

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 3, Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Have you ever thought about what it means to, like, choose darkness, you know, in a world that's so desperate for light? That's something we're going to kind of explore today as we take this deep dive into Isaiah chapters 4 and 5. Our source material is a lecture by Dr. John Oswalt, and he brings up some really powerful ideas about hope, judgment, and what it means to reflect God's character. What's fascinating about these chapters is that they're not just about ancient history. Right.

They speak to something much deeper, you know, something that's still incredibly relevant today. It's almost like they're holding up a mirror to our own lives and asking, like, what choices are you making? What kind of fruit are you producing? But before we get too deep into that, I want to make sure we're all on the same page. Could you give us a quick overview of what's happening in these chapters? Well, the first thing you'll notice is this back and forth between messages of hope and warnings of judgment.

Dr. Oswalt calls this interchange, and it's a literary device that really highlights the tension between the reality of the present and the hope for a transformed future. Okay, so it's like a constant reminder that even when things look bleak, there's always a chance for change, a glimmer of hope. Exactly.

And this idea of interchange is really important for understanding the whole prophetic message. It's not just doom and gloom. It's about recognizing the consequences of our choices and calling us back to a better path.

So, let's start with chapter four. We encounter this beautiful promise of holy remnant, but it sounds like Dr. Oswalt is saying that holiness is about way more than just being set apart or religious. Absolutely.

He emphasizes that true holiness is about being transformed to reflect God's character. Right. It's not about outward appearances or rituals.

It's about interchange, about aligning our hearts and actions with God's will. I'm curious about this imagery of a cleansing fire that he uses to describe this transformation. Isn't fire usually associated with destruction? How can it also be purifying? That's a great question.

Think about it this way. Fire can be destructive, but it can also refine. When you heat metal in a fire, it burns away impurities, leaving behind what's pure and strong.

So, it's like God is using the fire of hardship and exile to purify his people, to strip away the things that are holding them back from being truly holy. Exactly. And what's really interesting is that this image of fire also connects to other events in biblical history.

The exile is obviously a time of immense suffering for Israel, but it could also be seen as foreshadowing Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. It's like

this image carries through different eras, speaking to the ongoing need for spiritual renewal and transformation, both individually and collectively. Okay.

I'm starting to see how all these pieces fit together. So, we have this image of a cleansing fire, and then we also have this beautiful picture of God's sheltering presence. Right.

Yes. It almost sounds like a new exodus, a new beginning for God's people. Yes.

And Dr. Oswalt connects those two ideas in a really powerful way. He talks about driving through Israel with his father, who was a farmer, and his dad looked at the land and said, why would anyone fight for a rock pile like this? Wow. And it just hit me.

You know, we often take God's blessings for granted, even when they come in unexpected forms. That's such a vivid image. It makes you appreciate the significance of the vineyard analogy in chapter five, right? Because we go from this picture of God's protective presence—yes.

To this poignant song about a vineyard that fails to produce good fruit. That's exactly right. And the vineyard becomes a powerful metaphor for Israel, carefully cultivated by God, but yielding only bitter grapes instead of the sweet fruit he desired.

It's interesting because it starts like a love song almost. You can really sense Isaiah's deep connection to God and his heartbreak over what's happening to his people. Yes.

And that's what makes the imagery of God tearing down the vineyard's protective walls so heartbreaking. It's like he's saying, I've done everything I can for you, but you've chosen to reject me and produce only bitterness. And it took three years to even get the first harvest from that vineyard.

Oh, wow. Imagine the dedication, the anticipation. That really highlights just how devastating it is when God's love and care are met with such a disappointing response.

It's like, after all that, you give me this. That's such an important point. You can almost sense God's frustration and disappointment in that imagery.

And it sets the stage for the five woe pronouncements that follow, where God spells out the specific ways that Israel has gone astray. And just to be clear, when we talk about woe, it's not like God is gleefully condemning his people, right? It's more like an expression of sorrow and regret, like a parent grieving over a child who's making self-destructive choices. You hit the nail on the head.

It's not about punishment for its own sake. It's about trying to wake people up to the consequences of their actions and calling them back to a path of life and blessing. So let's dive into these woes.

What are they, and how do they connect to these bitter grapes that Israel is producing? Well, the first woe is all about greed. We see it in Isaiah 5.8-10, where God condemns those who are accumulating wealth at the expense of others. They're so focused on acquiring more land and possessions that they've lost sight of what truly matters: justice, compassion, and faithfulness to God.

It sounds like this greed is the root of a lot of other problems, almost like a domino effect. Yes. It leads to a breakdown in relationships.

Yeah. A disregard for the poor and vulnerable. Right.

And ultimately, a turning away from God. Exactly. And this theme of greed is so relevant today, isn't it? Absolutely.

We live in a culture that often glorifies wealth and material possessions, and it's easy to get caught up in that pursuit. And lose sight of what's truly important. It's like we're creating our own bitter grapes when we prioritize those things above our relationship with God and our responsibility to care for others.

That's a powerful way to put it. And it sets the stage for the second woe, which focuses on self-indulgence. Okay.

