

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 19, Conclusion the Nine Events

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on the saving work of Christ. This is session 19, Conclusion, the Nine Events.

It is time to bring our lectures on the work of Christ to a conclusion, and that is what we plan to do.

At the very beginning, I would like to make three points. First, we must hold together in our minds and hearts the person and work of Christ. We assumed a high Christology, the high Christology of John's gospel, Paul's letters, Hebrews, and Revelation.

Throughout this presentation on the work of Christ, we assumed an orthodox view of the person of Christ. Second, in light of our focus on Christ's saving events, we affirm that it is Jesus who saves through these events. We do not separate the person and work of Christ.

So, number one, we assume a high Christology. It would be a course on the person of Christ that would prove that, but we assume a high Christology. Second, we don't separate the person and work of Christ.

The work is saved only because of the one who accomplished it. He is God and man, and those are two absolutely essential criteria for his saving work. As the lecture on the incarnation emphasized, his becoming a human being does not save in and of itself.

Jesus had to perform various deeds to save his people from their sins. High Christology, inseparability of person and work of Christ. Third, because the separation of Christ's saving work into nine events tends to focus on their multiplicity, we need to emphasize their unity.

There is one saving work of Christ. All nine events can be thus viewed as the Christ event. Let us think again about Christ's saving events.

We can do so in three movements which we mentioned earlier, but now we'll specify in more detail. First a movement from heaven to earth. The first movement in the work of Christ is his coming from heaven to earth.

This coming is not simply a temporary appearance of God as in the Theophanies or Christophanies of the Old Testament. No, this is much more. The incarnation of the Son of God.

Astoundingly, the eternal, almighty God became a human being. God the Son left the glory of heaven and the fellowship of the Father and the Holy Spirit to become the last Adam, the second man. 1 Corinthians 15, 45 and 47.

God permanently took to himself genuine humanity. If we ask why the Son should do this, scripture has a ready answer. Quote, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Close quote, Galatians 4:4 and 5. God became a man to undertake a rescue mission that would lead to the God-man's death and resurrection. Three events cluster between their first coming from heaven to earth and his return to heaven. After his incarnation, we have these three events: a sinless life, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Like his incarnation, Christ's spotless life is an essential precondition for his saving death and resurrection. Although Christ was, quote, in every respect tempted as we are, close quote, the great news is that he was without sin, Hebrews 4:15. He was, as God said through Isaiah, the righteous one, my servant, Isaiah 53:11.

This qualified him who knew no sin to give himself for others in order that in him they might become the righteousness of God, 2 Corinthians 5:21. The central saving deeds of God's Son are his death and resurrection. The death of the sinless incarnate one saves in all of these ways.

It reconciles sinners to God, redeems them from bondage to sin, pays the penalty for their sins, triumphs over their foes, undoes the disobedience of the first Adam, and purifies defiled human beings. All of that is to say Jesus' work saves us from our sins. His death should not be separated from his resurrection.

If I have one point to make, that's it. Together, his death and resurrection constitute the essence, the core, and the center of his saving accomplishment. If he had not died, he could not have risen.

And if he had not risen, his death would not save. Quote, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, close quote, by raising him from the dead on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:4 and 57. Jesus' resurrection, the last event in this first movement from heaven to earth, signals his mighty conquest of Satan, of Satan's demons, and of all the other foes of God.

Three movements from heaven to earth in the incarnation, then secondly, a movement from earth to heaven. The first movement from heaven to earth is followed by Christ going from earth to heaven in his ascension. He not only accomplished salvation on earth in his death and resurrection as the God-man but also continues to minister in heaven in his intercession as the God-man.

The ascension moves Christ from the limited earthly plane to the transcendent heavenly one. The incarnation enabled the Son to partake of flesh and blood, quote, that through death he might destroy the devil and deliver his people, Hebrews 2:14, 15. The ascension ensures that one who still partakes of flesh and blood has gone to heaven, quote, as a forerunner on our behalf, Hebrews 6:20.

As a result, quote, we have a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, verse 19 of Hebrews 6. From heaven the exalted Lord and Prince bestows gifts of repentance and forgiveness of sins, quoting from Acts 5:31. The ascension enabled the session, Christ sitting at the right hand of the majesty on high, Hebrews 1:3. He sat as prophet, priest, and especially king. As a heavenly prophet, he equips his servant with his spirit; he equips his servants with his spirit to spread his word and advance his kingdom.

