

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 19, Isa. 38-39

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This is Dr. John Oswalt in his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session number 19, Isaiah chapters 38 and 39.

Well, it's Monday and it did rain, but thank the Lord it has stopped this evening, so we're grateful for that.

Let's begin with prayer. Father, we do thank you for your care of your creation. We thank you for the wonder of the order of the universe. We thank you for the rain. We thank you for chlorophyll. We thank you for all of the amazing structures that you have built into creation for the maintenance of life. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you that you have given us your word for the maintenance of our spiritual lives.

And we thank you, Holy Spirit, that you are here tonight to interpret your word to us. We pray, oh Lord, that you will help us. Help us each one to hear what it is that you would say to us out of these two chapters of your word.

We know that it will be different for every person. One word and yet a different application that you bring to our hearts. And so we thank you for that and trust you to do it in your own way. Thank you. In your name, we pray. Amen.

All right, we are looking at chapters 38 and 39, which are the end of section 36 through 39. We said that 36 to 39 is the mirror image of what earlier section of the book? 7 to 12. That's right.

In chapters 7 to 12, the king was challenged to trust God and he refused. And in the following chapters then are worked out the implications of that refusal leading all the way up to the Messianic Kingdom. Then we had the lessons in trust in 13 through 35.

And now we've had the examination again. And as we saw last week, Isaiah passed with flying colors as he chose to do what his father would not do. And that is to trust God in an hour of much greater crisis than his father was facing.

And as a result, was delivered from the Assyrians. Now then we come to chapters 38 and 39. And instead of the rising note that we had in those chapters, 38 and 39 are something of a downer.

Now as I said in the background, there's some question about the date of these two chapters. The Babylonian who is mentioned in 39.1, Merodach Baladan, was a Babylonian rebel who led several rebellions over the years. But it appears that he was not alive in 701, which is when the deliverance from Sennacherib occurred.

And that presents a problem if 38 and 39 are after 701. The most likely date for these kinds of events, given Merodach Baladan's sort of fluctuating career, is actually about 710. This would mean that chapters 38 and 39 actually occurred 10 years or 9 years before the events of 36 and 37.

So, the correct sequence would be this. If we have a chronological sequence here. That actually the last event that we're talking about here is the deliverance from Sennacherib.

So the question is, if that's correct, and not everybody agrees to that, one of the vexing problems is the Bible gives us conflicting dates for Hezekiah's lifespan. With virtually every other king we can understand what's going on. But with Hezekiah we cannot.

You've got one date that says that he began his reign in 726 before Samaria fell. And therefore ended his reign in about 696. But we've got another suggestion and that is that he began his reign about 716 and ended it about 686.

If this set of dates is correct, then that would argue that the extra 15 years he was given was given in 701. So whether other evidence confirms it or not, it would say that yes, Merodach Baladan was alive in 701 and that he was given the extra 15 years there. If, in fact, these events occurred in 710, then the 15 years being given in 710 and his death in 696.

So there simply is no way to reconcile these dates. One set is right, the other set is wrong, and we don't know which is which. Usually in cases like this, we can say, well, he began to reign as a co-regent with his father and then took over when his father died.

But the text doesn't support that. It does with some other kings, but it doesn't support it here. So, you simply have to pay your money and make a choice as to what's going on here.

If indeed they are out of order chronologically, then Isaiah has done this on purpose, and he has a reason for doing this, and we'll talk about what I think is the reason. And I think that these dates are the correct dates and that indeed these events did occur before the deliverance from Sennacherib. I've been wrong at least once before, so don't stake your life on this.

Okay, we'll talk a bit more about that in a few minutes. Chapter 38, verse 1. How much qualification is there in this prediction? None. Set your house in order, for you shall die, you will not recover.

Any questions on that? That's pretty clear. But it didn't happen. Are God's promises not reliable? Yes, they are, okay.

All right, so there's an implicit qualification in this, huh? He doesn't say it, but it's implied. Okay, all right, in the same way, Jonah went and said Nineveh, 40 days and you're going to be burned down and I'm glad. Okay, God is not interested in him dying, but he is interested in getting his attention, so he will serve him.

Okay, all right, now I'm with you there, but only to this extent. Does Hezekiah repent of anything? Well, does he? I don't think so. Yeah, yeah, he doesn't say I'm going to walk with you, he says I have.

And I think God responds to faithfulness and does not really want to condemn. I think someone who has lived and desires to live further and in his own heart he believes he can even do more, that plea God listens to. Okay, okay.

All right, all right, yes? He supposedly in places has told that he was the cause of the Babylonian invasion. Okay, so then also some commentators say he was the one who martyred Isaiah. Yeah, that's traditional.

