

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 13, Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

All right, let's jump into this deep dive into Isaiah chapters 26 and 27. We're looking at Dr. John Oswalt's lectures, and let me tell you, he's got some really cool insights. He doesn't just explain the verses; he brings them to life with some pretty vivid imagery, and he tells some stories that'll really make you think.

Yeah, one of the things that really grabs you about Dr. Oswalt's work is how he connects things that seem totally unrelated, and then bam, he uses those connections to show you the deeper meaning. He'll be talking about tuba players finding shalom or comparing cities to sandcastles. Right, totally.

So are you ready to unpack all this? Absolutely, let's dive right in. Okay, cool. So just a little background: chapters 24 through 27 in Isaiah are all connected by this theme of song.

You've got songs of victory, songs of terror, songs of praise, and they all build up to this super powerful song of the redeemed in chapter 26. And it's really interesting how Dr. Oswalt uses this whole musical thing to highlight a stark contrast between these two cities. Yes, he talks about the strong city of God.

It's built on salvation, and it stands in total opposition to this lofty city that's heading for destruction. He uses this analogy of a strong castle compared to a sandcastle, which I think is really effective. And it really makes you think like, which one are you building your life on? That's a good question.

It kind of leads right into one of Dr. Oswalt's most interesting ideas, this idea of eternal security, but with a twist. Oh, yeah. He says we have this incredible security in God, but we can also choose to walk away from it.

You know, when you're talking about the security we have in God, it makes me think that maybe Dr. Oswalt is pointing to this inherent tension, this choice we're constantly facing. Do we trust in God's strength, or do we rely on our own fleeting sense of security? I think it's a powerful reminder that the choice is really ours. God's love is always there.

It's constant. But how we respond to that love determines whether we stay within the walls of his city. Or if we go out into this vulnerable place with no protection.

Yeah, that makes sense. And speaking of those who live in God's city, Dr. Oswalt talks about these four key characteristics: righteousness, faithfulness, steadfastness, and trust. What do you think about those? Are those just qualities we should try to have? Or are they, like Dr. Oswalt suggests, kind of the inevitable results of surrendering our lives to God? That's a really good question.

And I don't think Dr. Oswalt is just giving us a checklist here. He really goes deep into each characteristic, showing how they're all connected and how they naturally flow from a deep relationship with God. He says that real righteousness isn't just about following rules.

It's about lining up our hearts with what God wants. So it's not about being perfect, but about letting God change us from the inside out. Exactly.

And that surrender, that's where the other characteristics come in. Faithfulness becomes like a natural response to our commitment to God. Steadfastness or unwavering hope, as some translations say, flows from our trust in God's promises.

And trust, well, that's the foundation of it all. It grows when we experience God's faithfulness in our own lives. So it's like those four characteristics are more like signposts.

You know, they're pointing us towards shalom. That's a great way to put it. They show us the path.

But the real goal is shalom, the deep sense of wholeness and peace that Dr. Oswalt talks about. And he doesn't shy away from how complex shalom really is. He says it's not just about the absence of conflict, and it's not some kind of passive bliss either.

He actually describes it as being put together, almost like when you finally finish a puzzle, and all the pieces are in place. Yes. And he uses this great analogy of a really skilled musician finding shalom in the middle of playing a difficult piece of music.

It's not that there aren't any challenges, but it's about experiencing this wholeness and purpose that comes from embracing those challenges and using the gifts God has given us to overcome them. Think about that for a second. How can you experience shalom in your daily life? Dr. Oswalt says it starts with recognizing and using the unique gifts that God has given you.

Okay. So we've got this image of a strong city, and we've talked about the characteristics of the people who live there and the ultimate goal of shalom. But how do we actually get there? What's the path? Well, in chapter 26, Isaiah describes it as a level path for the righteous, a path that's been made straight by God.

Wow. That's a really powerful image. And it's not just a one-time thing either.

If you jump ahead to chapter 40, you see this recurring theme of God preparing a way for his people, clearing obstacles, making rough places smooth. It's almost like he's saying, I'm going ahead of you. Just trust me and follow.

Trust and follow. I love that. And Dr. Oswalt reminds us that in the Old Testament, trust and wait are often used in the same way.

That's a good point. It's not about waiting passively. It's about actively trusting, having this confident expectation that God is working everything out according to his plan.

Yeah. It's like that feeling of, I can't wait to see what God does next. Exactly.

