

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Johannine Theology, Session 18, Salvation, Eternal Life

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Johannine Theology. This is session 18, Salvation, Eternal Life.

We continue our studies in Johannine Theology with Salvation viewed as Eternal Life, as is the case with many of the themes of the 4th Gospel.

Eternal Life is introduced in the prologue, you guessed it. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John intertwines the themes of life and light. Again, I commend Andreas Kostenberger's *Theology of the Gospel of John's Gospel and Letters*; that's the title, I think. And for more on that intertwining, but right now, I have separated those, and now we're discussing Eternal Life.

We discussed Jesus as the light, under the I am saying I am the light of the world. In the Logos, in the Word, was life. Every time *zoe*, the Greek word *zoe*, life in the 4th Gospel is used, it speaks of Eternal Life.

Eternal Life was in the Word. If you want to know where it resided, its place was in the Word. He was the life-giver, as verse 3 says, in terms of the created life.

All things were made through Him, and this is a comprehensive statement because it not only affirms the positive but also denies the negative. Without Him, nothing was made that has been made. He made everything.

In fact, in Him was life. The locus of Eternal Life is in the Logos. And that Eternal Life in the Logos, the source of all created life, verse 3, was the light of men.

It was the revelation of God, shining on humankind. Of men is an objective genitive. Light is an action noun.

The light radiates, illuminating and shining on human beings. That is, the Word is the author of general revelation. The things God has made bear witness of Him as Maker.

Specifically, the Son was the Father's agent in creation. Not only taught here in John 1:3, and 4, but in Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 as well. Eternal Life was in the Son.

This verse does not speak of salvation. It speaks of creation. And the source of that creation is the Eternal.

The source of all created life was the Life. Eternal Life in the Word of God. The second person of the Trinity.

The Son, the Light, the Word. So, of course, when the Light comes into the world, He continues to reveal God. But now, savingly, He illuminates sinners.

John 3, 14 and following. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. We treated this one before.

Numbers 21. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. Here's a whosoever will passage, to be anachronistic, to be archaic.

Whoever believes in Him has eternal life. This eternal life is the life of God given to those in darkness. In the darkness of ignorance of God, in the darkness of sin.

When God savingly illuminates them, darkness is replaced by light. Ignorance becomes knowledge. Sin becomes holiness.

Believing in the Son produces eternal life. For God so loved the world, John 3:16, that He gave His only Son, that whoever again believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. Here, eternal life is the opposite of perishing.

This is the language, the vocabulary of destruction we call it. Which in scripture speaks ultimately of the pains of hell. An eternal conscious punishment away from the Lord and His glory and joy.

Now let's be clear about it. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world. He wants to save the world through Him.

And whoever believes is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already. Because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. Eternal life is given as a gift by the life-giver.

The incarnate word which gave life, physical life, to all things. Even before the incarnation as the Father's agent in creation. John 1:3 and 4. Now He's incarnate, and He brings life.

John 3, the very last two verses. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

It's the present possession of believers. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life. But the wrath of God remains on him.

Here is this realized eschatology. The already dimension of life and, well, death. It doesn't use death but wrath.

Whoever believes in the Son, the Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. The Son is Lord, to use Pauline language.

John uses it, too, but Paul uses it much more. It's like John 17:1 and 2. You have given Him authority over all flesh. That's verse 35.

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. And unlike 17:1 and 2, which then goes from the Son's universal lordship to election. Here, the Son's universal lordship is followed up by faith and unbelief.

Again, teaching us we must hold the biblical teachings in tension. In balance, for want of a better word. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life now.

Oh, he'll have it in a fuller way in the new heavens and new earth. That is not John's accent. As a matter of fact, when you see it, find it, you say, ah, there it is.

Because most of the time, nine out of ten times, eternal life. Most often called eternal life, sometimes called life.

Referring to the same reality. Although with the adjective eternal is more prevalent. But they both mean eternal life.

Sometimes, John uses shorthand life. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life now. Whoever does not obey the Son, disobedience is parallel to belief.

As I said earlier, because the gospel is a command. And to obey the gospel is to believe. To disobey the gospel is to reject the gospel.

To disbelieve. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life. Now, nor in the age to come.

Life is not just existence. Every human being will exist forever. Life is, John 17:3, knowing the Father and the Son.

Life is having the life of God within oneself. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life. But the wrath of God remains on him.

We think of wrath as a futuristic idea associated with hell. So it is, but once again, the fourth gospel is eschatology. Some of it is so-called consistent eschatology.

