

# The Thief on the Cross

## Introduction

### Scripture Reading: Luke 23:26-43

1. The Bible clearly states that baptism is necessary in order to receive the forgiveness of sins.  
**Mark 16:16**  
**Acts 2:38**  
**Acts 22:16**  
**1 Peter 3:21**
2. Is there an exception to this rule?
  - A. There is an attempt by some to dismiss all of these passages with the one question, **"What about the thief on the cross?"**
3. The thief is thought by some to be the exception that would justify the idea of salvation at the point of confession of Jesus.
  - A. Mankind has elevated the thief to a position to steal the truth of the gospel from the hearts of many men.
    - 1) They have allowed him and his salvation to influence what we must do today.
4. But what does the Bible teach?
  - A. We should let the Bible speak for itself in this matter. Human reasoning and traditional doctrinal viewpoints will be of no value when we stand before God in judgment.
  - B. Those who believe Jesus to be the Son of God will want to do what He wants us to do.

## At Calvary

**1. When Christ was crucified, two thieves were also crucified, one on either side of Him.**

**A. One of them asked Jesus to remember him when He came in His kingdom.**

**1) The Jews believed the Messiah would miraculously appear to establish an earthly kingdom. The disciples were still under this misconception at the time of the ascension of Jesus**

Acts 1:6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

**B. A request based on this concept would have simply been an appeal to save his physical life. To this Jesus replied,**

Luke 23:43 ...**"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."**

**2. What did Jesus mean?**

**A. The statement simply meant that on that day they would both be in paradise, a place of departed spirits.**

**1) Jesus said this to dispel any false hopes of rescue in a physical kingdom.**

**2) "Paradise" did not refer to heaven in this passage; it described a place of departed spirits.**

**B. Jesus did not go to heaven on the day that He died. After the resurrection, He said to Mary, *"I have not yet ascended to the Father..."* (John 20:17).**

## Was the Thief Saved?

1. The word "Paradise" does suggest approval.
  - A. Jesus told a story about the rich man and Lazarus in **Luke 16:19-31**.
    - 1) We learn from that account that there is a Hadean world in which it is divided into two parts; Paradise and Torment. The rich man went to torment while Lazarus went to Paradise.
2. It could be assumed that the thief was saved because only Jesus has the power to forgive and save and He stated that he would be with Him in Paradise.
3. The thing that we should remember is that we should base our hope for eternity upon the Bible and the will of Christ.

## Can We Be Saved the Same Way?

1. Even if we assume that the thief was saved, we cannot be saved in the same way today.
  - A. The thief lived during a time when Christ on earth personally forgave the sins of several individuals.
    - 1) Remember the case of the paralyzed man?  
**Luke 5:17-20**
    - 2) Remember the sinful woman?  
**Luke 7:36-50**
      - a. Jesus personally forgave their sins and if we had lived at that time our sins might have been forgiven in similar circumstances.

**2. To all in our age Jesus has said:****Mark 16:16****This Side of the Cross**

**1. We live under a different covenant from those who lived at the time of Jesus.**

**2. Let us notice what the Bible says about our salvation on this side of the cross.**

**A. Hebrews 9:15-17 speaks of a new covenant which became effective at the death of Christ, the Testator.**

**Hebrews 9:15-17**

**B. Since we live after the death of the Testator, we are under this new covenant. It sets forth terms of obedience for those who through faith accept Jesus as Lord.**

**1) Those who believe Jesus to be the son of God are to confess Him as Christ and be baptized in obedience to His command.**

**Matthew 10:32****Mark 16:16**

**3. Baptism is now required as an expression of obedient faith.**

1 Peter 3:21 There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

## Salvation in Christ

### 1. We are baptized into the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit **we were all baptized into one body** — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

### 2. Christ is the savior of the body.

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is **the Savior of the body**.

### 3. There is no promise of salvation for those who are outside the body of Christ.

### 4. Baptism was required in all cases of conversion under the new covenant.

A. Those who attempt to find in the experience of the thief an exception to baptism for the forgiveness of sins, do so to try to justify that baptism is not required of us today.

A. In order to observe that baptism was a part of conversion, please take the time to read the following scriptures:

- **Acts 2:38; 8:12-18; 10:47-48; 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; 19:3-5; 22:16**

## Conclusion

### 1. Will you consider these scriptures thoughtfully?

### 2. Heaven is too wonderful and Hell too terrible for us to risk being misled by erroneous beliefs concerning the thief on the cross.

## Place

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Richard Thetford, November 2009 - Reworked October 2024 (Based on a 1981 tract by Robert L. Schales)