So let's unpack that a bit. What does Isaiah say about self-indulgence, and how does it connect to the overall theme of these chapters? In Isaiah 5.11-12, we see God condemning those who are consumed with pleasure and entertainment. They're so focused on partying and having a good time that they've become blind to the suffering around them and indifferent to the things of God.

It's like they've traded true joy and fulfillment for fleeting moments of gratification. So it's not that enjoying life's pleasures is inherently wrong. It's about where we place our priorities and whether those pursuits are ultimately leading us towards or away from God.

That's a nuanced point, and I think it's key to understanding this passage. It's not about becoming ascetics or denying ourselves all earthly pleasures. It's about finding the right balance, keeping our hearts and minds focused on what truly matters.

So we've got greed, self-indulgence. What's the third woe? So we've got greed, self-indulgence. What's the third woe? The third woe is about mocking God, and this one really gets to the heart of the matter.

We see it in Isaiah 5.1a-19, where God condemns those who treat his word and his warnings with contempt. Right. They basically say, let God do his worst.

We're not afraid. Wow. That's a bold statement.

But isn't there a fine line between questioning God and outright mocking him? How can we understand that distinction in our own lives? That's a great question. And I think it comes down to the posture of our hearts. Are we genuinely seeking truth, even if it challenges our assumptions? Or are we simply trying to justify our own rebellious desires? So it's about being open to God's guidance, even when it's difficult or uncomfortable.

Exactly. Dr. Oswalt brings up the example of Robert Ingersoll, a famous atheist who spent his life publicly mocking God and religion. But at the end of his life, he apparently died in despair, crying out about the darkness.

It's a stark reminder that true light and hope can only be found in God. That's a sobering thought. It makes me think about all the voices in our culture today that are telling us to reject God, to put our faith in ourselves and our own understanding.

But history seems to suggest that that path ultimately leads to emptiness and despair. It's a cautionary tale, for sure. And it leads us to the fourth woe, which is all about reversing morality, calling good evil and evil good.

We see this in Isaiah 5.20-21. It's this idea that we create our own standards of right and wrong, ignoring God's timeless truth. That feels incredibly relevant to our world today, doesn't it? Absolutely. I mean, think about all the debates we're having about gender, sexuality, the sanctity of life.

It seems like our culture is constantly trying to redefine what's right and wrong. And in the process, we're losing our moral compass. You're exactly right.

And Dr. Oswalt points out that when a society loses its moral foundation, it's headed for trouble. It creates chaos, confusion, and ultimately destruction. So we've got greed, self-indulgence, mocking God, reversing morality.

What's the final woe that Isaiah pronounces? The fifth woe focuses on corrupt leadership. We see it in Isaiah 5.22-23, where God condemns those in positions of power who are more interested in their own pleasure and advancement than in serving the people who are supposed to be led. They're more concerned with drinking and having a good time than with upholding justice and righteousness.

That sounds sadly familiar, doesn't it? Yeah. It seems like every time you turn on the news, there's another story about corruption, abuse of power, where leaders are putting their own interests above the common good. It's disheartening, to say the least.

It is. And it's a reminder that these ancient woes are still very much alive and well in our world today. The consequences of these sins, as Dr. Oswalt points out, are spelled out pretty clearly.

Exile, desolation, the land itself becoming barren. It sounds like these woes are painting a pretty bleak picture of Israel's spiritual and moral state. But didn't you mention earlier that there's also a connection to the book of Judges in all of this? How does that fit in? That's right.

Dr. Oswalt suggests that the prophets saw Israel's entire history, from the conquest of Canaan to the return from exile, as one big Judges cycle. OK. Remember the pattern in Judges.

The people experience God's blessing. They forget him and turn to idols. They face oppression.

They cry out to God for help. He sends a deliverer. They experience restoration, and then they repeat the cycle all over again.

It's like they never seem to learn from their mistakes. But how does the exile fit into this cycle? Well, in a sense, the exile becomes the ultimate consequence, the culmination of generations of disobedience and rebellions, like hitting rock bottom: a forced separation from everything they held dear- their land, their temple, their way of life. It's a consequence of rejecting God's instruction and despising his word.

But it's not just about punishment, right? There's also an element of redemption in the exile, a chance for the people to return to God with renewed hearts. You're absolutely right. And this is where we see the exodus imagery come back into play.

The return from exile is viewed as a new exodus, a time of deliverance and a chance to rebuild their lives on a foundation of faithfulness to God. It's a powerful reminder that no matter how far we stray, no matter how badly we mess up, God never gives up on us. He's always ready to welcome us back, to forgive us and to restore us to a right relationship with him.

That's encouraging. So even in the midst of judgment, there's a glimmer of hope, a promise of restoration. But what about the nations that God uses to bring about this judgment? I mean, Assyria doesn't exactly have a reputation for being merciful or compassionate.

How do we reconcile that with the idea of a loving God? That's a question that has puzzled theologians for centuries. But I think it's important to remember that God often works through human instruments, even flawed and imperfect ones, to accomplish his purposes. Think about it.

