

Hebrews 9:14-17 explains this fact quite clearly. The point is that while Christ was alive, He could save people as He pleased. However, His testament came into effect *after* He died, and men could only be saved according to how He prescribed (Acts 2:38).

It is similar to those who have an earthly will. While the testator lives, this person can spend his money as he pleases. However, after this person's death, the survivors must follow the dictates of the will. Therefore, this is why we read about people being saved in various ways before the cross. Yet, after the crucifixion, folks were saved in precisely the same manner, through faith in Christ, repentance of sin, confessing Christ, and being baptized (Acts 2:36-38, 8:12, 26-39, 9:17-18, 10:48, 16:13-14, 16:30-34, 18:8, 19:5).

### **One Simple Question:**

Now that we have put the events surrounding the crucifixion and the penitent thief in context let us ask ourselves, are we living before Christ's crucifixion or after His crucifixion? If He has been crucified, then the only way we can be saved is by following the example of those folks in the book of Acts (chapters 2-19). If He has already been crucified, then we have no right to say we will be saved like the thief. In fact, it would be impossible to be saved as the thief was, for that was peculiar to the time before Christ's death.

### **Conclusion**

The confession we read the thief making that day was the confession of a fallen-away disciple who realizes what he has done and is seeking Christ's forgiveness before he dies, rather than an "alien sinner" who had never met the Lord! Though we could not prove with 100% certainty that the thief was baptized at some point in his life, we can know with 100% certainty that we today need to be baptized because this was what

Christ commanded in His New Testament (Acts 2:38, 22:16; I Pet. 3:21)!

**Please visit with the Caneyville church of Christ....**



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### **Times of services...**

**Sunday:** 10:00 am  
(Bible classes for all ages)  
10:45 am (Worship)  
5:00 pm (Worship)

**Wednesday:** 7:00 pm  
(Bible classes for all ages)

### **Other opportunities for Bible study:**

- Correspondence Courses
- "The Ancient Landmark" Radio Program (101.5 and 103.5 FM WLBQ at 11:30 AM Sunday and 5:30 AM Monday-Friday)
- "The Ancient Landmark" ([www.youtube.com/theoldpaths1994](http://www.youtube.com/theoldpaths1994))



# **"What About The Thief On The Cross?"**

Jarrod Jacobs

**W**hen Jesus was crucified, the Bible says that there were two thieves crucified on either side of Him (Lk. 23:33). This was a fulfillment of Bible prophecy (Isa. 53:12). When He was crucified, the Bible says that the people, including the thieves, mocked Him (Lk. 23:35-38; Mk. 15:32). Yet, at some point, one of the thieves had a change of heart and spoke kindly to Him while rebuking the other thief for ridiculing the Master (Lk. 23:40-41). He went on to say, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:42-43).

There is much confusion surrounding this text. In fact, there has been many false doctrines that have been taught because folks have misunderstood this text. Many use this text to deny the fact that folks need to be baptized. Their claim is: "The thief wasn't baptized, why do we need to be?" Others say similar things, such as, "I want to be saved like the thief on the cross." When the thief was saved by Christ, did this prove that baptism is not necessary for our salvation today? Some go so far as to claim that the thief was not baptized, and yet he was saved anyway. Can we know that the thief was not baptized? Let us study this text, and learn what the Bible is saying concerning this thief who was crucified at the same time as Jesus.

## The Thief Knew Much About Christ.

When we take a closer look into the text of Luke 23:39-43, I am impressed with what this thief knew about Jesus. When Luke records how one thief had ridiculed Christ, he says that the other thief defended the Lord by saying, *“Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss”* (Lk. 23:40-41). Perhaps we read over these verses too quickly. Slow down and read these two verses again. Then, we must ask: “How did the thief know Jesus had done nothing wrong?” What a strange thing to say if this thief had never met Christ until the time they were nailed to the cross.

The thief then continues by requesting: *“Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom”* (Lk. 23:42). We must ask again: “How did the thief know?” How did he know anything about a kingdom if he had never met Christ until this day?” If all he knows is what has happened this day, then he knows nothing of a kingdom, salvation, or anything else! All he has heard is the ridicule of the rulers, the people, the soldiers, and those surrounding the cross (Lk. 23:35, 37). The other thief’s words reflect this truth (Lk. 23:39).

Yet, this thief makes two statements no one else at Calvary had ever said! In other words, these were statements made by someone who knows Jesus! He spoke up to say Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. Then, he made a profound statement of faith, asking Christ to remember him in His kingdom. What kingdom? He couldn’t be referring to an earthly kingdom, for Jesus is dying on the cross with the thief! He has suffered beatings, mockery, and scourging and is now nailed to a cross. No doubt, He does

not look very “kingly”! Yet, the thief speaks of a kingdom Christ will soon enter.

Yes, this thief knew much about Christ. He made a statement of faith that the apostles did not understand until after Christ’s ascension! The thief’s words remind me of someone who was a disciple at some point rather than some complete stranger! Is this a possibility? Absolutely! The thief could have been John’s disciple (Matt. 3:5-6) or Jesus’ disciple (John 4:1-2). We know *“multitudes”* followed Christ during those three years He was teaching. At the same time, Jesus had *“many”* leave Him (Ex: Jn. 6:66). Thus, if he was a disciple of John or Jesus, he *was* baptized! Then, the argument saying that the thief was saved without baptism would not be a true statement.

Are the statements of the thief 100% proof that he was baptized? No, they are not. Yet, I would suggest that the “circumstantial evidence” is pretty strong to suggest he was baptized! He had an understanding of Christ, His innocence, and His kingdom that many at that time did not have!

## Jesus’ Response To The Thief’s Request.

In Luke 23:43, we read where Jesus speaks to the thief. He said, *“Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”* Jesus was promising salvation to the thief at this time. It is impressive to see Him in a time of intense pain responding so kindly to this man. Yet, when we read the gospel records, we find Jesus always responding positively when folks come to Him for salvation.

For example, when the woman came to Simon’s house and cried at Jesus’ feet and wiped His feet with her hair, Jesus forgave her, telling

her that her faith had saved her (Lk. 7:36-50). On another occasion, the rich young ruler was told to sell all he had, give it to the poor, and follow Christ for salvation (Matt. 19:16-22). A third example was Christ’s salvation offered to the paralyzed man when his friends lowered him into the house where Jesus was teaching (Mk. 2:3-12). Yes, every time folks wanted to be saved, Jesus saved them, and saved them in various ways. Yet, I have found it interesting that while folks say they wish to be saved like the thief, they don’t seem to want to be saved like the woman in Simon’s house, or the rich young ruler, or the paralyzed man! Why not?

Why did Jesus respond to the thief in the way He did? Why are we given this example? Does this serve as an example of salvation being obtained without baptism? Can we just say, “Lord, save me” or something similar? No, we cannot be saved in this way. There is much more we need to do to be saved. Why do I say this? The first reason is that Christ does not save people simply because they request it (Matt. 7:21). Christ is *“the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”* (Heb. 5:9)! Another reason why folks are not saved in this way is because ...

## We Are Living Under A Different Law Than The Thief.

While Jesus was on earth, He, the thief, and many more lived under the Old Testament law. This law (Law of Moses) began at Mount Sinai (Ex. 20) and ended at Christ’s death on the cross (Col. 2:14). While He lived, Jesus spoke of His coming law and coming kingdom. In fact, Matthew 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount) described how citizens of His coming kingdom would act. However, this law did not come into effect until after His death.