As a priest, he sat down, demonstrating the completion, perfection, and efficacy of his sacrifice, Hebrews 10:12. As enthroned king, he reigns on high with his father and awaits the time, quote, when his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet, Hebrews 10:13, Hebrews 1:13, dependent upon Psalm 110:1. Pentecost is as much Christ's saving deed as are his death and resurrection. He is the Christ, or anointed one because he received the spirit at his baptism so that after ascending, he would dispense the spirit to the church.

In fulfillment of Old Testament prediction, the exalted Lord baptized his church by pouring out the Holy Spirit on it, Joel 2:28 to 32, Acts 2:17, 18, 33. He thereby publicly proclaimed the new covenant and began the new creation. The only ongoing work of Christ among the nine, his intercession, has two aspects.

First, as crucified, risen, and ascended one, he prays for his people with understanding and compassion and grants them mercy and grace to help in time of need, Romans 8:34, Hebrews 4:15, 16. Second, because of, quote, the power of an indestructible life, he is able forever, he is priest forever, and thus, quote, is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them, Hebrews 7:16 and 7:24, 25. So, the first movement from heaven to earth is in the incarnation, followed by his spotless life, death, and resurrection.

The second movement from earth to heaven involves ascension, session, Pentecost, and intercession. There's a second movement from heaven to earth, from heaven to

earth, from earth to heaven, and now the third movement is a second one from heaven to earth. The first movement was from heaven to earth in the incarnation of the Son.

The second movement was from earth to heaven in Christ's ascension. The third movement will be from heaven to earth in Christ's second coming. In the first movement, the Son brought a little piece of heaven to earth, so to speak, namely himself.

In the second movement, Christ brought a little piece of earth to heaven, again himself, because his incarnation is permanent. In the third movement, he will bring heaven down to earth, as Revelation reveals. John saw, quote, the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God to earth, Revelation 21:10.

Christ's second coming brings salvation. Quote, Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him, Hebrews 9, 28. The returning Christ will initiate the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the eternal state.

Christ's saving events are listed. Here are Christ's nine saving events with representative scripture references. I will simply turn and briefly discuss one passage for each.

In his incarnation, he becomes one of us in order to die in our stead. So, in Luke 2 and verse 11, the shepherds out in their field by night are shocked by this glorious light and by an angelic presence and then speaking. Fear not, the angel said in verse 10 of Luke 2, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the Lord. The incarnation is for the purpose of the savior, who is the Lord and Christ, the promised one, saving his people from their sins. The second event is his sinless life.

2 Corinthians 5:21 speaks of justification, actually in a context that speaks of reconciliation. And in so doing, it speaks of what Luther called this glorious exchange. For our sake, God made him to be sinful, and he knew no sin, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.

Christ is the one who knew no sin. He experienced no sin. He committed no sin.

He is the sinless one. And because of that, and his death and resurrection, the father made the son to be sin. This is metaphorical language, sometimes misunderstood.

As is Galatians 3:13, Christ became a curse for us. Neither of these passages teaches that Jesus became another entity, a sin, or a curse. Rather, the meaning is in Galatians 3, Christ bore the curse that we deserved and thereby became a curse for us, so to speak.

He took our penalty. Here, he did not cease being the God man and become something else called sin. No, our sin was so closely associated with him that scripture could talk like this.

For our sake, God made him, who knew no sin, to be sin as it were. Actually, St. Augustine said a sacrifice for sin, and that's possible. But in any case, our sin is so closely associated with the Son of God that this language could be used.

But it is not literal language. Our Lord did not literally become a curse or literally become sin. Rather, there's an exchange, a blessed exchange, as Luther said.

Our sin goes to him. His saving righteousness, which is the righteousness of God, goes to our spiritual bank account, and we are saved. We are justified before God.

That is the second event of Christ's atoning, Christ's saving work, is number one, incarnation, number two, sinless life, number three, death. I'll just quote Galatians 3.13. God delivered us from the curse of the law in this way. Christ, excuse me, delivered us from the curse of the law.

Paul had just said that everyone who disobeys the law is under a curse. Everyone. It is sometimes said, oh, this passage deals with Israel as a national entity.

No, it doesn't. Everyone who breaks the law is under a curse. It's talking about individuals, of course, that make up a nation, but it's talking about individuals.

But then it says, Christ redeemed us. He delivered us. He saved us from the law's curse that rightly hung over our heads.

How did he do it? By becoming a curse for us. Jesus took our curse. That is the punishment that lawbreakers deserve.

