

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 22, Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everyone. Today, we're going deep, really deep. We're diving into Dr. John Oswalt's work on Isaiah, chapters 44 through 46, to be exact.

Ooh, those are some good ones. Full of juicy stuff. They really are.

And we're tackling a question that, well, let's be honest, has kind of haunted humanity forever. Okay, I'm intrigued. Lay it on me.

What does it actually mean to be carried by God? Oh, I see where we're going with this. Versus being, what, weighed down by all the stuff W.E. creates? You got it. And Oswalt just nails his contrasts using Isaiah's writings, of course.

But he doesn't just tell us idols are bad. He shows us. Right.

It's like, imagine these pagans lugging around these statues, literally. Hauling them around, suitcases full of sand, thinking it's treasure. And Oswalt's like, hold on, these things can't even predict the future.

Right. No way, let alone control it. And what's even funnier, well, not really funny, but, you know, they're made of the very stuff they're supposed to be better than.

Right. Like trying to build a house out of the dirt it's sitting on. Yeah.

But I think Oswalt's onto something deeper here. Oh, absolutely. It's all about control, isn't it? Deep down, we humans, we crave it.

Makes sense. Surrendering to something bigger. Yeah.

Way more terrifying. For sure. So we make these idols, things we think we can manage.

But here's the question, and this is where it gets real for us today. Hit me with it. What are your modern-day idols? Seriously, think about it.

What are you carrying around that you'd be better off leaving behind? That one stings a little. I'm ready to think about social media. Always chasing those likes, you know.

It's like we've built this digital altar to validation. And it's not just the obvious stuff either. Oh, tell me about it.

What else is lurking in the shadows? Well, could be that need to be right all the time. Or clinging to some past hurt, never letting go. Those don't sound like golden calves, but... But they weigh us down just the same.

They distract us from what matters. Big time. So if that's the burden, what's the alternative? Oswalt gives us five reasons, straight from Isaiah 44, why God's people shouldn't be afraid.

He starts with this: God is with them. Simple, but profound. When things get rough, knowing you're not alone, that's everything.

It really is. And Oswalt doesn't stop there. God doesn't just watch from afar.

He actively helps, provides strength, guides. And then, bam, redemption. It's like God's already paid the price for our freedom.

Nothing can break that bond. Powerful stuff. He's like, chill, you're already home free.

Now let's live like it. And that leads us to reason number four. This one always gets me.

Okay, I'm all ears. God will pour out his Spirit upon them. Feels different, right? What's the Holy Spirit's role in all of this? This is where the rubber meets the road.

You can know God's with you, helps you, but how does it play out in real life, day to day? Right, good point. That's where the Holy Spirit steps in. Think of a recipe; you can read it.

But having a master chef guide you through each step. Ah, now we're talking. Exactly.

The Holy Spirit's that inner voice, that nudge, the source of strength when you're tempted to give in to those idols. So the Holy Spirit's like our inner GPS, guiding us through life's crazy turns. Love that analogy.

And speaking of knowing where we're going, Oswalt ends with this. God has foreknowledge. He's already seen the ending.

Mind blown. Every single time. We still get to play our part though, right? We do.

It's about trust. Imagine knowing how your life plays out. Wouldn't you relax a little, give it the control? Oh, for sure.

But God's got the whole tapestry, right? Even the messy parts. Yeah, even the parts that don't make sense right now. He sees it all.

Liberating, isn't it? Deeply. Makes you wonder, if knowing the future can do that, what about surrendering to the one who holds it? Now we're getting somewhere. And to understand that, one, we got to unpack these titles Oswalt uses.

King, Redeemer, Lord of hosts. Each one tells us something crucial. Okay, starting with King of Israel.

Feels very, uh, Old Testament. But Oswalt says it points to something bigger. Oh, it does.

It means God has an obligation to his people. He can't just abandon them. It's who he is.

Like becoming a parent, right? You can't just walk away. You're bound to that child. Responsible.

Exactly. And that takes us to Redeemer. God's not some distant ruler.

He's actively setting his people free from whatever holds them captive. Physical chains, emotional baggage, the whole nine yards. He's all about liberation.

And as Lord of hosts, commander of heaven's armies. He's got the power to back it up. No obstacle too big, no enemy too strong.

Seriously, why do we try to carry those burdens ourselves? Yeah. With that kind of backup. And here's the kicker.

Oswalt talks about how God uses Cyrus, a pagan king, to redeem Israel. Right. And Cyrus didn't even know the God of Israel.

Talk about unexpected. It's like God saying, I can work with anyone to bring about my plan. Even the folks who seem, well, far from him.

How does that sit with you about how God might be working in the world, even in unexpected places? It's a good one to chew on for sure. Makes me rethink those times I've tried to put God in a box, limit him to my understanding of how things should be. We all do it, but God's way bigger than our boxes.

