

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 21, Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's jump into another deep dive. This time we're going to tackle Isaiah, chapters 42 and 43. Oh, those are good ones.

Yeah, we're talking about big stuff. God's grace, that whole servant idea and how Israel is supposed to deal with all the other nations. And to help us unpack all this, we've got Dr. John Oswalt's lectures.

He's a great teacher, really makes you think. Right. So let's dive in and see what we can discover.

Sounds good to me. Okay, so right off the bat, we hit this puzzle with exile. Yeah, exile.

Is it just straight up punishment or is there something more to it? Like, is it some kind of purification process? That's a good question. It's not an easy one to answer, that's for sure. And I think that's what makes it so interesting.

Like you're in exile, things are bad. How is that a good thing? But then you've got Isaiah's vision, the one with the burning coal. Right.

Whoa, talk about intense imagery. You can't just read that and not feel it, you know? It's a powerful image for sure. It's like God's refining his people, using that fire to burn away all the impurities.

Exactly. Oswalt really emphasizes that even in that fiery judgment, God's grace is the fuel. It's not about destroying; it's about making something new and good out of something broken.

That's an important distinction. So even when it seems like God's people are getting the short end of the stick, they're still HIS people. Yeah.

That covenant, that relationship, it's rock solid. Yeah. Which I guess makes sense, because then we get to how Israel is supposed to act towards all the other nations around them.

Like, all right, you're my people, you're special, BD, here's how you're supposed to engage with the rest of the world. That's a good way to put it. It's like God's giving them a game plan.

Oswalt breaks it down into four main points. Okay, I'm listening. Lay it on me.

One, God's got Israel's back. He's going to protect them from those nations who are out to get them. Makes sense.

Two, and this one's a little tricky, there's this idea that God might actually use Israel to bring judgment on those same nations. Whoa, okay. That's heavy stuff.

Yeah, it's something to think about. Yeah. And then number three, things get really interesting.

Let me guess. World domination. Not quite.

It's about being a witness. A witness. So like testifying in some cosmic courtroom.

Well, there is this whole courtroom drama in chapter 41 where God puts the idols on trial. Oh, right, right. But the witness we're talking about here is different.

It's about living in a way that reflects God's character. Showing the world who he is through how you live, not by forcing anyone to believe anything. So it's less about shouting from the rooftops and more about, I don't know, quietly living a life that makes people wonder what your secret is.

Exactly. Oswalt really emphasizes this idea of witness as evidence, which I think makes a lot of sense, especially today when everyone's got their own belief system. Just living out your faith can be the most powerful argument you can make.

I like that. Okay, speaking of arguments, can we talk about that showdown with the idols? Sure. It's like God is calling them out and saying, all right, put your money where your mouth is, let's see what you've got.

It's such a bold passage. God basically says, okay, idols, if you're so powerful, predict the future. And of course they can't; they come up empty.

It's like God is showing the limits of a worldview based on things you can see and touch. Right, right. These so-called gods who are just forces of nature can explain where we came from or where we're going.

So they're stuck in this cycle, going round and round, but never getting anywhere. Exactly. And you know what? That's where it becomes really relevant to us today.

How so? A lot of people nowadays see life as pointless. Like it just began randomly and ends with nothing. And that's surprisingly similar to how those ancient pagans viewed the world.

Interesting. So both ways of thinking are missing that bigger picture. Yeah.

Something that gives meaning beyond just what we can see and experience right now. Yeah, exactly. But God, he's not stuck in that cycle.

He's outside of time. He created time. That's what makes him so different.

And that's why he can declare the future. And he does. Oswalt gives that example of God predicting the Babylonian exile.

Oh, yeah. Great example. When Babylon was practically a nobody on the world stage, imagine how mind-blowing that must have been for the people back then.

Talk about proving a point. It was undeniable proof that this God knew what he was talking about. That he had knowledge and power that went way beyond anything they'd ever seen.

But then things take a turn in chapter 42. We get introduced to this new character, this mysterious servant. A new servant.

Okay. So is this like a sequel with a whole new hero coming in to save the day? It's definitely a shift in the story. The thing is, this servant is totally different from Israel.

They're not getting any rewards for their service, just a mission. And that mission to restore God's divine order, what Oswalt calls mishpat. Mishpat.

Okay. I'm going to need a little help on this one. Is it just about being fair, following the rules? It's deeper than that.

Mishpat is about putting the whole world back in sync with God's design, like getting all the pieces of a puzzle back where they belong, restoring harmony to relationships, making society just and right, even how we treat the environment. It's big picture stuff. Wow.

So it's not just about laws. It's about a whole way of life, a way of being in the world that reflects God's heart. Exactly.

And the way this servant goes about it is just as important as the mission itself. There's that line that always gets me. He will not cry aloud.

