

Robert A. Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 12, Saving Events, Part 4, Jesus's Resurrection, Essential Results, Part 1, Jesus's Ascension

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on Christ's saving works. This is session 12, Christ's 9 Saving Events, Part 4, Jesus's Resurrection, Essential Results, Part 1, Jesus's Ascension.

We continue our study of Christ's saving events with the saving significance of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Already, because he is alive, believers are regenerated. They are united to Christ in his resurrection in this life and given new life by the Spirit. We have not yet been raised from the dead on the last day.

That is dependent upon Jesus's resurrection. Our resurrection is our final salvation. We will be raised to eternal life on the new earth in glorious, imperishable, immortal, and powerful bodies that are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 3:21, 1 Corinthians 15:42 to 43, and 52 to 53. Why is this true? Because Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day. 1st Corinthians 15:20 through 22, after frankly discussing the disastrous consequences if Christ were not raised, and I mentioned earlier in this series of lectures, that was one of the things, along with the doctrine of the Trinity, that the Lord used to bring me to himself.

I was so humbled and amazed at the candor and honesty of God in saying, what would obtain if Christ were not raised? Basically, the whole foundation would crumble, and that moved me toward faith in Christ and the gospel. Paul exclaims in 1 Corinthians 15:20 that, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He calls the risen Christ, quote, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, verse 20.

The firstfruits were an Old Testament offering made to God, either from the flock or the field, and on the part of the worshiper, it showed devotion to God, an acknowledgment that God had blessed our flock or had blessed our crops. From the Lord's side, his law, telling them to bring the firstfruits sacrifice, was a promise on his part to provide for his people after the firstfruits. Therefore, the fact that Jesus is the firstfruits means that there are more to come.

Jesus' resurrection is the cause of believers being raised from the dead to eternal life. 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. This is the second Adam new creation picture, and it certainly emphasizes Jesus' resurrection from the grave as the basis of our future resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:47 through 49.

The Apostle again contrasts the two Adams. Adam, the first man, and Jesus, the second and last Adam. In 1 Corinthians 15:47 to 49.

Quote, the first man was from the earth, a man of dust. The second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust.

And as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. God made the first man from the dust of the ground and named him Adam, Adam. The word ground in Genesis 2:7 is adamah.

The Son of God came down from heaven, 1 Corinthians 15:47, when he became a human being. Paul teaches that the people associated with the two Adams resemble them.

Because of Adam's fall, human beings are of the dust. We follow our father Adam in sin and death. But in Christ, believers are of heaven.

Verse 48, from heaven, means grounded in the reality of God and the new creation. Paul's point is that we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. That is, we'll be raised in resurrection bodies just as Christ was.

We'll be made like Christ, the second and last Adam. Because he is alive, we are assured resurrection to eternal life and glory. Once again, Jesus' resurrected life rescues us from the effects of the fall.

Furthermore, Christ's atoning death inaugurates the new heavens and the new earth. Jesus' death and resurrection bring regeneration and eternal life now. It causes the resurrection of believers to eternal life on the last day.

In addition, it has cosmic effects. Jesus' resurrection will inaugurate the new heavens and new earth. Scripture begins with the words; in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

In the next to last chapter of the Bible, it says, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, Revelation 21:1. To

get from the first verse in the Bible to Revelation 21:1, the fall intervenes and how does God redeem the creation, which according to Romans 8 was subject to bondage and corruption. The answer is that God will redeem his creation through the Son of God's death and resurrection.

Colossians 1:19 and 20, Paul gives Christ qualifications to be the reconciler of all things. That is, Paul unites Christ's person and work, as we said earlier on in the introduction, showing how Christology impacts atonement teaching. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, Colossians 1:19.

Colossians 2:9 provides inspired commentary on this text. Quote, in him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. That is, it's not merely saying of Jesus, he's a man indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

It's not saying that. It's saying that when you point to the body of this man, you are pointing to the body of God. In him dwells all the fullness of deity bodily.

In bodily form, in bodily fashion. That is, he is God incarnate. He is the God-man.

