

Was The Thief On The Cross Saved?

INTRODUCTION

Many people have asked about the thief on the cross when you are either witnessing to them or doing a Bible Study in the Gospel of Luke.

The Scriptures teach that salvation is only through Christ. “*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (**Acts 4:12**). Jesus warns that the way to heaven is narrow. “*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*” (**Matthew 7:13-14**). In pointing out the unity of Christianity, Paul stated, “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*” (**Ephesians 4:4-6**). There is only one church. There is only one faith. There is only one baptism. The Bible does not teach that there are multiple roads to heaven. It emphasizes that there is only one.

Luke 23:39-43

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. [40] But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? [41] And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. [42] And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. [43] And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

If you read the account about the thief you would notice that the thief didn't say anything about saving him from dying. These men knew that they deserved their punishment because they were thieves.

Crucifixion was a common method of carrying out the death sentence in the Roman Empire. It was probably the cruelest and painful method of death the Romans knew. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals; by law a Roman citizen could not be crucified. Crucifixion was usually a long slow process, but Jesus died in a remarkably short period of time

Let's look at some things here in the account:

- 1) The thief could have been baptized prior before being placed on the cross.
Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:21; 7:29-30
- 2) He could have been baptized with the baptism administered by John the baptizer.
Mark 1:4
- 3) The command to be baptized into Christ's death and resurrection was given *after* Christ's resurrection (**Mk.16:15,16**). The thief was still living under the Law of Moses when Christ spoke to him.

- 4) To say the thief was not baptized is an assumption; which is hardly a sound principle upon which to excuse ourselves from the command to be baptized.

The thief on the cross (**Luke 23:39-43**) lived and died under the Old Law and was subject to its commands and requirements. He was therefore not subject to the New Covenant and its commands and requirements for salvation (as we are today). When Christ died on the cross, the old law came to an end (see **Deuteronomy 5:1ff; Galatians 3:24-25; Hebrews 8:7, 13; Colossians 2:14**).

Remember Jesus can forgive anybody He chooses to forgive because He is God. Jesus seen the thief heart and knew he was sorry for what he had done and Christ forgave him. As this man was about to die, he turned to Christ for forgiveness, and Christ accepted him. This shows that our deeds don't save us—our faith in Christ does. It is never too late to turn to God. Even in his misery, Jesus had mercy on this criminal who decided to believe in him.

The dying criminal had more faith than the rest of Jesus' followers put together. Although the disciples continued to love Jesus, their hopes for the kingdom were shattered. Most of them had gone into hiding. As one of his followers sadly said two days later, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (**Luke 24:21**). By contrast, the criminal looked at the man who was dying next to him and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." By all appearances, the kingdom was finished. How awe-inspiring is the faith of this man who alone saw beyond the present shame to the coming glory!

Conclusion

It is an assumption to say the thief was not baptized.

The thief knew too much about Christ and His kingdom

Luke 23:42

And he said unto Jesus, [Lord], remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

The thief acknowledged Christ as sinless

Luke 23:41

And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

The thief could have been a follower of John the Baptist and was in a backslidden state. The thief was still under the Old Testament Law and the New Covenant has not taken affect yet because Christ hasn't died yet.

However, we must follow what the New Covenant teaches today, since Jesus has died to establish it, and since he will not make a personal appearance to forgive our sins.

1 Pet. 3:21

"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"

Acts 2:38

"Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 22:16

"Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

Mark 16:16

"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

According to the Scriptures, baptism is part of God's plan of salvation.