And this brings us to one of the more challenging passages in this section. Dr. Oswalt digs into this idea that sometimes God's favor can actually stop the wicked from learning righteousness. That's a tough one.

It is. It kind of challenges our assumptions about God's grace, doesn't it? It's easy to think that God's blessings always lead people to repent, but Dr. Oswalt says that's not always the case. Sometimes when things are going well, it's easy to get complacent and lose sight of how much we need God.

You know, it's interesting. He even suggests that America might be going through this very thing right now. Yeah.

I don't want to speculate too much about any specific nation, but it's definitely a question worth thinking about. Can abundance rather than hardship actually blind us to our need for God? It definitely makes you think. But even with this challenging idea, Dr. Oswalt also emphasizes how important it is to remember God's name, not just as a name, but as His character, His nature, His reputation.

Right. It's not about just saying a name. It's about actively remembering everything that God is and everything He's done.

He even connects this back to Jesus' words at the Last Supper when He told us to do this in remembrance of Him. It's about making God's character and His redemptive work the center of our lives. So it's like our lives should be a living, breathing testament to who God is and what He's done for us.

Exactly. And that leads to another profound idea that Dr. Oswalt's impacts. This idea that our deliverance, our experience of shalom, can actually be a form of condemnation for those who haven't experienced it yet.

That one's always been hard for me to wrap my head around. It seems so counterintuitive. How can our freedom point to someone else's bondage? It's not that we're intentionally condemning anyone.

It's more like our transformed lives, the evidence of God's grace in us, it can sometimes highlight the spiritual emptiness in others. Think of it like this. Our very existence can be a mirror reflecting back their own need for God.

Like that saying, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. We can share our faith, our experiences, our changed lives, but in the end, it's up to each person to choose whether they'll take a drink from God's grace. That's exactly where the tension lies.

We want to share the hope and joy we found in Christ, but we also have to respect people's free will. We can't force anyone to believe. But we can pray for them.

We can ask God to open their hearts and minds to the truth. Absolutely. Prayer is powerful.

And sometimes the most effective way to share our faith is just by living it out authentically, letting our actions speak louder than our words. It's about embodying those characteristics we talked about earlier: righteousness, faithfulness, steadfastness, and trust. That's a great point.

It's not about preaching at people. It's about reflecting God's love in real, tangible ways. And speaking of reflecting, we can't forget the hopeful message of resurrection that's woven all through Isaiah.

Yeah, you're right. In chapter 26, verse 19, it says, Your dead shall live, their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy.

It's a powerful reminder that death isn't the end. God has the final say, and his plan is always for our good, even when it doesn't feel like it. And Dr. Oswalt makes it very clear that destruction is never God's final word.

His ultimate desire is for redemption, for restoration, for new life. And that leads us to a really fascinating part of Dr. Oswalt's analysis. He draws this amazing parallel between the ancient Near Eastern myths about chaos and God's power to bring order and salvation out of the chaos of sin.

That's where it gets really interesting. So in these ancient myths, you have this idea of this primeval chaos. It existed before the gods created order in the world.

But Dr. Oswalt points out that the ancient Hebrews didn't buy into those myths. They believed that God created a world that was perfectly ordered, but sin brought chaos into it. And that changes everything.

What's so powerful is that they use this familiar imagery and language of chaos to communicate a completely different message: that God has the power to overcome the chaos of sin and redeem humanity. It wasn't about a bunch of gods fighting for control. It was about the one true God bringing order and salvation out of the mess we created.

And to illustrate this point, Dr. Oswalt shares this amazing story about Louis Zamperini, the Olympic runner who survived a plane crash. He was stranded at sea for 47 days and then endured brutal treatment as a prisoner of war. Wow, that's an incredible story of resilience and the power of faith in the face of unimaginable suffering.

Seriously, talk about chaos. This guy went through hell and back, but ultimately found peace and purpose through his relationship with God. It really makes you wonder: what kept him going? How did he find that sense of shalom in the middle of all that turmoil? Well, Dr. Oswalt highlights a few key moments in Zamperini's life where it seems like there was some kind of divine intervention.

Like when his plane crashed, and he was trapped underwater, tangled up in wires. He blacked out. And when he woke up, the wires were gone, and he was floating to the surface.

It's like something, or someone, miraculously freed him from certain death. Yeah. And then there was that time on the raft.

