

Dr. John Oswalt, Isaiah, Session 24, Isa. 49-51

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This is Dr. John Oswalt in his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session number 24, Isaiah chapters 49 through 51.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your presence here among us. We thank you for your active interest in who we are and what's happening in our lives, our growth in you. Thank you.

Thank you for your Holy Spirit's presence here to quicken our minds and our hearts. We thank you again for this wonderful book and pray that you will open some of its riches to us tonight. Help us to apply these riches to our hearts and be better people, better Christians because we've spent this hour together. In your name, we pray. Amen.

We're looking at the part of the book, Isaiah chapters 40 to 55. The first main division was chapters 7 to 39. Trust, is the basis for servanthood. I've titled Isaiah 40 to 55, Grace, Motive, and Means for Servanthood.

We saw how chapter 40 can be understood as an introduction and we finished our study last week of Grace, the motive for servanthood. God says to them, no, I have not cast you off. I've not been defeated by the Babylonian idols.

I've not been defeated by your sin. In fact, I'm going to use you as my chosen servants, my witnesses in a case against the idols, proving that I'm God. That kind of grace then ought to motivate them to trust him.

That kind of grace ought to motivate them to give their lives in service to him. But that raises a question. How is God going to do this? Is he simply going to ignore their sin? Is he just going to act as though nothing happened? I've said to you several times, God can't do that.

This is a cause-and-effect world. If he suspends cause and effect in one place, then the whole thing falls apart. So, the question is, how can God overlook their sin, and take them as his servants? Put another way, chapters 41 to 48 talk about God delivering them from Babylon.

But what about their sin? How is he going to deliver them from their sin and the consequent alienation that results of that sin? How is he going to deliver them back into fellowship with himself? I've mentioned it to you before, but let me say it again. In chapters 41 to 48, it's very clear you're talking about deliverance from Babylon. Babylonian gods, references to Babylon.

We saw in chapter 47 how the conclusion of all of the failures of the Babylonian gods is that Babylon is humiliated. Now the deliverance language continues in 49 to 55. Deliverance from bondage, deliverance from captivity, deliverance to God, that sort of thing.

But Babylon is never mentioned. Now many commentators will say, oh yes, but you're still, all you're really talking about in chapters 41 to 55 is deliverance from the exile. I'll try to show you tonight, next week and the following week, as we look at these chapters, why I don't think that's true.

We're not merely talking about deliverance from Babylon. We're talking about another level of deliverance here. So tonight, again, to try to maximize our available time, we're looking at three chapters, 49 to 51.

Chapter 49 begins, listen to me, O Coastlands, give attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord has called me from the womb, from the body of my mother. He named my name.

He made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand, he hid me. He made me a polished arrow.

In his quiver, he hid me away. He said to me, you are my servant, Israel, in whom I'll be glorified. But I said I've labored in vain.

I've spent my strength for nothing and vanity. Yet surely my right is with the Lord and my recompense with my God. Now the question is, who are we talking about here? Well, it says Israel.

So, it's obviously the nation. Do you see anything in this passage from what we've read previously that calls that into question? How has Israel been described in chapters 41 to 48? Disobedient. What else? Oh, dear.

I guess I should dig up truck driving after all. Get a small truck. Yeah.

Okay. Let's go back to chapter 42, verses 18 and 19. 18, 19, 20.

What about the servant? Death, blind, not looking. Verse 20. He sees many things but does not observe them.

His ears are open, but he doesn't hear. Verse 22. This is a people plundered, and looted, all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons.

Chapter 49. I'm a polished arrow hidden away in his quiver. Mel is saying that would be the Messiah.

Surely my right is with the Lord and my recompense with my God. So, if this is Israel, it's a different kind of Israel. Let's go on.

Verse five. Now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant to what? Bring Jacob back to him. Go on.

And gather Israel. Now, wait a minute. How's Israel going to gather Israel? In fact, what we're clearly talking about here is the ideal Israel, who will be for Israel, what Israel was never able to be in itself.

I ask you to look back at chapter 42, verses one to nine. And you notice. Verse six, I'm the Lord.

I've called you in righteousness. I'll take you by the hand and keep you. I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations to open the eyes that are blind, to bring the prisoners out from the dungeon, from the darkness, those who sit in darkness.

And here in chapter 49, verse six, it is to light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and bring back the preserved of Israel. I'll make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. It's too little a thing for this servant just to save Israel.

This servant is going to save the earth. Again, we're pretty clearly not talking about the nations. Now look at verse seven.

How does the world react to this servant despised abhorred? Then in verses eight through 12, God is speaking to the servant and look what he says he's going to do. Verse eight, I'll keep you and give you as a covenant to the people.

