

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 4, Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Hey everyone and welcome back. Today we're diving deep, really deep, into Isaiah chapter six. Oh yeah, this is going to be a good one.

Now, I think most of us are probably familiar with Isaiah, you know, the prophet. Right. But we're going way beyond just the surface level here.

Absolutely. We're going to be unlocking, like, the deeper meanings and the impact of this chapter. Definitely.

And to help us do that, we have an incredible source. Oh yeah. An actual lecture by the brilliant biblical scholar, Dr. John Oswalt.

Can't wait to dig into that. So we're going to discover, like, why does this chapter resonate throughout history? Why is it so powerful? What makes it so special? It's a big question. And get ready, because we're going to go on a wild ride.

Oh. We're talking about utter despair, like the depths of human despair, to an almost unbearable vision of God. Wow.

And ultimately, a message of hope. OK. But there's a catch.

Uh-oh. There's always a catch. There's a cost.

All right. Well, lay it on me. Let's start with the basics.

Yeah. Let's set the scene. Paint us a picture, you know? Where are we in history? What's going on? All right.

So picture this. A divided kingdom. OK.

We've got Israel, the stronger one, and then we have Judah, kind of the weaker of the two. Right. And they are facing this rising threat from, like, the superpower at the time.

Oh, no. Assyria. Oh, Assyria.

That's not good. That's like a modern-day superpower, you know, just looming on the horizon. Yeah.

I'm getting nervous already. It's a time of, like, serious political tension. Think about how unsettling it would be to live with this superpower, you know, kind of like, flexing its military might.

Oh, I don't even want to imagine. Yeah. It's not a good feeling.

Not a good feeling at all. And right in the middle of all this, you've got King Uzziah. King Uzziah.

He's a bit of a complicated character. Yeah. Very complex.

Strong leader for Judah. Yeah. But he overstepped his boundaries.

He did. He kind of pushed things a little too far. Yeah, he did.

OK. Ended up getting punished for it. Yeah.

And it's right at this point, isn't it? Like, during this time of both prosperity, like, things are going pretty well, but there's also this, like, sense of doom looming. It's this weird mix of, like, good times and bad times all at once. That Isaiah begins his ministry.

Right at that moment. Talk about dramatic timing, right? Seriously. It all kicks off with that powerful opening line, though.

Oh, yeah. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord every time. Why is the date so important? It's not just a historical marker, is it? No, no, no.

It's so much more than that. It's like a punch to the gut. Right.

Like, when King Uzziah dies, it symbolizes the loss of security. It's the moment people realize that they're actually vulnerable. Yeah.

It's like their safety net is just, like, ripped away. Gone. Poof.

Think about it, you know? Have you ever had a moment in your life where your own sense of security was just totally shaken? Oh, definitely. Like, when I lost my job a few years back. I mean, talk about the rug being pulled out from under you.

It's that feeling of being totally exposed, right? Like, all of a sudden, you're just out there, adrift, unsure of what's next. Exactly. It really makes you reassess your priorities.

You know, Dr. Oswalt drives this point home with a personal story. Oh. It's kind of terrifying, actually.

He talks about this horrible accident his father had. Almost took his life. Really? And he describes how that rush with death just completely shifted his father's entire perspective.

Wow. Like, all the things that seemed so important before, suddenly they just paled in comparison to the preciousness of life itself. It's a real wake-up call.

It is. And it's in this very moment that Isaiah sees the Lord. It's almost like you have to lose everything to truly gain everything, you know? I love that.

It's like hitting rock bottom allows him to see clearly. Spiritually. Yes, exactly.

It's like the spiritual awakening. But, and here's what's really interesting. Yeah.

Isaiah doesn't give us a physical description of God. That's true. It's always struck me as, like, a little odd, you know? Like, why not describe what God looks like? It's intentional.

It's about avoiding idolatry. Okay, that makes sense. You know, shifting the focus away from a physical image.

Right. And putting it on the effect of God's presence. I like that.

It's powerful. And get this, even the seraphim, these heavenly beings, they're covering their faces and feet. Whoa, hold on.

Even angels can't handle this. They are completely overwhelmed by God's holiness. Wow.

It's just too much for them to take in. I'm getting chills just thinking about it. It's intense.

And they're chanting over and over, holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of heaven's armies. That repetition really drives something home, doesn't it? It emphasizes God's unique otherness, his complete separation from us. In Hebrew, the word for holy essentially means other.

Okay, so they're saying God is in a category all by himself. Exactly. Unlike anything or anyone else in the entire universe.