That we might go free, he redeemed us by his penal substitutionary atonement. The death of Christ should be viewed inseparably from his saving resurrection.

1 Peter 1:3, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us. I need to go there. I'm sorry.

I'm conflating Paul and Peter. Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has caused us to be born again to a living hope. In mercy, he did this through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Believers have a new life now. How could it be? Because Jesus is alive. If the Father planned in mercy to give us new life, if the Spirit actually comes and quickens us, as John 3 teaches, speaks of everyone who's born of the Spirit in verse 8. What is the power of the new life? The Father is the architect.

The Spirit is the actual agent that empowers us. But where does the power come from? Peter tells us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Jesus is alive and that eternal life resident in him comes to believers as the Spirit activates them, imparts life to them, moving them from spiritual death to spiritual life now.

And on the last day, raising them from the dead to the total newness of life. The ascension of Christ is a neglected but nevertheless saving event. Acts 5:31 asks, is Peter preaching? And he's able to speak of repentance and forgiveness.

He uses this strong contrast. Boy, Peter does not beat around the bush. He speaks right to his Jewish audience, blaming them for the crucifixion.

The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging on a tree. He is talking to the Sanhedrin, to the Jewish ruling council. You gave your estimation of Jesus.

You crucified him. But God gives his estimation of the same Jesus. The God of our fathers, the God of Israel, raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.

God exalted him to his own right hand, assuming the ascension and affirming the session as leader and savior. And here's what the ascended, crucified, risen one does. To give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

The one who died and arose, ascended, sat down at God's right hand, and he gives, as the king, he bestows royal gifts upon his people, even upon everyone who believes. I do it like that every time I try to emphasize God's sovereignty, God's people, the chosen ones, and human responsibility to all those who believe. Here are the gifts the ascended Christ bestows.

Repentance is evangelical or saving repentance, and it is the forgiveness of sins. Jesus saves in his incarnation, sinless life, death, resurrection, ascension, and, yes, in his session. Aha, a passage we haven't really looked at.

Colossians 3:1 to 3. Oh, we did a little bit, I remember now. If then you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right

hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.

For you have died, the meaning is with Christ, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Paul is not denying that believers have a life on earth.

As a matter of fact, in the next chapter of Colossians, he talks about rules for Christian households. Instructing fathers, mothers, children, masters, and slaves in the first century is very, very earthy, if you will, right? But he wants his hearers and readers today to take the heavenly truths and apply them to earthly living. Look, fix your eyes on Jesus, he says, seated at the right hand of God.

In a little bit, he says, your life is hidden with Christ in God. The implication, too, are seated with the son alongside the father, which he explicitly states in Ephesians 2. You've sat down with Christ. And then he says, when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

This passage assumes death with Christ, union with him in his death. Up above, 2:20 had actually used those words. If you died with Christ, now it just says you died in verse 3 of Colossians 3, plainly implying, as the commentators say, with Christ.

It says you've been raised with him, 3:1. It assumes we sat down with him at God's right hand when it says your life is hidden with Christ in God. How is that? Christ has just sat down; he just said it. Then he says, when Christ, who is your life, appears, that's second coming language, the appearing of Christ, then you will appear with him in glory.

We are so joined to the son of God, we died with him, we're buried with him, we're raised with him, we ascended with him, we sat down with him. And there is a sense in Romans 8 and here in Colossians 3:3 that we're going to come again with him. What sense is that? Is Paul confusing our identity with Christ? Never.

But he is affirming such a unity with Christ that his saving events become our events. And we're going to have an appearing, not that we're literally going to come again, but that Jesus, to whom we're spiritually joined permanently, will come again, and thereby we'll have an appearing in the sense that only then will our true identity as the daughters or sons of a living God be fully manifested. Now, we have glimpses of our best days and moments, perhaps.

Then Daniel says, and Jesus says in Matthew 13, we will shine as the stars, as the sun. Oh, my goodness. Pentecost is Jesus' saving work.

In Acts 1:5, he recalls John the Baptist's words. Jesus does, and he says, John baptized with water, but you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. Acts 2 talks about that event. The important thing for us at this point is to underscore Pentecost is one of Jesus' saving events.

There would be no Pentecost without his death and resurrection. But he did die, he did rise, he did ascend, he did sit at God's right hand, and he fulfilled the prophecies of Joel and John the Baptist and his own prophecy by pouring out the Holy Spirit on the church. This was Jesus' saving accomplishment, thereby expanding his ministry eventually to all of his followers to spread the good news around the globe.