Because of that quote, God was pleased through him to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. The events and the pictures are inseparable. God paints the pictures to interpret the significance of the events.

And, of course, this is the picture of reconciliation. The big question is, what does Paul mean by all things? God was pleased through Christ to reconcile to himself all things. In the immediate context, the expression occurs four times.

For by him, all things were created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him, all things hold together.

Verses 16 and 17 of Colossians 1. Each time, the meaning is the same. All things indicates all created reality. The pre-incarnate Son created all things.

Verse 16, twice. He is eternal. He existed before all things.

Verse 17, and he performs the divine work of providence. In him, all things hold together. In verse 17, therefore, when verse 20 says he reconciled all things, we would expect the meaning to be the same.

Christ reconciled all created reality. This conclusion is confirmed by the very next words. Quote, God was pleased through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.

Verse 20. These words are an echo of verse 16. By him, all things were created in heaven and on earth.

Even as Christ created everything in heaven and earth, so he reconciles everything in heaven and earth. In this context, all things that Christ reconciled specifically include angels, saved human beings, and the heavens and earth. Some problems are forthcoming, of course.

That angels are involved is indicated by the way verse 16 explains all things in heaven and earth as quote, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. Close quote. By these expressions, the Apostle designates angels.

Compare 1 Corinthians 15:24, Ephesians 1:21, Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 2:15. But in what sense did Christ reconcile angels? Scripture teaches that the unfallen angels do not need salvation and that there is no salvation for fallen angels. For these reasons, scholars speak of Christ reconciling angels as his defeating and subjugating them in order to maintain his peaceable kingdom.

A key text here is Colossians 2:15, where after speaking of the cross in the previous verse, Paul writes that he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. God disarmed them and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. Him means Christ.

I mentioned before that this is a very rare ambiguous Greek simple pronoun, or it's either him or it. Either he refers to Christ, the Christ of the cross, or it refers to the cross of the Christ. Either which one it is, either one which it is, the other is implied.

Human beings, too, are reconciled, as the two verses immediately following Colossians 1:20 demonstrate. You, too, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he is now reconciled in the body of his flesh by his death in order to present you holy and above reproach, blameless and above reproach before him. The Colossian believers are a sample of the persons whom Christ reconciles.

When Paul then writes that God, through Christ, reconciled to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, he means that believers were saved, demons subjugated, and the heavens and earth delivered from the curse. I cannot improve on Doug Mu's summary. Doug Mu's commentaries are among my favorites on the books he has done.

Romans, wow, he spent a decade doing that. Colossians and Galatians, what he does is very solid. James, they're all good.

Colossians 1:20 teaches, then, Moo writes, not cosmic salvation or even cosmic redemption, but cosmic restoration or renewal. Through the work of Christ on the cross, God has brought his entire rebellious creation back under the rule of his sovereign power. God's work in Christ has in view a reclamation of the entire universe, tainted as it is by human sin, Romans 8:19 through 22.

The fact that fallen human beings are the primary objects of the reconciliation is clear from the New Testament generally and from the sequel to this text. Colossians 1 verses 21 and 20 to 23, but it would be a serious mistake, not always avoided, to limit this reconciling work to human beings. Close quote his Colossians pillar commentary.

What did Christ do to accomplish this astounding feat, the reconciliation of all things? Paul tells us, quote, making peace by the blood of his cross. He specifically mentions Christ's cross. Does he thereby intend to exclude Jesus' resurrection? No, for immediately before speaking of Christ's qualifications to be reconciler, he says, quote, he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, verse 18.

He means, as we explained earlier in these lectures that Christ is the beginning, the source of God's new creation in his role as the firstborn from the dead, holding the highest rank as a resurrected one. We conclude that Christ, crucified and risen, is the peacemaker. I need to clarify.

Does Jesus reconciling all things involved entail universalism, the salvation of absolutely every last human being? I answer no for four reasons. First is the nearer context in Colossians 1. Both before and after Colossians 1:19 and 20, Paul indicates that salvation involves a change of moral spheres. Had the Colossians not undergone this change, their sins would not be forgiven.

