

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 21, Isa. 42-43

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This is Dr. John Oswalt in his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session number 21, Isaiah chapters 42 and 43.

Father, we thank you for your presence here among us. We thank you for your desire to communicate with us. We thank you, Lord, that you have done so through your inspired word and you intend to do it again as your Holy Spirit applies your word to our hearts. Help us this evening and we'll give you thanks. In your name, Amen.

Well, when we stopped last week, we were in the middle, more or less, of chapter 41. We noticed how it begins in verses 1 through 7 with the announcement of the coming of Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon, and the nations being terrified of that fact and rushing to build idols.

In verse 8, though, the Lord speaks and says, But you, Israel, my servant, have Jacob whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abram, my friend, you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, you are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off. The question that I asked here was, didn't the exile mean that God had cast them off? I hear some muttered no's. Why not? Why not? Why not? Okay, he wanted to bring them back.

We've talked about this throughout the book that judgment is never God's intended last word. Judgment is never God's intended last word. So, the purpose of the exile was not to destroy them, whatever they may have thought.

Rather, the exile was intended, if you go all the way back to chapter 4, he's going to refine them with a wind of burning, a wind of fire. So, the exile is not intended to destroy them, the exile is intended to refine them. You might remember what happened when Isaiah lay on the floor of the temple and said, I am undone, I am dissolved.

What happened next? Yes, the angel came, not with a rose to sprinkle holy water on his lips. He came with a burning coal off the altar and I'm very confident that Isaiah did not say, oh, do it again, it feels so good. I think he cried.

I think he said, it burns. But God did not intend to destroy him, God intended to refine him. Now look again at what is it God says about them in verse 8. Who are they? My servant, my chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend.

And he repeats it again in verse 9. You are my servant; I have chosen you and not cast you off. Now, anybody remember what did I label this section, chapters 40 to

55? Grace, the motive and the means of salvation. Now, what is the purpose of servanthood? The question that we ask at the end of chapter 39 is, what can motivate us to make trust a way of life and not just a one-time deal in a crisis? And I'm suggesting to you that the answer is grace.

The kind of grace that God is displaying to these people. They think they're cast off and God says, no, you're the chosen. They think that God intends to destroy them and God says, no, no, you're my servant.

Far from casting you off, I've chosen you to be my special servant. So, what does it mean then in verse 10? Fear not what? I am with you. And then in verse 13, fear not what? I will help you.

And we talked about that last week. The wonder that God doesn't say, just sit down and shut up and I'll do it for you. Nor does he say, all right, I'm going to sit here and criticize while you do it.

No, he says, I'll help you. I want you to be involved, but in the end, I'll be accomplishing it. Now, in verse 14, we have the first occurrence of the Holy One of Israel.

It occurs again in verse 16 and again in verse 20. So, three times here, that phrase, the Holy One of Israel occurs. And I want just to call your attention to it before we jump in to ask you eventually, what do you think is going on here? Why that repeated phrase? Why emphasize the Holy One and why the Holy One of Israel in this context? Okay, now in verses 17 through, excuse me, 11 through 16, God says two things about them in regard to the nations.

So, number one, what about the nations in verses 11, 12, and 13? What does it say? You're not going to find them. The ones who are seeking to destroy you are going to disappear. You can't find them.

Then in verses 15 and 16, what about the nations? God is going to use Israel to judge the nations. That's a theme that you find over and over again in the prophets. Number one, the nations are going to discipline you, but the nations themselves are going to be judged.

And in the end, God is going to use Israel to judge the nations. God is going to use you to judge the nations. So, as you read the prophetic literature, just be conscious of that flow.

God will use the enemy nations to discipline you, but they're not going to get out of it scot-free. They are subject to the same moral laws you are subject to, and eventually, when He redeems you, He's going to use you to judge the nations. Now, a

fourth theme that is not present exactly in this passage, but it is you will witness to the nations.