A bruised reed he will not break. That's beautiful. That's like, you can be strong and powerful without crushing the people you're trying to help.

Yeah. But who is this servant? Oswalt seems pretty sure it can't be Israel, given how they're doing at this point in the story. Blind, deaf, captive.

Not exactly in top form for saving the world. You're right. That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? And to get the answer, we need to connect the dots between Isaiah and the Gospels.

Wait a minute. Are you talking about Jesus? You're catching on. Look at Isaiah 42.7, where it describes the servant's mission.

It lines up perfectly with how the Gospels describe Jesus. Healing the sick, setting people free, bringing good news. It's like Isaiah is giving us a sneak peek centuries before Jesus shows up.

Okay. That is wild. It's like foreshadowing on a cosmic level.

And Oswalt says that throughout Isaiah, there's this shift happening. Like the focus is moving from Israel as the servant to this other, even bigger figure. Exactly.

It's genius how Isaiah builds this anticipation for a figure who can fully accomplish God's mission. Yeah. That's what I call a plot twist.

Right. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, I think we need to address another key theme. The Holy One of Israel.

This title pops up all over these chapters. Why so much emphasis? Good point. It's like God is really hammering this one home.

What's the big deal with this title? Well, for starters, it sets God apart. He's not just another God in the pantheon. He's the Holy One.

Powerful and unique. But it also ties that power specifically to Israel. So it's like he's saying, I'm bound to these people.

They are my chosen ones. Exactly. And Oswalt puts it so well.

He's the only Holy One who has covenanted himself to a people for the salvation of the world. Whoa. That gives me chills.

Me too. It's like, what an incredible responsibility, but also what an incredible honor. Totally.

But then you've got that part in Isaiah 43, where God tells Israel to remember the exodus. Yes. But then also to forget how he did it.

That sounds a little contradictory, don't you think? It definitely makes you scratch your head. What do you think it means? I think maybe it's like he's saying, look, I've come through before and I'll come through again, but don't try to put me in a box. I like that.

Like I'm always capable of doing something new and unexpected. You're getting it. It's about trusting God's character without trying to predict his methods.

And Oswalt sums it up perfectly. God is always consistent, but never predictable. That's cold.

It's like he's saying, get ready for the ride, folks, because you never know where we're going next. That's the spirit. Remember the faithfulness, but be open to the new.

I like it. But then we hit that tough passage where God rebukes Israel for their sacrifices. It's like, you haven't really given these to me.

What's going on there? They're going through all the motions, the rituals. It's a head scratcher for sure. What's the deal? I think he's saying it's not enough to just do the right things.

Your heart has to be in it too. So, like, he sees right through our actions. Absolutely.

Oswalt highlights the danger of empty ritual. It's easy to get caught up in the outward forms of religion without any real internal change. Yeah, that's something we all need to be careful of.

It's easy to think we're good if we check all the boxes. But God wants more than that. He wants our hearts.

Absolutely. But here's the good news. We don't have to earn his favor.

We don't have to be perfect. Because in Isaiah 43.25, God says, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake. Wow.

That's powerful. Right. It's grace, pure and simple.

Pure, unadulterated grace. Salvation is not a reward for good behavior. It's a gift freely given out of God's own heart.

That completely changes how we see our relationship with him. It does. It's not about trying to climb some ladder to reach him.

It's about accepting a gift. He's already holding out to us. That's it.

This is blowing my mind. It makes you realize how much of our religious thinking is all about what we do instead of what he's already done. It's a complete game changer.

And that's exactly what makes these chapters of Isaiah so relevant even thousands of years later. I don't know about you, but I'm feeling like we've already uncovered a goldmine of insights here. What stands out to you so far? What's grabbing your attention? For me, it's that depth of God's grace.

It just keeps coming back to me. Yeah. You know, it's like, even when Israel is messing up, he's still there waiting, ready to pick them up, set them back on track.

And it's not because they earned it. That's for sure. Exactly.

It's pure love and mercy. No strings attached. He reminds me of that whole witness thing.

It's not about being perfect, having all the answers. Right. It's about letting God's character come through, even if we're still works in progress.

Hopefully, that's what draws people to him. Yeah. Like a walking billboard for God's transforming power, even if you're still under construction yourself.

I like that. It connects to that new thing idea too. God's always pushing the boundaries, surprising us.

He does, doesn't he? You can't put him in a box. Yeah, you can't. That's part of what makes it so exciting, right? Absolutely.

We think we've got God figured out, and then bam, he does it totally unexpected. It's part of the beauty of faith, I think. Keeps us on our toes.

Speaking of surprises, that contrast between the two servants really jumped out at me. Yeah. Tell me more.

