**What about the thief on the cross?**

*Luke 23:32-43*

*“Then two* ***robbers*** *were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left” (Matthew 27:38)*

**Introduction**

1. Luke’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion tells of an important interaction the Son of God had while on the cross.
   1. **Isaiah 53:12** – The prophecy anticipated the appearance of God’s grace on this occasion.
   2. It is magnified by Jesus humble willingness to die for the guilty (**cf. Romans 5:8**).
   3. **His interaction with the thief personified His immense desire for the salvation of each and every man. *(“not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” – 2 Peter 3:9*).**
      1. The thief acknowledged his guilt **(v. 39-41)**.
      2. With that acknowledgment he turned to the only one he knew could save him **(v. 42).**
         1. *Remember – to bear in mind, i.e. recollect;* ***by implication, to reward or punish****: — be mindful, remember, come (have) in remembrance (Strong)*.
         2. **His plea is that Jesus would include him in His kingdom. I.e. salvation as Jesus’ Kingdom promised.**
      3. Jesus’ response indicates forgiveness and salvation **(v. 43**).
         1. Upon death Jesus entered Hades (**cf. Acts 2:27, 31**) – Christ would not stay there. He would be raised.
         2. That place of entering after death has two parts (**cf. Luke 16:25-26** – Rich man and Lazarus. Great gulf fixed – permanency.)
         3. **The thief would be with Jesus. Jesus would be raised, but the thief would stay without possibility of ever being in torments.**
2. However, many use the account of the thief on the cross in an effort to justify salvation by faith only – no obedience required (water baptism is not necessary).
3. This passage is used as a **pre-text (using the passage to make a point, instead of letting the passage make its own point)** to falsify the claim of necessary baptism, and justify the desire for salvation without obedience.
   1. Scripture is not meant to be used in this way **(cf. Matthew 4:6-7** – Devil tried to use scripture out of its context. Jesus showed the text was misused.).
   2. **James 1:19-22 – Our approach to scripture should be to hear what God has to say, allow that to soften our hearts instead of harden them, and obey the message.**
4. There are various problems with the appeal to the thief on the cross to nullify baptism 🡪
5. Jesus had authority to forgive sins.
6. Limitless Authority
   1. **Matthew 8:5-10** – The centurion (a man of authority – captain of 100 men) understood Jesus’ power.
      1. Jesus had the right and ability to give blessings and forgiveness as He saw fit.
      2. When He commanded something to be done, it was accomplished.
   2. **Matthew 7:28-29** – At the end of the Sermon on the Mount.
      1. Jesus went about everywhere teaching, and exhibiting His authority.
      2. The things He said, and the way in which He taught showed power from God 🡪
7. Given from the Father
   1. **John 7:14-18** – Jesus was given authority from God, as He was sent by God.
   2. **John 5:16-27** – After healing a man on the Sabbath.
      1. Jesus is God’s Son. He is deity!
      2. Only God has the power to forgive sins, and Jesus has that power.
      3. Jesus has life in Himself, and is able to give that life to others.
      4. **He was given authority to grant everlasting life.** 🡪 (His judgment is always true.)
8. He exercised forgiveness.
   1. **Matthew 9: 1-7** – Jesus, by the authority He possessed, forgave a man of His sins.
      1. We must not question the circumstance.
      2. Jesus knew the thoughts of the scribes, He knew the thoughts of the paralytic.
   2. It is foolish to assume our circumstances today are the same as that of the thief on the cross.
      1. The thief found himself face to face with the Son of God.
      2. We do not find ourselves in the same situation.
   3. However, we are given instruction on how to attain what the thief attained.
      1. Jesus does not speak directly today.
      2. He is not with us in person, but through the gospel. (**cf. Romans 1:16-17**)
9. Salvation under the New Testament
10. He has chosen to save through the message – **1 Corinthians 1:18**
    1. There are those who considered this to be foolish during the first century.
    2. There are those who claim to love this truth today, but consistently prove by action that they think otherwise.
    3. Included in the message of the cross 🡪
11. The Necessity of baptism.
    1. **Acts 8:30-35** – Philip preached the message of the cross to the eunuch.
       1. The scripture being read was from Isaiah 53.
       2. This includes the prophecy of Jesus death for mankind.
       3. Philip was preaching Jesus. Included in preaching Jesus 🡪
    2. **V. 36-38** – Why was baptism even brought up by the eunuch?
       1. **Baptism WASN’T brought up by the eunuch, but by Philip.**
       2. **Philip mentioned baptism through inspiration because it is what Jesus commanded** 🡪
    3. **Matthew 28:18-20** – Jesus has told us what we need to do to be saved.
       1. Speaking from the same authority that pardoned the thief, and forgave the paralytic.
       2. **That authority is still binding – He said to make disciples they had to be baptized**.
    4. **Mark 16:15-16** – Mark’s account of the commission.
    5. **Acts 2:37-38** – The Jews on the Day of Pentecost were seeking the same thing the thief was when they asked their question.
       1. Peter instructed them as Jesus’ had commanded – this is the only way they could be saved. ***(Keep in mind they now believed what the thief had come to believe, but had to do something to receive forgiveness.)***
       2. The thief had a face to face encounter with the Son of God who possessed the power to forgive.
       3. *We encounter Him in the gospel. It is there He tells us to be baptized, for baptism is what He has established that saves us* (**cf. 1 Peter 3:21**).
       4. *The next time we literally see Jesus it will be too late to do what He had instructed us to do to be forgiven* (**cf. Revelation 1:7**).
12. New Testament not yet inaugurated.
13. Baptism for the remission of sins was a command under the New Testament – which is still in place.
14. The thief lived and died under the Old Law.
    1. **Colossians 2:13-14** – The Old Law was still in effect until was wiped out in Jesus crucifixion.
    2. **Hebrews 7:11-13** – The Levitical priesthood lacked perfection. Jesus would prove to be that perfect priest. (But with the change of a priest comes change of law.)
    3. **Hebrews 8:7-10** – There was a need for a New Covenant (new law).
    4. **Hebrews 9:16-17** – The New Testament was not activated without Jesus death.
       1. The thief was pardoned while Jesus was alive.
       2. The Old Law was still in place – baptism was not the command.
15. Are we exempt from belief in Jesus’ resurrection based on the account of the thief on the cross?
16. **Romans 10:9** – we must believe that Jesus was raised from the dead in order to be saved.
17. ***“For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:16-17)***.
18. The thief spoke to Jesus before He died, and Jesus pardoned Him during the same scene.

**Conclusion**

1. Using a wonderful account of a lost man being found to undermine the clear teaching of Christ in scripture is abysmal.
2. It is an argument conceived in ignorance, and a lack of love for the truth.
3. **We must instead submit to the simplicity of the gospel, and obey the SIMPLE command given us to receive the remission of sins!**