You will be evidence of God and God's character. And I think I'd like to say you will bear witness to the nations because that's a little different in most of our thinking than you will witness to. Most of us have this idea of witness is you go up and grab somebody by the necktie and say, do you know Jesus? That's not quite what Isaiah has in mind, as we'll see.

Okay, 17 through 20 is a poem, a poem of deliverance. What's the atmosphere that you see there? What do you sense as you read that poem? What ideas and feelings are there? God is going to meet their needs. In what manner, on what level is He going to meet their needs? Personally, yes, yes.

Abundantly, huh? Abundantly, yes. Super abundantly. Rivers on the heights, fountains in the valleys, make the wilderness a pool of water, dry land springs of water, cedars and acacias and myrtles and olives in the wilderness, cypresses in the desert.

An overabundance of God's blessings and one of the things particularly is water and fertility. These, of course, in the ancient world of the Near East were priceless commodities. So, they are saying, I am a dead stick.

I've been cut off, carried off to another land, I'm a dead stick, and God says, no you're not. Don't leave me out of the equation. Okay, in 21 to 29, we come to the first of the so-called cases against the idols.

About five times between chapter 41 and chapter 46, you have God presenting a case against the idols. We're going to see a second one in chapter 43 that we'll end with this evening, or come close to ending with, but here it is. So, remember the situation.

God has been defeated. He's been defeated by our sins. This chapter says, no, no.

Your sins are His chosen. You're His servants. You're His friends.

No, no. Your sins have not defeated Him. Well, if our sins haven't defeated Him, then the Babylonian idols have defeated Him, and we're addressing that question here.

God calls the gods into court, and He says we're going to find out who is God here. So, verse 21, set forth your God, and you will find out who is God. Set forth your case, bring your proofs, let them bring us.

Now, here's what they're supposed to do. Tell us the former things, or declare to us the things to come. Do good or do harm.

Do something that we may be dismayed and terrified. Behold, nothing and an abomination is He who chooses you. I stirred up one from the north, and he's come, from the rising of the sun, and he'll call on my name.

He'll trample on rulers as on mortar, as a potter treads clay. Who declared it from the beginning that we might know, and beforehand that we might say He is right? There is none who declared it, none who proclaimed it, none who heard your words. I was the first to say to Zion, behold, here they are, and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news.

But when I look, there's no one, among them, there's no counselor, who when I ask, gives an answer. Behold, they are all a delusion, their works are nothing, and their metal images are empty wind. So, what is God saying that He wants the gods to do? He wants them to predict the future.

Tell us sometime in the past, formerly, when you made a specific prediction that in fact came true in the future. Now there may be something else going on here as well. I think there is.

I think there may be also, an explanation of where the world came from, and explain what the eventual goal of life is. Now this is pretty sophisticated. The gods, as I've told you over and over again, are simply personified forces of the cosmos.

The sun, the moon, the stars, the moon, the stars, passion, fury, power, all those things. Well, can the sun tell us where it came from? Of course not. Can the moon tell us what the end will be? No.

Because they're part of this world, this cosmos that is. In the same way, they are unable to imagine something that has not yet happened. The pagan worldview assumes that everything is the same forever.

We came from nowhere, and we're going nowhere. There was no purpose in the origin of the cosmos, and there's no purpose in its continuing to operate. Now that's pagan, and it's very, very modern.

That's basically how the person on the street operates. Life came from nowhere, and it's going nowhere, so enjoy the trip with the maximum of comfort, pleasure, and security. That's all there is.

So, who could possibly predict what's going to happen in the light of what has happened? Only a being who is outside this circle. Anybody inside cannot tell you

where it came from, why it exists, or where it's going. Only somebody with a perspective from the outside can say, oh, and especially if that one who is outside is the creator.

And so he says, just once, give us evidence that your God specifically told the future, and it happened. Now, one of the commentators, a very famous German commentator, says, you know, this is just, this is really too bad. Isaiah knows perfectly well, or second Isaiah knows perfectly well, that the gods predicted the future all the time, and yet he makes this kind of egregious overstatement.