Well, maybe God had a better idea. Yeah, maybe it would have been better for Judea if Hezekiah had died. I don't want Hezekiah to die.

Oh, yes, and I think that's and that's exactly my point that what we see here is this continual interplay between God's sovereignty and our response to that sovereignty oh Yeah, it's a lot tricky Okay Yeah, yeah, yeah Yes, yeah Let's push on now. What is it? What is it that the Lord responds to? I'm not I'm not leaving this point. I just want to take us another step farther.

What does the Lord respond to? All right, he responds to a prayer, a Prayer Obedience, Faithfulness Obedience. So we said earlier he responds to repentance, and there's no question of that That's what Jonah says, and that's what the passage from Jeremiah says Unquestionably God will change an announcement of destruction in view of genuine repentance What's happening here makes it a little more complicated Because Hezekiah does not repent I mean there's no question of that There's no I've done wrong, and I'm going to quit that it's not at all rather Hezekiah makes a claim on the basis of his own previous behavior and God responds to that Now again what I'm wanting to say to you and what I'm wanting us to think about is that Sometimes we think about God's promises as kind of a lockstep kind of thing and I think what the Old Testament and the Bible tells us is that this walk with God is a relationship and Relationships are never clean. They're always messy. I Don't mean unclean.

I mean messy They're never neat. They're always complicated and again God is in relationship with us and God is willing to adjust God's willing to give in response to everything we are and To me that's good news. It's not neat Well God said it and I believe it and that sells it it's not that neat But it does say that God is Involved with us he cares about what we think he's going to adjust his actions to us in a variety of ways and He is that kind of a being he is not a force with a mask on so That's one of the things I think it's important for us to recognize here now This means that it was very tough being a prophet You know Isaiah has not even gotten out on the front porch before God says go back in there and tell him he's got 15 years God I'm going to look like an idiot That's all right.

Who are you working for? So, it's not neat but nevertheless, it's rich and fulfilling Okay Now we've listed some things here I asked you what are the elements in? Hezekiah's life that God responded to favorably. What are they there? Let's just work right down through there. What's number one? No, that's not number one Walked before you.

Mm-hmm So then he describes this walk Walked before you I heard someone said in truth or Faithfulness Okay Yeah, a whole heart with a whole heart So walked is qualified by those two And then he says I've done Good I've done good. Yes In your eyes not in my eyes, I think that's quite important in the end. It's not what I think about what I've done that counts It's what God thinks about what I've done.

All right Let's go back and look at Genesis 17 1 the Bible Is so fascinating in the way everything is linked together Some of you were here for the Abraham study and you may remember Chapter 16 is the Ishmael tragedy Here comes 17 13 years have passed 13 years that the Bible does not say a word about 13 years of silence from God don't know But when Abram was 99 years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him I am God Almighty Now what comes next? Walk before me and be blameless I wonder if the king knows his Genesis he was supposed to the Kings were supposed to have themselves copied out a copy of the Torah and Kept it Now it appears that Hardly any of them did it. What does that mean? No walk before God Okay, you're getting ahead of me Those are descriptions of this but what is that? Okay. Why does he say walk before? God, why not walk with God? Okay a demonstrating faithfulness Okay, okay Wasn't a straight line Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes.

Yes. Yes Yes, and I suspect there's some imagery of the shepherd here that the sheep Walks before the shepherd You have an interesting statement I will guide you with my eye Is the sheep constantly looking over his shoulder where's the shepherd looking now Why describe the relationship as a walk though, I want to say I've lived before you All right. It's a journey It's a journey One of the things that I think we as Evangelical Christians have constantly got to combat is the idea that salvation is a position I'm in a saved Position and I'm going to rot right here till the bus comes to get me.

I don't think the Bible maybe once or twice would support that idea, but Most of the time in both the Old and the New Testament Life with God is described as a walk. That means you're going from someplace to someplace It's a marathon. That's right.

It's for the long pull it is Again, you can pull out a lot of descriptions here and we don't have time to do that But it is I did a study several years ago, and it's amazing All of all the occurrences of verbs meaning walk in both the Old and the New Testament Three-quarters of them are metaphorical Only a quarter of them are actually describing somebody walking down the road Three-quarters of the references are about your life with God So he's saying I've been in this with you God for the long pull and I've been your sheep walking before you in the path that you direct and again Your rod and your staff they comfort me One of the ways that a shepherd directs the sheep is with his staff Stay out of the ditch there. So so that's one of these key elements. I've been in this long-term relationship with you.

