

## **Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 23.**

### **Audio Overview Podcast**

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to another Deep Dive. This time, we're going to be exploring Isaiah, chapters 47 and 48. Oh, wow.

Yeah. And guiding our exploration is a lecture from Old Testament scholar Dr. John Oswalt. Okay.

So we're really diving deep into biblical prophecy and the nature of God, but we're going to approach it from kind of a unique angle. Okay. So imagine yourself as someone in ancient Israel, you know, and feeling like everything you believed in just crumbled around you.

That's where they were. I imagine. But the prophet Isaiah had some surprising news, both for them and for their captors in Babylon.

Interesting. So right off the bat, we're seeing this tension between kind of despair and hope. Yeah, definitely.

And these chapters really highlight that contrast, you know, between Babylon's arrogance and that unexpected hope offered by God's grace. Yeah. Let's start with Babylon's downfall.

Okay. Oswalt uses some really vivid imagery to describe this. It's almost like a queen being dethroned and then forced into the very kind of labor that they had inflicted on the Israelites.

Wow. That's a powerful image. It is.

And it really underscores a recurring theme in Isaiah. This idea that when we try to exalt ourselves, we inevitably end up being humbled. Oh, that's good.

And Babylon's boast, I am, and there is none beside me, is practically a direct echo of God's own words. It's a classic example of hubris built on a foundation of ambivalence and a reliance on things like magic. It's like they're trying to play God, aren't they? It's almost like that, isn't it? And what I found fascinating was how Oswalt connects this ancient story to our modern world.

Okay. He argues that our society's pursuit of material wealth often leads to disillusionment and a resurgence of interest in the occult. Interesting.

What do you make of that connection? Well, you know, you think about it. We're constantly bombarded with messages that tell us happiness comes from having more things, you know, more status, more power. But when that doesn't satisfy, you know, those deeper longings of our hearts, we often turn to things that promise easy answers or quick fixes, even if they're based on illusion or manipulation.

Yeah. It's like we're trying to fill a spiritual void with things that can't possibly deliver. Makes you wonder if that's what Babylon was doing too, you know, trying to control their destiny through magic and knowledge that ultimately proved to be empty.

It's certainly a possibility. And this raises an important point that Oswalt makes about learning itself. Yeah.

It can be destructive when it's used for selfish gain or to control others. It's a challenge to us even today to examine our own motives for seeking knowledge. You know, are we genuinely seeking understanding, or are we using knowledge as a tool to build ourselves up or manipulate others? That's a great point.

It really forces us to think about the purpose behind our pursuit of knowledge. But let's shift gears a bit and talk about God's character and grace. It seems that God's judgment on Babylon wasn't just about their cruelty, but about their audacity in claiming divine power for themselves.

Absolutely. They were essentially putting themselves in God's place. And throughout these chapters, God keeps reminding Israel and us as readers, hear this.

It's as if he's saying, pay attention. This is important. You need to understand what's at stake here.

Yeah. I love how you put that. It really emphasizes the weight of God's message.

But one thing that really struck me was Oswalt's point that God deferred his anger, not because Israel deserved it, but for his own sake. That's a bit of a head scratcher, isn't it? Yeah, a little bit. What does that tell us about God's grace? It suggests that grace is not something we earn or deserve.

It's not a reward for good behavior or response to our pleas. Instead, it's an outpouring of God's inherent nature, a proactive expression of his love and mercy. Wow.

It's fascinating, really. It is. It challenges our whole understanding of how grace works.

It's almost like God is saying, I'm going to show you grace not because of who you are, but because of who I am. Exactly. And this is where Oswalt's observation about the word create becomes really significant.

He points out that God uses this word to describe his actions, emphasizing his power to do something entirely new and unexpected. He's not bound by the limitations of our understanding or our expectations. That's powerful.

It almost makes you wonder what other new things God is capable of? Well, Oswalt actually gives us a fascinating historical example of this. He talks about Cyrus, the Persian emperor who ended 700 years of exile for the Israelites. Wow.

It was a radical break from precedent, something no one could have predicted. It's a testament to God's ability to intervene in history in surprising and often unconventional ways. Wow.