Well, yeah, the gods predicted the future, like Jean Dixon predicted the future, remember her? And they always predict it with enough of a fudge factor that whatever happens, they were right. But God specifically predicted the exile, remember chapter 39? The exile of the dead. And he said, well, Babylon.

The exile to Assyria? Say no. The exile where? Babylon. In 701 BC, or thereabouts, he specifically predicted exile in Babylon.

Babylon was simply a rebel city in the great Assyrian empire at that point. The Assyrian empire had another 70 years to run, but God says exile in Babylon. Now, of course, the people said no for two reasons.

Number one, we couldn't go into exile because that would mean the end of the promises, so it's not going to happen. Number two, we're not going to go into exile in Babylon because Babylon is not a world power, so it's not going to happen. It did.

He also predicted the return from exile, and their response was just the same. They were quite consistent. Nobody ever returns from exile.

That's the whole point of it. Exile is to absorb that culture into the larger culture of the empire. The purpose of exile is to destroy you as a distinctive people with a distinctive language and a distinctive religion.

So if we were to go into exile, which can't happen, then there's no way we could ever come back from exile. And number three, your deliverer is a Persian named Cyrus. Who? Cyrus the Great.

Cyrus the Great was a Persian. What? Where? God says, and that's why I believe it's important not to believe in second Isaiah. You see, those who believe in Second Isaiah believe it for two reasons.

Number one, it's impossible for somebody to write to people 150 years in the future. And number two, it's impossible for anybody to make specific predictions. That means that the person who wrote this then was lying.

He knew God had not predicted this in the past, and he hung his whole case upon God's ability to predict the future. He's not going to lie. There's something wrong with that argumentation somewhere.

Now, if I get to heaven by God's grace and meet second Isaiah, I'll not turn in my ticket. But I think the argumentation of the book demands that this was written far, far in advance. Okay, so that's the argument.

That's what is made to hang on. God shows that you are more than just personified forces of the cosmos. And the way you'll do that is by showing that sometime in the past you specifically predicted the future and it happened.

And in matter of fact, you can't. But I, Yahweh, have done it. That's the case.

Questions or comments there before we push on? Yes? Yes, sir, please. Two things. Is the reference in 41:20, is that another passing reference to Cyrus? Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.

And the predictions get more and more specific as we go along. When we get to chapter 44, he names him and talks about his conquests and so it's moving on. And the other thing, a couple of us here missed it.

This is the first of the cases against the idols. You say there are five times between chapters 41 and 49? 46. 46.

Thank you. Okay. Chapter 41. Excuse me, 42. Let's turn the page. Yes.

Okay. Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights. Okay.

Who has been the servant thus far? Israel. The nation Israel. And the emphasis has been on the benefits that they're going to receive.

God's going to be with them. He's going to help them. He's going to use them to judge the nations.

He's going to deliver them. So, the benefits of being God's servant. Now look at this servant.

I have the ability to put my spirit upon him and he will bring forth... Here's this word we've talked about in the past. He will bring forth Mishpat. As I've said six times before and will say a dozen times more before June, justice is not a bad translation for that word.

It's just not big enough. Because in English justice means simply legal equity. Mishpat means much more than legal equity.

It means God's divine order for life. Does that involve legal equity? Absolutely. Does it involve retribution? Absolutely.

Does it involve balancing the books? Absolutely. But it's more than all those. So this servant is going to restore God's order in the world.

He will not cry aloud, lift up his voice or make it heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break. A faintly burning wick he will not quench.

He will faithfully bring forth Mishpat. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established Mishpat. I think he's trying to make a point.

In the earth and the ends of the earth, the coastlands. What? What do they do? Wait. What does wait mean? Trust.

And what do they wait for? His instructions. His Torah. His covenant law.

Now the question is who is this servant? What benefits does this servant receive according to these first four verses? That's right. None. None.