And then they say, the whole earth is full of his glory. Okay, that's beautiful. But what does it even mean? What does that even mean? Think of it this way: everything good and beautiful in the world, from a stunning sunset to the love you feel for your family, all of it is a reflection of God's character.

Wow. It's like he's poured his glory into the world so we can experience a little piece of him everywhere we look. That's amazing.

Okay, so you've got these angels praising God, proclaiming his power and holiness. Right. And then you have Isaiah just melting down.

Yeah. Crying, "Woe is me, I am lost. I mean, he doesn't even mention sin specifically, but you can feel it.

You feel it in your bones, right? It's like a visceral reaction. And that Hebrew word for lost points to something deeper, deeper than just being a sinner. It's about this total breakdown of identity.

Like, who am I? Yeah, it's like Isaiah realizes he can't even exist in the presence of this kind of holiness. It's like that moment when you realize just how small you are in the grand scheme of things. Totally.

But amplified by like a thousand. Exactly. Okay, so this is where the unclean lips come in, right? Right.

Why is that such a big deal? Well, remember, Isaiah is a prophet. True. His words are his tools.

It's how he communicates God's message. Right. But when he's standing before pure holiness, he realizes his words are tainted, inadequate.

So it's not just about saying the wrong thing. It's about the state of his heart, his whole being. Exactly.

And that's such a powerful message for us today. Oh, yeah. I mean, think about how often we speak carelessly without thinking or even using our words to hurt others.

It's a good reminder to pause and think before we speak. It really is. Isaiah's reaction is a reminder of the responsibility we have with our words, especially when it comes to matters of faith.

So Isaiah is basically a puddle of despair at this point, right? Pretty much, yeah. I mean, he doesn't even ask for forgiveness. He's way past that.

He's given up all hope. But then out of nowhere, one of the seraphim swoops in with a burning coal. Oh, yeah.

From the altar. Straight from the source. And touches it to Isaiah's lips.

Ouch. That's got to hurt. I'm wincing just thinking about it.

But fire is symbolic, right? It is very much so. It represents purification, transformation, like God's grace is at work here, burning away the impurity and making Isaiah fit for service. I'm like, buckle up, Isaiah.

This is where the real work begins. Right. But, you know, Dr. Oswalt brings up this super interesting question.

Oh. He asks, which altar did the coal come from? Whoa, I never thought about that. Was it the incense altar, representing prayers? Or the altar of burnt offerings, symbolizing sacrifice? I'm sensing a theme here.

You know, fire, sacrifice, transformation. It's all very intense. It is.

And I think that's the point. Following God, it isn't always easy or comfortable. Demanding.

Yeah, it demands something from us, you know. It requires a willingness to let go of our own plans and embrace his plan, even when it's difficult or painful. So it's not about us earning our way to God.

No. It's about surrendering to his process. That's a great way to put it.

And this brings us right to the call, you know, when God says, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? I love how he doesn't just command Isaiah, you know. Right. It's an invitation, a dialogue.

Yeah, it's like God saying, Isaiah, are you in on this? Are you willing to partner with me? And it shows how much God respects our free will. You know, he doesn't force himself on us. Absolutely.

He invites us to take part in his work. To choose him, even when it's hard. And Isaiah, who just moments ago was like a trembling mess.

Oh yeah, right. Now he's saying, here I am. Send me.

What a change. Talk about a transformation. What? From despair to empowered action.

All because he encountered God's holiness and allowed himself to be changed by it. That's the power of grace right there. But hold on, the story doesn't end there.

God doesn't give Isaiah some feel-good message to preach, does he? Nope. He tells him to go out and speak a truth that will actually harden people's hearts. OK, wait, why would God want things to get worse? That's one of the tough questions, isn't it? It's a head scratcher.

But Dr. Oswell offers a really helpful perspective here. He says that if Isaiah preached an easy message, one that everyone loved, people might be superficially converted, but not truly changed. Ooh, that's interesting.

It's like putting a band-aid on a gaping wound. OK. It might look better on the surface, but it won't actually heal.

So Isaiah's message is meant to, like, shake things up. Expose the truth, even if it hurts. Exactly.

It's about revealing the real state of things, even if it's uncomfortable. And it's about preparing the way for real change, lasting change. Yes.

And remember, Isaiah isn't just a passive mouthpiece here. Right. He's wrestling with this too.

Oh, yeah. He asks, how long, Lord? He's clearly on board with the mission, but wants to know how long he's going to be walking this difficult path. And God's answer is pretty bleak.

