

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 27.

Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everybody. We're diving into some fascinating stuff today. Oh, yeah.

Isaiah chapters 56 and 57. All right. And we've got some excerpts from lectures by Dr. John Oswalt to guide us.

A great resource. He's amazing at making these complex theological ideas really accessible. So get ready for some aha moments.

I think there will be a lot of those. Yeah, I was really struck by something Dr. Oswalt pointed out about the structure of Isaiah. Okay.

You know how we tend to think it wraps up with the servant's sacrifice in chapter 55? Right, like a nice bow on it? Exactly. But he points out that chapters 56 through 66 actually form this intricate pattern. It's called a chiasm.

Oh, a chiasm, like a literary mirror image. Right. The themes reflect each other.

And with the arrival of the Messiah right smack in the center. So it emphasizes that the Messiah's purpose isn't just about rescuing Israel. It's about empowering them to live in a way that draws the whole world closer to God.

That totally connects back to Isaiah's vision from chapter 2. Right. All the nations are streaming to Mount Zion to learn God's ways. Yeah, it's a powerful image.

But it makes me wonder, you know, about the whole concept of who gets to be part of that vision. That's a great question. Even today there's this debate, this tension over who has a claim to the land of Israel.

Right. And sometimes it seems like the focus is more on birthright than on actually living out those ideals of righteousness. Yeah, that's a really important point.

And it's interesting because Dr. Oswalt uses Isaiah 56 to address that very tension. How so? Well, he talks about foreigners and eunuchs, groups that were traditionally excluded from worship. Right.

But God says they're welcome if they choose to live righteously and keep the covenant. So it's not about your lineage. It's about aligning your life with God's values.

Exactly. It begs the question, though: what does it even mean to be a covenant keeper today? Good question. We're not offering sacrifices or following all the ancient laws.

Right. It has to have a different application. What does it look like to live out that covenant in our modern context? Well, that's where things get really thought-provoking.

Okay. I'm intrigued. Dr. Oswalt uses this really provocative term, pagan Christianity.

Pagan Christianity. Yeah. He's suggesting that even though the people returning from exile might have given up physical idols, their hearts might still be caught in a pagan mindset.

What do you mean by that? Still trying to manipulate God through rituals. Like going through the motions without a real heart connection. Exactly.

You can be doing all the right things outwardly. But if your motivation is off, if you're not acting out of genuine love for God, it's almost meaningless. It reminds me of that example Dr. Oswalt gives about two people praying.

Oh, yes. One is motivated by pure love for God and the other is driven by self-interest. And he says those are completely different actions in God's eyes.

Even though on the surface they might look the same. Right. It really makes you stop and think about your own prayers, doesn't it? It does.

It's so easy to slip into that transactional mindset. Like, if I do this, God, then you'll do that. Yeah.

Like we're trying to strike a deal. But that's not true surrender, is it? And speaking of surrender, that leads us to another challenging concept that Dr. Oswalt explores. The paradox of God's justice.

Okay. That age-old question: why do bad things happen to good people? It's a question that has haunted humanity forever, hasn't it? He even shares a personal story about a friend, Everett Hunt, who died tragically young. I remember that part.

Those moments when tragedy strikes, it's only natural to question everything. That's fairness. His plan.

But Dr. Oswalt offers a perspective that's both comforting and a little unsettling. How so? He suggests that sometimes God might be sparing the righteous from even worse things to come. It's a reminder that we're limited by our human understanding.

Yeah. We can't fully grasp God's plans or his timeline. It's like we're seeing a tiny sliver of a much larger tapestry.

But he emphasizes that God's ultimate desire is always healing and restoration. Not destruction. Right.

Even when offered God's shalom, that deep abiding peace, he points out that those who choose to live as if there is no God ultimately walk away from it. They choose their own path. And yet, Isaiah 57 gives us this beautiful picture of what it looks like to embrace God's shalom.

Oh, yeah. What is it? It talks about God dwelling with those who are contrite and humble, those who acknowledge their need for him. It's like that verse, Thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly, to revive the heart of the contrite. Exactly. It's like God saying, come as you are with all your brokenness, and I will meet you there.

