to give him a chance to say, God, God, couldn't you use me somehow? Isn't there someplace, someplace in your kingdom that I could serve you? I'm afraid most of us, our experience of grace hasn't been deep enough for that.

He thought he was an inkblot, and now he's alive and clean. So I think God was doing this kind of on purpose. And Isaiah says, here am I, send me.

It's 8 o'clock, we'll have the benediction, go home. No, it is 8 o'clock. I've only heard one sermon in my whole life on Isaiah 6 that did not come to a screeching halt at verse 8. Here am I, send me to build a megachurch.

Here am I, send me to win all the lost in China. Here am I, send me. God said, no, I want you to keep a message.

I want you to preach a message. It's going to blind these people's eyes, deafen their ears, and harden their hearts. Lest they turn and be healed.

Wow, are we talking about double predestination here? God has determined these people are damned, and they're going to all be damned. I don't think so. Interestingly, these two verses, Isaiah 6, 9, and 10, are the most quoted two Old Testament verses in the New Testament.

Jesus quotes it, and the disciples quote it, because it helps them to understand their own experience. Now, our time is going, so I'm just going to go ahead and answer the questions, and not give you a chance to answer them. What's going on here is, if Isaiah would preach a soft, easy message, his generation would be converted.

But not really. This generation that he's talking to, if he preaches the truth, his message is going to drive them farther from God. Not because God wants them to be driven farther, but simply because of the nature of their own condition.

So, Isaiah has a choice. He can preach the truth, and his own generation will be driven farther away from God. But another generation will hear the truth, and believe, and be truly converted.

If Isaiah had preached an easy message that got a nice response from his own generation, we would not know the name Isaiah today. His book would not exist. We would know nothing about him.

Now, I have the luxury of talking like this, because I'm not pastoring a church. But I have grave concerns for the church in North America today. I think we're preaching an easy message that is filling our big buildings.

Not our little buildings, but our big ones. And I worry about the outcome when the fire begins to burn. Maybe I'm dead wrong.

I hope so. I sincerely hope so. And it's the mark of the man, verse 11.

Notice his question? Not, why? Or worse, why me? How long? How long? I'm told that in the Marines, when the drill instructor says, jump, the only appropriate answer is, yes sir, how long? And God doesn't give him an encouraging answer. Until cities lie waste without an inhabitant, houses without a people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land, and though a tenth remains in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it's felled. Oh, dear God.

Preach until the land is a field of burned-out stumps? The holy seed is its stump. Yes. Yes.

Out of one of those burned-out stumps, look there. A little green shoot. Yes, Isaiah.

The whole outcome of your ministry is going to be a little green shoot. That doesn't look well on a DS's annual report. Doesn't play well in the newspapers.

But thank God, Isaiah said, yes Lord. Yes, Lord. I'll be faithful.

And because he was faithful, we're here today. Let's pray. Thank you, Father.

Thank you for an Isaiah. A man who longed to serve you no matter what, no matter where, no matter how. And who was able in the midst of rejection, hatred, and laughter, to keep his faith in you?

And to stay so attentive to you that he could hear every word you had to say. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Isaiah.

Help us, oh Lord. Help me. Help me to feel your grace so deeply.

That the only thing to do is to throw my life into service for you. May that be true for all of us Lord. Baptize us in your grace.

And baptizing us in your grace. Enable us for joyous service wherever you happen to place us. In your name, Amen.

This is Dr. John Oswalt in his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session number four, Isaiah chapter six. you