What is said about this servant? The mission. This servant has a mission and the mission is to restore God's Mishpat on the earth. Is that the nation of Israel? Good answer.

No. So what does the Lord say about this servant? Verse six. What does God say to this servant? I have called you in righteousness.

I will take you by the hand for what? A covenant to the people and a light to the nations. Israel is not a covenant to the people. In fact, I have said it in various contexts.

The old covenant is broken and it cries out for satisfaction. God, you have to kill them. They swore in blood they would keep that covenant and they've broken it.

So God if you're just you've got to kill them. And a new covenant, one that is written on our hearts and not on tablets of stone, calls out for ratification. What will this servant's mission be? A covenant to the people.

Somehow this servant, this servant is going to have to satisfy the old covenant and ratify a new covenant. Now I can imagine Isaiah scratching his head and saying, God

how is that going to happen? And God says just keep writing. Now verse seven, as far as I'm concerned, clinches this finally.

I ask you to look at chapter 61. Keep your finger there at 42.7 and look back at 61. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me.

Notice I have put my spirit upon him. That's what 42.1 said. Because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted to proclaim liberty to the captives. To open the eyes, I'm skipping back and forth from verse to verse, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. Verse seven, to open the eyes that are blind to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon from the prison, those who sit in darkness.

This is not Israel. This Israel is not delivering Israel. This is some other servant.

Now, one of the exercises that I have my students do, I guess Candice is not here tonight. Candice is auditing my Isaiah class at the seminary. But one of the exercises I have my students do is to go through all of the references to servant in chapters 41 to 48.

And what they discover is all of those references except this one are clearly to the nation. And what they talk about is the benefits of being God's servant. He'll deliver you, he'll care for you, he'll help you, he'll protect you, etc., etc., etc.

Every one of them except this one, which doesn't say a word about benefits but says everything about the mission. Now, I believe what's now, then they have another exercise. In 49 to 55, they do the same thing and they discover something.

All of the references except one talk about a servant with a mission and just one reference talks about the nation and its benefits. There's a flip-flop. 41 to 48, all the references are to the nation and the benefits that it will receive from being a servant with one exception, this one.

49 to 55, all the references are to the servant who has a mission to the people and to the world except for one, which is the nation, and talks about the benefits. I'll say more about that as we go along. Okay, so, look at verses 10, 11, 12, and 13.

What would you call that? What kind of literature is that? It's a song, yes, and a song of what? Praise, yes, yes. Now, what, this is a softball, I think, what in the immediate context would explain that song of praise? Exactly. What exactly? Exactly, exactly.

This song of praise is a song of joy because of the revelation of God's delivering servant. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth. You who

go down to the sea and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants, the desert and its cities lift up their voices, the villages that Kedar inhabits, the inhabitants of Sila sing for joy.

Let them shout from the top of the mountains, let them give glory to the Lord, declare his praise in the coastlands. Now, geographically, how far does this praise extend? Around the world. Something has been revealed in chapter 42, 1 through 9, that is a cause for universal praise.

Now, we ask why? Why this one example here? And I think it is simply to introduce us to the discussion, that we're going to be talking about two servants here. Keep that in mind now. We're going to go back and talk the rest of the next eight chapters about servant Israel.

But just remember, that's not the only servant we've got to talk about here. I think that's what's going on. We've had this introduction so that we'll know what's happening.

Okay. Well, we've got to push on. Chapter 42, verses 14 to 17.

Was God glad about the exile? No. No. Look at verse 14.

God was not glad about the exile. I kept still and restrained myself, but I couldn't do it any longer. I've got to deliver these children of mine like a woman in labor.

And who are they? Verse 16. Blind. Yeah.

Yeah. Blind and deaf. Lost.

Yes. Yes. Here you deaf, look you blind.

Who's blind but my servant? Or deaf is my messenger whom I send? You've got to be pretty confident of your case to rest everything on blind servants and deaf messengers. He sees many things, doesn't observe. His ears are open, he doesn't hear.