God used Pharaoh's hard heart to demonstrate his power and deliver his people from slavery in Egypt. And in this case, he's using Assyria, a powerful and ruthless empire, to bring about judgment on Israel and ultimately to purify and refine them. So it's not that God endorses Assyria's brutality.

He's simply using them as a tool to accomplish his purposes, which ultimately include the redemption and restoration of his people. Exactly. And I think it's interesting that even in the face of this impending judgment, Isaiah doesn't despair.

Right. He boldly declares, I am not afraid. Why? Because he trusts in God's sovereignty and his ultimate plan for his people.

That's a powerful statement of faith. But it must have been terrifying to see this massive Assyrian army approaching, knowing the destruction they were about to unleash. Absolutely.

And Isaiah doesn't shy away from describing the terror of that moment. Right. He uses vivid imagery to depict the Assyrian army's relentless advance, their sharp swords, their swift chariots, their unwavering determination.

It's a sobering reminder that there are real consequences to rejecting God and choosing darkness over light. So we're left with this image of darkness and distress engulfing the land, a direct result of Israel's rebellion and their refusal to listen to God's warnings. That's right.

But remember, even in the midst of this darkness, there's a flicker of hope because judgment is never God's final word. He always offers a path back to himself, a way to experience his forgiveness, his healing, and his restoration. And that's something we'll explore further as we continue our deep dive into these powerful chapters of Isaiah.

But before we move on, I'd love to hear your thoughts. What's resonating with you so far? What questions are coming up for you? It's almost like we're looking at a map of the human heart, isn't it? These chapters in Isaiah show us the paths that lead to destruction, greed, self-indulgence, pride, a rejection of truth. But they also point us toward a different way, a path that leads to life, to healing, to restoration.

That's a beautiful way to put it. And it brings us back to that initial question we posed. What does it mean to choose darkness in a world that's so desperately in need of light? Right.

I think these chapters are challenging us to examine our own lives, to see if we're clinging to those bitter grapes of sin and rebellion, or if we're willing to let God transform us, to make us into people who reflect his character and bring light to the world around us. Speaking of transformation, I'm struck by how Dr. Oswalt emphasizes that it's a process, not a one-time event. It's not like we flip a switch, and suddenly we're perfect, right? There are going to be times when we stumble, when we make mistakes, when we choose darkness over light.

Absolutely. And I think that's where grace comes in. God's grace is bigger than our mistakes.

It's not about being perfect. It's about recognizing our need for him and allowing him to work in our lives, to shape us and mold us into the people he created us to be. That's encouraging because I know I'm far from perfect, but I do want to grow to become more like Christ.

It sounds like that's what this Holy Remnant is all about, a group of people who are committed to reflecting God's character, even in a world that's often hostile to his truth. Yes. And I think it's important to note that this Holy Remnant isn't limited to a specific time or place.

Right. It's not just about ancient Israel. It's about anyone in any era who chooses to follow God wholeheartedly and allow him to work in their lives.

So even in the midst of all this talk about judgment and exile, there's an underlying message of hope. Yes. God hasn't given up on his people.

He's still working to redeem them, to restore them, to bring them back into a right relationship with himself. Exactly. And I think one of the most beautiful images of that hope is found in Isaiah 4, where God promises to create a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night over Mount Zion.

You know, I was wondering about that passage. It sounds familiar, but I couldn't quite place it. Well, it's a direct echo of the Exodus.

Oh, okay. When God's presence guided and protected the Israelites in the wilderness, it's a reminder that even when his people are going through difficult times, even when they're

facing the consequences of their own choices, he's still with them. He hasn't abandoned them.

It's like a beacon of hope shining through the darkness. It reminds us that even when things seem hopeless, God is still at work and he can bring beauty and redemption out of even the most difficult circumstances. And that, I think, is the ultimate message of these chapters.

They're not just about judgment and doom. They're about the transformative power of God's grace, the hope that's available to all who turn to him, and the invitation to become part of that holy remnant that's working to bring light and healing to a broken world. So as we wrap up this deep dive into Isaiah chapters four and five, I'm left with a sense of both urgency and hope.

Urgency because we can see so clearly the consequences of choosing darkness, both individually and collectively, but also hope because we've been reminded that God is a God of second chances, that his grace is always available, and that he's still working to redeem and restore his creation. Beautifully said. And I think that's a great place to leave our listeners today with that challenge to choose light over darkness, to embrace God's grace and to allow him to transform our lives, and make us into agents of hope and healing in a world that so desperately needs it.

Yes. And I would add that it's not just about our individual lives. It's about recognizing our collective responsibility to work for justice, to care for the vulnerable and to stand up for what's right, even when it's difficult.

I couldn't agree more. So dear listeners, as you go about your week, remember this: you have a choice to make. Will you choose the path of darkness? Or will you embrace the light of God's truth and allow him to guide your steps? The decision is yours, but the consequences are eternal.

Thanks for joining us on this deep dive. We hope you found it insightful and challenging, and we encourage you to keep seeking, keep questioning, and keep diving deep into the truths of God's word.