

Dr. John Oswalt. Isaiah, Session 30,

6-min. Video Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back to another explainer. Today, we're skipping the dry history lesson. Instead, we're looking at an ancient text as a total masterpiece.

We're diving into Dr. John Oswalt's incredible analysis of the book of Isaiah, specifically chapters 60 through 62. You know, Dr. Oswalt actually frames this entire book like a grand unfolding symphony. It's this massive, complex theological work where these deep themes surface, fade away, and then come roaring back for a spectacular finish.

So think of me as your conductor today, and here's our playbill. We've got six movements: the symphony of Isaiah from darkness to light, the Holy One, the anointed redeemer, beauty for ashes, and finally a nation of priests. Let's get right into it.

All right. Movement one, the symphony of Isaiah. Just to orient us, let's look at how Dr. Oswalt breaks this down structurally.

Like any great classical piece, Isaiah relies heavily on recurring motifs. A theme plays, goes quiet, and then boom, chapters later, it's back for the grand finale. He divides the book into four main sections.

Chapters one through six establish this call to servanthood, which really frames the core problem of a sinful Israel. Then chapters seven through 39 shift the focus to trust, basically learning to wait on the Lord instead of, you know, relying on flawed humanity. Next up, chapters 40 through 55 highlight grace as both the motive and the means of that servanthood.

And finally, chapters 56 through 66, which is exactly where we're camped out today, are all about righteousness. That's the expected character of God's servants. Now the ultimate goal of this entire symphony sits right in the middle of what's called a chiasm.

That's a literary structure where everything points inward to one specific central idea. And get this: that overarching goal from beginning to end, it isn't actually just for Israel. No, it's for all nations, the righteous Gentiles to witness God's glory.

And we have to remember in the Old Testament, glory isn't just some fleeting fuzzy feeling. It's reality. It is a solid, significant weight.

God's ultimate goal is that literally all people will see his reality shining straight through his servants. Moving on to movement two, from darkness to light. But before we hit that glorious finale, we've got to deal with some pretty severe dissonance in the music.

The massive glaring problem at the heart of the text is the unrighteousness of the people. And Isaiah brilliantly illustrates this with a really stark poetic shift. Over in chapter 59, the people are described as groping for the wall like the blind.

Just walking in gloom, stumbling around at noon, like it's pitch-black. I mean, total utter darkness. But then suddenly you hit chapter 60 and bam, it's an explosion of radiant light.

Arise, shine for your light has come. The contrast is absolute night and day. So what exactly accounts for this massive, dramatic change? Well, what bridges that massive gap between the utter failure of chapter 59 and the blazing light of chapter 60? It's the divine warrior.

When there was literally no one around to intercede, no one who could drag the people from unrighteousness into righteousness, God's own arm brought salvation. He steps right into the mess as the divine warrior to defeat the ultimate enemy, which of course is sin. Which brings us to a pretty pivotal question, right? How exactly do these unrighteous people suddenly become the light of the world? Do they just, you know, buckle down and try really, really hard? No way.

The text says the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. This glorious light isn't something they generated from within by sheer human effort. It's entirely a received gift.

God sheds his glory upon the people, essentially turning them into a lantern so his light can shine out to all the nations. Okay. Movement three, the Holy One.

Now to really grasp this light, we need to look at the core identity of that divine warrior. And to do that, let's look at a phrase that just gets repeated relentlessly in the text, 26. The phrase Holy One of Israel, along with Holy One of Jacob, which pops up once, shows up 26 times in the book of Isaiah.

Now to put that into perspective, it only appears 31 times in the entire Bible. So yeah, the crucial takeaway here is that Isaiah is absolutely laser-focused on this specific title. It is immensely important for understanding exactly who God is.

So how does Dr. Oswald actually define the Holy One? Well, historically, scholars like Rudolf Otto focused really heavily on just the first half of the equation, that utterly transcendent separation from creation, you know, the tremendous mystery that produces this terrifying sense of awe. But Oswald points out that Otto missed the second equally crucial half, a half that's honestly found only in the Bible. God is an intimate relational character that he explicitly wants to share with us.