The Lord was pleased for his righteousness sake to magnify his Torah and make it glorious. But this is a people plundered and looted for all of them trapped in holes, hidden in prisons. They become plunder with none to rescue, spoil with none to say restore.

So here again, there's the servant who's going to bring God's mishpat to the world, his light to the nations. And then there's this servant who can't find the way out even when the lights are on. Now, verses 24 and 25 is making an important point.

How did Israel get into exile? Why did they go into exile? Who took them into exile? They did, yes. But look at 24 and 25. What's it saying? The Lord put them in exile.

You know, Isaiah, you can blather on all you want about deliverance but look, Babylon was strong enough to drag us out of our land, destroy our city, and clap us into chains. What's the Lord going to do about that? And Isaiah says, you don't understand, do you? Babylon didn't take you into exile. I sent you into exile.

And what does that mean? He can get them out. Exactly. If Babylon had taken them against his will, then it really would be a contest.

Maybe Yahweh is a little stronger than Babylon, I hope. But it's no contest. I sent you into exile and I'll get you out whenever I'm ready.

And Babylon can't do a thing about it. Remember chapter 40, all flesh is? Grass. So, in chapter 43 verse 1, here comes the third, fear not.

Fear not. Why? I have redeemed you. Yeah.

I'm with you. I'll help you. Oh, but God, even though you were with me and helped me, I really messed it up.

I went off the road and into the ditch in spite of your presence with me, in spite of your help. God says, that's all right, for I have redeemed you. Throughout this part of the book, the Holy One of Israel is said to be your Redeemer.

The absolutely transcendent One whose power is incomparable to anything or anybody else. That One who has given Himself to you is able and willing to be your Redeemer. That's good news.

I am the Lord, verse 3, I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Now probably, as I mentioned before, you mentioned in the background, 3b is a reference to Cyrus. I gave Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Sheba in exchange for you.

Both Assyria and Babylon had conquered Egypt for periods of time but hadn't been able to hang on. Persia was the first of the empires to take Egypt and to continue to control Egypt for the rest of the Persian empire's history. So that's probably a reference to, God says, yeah, I let Cyrus do this in exchange for getting you free.

Fear not, for I am with you. So he talks about in verses 5, 6, and 7 that he's going to recall them from every part of the earth. I have to feel that there is a connection that these promises were not completely fulfilled in 539.

I don't think Jews came back from all the corners of the earth. I do think they have been fulfilled in our lifetime. As I said to you before, that does not mean that I believe that the present state of Israel is what God wants.

They're 90% atheists, so we still wait for the ultimate fulfillment of these promises, but I do not believe for one moment that the restoration of Israel, beginning in the 1880s or thereabouts, and continuing up to the present, is an accident of history. I think it's a fulfillment of the biblical prediction. Yes? 5, 6, and 7 is primarily about Israel.

Now later on he's going to talk about the rest of us. Oh, I think those are for all of us. Yes, in terms of God's character and what he wants to do in our lives and for us, yes, I think those promises are for all of us.

But 5, 6, and 7, the specifics about bringing your captives back, I think that's particularly for Israel. Okay, now then we come to the second of these cases and one of the glorious passages of the Bible, 43.8-13. Bring out the people who are blind yet have eyes, who are deaf yet have ears. Call my witnesses.

You want to say, God, this is a little risky. All the nations gather together in the people's assemble. Who among them can declare this, here it is, and show us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses, let the gods bring their witnesses to prove them right.

Let them hear and say, it's true, it did, it happened. Bring me a witness. You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I've chosen.

Why did God choose them? Middle of verse 10, that you may know, and believe, and understand, what? And do you remember last week we talked about it, I am, I am. No other being in the universe can say that. Every one of us is dependent on something outside of us.

