

Popularity of a Thief

Possibly no one individual of the New Testament, save Jesus Christ Himself, has been idolized more than one of the two thieves crucified with our Lord (Luke 23:33, 39-43). No other thief in history has been as canonized as this one man! What makes him so popular? It is believed by most that he is the justification for not being immersed unto the forgiveness of sins.

When speaking to others about God's plan of salvation, the first retort is, "*But, what about the thief on the cross? He was never baptized, so why should I?*" Without a doubt, no matter what any of us think about the thief and his actions on that day of his crucifixion, his eternal destiny will not change one bit. However, the same cannot be said of men and women living today; as your soul can and will spend eternity in torment if you choose to remain misguided by men's misrepresentation of the thief's salvation.

What the majority of religious people today have forgotten is that there are TWO sides of the cross of Jesus Christ. On the side prior to the death of our Lord the Jews were held to the Old Covenant Law and the Gentiles under universal law. On the side of the cross AFTER Christ's death ALL men and women were and are today held to the Gospel, which is the Law of Christ. Understanding this most important difference will help you realize how the thief was blessed with being in Paradise with Jesus under different circumstances than we are today.

In this tract we will consider briefly the following: 1) Was the Thief saved?, 2) Why baptism was not required, and 3) Are we under the same rules as the Thief? These questions are very important to our soul's salvation today, and should be carefully studied and meditated upon if we truly desire to prove our love for God and be saved. It is our fervent prayer that as you read and study that you will open your heart and mind and not allow yourself to be persuaded by the things you have always heard about the thief on the cross; but instead allow God's word and common sense to reign.

Was the Thief Saved?

While on the cross, Jesus declared to one of the thieves, "*Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise*" (Luke 23:43). Was the thief saved without having to do one thing? The answer of course is no. It is apparent from his attitude that he believed in Christ as he rebuked his fellow thief, "*Doest not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? We indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom*" (Luke 23:40-42). From this text we discover some rather important information about the man, 1) He believed in Jesus, 2) He repented of his sins as he did not participate in the mockery of our Lord.

Possibly the thief had heard John the Baptizer or even Jesus Himself preparing the way for the kingdom. Something caused this man to know whom he was being crucified with. From the text of Luke 23 we are able to confirm that the actions of this one thief, then living under Mosaic Law, allowed him to enter the realm of the saved – Paradise.

What is Paradise?

When the thief asked Jesus to remember him when He entered His kingdom, Jesus answered him, "*Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise*" (Luke 23:42-43). Where and what is the Paradise that Jesus spoke of? Most people assume that it referred to the heavenly realm, but this cannot be true. While it is true that sometimes the word 'Paradise' can refer to heaven, it is not always the case. The soul of every person who has ever lived and died goes on living in a special place called Hades. In Hades there are two compartments with a gulf between the two, where the righteous dead on one side await Judgment, which is called Paradise or Abraham's bosom; then the unsaved and unfaithful dead on the other side await their Judgment, which is referred to as torment or tartarus. (Luke 16:19-31).

Sadly the King James Version of the English Bible has mistranslated the Greek word "Hades" to make it say 'hell.' Acts 2:31 and Psalm 16:10 informs us of Jesus' death, "*His soul was not left in Hades, neither did His flesh see corruption.*" This shows us that the Paradise that Jesus spoke of was not located in Heaven, but in the realm of departed spirits. In John 20:17 affirms that Jesus had not yet ascended into heaven.

Are we Under the Same Rules As the Thief?

It makes no difference one way or the other whether the thief was baptized or not baptized. He lived at the same time as Jesus, and Jesus was born under the Law of Moses (Galatians 4:4). The promise that Jesus made to this thief to be with Him in Paradise came BEFORE the death of Christ! The Old Law, the Old Testament Covenant was STILL in force! The Law of grace and truth had NOT YET taken effect.

What the Thief did or did not do has nothing whatsoever to do with what ALL men and women MUST do for salvation today. Why? Because we are ALL under a different will than the thief. The author of Hebrews wrote, "*And for this cause He (Christ) is the mediator of the New Testament (Will), 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 by 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*" (Hebrews 9:15-17 – emph. mine).

The New Testament is the 'Last Will and Testament' of Jesus Christ our Lord. According to the practice of law today, and the practice of law of the first century, the death of testator (will-maker – Jesus Christ), had to occur first, BEFORE His will became operative (John 19:30, 33-34). Before His death on the cross, Jesus could tell the woman, "*Thy sins are forgiven*" (Luke 6:48), without her having to be baptized; or the palsied man, "*Son,*

thy sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5-12), again, without the requirement of baptism. Even Zacchaeus was told by Jesus, "*This day is salvation come to this house.*" (Luke 19:9-10), yet nothing is said of baptism.

It should be no surprise to the avid Bible student that ALL Israelites (Jews) ceased to be the chosen people of God once the New Testament (Will) of Christ became effective (Ephesians 2:11-16; Romans 2:28-29; 9:6; Galatians 3:24-29). Nicodemus was instructed by Jesus that Jewish blood meant nothing in the new kingdom – a kingdom about to be established. The only way for anyone to enter this new kingdom (the church) was to be born again, of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-5).

