

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 16, Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

All right, let's dive into Isaiah today. Sounds good. Chapters 32 and 33.

Okay. And we are so lucky to have Dr. John Oswalt's thoughts to help us along the way. Wonderful.

These chapters, they kind of hit differently because they're all about trusting God when everything feels really shaky. And it's kind of like when Judah was staring down that Assyrian invasion and their own leaders were making some interesting choices, shall we say? Yeah. It's fascinating, isn't it? You've got this backdrop of impending doom, and yet Isaiah manages to weave in a powerful message of hope.

Totally. And that's where chapter 32 kicks off, right? It doesn't start with the usual woe to, you know, whatever; it just jumps into these really positive promises. It's like a breath of fresh air after all the warnings and judgments we've been talking about.

Isaiah is painting a picture here of the righteous king, a leader who is the polar opposite of the corrupt ones that Judah is used to. This new king brings transparency and justice and true nobility. Okay.

But then there's this line about how, like, fools and scoundrels won't have a place in this new kingdom. Right. And knowing Isaiah, he's not just throwing around casual insults.

Absolutely not. The word fool in the Old Testament carries a lot of weight. It's not about lacking intelligence.

It's about rejecting God's wisdom, choosing to walk in darkness instead of light. It really makes you think: who are the fools in our own time? That's a good question. What kinds of choices and actions mark someone as truly foolish in God's eyes? That's a great question to ponder.

So we've got these incredible promises of a new kingdom, a righteous king, but then Isaiah hits us with a warning about complacency. Why the sudden shift? Well, I think Isaiah recognizes that it's easy to hear these promises and just sit back. Oh yeah.

Expecting God to do all the work. Yeah. It's like, okay, God's got this.

I can relax now. Yeah. But true trust involves action.

It requires us to respond to God's grace by actively participating in the transformation he's bringing about. So it's not just about receiving the promise. It's about tending to the soil of our hearts.

Exactly. Making sure we're actually prepared for the good things God has in store. Isaiah uses the imagery of a failing grape harvest to illustrate this point.

If the people don't tend to the vineyard of their hearts, they won't bear fruit. It's a powerful reminder that God's blessings aren't automatic. They require our cooperation.

That reminds me of something Oswalt said about thorns and briars. You can't just expect a garden to flourish if you're not willing to do the hard work of weeding out the stuff that chokes the life out of it. Exactly.

And that work often involves confronting our own complacency. Those areas where we've gotten comfortable with mediocrity or allowed sin to take root, it's not always pleasant, but it's essential for growth. Okay.

So things are looking a little bleak with this failing harvest and all these thorns and briars. But then we get to verse 15, which talks about a turning point. Right.

This is where the Holy Spirit enters the picture. It's like a drought-stricken land suddenly being flooded with life-giving rain. I love that.

The barrenness ends, and everything starts to bloom again. I love that imagery. And Oswalt had this really interesting take on chapters 32 and 33 as a whole.

He suggested that they might be a parable for the Christian life. I find that so insightful. Think about it.

Conversion is like entering a new kingdom, full of hope and promise. But then, just like the people of Judah, we can become complacent. We start taking God's grace for granted, and our hearts become hardened.

Until the Holy Spirit shows up and shakes things up. Exactly. He awakens us to our need for God, convicts us of our sin, and empowers us to live lives that are truly aligned with his will.

Wow. It's like we're given a fresh start, a new opportunity to bear fruit. And speaking of fruit, Oswalt asked a pretty challenging question.

What are the results of the Spirit's work in our lives? Is it all about spectacular signs and wonders? Isaiah would say no. Look at verses 16 to 18. The real work of the Holy Spirit is about character transformation.

It's about cultivating righteousness, justice, peace, and a quiet trust in God. It's not about outward show. It's about the inward change.

Oswalt drew a distinction between fruit, which represents character, and gifts, which are more about utility. While gifts can be misused, true spiritual fruit can't be faked. It's an authentic expression of God's work in our lives.

It's like the difference between a plastic fruit you might use for decoration and a real piece of fruit that nourishes and sustains you. And this theme of inner transformation is echoed in other parts of Scripture. Like Ezekiel 36, where God promises to give his people new hearts and enable them to walk in his ways.

So it's not just about outward behavior modification. It's about a radical change from the inside out. Absolutely.

And that kind of change doesn't happen overnight. It's a process, a journey of continually surrendering to God's transforming power and allowing his Spirit to work in us. It sounds like a pretty incredible adventure, though, wouldn't you say? It really is.

