

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 10, 9 Saving Events, Part 2, Essential Prerequisites, Incarnation, and Jesus's Sinless Life

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson and his teaching on Christ's Saving Works. This is session 10, Christ's Nine Saving Events, Part Two, Essential Prerequisites, Incarnation, and Jesus' Sinless Life.

We continue our study of what Jesus did to save us, his saving works, and perhaps my main point to make out of many points is that the death and resurrection of Christ should be understood together.

Jesus himself predicted his two key saving events. Mark 8:31, he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and, after three days, rise again. See also Mark 9:31 and chapter 10, verses 33 and 34.

In John 10, Jesus says, for this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down in my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down; I have the authority to take it up again.

I have received this charge from my father. John 10:17 and 18. Paul in Romans also joins Jesus' death and resurrection.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes and is justified, and with the mouth, one confesses and is saved. Romans 10:9 and 10.

Many times Paul combines Jesus' death and resurrection as his primary saving events. I'm not going to read all these passages, but I will mention them in case you want to look them up for yourself. Romans 4:25, 2 Corinthians 5:15, Philippians 3:10, Acts 2:22-24, Hebrews 1:3, 1 Peter 1:11. Unequivocally, scripture puts in the spotlight Jesus' death and resurrection when it talks about his saving work.

Yet, altogether there are nine saving works of Christ. I'm going to give brief definitions so that we'll be on the same page. The incarnation is the Son of God's becoming a human being by a supernatural conception in Mary's womb.

Christ's sinless life is his living from birth to death without sinning in thought, word, or deed. I regard these two as essential preconditions of what Jesus did to save us.

The core events are not his incarnation and sinless life, but rather his death and resurrection.

They are distinct and yet united in the plan of God. The crucified one is the risen one, and the risen one is the crucified one. Two essential preconditions, two core events, and then five essential results of what Jesus did to save us.

His ascension is his public return to the Father, going up from the Mount of Olives. His session is his sitting down at God's right hand after his ascension. Pentecost, the Jewish festival, is known to Christians mainly not as a Jewish festival but rightly as Christ's saving work of pouring out the Holy Spirit on his church.

His intercession includes his perpetual presentation in heaven of his finished crosswork and his prayers on behalf of his saints. His second coming is his return in glory at the end of the age to bless his people and to judge his enemies. So, the heart and soul of Christ's saving work is his death and resurrection.

Nevertheless, there are many saving events and I single out nine major events from the biblical story. The classic statement of the breadth of Christ's saving work is that of John Calvin in his hymn of praise to Christ. If we seek salvation, Calvin wrote, we are taught by the very name of Jesus.

It is of him, 1st Corinthians 13:1. If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, tongue twister, it lies in his dominion.

If purity, in his conception. If gentleness, it appears in his birth. For by his birth, he was made like us in all respects, Hebrews 2:17, that he might learn to feel our pain, Hebrews 5:2. If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion.

If acquittal, in his condemnation. If remission of the curse, in his cross, Galatians 3:13. If satisfaction, in his sacrifice. If purification is in his blood.

If reconciliation, in his descent into hell, which Calvin understood as Jesus taking the penalty of hell on the cross. If mortification of the flesh, in his tomb. If newness of life, in his resurrection.

If immortality, in the same. If inheritance of the heavenly kingdom, in his entrance into heaven. If protection, if security.

If an abundant supply of all blessings in his kingdom. If untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of goods abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain and from no other.

We will start now to look at the nine saving events of Christ, one at a time. Christ's incarnation. Now, it was of the greatest importance for us that he, who was to be our mediator, be both true God and true man.

Since our iniquities, like a cloud cast between us and him, had completely estranged us from the kingdom of heaven, no man, unless he belonged to God, could serve as the intermediary to restore peace. But who might reach to him? Any one of Adam's children? No. Like their father, all of them were terrified at the sight of God.