Uh-oh. Preach until the land is desolate. Wow.

Talk about a long game. It's like he's being asked to plant seeds that might not sprout for generations. It is a long game, but there's this glimmer of hope.

Oh. A remnant will remain, a holy seed. So even though it seems like everything is falling apart, God is preserving a faithful few.

It's a reminder that God's work often happens in quiet, unseen ways. Not always about instant results, but about faithfulness and persistence. Even when we can't see the finish line, this is getting pretty intense.

What does all this mean for us today? I mean, we're not ancient prophets. Right. We're not facing down superpowers, are we? Well, that's the beauty of it.

You know, it speaks to us no matter what we're facing. We all have our own Uzziah moments, those times when everything changes, when our security gets shaken. Yeah.

Like when that job I had fell through, my whole world shifted. Could be a loss, a relationship ending, a dream that dies. Sometimes it's just realizing we're not as in control as we thought.

Right. It's like you get knocked off balance. But maybe that's when we can actually see things differently, you know? Exactly.

And think about the imagery here, those seraphim, those burning ones. Isaiah doesn't hold back. They've each got six wings.

Six wings? What? Why so many? Okay, so two wings cover their faces, two cover their feet, and two are for flying. It's this picture of like humility and awe, you know, in front of God's holiness. Even these super powerful creatures can't fully handle it.

So they're like shielding themselves. Yeah. Out of respect.

Yeah. It's like saying God's too awesome for us to even look at. And they're constantly saying, holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of heaven's armies.

That repetition, it's not just for emphasis. It's showing us how different God is. Remember how we talked about holy meaning other in Hebrew? Yeah.

So God is totally unique in a category all his own. Right. But then we get that line: the whole earth is full of his glory.

It's like the flip side, you know? Okay. So he's totally other, but also everywhere. I'm trying to wrap my head around that.

It means God's not some distant being, you know? He's present all around us in the beauty of creation, in those moments of goodness we experience. So like every sunset, every act of kindness, every time something makes you go, wow, that's amazing. That's a little bit of God's glory shining through.

You got it. But okay. Back to Isaiah.

He sees this vision. Here are these incredible things. And he freaks out.

Woe is me. I am lost. And he doesn't even say I'm a sinner.

It's lost. Like his whole being is undone. That's the key.

That word in Hebrew means more than just messing up. It's about being shattered. Like your identity dissolves.

Isaiah is saying he can't even exist in this kind of holiness. I've had moments where I felt kind of like that. Maybe not that intense, but like when you realize you really messed up and it just crushes you.

We've all been there. And that's where change can happen. You know, when we're broken, that's where grace can really work.

But he also says unclean lips. What's the deal with that? Well, think about it. He's a prophet, right? His words are his tools.

And suddenly standing before God, he sees how inadequate they are, how tainted. Like his words can't even handle this kind of truth. Exactly.

And isn't that something we struggle with too? I mean, how often do our words come out wrong or we use them to hurt others? It's a big deal. Yeah, it makes you think twice about what you say. So if we want to speak truth, we've got to check our own hearts first, right? A hundred percent.

Are we speaking out of love? Are our words building up or tearing down? Big questions to ask ourselves. So Isaiah is basically a wreck at this point, right? Hopeless. But then that seraph comes back with the hot coal and touches it to his lips.

I'm cringing just imagining it. It's not a gentle image. But remember, fire is symbolic, right? It's about purification, transformation.

It's like God's grace burning away what's not good and making Isaiah ready to serve. You're going through the fire to come out stronger. That's it.

And Dr. Oswalt asks this awesome question. Which altar did the coal come from? Incense, representing prayer? Or burnt offerings? Sacrifice. Okay, yeah.

Now I'm really seeing the themes here. Sacrifice, change. It's all pretty serious stuff.

And that's the point, right? Following God isn't a walk in the park. It takes something from us. This willingness to let go of what we want and embrace his plan, even when it's tough.

So it's about surrendering, not earning our way. Exactly. And that leads us to the call.

You know, God asks, "Who shall I send? Who will go for us? It's not a command. It's an invitation. Like Isaiah, are you in on this? It's your choice.

That's it. Shows how much God values our free will. He doesn't make us do anything.

He wants us to choose him, even if it's hard. And Isaiah, from being a total mess, now says, here I am, send me. Wow.

From despair to action. That's what encountering God can do. But wait, there's a twist.

God doesn't give him some feel-good message to preach. It's going to be hard, even make things worse in the short term. Why would God do that? That's a tough part to understand, right? But Dr. Oswalt says, imagine if Isaiah preached a super easy, popular message.