Colossians 1:13 and 21. Second is the teaching of the entire epistle. Those who have been in my Sunday school classes will recognize I'm working from concentric circles, the closest one being the verses right around the verse we're dealing with, and then the chapter, and then the book, and then the whole New Testament, and then the whole Bible, if that were pertinent at this point.

Moving to the entire epistle in 3:6, Paul announces that the wrath of God is coming against rebellious human beings. Not everybody will be saved. It's a mistake to interpret all things in Colossians 1:19 and 20 as if it did teach as if Paul contradicted himself in the same letter.

Third is the teaching of Paul's epistles as a whole. In Romans 2, he says that the lost will inherit wrath and fury and tribulation and distress. Romans 2:8 and 9. In 2 Thessalonians, quote, those who do not know God will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 through 9. Fourth, expanding my concentric circles of context, if you will, is the teaching of the whole New Testament. Jesus warns in Matthew 25, 46 of eternal punishment, and the end of the biblical story includes human beings outside the city of God, Revelation 22, in the lake of fire, suffering the second death of eternal separation from the joy of God, Revelation 21:8 and 22:15. There simply isn't a Revelation 23 with everybody saved.

We can't rewrite the story to fit our own likes and dislikes or our own preconceived notions. No, sola scriptura means we consistently and deliberately subordinate our reason, experience, and traditions to the revealed Word of God. Revelation 3:14, perhaps a surprising one, is another passage rightly understood where Christ inaugurates the new heavens and earth.

Here, Jesus refers to himself as the beginning of God's creation. Though the majority of interpreters understand this as teaching that Christ is the Father's agent in creation, I am convinced that Jesus here refers to himself, not to the original creation, but to the new creation. Earlier, I gave three reasons.

I need to give three reasons for this. First, Isaiah 65, 16 is the source of the word Amen in Revelation 3:14. There are only two verses in the whole Bible that understand Amen as a name.

The very next verse, after the verse in Isaiah 65:16, says, For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth, for the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. Therefore, because the Old Testament antecedent to Revelation 3:14, that is Isaiah 65:16, is immediately followed by the first Old Testament reference to the new heavens and new earth, it supports the conclusion that Revelation 3:14 speaks of that same idea. Second, the next words of Revelation 3:14, the faithful and true witness, point readers back to Revelation 1:5, which speaks of Jesus Christ, the faithful witness.

Witnesses used five times in the book of Revelation. Three of those uses refer to martyrs and human witnesses to Jesus. The only two places where witness refers to Jesus are 1:5 and 3:14.

This is John's way of telling readers to interpret 3:14 in light of 1:5. Revelation 3:14 further explains Christ's title in 1:5, which treats not creation, but Jesus preaching death and resurrection. Revelation 3:14 also treats redemption, not creation. Third, the expression in Revelation 1:5, the firstborn of the dead takes us back to Colossians 1:18.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, and the words that immediately precede in Colossians speak not of creation but of the church, a part of God's new

creation. And he is the head of the body, the church. Therefore, we are to interpret Jesus' description of himself in Revelation 3:14 as the beginning of God's creation, to mean an elaboration of the reference in his resurrection in 1:5, the firstborn from the dead.

In a word, his resurrection is viewed as the beginning of the new creation. This means that he alone, who died and arose, is the beginning of God's creation. Jesus is the one who is alive after dying and as the living one launches the new creation of God.

The crucified and resurrected Christ already has begun the new age. He gives eternal life now to all who believe in him by regeneration. He will raise them from the dead to eternal life and resurrection bodies when he comes again.

One of the magnificent fruits of his death and resurrection is the revelation of the new heaven and earth of which the prophets and apostles spoke. Isaiah 65:17, 66:22, 2 Peter 3:13. Christ's saving work consists of two essential prerequisites.

His incarnation and sinless life. The heart and soul of his saving work, the essential core of his saving work, is his death and resurrection. We move now to the first of the five essential results of his saving work, which are also saving works the results of his death and resurrection, and that is his ascension.

Peter Toon speaks of the ascension of Christ in his book *The Ascension of Our Lord*. Heaven is the place and sphere from where the universe is sustained and ruled. Heaven is the place and sphere from where salvation goes forth into the world of space and time.