What then? The situation would surely have been hopeless had the very majesty of God not descended to us since it was not in our power to ascend to him. Hence, it was necessary for the Son of Man to become Emmanuel, that is, God with us, in such a way that his divinity and our human nature might grow together by mutual connection. In undertaking to describe the mediator, Paul then, with good reason, distinctly reminds us that he is a man, quote, one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Another quotation from Calvin's Institutes. The Son had to become a man because the work of salvation had to be performed by a human being for human beings. This is wonderfully shown in Hebrews chapter 2. In Hebrews 2, the work of salvation is presented in three pictures.

We have Christ as a second Adam, Christ as the victor, and Christ as our great high priest. Hebrews 2, after quoting from Psalm 8, a creation psalm that speaks of Adam and Eve's great blessing by God to be his rulers under him, his vice-regents, if you will. Whom he crowned with glory and honor.

What is man that you're mindful of him, Hebrews 2:6, quote Psalm 8, or the Son of Man that you care for him. You made him a little lower than the angels. You've crowned him with glory and honor.

You put everything in subjection under his feet. In context, Psalm 8 is not speaking of Christ but of Adam and Eve. And I say it this way: in his incarnation since Jesus becomes the second Adam, a genuine human being, he steps into Psalm 8. It didn't predict him.

It meditated on our first parents and their privileged position by virtue of the creation of God. They're being created by God in the image of God. But when Christ becomes a man, he steps into Psalm 8. It now pertains to him because he is the ideal man, the second Adam.

The writer to the Hebrews goes on and says, now I'm putting everything in subjection to him, Adam, or humankind. He left nothing outside his control. Under God, Adam was a little lord, if you will.

He had dominion. He wasn't to abuse God's creation. He was to care for it.

But he was over it. God put all those things, Psalm 8 says, under his feet. Yet, at present, we do not see everything in subjection to him, mankind.

But we see him, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Jesus, the true man, God-man, steps into Psalm 8, and now it is said of him that he who made the angels is a little lower than the angels because he is a human being. And the psalmist uses the language of Psalm 8. Jesus is now crowned with glory and honor.

Adam and Eve were that way by creation. Jesus, by his mighty resurrection, is crowned with glory and honor, having died for his people on the cross. This is the second Adam, the new creation theme of the work of Christ.

Notice how it begins. We see him, who for a little while was made lower than the angels. The writer to the Hebrews begins the second Adam metaphor with a reference to the Incarnation.

Using the language of Psalm 8, which spoke of the original creation of Adam and Eve, now it speaks of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Another theme he pursues is the Atonement in chapter 2. Again, he combines three themes, one after another. I think I said that earlier.

The Bible interweaves these themes of the work of Christ because it's one work of Christ, it's one Christ and one work of Christ, it's one salvation. And we're going to talk about why the multiplicity of images. It's a very good question.

But later on, for now, just notice that here it moves from second Adam imagery to Christus Victor imagery. Verse 14, since therefore the children also share in flesh and blood, he likewise, the Son in context, likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. This is Christ our champion, Christ our victor, not only delivering his people from the fear of death but defeating the evil one himself.

But notice again how the writer to the Hebrews introduces the Christus Victor theme. Since the children of God share in flesh and blood, actually, the Greek says blood and flesh, but you can't translate that way because we don't speak that way. It's idiomatic in English, and it has the same meaning.

Since the children share in flesh and blood, he himself, the Son, likewise partook of the same things, that through death, he might destroy the devil and deliver his people. The incarnation is an essential precondition to the work of Christ, whether it be second Adam imagery, whether it be portrayed as Christ our champion, or the great priesthood language of Hebrews because that is the third picture of redemption. Redemption is used in a narrow sense in theology to mean that very picture of buying out the slaves by virtue of the redemption price and setting them free.

It is also used in a more general sense of salvation, so I was using it here. It's not the narrow redemption sense but the broader sense of salvation. The third picture is verse 17 of chapter 2 of Hebrews.

One chapter, second Adam, Christus Victor, priestly motif. Every one of those images begins with the incarnation. Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation.

This is the second of the four uses of that word, Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:10. Here in Hebrews 2:17, as priest, Jesus makes propitiation for the sins of his people, and he also, since he suffered, helps those who are being tempted. But once again, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect. It's beautiful prose speaking of the incarnation of the Son of God.

