

Isaiah Session 16: Righteousness, Complacency, and the Holy Spirit (Isaiah Chapters 32 and 33)

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt examines Isaiah chapters 32 and 33, which form the conclusion of the subsection 'Woe to those who will not wait' within the larger 'Lessons in Trust' division. The session contrasts the coming righteous kingdom, characterized by open nobility and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, with the spiritual complacency and decay of Judah's present leadership. Dr. Oswalt outlines the primary work of the Holy Spirit in cultivating godly character (fruit) rather than mere utility (gifts), and explores the titles of God as Judge, Lawgiver, and King who restores order to chaos. Ultimately, the lecture highlights how true righteousness is not self-produced but is a product of grace and faith, allowing believers to dwell safely with the 'consuming fire' of God's presence.

Outline

I. Introduction and Structural Context

- A. Welcome, older sisters story, and opening prayer
- B. Placement in the 'Lessons in Trust' division (Chapters 7-39)
 - 1. Trust is the baseline for servanthood
 - 2. Chapter 6 serves as the spiritual model for the nation
- C. Placement in 'Woe to those who will not wait' subsection (Chapters 28-33)
 - 1. Historical setting: Circa 710 to 705 BC
 - 2. The Northern Kingdom of Israel is gone; only Judah remains
 - 3. The leadership's foolish attempt to rely on Egypt's horses and chariots instead of waiting on the Lord
- D. Structural anomaly of Chapter 32
 - 1. Does not begin with 'Woe' but rather 'Behold'
 - 2. Functions as a direct continuation of Chapter 31's message
 - 3. Changing proportion: moving from mostly negative judgment in Chapter 28 to mostly positive hope in Chapters 32 and 33

II. The Righteous Kingdom vs. Present Complacency (Isaiah 32:1-14)

A. The Promise of the New Kingdom (32:1-8)

1. A king reigning in righteousness and princes ruling in justice
2. Restoration of sight, hearing, and understanding, contrasting with previous blindness
3. Openness and nobility replacing stumblers, scoundrels, and crooks
4. Living in transparent truth without fear

B. The Threat of Complacency (32:9-14)

1. Inductive study contrast: Promised kingdom (nobility) vs. present complacency
2. The danger of taking God's promises for granted (e.g., modern evangelicalism assuming 'everything pans out in the end')
3. The metaphor of the grape harvest: lack of fruitfulness and a drought of the soul
4. Living a sloppy, unconvicted life results in growing thorns and briars
5. Coleridge's garden analogy: if you do not cultivate flowers, weeds and thorns will grow naturally

III. The Outpouring and Primary Work of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 32:15-20)

A. The Transition from Barrenness to Fruitfulness (32:15)

1. Barrenness persists 'until the spirit is poured out upon us from on high'
2. The desert becomes a fertile field and the forest grows
3. Parallel to conversion (verses 1-8) and subsequent sanctification

B. The Fruit of the Spirit vs. the Gifts of the Spirit (32:16-18)

1. Results of the Spirit: justice, righteousness, peace, and quiet trust
2. The primary work of the Holy Spirit is reproducing God's moral character (fruit) rather than utility (gifts)
3. Gifts can be counterfeited or misused, whereas genuine fruit cannot

C. Ezekiel 36 Connection

1. Cleansing, breaking the heart of stone, and receiving the Spirit
2. The Spirit enables walking in God's statutes and obeying His commandments

D. Discussion on Spiritual Sensitivity

1. Why women are addressed: spiritual sensitivity and the danger of going off the rails
2. The passive nature of waiting vs. the active progress of the Christian life
3. F.B. Meyer quote: the covenant is meant to be fulfilled first in Christ for us, and then by the Holy Spirit through us

IV. The Deliverer and the Exaltation of God (Isaiah 33:1-13)

A. Woe to the Destroyer/Betrayer (33:1)

1. Geopolitical identity: likely Egypt, which betrayed Judah during the Assyrian crisis
2. The contrast with Chapter 30: the people now say 'we will wait because we know you are gracious'

B. The Sovereign Exaltation of the Lord (33:2-13)

1. Seeking God's guidance and prioritization of the day through quiet waiting
2. Exalting God humbles human pride and puts life in proper perspective
3. Three divine titles (33:22): Judge (restorer of order), Lawgiver (creator who provides instruction), and King (holding all things together)

C. The Consequence of Rejecting God's Exaltation (33:7-9)

1. When the Lord is not exalted: heroes weep, treaties are broken, and the lush land (Lebanon, Sharon, Carmel) withers away
2. The human spirit apart from God acts as a self-consuming fire

V. Dwelling in the Consuming Fire (Isaiah 33:14-24)

A. The Question of the Holy Blast Furnace (33:14)

1. 'Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire?'
2. God does not send people to hell; He allows them their choices because they cannot tolerate the purity of heaven

B. The Answer of True Righteousness (33:15-16)

1. Walking righteously, speaking uprightly, rejecting bribes and oppression
2. The danger of self-produced righteousness: 'righteousness like a bloody rag'
3. The contrast between self-righteousness (Pharisees, rich young ruler) and Christ's imputed righteousness through faith

C. Closing Prayer

1. Thanksgiving for the cleansing of the temple and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
2. Living a righteous life out of love and gratitude rather than duty