For God's salvation to be universal and everlasting, the Incarnate Son, Jesus the Messiah, returned to heaven where he could be the source of salvation everywhere to all who believe. From heaven, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, the Incarnate Son preaches the Word of God, builds up God's church, and continues the divine work that began in the restricted area of Palestine. Most Christians have never considered the saving significance of Christ's ascension.

The author to the Hebrews teaches us about Jesus' ascension in order to establish our present hope on a sure foundation. In 6:19 of Hebrews, we're told we are said to have a hope that itself enters into the very heavenly presence of God. The believer's hope is set on the firmest foundation, for Christ has ascended and given the privilege of access to God behind the veil that formerly separated humanity from God.

We are to live in the hope now that one day we too will come to where Christ has gone before us. He is our forerunner, and his ascension made a way for us also to dwell in God's heavenly presence. As surely as he has died, risen, and ascended, so

we too will join him in the Father's heavenly house, John 14:1 through 3. Hebrews 6 has perhaps the most famous warning passage in the Bible.

It is not common knowledge, however, that immediately following it is a strong preservation passage of which Hebrews 6:19 and 20 are the conclusion. We have this hope as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. To summarize the saving significance of Christ's ascension, and I'll say it again, Christians rarely even think of this theme.

First of all, the ascension is a work of Christ. Is it proper to call the ascension a work of Christ? The question arises because, in the accounts of the ascension, the primary actor appears to be God the Father. Luke says Christ was carried away and lifted up in Luke's accounts of the ascension.

Both of these verbs function in what is known as a divine passive, meaning that while the one doing the action is not expressively given, the context and type of action imply it is God who's raised, who's elevating his son back to heaven. The idea that God is the primary actor in the ascension is also echoed in Acts 5:30 and 31 and 1 Timothy 3:16. However, as is often the case when talking about the triune God, things are not that simple.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus himself speaks of the ascension as the next step in his ministry. Quote, I have not yet ascended to my father, John 20:17. In addition, Paul and the author of Hebrews depict the ascension as an action of Christ.

He ascended on high, Ephesians 4:8 Paul says, and a great high priest has passed through the heavens, Hebrews 4:14. In all of these instances, Christ himself is the one who is active in the event of his ascension. Given these two emphases, the best course is to understand the ascension as a cooperative work of the Trinity.

The Father lifts Christ up and exalts him above the heavens. Christ himself ascends in accordance with his father's will and passes through the heavens. Although the Bible doesn't explicitly say so, it is warranted by the fact that Christ is the man of the Spirit par excellence to assume the Spirit empowered Jesus in his ascension.

Allowing this Trinitarian perspective, the ascension can meaningfully be understood as a work of Christ. Although we should not forget the actions of the Father and the implied action, the Bible doesn't say so. I try to always make that distinction of the Holy Spirit.

So, the ascension, too, is part of Jesus' saving work. The ascension is the linchpin of Christ's other saving works. As we look at Christ's saving work as a whole, the foundational import of the ascension is its function in relation to other saving events.

The ascension confirms the authenticity of Christ's previous works and is a prelude and prerequisite for the subsequent works. Christ's ascension then confirms that he is who he claimed to be. He truly was the Son of God who came into the world to save sinners and restore creation, and proof of this is the fact that after he arose from the dead, he ascended into heaven and into the very presence of God to reign.

In John 6, Jesus says, What if you see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? The ascension is also the prerequisite for the subsequent saving works of Christ. The Session, Pentecost, Intercession, and the Second Coming. It is clear from Psalm 110.1 and Acts 2.33 to 36 that Christ had to ascend in order to sit down at the right hand of the Father, thereby beginning his heavenly session or sitting.

By his ascension, therefore, Christ was able to take his place as the king over all creation until the time when all things would be wholly subjected to him. The ascension was also necessary for Christ to send the Spirit at Pentecost. Christ makes this claim explicitly in John 16:7. I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away.

For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. Upon Christ's ascension, he received the Spirit from the Father and then, as the great prophet, priest, and king, poured out the Spirit upon his church as a blessing.