In Hebrews 2, then, the writer presents Christ's work of salvation using three pictures. Christ is the second Adam. Christ is Victor.

Christ is our great high priest. The writer introduces each picture by telling of the incarnation. Plainly, it is the essential precondition for Jesus' cross and empty tomb.

Jesus' incarnation saves. Luke 2:11, the shepherds in the field are shocked by this bright light. And one angel, if the good Lord had sent the whole company of angels, there might be some dead shepherds out there, some catatonic shepherds.

So, he's great gentle. A light? Thomas Edison didn't do his thing yet. A bright light, the glory of God in the darkness.

It's beautiful imagery, is it not? And anyway, the angel says, don't be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy. That will be for all the people.

Luke 2:11, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, Bethlehem, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Even introducing this account, right? In the introduction to it, he already said to be Savior. It speaks of his birth and then his being Savior.

Plainly, the incarnation is for the purpose of salvation. Galatians 4:4 and 5, in the fullness of time, God sent his son born of a woman—reference to Mary and the virginal conception.

Born under law. Why? To redeem those under law that we might receive the adoption as sons. And we just looked at Hebrews 2:14-15, since the children share in flesh and blood.

He, too, the son of God, a divine title in Hebrews 1, took the same things, flesh, and blood, that he might die. God in heaven can't make atonement. God on earth, the God-man, did make atonement.

The incarnation is the essential prerequisite for Christ's saving accomplishment. Does Christ's incarnation save? Yes, but we have to be careful. Does the incarnation save in and of itself? The answer is no.

Salvation does not come automatically to humankind when the eternal son of God becomes a man. Eastern orthodoxy appears to answer that question with a yes sometimes. They rightly emphasize the miracle of the incarnation, and so should we, and yet the event itself does not save.

It is an essential prerequisite precondition to the cross and empty tomb. Does the incarnation save as the essential precondition for the saving deeds that follow? Yes. Only a divine-human redeemer would do.

If the son had not become a human being, he could not have lived a sinless life, died, and risen again to deliver his people. He could not have ascended, sat down at God's right hand, and poured out the Holy Spirit. He could not intercede for us, and he certainly could not come again.

Philip Hughes memorably underscores the nexus, the connection between the incarnation and Christ's saving work. But Bethlehem, which he has just extolled as the scene of the incarnation, as unlikely as it was, the whole thing is unlikely. God announced the birth of his son to the greatest kings of the world.

No, to shepherds. To poor, ragged shepherds. Whose character was such, the scholarship is debated here, but it seems like their word was not accepted in a court of law.

God reveals the birth of his son to them. Oh yeah, oh yeah. It shows God's grace.

He goes to the lowly, and they respond. They go, and then they spread the word. The Lord has a sense of humor.

Bethlehem is not the whole story, Philip Edgecumbe Hughes says. The birth that took place there was not an end in itself but a means to an end. The end to which Bethlehem was a means was Calvary.

And unless Bethlehem is seen in direct relationship to Calvary, its true purpose and significance are missed. The cradle was the start of the road that led to the cross, and the purpose of Christ's coming was achieved not in the cradle but on the cross. Thus, Jesus declared himself the son of man and came to give his life as a ransom for many, Mark 10:45. And St. Paul proclaimed in 1 Timothy 1:15 that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Amen. Christ's sinless life is the second essential precondition of atonement. The sinlessness of Christ involves two elements, according to Donald MacLeod in his wonderful book on the person of Christ.

First, Christ was free of actual sin. He betrays no consciousness of guilt. He never prays for forgiveness.

He never confesses shortcomings. On the contrary, all he did, thought or said conformed exactly to the will of God. He fulfilled all righteousness as he told John the Baptist, Matthew 3.15. Secondly, he was free from inherent sin.

Nowhere in the structures of his being was there any sin. Satan had no foothold on him. There was no lust.

There was no affinity with sin. There was no proclivity to sin. There was no possibility of temptation from within.

From without? Yes. From within? No. In no respect was he fallen, and in no respect was his nature corrupt.

Until the 19th century, this was virtually the unanimous confession of the Christian church. Donald MacLeod is right. Isaiah, as we saw when we took biblical soundings, predicted that the coming servant of the Lord would do no violence and there'd be no deceit in his mouth.

