

Title: Isaiah Session 29: Righteousness, the Character of Servanthood (Isaiah Chapters 60–62 and 63–66)

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 60 through 62 and 63 through 66, exploring the chiastic structure of this final division entitled 'Righteousness, the Character of Servanthood'. The session focuses primarily on the parallel between Chapters 56–59 and Chapters 63–66, contrasting human spiritual inability with God's ultimate power to defeat the enemy of sin as a Divine Warrior. Dr. Oswalt unpacks how true holiness is a matter of heart attitude rather than self-serving ritual, pointing to the necessity of a new heaven and new earth where God's covenant promises are fully realized. Ultimately, the lecture highlights how the cross serves to both pardon past transgressions and break the ongoing power of sin in the believer's life.

Outline

I. Introduction and Structural Framework of Chapters 56–66

- **A. Righteousness, the Character of Servanthood:** The stair-step/triangle/chiastic structure of the final division.
 - **1.** The apex of the structure represents Chapters 60–62, which stands alone at the top of the ladder without a parallel.
 - **2.** The purpose of this structure is to keep the focus on the goal of servanthood: bringing all the world to worship God.
- **B. Grace and Righteousness:** Symmetrical relationship between chapters 40–55 and 56–66.
 - **1.** Chapters 40–55 emphasize salvation by grace with no initial call to repentance.
 - **2.** Chapters 56–66 clarify that how we live matters; the character of righteousness is also made possible by grace.
 - **3.** The Divine Warrior intervenes to defeat our spiritual enemies because we cannot do it ourselves.

II. Comparing Chapters 56–59 with Chapters 63–66

- **A. Structural Reversals in the Stair-Step Layout.**
 - 1. The first section (Chapters 56–59) concludes with the Divine Warrior, while the parallel section (Chapters 63–66) begins with the Divine Warrior.
 - 2. The shift in emphasis: Chapters 56–59 focus primarily on human inability with a minor emphasis on divine ability. Chapters 63–66 reverse this, with a major emphasis on divine ability and a minor emphasis on human inability.
- **B. The Parallel of the Divine Warrior (Isaiah 63:1–6 and 59:16).**
 - 1. Near-identical phrasing highlights the parallel: 'My own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath/righteousness upheld me.'
 - 2. Symmetrical contrast: In 59:16, His righteousness upholds Him; in 63:5, His wrath (righteous wrath) upholds Him.
 - 3. Graphic imagery of the Warrior stomping Edom in the wine vat, staining His robes red with blood.
 - 4. Symbolism of Edom: Re-emphasizing Edom (the capital Basra) as the representative symbol of the enemies of God (sins).
 - 5. The theological substitution: The blood on the Warrior's garments is ultimately His own, demonstrating Christ becoming sin for us on the cross.
 - 6. The double work of the cross: Jesus as the suffering servant takes sin's punishment, but as the Divine Warrior, He destroys the power of sin in our daily lives.

III. Human Blame and the Cry for God to Act (Isaiah 63:7–64:12)

- **A. Recounting God's Past Grace (Hesed) (63:7–14).**
 - 1. Acknowledging God's past compassion, pity, and undeserved devotion (hesed) to Israel.
 - 2. The tragic response: despite His carrying them, they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit.
 - 3. Emphasis on the Holy Spirit: Occurs three times in this stanza (63:10, 11, 14).
 - 4. Recognizing the individual need for the Holy Spirit to write the Torah on human hearts and enable obedience.
- **B. Blaming God for Human Sin (63:15–19).**
 - 1. The people complain that God has withheld His zeal and hardened their hearts from fearing Him.
 - 2. The theological trap: blaming God's absence for their hardness of heart because He is the sovereign Potter who chose them.
 - 3. Relying on election (Abraham's lineage) as a claim or lock on God's obligations.
- **C. The Appeal for Divine Revelation (64:1–12).**
 - 1. The desperate cry: 'Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!'
 - 2. Recognizing total human uncleanness: all righteous deeds are like polluted garments.
 - 3. The argument of possession: appealing to God because they are the clay, He is the Potter, and the land and temple (burned by fire) belong to Him.

IV. Divine Accusation and Sincere Worship (Isaiah Chapter 65)

- **A. God's Response to Superficial Seeking (65:1–2).**
 - 1. God declares He was ready to be found, but they did not truly seek Him.
 - 2. True seeking requires genuine humility and a willingness to do God's will rather than blaming Him for our problems.
- **B. The Odor of Self-Serving Holiness (65:3–12).**
 - 1. Sarcastic, graphic language of pagan abominations (sacrificing in gardens, eating pig's flesh and mouse/mouse broth) used to describe their internal attitudes.
 - 2. The trap of 'me-centered' holiness: doing commanded religious acts for self-image and personal achievement.
 - 3. God declares their prideful 'holiness' to be a stench and smoke in His nostrils.
 - 4. The contrast of the True Sacrifice (66:2-3): offering an ox without humility is condemned as murder, and grain offerings as pig's blood.
- **C. The New Creation as the Cause of Blessing (65:13–25).**
 - 1. Separating the self-righteous 'you' from the humble 'my servants' who seek God.
 - 2. The introduction of the New Heavens and New Earth.
 - 3. Why heaven is structurally necessary: without an afterlife, the promise of perfect justice (blessing for righteousness, curse for wickedness) does not consistently materialize in this broken world.

V. Symmetrical Conclusion: Chapter 66 and Chapter 1 Parallel

- **A. Reversals of Judgment and Hope.**
 - 1. Chapter 66 mimics Chapter 1, shifting back and forth between solemn warnings and beautiful hope.
 - 2. The return of the 'garden' metaphor from Chapter 1 as a symbol of pagan self-purification.
- **B. Universal Gathering and the Glory (Kavod) of God (66:18–23).**
 - 1. Highlighting Kavod (weightiness, significance, reality) of God declared among the nations.
 - 2. Radical promise of Gentiles being taken as priests and Levites.
 - 3. The final warning: despite the beautiful promise of universal worship, the book ends on a stark reminder of the consequences of choice and rebellion.