

Title: Isaiah Session 26: Isaiah Chapters 54 and 55

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 54 and 55, concluding the section on grace as the means of servanthood. Dr. Oswalt contrasts the historical and spiritual realities of Israel's barrenness with God's glorious invitation to experience eternal covenantal love (hesed) and complete reconciliation. The session explores the concepts of justification and enabled righteousness, the warning against neglecting divine near moments, and the sovereign power of the Word to transform human lives. Ultimately, the lecture highlights how God's redeemed people serve as living witnesses and an everlasting sign of His sovereign glory.

Outline

- **I. Introduction and Overview of Chapters 54-55**
 - **A.** Opening prayer and reflection on human uniformity in desiring to know God through His Word.
 - **B.** Placement in the "Grace Means of Servanthood" division (chapters 40-55).
 - **1.** Chapters 40-48 focused on grace as the motive for servanthood.
 - **2.** Chapters 49-55 focus on grace as the means of servanthood.
 - **3.** The Servant's work (especially in chapter 53) makes forgiveness and undeserved grace possible.
 - **C.** Transition of tone in chapters 54-55.
 - **1.** Previous chapters (49-52:12) focused on anticipation of deliverance.
 - **2.** Chapters 54-55 shift from anticipation to invitation ("Come and take part in this which is yours").
- **II. Isaiah Chapter 54: The Barren Widow Restored**
 - **A.** The Figure of Fruitfulness vs. Barrenness (54:1-10).
 - **1.** Zion previously saw herself as a barren widow whose children were dead, with no hope.
 - **2.** God promises that the children of the desolate will outnumber those of the married woman, spreading over the world.
 - **3.** Alleviating the exiles' fear of cultural and physical elimination.
 - **B.** The Five (or Six) Terms for God and His Relationship (54:5).
 - **1.** Maker: He knows our origin.

- 2. Husband: Denotes protection and the closest intimate bond.
- 3. Redeemer: Closest relative with a legal/moral obligation to the destitute.
- 4. Holy One of Israel: The transcendent one who is also immediately present (imminent).
- 5. Lord Almighty (Lord of Heaven's armies) and God of the whole earth: Signifies absolute, undefeated victory.
- C. God's Anger vs. His Eternal Love (Hesed) (54:7-10).
 - 1. Anger is brief and temporary, but love (hesed) and compassion are eternal.
 - 2. Womb-like compassion (R-H-M): represents deep tenderness and feeling what we feel.
 - 3. The Covenant of Peace (Shalom): Denotes total and complete reconciliation and wholeness, not just an armistice.
 - a. Biblical parallels of the covenant of peace in Numbers 25 (Phineas) and Ezekiel 34, 37.
 - b. New Testament connection in Romans 5:1, 10.
- D. Established in Righteousness (54:11-17).
 - 1. Precious stones and jewels show how much God values His people.
 - 2. Double-sided righteousness: Being counted righteous (Luther's discovery) and being enabled to live righteously (Wesley's completion of the Reformation).
 - 3. The word is two-sided: "Righteousness" is better than translating it as "vindication" because it preserves both deliverance and a new way of living.
- III. Isaiah Chapter 55: The Invitation to Life
 - A. The Free Gift of Sustenance (55:1-3).
 - 1. Invitation to receive wine, milk, and bread without money.
 - 2. Represents the basic liquids and elements of life.
 - 3. Everlasting covenant and the "heseds of David" (55:3).
 - B. The Purpose of Witnesses and Glory (55:4-5).
 - 1. David as a witness and leader whose life provides evidence of God's exclusive deity.
 - 2. Glory in the Old Testament represents solidity, significance, and reality.
 - 3. God wants to share His glory to make His people real, drawing nations to Zion.
 - 4. The tragedy of play-acting spirituality (appearing spiritual without being spiritual).
 - C. Seeking God While He is Near (55:6).
 - 1. Making a step toward Him in moments of sensitivity and conviction.
 - 2. Smashed receivers: Rejecting the Spirit leads to the unpardonable sin where one can no longer hear grace.
 - 3. Historical illustrations of Aaron Burr and North Park College/Hugh Hefner.
 - D. Transcendent Thoughts, Rain, and the Transforming Word (55:8-13).
 - 1. "My thoughts are not your thoughts."
 - a. God's way is grace; humanity's way is earning acceptance.
 - b. C.S. Lewis quote on meeting love.
 - 2. The Word sent out will not return empty but accomplish its purpose.
 - a. The modern illustration of Olympic runner Louis Zamperini's transformation at Billy Graham's 1949 crusade.

- **3.** Salvation as an everlasting sign that makes a name for the Lord.
 - **a.** Redeemed lives are the ultimate proof and sign that He is God.
 - **b.** God is willing to hang His eternal reputation on His people.