People might change on the surface, but not deep down. Oh, so it's like, you got to get real, even if it's painful for real change to happen. That's it.

And Isaiah is not just obeying blindly. He's wrestling with it. How long, Lord? He's in, but he wants to know: how long will this tough road be? And does God give him an answer, like a timeline? Not really.

He says, preach until the land is desolate. Pretty bleak. So it's a long game, eh? Like planting seeds that might take forever to sprout.

That's it. And it's a message for us too. Sometimes God's work is slow.

We don't see the results right away. So how do we keep going when it feels like we're just shouting into the void? That's where faith comes in, you know? Trusting that God is working, even when we can't see it. He's planting seeds that might not bear fruit for generations.

That's a powerful thought. But there's hope, right? That remnant, the holy seed. Right.

Even in the mess, God is keeping a faithful few. It reminds us, no matter how bad things get, he's always working, bringing people to him. So even when it seems hopeless, there's still a reason to hang on.

Absolutely. And that hope isn't just wishful thinking. It's based on God's faithfulness.

He always keeps his promises, even when we don't see the way forward. This has been quite the journey. Despair, holiness, speaking truth, even when it's tough.

But how does this all connect to our lives today? We're not prophets. We don't have burning coals and angels. That's where it gets really practical, you know? It's not just Isaiah's story.

It's for anyone who wants to live a life that, you know, really matters. Okay, but how do we actually do that? Yeah. We're not exactly running into seraphim on the street corner.

True. But those big ideas, they still apply. Remember that line in the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.

Have you ever had a King Uzziah, something or someone you put so much trust in, maybe even made it an idol without realizing it? Ooh, yeah. For me, I think it was my job. Like, my whole identity was wrapped up in that title, you know? And when I got laid off, man, it was rough.

But it forced me to look at what I really cared about, you know? Exactly. Loss, those breakups, those moments when what we thought was solid crumbles- that's when we can see things with new eyes. That's where growth happens.

It could be anything, really. A relationship, even just an idea we're clinging to. Absolutely.

Anything we put above God, anything that becomes more important than Him- sometimes that stuff has got to go for us to really see Him. Kind of scary, to be honest. But like, also freeing.

Like, once you let go of those false things, it opens you up. That's it. It's not about saying those things are bad.

It's about putting them in the right place. Realizing that true security, the stuff that really matters, comes from God. Okay, that makes sense.

But how do we do that? Like, let go of our King Uzziahs and actually have deeper faith? It starts with honesty. Admitting what we're clinging to, what we're afraid to lose, and then asking, what am I really afraid of? What if I gave this to God? Like, taking a good, hard look inside. Exactly.

And it's not a one-time thing. It's constantly surrendering, letting go, trusting God's got a better plan than we do. Speaking of plans, Isaiah got a pretty rough one.

Go preach truth that's going to make people mad. Still struggling with that part. I know, it's tough.

But remember what we said about truth hurting sometimes? If we sugarcoat it, we're not really helping anyone. So honesty, even if it's risky, even if people get upset. That's it.

But it's not about being mean. It's about speaking because you care, because you want people to see things clearly, to have a real relationship with God. Isaiah did that, right? Spoke the truth, even when it was tough, when people pushed back.

Exactly. And think about today. It's so easy to just stay in our little bubbles with people who agree with us all the time.

But that doesn't help us grow. So we've got to get out of those echo chambers, hear different viewpoints, even if it's uncomfortable. Yes.

And do it with kindness and humility, realizing we don't know everything. It's about being open to learning, to being changed by other people's stories. That's tough, though.

It's way easier to just stay comfy. It is. But Isaiah wasn't called to be comfy.

He was called to obey, to step out in faith, trusting God would use him even when things were hard. That's a message for all of us. So it's about saying yes to God, even when we don't get it, when it's scary.

That's it. And remember, Isaiah wasn't alone. God was with him.

And God's with us, too. When we let go of those King Uzziahs and step out, he's right there guiding us, making us stronger than we thought we could be. That's awesome.

This whole conversation has me thinking: where am I clinging to my own king Uzziah? And what would it look like to really trust God, even with those uncomfortable truths he's showing me? That's what a deep dive like this is all about, right? It makes us think, challenges our ideas, and ultimately brings us face to face with God. He's bigger than our fears and way more loving than we can imagine. So here's my final thought for you.

What truth is God calling you to speak? What scary but awesome thing is he inviting you to do? Don't be afraid to say yes, even if it means going through fire. The change might just amaze you.