Very same thing that is said in chapter 42, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, to do what? Say to the prisoners. Now again, you see, if Israel is in prison, then Israel can't say to the prisoner, come out. So, verse 11, I'll make all my mountains a road and my highways shall be raised up.

Behold, these shall come from afar. These are from the North, from the West, these from the land of Syene. Go back to chapter 35 verse eight.

What will be there? A highway, a highway of holiness. And verse 10 tells us who will walk on that highway. The ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion with singing.

Clearly, this servant is restoring not only Israel but the world to God. It's not going to be enough to get the people back into the land unless something has been done about their sin. Otherwise, we're simply in the same mess we were in before with unforgiven sin.

Now look again at verse two. He made my mouth like a sharp sword in the shadow of his hand. He hid me.

He made me a polished arrow in his quiver. He hid me away. Now I ask you to look at chapter 11, verse four.

Does anybody do their homework? Look at what verse four says. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth. With the breath of his lips, he will kill the wicked.

He has made my mouth a sharp sword. Saying the very same thing, isn't it? Well, chapter 11 is clearly about the Messiah. So, who's this servant? This servant is the Messiah.

This is not the nation of Israel. This is the ideal Israel, who is for Israel what Israel could never be for itself. All right, now look at the response then in verse 13.

What's the response? Sing for joy. Exalt, oh sing for joy, oh heavens. Exalt, oh earth.

Break forth, oh mountains, into singing for the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion upon them. Look back at verses 44, 23. What's happening? Sing for joy.

Who? Who's singing? Heaven and earth, the mountains, the trees. What is that? What's singing? Nature is singing. Yes.

All right, now go all the way back to chapter one. We're going to do this again next week, but that's all right. Verse two, who is the jury to hear God's case against his people? The heavens and the earth.

Yes. Nature is the witness of our sinfulness and nature is the one who rejoices in our salvation. Do you remember what Paul says in the book of Romans? All nature groans, awaiting our redemption.

Nature has been cursed by our sinfulness and the day will come when nature will be redeemed and so nature rejoices in the work of this servant. There in 44 and again in 49. Before we leave this, I want you to look at verse nine and then I want you to compare that to 61.1. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. 49.9, saying to the prisoners, come out, to those who are in darkness, appear. Who is this servant? It is the ideal servant.

It is the Messiah. In short, the work of the servant makes it possible for us to be God's servants. Now, the question that remains for us is how is that going to happen? This servant who is faithful to God, who has been called from the womb, this servant is going to proclaim liberty to the captives.

Not the captives in Babylon, but those who are captive to sin. And the question arises in our minds, how is he going to do that? But there it is. Back in chapter 42, there were fully six verses of rejoicing over the revelation of this servant.

And maybe you remember that I said in 41 to 48, all the references but one are to the nation. Here in 49 to 55, I should say, and the one was this servant who's obedient, who is sensitive, who is called by God, who is called to be a covenant to the people, to bring justice to the nation. That's the one here.

In 49 to 55, all but one are to the ideal servant. And that one is the very last one in chapter 54. So, an interesting flip-flop in the proportions that we're doing here.

I think what's going on in 41 to 48 is that God is just sort of introducing this ideal servant there. His main point is to say, you are chosen. I have not cast you off.

I'm going to use you in my case. And if you have a question about how that happens, well, let me tell you. I'll just introduce this fellow to you.

Now, here we go the other way. I remind you that he did this for you, but the primary emphasis is on him. All right.

So, what is Israel? The mountains and the hills are singing over this great good news of the servant. And how does Israel respond in verse 14? Disbelief. The Lord has forsaken me.

The Lord has forgotten me. And you sort of hear the hills and the heavens and the earth saying, oh, good grief. These people are as blind as bats.

And that's exactly what Isaiah has been saying. So, if you look at chapter 40 verse 27, you see a somewhat similar response there. God's desire to deliver, his ability to deliver, and his intention to deliver have been revealed.

And the people respond, my way is hidden from the Lord. My right is disregarded by my God. Now, here in 49 14, it's a little bit different.

How is this one different? What is hidden from the Lord in 49 27? My way and my right. Now, what about 49 14? The Lord has forsaken me. He has forgotten me.

It's become more pointed. He's disregarded my way. He doesn't understand the situation I'm in.

He has forsaken me. And that's going to be the burning question through here. How are we going to overcome that just forsakenness? Yes, God did forsake them because they deserved it.

They brought it upon themselves. Now, how is he going to bring them back to himself? All right. What is God's response? How about verse 15? Can a nursing mother forget her baby? Maybe she could, but I won't forget you.