That's an incredible story. It really shows that God isn't limited by human history or tradition. He can break through with something fresh and unexpected whenever he chooses.

And that's exactly the kind of hope that Isaiah was offering the Israelites, even in their darkest hour. He was pointing them towards a future they could barely imagine, a future where God's power would be revealed in a way they had never seen before. This is getting really good.

I'm eager to hear more about this message of hope. How does Isaiah's message shift from judgment to restoration? That's a great question. And it's where we see the true brilliance of Isaiah's prophecy.

He doesn't just pronounce doom on Babylon. He also offers a vision of hope and renewal for Israel. But it's not a hope based on their own merits or accomplishments.

It's a hope rooted in the unwavering character of Yahweh, their husband and redeemer. You know, I've always been intrigued by this image of God as a husband. What does that tell us about his relationship with his people? That's a great question.

And it's a really rich metaphor that runs throughout the Old Testament. It speaks to God's covenant loyalty, his unwavering love, and his commitment to his people, even when they stray. It suggests the depth of intimacy and connection that transcends the ups and downs of human relationships.

It's like he's saying, no matter what you've done, no matter how far you strayed, I'm not giving up on you. Precisely. And that brings us to another important point that Oswalt makes.

He highlights the contrast between Babylon's barrenness, their inability to produce anything lasting or meaningful, and the promise of abundant descendants for Israel. It's a powerful image of hope and restoration. It's like the Israelites are being offered a new beginning, a chance to start over and build a future filled with life and abundance.

Exactly. And this hope is not based on their own strength or cleverness. It's rooted in the character of God himself.

He's the one who promises to make them fruitful, to restore their fortunes, to bring them back from the brink of despair. That's such a powerful message of hope, especially for people who had lost everything. It makes me wonder: how does this message resonate with us today? We may not be facing exile in a foreign land, but we certainly face challenges and struggles in our own lives.

That's a great question. And it's something we'll explore further as we delve deeper into these chapters. But for now, I think it's important to recognize that Isaiah's message is not just for the ancient Israelites.

It's a message of hope and restoration for anyone who feels lost, broken, or forgotten. It's a reminder that God is always at work, even in the darkest of times, and that he has a plan for

our lives that is far greater than we can imagine. And what strikes me is how Isaiah doesn't just offer this vague sense of hope.

He gets specific, almost like a blueprint for how this restoration will unfold. He tells the Israelites that their peace will flow like a river if they truly listen to God's commands. You know, when you put it that way, it makes you wonder what would happen if they had listened.

Would they have avoided all that suffering and exile? That's an interesting question, isn't it? We get a glimpse into this alternate timeline, one where Israel flourishes because they're aligned with God's will, but even though they didn't always listen, God's grace is still there. He doesn't give up on them even when they make mistakes. It's almost like God is constantly offering them a second chance, a chance to kind of reset and start over.

Exactly. And this is where Oswalt makes a really compelling connection to the modern Christian experience. He argues that even though we have access to God's grace, we often miss out on the fullness of its blessings because we're not truly listening to his voice.

It's like we're trying to navigate life with a faulty GPS. We may eventually get to our destination, but the journey will be a lot more difficult and frustrating. That's a brilliant analogy, and it really makes you think about all the ways we might be tuning out God's voice in our own lives, you know? What are we prioritizing that's getting in the way of that connection? It could be anything, really.

Our careers, our relationships, our pursuit of comfort or pleasure, or maybe it's something more subtle, like the constant noise of social media or the pressure to conform to God's expectations. Right. Whatever it is, it creates a kind of spiritual static that prevents us from hearing God's guidance clearly.

It's almost like we're surrounded by all these distractions, these glittering objects that pull our attention away from what truly matters, kind of like Babylon and their reliance on magic and occult practices. Exactly. And that's why Oswalt is so insistent that we need to be intentional about cultivating a posture of listening.

It's not something that just happens passively. It requires discipline, humility, and a willingness to set aside our own agendas. It's like we need to create space in our lives for God to speak, to silence the noise and tune into his frequency.

And when we do that, it can be a truly transformative experience. We begin to see the world differently, make decisions from a place of wisdom rather than fear and experience a level of peace and fulfillment that the world can't offer. It's like we finally start living in alignment with our true purpose, our God-given design.