Scripture often combines views together—Christ's ascension and then session, his sitting at God's right hand. Christ's intercession also required him to ascend.

And Christ could only come again if he went away in the first place. First of all, intercession. The heavenly ministry of Christ is only possible if he takes his place as a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek in heaven.

That is, he has to move from earth to heaven. Even his second coming is also dependent upon his ascension because he cannot come again unless he leaves the earth in the first place to return to where he began. Peter says, he speaks of this Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all things, Acts 3:21. Although we cannot fully grasp the mystery of God's plan, it does require that Jesus ascended to heaven and, once there, rule and empower the church so that the kingdom of God might spread.

Christ's ascension saves in that every benefit the church receives from Jesus in heaven would be impossible unless he first ascended to take his position there. The

ascension and Christ's perfect sacrifice. The ascension is essential for the completion of Christ's priestly work.

It qualifies him for a greater priesthood and enables him to present in heaven the sacrifice that he accomplished on earth. By his ascension beyond the earthly realm, Jesus was able to take his sacrifice into the heavenly sanctuary, where the earthly temple, tabernacle, and temple were mere shadows. Sacrifice in the Old Testament was not completed until the offering was presented before God.

We should expect, therefore, that this would also be true of the perfect sacrifice of Christ offered upon the cross. Christ accomplished this through his ascension when he passed behind the heavenly curtain into the presence of God the Father and presented in the heavenly sanctuary what he accomplished on the cross. We thus distinguish between the completion of his sacrifice and the completion of his priestly ministry in presenting the finished sacrifice on earth in the very presence of the Father in heaven, and that requires his ascension.

A very fruitful understanding of the saving significance of Jesus' ascension is the ascension and divine reconciliation. The ascension takes to a new level the reconciliation of humanity and God. After the fall in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were cast out of the immediate presence of God because of their rebellion.

Although we understand that God accepted them as he gave them the first promise of redemption, the sweetest fellowship they enjoyed with him in Eden was a thing of the past. While God continued to condescend to interact with his people, Israel, in the Old Testament, the closest relationship was not possible because of the sin that separated a holy God from his unrighteous people. Through his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, Christ destroyed the power of sin and cleansed the people from the iniquity that prevented intimate relationship with God.

And wonderfully, this extended even to Old Testament Israel. Hebrews 9:15 says Christ's sacrifice was so efficacious that it pertained to the sacrifices that the sins, excuse me, it pertained to the sins committed under the law. It's amazing.

Jesus' sacrifice was thus effective before it was actually accomplished, as God applied it to his people prospectively. Of course, for the rest of us, except for somebody who believed while he was on the cross, God applies it retrospectively. Nevertheless, the fellowship enjoyed in Eden was never fully recovered, and then Christ ascended into heaven, taking with him the complete human nature he had during his incarnation, Acts 1:11. Once there, Christ became the forerunner of humanity, Hebrews 6:19 and 20.

Through Christ's ascension and subsequent saving events, he did everything necessary to re-establish the intimate relationship between humanity and divinity.

He abolished everything that separated God from his people. This is a source of great hope and assurance for humankind because one of our own kind, one of our own human race, has ascended to the right hand of God, thereby making a way for us to be in full relationship with God.

This is wonderful in God's plan and in enacting his plan in history through his son and spirit. This sort of intimacy has not been possible since the time of Eden. And only Christ as the perfect human being, the God-man, could accomplish it.

God's people will enjoy this fellowship in its fullness only as resurrected saints on the new earth. But even now, quote, our fellowship is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ. First John 1, 3. This is possible only because Christ died and ascended to God's right hand.

1 John 2:1 and 2. Our Lord has ascended. Christ, who came in the full likeness of humanity, lived a faithful and sinless life, was obedient to the point of death on the cross, and arose victorious over the grave. He has ascended into heaven to take his rightful place at the right hand of the Father and to reign over his creation.

He has moved from his earthly to his heavenly ministry, which he currently executes for the benefit of his people. Having discussed the glories of the ascension, we turn next in our next lecture to investigate his heavenly session. Amen.

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