

Jesus Saves! But How?

Understanding the doctrine of the atonement, Part 1

By Michael Cheuk

Jesus saves!

Jesus saves us **from what??**

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Jesus saves us **from what??**

- Sin
- Satan
- Suffering & Brokenness
- Systemic evil
- Hell
- God the Father?

Let's start from the very beginning . . .

- Genesis 1:1 - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
- Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25 – And God saw it was good.

Let's start from the very beginning . . .

- Genesis 1:27-31 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground-- everything that has the breath of life in it-- I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Let's start from the very beginning . . .

- Genesis 2:18 - The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Let's start from the very beginning . . .

- Genesis 2:21-25 - So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both

naked, and they felt no shame.

Human Beings as “image of God” are designed for relationships . . .

- To God
- To Self
- To Others
- To the World and Society in which we live

Something Went Wrong . . .

- Genesis 3:1-5 - Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Something Went Wrong . . .

- Genesis 3:6-7 - When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Something Went Wrong . . .

- Genesis 3:8-10 - Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Something Went Wrong . . .

- Genesis 3:11-13 - And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me -- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The

woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Something Went Wrong . . .

- **Genesis 3:14** So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals!
- **Genesis 3:16** To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing
- **Genesis 3:17** To Adam he said, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

What Went Wrong . . .

- Willful Disobedience
- "Hubris" – more than "pride." It means "exceeding one's proper limits," i.e. wanting to become "God-like."
- Sloth – uncritically accepting another's ideas about how to live one's life
- Birth of Consciousness – knowing "good and evil."

The Result . . .

- Separation from God – hide from God
- Alienation from Self – ashamed of their nakedness, fear
- Estranged from Others – covering up self, blaming others
- At odds with Creation – enmity among animals, between humans and world

The Result . . .

- is a world where "things are not the way it's supposed to be."
- is a world where human beings are no longer wholly the "image of God."
- is death.

Sin is . . .

- Anything that breaks union with God or communion with others,
- Anything that is unloving,

- Anything that wants to establish any of these breaks of union as an earthly system

-- Scot McKnight, *Embracing Grace*, p. 50

Sin is . . .

- The disruption of created harmony and then resistance to divine restoration of that harmony.
- Is culpable shalom-breaking. In sum, shalom is God's design for creation and redemption; sin is blamable human vandalism of these great realities and therefore an affront to their architect and builder.

-- Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*

How Does Jesus Save?

A brief historical survey
of theories explaining
how Jesus saves

Theory of "Recapitulation"

- Building on Romans 5, Jesus is seen as the second Adam, with Jesus "recapitulating" or "summing up" Adam's life for our benefit. So just as Adam and Eve created a line of fallen and broken human beings, Jesus Christ established a line of restored human beings. Therefore, Jesus is our new representative, the originator of a new humanity.

Theory of "Recapitulation"

- The theologian who espoused this theory the fullest was Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), who saw Christ as the new Adam, who systematically *undoes* what Adam did: thus, where Adam was disobedient concerning God's edict concerning the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Christ was obedient even to death on the wood of a tree. Irenaeus thought of Christ as "recapitulating" or "summing up" human life. This means that Christ goes through every stage of human life, and simply by living it, sanctifies it with his divinity.
- According to Irenaeus: Jesus became what we are so that we might become what he is.

Theory of "Recapitulation"

- This theory emphasizes the fact that Jesus has paved the way for our lives because he summed up the life of Adam, perfected the life, and given us a path to follow. As we live the story of our lives, we find markers along the way—that find that God "has been

here" before. Without those markers we would be lost; with those markers we learn that someone has walked our path before us and lived our life for us.

Theory of "Recapitulation"

- FOCUS: Incarnation
- How Jesus Saves: Jesus ushers in a new redeemed humanity.
- Irenaeus: "God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man and woman, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power and vivify humanity." (*Against Heresies* 3.18.7)

Theory of "Ransom"

- This was a very popular theory in the first millennium of the Church. This theory was rooted in the story of the Passover and Exodus, when God liberated Israel from bondage. The ransom theory describes a new Exodus in Jesus.

Theory of "Ransom"

- From the time of Adam and Eve, human were enslaved spiritually to Satan and demonic powers. To liberate them, God sent His Son, but to do that God had to trick the Devil. Spying his chance, Satan snatched the Son while the rest of humanity escaped. As if to insult Satan, Jesus rose from the dead and broke Satan's power. Victoriously, Jesus returned to God the Father.
- Therefore, God's work in Jesus' death and resurrection sets us free from sin and from systemic evil so we can be restored as creatures made in the image of God.

Theory of "Ransom"

- **Mark 10:45** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
- **Galatians 1:3-4** Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,
- **Colossians 1:13-14** For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Theory of "Ransom"

- FOCUS: Death AND Resurrection

- How Jesus Saves: Ransom is paid to Satan. But Satan could not stand having Jesus in his grasp. He let Jesus go and lost his ransom payment after already given up his (human) prisoners. As such, Jesus saves humanity from ALL evil powers in the spiritual realm and the human realm.

Theory of "Satisfaction"

- God's honor was wounded by Adam and Eve's sin. For God's honor to be restored, humans must offer to God a genuine satisfaction or compensation for what they have done. But humans can't make satisfaction to a God whose infinite honor has been wounded. The God-Man, Jesus Christ, is the perfect substitute: he is both human and divine. He alone can restore the honor of God, by "paying the price we can't pay."

Theory of "Satisfaction"

- This theory was first most fully developed by Anselm of Canterbury, around 1000 A.D.
- It's intelligibility was heavily based on the feudal system of medieval kings, lords, and vassals.

Theory of "Satisfaction"

- FOCUS: Death of Christ
- How Jesus Saves: Human sin insulted God's honor, to which we must offer compensation. Christ's substitutionary sacrificial death offers satisfaction to God for the debt owed to God by sinful humanity.

Theory of "Moral Example"

- Jesus died as an example, and by contemplating his example we can learn to love God and others. The cross is a vivid demonstration of a life of sacrifice.

Theory of "Moral Example"

- **1 Peter 2:21** To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Theory of "Moral Example"

- Peter Abelard, a twelfth-century theologian and philosopher (1079-1142) is credited with proposing this theory.
- It focuses on the work of Christ in reorientating our intentions so that we do all things out of love and not fear.

Theory of “Moral Example”

- Focus: Jesus’ life and death
- How Jesus Saves: Jesus’ life and death is seen as a demonstration of God’s love that moves sinners to repent and love God.

Theory of “Penal Substitution”

- Because humans have sinned and wounded God’s honor by breaking God’s law, they deserved God’s wrath. As our substitute, Jesus absorbed the wrath of God’s punishment against sin, restored God’s honor, and so enabled us to escape God’s wrath.

Theory of “Penal Substitution”

- The Protestant Reformers like John Calvin and Martin Luther emphasized this theory. They also emphasized that God also imputed to humans the perfection of Christ so they would be worthy of God’s presence. Humans are, in other words, justified by faith in Christ.

Theory of “Penal Substitution”

- It uses a juridical/legal model to understand how Jesus saves us. In this context, Christ does not pay a debt humans owe to God, but rather Jesus bears the punishment of God against human sin.

Theory of “Penal Substitution”

- **Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
- **Colossians 3:4-6** When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.
- **Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Theory of “Penal Substitution”

- Focus: Death of Christ
- How Jesus Saves: Jesus takes on and absorbs the wrath and punishment of God that was intended for human beings.

Jesus saves!

Jesus saves us **from what??**

- Sin
- Satan
- Suffering & Brokenness
- Systemic evil
- Hell
- God the Father?