They had been without water for days. Zamperini prayed for rain and promised to dedicate his life to God if he answered his prayer. Just a few hours later, a downpour came.

Wow, talk about an answer to prayer. Right. But his trials didn't end there.

They were later attacked by a Japanese bomber. Their raft was riddled with bullet holes. Yet neither Zamperini nor the pilot was hit.

It's like they were protected by some invisible shield. Makes you wonder: was it just luck, or was there something more going on? That's exactly the question Dr. Oswalt wants us to wrestle with. He's not giving us easy answers, but he is inviting us to consider the possibility that God is at work, even in the darkest of times, bringing order out of chaos.

Even when we can't see it. It's about recognizing those moments of divine intervention, no matter how subtle they may be. And Zamperini's story really illustrates that theme of God bringing order out of chaos.

It resonates throughout Isaiah. Remember that image of the vineyard? Oh, yeah. Back in chapter 5. It was this vineyard of bitter grapes, a symbol of Israel's rebellion and the consequences that followed.

But now in chapter 27, there's a noticeable shift. This time it's described as a pleasant vineyard, a symbol of God's enduring love and care for his people, even though they messed up. It's like a picture of God's faithfulness.

Even when his people wander away from him, he keeps tending to his vineyard, hoping for a good harvest. And in that sense, aren't we all part of God's vineyard? He's invested in each and every one of us, and he wants to see us flourish. Absolutely.

But as Dr. Oswalt points out, sometimes flourishing requires pruning. And that's where the difference between discipline and punishment comes in. Right.

He makes it clear that God's discipline isn't about inflicting pain just for the sake of it. It's about guiding us towards growth and maturity. Yeah.

Even if it means allowing us to experience the consequences of our choices. It's not about being mean. It's about helping us learn and grow.

Just like a loving parent who sets boundaries for their child's good. And sometimes that growth can be painful, but ultimately it's for our good. Exactly.

Hebrews 12.11 puts it this way. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who've been trained by it.

No way. It's a good reminder that God's discipline is always rooted in love. He's not trying to tear us down.

He's trying to build us up. And that's a truth we can hold on to, even when we're going through tough times. We can trust that God is working all things together for our good, even when we can't see the bigger picture.

That's the beauty of trusting in God's plan. Even when it feels like everything's falling apart. He's the master gardener, and he knows exactly what each vine needs to thrive.

And maybe, just maybe, those times of pruning, those moments of chaos and difficulty are actually opportunities for God to bring about something even more beautiful and fruitful than we could ever imagine. It's definitely something to think about. We often resist those times of pruning, but maybe if we can shift our perspective, we might see them as invitations to surrender to God's transforming power.

And that, I think, is a perfect place to pause for now. We've covered a lot of ground in this first part of our deep dive, but don't go anywhere. We've got plenty more to explore in Isaiah 26 and 27.

So before the break, we were talking about Louis Zamparini's incredible story and how Dr. Oswalt uses it to highlight this theme of God bringing order out of chaos. What really stood out to you about that story? You know, it's hard to ignore the resilience of the human spirit, especially when it's driven by faith. Zamparini's story is like a testament to the fact that even when you're facing unimaginable suffering, hope can still survive.

And Dr. Oswalt doesn't present Zamparini's faith like some kind of magic charm. That shielded him from pain. He recognizes the very real trauma and struggles that Zamparini went through even after his physical ordeal was over.

Yeah, you're right. Dr. Oswalt points out that Zamparini struggled with nightmares, alcoholism, and the deep psychological scars from being a prisoner of war for years. It was only when he met Billy Graham and surrendered his life to Christ that he finally found real healing and peace.

And I think that's where the real power of Zamparini's story lies. It's not just about a human triumph over adversity. It's a testament to the transformative power of the gospel.

It's about God meeting us in our brokenness in the middle of all the chaos and offering us something so much greater than just survival. It's about experiencing that shalom we were talking about. That deep feeling of wholeness even after going through intense suffering.

And it's not something we can create on our own. It's a gift freely given by a God who wants us to be healed and whole more than we could ever imagine. So how does Zamparini's story connect back to the bigger themes we're exploring in Isaiah? We've got these contrasting images of the vineyard, this idea of God's discipline versus punishment, and this overall message of hope and restoration.