It's futuristic. There's a final stage of eternal life for the resurrected righteous on the new earth. There's a final stage for the wrath of God where people were cast into eternal fire, into hell, to the lake of fire, into the second death, into Gehenna.

But John teaches everyone who does not believe in the Son has been condemned already, John 3.18. And here later in the chapter, the great contrast is given. Believers in the Son gain eternal life now and forever. It's eternal life.

It lasts forever. Unbelievers don't see eternal life now or forever. Rather, God's wrath remains on them.

I see this as merciful of God to warn sinners now of the wrath to come. Although in John, the wrath to come has already come. But it's a precursor of a greater eternal wrath, of course, that is good of God.

If he told people everything was okay when it wasn't okay, that wouldn't be good. As Luther reminds us, he taught that bad news is necessary to understand the good news. The kakangelion is a prelude, epistemologically speaking, to understanding the euangelion, the good message, the good news.

We see eternal life in chapter 4 with the woman at the well. Again, don't miss the great irony between chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3, any Jew would expect, Nicodemus, are you kidding me? A Jewish man, Pharisee, member of the Sanhedrin, and a famous teacher in Israel. This guy is already in the kingdom of God.

No? Oh, then he's right on the cusp of it. Good grief. Jesus says he is far away from the kingdom of God and doesn't understand the ABCs.

In fact, when he hears the new birth, he's talking about outrageous things like re-entering your mother's womb. And then chapter 4, oh my goodness. If ever there was a soul to be pitied, it's not fair or good or just, but women were demeaned in 1st-century Palestinian life.

And Samaritan woman? Are you kidding me? The disciples were really shocked that Rabbi Jesus was talking to a woman in public, let alone a Samaritan woman. And if they had known her background, they would have dropped the food that they were carrying. She was a female, a Samaritan, the despised race in Israel's eyes.

And a disreputable one at that. You've had five husbands for 18, Jesus says, and the one you have now is not your husband. Nobody told him that.

So, I perceive you are a prophet. And she quickly shifts to the theological question at the place of worship. But she's honest.

Wow. She's working on her sixth man. This is not in vogue in the 1st century, no matter where you live.

Oh, my goodness. How unexpected. The great Pharisee, Sanhedrin member, teacher, and Israelite.

God knows how to humble the proud. And he knows how to raise the humble, as the proverb says. As Mary says in her Magnificat.

Does he know how? James and 1st Peter both. God is opposed to the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. It's an Old Testament thought.

I don't have the reference in my head. But James certainly, an Old Testament Christian, knows this one. God humbles the proud and exalts the lowly.

Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand, that he might exalt you at the proper time. For he cares for you. Likewise, you who are younger, 1 Peter 4:5, be subject to the elders.

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another. For God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. I know it's got Old Testament antecedent.

I just don't see it quickly. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. God humbles Nicodemus.

And give Nicodemus credit if that's an appropriate way to say it because he listened. He was humbled. He defended Jesus in chapter 7 and gave time and money to attend to the crucified body of Jesus in chapter 19.

He was humbled. Samaritan woman, she couldn't be any more humble to start out with. She ends up coming across as a female evangelist, the men of the city run to hear Jesus.

They flock to hear Jesus, because she said, come hear a man that told me everything I ever did. They knew exactly what that meant, unfortunately. And because of her efforts, they said, now we know this man is the savior of the world.

That is so advanced, we don't find that in Israel, in any of the gospels. God has a sense of humor. He's not saying that John's making up anything.

But now we believe, not just because of what you said, but we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the savior of the world. In this context of God elevating the humble, we have verse 14. She asked him for a drink.

She can't believe it. How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? If you knew the gift of God, 4:10, and who it is that's saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water, double meaning, running water. Ah, that sounds good.

This is a pain in the neck. I don't have to come here anymore. Give me this, sir.

This will be very convenient. First of all, she says, where are you going to get this water from? You don't even have a bucket. I don't understand.

How are you going to get water out of the well without a bucket? Remember the symbolism that John uses so powerfully. Bread, water, light. Sir, give me this water, verse 15 so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.

He does the husband deal. She acknowledges and says Mount Gerizim is where you should worship. That's what we think.

You're wrong. Salvation is of the Jews. You should worship in Jerusalem, except right now, I'm already nullifying that.

Oh, my goodness. It is incredible. But our concern is 4:14.

Whoever drinks, if you drink of this water from Jacob's well, you're going to be thirsty again. Of course. But whoever drinks of the water I will give him, spiritual water, will never be thirsty again.