But shifting gears for a moment, I was struck by how Oswalt contrasts the emptiness of Babylon's pursuit of knowledge with the transformative power of God's word. Could you elaborate on that a bit? Absolutely. It's a fascinating contrast that goes to the heart of what true knowledge is all about.

Babylon was obsessed with accumulating knowledge for its own sake, knowledge as power, knowledge as control. But as we've seen, that kind of knowledge ultimately leads to emptiness and disillusionment. It's like they were trying to build a tower to heaven without acknowledging the one who created heaven and earth.

Precisely. And that's where God's word comes in. Oswalt reminds us that God's word is not just information to be memorized or debated.

It's a living, active force that has the power to penetrate our hearts and bring about real change. It's like the difference between reading a recipe and actually tasting the food. One is purely intellectual, while the other is a sensory experience that nourishes and satisfies.

That's a great analogy. And it highlights the importance of engaging with God's word on a personal level. It's not enough to simply read it or hear it preached.

We need to allow it to seep into our souls, to shape our thoughts, and to guide our actions. So it's not just about knowing the words, but about allowing the words to know us. Exactly.

And when we do that, we open ourselves up to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. We begin to see the world through God's eyes, to understand his will for our lives, and to experience the fullness of his love and grace. It's a journey of ongoing discovery, a process of being continually shaped and molded by the divine sculptor.

This deep dive into Isaiah has really challenged me to think about my own relationship with knowledge and with God's word. It's so easy to get caught up in the pursuit of information, but it's the transformation that really matters, isn't it? Yeah. The way God's word can take root in our hearts and bear fruit in our lives.

Absolutely. But before we wrap things up, I'd love to hear more about this idea of hope and restoration that we touched on earlier. Okay.

How does Isaiah's message apply to those who are struggling or hurting? That's a great question. And it's a theme that's especially poignant in light of what the Israelites were going through. Remember, they were in exile, stripped of their homeland, their temple, their sense of identity.

They were living in a foreign land, surrounded by people who worshiped different gods and followed different customs. It must have felt like their world had been turned upside down, like everything they believed in had crumbled. Yeah.

And yet in the midst of that despair, Isaiah offers them a message of hope. He reminds them that God has not abandoned them, that he still has a plan for their lives, and that he is working behind the scenes to bring about their restoration. It's like a beacon of light in the darkness, a lifeline of hope in the midst of a storm.

Precisely. And that's what makes Isaiah's message so powerful and relevant for us today. We may not be facing the same kind of physical exile that the Israelites experienced, but we all face challenges and struggles that can leave us feeling lost, broken, and alone.

We might be facing personal loss, relationship struggles, financial hardship, or even just a general sense of dissatisfaction with life. Right. It's easy to feel overwhelmed and discouraged when these things happen.

Absolutely. And it's in those moments that we need to cling to the message of hope that Isaiah offers. We need to remind ourselves that God is still with us, that he still cares about our pain, and that he is working to bring about our good even when we can't see it.

It's a powerful reminder that even when things seem hopeless, God is still in control. He's still writing our story, and he has a plan for our lives that is far greater than we can imagine. That's where the theme of restoration comes in.

Isaiah doesn't just offer a vague sense of hope. He points to a specific future where God will make all things new. He will heal our brokenness, restore our relationships, and bring us into a place of wholeness and abundance.

So it's not just about getting through the tough times; it's about being transformed by them. It's about allowing God to use our experiences to shape us into the people he created us to be. Exactly.

And that's a process that can take time. It can be painful. But it's ultimately a journey of redemption and renewal.

This has been such an insightful conversation. I'm starting to see Isaiah's message in a whole new light. But before we wrap up this episode, I'm curious to hear more about how these ancient prophecies connect to our everyday lives.

What are some practical takeaways that we can apply to our own challenges and struggles? That's a great question. Yeah. And it's one that Oswald addresses directly in his lecture.

He argues that one of the most important takeaways from Isaiah is the need to cultivate a posture of listening. You mean listening to God's voice. But how do we do that in a world that's so noisy and distracting? It's definitely a challenge, but it's not impossible.