How does it all fit together? Zamparini's life, in a lot of ways, mirrors the journey of Israel in Isaiah. You see seasons of rebellion, times of bitter fruit, moments of intense suffering, like really chaotic events. But woven through it all, there's this thread of God's relentless love and pursuit.

Just like he didn't give up on Israel when they were being disobedient. He didn't abandon Zamparini in his pain. That's a powerful image.

God patiently tending to his vineyard, pruning away the dead branches, nurturing the fruitful vines, always working towards a bountiful harvest. And I think that's where the distinction between discipline and punishment becomes so important. Yeah.

Dr. Oswalt really emphasizes that God's discipline isn't about revenge. It's about shaping us, molding us, refining us into the people he created us to be. It's a process.

And it's not always easy, but it's always rooted in love. And that's something we all need to hear, especially when we're going through those tough times. You know, those seasons of pruning, those moments when it feels like everything is falling apart.

It's so easy to question God's goodness then, to wonder if he's punishing us for our mistakes. Right. But what if instead of seeing those difficult times as punishment, we saw them as chances to grow? What if we embrace those moments as invitations to let God transform us? That's a challenging way to look at it.

But I think it's also incredibly freeing. It takes the focus off of what we do and puts it squarely on God's grace and his ability to work all things together for good, even the messy, painful parts. And that's where trust comes in.

Choosing to believe that God is who he says he is and that he'll do what he promised, even when we can't see the whole picture. It's about remembering that he's the master gardener and he knows exactly what each vine needs to thrive. And sometimes what we need is a good pruning.

It might feel painful at the time, but ultimately it helps us bear more fruit, to grow stronger and to flourish in ways we never thought possible. Exactly. And just like God didn't give up on Israel, even when they produced bitter grapes, he won't give up on us.

He's patiently taking care of his vineyard. And he wants to see each of us flourish to bear the fruit of righteousness and shalom. Speaking of shalom, we talked about how it's not just the absence of conflict, but a state of wholeness of being put together.

And Dr. Oswalt brought up this really interesting idea that our deliverance, our experience of shalom can actually be a way of condemning those who haven't experienced it yet. How do we reconcile those two seemingly opposite ideas? It's definitely a complex concept, but I think what Dr. Oswalt's getting at is that our transformed lives, the evidence of God's grace working in us, can sometimes highlight the spiritual emptiness in other people. So it's like our light shines brightest in the darkness.

And that contrast can be uncomfortable for those who are still stumbling around in the shadows. It's not that we're trying to make anyone feel bad, but our very presence can be like a mirror reflecting back their own need for God. Right.

It's not about being judgmental or condemning. It's about living authentically, letting our lives show the transformative power of the gospel. We can't force anyone to believe, but we can offer them a glimpse of what's possible when they surrender to God's love and grace.

Maybe that's the most powerful way to share our faith, not through words, but through the real changes that happen in our lives when we walk with God. It's about living out those characteristics we talked about earlier: righteousness, faithfulness, steadfastness, and trust. And it's about recognizing that transformation is an ongoing process.

We're all works in progress, but God is patiently working in each of us, pruning away the dead branches, nurturing the fruitful vines, bringing us closer to that state of shalom, that deep sense of wholeness. And that brings us to the core of Isaiah's message, the amazing hope of resurrection. In chapter 26, we read those powerful words: your dead shall live, their bodies will rise.

You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy. Such a beautiful reminder that death is not the end. God has the final say, and his plan is always for our good, even when it doesn't seem like it.

Dr. Oswalt emphasized that destruction is never what God ultimately wants for us. He wants redemption, restoration, new life. It's like the story of the vineyard.

Even when it produces bad grapes, God doesn't abandon it. He continues to care for it, hoping for a better harvest. And that's true for all of us.

It doesn't matter how far we've strayed or how many mistakes we've made. God never gives up on us. He's always there waiting with open arms, ready to welcome us back into his love.

It's a beautiful picture of a love that never fails, a hope that never dies, and a grace that's always there for those who look for it. And I think that's the essence of the gospel message, a message of redemption, restoration, and new life. It's a message that echoes throughout Isaiah, and it speaks to what humans really long for deep down.

So as we get ready to move into the final part of our deep dive, I want to leave our listeners with this question. If God's ultimate goal is restoration and new life, how does that change the way you see your own life, your struggles, your hopes, and your dreams? What does it mean for you to be a part of God's vineyard, to experience his love and grace, and to be an ambassador for his hope and healing in a world that needs it so badly? Those are some really good questions to think about. And as we dive into the last section of Isaiah, 12 weeks and 27, I think we'll discover even more about God's heart for his people, and his plan to redeem us.

