

# THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

Today we're on sermon request #10 - the thief on the cross! One of you mentioned seeing a few online posts on this topic, so here we are. Unfortunately, this beautiful act of grace and mercy on the part of our Lord turns into a battleground of competing doctrines. Honestly, I'm glad that thief isn't here to witness it all. I assume everyone knows where this is going. Still, I'll approach this as if you're unaware of the controversy surrounding this man.

Let's meet the thief on the cross:

- **Matthew 27:38-44; Mark 15:27-32; John 19:18, 31-32** Two robbers are crucified with Jesus on each side. Both reviled him like the others. Their legs were broken after His death.
- **Luke 23:32-43** This account includes the change of heart from the thief on the cross.
- Here's what I know:
  - He deserved to be on the cross.
  - He mocked Jesus.
  - He changed his mind.
  - He knew who Jesus was.
  - He asked to be remembered.
- His story, principally, is similar to ours. It's meant to show the authority, mercy, and grace of our Lord. The thief ends up serving as an example to the world.

So, what's the controversy all about? Preaching baptism for the forgiveness of sin has been challenged and rejected for a long time. It's during this discussion that the thief is brought into the discussion. The argument is this:

- The thief was saved by Jesus.
- Yet the thief wasn't baptized.
- Therefore, baptism isn't necessary for forgiveness.

## HERE'S WHAT'S NOT BEING CONSIDERED:

- **No one knows if the thief was baptized or not.**
  - I know this man had some knowledge of Jesus and His kingdom. Did he learn all of that on the cross, or was he familiar with Jesus?
  - Did he submit John's baptism (**Luke 3:3**) and return to a sinful life?
  - I don't know or feel the need to prove he was or wasn't.
- **He literally couldn't be baptized at that point.**
  - I'm okay letting God be God . . . 2,000 years ago and today.
  - Exceptions to the rule don't become the rule.
  - This also blends into the "what if" scenarios. "What if a man came forward to be baptized but died of a sudden heart-attack?" Well, "What if a man came forward to confess Christ but died of a sudden heart-attack?" Let's not do this . . .
- **Jesus made the promise while under the Old Law.**
  - There's debate about when the New Covenant came into play.

- They say that the Old Law was set aside at the moment of Jesus' death (**Hebrews 9:15-18**). Then the observation is made: the thief died after Jesus.
- I appreciate this argument, but it doesn't consider that Jesus made a promise while still alive under the Old Law. Plus, it forgets the pattern of covenants. Covenants have to do with God's will and are always explained (whether conditional or unconditional). That only occurred in **Acts 2**. It's taking the Hebrews 9 illustration on a too-literal timetable instead of recognizing it as a principle. It wasn't meant to be used as a strict timeline.
- It's not considering that the thief is in trouble if you take this too literally. Consider **Romans 10:9**. Did the thief believe Jesus was raised from the dead? How could he? So, you and I wouldn't need to believe this? Isn't this all missing the point?
- **Jesus did command belief and baptism.**
  - **Mark 16:16** Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.
  - **Matthew 28:18-20** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
  - **Luke 24:45-49** Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."
  - **Acts 2** - the Spirit came with power, and the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter preached Christ was crucified and resurrected. The crowd asked what they should do, and Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." **Acts 2:38**.
- **Jesus isn't boxed in.**
  - Our Lord holds all authority. It stands if he tells one man to give all he has and give to the poor. It stands if He tells another man his sins are forgiven because he trusted the Lord could heal him. Were any of them baptized? I don't know, and I'm not bothered by it. And to be precise - if the Lord returned for a couple of days and spent time with a person (I don't care who they are) and He said, "I forgive you," . . . then they're forgiven. If He decided to forgive a man on a cross who may not have been baptized, then he was forgiven. This doesn't mean His death wasn't central to our forgiveness (since that happened after the promise), nor does it mean that baptism wasn't commanded and defined (because it was commanded after His resurrection). Jesus had the right to forgive us of our sins, and He still does, brethren.