I have been walking with you Okay. Now, now we get to what you wanted to talk about in the beginning We're describing this walk. What kind of a walk? We've talked a little bit about this before but let's talk about it some more How do those two relate to each other? How do truth and faithfulness relate? All right, if you're untruthful, you're unfaithful.

Good good. What else? Okay, okay. Okay in the in the Bible Truth is Regularly something you do.

It's not first of all something you say It's something you do that is to be true to someone to be faithful to them to be absolutely reliable the Hebrew word that runs and This is the same Hebrew word Has that basic meaning of Dependable Reliable so God in my walk You have been able to depend on me I've been true to you and I think the implication is very clear other people have been able to depend on me and This is the thing that runs right through the Old Testament is we have met a God Who is true? Now the gods by definition are untrue Because the gods are simply human beings written large and human beings are not very reliable Human beings are tragically committed to lies in their relationships But what the Hebrews are saying is can you believe it? Can you believe we've met a God? Who keeps his word? We've met a God who does what he'll say and does what he says he'll do What that means is the Hebrews didn't create this God If you create a God then he's going to be a human just bigger But if you have a God who is not what we humans are They didn't create that God He dropped himself on them so I'm mimicking you in my walk I'm convinced this is why adultery is the sexual sin Now if I were going to pick out one sexual sin to represent all the rest I think I'd pick out one of the nasty ones But God says adultery is the one that represents all the rest why Because it's breaking faith It's being untrue and in that sense then is a Terrible offense to the God who is true. I've walked before you in Faithfulness, I've walked before you with a whole

heart Now I gave you some references there. We won't take the time to Go look them up, but the first one in 1 Chronicles 28:9 is David Praying for Solomon that he will have a whole heart in 29 19 Solomon asks for a whole heart in first Kings 8:57 and 6 to 61 Solomon prays that the people will be able to serve God with a whole heart and then here comes Perhaps the saddest verse in all of Scripture first Kings 11 for Solomon loved many foreign women and When he was old his wives Turned his heart away from God and his heart was no longer whole 1514 is Asa Who served God with a perfect heart even though his performance left a few things to be desired But his heart was whole in 2nd Chronicles 19 9 Jehoshaphat is sending out teachers to teach the Torah through the land and he says do this with a whole heart Now, what are we talking about here? The King James had no problem.

The King James says a perfect heart But of course, we know today. Nobody's perfect. So the Modern the contemporary translations are all over the map with this word Faithful loyal devoted wholeheartedly And ESB has whole heart But the point of the thing is It's a fascinating Hebrew verb it is on the root the same root as shalom I've talked with you about this before I'll talk with you again shalom The translation peace is a very weak one Because in English peace only means absence of conflict Shalom is to be put together to be united And so if you have the shalom of Christ has put your broken pieces together And made you whole This is a verb their hearts are shalamed If you've got a debt that is unpaid How do you shalame it? You pay it Something is hanging Something is out of balance, but when you pay the thing you have put it in balance.

So, what about a heart that is shalamed It is undivided And that's why the King James could say perfect. It's all for God No ifs no ands no buts but a heart which is like Solomon's in his old age is partly for Yahweh and Partly for the gods it's divided So what the Bible is saying to us is you can be Entirely God's You can belong to him Completely without arrival without a limit. That's Christian perfection Long and short can anyone have a whole heart and the answer is yes. Does that mean you perform perfectly? No Does that mean you understand perfectly? No, but it does mean your heart is all God's, and remember again some of you stick with me long enough.

You're going to get these points the heart The heart This is a little misleading here because we look at that and think Valentine's Day The heart is the core of human personality This is where you think This is where you feel this is where you decide We hear whole heart and we think oh you really feel entirely fuzzy toward God No, the central core of your person is All God's that's what it's saying and that's exciting That's exciting Because clearly it is possible. God doesn't say Hezekiah you liar. Is that my phone? Don't think so No So I just want to say we we Wesleyans We need to quit apologizing It's in the Bible the core of your personality can belong Completely to God in an undivided fashion I said again, does it mean we perform perfectly? No, does it mean we understand perfectly? No, It's talking about belonging now again, I think sometimes we make it we make it too Super spiritual hey, I can I can stand

before you tonight and Testify without any question My heart belongs completely to Karen Kennedy Oswald.

I'm hers That's right, yeah, but I mean I mean Does that mean I'm a perfect husband well, she's not here so yes it does She'll see the tape and I'll pay for that. No, I won't. No, I won't but you know no big deal I am hers and The rest of you ladies can be relieved So Why can't we see that about God I belong to him No limits no rivals come in and I Have done what is good in your sight? Okay 40 minutes on three verses not bad.