There's such a powerful message of hope in that. Absolutely. And it ties in beautifully with that recurring theme in Isaiah, pride versus humility.

When we try to exalt ourselves, we ultimately fall. But when we acknowledge our need for God... He lifts us up. It reminds me of that story Dr. Oswalt tells about being told to change your prayer.

Oh, right. Realizing he was coming to God with demands instead of surrender. True peace, true shalom comes from letting go of our own will and embracing God's will.

Letting go and letting God. But that's easier said than done sometimes, isn't it? Oh, absolutely. And that's where the next section of Isaiah gets really interesting.

Oh, how so? Chapters 58 and 59 explore this tension between the people's hypocrisy and the genuine righteousness that God desires. That contrast between outward actions and inner transformation. Okay, I'm ready to hear more.

Well, let's dive in. What does Dr. Oswalt have to say about these next chapters? Well, in Isaiah 58, Dr. Oswalt kind of paints this picture of people who are going through the motions of religion. Okay.

Like they're fasting and praying, but their hearts are far from God. So they're more concerned with appearances than with actual righteousness. Exactly.

Dr. Oswalt actually compares it to running on a treadmill. Okay. You're expending all this energy, but you're not actually getting anywhere.

You're not going anywhere. And he says, God isn't fooled by this performance. Right.

He sees right through it. He actually calls them out. Yeah.

Like, why are you fasting if you're still oppressing your workers? Oh, wow. If you're quarreling and fighting. Yeah.

Like, your religious practices are meaningless. Yeah. If they don't translate into genuine love and care for others.

That's such a powerful indictment. And it really connects back to what we were talking about earlier, you know. Right.

With pagan Christianity. Exactly. Getting so caught up in the outward forms of faith that we lose sight of the heart transformation.

Yeah. The inner transformation. That should be at the core.

And the beautiful thing is God doesn't just leave them hanging with this condemnation. No. He offers a way forward.

He does. A blueprint for living out Shalom in practical ways. It's not just about personal piety.

It's about creating a just and compassionate society. That's exactly it. Where those principles of Shalom are actually lived out.

And God promises incredible blessings. Oh, yeah. To those who respond to this call.

What kind of blessings? He says things like, their light will break forth like the dawn. Okay. Their healing will spring up quickly.

Their righteousness will go before them. And the glory of the Lord will be their rear guard. So it's like a whole new way of life opens up when we choose to align ourselves with God's vision.

It really is. Of Shalom for ourselves and for the world. But then Dr. Oswald takes us to chapter 59.

Okay. What happens there? And it paints a much bleaker picture.

Here we see the consequences of rejecting God's call to righteousness. What are the consequences? The people are described as living in darkness. Okay.

Stumbling at noon as if it were night, groping like the blind. Wow. That's heavy imagery.

It's like they've completely lost their way. And it goes even deeper than that. Oh, no.

Isaiah lists their offenses. Like what? Their hands are stained with blood. Their lips speak lies.

Their feet run to evil. You've really gone astray. There's this overwhelming sense of hopelessness.

Yeah, like they're trapped. And despair as they recognize their own inability to save themselves. They've hit rock bottom.

But sometimes that's the only way to truly see our need for a savior. When you realize you can't do it on your own. And that's what's so powerful about this chapter.

What happens? In the myth of their brokenness, the people cry out to God. They repent. They confess their sins, and they plead for His intervention.

It's that moment of surrender, letting go of pride and acknowledging their helplessness. And God responds. In Isaiah 59.15-21, we see the arrival of the divine warrior.

He comes to the rescue? He comes to rescue his people and establish justice. And that image of a warrior, it connects back to that chiastic structure, right? It does. With the arrival of the Messiah at the center.

Beautifully intertwined. And you said this intervention, it's not just about physical deliverance. No.

Dr. Oswald emphasizes that it's about spiritual transformation as well. So God's not just rescuing them from their enemies. He's also renewing their hearts and minds.

He's empowering them to live lives that reflect His righteousness. Like, He's equipping them to be warriors themselves. Fighting for justice and shalom in their own lives and communities.