Every one of us is dependent on the love of a man and a woman that we even exist today. We are utterly dependent on air, food, and water. Having been sick most of last week, I've gained a new appreciation for the normal functioning of the old body.

How wonderful. We don't even think about it until something goes wrong and then we do a lot of thinking. But there it is.

I am. I don't depend on anything else for my existence. Absolutely independent.

And that's why I chose you, that you might know who I am and knowing who I am might find life in my life. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be after me. I, I am Yahweh and beside me, there is no savior.

Now I want to talk about that next week. That's a pretty exclusive statement, isn't it? I mean really now, there are many ways to heaven, aren't there? You Christians, you think you are the only people? Think about that. I declared and saved and proclaimed.

I told you what I was going to do, now I'm doing it. When there was no strange god among you and you are my witnesses, declares the Lord, I am God. And henceforth I am He.

There is none who can deliver from my hand. And I work and who can turn it back? Did you know that Jesus was quoting Isaiah on his ascension day? You are my witnesses. Now again, you see what he was talking about.

He was not talking about, now you're the people that I want to go out and grab people on the street. What he's saying is, I want your lives to be such that at any moment when the world says to me, you're not God, I can call on, here's the evidence. You didn't rise from the dead, here's my evidence.

I read something just today about the most feared tribe in Papua New Guinea 40 years ago have been given a Bible and they are now the Christian leaders on the whole island. You are my evidence. That's the issue.

When everybody around you is lying, you are my witnesses. Not necessarily that you have to stand up and say, well I'm a Christian, I tell the truth. But it will simply be unmistakable evidence there's something different about you.

That's what he's saying here. You may be blind, you may be deaf, you may be stupid, but you know what I've done in your lives. And all I ask you is to testify to it when you get the chance.

Now here's just a word on Bible translation, this is my favorite. 43:13, the King James version said at the very end of the verse, I will work and who will let it. I have heard a sermon on will you let the Lord work? There's only one problem with that.

In 1613 that word meant prevent. So, this ESV is exactly correct. I will work and who can turn it back? That's what the Hebrew says.

That's why we need modern translations. Words change. Okay, that's free.

All right, push on. Here we are in the middle of the Bible. We're in the middle of the Bible.

Here we are again. Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Down in verse 15, the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.

Now what do you think? Why is this repetition of the Holy One of Israel in this context? Reinforcement. He's the Redeemer. Why add the Holy One of Israel to your Redeemer? Why not just say, I'm the Lord, your Redeemer? Someone said reinforcement.

That's one good answer. What's another reason that possibly he piles on here? Okay, an expansion of what redemption is going to involve. That relationship with the Holy One.

Names the witnesses. It's the Holy Ones of Israel. His role in our salvation.

Yes, if he is holy, we need to be holy. That's right. That's right.

It's a way of underlining who is this I am. He is the only Holy One. There is no other.

And therefore, he has the power and the capacity to do whatever he wants to. But thank God he's the Holy One of Israel who has covenanted himself to a people for the salvation of the world. So, it's a powerful statement.

Now, I love what comes next. Verses 16 through 20. Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior, they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick.

What's he talking about? Egypt. Egypt, the exodus. Now look what comes next.

Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I'm doing a new thing, and now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I'll make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, and so forth. Why does God remind them of the exodus if he wants to tell them to forget it? Right on.

Give that lady a gold star. Yes. Yes.

Remember what sort of a God I am as evidenced in what I did in the past. But forget what I did in the past because I've got a very low threshold of boredom. I'm going to do it a different way this time.

Now you see, we humans, tend to flip that right on its head. We forget who God really is, but boy, do we remember how he did it. You know, somebody's going to get converted.

Well, we know how that happens. It happens in an evangelistic service, and there's an invitation given with 27 verses of just as I am, and on the 27th verse, this person finally lets go and drags down the aisle and falls at the altar, and they've got to be on two knees, not one knee, and they've got to cry, and when they've prayed through, they stand up and they give a testimony of salvation. That's the way God saves people.