I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Tattooed. That's a big hand.

All of our names are written there. Now, if you look at verses 15 through 26, there's one prevailing concern that Israel has that God is addressing. What is God promising to do in these verses? He's going to give your children back.

Lift up your eyes or verse 18, lift up your eyes around and see they'll all gather. They'll come to you as I live, declares the Lord. You'll put them all on as an ornament.

You'll bind them on as a bride does. Surely your waste in your desolate places, your devastated land. Surely now you'll be too narrow for your inhabitants.

Those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears, the place is too narrow for me. Make room for me to dwell in.

Then you will say in your heart, who has born me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away. Who has brought up these? I was left alone. Where did these come from? Now, why would that be a concern for the exiled people? The exiled people usually just disappeared.

God had made these promises to Abraham, but they are in exile. Their children are all going to become good Babylonians. Given a generation, Israel won't exist anymore.

And God says, no, the opposite is going to be true. You're going to be saying, where did all these kids come from? Yes, where are we going to put them? And you see, in fact, that is exactly what happened. The Hebrew people were only in exile.

The Judean people were only in exile for about a generation and a half, from 586 until 539, about 45 years. God says, no, I'm not going to let it happen. You are not going to disappear.

You're not going to be dissolved. I'm going to preserve your life. I'm going to restore you to myself.

So verse 24, can prayer be taken from the mighty or captives of a tyrant be rescued? Thus says the Lord, even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued. For I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. Back in chapter 44, he says, I'm going to pour water on the dry land, and your descendants will spring up like rushes beside the waterways.

And one of them will write on his hand the Lord's, and another will say, I belong to Jacob, and another will say, I belong to the Lord. So that promise, no, no, I am not going to let you disappear as a people. Now, I have to believe that that promise is still applying to the Jewish people.

I don't see any way you can explain the existence of the Jews today after 2,000 years of we Christians trying to get rid of them. There they are. Still a coherent group.

I don't think there's any good explanation for that apart from the fact that God continues to care for them. He continues to yearn for them, to long for them, and to protect them under his hand. Now, you ask the Jews, and many of them will say, we'd like to be unprotected if this is what it means to be chosen.

But, in fact, it seems to me they still remain among the chosen. Yeah, yeah. Hitler, Goebbels and Goering made it their mission to destroy Judaism from the face of the earth.

And where are Hitlers and Goebbels and Goering today? In a very warm spot. Yes, yes. Okay, now I want you to look at the last part of 23 and the last part of 26.

There are statements there that we've encountered in this study and in other studies. What is God's purpose? Yes, yes. You will know, that's verse 23, and who will know in verse 26? All flesh, all humans will know that I am Yahweh, your Savior, your Redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob.

God's purpose is that we might know him. Paul picks that up in the book of Philippians. He says, here are all my accomplishments.

Very, very few people in the world can match that list, but I'll tell you what, I consider it all manure. I've been happy to lose it all, to be called a fool, in order that I may know Christ and be found in him. Not in order that I may be saved.

Not in order that my sins might be forgiven. Nothing wrong with either of those, but the goal that captures Paul's attention is, I want to know him, know everything about him, know him as my personal Savior, know him as my personal Savior. Know him as my personal Redeemer, know him as my friend.

Exactly, exactly. You know that Paul is serious when he says, and I want to know him in the fellowship of his suffering. If the one with whom I have fallen in love had to walk up Calvary, then I want to walk up there with him.

Now you know he's serious. Now you know he's serious. Oh yeah, I want to know him when the sun is shining.

I want to know him when everything is going well. Paul says I want to know him all the way to Calvary. Because, he says, I know that there is resurrection on the other side of Calvary.

He's not merely a masochist. Well, Jesus suffered, so I want to suffer. No, Jesus suffered in order that he might rise from the dead, and that's what I want.

Okay, let's push on. The segment really goes, as you have it on your sheet, from 49, 14 through 50, verse 3. You've forsaken me. No, I haven't, and here's the evidence that you're going to see.

You're going to have more children, than you have any way of imagining. Why? Because I am your Redeemer. Well, wait a minute.

Chapter 50, verses 1, 2, and 3. Now, I talked to you about that in the background. The exiles were accusing Yahweh of having divorced Judah. Forsaken and divorced are the same word.

You've divorced us. Well, the law makes it very clear that a husband may not remarry a divorced woman as if she has had relations with another husband. So, you've divorced us.

You can't take us back. Or, to use a different metaphor, you had to sell us to pay your creditors. So, you can't get us back, and God says, where's your mother's certificate of divorce? Who says I divorced you? Which of my creditors did I sell you to? For your iniquities, you were sold.

