

## The Thief On The Cross

Whenever a Christian talks to someone in a denomination about the topic of baptism, they are bound to hear a couple of arguments against the essentiality of baptism. The first argument one might hear is that baptism is a work. The denominationalist will quote Ephesians 2:8-9 to try and show that baptism constitutes salvation by "works". However, the rebuttal of that point is beyond the purview of the article.

The second argument one might hear concerns the thief on the cross. If anyone thinks this argument is old and not used anymore, I would have to respectfully disagree. In a debate two weeks ago, a Baptist preacher used the thief on the cross as "proof" of his arguments regarding baptism. In Luke 23:43, the Lord said to him, *"Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."* Denominational evangelists have been deceiving those who do not know their Bibles by misapplying the account of this thief as they reason, "The thief on the cross was not baptized; therefore, there is no absolute need in our being baptized either." But is this a valid point? Let's observe a few points:

First, no man can prove the thief was not baptized. We are quickly informed that there is no mention of his having been baptized. I will admit that. However, on this basis, we can prove that faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation, for there is not one statement to the effect that Lazarus had faith, yet he ended up in paradise (Luke 16:19-31). What proves too much proves nothing.

Second, it is possible that the thief had been baptized. John the Baptist had a very widespread coverage and acceptance of his teaching. John's baptism was for the remission of sins. The thief was also very well informed as he hung upon the cross. Luke 23:42 records, *"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."* So the thief on the cross knew that Jesus was Lord and knew that His kingdom was coming in the future. However, he could have been one of those who had gone back and *"walked no more with Him"* (John 6:66).

Third, the New Testament was not in force when the Lord made His promise to the thief. Hebrews 9:15-17 says, *"And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For*

*a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.*" When Jesus was alive, He could execute His will in whatever way He desired, but once He died, we have no other authority than the will of the New Testament.

In conclusion, the thief on the cross cannot constitute an example for us today. The New Testament was not operative, the Great Commission had not yet been given; and the kingdom of our Lord had not yet begun using the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). Nine examples in the book of Acts all definitively point to the necessity of baptism for salvation. Can we be rightly dividing the word of truth to pass over all these cases of conversion in the book of Acts and go back to the account of the thief on the cross? I think not!

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