The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water. That's what she wanted. But this is a metaphorical, spiritual spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Told you before, it's hard for me to know. I'm sure the Holy Spirit and eternal life are both involved. Is the water eternal life itself? Is the water the Holy Spirit that produces eternal life? I'll vote for door number two, but I'm not sure.

The main thing is, there's an illusion, I think, to the spirit without naming the spirit. And surely there is eternal life. Jesus is the giver of eternal life.

Even to Samaritan immoral women who believe and open their hearts to him. 5:21. As the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life.

There is a direct statement that the son is the life-giver. As the father raises the dead, that is a divine work if there ever was one, and gives them life, is that a regeneration or resurrection? I'm going to suggest in the immediate context, regeneration. Both are true, of course.

So also, the son gives life to whom he will. Oh boy. This isn't an election.

This is regeneration by the son. The son gives eternal life to people now, to whom he will. It's the son's sovereignty.

Many times, you usually believe in the Son for eternal life. Now here, as the father sovereignly gives life to those who are dead, so the son gives life to whom he will. The father judges no one but has given all judgment to the son that they may honor the son just as they honor the father.

The Gospel of John is so clear on the deity of Christ, consistently clear, over and over again. 5:21, explicitly, the son gives life. And we see it in 24.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in me, believes in the one who sent me; Jesus is so much the revealer of God. If you hear his word and believe, you automatically believe in the Father. That person who believes Jesus' word has eternal life.

So, he could say in 6, my words are spirit and they are life. They so bear the message of eternal life that he could talk like that. His words are eternal life.

Ah, it's a metonymy. His words are so closely associated with eternal life. Metonymy is a figure of speech whereby two things are so closely associated that one stands for the other.

If you read in the paper or heard a message today, a message came out of the White House today, you would say, out of a house? What's going on here? A house painting? No, you'd say, ah, that means it's from the office. You wouldn't even think about it because of the association of the office of the presidency of the United States with the White House. You would understand it's a message from the president.

So, too, whoever hears Jesus' word and believes in the Father has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. Jesus' life-giving word, the life-giving word of the life-giver, regenerates unregenerate human beings.

Wow. Truly I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here. That's the already.

When the dead will hear the voice of the son of God, those who hear will live. For the father has life in himself. It is part of God's being God.

So he has also granted the son life in himself. You might mark it down. I disagree with D.A. Carson here.

He's certainly my teacher by his writings. He thinks this is a statement of the eternal generation of the son. I don't deny that notion that God has always been the father of the son and the son has always been the son of the father.

I don't think this is talking about pre-incarnate inter-trinitarian relations, however. I think it's talking about incarnate business here. As the Father has life in himself, inherently, God the Father is the living God.

So he's granted the incarnate son to have life in himself. He planned and executed by the spirit. The incarnation of the eternal son.

So that this man, Jesus, has eternal life in himself and is the giver of life to others. And that's why he has the authority to judge. The father gave it to him.

And the father has, as we just read, given all judgment to the son. Don't marvel at this. Don't marvel at spiritual resurrection now because an hour is coming when there's going to be a literal, physical resurrection.

And that's going to be the voice of the son of man, too. So, they are right to say Jesus was very specific. He said, Lazarus, come forth.

He didn't want a whole multitude of people to come and raise him. He didn't want to empty out the whole graveyard, so to speak. Jesus is the giver of eternal life.

He is eternal life incarnate, if you will. And at his word, people who are spiritually dead move from spiritual death to spiritual life. They are regenerated.

They are born again. They are born from God. They have eternal life, Pauline language now, in mortal bodies.

And one day, we'll have eternal life in immortal bodies when the son, at his voice, raises them along with all the rest of the dead, righteous and unrighteous. We're back to 17, John 17. Of course, there's eternal life there.

I think you could do a whole course on the gospel of John using the prologue and tracing the themes out from there. I think you could do a whole course on the gospel

of John using John 17 and the themes prior to it and coming from it. 17, two and three, when Jesus has spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify your son that your son may glorify you. The mutual glorification of the father and the son and, yes, the spirit, although he doesn't say it as much, since you've given him authority over all flesh, why? That he might give eternal life to all whom you have given him. Oh, wait a minute.

If they're elect, don't they have eternal life already? No, they were just chosen for that. God set his son to be the savior of the world as the Samaritans teach us.

John 4, and the Son is the life giver. He gives eternal life; I'll say it two ways: to whosoever believes in him, it is true. He also gives eternal life to those whom the Father gave him, and somehow, he can handle that knowledge of knowing who will believe and who won't. I'm glad he can handle it because I don't see how he could handle it, but I believe, indeed, that he did handle it quite well.