For your transgressions, your mother was sent away. But the whole point is, no, God was not forced to do this against His will. The Babylonians didn't do this to Him, though He wanted to prevent it.

No, this happened because He chose to do it, and freely choosing to do it, He is freely able to take you back again. Now, verse 2, a couple of possible interpretations there. One possibility is that there was nobody to intercede and thus prevent the exile.

Ezekiel seems to talk in that way. There was nobody to stand in the gap. Now, again, this is Semitic, and Semitic has hyperbole.

Were there no righteous people in Judah when the exile came? No, there were righteous people, but there weren't enough. And the same way here. Was there nobody to intercede? Sure, there were people interceding, but there weren't enough.

It's also possible, though, that the verse is saying, there is nobody now among you exiles who is able to redeem you, is there? So, is my hand shortened? If there is nobody, if there was no righteous person at the time the exile occurred, if there was no intercessor at that time if there is nobody now who can deliver you, does that mean I can't? No. Now, this hand and arm thing is going to be very important. I'll ask you to pay careful attention to that.

The two are used interchangeably to talk about God's power of salvation, and particularly in our study next week, it'll be quite significant, the way that works out. So, then we come to chapter 50 verses 4 to 9. Here's the third time that the servant speaks. The first one was in chapter 42, the second was in 49, and here's the third one.

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught that I might know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear and I was not rebellious.

I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, my cheeks to those who pull out the beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting, but the Lord God helped me.

Therefore, I have not been disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like a flint. I know I will not be put to shame.

Do you remember what I've said to you before about being put to shame? The idea of disgrace because something you trusted and failed you. I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who's my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps me.

Who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment. The moth will eat them up. All right.

What can we say about this person from this passage? Let's just quickly. Our time is flying away. What can we say about him? Okay.

He's going to obey. He's determined to obey. Let me say it that way.

All right. What else? Okay. He is an encourager.

What else? All right. Yes. All right.

What else? Okay. Okay. All right.

What? Light. Okay. How about an ear to hear? He hears and speaks.

There's one more thing though that's said pretty significant. He's going to suffer, huh? Yes. And I think we can assume it's not said explicitly, but we can assume he suffers unjustly.

Nobody will make me guilty, he says. Once again, we're not talking about the nation. If there was a question about that, I think it's answered in verse 10.

Remember what I've said about Hebrew poetry? What's the main feature of Hebrew poetry? Synonymous parallelism. A second line says the same thing as the first, but in slightly different words. So, look at verse 10.

Who is the servant according to the parallelism here? The Lord. If you fear the Lord, you are obeying the voice of the servant. If you obey the voice of the servant, you are fearing the Lord.

The servant is equated with Yahweh. Oh my goodness. So, if you obey the voice of the servant, then you are fearing the Lord.

And the issue that is brought forward there then is, as you've highlighted here, absolute confidence in the Lord. A trust in him in the face of injustice, in the face of suffering that's undeserved. And again, we ask ourselves, well, where does that come from? Why? Well, why does this person suffer? Why are they treated? Why is he treated badly? And we don't know the answer yet.

So, if you walk in darkness, what's the solution? According to verses 10 and 11, you have two choices. You can kindle a fire for yourself, and what will happen? No, you'll lie down in torment. You'll burn yourself up.

And how true that is. How true that is. I'll light my way with my own education.

I'll light my way with my own accomplishments. I'll light my way with my own power. I'll light my way with human love.

And God says, good luck. What does verse 10 say, though? If you don't have any light, what should you do? Trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. Have we heard anything about trust in this book? If we haven't, you haven't been here.

Yes, yes. The whole foundation of servanthood is that absolute trust in God, and we can trust in him because of his grace. Okay, push on then into 51.

Notice how many times listen gets repeated here. Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness. Verse four, give attention to me, my people give ear to me, my nation.

Verse seven, listen to me, you who know righteousness. Who is he speaking to? Did you catch it? You who pursue righteousness. Verse four, my people.

Verse seven, you who know what is right. Now, why is God addressing these people? Well, they're hard of hearing. What are your thoughts? Why address what you have to say to these people? Okay, I think that's exactly right.

These are people who, for better or worse, are genuinely seeking righteousness. So, there's a chance of their hearing what is going to be said. Yes, yes, yes, yes.

And again, we can think about the situation among the exiles. I think you've certainly got at least three groups of people. Those who are seeking righteousness.

Those who are mocking righteousness and saying, hey, this is all a bunch of craziness. We need to just become good Babylonians because the biblical teaching is wrong. And then you've got the whole big bunch in the middle who are just surviving.