We'll be back after a short break to continue our exploration. All right, welcome back. Before the break, we were talking about God's incredible love and how he never stops pursuing us, and how that actually works out in our everyday lives.

It's powerful stuff, but like, what does it actually look like? How do we go through this transformation, this journey towards Shalom, in the middle of all the messiness of life? That's a great question. And I think Dr. Oswalt gives us some really helpful insights. He reminds us that true transformation isn't a one-time thing.

It's a process. He compares it to a potter working with clay, carefully molding and shaping it. It's not about becoming perfect overnight.

It's about letting go, and letting God's loving hands work on us over time. So it's not so much about trying really hard, but more about yielding. Exactly.

And that yielding takes humility. It's admitting that we have limits, that we're broken, that we need God's grace. And it's trusting that He knows what's best for us, even when we don't get it.

I mean, that can be a tough thing to accept, especially in a culture where being self-sufficient and in control is so valued. We want to fix everything ourselves, have all the answers, be the masters of our own fate, you know. But like we've seen in Isaiah, God's ways are often the opposite of what we expect.

He wants us to surrender, to let go of our need to be in control, and just trust His power and wisdom. It's in that surrender, that letting go, that we really start to experience the freedom and peace He offers. It's kind of like that paradox we talked about earlier.

Our strength comes from admitting our weakness. The more we try to do everything ourselves, the more frustrated and tired we get. But when we admit we need God, when we surrender to His will, that's when we tap into a strength that's way bigger than our own.

And that strength is what helps us keep going during those times of pruning, those moments when it feels like God's not there. Yeah. It gives us hope when we're facing these huge challenges.

It reminds us that even when things are really dark, God is still working behind the scenes, making everything work out for good. And that brings us back to that image of the vineyard. We talked about how God is the gardener, taking care of His vines, pruning the dead branches, nurturing the good ones.

But in Isaiah 27, there's something really amazing. God doesn't just tend His vineyard. He protects it fiercely.

You're right. It says, Sing about a fruitful vineyard. I, the Lord, watch over it.

I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it. It's such a strong image of God's love and care for His people.

It's like He's saying, You are so valuable to me. I'm totally invested in you and I'll do whatever it takes to keep you safe. And it's not just about being physically safe.

It's about protecting our hearts and minds from the enemy's attacks. Right. It's about protecting us from those lies that tell us we're not good enough, that we can't be redeemed, that God's given up on us.

It's about reminding us of His truth, His love, His faithfulness that never wavers. And that faithfulness is what gives us hope even when we face death. In Isaiah 26, we read those powerful words about resurrection.

Your dead shall live. Their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust awake and sing for joy.

It's such a different view of death compared to what people believed back then. Definitely. Other cultures saw death as the absolute end.

But the Israelites, through Isaiah, proclaimed this hope that went beyond the grave. And it wasn't just wishful thinking. It came from their understanding of God's character and His promises.

And Dr. Oswalt reminds us that the hope of resurrection isn't just some abstract idea. It affects how we live today. If we really believe that death isn't the end, that there's more after this life, it changes everything.

It takes away the fear of death. So we can live boldly and with purpose. It gives us a perspective that goes beyond right now.

It reminds us that our lives are just a blip compared to eternity. And it makes us want to invest in things that matter forever. To live in a way that shows our hope in the resurrection.

So as we wrap up this deep dive into Isaiah 26 and 27, what's the one thing you want our listeners to take away? I think it's this: no matter what you're going through, no matter how chaotic or uncertain your life might feel, you're not alone. You're part of God's vineyard and He cares about you deeply. He's the master gardener, patiently helping you grow, pruning the dead stuff, nurturing the good stuff.

He's your protector, your provider, and your ultimate hope. And he wants to see you flourish to experience his shalom fully, both now and in eternity. Wow.

That's beautiful and so encouraging. We've only just scratched the surface of the wisdom in these chapters, but hopefully we've given you a little taste of the richness that's there. So as you go about your week, we encourage you to dig into the source material yourself, wrestle with the text, and let God speak to you directly through his word.

He has something to say to each of us, and his words are life-giving. They change us, and they matter forever. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive into Isaiah.

Until next time, may you experience God's shalom in every part of your life.