One practical step is to create space in our lives for silence and solitude. Whether it's through prayer, meditation, or simply spending time in nature, we need to disconnect from the constant barrage of information and stimulation that bombards us every day. It's like hitting the pause button on life so we can actually hear what God is saying.

Exactly. Yeah. And once we've created that space, we need to be intentional about paying attention to the ways God might be speaking to us.

It could be through Scripture, through the words of a friend, or even through a song or a work of art. So it's not just about listening for a booming voice from heaven. It's about being attuned to the subtle ways God might be communicating with us.

Precisely. Yeah. And that requires a certain level of humility and openness.

We need to set aside our own preconceived notions and be willing to listen with a childlike curiosity. It's like we need to approach God with the beginner's mind, ready to learn and be surprised. Exactly.

And when we do that, we open ourselves up to the possibility of hearing God's voice in unexpected ways and in unexpected places. Wow. It feels like we've only just scratched the surface of these chapters.

There's so much richness and depth to unpack here, but as we head into the final stretch of our deep dive, I'm curious: what would you say is the most crucial takeaway for our listeners? What's the one thing you hope they walk away with? That's a great question. It's hard to narrow it down to just one thing.

Yeah. But if I had to choose, I think it would be this reminder that even when things seem hopeless, God is still at work. He's still writing our story, and he has a plan for our lives that is far greater than we can imagine.

It's like those moments when you're working on a puzzle, and you just can't see how the pieces fit together, and then suddenly you find that one crucial piece. Everything clicks into place. That's a perfect analogy.

We may not always see the big picture, but God does. And even when we feel lost and confused, he's guiding us step by step towards his ultimate purpose for our lives. It takes a lot of trust to believe that, especially when we're going through difficult times.

It does. But that's where faith comes in. It's about choosing to believe in God's goodness and his faithfulness, even when we don't understand what he's doing.

It's about surrendering our need for control and allowing him to lead us through the unknown. And it's in those moments of surrender, those times when we let go of our own striving and simply trust in God, that we often experience the greatest breakthroughs. Absolutely.

It's like we're finally able to relax into the flow of God's grace and allow him to work in and through us. And when that happens, amazing things can occur. We start to see opportunities we never noticed before, experience a sense of peace that surpasses all understanding, and discover strengths we didn't even know we possessed.

Exactly. It's a process of transformation, of becoming more fully the people God created us to be. And it all starts with that simple act of surrender, saying, OK, God, I trust you.

I'm letting go of my own plans, and I'm choosing to follow yours. It's a daily decision, isn't it? It is. To choose faith over fear, trust over doubt, hope over despair.

It is. And it's not always easy. But the more we practice it, the more natural it becomes.

And the more we experience the fruit of that- surrender, the peace, the joy, the purpose- the more we're drawn to it. Oswald talks about this idea of God creating something new, something unexpected. Do you think that's what he's inviting us to do as well, to step out in faith and become part of that creative process? Absolutely.

I think God is constantly calling us to partner with him in creating something new, something beautiful, something that reflects his glory. It might be a new way of thinking, a new relationship, a new project, or even just a new way of being in the world. But whatever it is, it starts with that willingness to say yes to God and to step out in faith even when we don't know where he's leading us.

It's exciting, isn't it? It is. To think that we get to be part of something so much bigger than ourselves. It is.

And it's an adventure that's full of surprises, challenges, and triumphs. But the reward is immeasurable. It's the joy of experiencing God's presence in our lives and the satisfaction of knowing that we're making a difference in the world.

So as we wrap up this deep dive, what final thought would you like to leave our listeners with? I would simply encourage them to ask themselves this question. What new thing might God be doing in my life if I truly listen? That's a beautiful question and one that I hope will spark a lot of reflection and exploration. Thanks for joining us on this incredible journey through Isaiah 47 and 48.

We've covered a lot of ground from Babylon's downfall to the nature of God's grace, from the transformative power of his word to the importance of listening for his voice. We hope this deep dive has challenged you, encouraged you, and left you with a renewed sense of hope and purpose. Until next time, keep seeking with me, keep exploring, and keep listening for the whispers of God in your life.