No kidding. And speaking of things bigger than our understanding, Oswalt tackles Isaiah 45.7. Always a head scratcher. Where God says he forms light, A-N-E-D creates darkness.

Makes peace, A-N-E-D creates calamity. Yeah, that one can ruffle some feathers. Especially if we think God's only capable of good, never anything that causes suffering.

So how do we make sense of that? Well, Oswalt says God's the primary cause, the author of everything. But he doesn't micromanage every single event. We've got free will, right? And our choices, well, they have consequences, often painful ones.

Exactly. But God's not just watching from the sidelines. He's actively working, bringing good out of it, redeeming, restoring.

So even though he permits suffering. He's ultimately responsible for bringing good out of it. Like imagine a symphony.

There are dark, dissonant moments, but it all comes together. Beautiful and harmonious. Powerful imagery.

So how does that resonate with you? About how God interacts with the world, especially the tough stuff. Food for thought, isn't it? Absolutely. And it all comes back to those contrasting images Oswalt keeps showing us.

Pagans burdened by their idols, striving, anxious, never satisfied. And God gently carrying his people, offering rest, peace, freedom. It's a choice, isn't it? Every single day, cling to our idols, our need for control, or surrender to the one who knows the way, loves us no matter what.

Oswalt even quotes Bonhoeffer. You can only really own something that you can honestly see yourself as better off without. Wow.

That's a lot. Yeah. So if something's weighing you down, maybe it's time to ask, would I be better off without it? It's about freedom, true freedom, letting go of the reins, realizing we were never meant to carry the weight of the world on our shoulders.

We were made to be carried, not burdened. And that brings us to Oswalt's final mic drop. God's redemption.

It's all about his grace, not our effort, not what we deserve. It's a radical idea. We think we have to earn everything, even God's love, but grace flips the script.

Grace is a gift, pure and simple, unearned, undeserved. God saying, I love you, not because of what you do, but because of who you are. Takes the pressure off, right? Knowing our value isn't based on performance.

So how does that change how you live? Knowing you're loved just as you are. That's the question, isn't it? The one that changes everything. It really is.

And that's just the beginning of what we can uncover in these chapters of Isaiah. There's so much more to explore, so much more freedom to be found in the truth that we are carried, not burdened. We've only just scratched the surface, but for now.

We've got to take a breath. We'll be back soon with more of Oswalt's wisdom. Stay tuned.

It's a whole different way of thinking, isn't it? Shifting from earning to receiving. And, you know, in Isaiah 44, there's this amazing part where he describes the whole idol-making process. Oh, yeah.

He goes into crazy detail, almost like he's giving us a backstage pass to this totally absurd ritual. I know, right? You can practically see the guy picking out his piece of wood, then using half of it to build a fire to cook his dinner. And then, get this, he uses the other half to carve an idol.

It's almost like Isaiah is making fun of the whole thing. Totally. Like, dude, you're worshipping something you just roasted a potato over.

It can't even hear you, let alone save you. But then, he takes it a step further, right? He connects to something much deeper. Something that's true for all of us, no matter the time or place.

He's holding up a mirror, for sure. How many times do we create idols out of things that are good on their own? Money, relationships, success. It's sneaky, isn't it? It's not like we wake up and declare something our new god.

It just creeps in until, bam, you're living for something that can't give you what you truly need. Those counterfeit gods, right. They promise satisfaction, but only deliver emptiness.

So how do we break free? I feel like such a basic human struggle, this idol-making thing. Honestly, I think it's a good place to start. We've got to shine a light on those hidden corners of our hearts, where we've placed our loyalty.

What are we clinging to? What defines us? What are we secretly hoping will finally give us that sense of security and purpose? Tough questions, but important ones. No doubt. And once we've named those idols, then what? Then comes the letting go part.

Surrendering. Admitting we're not actually in control. Putting our trust in the one who really holds our future.

I got to say, that's a scary thought. Way easier to cling to what we think we can manage, even if it's slowly killing us. Easier, yes.

But it's not freedom. True freedom is letting go. Realizing we weren't meant to carry the weight of the world on our own.

We were made to be carried, not burdened. Which brings us back to Cyrus. God chooses this pagan king, someone who doesn't even know him, to carry out his plan.

Talk about a plot twist. God saying, I can work with anyone, even those who seem far from me, to accomplish my will. Makes you wonder if we try to limit God too much, right? Dictating how he should work things out.

It's tempting, isn't it? To put God in a box. To fit him into our neat little theological systems. But he's way too big for that.

And on that note, speaking of things too big for us to grasp, Oswalt digs into that verse in Isaiah 45 that always gets people talking. I form light and create darkness. I make peace and create calamity.

I, the Lord, do all these things. It's a hard one to swallow. Especially if we have this simple view of God as only good, incapable of causing anything bad.

