
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: ***Does the thief on the cross prove baptism is not necessary?***

Luke 23:39-43

39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?"

41 "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."

42 Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Here we are introduced to two thieves crucified along with Jesus. At first both of these thieves reviled Jesus and mocked Him, but one thief changed his attitude and repented. He looked to Jesus in his final hour of life and asked Jesus to save him and Jesus, about to die Himself, graciously forgave the man of his sins and promised him eternal life that very day!

Now, the question before us is this: ***Does this case prove baptism is not necessary for salvation today?*** If baptism is so important, why didn't this penitent thief have to be baptized to be saved?

Many people use the thief on the cross as an excuse for not being baptized themselves. For one reason, or another there are some people who absolutely refuse to obey the Gospel and be baptized for the remission of their sins. To justify themselves they point to this thief on the cross and argue: "Wasn't he saved without baptism? And if he was saved without baptism, then we all can be saved without baptism."

WHY CHOOSE THE THIEF?

The first thing I want you to notice is that people always pick the thief on the cross as the example of how they want to be saved. They like the thief on the cross because he didn't have to do very much. No one ever wants to be saved like the rich young ruler, for example, because he had to do a lot. Remember him? A rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked what he had to do to be saved. Jesus told him:

Mark 10:21

21 ... "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

Why is it that no one ever wants to be saved like this man?

WAS HE REALLY UN-BAPTIZED?

The second thing I want to notice about the thief on the cross is that everyone assumes he was never baptized! How does anyone know that he was never baptized? Obviously he was not taken down from the cross and baptized that day – the Romans wouldn't have allowed that.

But how do we know that he had not been previously baptized before he was arrested and tried and nailed to the cross? Perhaps he had gotten baptized prior to his crucifixion and then fell away. After all, the Scriptures plainly say:

Matthew 3:5-6

5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to [John]
6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

Since all these people from all around Jerusalem and Judea were coming to be baptized by John, this thief could easily have been in that multitude of people.

So then, before someone argues that the thief on the cross was saved without baptism, they must prove it! But it cannot be proven. For all we know he could very well have been baptized and if he was baptized this is not an example of someone being saved without baptism.

"POWER ON EARTH TO FORGIVE SINS"

But there is a third point I would like you to consider about this thief is that he lived before the Lord died. While the Lord was alive He had the authority to forgive anyone he wished under any conditions He wished.

He could have forgiven the rich young ruler without requiring him to sell all that he had, but He didn't. (Mk 10:21).

Matthew 9:5-6

5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'?
6 But that you may know that **the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins** — then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

So while the Lord was alive on the earth, He could forgive men freely as He saw fit. But after the Lord died and His will, the NT, came into force, men must meet the terms required by the will.

Let me illustrate. Suppose a father has a will. According to the will all his property and money will go to his only son. Does that will have binding force while the father is alive? Of course not. If the father wishes to give some needy person money, the father may freely do that. If the father wishes to make some donation to a charity, he may freely do so. But once the father dies, the will comes into force and now the money and property must be dispensed according to the will.

Likewise, while Jesus was alive, He was busy preaching and teaching the terms of His new will. However, that new will did not have any force as long as the Lord was alive.

Hebrews 9:16-17

16 For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.
17 For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

Just like a father could freely give away money while he is alive, the Lord Himself could freely grant forgiveness to anyone He wished and on any terms He wished. Yet, after the Lord died, His new will came into force – the NT. Here is what the Lord Himself said after He resurrected from the dead and after the thief had been saved:

Mark 16:16

16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; ...

These are the terms of forgiveness for men today. If anyone hopes to be saved, he must believe in Jesus and be baptized for the remission of his sins! The thief on the cross does not prove baptism is not a necessary condition for salvation. The thief does not negate what the Lord Himself said in Mk 16:16.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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