So holiness isn't just about God being separate and far away. It's about a highly distinct, deeply personal relationship. Dr. Oswald really hits the nail on the head here.

He says, you cannot separate his transcendent essence from his transcendent character. God doesn't just want us standing far off in terrifying awe. When he says, you must be holy as I am holy, he's really saying, I want you to share my character.

He actually wants his people to embody that exact same purity. All right. That brings us to movement four, the anointed redeemer.

So if God really wants to share his holy character with the deeply sinful people, what's the actual mechanism for that salvation? How does it happen? Well, we find this beautifully laid out in Isaiah chapter 61. The anointed one is given a very specific mission to preach good

news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, free the captives, and comfort those who mourn. And notice exactly who this good news is aimed at.

It's not for the self-righteous folks who think they've got it all together. It's for the contrite. It's specifically for those who know they are broken and held captive by their own sin and failure.

And Dr. Oswald makes a really profound connection here. He is absolutely confident that Jesus is fulfilling this exact prophecy of the anointed one right at his baptism. Think about it.

When Jesus says, " Let us fulfill all righteousness, it's a massive demonstration that he truly is the Messiah described back in Isaiah 11 and 61. As the Spirit of God comes down, he is revealed as the one anointed to bring this ultimate freedom and healing to the world, which leads perfectly into movement five, beauty for ashes. When the anointed one completes his mission, a profound transformation occurs, but we really need to define what kind of transformation we're talking about here.

When Isaiah 60 says, " Your people shall all be righteous. Is that just a declared position like a legal status, or is it actual real character change? And theology is super tempting to say, God just puts on, you know, Jesus colored glasses, ignores our sin, and simply calls us righteous even when we really aren't. But Dr. Oswald insists we absolutely cannot stop there.

Now, justification being given a righteous standing before God by faith, that is completely true. But God gives us that position specifically so that we might actually manifest his character in our daily behavior, in our relationships. The actual character change happens by faith, just like the new position happens by faith.

We are brought into the family so we can genuinely, practically live out God's life. And honestly, this leads to one of the most breathtaking poetic climaxes in the entire book. Just listen to this beauty for ashes, the ashes of our unrighteousness, the ashes of our brokenness, his beauty.

God is literally taking all the human sorrow, all the pain, the profound grief and the failure of this world, which Christ took directly into himself and he's trading it entirely for his divine beauty. It completely turns the absolute tragedy of human sin right on its head. And finally, movement six, a nation of priests.

So where does this profound transformation actually lead the people of Israel? Well, to understand their ultimate destiny, we've got to look at the historical stakes. See, the Israelites always thought being the kingdom of God meant having a powerful king on the throne, a massive standing army, and tons of wealth. But after the exile, they lost all of it.

None of that was possible anymore. They were completely stripped of their earthly geopolitical power, and that forced a total ground-up identity shift. But here's the amazing part.

Losing all that worldly power gave them the opportunity to finally become what they were actually called to be all the way back in Exodus: a royal priesthood. Instead of being this

towering military superpower, their incredible new calling was to serve as mediators. Think about it.

A priest stands directly between God and the rest of the world. Through their sheer reliance on God, they would become his ministers, actively drawing all the nations into the sanctuary. This really wraps up the theology so beautifully.

In Hebrew poetry, righteousness and salvation are just deeply inextricably linked. You are saved specifically in order to display the righteousness of God in your everyday life, but flip it around. You cannot possibly live out the true righteousness of God without experiencing his divine, gracious salvation first.

Each one relies completely on the other. God does the work in us so that his glory can actually be seen by the rest of the world. Which leaves us with this final, absolutely powerful visual from the text: that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the law, that he may be glorified.

The entire symphony resolves right here. God is taking broken captive people and turning them into deeply rooted, incredibly fruitful trees of righteousness. So I'll leave you with this to ponder.

In what specific ways is God currently at work in your own life? Taking the ashes of your past failures and trading them for his transcendent beauty so that you might become an oak of righteousness for the whole world to see. Thank you so much for joining me on this explainer. Keep learning, keep digging deep, and I'll see you next time.