He intercedes for us in Acts, sorry, Romans 8.34, following a few verses that speak of the Holy Spirit interceding for us before the Father because he knows the will of God. Then, when Paul says Christ makes intercession for us in Romans 8.34, it means he prays for us, too. That's part of his priestly work, which is the main priestly work, dying in our place.

Additional priestly work is ongoing; the only ongoing aspect of his saving work is that he prays for his people. And then in Hebrews 7:25, as we saw, Christ not only prays for us, but he appears in the presence of God bearing his stigmata, demonstrating that he loved us and gave himself for us as the perfect and final sacrifice for sins. Finally, his ninth saving event, which is still the future, is his return, his second coming.

I love 1 Peter 1:13, and we did not look at it in this. These hours together on video. I love this verse. Therefore, prepare your minds for action and be sober-minded. Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Some years ago, in a festschrift celebrating the 50th anniversary of the school at which I taught, Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, I wrote an article on the grace of God, showing how we have shrunk God's grace in our thinking. His grace is bigger than we realize. It is not only his initial love when we deserved his wrath, but it is also his ongoing power to live a Christian life.

That is why when Paul writes to Christian churches and individuals, he says, and grace to you, grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Is he praying for the salvation of Christians? No. The grace there is not initial saving grace.

It is enabling grace. That is the power of God to live the Christian life. We also shrink God's grace in regarding it sometimes as almost wholly something of the past.

Oh, it's something of the past. Ephesians 2:8 and 9, for by grace you have been saved. But it's also in the present.

We come boldly, Hebrews 4, to the throne of grace that we might obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. That's not in the past. Oh, only because of that past grace do we gain present grace from the mediator.

But we have shrunk grace into something almost entirely in the past when it's past, present. According to 1 Peter 1:13, God's grace is still in the future. There's past grace, present grace, and future grace.

Preparing your minds for action. Be alert. Wake up, Christians, he says, and be sober-minded.

Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. I have appreciated the honesty of Adults for more years than I can count, 45 years or so. And I've appreciated the honesty of my students.

At times, some of them have said that they have mixed emotions about the second coming of Christ. Because of the notion of having sins, they confess that they still sin occasionally. With that, I can identify, I assure you.

But that they're afraid that they're going to be ashamed of him and his coming, 1 John because they're going to have sins to confess. And I use a human illustration. I say I want you to think of the person older than you who loves you the most than any other person in the world.

And you're living your life, and your father, or mother, or brother, or sister, or great friend comes to your mind, and you realize you've sinned against them. What is your first reaction? To run far away from them because you're ashamed? No. Your first response is to get to that phone, email them, immediately text them, and somehow immediately make things right.

Why? Because you are so accepted by this person. You are loved unconditionally. They mean more than anything to you.

Your beloved spouse easily fits into this category. And you want to confess. You would delight to confess, to make things right, to honor them.

How much more if we have sins to confess when Jesus comes again? Should we be eager to do so? And I'm not even saying that should be our major preoccupation with his second coming. It isn't. Listen, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Past grace is awesome. It got us into this Christian life itself. Present grace is wonderful.

It's God's provision. It's power for our needs. But you haven't seen anything yet, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Future grace will be so overwhelming that we will be flooded with the love of God and acceptance, the biggest hug we've ever had, and so forth. Yes, we need not fear the second coming because the one who comes is he who loved us and gave himself for us, who is alive and who will pour out such an overflow of grace upon his people. At that time, as has never been seen before, set your hope fully on the grace to be given you at the revelation, the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Christ-saving events related. There are four key points. Number one, all nine events constitute one saving work of Christ.

Again, systematic strength is its weakness. We take these things apart to understand them better, but we better put them back together again. There's one Jesus.

There's one salvation. There's one saving work. Number two, Christ's death and resurrection are his saving events par excellence.

OK, please, after hearing these lectures, do not say Peterson puzzles up salvation among nine events of Christ equally. How could you do that? Think that now the core, the center, the heart, the soul, the essence is his death and resurrection. Three.

His death and resurrection are preceded by two essential prerequisites, which, you know, by heart by now, and they are followed by five essential results. First, all nine events constitute one saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each event is important in its own right and should be appreciated as such.

Yet Christ's saving work consists of all nine events. We should then have a holistic view of his salvation that includes everything from his incarnation to his return. It is all his saving work, and it is all one.