And that leads to a really fascinating question. What's that? What does this transformation actually look like? Yeah, how does God's Spirit actually empower us to live differently? That's where things get even more interesting as we move into chapters 60 and 61. Absolutely, and that's where we'll pick up next time.

Okay, so let's jump into Isaiah 60 and 61. Right. You mentioned this is where we see that spiritual transformation in action.

Right, and Dr. Oswald kicks off Isaiah 60 with this incredible image of Jerusalem emerging from darkness into this radiant light. He actually quotes the verse, Darkness covers the earth, deep darkness to peoples. But over you the Lord rises, and His glory appears over you.

Beautiful. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. So it's like Jerusalem becomes this beacon of hope.

Yeah. A shining city on a hill, drawing everyone to its brilliance. That's a great way to put it, and it's not just a spiritual or metaphorical light either.

Isaiah describes wealth from all nations flowing into Jerusalem. Oh, wow. Camels laden with treasures, gold and frankincense, even flocks of sheep and goats.

Okay. He talks about the city's walls being rebuilt with precious stones. Wow.

Its gates with pearls. This is a total makeover. It is.

Like Jerusalem becomes this dazzling metropolis, you know, a testament to God's blessing. What's really interesting is how Dr. Oswald emphasizes that this transformation is not something that's earned or achieved through human effort. It's a gift.

It's a pure gift, an outpouring of God's grace. On those who choose to align themselves with his purposes. Exactly.

So it's not about trying to earn God's favor. Right. But about responding to his love.

Yes. And becoming a reflection of that love in the world. That's beautifully said.

And that leads us to Isaiah 61. Okay. Where we see the Messiah himself stepping onto the scene.

This is the chapter that Jesus quotes from in Luke 4. Yes. Right, where he talks about bringing good news to the poor and binding up the brokenhearted. Yeah, proclaiming freedom for the captives.

That's it. And Dr. Oswald really highlights how the Messiah's mission is all about restoration and healing. He's come to bring comfort to those who are hurting.

Freedom to those who are oppressed. And beauty for ashes. It's like he's undoing the curse of sin.

And restoring humanity to that state of wholeness and flourishing. And what's striking is how this mission connects back to what we saw in Isaiah 58. Oh, how so? Remember how true fasting involved caring for the poor and oppressed? Right.

Well, the Messiah, he embodies those very actions. He's living it out. He's living out what true righteousness looks like.

Bringing God's justice and compassion to those who need it most. And the impact of his work is incredible. What happens? Isaiah 61 describes this amazing transformation.

Okay. The people are called Oaks of Righteousness, planted by the Lord to bring him glory. Wow.

They rebuild the ancient ruins, raise up the former devastations, repair the ruined cities. So the Messiah's coming not only brings personal healing. Right.

But it also sparks this renewal of the entire community. It's like a ripple effect, transforming everything it touches. And you know what else is amazing? What's that? This restoration includes reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles.

Yes. Isaiah talks about foreigners joining the people of God, serving alongside them, sharing in their blessings. It's that vision from earlier in Isaiah of all nations coming together in unity and worship.

It's like everything's coming full circle. And Dr. Oswald reminds us this isn't just some far-off idealistic dream. Right.

It's a call to action for us today. As followers of the Messiah. We're invited to participate in this work of restoration and reconciliation.

We get to be part of bringing God's shalom to the world around us. Wow. This deep dive has been quite a journey.

It has. Isaiah's message is not just ancient history. It's a blueprint for how we live out our faith today.

It challenges us to examine our motivations. Yeah. To pursue genuine righteousness.

And to be active participants in God's mission of healing and restoration. Absolutely. It's a reminder that God's grace is always available to us.

Yes, always. But we have a choice to make. We do.

How will we respond to his invitation to shalom? That's a good question. Will we let that grace transform us into agents of his love and justice in the world? That's something for all of us to consider. Well, thanks for joining us on this deep dive.

It's been a pleasure. Until next time, keep seeking. Keep exploring.

And keep diving deep.