

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 29

Audio Overview Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Hey, everybody. Welcome back. We're going to be taking a deep dive today into a pretty powerful idea, the concept of righteousness in the book of Isaiah.

Oh, yeah. We've got some excerpts from session 29 of Dr. John Oswalt's teaching series covering Isaiah chapters 60 to 62. Okay.

Now, what's really cool about this section is how it's structured. It's got like this stair-step pattern with these parallels and then a central apex. So get ready to discover why this structure is important and what it tells us about living righteously, not just, you know, like being saved.

It's like Isaiah's using the structure to build to something, wouldn't you say? Totally. Yeah. Like he's setting us up for a big reveal.

Yeah. But before we get there, let's talk about this image that appears in both Isaiah 59.16 and 63.16. Okay. The divine warrior.

It's pretty intense imagery, right? Yeah. Robes stained red, a wine press overflowing. It's not what you typically picture when you think about God, is it? No.

It's definitely a powerful image, one that might make some people a little uncomfortable. We tend to think of the, you know, gentle shepherd, but here Isaiah is showing us another side of God. Yeah.

He's the one who fights for his people, takes on their enemies. And what's interesting is that in this case, the enemy isn't just some outside force; it's their own sinfulness. Right.

Wow. That's heavy. So Edom, which is mentioned as the place where this warrior is coming from, it's more than just a, you know, a physical enemy.

Exactly. Think of Edom as like those stubborn, ingrained sins that we all struggle with. Yeah.

The things that really hold us back from experiencing God's blessing fully. Right. Those are the Edoms that we need the divine warrior to conquer.

Wow. That makes you think, you know, we often cry out to God to change our circumstances. Right.

But what about those internal battles? What about those Edoms inside of us? Yeah. And that brings us to a really crucial point. We see a difference in those two verses we mentioned earlier.

Okay. In 59.16, it says that God's righteousness upholds him, but in 63.5, it's his wrath. Okay.

Now, if we just took those verses at face value, it might sound like God is this vengeful figure. Yeah, that doesn't really fit with the loving God we know. Right.

And that's why it's important to really dig a little deeper. Yeah. I think what Isaiah is trying to show us is that God's wrath, his anger, isn't directed at his people, but at the sin that's entangling them, that's separating them from him.

Okay. His righteousness compels him to deal with sin, but his ultimate desire is to save and redeem. So it's like a surgeon removing a tumor.

Yeah. The surgery itself might be painful, but the goal is to bring healing. Exactly.

And think about this. We see this same dynamic played out in Jesus. He is the suffering servant who atones for our sin, but he's also the victorious warrior who defeats the power of sin in our lives.

So we've got this image of the divine warrior battling our own internal Edoms. Right. It's a powerful reminder that we're not in this fight alone.

Absolutely. But this deep dive isn't just about God fighting for us. It's about the transformation that happens within us, the process of becoming more like him.

Right. And that leads us to this poem in Isaiah 63.7 through 64.12. What strikes you about this section? Well, the tone shifts pretty dramatically. Yeah.

We go from this really intense battle scene to a much more introspective, almost mournful reflection on God's faithfulness. It's like they're looking back and remembering all the times God has come through for them. Right.

But they're also kind of lamenting their current state. Yeah. They're acknowledging that they haven't lived up to God's expectations.

They've messed. But here's the thing. They're also kind of blaming God for their failures.

Wait, seriously? Yeah. Look at Isaiah 64.5. You were angry, and we sinned. It's almost like they're saying, well, if you hadn't been so angry, maybe we wouldn't have sinned.

So they're acknowledging their sin, but they're not really taking ownership of it. And I think this is something we can all relate to, right? Yeah. How many times have we been stuck in a bad habit, a pattern of sin, and found ourselves blaming something or someone else? Totally.

Maybe even blaming God. Yeah. It's easy to do, isn't it? To point fingers instead of looking inward.