Second, although all nine events are necessary to salvation, two are central and inseparable. Christ's death and resurrection are the heart and soul of his saving accomplishment. Sometimes Scripture combines the two.

John 10:17, 18, Acts 2:22 to 24, Romans 4:25, Romans 10:9 and 10, 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4, 2 Corinthians 5:15, Philippians 3:10, Hebrews 1:3, 1 Peter 1:11. But usually, Scripture uses shorthand and merely mentions either his death or his resurrection, implying the other. Third, there are two essential preconditions to Jesus' death and resurrection: his incarnation and his sinless life.

His incarnation is essential because he had to become a man in order to die and rise again. His atonement counts for human beings because it was accomplished by a human being. He's never only a human being, but he is the God-man with a genuine humanity.

His sinless life is essential because it qualified him to die for others. Had he sinned, he would have been disqualified from being Savior. Fourth, there are five essential results that follow Christ's death and resurrection.

His ascension, session, sending the Spirit, intercession, and second coming. His ascension saves in that it transported him from the limited earthly realm to the transcendent heavenly one to appear in God's presence for us. His session saves in that sitting at God's right hand. He rules and saves from on high.

His work at Pentecost saves us in that he, the anointed one, poured out the Spirit on the church to extend the kingdom of God. His intercession saves in that he perpetually presents his sacrifice in God's presence and prays for the saints. His second coming saves in that he will come again in great glory and power to vanquish his foes and bring final salvation to his own.

Biblical pictures of Christ's saving work. There are six major pictures that Scripture paints in order to help us understand the significance of Christ's atonement. Here we view all six pictures together.

A summary of the pictures. The picture of reconciliation comes from the sphere of interpersonal relations. We need to be reconciled to God because of alienation or the disruption of relations.

Christ is portrayed as the peacemaker who, by his death and resurrection, reconciles God to human beings and human beings to God. The result is peace between God and us. The theme of redemption comes from the sphere of the master-slave relationship.

We need to be redeemed because we are in bondage to sin and Satan. Christ is portrayed as a redeemer who, by his death and resurrection, delivers us from spiritual slavery. As a result, we experience the freedom of the sons or daughters of God.

The picture of legal substitution comes from the sphere of law. We need to be justified because of the guilt of Adam's original sin and of our own actual sins. Christ is portrayed as our legal substitute who, by his death and resurrection, propitiates God and pays the penalty for our sins.

The result is that a holy and just God declares righteous all who trust in Jesus. The theme of Christ as victor comes from the sphere of warfare. We need to be delivered because we have spiritual enemies far more powerful than we.

Christ is portrayed as our champion who, by his death and resurrection, defeats our foes. As a result, there is real victory in the Christian life. The picture of recreation comes from the sphere of creation.

We need to be restored because Adam's fall brought sin, death, and disorder into the world of humankind. Christ is portrayed as the second Adam who, by his obedience unto death and resurrection, reverses the effects of Adam's sin. The result is the restoration of our lost glory and dominion.

The theme of sacrifice comes from the sphere of worship. We need to be cleansed because we are defiled by our sin. Christ is portrayed as the great high priest who offers himself as a sacrifice and lives forever.

As a result, believers are purified. The pictures portray the same reality. It is important to keep in mind that the six pictures do not talk of six different realities.

Rather, there are six different ways of talking about the same reality, the salvation that Christ accomplished. Why, then, does scripture offer six major pictures? The answer seems to lie, as Leon Morris suggested years ago, in the Bible's depiction of sin. The multiplicity of images of salvation corresponds to the multiplicity of images of sin.

Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, page 395. The many ways of speaking about our plight correspond to the many ways God, in his grace, comes to our aid. Sin is so odious to God that he depicts it in a variety of ways.

As a discussion of the need for each picture, which we have already done, shows. Each need, each way of describing sin, corresponds to God's way of overturning sin in Christ's work. So, God overturns sin as alienation with Christ's reconciliation.

He overcomes bondage with Christ's redemption. He overtones guilt with Christ's propitiation. He overcomes our mighty enemies with a mightier champion's victory.

He overturns Adam's disobedience with the second Adam's obedience. He overcomes our spiritual defilement with Christ's purifying blood. But the key point here is that these are multiple ways of communicating the same truth.

Jesus saves sinners through his death and resurrection. In our next and last lecture, we will focus on penal substitution as a foundation for the other pictures.

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