It really is. And, you know, that journey of transformation leads us right into chapter 33. Remember, it starts with that last woe.

And while scholars might debate about who this destroyer is, the point seems pretty clear. You mean that God isn't going to just sit back and watch while his people are exploited and betrayed? Exactly. There are consequences for those who choose to operate outside of God's order.

Okay. But what's striking to me is the contrast between this chapter and chapter 30. Okay.

Back then, the people were rejecting God's offer of returning and rest, determined to do things their own way. Now their tune has changed. They're like, okay, God, we messed up.

We're ready to wait on you now. It's a beautiful moment of surrender, isn't it? Yeah. And notice how the theme of God's exaltation runs through this entire chapter.

Yeah. It's not just about acknowledging his power, but about recognizing that true peace and security come from aligning our lives with his will, his design. So it's not enough to just say God is great.

We have to actually live in a way that reflects that belief. Absolutely. And that brings us to those three powerful titles given to God in Isaiah 33.22. Okay.

Judge, Lawgiver, King. Wow. Each one reveals something important about his character and how he interacts with us.

Let's untack those, starting with Judge. Now I know we've talked about this before, but it's easy to get caught up in this image of God as a harsh, condemning figure. Right.

But remember, in the biblical context, a judge isn't primarily about punishment. It's about restoring order, upholding justice, making things right. It's like when a referee steps in to ensure everyone is playing by the rules so the game can continue fairly.

So when Isaiah calls God the judge, he's emphasizing his role in establishing a just and righteous world. Exactly. And then there's the title, Lawgiver.

Okay. This points to God as the one who designed us, who gave us the instruction manual for how life works best. Right.

It's like if you want your car to run smoothly, you follow the maintenance schedule. It makes sense. So ignoring God's laws is kind of like running your car on empty and then wondering why it broke down.

You could say that. Yeah. And finally, we have King.

Right. Which emphasizes God's ultimate authority and sovereignty. Okay.

He is the ruler, the one who sets the standards and calls it to live in alignment with his purposes. Wow. These three titles together paint this incredible picture of God as both powerful and involved.

Yeah. He's not some distant deity. Right.

But a ruler who is deeply invested in the well-being of his creation. Now, when you look at the contrast between Isaiah 33.56 and those verses that follow, 7-9, it's like night and day. Yeah.

One minute you've got this image of abundance and stability, and then suddenly everything falls apart. It's a stark reminder of the consequences of choosing to live outside of God's order when we reject His wisdom, when we try to build our own little kingdoms; things inevitably crumble.

Isaiah doesn't hold back in describing that downfall, does he? Highways, deserted covenants, broken, a total disregard for human life. It's a pretty bleak picture. It is.

Yeah. And it leads us to that famous question in Isaiah 33.14. Yeah. Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Right.

That's a question that has resonated throughout history, forcing us to confront the reality of God's holiness and our own inadequacy. It can feel pretty intimidating, to be honest. Yeah.

Like who are we to even stand in God's presence, let alone live with him? That's a varied feeling. Yeah. But it's important to remember that this isn't about God being mean or unapproachable.

Right. It's about the reality of his pure, perfect nature. Yeah.

Imagine trying to bring a muddy, dirt-covered shoe into a pristine white room. Right. It just wouldn't work with it.

Not without making a huge mess. Exactly. Yeah.

Our sin, our brokenness. It creates this barrier between a holy God and us. We can't just barge into his presence without being transformed.

So what's the solution? Isaiah 33.15 gives this list of qualities: living righteously, speaking honestly, and rejecting oppression. It kind of sounds like salvation by works, doesn't it? I can see how you get that impression. But true righteousness isn't something we can achieve on our own.

Okay. It's a gift from God, received through faith and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Right.

Think of it like this. Imagine you're trying to climb a sheer cliff face. Okay.

It's impossible to do it in your own strength. Yeah. But what if someone threw down a rope offering to pull you up? Well, and then you'd grab onto that rope for dear life.

Exactly. God's grace is that rope. We can't reach him on our own, but he extends his hand, offering to lift us up and transform us.

And as we cling to him, as we allow his spirit to work in us, we start to see those characteristics described in verse 15 begin to take shape in our lives. So it's not about trying to be good enough for God, but about surrendering to his transforming power and letting him mold us into the people he created us to be. That's a great way to put it.