Phew. Wonderful themes intertwine in those first few verses, and this is eternal life. It is defined for us.

Truly? Yes. Comprehensively? No, it's too big. This is eternal life.

The concept is too big. They know you, the only true God, and they know Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Eternal life is knowing the father and the son.

Wait a second. Isn't this a verse for the cults? It calls the Father the true God and doesn't say that that of the Son distinguishes him from the true God. It does, but get a load of this. Eternal life is knowing not only the Father but knowing the Son.

The Son is, hence, equal to the Father. True God gives the son, gives the Father prominence as the first person as we say. After all, the spirit didn't become incarnate, only the son, and the father didn't become, only the son did, and there is a, not an essential, but an economic or functional subordination in the incarnation.

Eternal life is knowing the father and the son. When? Now. That is, eternal life is relational.

That is, it is not only quantitative. Eternal death is also quantitative. Human beings last forever.

But it's also qualitative. Eternal life is defined relationally. It is knowing God.

The Bible teaches there is religion. And don't just say, I don't have religion, I have a relationship. James 1 uses the word religion both negatively and false religion.

What good is that religion? And true, true religion and the father before God and father is this. Visiting widows and orphans in their distress and keeping oneself unstained from the world. But the Christian life, it is. There is religion.

There are religious functions and praying and standing up and sitting down and singing hymns and listening to the word of God and taking the Lord's supper. That's all religion. It's more than that biblically.

Traditionally, we distinguish, not biblically, but traditionally between theology, which is concerned with Christian teaching, and religion, which is concerned with Christian practice. Here, permeating them both is knowing the Father, the Son and, of course, the Holy Spirit. We conclude this lecture with the purpose statement.

Jesus showed he was alive three times, according to John's count. That doesn't mean it's; he only appeared three times. But John counts three and that's true that he appeared three.

It doesn't say he only appeared three to his disciples. Specifically, the purpose statement follows Thomas's appearance, doubting Thomas. My Lord and my God John 20, 28 Thomas says.

Jesus said to him, have you believed because you've seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. The very last verse of the Gospel of John is hyperbolic.

It is a hyperbole. Now there were many other things that Jesus did where every one of them to be written I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. That is sanctified overstatement.

That is a sanctified exaggeration. Wait a second. Isn't it true the son is eternal? Yes.

And therefore you can't count what he did in eternity past. Yes. But this verse isn't talking about eternity past.

It's talking about the economy. It's talking about the incarnate son. And it doesn't even say signs but many other things.

Yes, innumerable things, but a finite number. John's meaning is the son of God did many wonderful works. Same for 20:30.

Jesus did many other signs than the 7:8 or 9 that John recorded. Reading Kostenberger I'm kind of thinking maybe the resurrection isn't a sign but the substance toward which Jesus' resurrection but the substance toward which the other signs point. What stumbles me is chapter 2. What sign do you do to show you have authority to cleanse the temple? And then immediately Jesus predicts his resurrection.

So, I don't know and when I taught that earlier I said I wasn't sure. So, I'm more unsure now because Kostenberger says all these giants believe that the resurrection is the reality to which the signs point.

After all, what is a sign? It's not the reality. It's an ouch. So, I will be I now believe 60% that that's right, and I'll swallow that sign request for a sign in chapter 2, and what am I not important?

Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. John has been selective. The gospel writers are historians.

John's not making stuff up, but he had a lot of stuff to choose from. He had a lot more time than Matthew, Mark, and Luke than Peter, Matthew, and Luke to think about what Jesus said and did. And he presents to us the gospel of John, which could be likened to a river, and indeed little children could play in this river and get a lot of good stuff and have a lot of fun, but for goodness sake, elephants can swim in this river and have to be careful they don't drown.

These signs are written so that you may believe. The miracles are written and selected many times, combined with sermons. I'm never saying John is being creatively wrong by making stuff up.

He thinks more deeply than the first three gospel writers. He has time on his side. He puts together what was there that they many times didn't even mention.

They were so overwhelmed with the immediate story of Jesus. These are written so that you may believe what? That Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph is the Christ the anointed one the Messiah the promised one of Israel. The son of God the divine human ruler king of Israel and that by believing you might have guess what life in his name.

Thus there's a big inclusion, a big inclusion bookends the same feature of language. As a matter of fact, the same word life in John 1:3 and in 20:30 1. Remember, the chapter divisions are not inspired. In our next lectures, we will move on and, Lord willing, finish up still thinking about salvation, but now, in terms of the Father drawing people to Jesus, the Son raising people from the dead, the Son keeping people saved, and we'll conclude, Lord willing, with the already and the not yet.

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