Okay There it is, so I think this is this is If Hezekiah can say that why can't every person in this room say that I don't think there's any reason not to it except for perhaps a Limit of faith If he can do it for Hezekiah, he can do it for you and God will respond and say yes You're right, you're right Okay So we push on Verse six, I think kind of supports the idea that these chapters may have occurred before 36 and 37 If they're after 36 and 37, he has already delivered the city from the Assyrian Okay, I talk in the background about this funny not a sundial but a sun Stairsteps is what it appears to have been Okay, let's come then. He's been healed. He's been given 15 years What's the tone of this poem in verses 10 through 20 All Four Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah Yeah, it's pretty somber Where would you say that second part begins Well, it's still pretty somber after 16, isn't it 19 I think there we finally find.

Thanks, but we've had Nine verses Yeah, I mean this guy's just been given 15 years You'd expect him to be I think I would expect him to be jumping up and down But we have very little. Thanks your except verse 19 Yeah, yeah, I'll grant you 17 to Yeah, yeah I see he's saying God intended to take my life. I appealed To his mercy and he healed me praise the Lord.

Okay, that's pretty good. That's pretty good the problem for me is that you've got nine verses of he intended to take my life and two verses of thank you Yeah Okay, okay, okay What strikes me here is that this is primarily a reflection on mortality. I must depart in the middle of my days I Will not see the Lord.

I'll look on man no more. My dwelling is plucked up From day to night you bring me to an end Like a swallow or a crane. I'm moaned like a dove.

My eyes are weary Lord. I'm oppressed What am I going to say? He himself has spoken to me and he's done it now. I don't think that's the healing He's talking about he's saying God said you're going to die.

Oh, what am I going to say about that? Well, I'll walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul Wow This is a guy who's just been delivered from death. Oh Restore me to health and make me live it was for my welfare that I had great

bitterness. I think I think Bonnie that comes closest to the idea that God told him this to get his attention To focus on what matters and sort of to refocus his life.

I think you could understand Verse 17 on that point it was for my welfare and may well be but What strikes me here is that this is? More about the fact that Hezekiah is a mortal Than about deliverance Which is I think significant Because the question is who is that? Unto us a child is born Who is that child? Remember that's back a has is he The Messiah, I mean he has proven that God is trustworthy He's trusted him against all the odds and has saved the nation by his trust Okay? Okay number so 38 seems to be saying a Good man, genuinely good But in the end a mortal man He's going to die. He may be given 15 more years, but What this poem talks about is but the day's going to come Okay Let me Before we leave I asked the question What does this say to us about how we ought to conduct our lives? Even though we believe in heaven, which Hezekiah I'm quite sure did not didn't know about it really This is you see this in the Psalms God you can't let me die because nobody praises you in the grave or she'll So you need my praise Okay, but if we go beyond that and say no we do have the benefit of further revelation We know there's a blessed heaven.

What is there still here for us? Okay That's good That's good, that's good Yes, yes, yes, this is a real world and we need to walk with him now, yes, yes. Yes. Yes.

One of CS Lewis's great lines is heaven begins now and hell begins now Yes, yes, so Yes walk in that life of fellowship now every day in The sense that this is a real world It's not a shadow world that we wait to get out of and get someplace else Okay, good enough so chapter 39 Why did the Babylonians come What does verse 1 tell us? They heard that he had been sick and had recovered Now that's fascinating Babylon is a long way away Straight across the desert. It's almost 600 miles by road up and down the Euphrates River. It's nearly a thousand miles So this must have been a pretty big deal Very well, very well could be.

Yes. Yeah Yeah, yeah, hey wait a minute I did you hear that that Judean guy over there, you know way over there on the Mediterranean. He was sick and he was recovering death Everybody knew it.

He was going to die and he recovered. Do you suppose they know something we ought to know? So, it's very clear and how does Hezekiah respond? He acted as though all the possessions were his instead of belonging to God Acting like he deserved to recover Yeah, I have the feeling He was blown away Wow Babel We finally got the attention of the big boys Because even though Babylon was under the thumb of Assyria it was kind of like Washington DC in New York City Babylon always knew that they were the really sophisticated Cultured brilliant good-looking smart people and those clods up in Assyria. They may be having us under their thumb at the moment, but everybody knows Babylon is where it is. I mean little dinky Judah

Wow Whoa, here is our chance How ironic You're going to show Babylon your wealth You're going to show Babylon your armaments and I just I just have a picture of those Babylonian guys kind of snickering You Remember what the Assyrian said to him? Hey, you know if you had 2,000 guys to put on horses, we'd give you 2,000 and we'd still beat you What happens when we try to impress the world Self-aggrandizement, that's right.