And as we yield to that process, as we allow ourselves to be shaped by his grace, we become more than just rule followers. Okay. We become reflections of his character, his love, his justice.

It's like we're trading in our old worn-out clothes for a brand new wardrobe fit for a king's palace. What a beautiful image. And it reminds me of something Oswalt shared in his lecture.

Oh yeah. He talked about how the day he realized his own righteousness was like dung in a dunghill. It was the best day of his life.

Wow. That's quite a statement. What do you think he meant by that? I think he was expressing the freedom that comes from letting go of our own efforts to be good and surrendering to God's grace.

It's like he finally realized that true righteousness isn't about striving and performing, but about receiving God's free gift and allowing that gift to transform him from the inside out. It's a good reminder that we can stop trying to earn God's love because he already loves us unconditionally. And that love has the power to change everything.

Absolutely. Yeah. And when we experience that kind of transformative love, it naturally overflows into our relationships with others.

Okay. We become less self-focused and more attuned to the needs of those around us. So instead of constantly worrying about our own image and reputation, we're free to extend grace and compassion to others.

Exactly. We become more forgiving, more patient, more willing to serve and sacrifice. Right.

It's like that old saying: you can't give what you don't have. If we're not filled with God's love, we can't truly love others. That makes a lot of sense.

So these chapters in Isaiah aren't just about some abstract theological concepts. They're about a radical transformation that affects every aspect of our lives, our relationship with God, our relationships with others, and even how we see ourselves. You hit the nail on the head.

It's about recognizing that we can't do it on our own, but with God's help, we can become the people he created us to be. And those people reflect his love and grace in a world that

desperately needs it. It's not about becoming perfect overnight, is it? It's about taking that first step of faith, surrendering to God's transforming power and allowing him to work in us day by day.

And it's a journey with its share of ups and downs, twists and turns. Right. But with God as our guide, we can navigate those challenges and emerge even stronger on the other side.

It's like hiking a challenging trail. There will be steep climbs and rocky paths, but the view from the summit is breathtaking. And we have the assurance that we're not alone on that journey.

God is with us every step of the way, providing strength, guidance, and encouragement. That's such an important point. We're not meant to go it alone.

We have God's Spirit within us, empowering us, and we have each other to walk alongside us, offering support and accountability. Speaking of walking alongside each other, I'm curious: what do you think it looked like for the people of Judah to live out this kind of transformed life in their historical context? Remember, they were facing this terrifying Assyrian invasion. Their leaders were making some questionable choices.

It must have felt pretty chaotic. You're right. It was a time of great uncertainty and fear.

But even in the midst of that turmoil, Isaiah's words offered a message of hope and challenge. He was essentially saying, look, I know things are tough right now, but don't give up hope. Don't put your trust in fleeting human solutions.

Turn to God, the one who holds all things in his hands. He is your only true hope. So even when everything around them felt like it was falling apart, they were to keep their eyes fixed on God, trusting that he would ultimately bring deliverance and restoration.

Exactly. And that message resonates just as powerfully today as it did back then. Right.

We live in a world that can often feel chaotic and unpredictable. It's easy to get caught up in fear and anxiety, to look for quick fixes and easy solutions to our problems. But Isaiah is reminding us that true security and lasting peace aren't found in external circumstances or human strategies.

They're found in a deep, abiding, trusting God, a surrender to his will and his ways. And he's assuring us that when we choose to exalt God above all else, we will experience his transforming power, not only in our own lives, but also in the world around us. It's like those ripples you were talking about earlier.

Yeah. Our individual transformation has the potential to create a ripple effect impacting our families, communities, and even the wider culture. We might not be facing a literal Assyrian invasion.

Right. But we all have battles to fight, challenges to overcome. Right.

And the way we choose to approach those challenges, the posture of our hearts, it matters. So as we move forward from this deep dive into Isaiah 32 and 33, I want to encourage our listeners to really consider what it means to exalt God in their everyday life. Yeah.

What choices can they make, big or small, to put God first? How can they allow his spirit to guide their thoughts, words, and actions? Those are great questions to ponder. And as you reflect on them, remember the incredible promises that Isaiah offers to those who choose to trust in God. Yes.

He promises peace, justice, righteousness, and a future filled with hope. Let's hold on to those promises and let's choose to live lives that reflect God's glory even in the midst of chaos and uncertainty. And you know what? We'll be back next time to explore the concluding chapters of this section on trust in Isaiah chapters 34 and 35.

