

The *Other* Thief on the Cross

Over the years, many would-be believers have either wanted to be or claimed to have been “saved like the thief on the cross.” By this, they usually mean “without baptism,” or “only on the basis of confessed faith in Jesus.” But two things are inherently wrong here: 1) Jesus had not yet died, so His instructions including baptism as necessary for salvation had not yet become “*in force*,” cf. Hebrews 9:16-17; Mark 16:15-16; and, 2) Since N.T. baptism is “*into His death*,” and Jesus had not yet died, baptism “*into Christ*” was not yet even a possibility, Romans 6:3-4. But now that we have these matters out of the way, let’s think about the *other* thief on the cross...

While there is no doubt or argument that *the* thief on the cross was saved (Luke 23:43), an equally important consideration is: Why was the *other* thief on the cross conversely lost? Just as there are reasons *the* thief was eternally saved, there are also reasons the *other* thief was eternally lost. As always, let’s go to the Word for answers.

Consider the following from Luke 23:

- **v.39, “And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him...”** The word translated as “abuse” in the NASB (“railed” in ESV and KJV) is the Greek term *blasphemo*- the same word rendered as “blaspheme” in other passages. It basically means “to speak against” or “speak evil against,” but more specifically it can refer to “denying God” or “denying God’s power,” cf. Romans 2:24. The point is, this *other* thief was denying that Jesus was “*the Christ*” (or *Messiah*) by his own words. This “other” thief was lost because he denied the *divinity* of Jesus Christ, and thus he *rejected* what “the” saved thief *affirmed*, cf. v.42. No one can or will be saved while repudiating Jesus as the Christ, Matthew 10:32. His question at the end of the verse, “*Are You not the Christ?*” was a mocking question that was meant to be rhetorical. He obviously did not believe Jesus was the Son of God.
- **v.40a, “Do you not even fear God?”** “The” thief posed this question to the “other” thief. The answer was clearly “No”- the “other” thief did not *even* fear God. He had surely missed the wise man’s summation of Ecclesiastes 12:13 that the *whole (duty) of man* was to “*fear God and keep His commandments*.” He hadn’t *kept God’s commandments* for he was surely a convicted thief currently being crucified for his crimes. Additionally, he certainly didn’t *fear God* for he was, even in his final moments before death, “*hurling abuse*” at God’s Son! Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, “*Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*” This “other” thief not only failed to obey, he didn’t even possess a basic (and necessary) fear of God as “*Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*,” Matthew 10:28. No one can or will be saved who has no *fear of God* in His heart and thus disregards His laws.
- **vv.40b-41a, “... you are under the same sentence of condemnation. And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds...”** A perhaps more subtle but nonetheless important consideration is that the “other” thief was apparently still denying personal responsibility/accountability for his actions. Though Jesus was surely *innocent* of the charges against Him- even “the” thief said of Him, “*this man has done nothing wrong*,” v.41b, *both* thieves were guilty of their charges. “The” thief understood and accepted his culpability and the earthly consequences of it. But the “other” thief still, even as he is dying, has yet to understand and accept personal responsibility for his sins. Though everyone will eventually be forced to accountability in eternal judgment (cf. Romans 14:10-12; 2Corinthians 5:10), only those who accept and acknowledge their sins through confession *in this life* will be spared *eternal condemnation*- a fate even worse than the agonies of crucifixion. “The” thief did so, but the “other” thief did not. “I

acknowledged my sin to Thee, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin," Psalm 32:5.

There are significant, noteworthy reasons "the" thief on the cross was saved, even though we may not today be saved in precisely the same ways. But there are also significant, noteworthy reasons the "other" thief on the cross was lost, and those same reasons can and will cause us to be lost today. Think about it, won't you? (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)