It's a verse that makes us wrestle with the complexity of God. Oswalt helps us understand it, though. He explains that while God is the source of everything, he doesn't directly cause every single thing.

Especially when it comes to suffering and evil. Free will comes into play, right? Our choices have consequences. And sometimes those consequences are pretty devastating.

But even though he allows for suffering, God isn't just a passive observer. He's working to bring good out of it. To redeem and restore.

So not that he creates evil, but that he allows for it as part of something bigger. Something that ultimately reveals his goodness and purpose. Exactly.

He doesn't enjoy our suffering. He doesn't want us to be in pain. But he can use it to refine us, to strengthen our faith, to draw us closer to him.

Still a tough concept. Especially when we're the ones going through the tough stuff. But it reminds us that God is bigger than our circumstances.

His purposes are way beyond our understanding. Ultimately good. Even if we can't see it.

What about you? Does that idea resonate with you? How God interacts with the world, with the good and the bad? It's definitely something to sit with. To chew on. And it brings us back to that central image.

Being carried by God. Letting go of our idols. Oswald paints such a vivid picture, doesn't he? Those pagans, weighed down, always striving, never content.

And then there's God, gently carrying his people. Offering rest, peace, freedom from the burdens. It's a choice, isn't it? Every single day.

Do we hold on tight to our idols? To control? To fear? Or do we surrender to the one who made us? Who knows us better than we know ourselves? And it's not a one-time decision, is it? It's daily. It's moment by moment. Letting go of our own way and embracing God's grace.

And Oswald makes another point that goes along with this. God's redemption isn't something we earn. It's all about his grace.

Such a radical concept in our world. I know, right? We're so used to earning everything. Even God's love.

But grace turns that upside down. It's a gift. Pure and simple.

No strings attached. God saying, I love you, not for what you do, but simply because you are. It changes everything.

No more pressure to perform. To prove ourselves worthy. Just gratitude.

Joyful obedience. How about you? How does that impact your life? Knowing you're loved unconditionally, just as you are. It's a question that goes deep, doesn't it? To the core of who we are.

It does. Now, before we wrap this up, I got to bring back that Bonhoeffer quote. Oswald loves this one.

You can only really own something that you can honestly see yourself as better off without. So simple. But man, it hits hard.

What does that say to you? About the whole idol thing and everything we cling to so tightly in life? It forces us to really look at what we're holding on to. To honestly ask, are these things adding to my life? Or are they keeping me from experiencing true freedom and joy? What are we willing to let go of? To embrace something better? Something that leads to real peace and purpose? Big questions. But as we navigate this life, as we wrestle with our faith, they're the ones worth asking.

What's truly essential? What's just weighing us down? And how can we live with more grace, more gratitude, more freedom? The kind of freedom that comes from being carried by the one who made us and loves us more than we can imagine. It's like we were made to be part of something bigger, not just going it alone. Totally.

We need connection, relationship, dependence on, well, on something beyond ourselves. And that's where this whole being carried thing gets interesting. It's about surrender, isn't it? Letting go of control.

Exactly. Trusting that even when we can't see the path, there's a love guiding us. A love that knows the way.

Like we're in a boat. And instead of frantically rowing, we finally just let go of the oars. Let the current take us.

Ooh, I like that. But it's not about being passive, right? Just sitting back, waiting for God to magically fix everything. Definitely not.

It's an active choice to align our will with God's will. Trust his timing, even when it makes zero sense to us. It's like, hmm, learning to dance.

At first it's all awkward steps, right? But then you surrender to the rhythm. Trust your partner to lead. And suddenly you're moving with grace, with freedom.

That's the beauty of being carried by God. It's not weakness, it's strength. True freedom comes from surrender.

From realizing we're most alive when we're in sync with, well, with the one who made us. The one who knows us better than we know ourselves. Before we wrap this up, I got to bring back that image Oswalt uses about God's relentless pursuit of us.

Oh, yeah, that's a good one. He compares God's love to a father stepping into a pig pen to bring his kid home. It's a powerful image.

Messy, but powerful. What do you think? It speaks volumes, doesn't it? About how far God will go to get us back. There's no place we can hide, no mess we can make that's beyond his love.

He's not waiting for us to clean up our act. He's running towards us, arms open, ready to embrace us, flaws and all. Exactly.

It doesn't matter where we've been, what we've done. His love isn't based on any of that. It's a love that pursues, that redeems, that carries us home.

So as we wrap up our deep dive into Isaiah, think about this. What if you let go of the oars and surrender to that current of grace? What kind of freedom would you find? It's a journey worth taking, that's for sure. No doubt.

Thanks for joining us today. Until next time, may you experience the peace and freedom that comes from knowing. Knowing that you are carried, not burdened.