Oh, great. We'll see how Isaiah masterfully weaves together judgment in a hope challenge in comfort, painting a vivid picture of God's ultimate plan for his people. Oh, I'm already looking forward to unpacking those chapters.

They're full of such rich imagery and profound truths. But for now, we'll leave our listener with this thought. If true righteousness comes from the Holy Spirit, as we've been discussing, what might that look like in your everyday life? What are those thorns and briars that need to be weeded out? What steps can you take to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in your heart and mind? Those are powerful questions to wrestle with.

Take some time to really ponder them, and who knows? Your answers might surprise you. Until next time, keep diving deep and discovering the treasures of God's word. As we're wrapping up this deep dive into Isaiah 32 and 33, I keep thinking about that image of God as the consuming fire.

It's a powerful image, you know, a little bit intimidating, right? It definitely makes you think, yeah, it does. And it connects directly back to that question we were wrestling with, right? Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? That question forces us to confront our own limitations, our need for transformation. And Isaiah gives us that answer, right? He does.

In verse 15, he lists all those qualities: living righteously, speaking honestly, rejecting ill-gotten gain. But it's easy to read that and think, wait a minute, is this about earning our way into God's good graces? I know it's a common misconception. Right.

But remember, Oswalt highlighted something really important about those verses. He said they describe the kind of person who can dwell with the consuming fire. But then he pointed out that those very characteristics are the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

So it's not about us mustering up enough righteousness. It's about surrendering to the one who makes us righteous. Yes.

It's a beautiful paradox. Yeah. We can't dwell with God in our own strength.

But when we surrender to him, his Spirit empowers us to live in a way that aligns with his holiness. It's not about striving. It's about receiving.

So we're given this impossible task, right? Be holy as I am holy. But we're also given the means to actually accomplish it through the power of the Holy Spirit. That's it.

It's not a DIY project, thank goodness. True righteousness. The kind that allows us to stand before God without fear.

It's a gift. It's received through faith, nurtured by the Spirit. It's not something we achieve, but something we are given and then grow into.

Which makes me think of that analogy we used earlier. The one about the garden. Yes.

We can't just will ourselves to produce fruit. We need the right soil, the water, the sunlight, and the Holy Spirit is all of that for us, helping us to grow and flourish. I love that.

And just like a gardener tends to their plants, we need to stay connected to the source of our righteousness. We can't produce it on our own. We need to continually draw on God's grace and allow his Spirit to do the work within us.

It's like plugging into a power source, right? Yes. If we want to live the kind of life God's calling us to, a life that reflects his character, we need to stay plugged into his power. And when we do, when we stay connected to the source, we'll start to see those characteristics described in Isaiah 33.15 blossoming in our own lives.

Right. We become more righteous, more honest, more compassionate, more willing to stand up for what's right. And that's not just good for us.

It actually impacts the world around us, doesn't it? Absolutely. It's like a stone dropped into a pond, creating those ever-expanding circles of influence. Beautiful image.

The transformation that begins in our own hearts ripples outward, affecting our families, our communities, and ultimately the world as a whole. What a thought. It's incredible to think about the potential, the power of one life surrendered to God, one heart filled with his spirit.

Powerful. It can really make a difference. It absolutely can.

And that's what's so hopeful about these chapters in Isaiah. They challenge us, they confront us with our need for God. But they also offer us this incredible promise that through his Spirit, we can experience true transformation, the kind that changes us from the inside out and then spills out into the world around us.

So as we wrap up this deep dive into Isaiah chapters 32 and 33, I want to leave our listener with this challenge. Think about what it means to exalt God in your everyday life. What choices can you make, big or small, to put him first? How can you allow his spirit to guide your thoughts, your words, and your actions? It might be something as simple as taking a few minutes each day to quiet your heart and listen to his voice.

Or it might mean choosing to forgive someone who has hurt you, even when it's hard. Whatever it looks like for you, remember those incredible promises that Isaiah offers? To

those who choose to trust in God, he promises peace, justice, righteousness, and a future filled with hope. Let's embrace those promises and choose to live lives that reflect his glory.

Beautiful. And don't forget, we'll be back next time to explore those concluding chapters of this section on trust in Isaiah, chapters 34 and 35. We'll delve into how Isaiah weaves together judgment and hope, challenge and comfort, giving us a glimpse of God's ultimate plan for his people.

I can't wait. Until then, keep diving deep into God's word and discovering those treasures he has in store for you. Right.