Yeah. But what I find really interesting is that in this section, we see multiple references to the Holy Spirit. You're right.

It's like they're starting to realize that they need more than just the law, more than outward obedience. They need a heart change, an inner transformation. And who brings that transformation? The Holy Spirit.

So is Isaiah hinting that they're starting to understand their need for the Spirit's work in their lives? It's certainly possible. And that sets us up for God's response to their pleas, which we'll dive into next time, and God's response to their cry for help. Well, it's not what they were expecting.

Isaiah 65 opens with God saying, I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. That's pretty blunt. Yeah.

It's like he's saying, you say you're looking for me, but your actions are telling a different story. It's a powerful reminder that true seeking isn't just about saying the right words. It's about aligning our hearts with God's will.

And it makes you wonder, what does it really mean to seek God? Are we willing to let go of our own agenda, our preconceived notions, and truly open ourselves to his guidance? That's a question we all need to wrestle with. But God doesn't stop there. No, he doesn't.

He goes on to list some pretty shocking accusations in verses three through five. Idolatry, hypocrisy, focusing on outward rituals while their hearts are far from him. It's intense.

And what's fascinating is that it's unlikely they were literally eating mice or sacrificing dogs. Oh, really? This was probably symbolic language meant to shock them into recognizing the ugliness of their sin. They thought they were being righteous, but their motives were all wrong.

So even religious practices, things that are supposed to draw us closer to God, they can actually become a stumbling block if they're done out of pride or self-righteousness. Exactly. It's like they were trying to earn God's favor through their actions rather than responding to his grace with humility and gratitude.

And this idea of our good deeds becoming a stench in God's nostrils if they're done with the wrong motives. That's a pretty disturbing thought. It makes you wonder, are there things I'm doing, even things I consider good, that might actually be displeasing to God because of my heart attitude? How do we even begin to check our motives and make sure we're not falling into this trap of self-righteousness? It's a challenging question, for sure.

I think it starts with recognizing our own need for God's grace. We can't earn his favor. We can only receive it as a gift.

And when we truly grasp that it changes everything, it humbles us, it makes us grateful, and it motivates us to live lives that are pleasing to him, not out of obligation, but out of love. This whole section is a powerful reminder that true righteousness isn't about outward appearances. It's about an inner transformation that flows from a heart's surrender to God.

Absolutely. And speaking of transformation, one of those mind-blowing concepts that emerges in Isaiah 65 is this idea of a new heavens and new earth. Now, this is pretty rare in the Old Testament.

Yeah, it is. Which mostly focuses on blessings and curses in this life. So why introduce it here? Why is heaven even necessary in light of all these promises of restoration and blessing? I think it has to do with the reality that sometimes, even when we live righteously, things don't work out the way we expect.

We may face hardship and justice, even persecution. And if this life is all there is, it can feel like God's promises have failed. So heaven becomes this ultimate guarantee that God will make things right, that his justice and faithfulness will prevail, even if we don't see it fully realized in our lifetime.

Yes, and that hope, that assurance can sustain us through the toughest trials. It reminds us that this world isn't our final destination. We're citizens of a kingdom that's yet to come.

A kingdom where righteousness reigns supreme. That's an incredible thought. It shifts our perspective completely, doesn't it? It does.

Knowing that we have an eternal home waiting for us, a place where there's no more pain, no more suffering, no more sin, it gives us the strength to persevere, to keep fighting the good fight, even when it's hard. And as we move into Isaiah 66, we see this tension between judgment and hope continue to play out. It's like a final call to choose.

Will we cling to our own self-righteousness and face the consequences, or will we humble ourselves before God and experience the fullness of his blessing? It's a big decision. Okay, so we've journeyed through the divine warrior imagery, the people's lament, God's response, and this glimpse of heaven. It's been quite a journey.