Consequently, he, the righteous one, my servant, would make many to be accounted righteous, and he would bear them, he shall bear their iniquities. Isaiah 53 verses 9 and 11. All parts of the New Testament testify that to accomplish that saving work, the son slash servant was without sin.

The gospels. The child to be born, Gabriel, speaking for God, told Mary they will be called holy, the son of God, Luke 1:35. To whom shall we go, John says.

The apostle. You have the words of eternal life. Perhaps it's Peter, I'm sorry.

John 6:68, 69. One of the disciples says to Jesus, to whom shall we go, Lord? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God. The book of Acts.

Peter does not mince words when he preaches the gospel. His Jewish hearers need to be convicted, and man, he just lays them out. Quote Acts 3:14.

But you denied the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be granted to you. A reference to Barabbas. Many times, Jesus is called God's holy servant.

Just one more reference. I have a bunch of them here for Max. For truly in this city, Peter said, they were gathered together against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed.

He's praying to the Father, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel. Acts 4:27. Paul, in at least one place, 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, for our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin, who knew no sin.

So that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. General epistles, Hebrews 4:15. We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15. 1 John 2:1. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 1 John 2:1. I could multiply references.

I won't. Revelation 3:7. All parts of the New Testament. We testify to the sinlessness of the Savior and to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, right? Quote, the words of the holy one, the true one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

And on it goes to give Jesus words. Revelation 3:7. Not only do all the parts of the New Testament, a little bit in the Old Testament, but all the parts in the new, as we might expect when the Redeemer comes, testify to his sinlessness. But examining various aspects of Jesus' life yields the same result: his righteousness before birth.

As we saw, God announced he'd be the holy son of God. Luke 1:35. In a word, Isaiah prophesies there was no deceit in his mouth.

Isaiah 53:9. Likewise, Peter affirms, actually quoting Isaiah, that neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile and return. When he suffered, he did not threaten.

1 Peter 2:22-23. Indeed, as we saw, Paul writes, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin. It means experientially, so that in him we might be made God's righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:21. Peter announces he committed no sin but continues entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:22-23.

Every aspect of the earthly life of the son of God exhibits his sinlessness, his character. It is no surprise, then, that the New Testament repeatedly testifies to his pure and holy character. The holy and righteous one, Acts 3:14.

Your holy servant Jesus, Acts 4:27, 4:30. The righteous one, Acts 7:52, Acts 22:14. The righteous one, 1 Peter 3:18.

Jesus Christ the righteous, 1 John 2:1. The holy one, 1 John 2:20. He is pure, 1 John 3:3. In him there is no sin, 1 John 3:5 and 6. He is righteous, 1 John 3:7. The holy one, Revelation 3:7. I rest my case. Various witnesses, that is diverse personalities, good and bad, testify to the moral uprightness of Jesus Christ.

Demons encountering Jesus, the unclean spirit within a man cries out, what have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. The irony is the demons know better than the poor disciples do. You are the holy one of God, Mark 1:24.

Disciples, Peter, spokesperson for the twelve, not John, but Peter said, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the eternal, you have the words of eternal life, and we believe and have come to know that you are the holy one of God, John 6:68-69. Enemies, when locked in a verbal battle with the Jewish leaders who wanted to stone him to death, Jesus says, which of you convicts me of sin? Romans 8:46. And you bet if they could, they would have.

Whether human beings or fallen angels, whether friends or foes, the witnesses agree that Jesus of Nazareth is the holy one of God. Scripture connects not only to Jesus' sinlessness but also to his saving accomplishment. Listen to Philip Hughes' eloquent words.

The perfection of Jesus then was not just a perfection of being but a perfection of becoming. The former was sustained by the latter as, progressively, he consolidated what he was and had to be. But in no sense was the perfecting of Jesus progress from imperfection to perfection.

Had he at any time been imperfect or had he even momentarily lapsed into disobedience, he would have failed in all that he came to be and to do. He would

have become the first Adam became. Incompetent then to save others, he would himself have been in need of salvation.

