

Redemption – Why it had to Happen

In order for the eternal Son to become our near-kinsman, he had to become human so as to completely identify with us in our specifically 'embodied' context. Our embodiment determines our finitude, it limits us in every way – for instance, we cannot be eternal without something fundamentally changing; and nor can we be perfect without a fundamental change within us.

Jesus, the embodied Son of God, holds all the keys for us, and the Bible speaks into these practical realities in Heb 2:10-18:

¹⁰ In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. ¹² He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises. ¹³ And again, 'I will put my trust in him. And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me.' ¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

(Heb 2:10-18)

The same writer gives further relevance to Jesus' human experiences when he makes a direct connection to the emotional trauma that Jesus experienced in the temptation he went through in the Garden of Gethsemane. While Gethsemane is not specifically mentioned, it is quite clear that is what he is referring to:

⁷ During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

(Heb 5:7-10)

To give some relevant context to this extraordinary trauma, Matthew's presentation of Jesus' conversations with his Father (Matt 26:36-46) uniquely show the struggle that he experienced as he wrestled with his decision, within his humanity, to surrender to his Father's will.

In Matt 26:39 Jesus prays to his Father, asking the question, "My Father, **if it is possible**, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

In his humanity, his human emotions would prefer another option, but his divine nature knows what he must do, and he immediately surrenders to it.

In fact, Jesus' encouragement to his three disciples, sums up exactly what he was personally experiencing in his human nature, *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak"* (v.41). His temptation was to give in to his extreme natural, very human, feelings that he was going through in those very real temptations.

Jesus' second prayer to his Father is very revealing, *"My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."* (v.42).

Can you see the shift in Jesus' thinking – from *if it is possible*, to *if it is not possible*.

This was a personal decision he had to arrive at within his own humanity, which was imperative to his becoming the perfected and sinless human sacrifice who could atone for the collective sins of humanity. We will see the significance of this in a moment!!!

The protracted nature of this personal decision-making process is evident because of the need to pray a third time with his Father:

vv44-46 ...prayed the third time...Then he...said to them, *"Rise, let us go!"*

Jesus has clearly been experiencing a gut-wrenching wrestle within his own humanity on behalf of fallen humanity during these three successive prayer conversations with his Father, in which there has been a definite progression in his thinking – finally leading to the settled decision that he came to of his own human choosing to surrender to what he already knew in his divine nature.

It is worth noting that we only hear Jesus' side of the conversations he had with his Father. However, Paul gives us a further insights in Philippians 2:5-9, as he theologically unpacks the processes behind the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. In this passage, Paul alludes to two quite separate and personal decisions that Jesus made:

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, [to be used for his own advantage] ⁷but he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place...

Let's look at the two personal decisions the Son had to make:

- i) v.7 *"...he made himself nothing...being made in human likeness."*
- ii) v.8 *"...he humbled himself and became obedient to death – on a cross!"*

The question we need to ask is, when did the Son make these two decisions???

Jesus' first decision, 'he made himself nothing' – the Greek word here means 'he emptied himself', meaning, he emptied *himself* out of his heavenly and glorious form into an earthly and inglorious form, which involved his willing decision to 'be made in human likeness'.

On the premise that one must *be something* before one can personally decide to *be nothing*, so to speak in verse 7, Paul is clearly alluding to a personal decision the Son made in eternity past. This decision echoes the revelation that the Lamb was slain, in God's mind, before creation (1Pet 1:19-20; Rev 13:8).

The second personal decision that the Son makes is processed during Jesus' trauma in the Garden of Gethsemane. As already mentioned, the writer of Hebrews makes a clear reference, in context, to this agonising decision, culminating in the statement: *He learned obedience through the things he suffered* (Heb 5:7-8), specifically in the Garden of Gethsemane, but also including his whole early journey, through which he learned what it meant to be human.

These Garden of Gethsemane conversations with Father, which lead to his decision of obedience to God's will, presuppose another conversation that had already taken place in eternity past before the creation of the world, in which the Son had already fully agreed with this strategic necessity for him to take on human form in order to become the 'perfected' human who would be presented to the Father in his resurrection.

Within this context we can see the logic for the tension between Jesus' dual natures – the decision that was made in eternity past in his divinity having to be validated on earth, in his humanity, for his sacrifice to be effective for created humanity.

To summarise what we have said, the Son, having made a decision in eternity past to take on human form in his incarnation, then Jesus in his humanity, wrestled with his eternal decision, in light of the prospect of the multi-layered trauma that the cross would mean for him, but came into settled agreement with his Father's will, a real-time earthly human decision, confirming, validating, and actuating his prior heavenly decision to do so on our behalf and for our benefit.

This is the reason why redemption had to happen. Jesus, in his humanity, had to validate his prior 'heavenly' decision here on earth, which required him experiencing the temptations that we face as we live for him in our fallen world and embodied state.

¹⁴ *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.* ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.* ¹⁶ *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

(Heb 4:14-16)