We've explored the dangers of self-righteousness, the power of the Holy Spirit. What stands out to you about Isaiah 66? What's catching your attention? Well, Isaiah 66, it kind of feels like this crescendo, this culmination of everything we've been talking about. It's a chapter full of contrasts with these warnings for those clinging to empty rituals.

And then incredible promises for those who are truly seeking God. So it's not just about wrapping things up neatly. It's about driving home that choice between clinging to self-righteousness or embracing God's transformation.

Precisely. And it starts with this really stark image in verse 17. God condemns those who are sanctifying and purifying themselves to go into gardens, engaging in all these elaborate rituals, yet their hearts are far from him.

It's almost like they're playing a part, putting on a show of righteousness. It's all surface level. Right.

It's outward religion without that inward transformation. God sees right through it. But then we get this incredible shift in verse 18.

It's like this burst of light breaking through the darkness. Yeah. It says, for I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and see my glory.

Isn't that beautiful? This vision of God's ultimate plan, his desire to draw all people to himself, not just a select few. Right. And notice the emphasis on his glory, his kavod.

Hold on kavod. You're going to have to break that down for me. Of course.

Think of kavod as like God's weightiness, his significance. It's not just about being famous or powerful. It's about his inherent worthiness, the sheer awe-inspiring reality of who he is.

So this gathering of nations, it's not just about everyone coming together to sing kumbaya. No, no, no. It's about recognizing and bowing down to God's kavod.

Yes. His absolute supremacy. Exactly.

It's a picture of humility, of acknowledging that God is the source of all blessing and goodness. And it connects back to what we saw earlier in Isaiah, that vision of people from all nations streaming to Mount Zion to worship the Lord. It's like that vision is being amplified here.

It is. It's expanding to encompass all people groups. Yes.

Not just the Israelites. And then in verse 21, we get this really radical statement, and some of them I will take for priests and Levites, says the Lord. With Gentiles serving as priests in the temple, that's a major paradigm shift for the Old Testament.

It completely shatters the traditional boundaries and distinctions, hinting at a time when God's people will be defined not by ethnicity or religious practice, but by a shared heart for him. This is about true righteousness, a righteousness that transcends outward labels and goes straight to the core of who we are. It's almost like God is saying, look, it's not about following a set of rules perfectly.

It's about letting me transform your heart and then letting that transformation flow out into every area of your life. And that transformation leads to an enduring legacy God promises. For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your offspring and your name remain.

It's a promise of permanence, not based on fleeting earthly structures, but on God's unwavering faithfulness. So even though we're talking about these massive concepts, new heavens, new earth, God's glory filling the nations, it all comes back to this personal transformation, this choice to embrace God's righteousness. Yes.

And Isaiah reminds us that this choice has consequences. In verse 24, we get a glimpse of judgment and they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me for their worm will not die, their fire shall not be quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

It's a sobering reminder that there's a cost to rejecting God's offer of grace, to clinging to our own self-righteousness instead of surrendering to his transforming power. It's like standing at a crossroads. One path leads to life, to fullness, to becoming who we were truly created to be.

The other path leads to death, to emptiness, to being separated from God. And the choice is ours. This deep dive through Isaiah has been quite a journey, wouldn't you say? We've gone from the battle against internal Edoms to this awe-inspiring vision of God's glory filling the earth.

It's been a powerful exploration of what it means to be truly righteous. We've seen that it's not about earning God's favor through our efforts, but about responding to his grace with humility and allowing him to transform us from the inside out. And it's that transformation that allows us to be a light in the darkness to reflect God's character to a world that desperately needs hope.

So as you reflect on everything we've discussed today, I encourage you to ask yourself, what steps can you take, starting right now, to cultivate that genuine humility, that hunger for God's transformation? How can you become a more faithful reflection of his light and love in the world? What will your yes to God's invitation look like? And until next time, keep diving deep, keep seeking truth, and keep allowing God's word to shape and transform you. We'll see you on our next deep dive.