After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, gave commandment to His disciples. "*That repentance and remission of sins be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, and ye are witnesses of these things*" (Luke 24:47-48). Fifty days later on Pentecost, 30AD, the church that Jesus said He would build was founded and the apostles obeyed their Lord's command by preaching repentance and remission of sins. When the Jews heard Peter's sermon concerning Jesus Christ, they asked what they needed to do for salvation, and Peter answered them, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ FOR (in order to receive) the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:37-38). Nowhere do we find the apostles referring to the actions of the thief on the cross, for they knew that all men and women were now subject to a different set of rules. Who were the ones who God added to the church that day? Those who gladly received the words given them by the apostles, and who willingly obeyed by receiving baptism (immersion in water in order to obtain forgiveness of their sins).

Now stop and consider for a moment if the thief had lived on to this day. He too would have been required by God to be immersed in water for the remission of his sins. There is no getting around it, unless you are dishonest and care more about the pride of having it your own way rather than

heeding the truth of God's word. Keep in mind that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), had the thief been living this side of the cross, he would not only have been required to be baptized, he would have done so faithfully and willingly. Since that great day that the gospel was first proclaimed in Jerusalem, to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles, the New Testament (Will) of God has been for ALL men and women to believe, repent and be baptized in order to obtain the benefits that God's grace has provided to all faithfully obedient individuals.

Why Baptism was Not Required of the Thief

It is difficult to understand why so many people object to getting wet. Rejecting the will of Christ is equal to disobedience, rebellion and downright hatred for God's will. We of course do not reject the fact that God's grace is a necessary part of our salvation, any more than faith. But what we do reject is the false notion that one is saved by grace or faith alone. That baptism is simply a symbol of one already being saved. Nowhere can such an idea be found in the Scriptures, unless passages are twisted. Three Thousand souls obeyed from the heart the words of Peter, and their faith was manifest by their willingness to submit to baptism so that their sins could be washed away (Acts 2:41-47).

Faith is more than trusting, or believing in Jesus Christ and God, it is a word of action. Faith must move us to action, through repentance, confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and finally being immersed in water in order to contact the cleansing blood of Christ. Mark wrote, "*He that believeth AND IS BAPTIZED shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16). Saul was commanded, "*Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins*" (Acts 22:16). The question that should be on your mind, is why Saul needed his sins washed away if he was already saved? Peter declared, "*Baptism doth also now save us*" (1 Peter 3:21). Obedience to baptism proves our faith in God, that He will save us when we obey His conditions to salvation.

These are the requirements that we must meet today in order to be saved. Why? Because as we have already said, we are under a New Will of God, a Will of God that was not in force when Jesus and the thieves died on the cross. It is for this reason that the example of what the thief did or said, and did not say or did not do matters not one whit to what YOU MUST DO today! You are not under the same set of rules as the thief, the palsied man, the woman, Zacchaeus or anyone else when Jesus lived.

Why was the thief not required to be baptized? The answer has been given – because he was not under the same law as you and I are today.

Conclusion

While this is a brief discussion of the subject of the thief on the cross, it should be enough information to cause you to reconsider what you must do to be saved. From the things that have been said, you should be able to honestly conclude that the thief is not a good example of what anyone living today should do to be saved. Although it is true that we should submit ourselves to God as he did, and repent as he apparently did, there is still more that must be done to prove our faith to be true.

Because you and I are now under a different law (will) of God, we are now required to add to our faith and repentance, confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 10:9-10), and immersion in water in order to receive forgiveness of our sins [to have our sins washed away] (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:28; 22:16). The thief was unable to obey from the heart the form of the gospel that the Romans obeyed and you and I are required to obey because that form had not yet occurred. Please read Romans 6:17 which says, "*But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.*"

What is Paul speaking of when he says, "*That form of doctrine which was delivered you?*" The doctrine that they heard was the gospel; the gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ. So these Romans had obeyed a form or pattern of the gospel. They had died to sin, were buried in the waters of baptism to wash away the old man and then raised up to walk a new life (Romans 6:3-8). This is what being born again is all about (John 3:3-5). Not repeating some sinner's prayer, or believing that you are saved by faith alone, but obeying the gospel pattern, wherein God will add you to His church when He sees your repentant attitude and obedient heart (Acts 2:47).

So please stop relying upon the example of a thief who was saved under a totally different system. Yes the thief was saved that day, but you cannot be saved in the same way that he was. You must be baptized as the final act of your faith.

If I had a lot of money that I wished to give away, I think upon my preacher friends a little test I'd play. I'd call them all together and explain to them a plan, whereby a thousand dollars would be given to each man. The plan it would be simple anyone could get it straight; the language would be a paraphrase of Acts two thirty-eight. They'd ask of me, "What shall we do?" I'd answer them as follows: "Be baptized each one of you for a thousand silver dollars." My Baptist friend would shed his coat and cease his "because of" prattle; he'd know the meaning of this "FOR" when he heard the silver rattle. Friend Methodist, too, without a doubt the "FOR" could understand, if the understanding meant for him a thousand smackers in his hand. Not one of them would argue back, and you can write it down, within thirty minutes, there'd not be a dry preacher in the town!

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*What Saith
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Concerning.....*

The Thief on the Cross



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