And God says, sometimes. Same thing here. Oh, wow.

He's going to deliver us? Oh, we know how he's going to do that. One of our ladies is going to have a baby, and they're going to stick him in a basket in the Euphrates River, and the Babylonians are going to find him, and they're going to train him up, and he's going to deliver us, and when we're ready to go, the Euphrates River will divide in two, and we'll... God says, no, I did that once. I think this time I'll use a pagan emperor who does not know my name.

God, you can't do that. Watch. Watch.

So beautiful. Remember what you've learned about my character in nature, but forget how I did it because I'm going to do a new thing. Here again, this is very significant.

God can't do new things. How soon do you suppose it'll be that the sun comes up in the west? Don't hold your breath. Nature is locked in.

Nature is not self-existent. Nature is not independent. Nature obeys certain principles, but God, the creator, can do something that has never happened before.

Wow. Could there be a relationship between that and back in 42 with the new song, This is a New... And we're going to play it out when we get to 55 when God says, my ways are higher than your ways. My thoughts are higher than your thoughts.

Now, no, my word is going to bear fruit, but hey, don't try to parcel this out according to your brain power. You're never going to figure it out. Yes? And here's my line.

This is another one that is not copyrighted. You're free to quote it. God is always consistent, but he is never predictable.

God is always consistent, but he is never predictable. We want him to be predictable, so we can put him in a box. We don't like surprises.

God loves them. Okay, let's see if we can finish this. We're two minutes over.

Let's hang on for just a bit more. Verses 22 through 24 are difficult. I'll say that right up front.

You did not call on me, O Jacob, but you've been weary of me, O Israel. You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings or honored me with your sacrifices. I haven't burdened you with offerings or wearied you with frankincense.

You haven't brought me sweet cane with money or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices, but you burdened me with your sins. You wearied me with your iniquities. Now, what's going on there? The one thing the Hebrews were good at was giving sacrifices.

They'd done that a whole lot, but God says, no, you didn't. Instead, you've burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your iniquities. What do you think he's talking about? The heart.

The heart. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You gave me all those offerings, but your heart wasn't in it.

You went on living in your sins and your iniquities and thought that you could make me forgive you by giving me a bunch of offerings. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Precisely, precisely.

Uh-huh. You went on living in your sins and your iniquities. He said it a little more bluntly.

There, he said, stop bringing them. Here, he says, you haven't done it. Yes.

Yes, yes, yes. I don't want to point fingers particularly at Catholicism, but tragically that has been a very, very magical view most of the time. Well, I go to confession and say my beads and take communion and now everything's fine.

But if we point fingers at those, we have to point a bunch of fingers at ourselves. And Paul's frightening statement that we never, never speak about in Protestantism, many have drunk damnation to themselves by taking unworthily. When was the last time you heard a sermon on that one? Yep, yep.

But here's what God says at the conclusion, and this is a wonderful conclusion. I, I am he who blots out your transgressions. Why? For my own sake.

Not because of your sacrifices, not because of your offerings, for my own sake. Old Testament, New Testament. Salvation is by grace.

Obedience is a response to grace. It's not a way of manipulating God to do what we want. Who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, I will not remember your sins.

Put me in remembrance. Let us argue together. Set forth your case so that you may be proved right.

Your first father sinned and your mediators transgressed against me. Therefore, I'll profane the princes of the sanctuary and deliver Jacob to utter destruction and Israel to reviling. I have the feeling that particularly these verses 22 through 28 were especially addressed to people of Isaiah's own day.

He's talking about what's going on there. And what's going to lead to the exile? Because they're not willing to accept God's free grace and quit transgressing.

Okay. You've been patient. Thank you.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for the wonderful truths that you have placed there for us. Help us, O God, to be living evidence that there is a God who is not this world and who is able to transform us to the uttermost. In your name, amen.

This is Dr. John Oswalt in his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session number 21, Isaiah chapters 42 and 43.