You've got Israel trying their best, but struggling. And then this other servant, this mysterious, perfect figure. It's like night and day.

It's a powerful way to show how much we need a savior, someone who can actually fulfill God's mission perfectly. And as we talked about, all signs point to Jesus. It's like Isaiah is painting a portrait of Jesus before he's even born.

It really shows how the scriptures are prophetic, this grand plan unfolding across history. I'm already pumped for our next deep dive, chapters 49 to 55. Can't wait to see how this servant theme plays out, what other nuggets Oswalt finds.

Oh, me too. Those chapters are packed with insights, plenty more aha moments, that's for sure. But before we get ahead of ourselves, let's think about our listener for a minute.

What are some key things we want them to take away? The biggest one for me is that God's grace is unshakable. Couldn't agree more. Doesn't matter how many times we mess up, he's there, arms wide open, ready to welcome us back.

So true. And that new beginning, it's not just for us individually; it's about God's plan to heal the whole world, make everything right. And that's where Jesus, that ultimate servant, comes in.

Which reminds me, it's not enough to just sit back and be grateful for God's grace. Right. We're called to be part of that healing, to be witnesses, to show his love, his truth.

The world needs it. Yeah. We're not just recipients; we're ambassadors.

We've got this incredible gift. Now we've got to share it. Exactly.

One last thing I'd say to our listeners: Do I embrace that new thing God's doing in my life? Let go of those expectations. Be open to the unexpected ways he moves. Because he is working, even when we don't see it.

Sometimes the greatest adventures are when we let go of our plans and say, OK, God, lead the way. I'm ready. I love that.

It takes a lot of trust to surrender like that. But when we do, that's when we really start to experience God's power and love. Now, as we wrap up part two here, I want to leave our listener with a question to think about.

OK. I like where this is going. What does it mean to be a witness to God's character in a world that seems so skeptical about faith these days? It's tough, but worth wrestling with, I think.

OK, so picking up where we left off, I keep thinking about that part in Isaiah where God confronts Israel about their sacrifices. You know, they're doing all the right things, the rituals, the offerings, the whole nine yards. But God's like, nope, you haven't actually given these to me.

It's almost like he's looking right through their actions and seeing this big hole. What's your take on that? It really gets to the heart of worship, doesn't it? What does it mean to truly worship? Oswalt's point is that God isn't just looking for outward obedience. He wants our hearts to be changed.

Yeah, it's that difference between just going through the motions and really meaning it. It makes you wonder how often we do that in our own faith, you know? Yeah, for sure. We check all the boxes, do all the right things.

But are our hearts really in it? It's a good question for all of us to ask ourselves. It is. But it's also a call to action, right? Like, OK, how do we make sure our faith is more than just an empty ritual? Right.

It's about letting God's grace really sink in, change us from the inside out. And that's where Isaiah 43.25 comes in, right? Absolutely. That's where God says, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake.

It's like a total reset. It is. It's pure grace, unmerited, undeserved, and it changes everything.

Because it shifts the whole power dynamic, doesn't it? It does. We're not begging for God's love anymore. We're standing in awe of it because it's already there.

It's like we can finally breathe. Yes. We can stop striving and just rest, knowing that we're loved, forgiven, accepted, no matter what.

That's the key. And that freedom, that release from striving, that's where true obedience comes from. OK, I'm following you.

It's not about earning God's love. It's about responding to it. Ah, I see.

Our actions become an overflow of a heart that's been changed by grace. Beautifully put. It's not about rules and checklists.

It's about living a life that reflects that love and grace we've been given. Man, this has been an incredible deep dive. We've covered so much ground: God's grace, what it means to be a servant, how God's people are supposed to engage with the world.

And Dr. Oswalt has been such a great guide, helping us connect these ancient texts to our lives today. I feel like my understanding of Isaiah has just exploded. Mine too.

But the real work starts now, right? It does. It's about taking these insights and letting them change us, how we live, how we love, how we see the world. It's not just about knowing stuff.

It's about transformation, letting these truths sink in and then letting them flow out in how we treat others, how we make choices, how we see ourselves and the world around us. So as we wrap up this amazing deep dive, I want to leave our listeners with one final thought to chew on. I like it.

Hit us with it. If God is always doing a new thing, as Oswalt suggests, how can we be more open to that? How can we learn to spot those unexpected moments where God's breaking through, inviting us to be part of something bigger? That's the adventure, right? Learning to trust God's leading, even when it takes us off the map, even when it feels a little scary. It's about saying, okay, God, I'm listening.

Show me what you're up to. Let's do this. Yeah.

What a way to live. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive into Isaiah. May we all learn to embrace the unexpected and be open to the new things God is doing in our lives and in the world around us.

Until next time, keep seeking, keep exploring, and keep diving deep.