

What About The Thief On The Cross?

A couple of weeks ago, we ran an article titled, "The Baptism Of Desire." A man called us, taking issue with the statement that one has to be baptized in order to be saved. He urged us to look at the thief on the cross. In Luke 23:43, Jesus said, "*Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*" Denominationalists have misapplied the account of this thief as they reason, "The thief on the cross was not baptized; therefore, there is no need in our being baptized." There are three good reasons why the thief on the cross cannot be used to prove salvation without baptism.

First, no man can prove the thief was not baptized. We are quickly informed that there is no mention of his baptism. However, on this basis, we can prove that faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation, for there is no statement to the effect that Lazarus had faith, yet he ended up in paradise (Luke 16:19-31). Second, it is possible that the thief had been baptized. He was well-informed as he hung on the cross (Luke 23:42). He could have been a disciple at one point, but 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). When Jesus was alive, He could execute His will in whatever way He desired, but once He died, we have no ability to change His will.

The thief on the cross is not a valid example for us today. The New Testament was not operative, the Great Commission had not yet been given, and the kingdom had not yet begun. Are we handling the Bible accurately when we pass over all the cases of conversion in Acts and go back to the account of the thief on the cross?

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