Yeah. Yeah, but How does the world respond? They are not impressed. They are not impressed Oh, yes, if it serves their ends, yes.

Yes, and it's so often the world is going to be slicker They're going to be more technically advanced. They're going to be all these kinds of things and We come off looking like country clods trying to impress them with stuff they've already got. What they didn't have was Yahweh and Hezekiah kept his mouth shut. I wonder if he was embarrassed we often are Right Yep could well be good.

Well, be but here was the opportunity to declare the glory of God, which is what? Way back in chapter 2, all the nations are going to flow to Jerusalem to learn God's Torah and They will say Let us walk with the Lord And he blew it Yes, yeah, yeah Got the big head a Contrast to Daniel. Yes. Yes.

Yes, very definitely and So Isaiah says what did you show him? They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses. I didn't show him I wonder if he's beginning to get a little uncomfortable here and is trying to brazen it out.

I don't know Isaiah said well, that's a good thing because the Babylonians are going to own it all one day Looking in your closets The days are coming when all that is in your house that which your fathers have stored up till this day Will be carried off to Babylon Now that's pretty shocking Assyria is the problem here It's Whichever date you take 710 701 Assyria is the problem. So, what's that prophecy about anyhow? Now, you know what the critics will say The critics will say well somebody writing 150 years later knowing that it was Babylon that took it wrote that in back there Well, if you don't buy that which I don't What's the point of bringing it up here Yes, there's another reason as well and that's because 40 to 66 is Addressed to the exiles in Babylon. So Here in 39 That's sort of we're transitioning We've been talking about a Syria, but I have to tell you a Syria is not the big issue here 150 years from now the big issue is going to be Babylon When we talk about this exile business when we talk about the danger of trusting the nation's The ultimate danger for you is going to be out there in the future and you need to know it And when it comes know that God knew it in advance We've said before that one of the purposes of prophecy is so that when it happens You're not blindsided You're ready and That's what's going on here Nothing will be left says the Lord and some of your own sons who will come from you whom you will father Shall be taken away and they shall be eunuchs What can't eunuchs have Offspring What line is Hezekiah in the line of David it's going to be on

the throne forever Some of your sons are going to be eunuchs in Babylon Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah the word of the Lord that you have spoken is good Well, very nice for he thought There will be peace and security in my days Oops It's a good word because it's not going to happen to me So is Hezekiah this good man? This man who has served the Lord With a whole heart is he the Messiah No He is mortal and he is fallible trust Cannot be one time It has to be a way of life And that's the question that arises We now know God is trustworthy.

No ifs no ands no buts. It's been proven Hezekiah has proven it But the question is what will motivate us To a life of trust Not just once in the crisis But to a life of trust and That really is where we're going in the next part of the book We've the trust thing has been demonstrated. God is trustworthy No question But the question is what will motivate us? to a life of trust And then beyond that What will make it possible? to live such a life And as we get into 40 to 66, we're going to see these questions coming up Yes, exactly, exactly and that that again then is the point and that man cannot save the nation So in a real sense 7 to 12 ends with the promise of the Messiah 36 to 39 ends saying Hezekiah trusted, but he's not the Messiah We're going to have to have more Revelation to know who the Messiah is and that's what comes in these next chapters Yeah Something happened So it probably means blessings from God We really have to be careful what we do precisely. And this is again the old story of be careful what you pray for you may get it oh Yes, oh yes, oh yes I When you talk about pastoral Falls It's almost boring that those kinds of things often happen after a great revival After some great success you let down your guard Yeah, yeah I suspect it would kind of depend on the person Some people would say eat drink and be merry for tomorrow.

We die, other people, I think it would They probably would become fatalistic and some people might profit from it But yeah The old you've got two years to live so what's your bucket list well Not too sure about that, but yeah And I always again the whole question of Manasseh is an interesting one It says he was 12 when he began to reign So If he's born during this time then Hezekiah had three years before this child is born Says a guy too busy to spend time with the kid or is this you know one of 20 royal children All kinds of interesting questions there did Hezekiah not have a son and Is that why he was so terrified of dying But then the irony of course is so Isaiah says well, yeah, you got a son, but your descendants are all going to be eunuchs Oh Well, that does change things but there it is if we look for a Messiah We have to look beyond human perfect ability Okay

We'll pray Father Thank you that we can have a whole heart for you No, ifs no ands no buts all yours Thank you but we pray Lord that you will to the extent that that's true for any or all of us you'll also give us insight and understanding to enable all that enable us to understand all that that involves and all that it can imply Thank you for Hezekiah. Thank you for the degree of faithfulness that he did manifest Help us to be at least as faithful as He even to the end in your name, we pray, Amen

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