

slavery or bought back family property (Ruth) , and in that sense a ransom was being paid. God is described as 'Goel' for redeeming the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt (e.g. Ex. 6:6, 15:13) for bringing the Israelites back from exile (e.g. Isa. 41:14 etc.) and saving them from their enemies (e.g. Ps.44). So, the use of 'Goel' is just an **image** for God's love as God never actually paid any ransom to anyone.

So, Jesus carries out redemption in the same way Yahweh did in the O.T., because he is **divine**, because he is our **kinsman**, and because he not only **sets us free** but also **restores us** to where we should be in relation to God. Against this, it may be argued that Jesus was called a sacrifice (Hebrews 9 etc.) to **atone** for our sins and sacrifices must be offered to someone. But, in the O.T. there were different types of sacrifice with different names for each (Lv.3 and 4) and, importantly, no sacrifice could be offered for deliberate sins. Although Jesus is also called by St. Paul a Paschal Lamb (1 Cor.5:7) the Passover was not originally a sacrificial meal (Ex.12) and if it could be termed a sacrifice it could only be a communion or friendship sacrifice not a sin offering. When the early Church described Jesus' death as a sacrifice it was doing this to make sense, in the only terms it was familiar with, of how Jesus' death could remove sin.

A Personal Interpretation of Jesus' Death

A better approach would be to start by accepting that although Jesus died as a man he was **also God**. He wanted to **forgive us** our sins but in a way that showed directly how **hateful** sin is to him, while also demonstrating how great **his love** is for us, and also by giving us the best possible **example** of what love is and what is **expected of us**. His death **was** a sacrifice, but it was a sacrifice on **his** own terms, not in terms of any O.T. definition. His death **redefined** what a sacrifice truly is - **God himself entering and dying in history in order to reveal in a definitive way his gratuitous gift of endless love for us**.



What About Those Before Jesus?

There were many people who lived before Jesus who are shown to have had a close relationship with God e.g. Enoch and Elijah who were both **taken up** to God , Noah and Abraham, both described as **upright** men, the other Patriarchs, Moses who **spoke** with God, David, the Prophets etc not to mention John the Baptist and St. Joseph. How could they be righteous before Jesus had saved them, and without being baptised? The answer to this is **the key** to what Jesus' death achieved. Through the grace of God, it was possible for those before Jesus to do good. But it was **not** possible for them to enter Heaven after they died. The prime effect of Adam's sin was to lose for all his descendants that particular privilege given by the state of Original Righteousness. The direct effect of Jesus' saving death was to have that privilege restored to us, but an even greater effect was to offer to us the chance of a share in his own life.

Our Catholic Faith

12. Salvation Through Jesus Christ

Part 1 - Salvation from What and How?



Questions for Reflection

1. What do you understand by 'Jesus died for our sins'?
2. Can Jesus' death really be described accurately as a ransom?
3. How do you explain the goodness and closeness to God of many people in the O.T. when this was obviously prior to the salvation and atonement brought by Jesus??

Salvation Through Christ is Part of God's Plan

Holy Scripture is clear that God created us to be united with him as adopted children **“He chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy before him in love .. to be adopted sons”** (Eph.1). In addition, knowing that Man would fall, he always had a plan for our salvation **“the mystery of his purpose, according to his pleasure which he determined beforehand in Christ”**.

This truth is stated elsewhere e.g. Rm. 9:22f, 1 Cor.2:7f).

Salvation From What?

The New Testament describes the salvation brought by Jesus in two distinct albeit related ways:

1. It is the removal of sin **“Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world”** (Jn.1:29), **“A tradition I myself received, that Jesus died for our sins ..”** (1 Cor.15), **“He is the sacrifice to expiate our sins ..those of the whole world”** (1 Jn.2:2), **“He was bearing our sins in his own body.. so we might die to our sins”** (1 Pt.2:24)
2. It is to bring about our reconciliation with God **“God appointed him as a sacrifice for reconciliation”** (Rm.3:25) or, in other words, for us to become righteous or justified before God **“Justified by the free grace of God through being set free in Christ Jesus”** (Rm.3:24)

Sometimes it is expressed as **both** these ways: **“Handed over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification”** (Rm.4:25).

As far as Christian theology is concerned, St Paul makes the important link to Adam, contrasting the entry of sin and death into the world through Adam with the grace and saving justice, or justification and life, now brought by Jesus (Rm.5:12f) that makes us upright before God.

This would later develop into the doctrine of Original Sin, with Jesus' death understood as undoing the effects of that first sin which had become inherited by all of Adam's descendants. Jesus' death also had the effect of removing the detrimental effects of all sin so that, through faith in him, we could once again become reconciled with God. Other ways of expressing this is to say we have become upright or justified before God.

How is Salvation Achieved by Jesus' Death?

It is clear from Scripture that Jesus was preordained to be put to death in order to effect the will of God the Father. Jesus himself revealed this three times to his Apostles (Mtt.16, 17 and 20 and parallels in Mark and Luke) and in a discussion



with the Pharisees (Jn.8:28). The Gospels all portray Jesus' death and resurrection as the culmination of his ministry, and although there is no use of the actual word for 'sacrifice' to describe Jesus' death in the Gospels and uncontested Pauline letters, it may be implied by the various references to Jesus' blood and it became a specific theme of the early Church, as seen in the letter to the Hebrews (e.g. 9:15f).



The question arises, though, why is Jesus' death **necessary** in order to effect our salvation? Could not God have forgiven us without Jesus' death? In particular, is there not something repellent in the notion of a just and loving God requiring the death of his son in order for him to receive suitable recompense for our sins and offences against him? Yet this is the type of idea that many in the Church have sought to give to answer this very difficult question. There have been several different ideas about how salvation has been gained for us by Jesus' death:

St. Irenaeus, in the 2nd century, had two views: First, based on Mtt.20:28 and Mk. 10:45, Jesus' death was a **ransom** paid to Satan to persuade him to free us. This was to respect and maintain the importance of justice. Second, Jesus **recapitulates** the whole history of Adam and restores it to its original position.

St. Athanasius, in the 4th century, saw the Incarnation and Redemption as virtually indistinguishable in their effect of **raising** human nature to the highest level, with Jesus' death the greatest expression of pure love for God the Father. **Rufinus of Aquileia and St. Augustine**, in the 5th century, presented views, known as the fish-hook or mousetrap theories, that held Mankind could not be liberated from Satan's power by legitimate means. Therefore, it could only be done by **trickery**, whereby Satan was deceived into seizing Jesus' humanity, only to be thwarted by his divinity into giving up Man.

St. Anselm, in the 11th century, based on the notion of feudal responsibilities towards a Lord, developed the notion of **satisfaction** being due to God the Father for Man's sin. Only Jesus as God has the ability to give appropriate satisfaction, while as Man he has paid the obligation of all men.

St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, explained that the satisfaction Jesus offered to his Father was something that gave his Father greater pleasure than the pain caused him by Adam's sin and our personal sins. Jesus could do this because of the greatness of his love, the worth of his life, and the level of his sorrow.

Why Did Jesus Die on the Cross?

The notions of Jesus being a ransom to Satan or a form of satisfaction to appease an angry God seem primitive ways of viewing how Jesus' salvation works for us. After all, Jesus as the second person of the Blessed Trinity **was** God - how useful, therefore, is it to express his death as a price he paid, in effect, to himself? In the Old Testament a redeemer, 'Goel', was one who purchased a kinsman from