He speaks reverently, of course. The incarnation was not a comfortable excursion or an enjoyable interlude. We do not consider sufficiently its extreme costliness in suffering and anguish to him who is the eternal son of God, an image after which we are formed, nor do we remind ourselves, as we constantly should, that the perfection of obedience was he established through suffering was not for his, but for our sake, for us men and for our salvation.

Again, quoting from the ancient creeds, what theological significance does Christ's sinlessness have? Scripture tells us, Isaiah already tells us, 53:11, by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, how? He as and he shall bear their iniquities. Isaiah 53:11, already Isaiah combines Jesus' purity and his making of atonement. For our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Our justification is dependent upon Jesus' own righteousness. Of course, on his death, too. The whole point I'm making now is that there are two essential preconditions for the saving atonement of Jesus: his incarnation and his sinlessness.

I'm showing with these quotations from scripture that scripture itself regards his sinlessness as a precondition of atonement. We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who, in every respect, has been tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us then, with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus' sinlessness through temptation that we will never know. The devil one-on-one, may it never be, oh Lord, never sinned. That qualifies him as our great high priest who will give us grace and mercy when we need it.

Christ also suffered, Peter wrote, once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. Christ's righteousness qualifies him to be our substitute, 1st Peter 3:18. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, an advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, 1 John 2:1. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him, there is no sin, according to 1 John 3:5. This is an impressive array of passages from Isaiah to Paul, writer of Hebrews, Peter, John, and in the last book of the Bible, which I also think was written by John, Jesus' righteousness is proclaimed and connected to his saving accomplishment. Therefore, in different contexts, with different words, at different times, and for different purposes, Isaiah, Paul, author of Hebrews, Paul, and John, Peter, and John all proclaim the same message.

Only the sinless Son of God can be the Savior of the world. Robert Latham rightfully summarizes, insightfully, rightfully too, but insightfully summarizes this message. There is a consistent witness in the New Testament to Jesus' sinlessness.

To a man, the New Testament writers regard it as beyond dispute. To be sure, Jesus is fully human, and there could be no salvation unless the Word had become flesh. But did full and true humanity require sinfulness? The answer to that must be no.

Just as Adam, when created, was fully human yet sinless, so the second Adam, who took Adam's place, not only started his life without sin by virtue of the virginal conception but continued so without sin. Adam was tempted in a beautiful garden and succumbed. The second Adam was tempted in a bleak desert and yet triumphed.

Matthew 4:1 to 10. Luke 4:1 to 12. Again, the ultimate goal of our salvation is seen as the final deliverance from sin and its consequences.

Life and righteousness will replace death and condemnation. Will we be less than fully human for that? In fact, the reverse will be true. We shall be fulfilled as men and women, remade in the image of God.

The assumption in the New Testament that Christ's true humanity involves complete sinlessness is in harmony with the basic anthropological and soteriological teaching of the whole Bible. That is, it fits with the Bible's doctrine of humanity and is essential for Christ to perform his saving work. Indeed, the incarnation and sinless life of Jesus are essential prerequisites for the redemption of Adam's fallen sons and daughters.

The incarnation was essential for the work of salvation to be accomplished. It was necessary for the Son of God to become a man to save his people from their sins. Likewise, Christ had to live a sinless life in order to accomplish redemption.

A sinner is unable to rescue sinners. Only a sinless Savior will do. In that regard, the sinless life of the Lord Jesus saves, as John Stott emphasizes, and I quote, "his obedience was indispensable to his saving work."

For just as through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous." Romans 5:19. If he had disobeyed by deviating an inch from the path of God's will, the devil would have gained a foothold and frustrated the plan of salvation.

But Jesus obeyed, and the devil was routed. Thus, he refused to either to disobey God, hate his enemies, or imitate the world's use of power. By his obedience, his love, and his meekness, he won a great moral victory over the powers of evil.

He remained free, uncontaminated, uncompromised. The devil could gain no hold on him and had to concede defeat.”

As indispensable as the incarnation and Christ in this life are, they do not save by themselves. Rather, they are essential preconditions for Christ's central saving events, his death and resurrection. These events will be the subjects of our next lecture.

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