There probably is not much hope for these folks. But these folks, if these people will hang on and not give up and really believe the Word of God, then there's some hope that they can have some influence on these people. So, what does God say to them? Verse 2, look to Abraham your father.

Remember where you came from. Don't forget that. Verse 3, for the Lord comforts Zion.

This is the first-time comfort, and you remember, I hope, what I said before, that comfort is not the best translation. Encourage, strengthen is a better word. But this is the first time that this word has shown up since chapter 40.

One of the reasons I think chapter 40 is introductory to all of 41 to 55. So, I want to encourage you. Go on.

Verse 4, Torah will go out from me. I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. My righteousness draws near.

My salvation has gone out. My arms will judge the peoples. And the coastland, the ends of the earth, hope for me whether they know it or not.

For my arm, they wait. So, you who are seeking righteousness, don't give up. My salvation is coming, and it's for the world.

Lift your eyes up to the heavens. Look at the earth beneath. The heavens vanish like smoke.

The earth will wear out like a garment. They who dwell in it will die in like manner. But my salvation will be forever.

My righteousness will never be dismayed. The heavens and the earth, they're going to flee away. But my salvation, my righteousness is going to last forever.

Don't forget it. So, verse 7, don't be afraid of the reproach of man or be dismayed at their revilings. Hang in there, baby.

It's the Living Oswald version. The moth will eat them up like a garment. But my righteousness will be forever.

My salvation to all generations. So, clearly, he's seeking to encourage these folks who are sort of wavering, perhaps. God's saying, don't do it.

Stand. Stand firm. Oh, how true this is for you and me as we see Christendom going down the tubes all around us.

I think chapter 51, verses 1 to 8, is for us. Hang in there. So, how do they respond? Verse 9, wake up, arm of the Lord.

Where have you people been? But at least, at least, they're responding. Once again, here's arm. So, we've seen it, verse 5, twice.

My arms will judge the peoples. The coastlands, the ends of the earth, hope for me. For my arm, they wait.

Remember, wait? The ends of the earth are trusting God for his mighty arm of salvation. So, here it is again. Wake up, arm of the Lord.

And they use the allusion to the ancient myth of creation. You're the one that really destroyed chaos, and you did that at the Red Sea. Salvation is what you're all about.

And then, here's 51, 11. The ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will be on their heads.

They will obtain gladness and joy. Sorrow and sighing will flee away. I, I am he who encourages you.

Who are you that you're afraid of a man who dies, or the son of man who's made like grass, and have forgotten? Do you think I forgot you? You've forgotten the Lord, your maker, who stretched out the heavens, laid the foundations of the earth, and you fear continually all day because of the wrath of the oppressor. You want me to wake up? You need to stay awake, not be lulled into all the things that come along, and get our attention off our Savior. So, what is God doing all through here? He's encouraging these people to believe, to remember who he is, to remember what he's done.

So then, in verse 17, who needs to wake up? Jerusalem needs to wake up. It's not the arm of the Lord that needs to wake up, it's Jerusalem that needs to wake up. And in our closing minutes here, I want you to look at a figure of speech here.

Verse 17. You have drunk from the hand of the Lord, what? The cup of his wrath. You have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.

Now, verse 21. Hear this, you who are afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine. Thus says your Lord, Yahweh, your God, who pleads the cause of his people, behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering, the bowl of my wrath, you will drink no more.

Okay, so he says, you drank it, but that's over, and your enemies are going to drink it. But the question is, how can God take that cup out of our hands? We deserve it. His chesed, yes, and his chesed is displayed in the garden of Gethsemane.

Do you remember what Jesus said? If it's possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, you will be done. The cup of staggering, the cup filled with all the vile sins of humanity.

God says I'm going to take that out of your hands. I'm going to put it in your enemy's hands. But the only way he can take it from our hands is if he himself drinks it and drinks it to the bottom.

Yes, you are my servants. And the question is, how? How can he be? How can we be his servants? Only if a way is found to take that cup out of our hands.

Let's pray. Oh, Lord Jesus. Thank you. Thank you that when the father said, son, there's no other way. You took the cup and drank it to the bottom. Thank you. Help us, Lord.

In the midst of a declining church, in the midst of a culture that seems bent on destroying itself as rapidly as possible. Help us to stand, to stand joyfully, calmly, triumphantly. Because you have come to encourage us.

You, in the power of your Holy Spirit, have come to enable us to stand. Help us, oh Lord, in the knowledge of what you have done in Christ and in the certainty of what you will do at the end of the age, to stand and having done all to stand. In your name, we pray. Amen.

This is Dr. John Oswalt in his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session number 24, Isaiah chapters 49 through 51.