

What about the thief on the cross?

Luke 23:39-43

Introduction

1. ***“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)***
2. This is not demonstrated in a greater fashion than in the account of **Luke 23:39-43**
 - a. **Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32** – Both criminals partook in blasphemy.
 - b. One had a change of heart, and repented.
 - c. Perhaps began to ponder falling into God’s hands – ***“Do you not even fear God” (v. 40)***
 - d. Then in the last moments of his life, he reached out for loving favor, and was forgiven by Jesus, being given assurance of fellowship with Him – **(v. 43)**
3. This beautiful account of God’s amazing grace is often appealed to when some chafe at the teaching of God’s grace about the necessity of baptism for salvation.
4. What about the thief on the cross?
 - I. What about other biblical accounts of faith?
 - A. Abraham
 - a. Abraham was justified by faith, not works – **Romans 4:1-4** – meaning he didn’t have to do anything?
 - b. Abraham was justified by works – **James 2:23-24**
 - c. **Genesis 15:6** – Abraham believed and was counted righteous before God.
 - i. Was this the point Abraham went from being unrighteous to righteous?
 - d. **Hebrews 11:8** – Abraham’s beginning of faith (**cf. Genesis 11-12**) – He acted, obeyed.
 - e. **Romans 4:19-22** – Abraham’s ongoing faith (**cf. Genesis 17**) – ***“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.’” (Genesis 17:1)***
 - f. **James 2:21-24** – Abraham’s matured faith (**cf. Genesis 22**) – He acted, obeyed.
 - B. Israel at the Red Sea
 - a. **Hebrews 11:29** – they were saved by faith when they moved forward.
 - b. **Exodus 14:13-15** – ***“Stand still, and see”*** (passive), ***“go forward”*** (active)
 - C. Israel at Jericho
 - a. **Hebrews 11:30** – the walls fell by faith but accompanied with corresponding action.

- b. **Joshua 6:2-5** – what if they refused? What if they didn't have the right number of days? What if the horns weren't blown? Was this strategy ever used before?
- D. Naaman
 - a. **2 Kings 5:9-14** – Naaman, commander of the Syrian army, was cleansed of leprosy when he did what Elisha told him to do.
 - b. **“What about the thief on the cross?”**
 - i. Who does the questioner identify with? – Naaman
 - ii. Heed his servants' plea – **(v. 13)** – where does the resistance in the question come from?
 - iii. What did Naaman do? – **“dipped” (v. 14)** – *ṭâbal* (HEB. “to immerse,” STRONG); *baptizo* (LXX, GK.)
- II. What about John's baptism?
 - A. **“The thief on the cross wasn't baptized.”**
 - a. How would we know? Can you prove he wasn't?
 - b. 3 years earlier, John was preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins – **Luke 3:3**
 - i. All of Judea and Jerusalem went – **Mark 1:5**
 - ii. Jesus baptized even more – **John 4:1-2**
 - B. The baptisms are not the same – **Acts 19:3-5**
 - C. However, both were divine commands – **Luke 7:27** (cf. **Malachi 3:1**) – John was God's messenger.
 - D. How did God view a refusal to be baptized according to His requirement for remission of sins under John's baptism? – **Luke 7:29-30** – God revealing His mind through Luke's pen.
 - a. **“acknowledged God's justice” (NASB)** – they did not think it unjust, or out of line, that God required baptism.
- III. What about Jesus' authority on earth to forgive sins?
 - A. It would be presumptuous to deny that anyone Jesus said He forgave was forgiven.
 - a. The thief on the cross – **Luke 23:42-43**
 - b. The sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet – **Luke 7:48-50**
 - c. The woman caught in adultery – **John 8:10-11**
 - d. The paralytic man – **Mark 2:1-12**
 - i. **(v. 5)** – forgiveness pronounced.
 - ii. **(vv. 6-9)** – forgiveness challenged.
 - iii. **(vv. 10-12)** – authority to forgive confirmed. **(“power”** – *exousia* – authority)

- B. It is also presumptuous to suggest Jesus did not, would not, or must not require something for salvation that He did not require of others before.
- a. **Mark 2:10** – **“power on earth to forgive sins”** – this is how Jesus forgave multiple times while on earth – **“your sins are forgiven you”**
 - b. Now Jesus sits at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven!
 - c. What did Jesus say would happen when He ascended?
 - i. **Matthew 16:19** – keys of kingdom given to apostles, what was bound and loosed revealed to them to give to others on earth.
 - ii. **John 20:21-23** – inspired by the Spirit, Jesus gave the apostles the power to forgive.
 - iii. **Acts 2:38** – baptism for the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus – i.e. by His authority, His command.
 - iv. **I.e. the power (authority) that forgave the thief, sinful woman, adulterous woman, and the paralytic man is the same power that forgives through the command of baptism.**
- IV. What about the New Covenant?
- A. When Jesus forgave the thief, they were still under the Old Covenant.
 - a. The Old Covenant did not require baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
 - B. Old – **Hebrews 8:7-13** – because Jeremiah, under the law of Moses, spoke of a New Covenant.
 - C. The New was not yet in place – **Hebrews 9:15-18** – the New was ratified by means of His death.
 - D. Jesus came in the flesh to sacrifice himself to deal with sin – **Hebrews 9:26-28**
 - E. Entering the flesh, through His death Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant – **Hebrews 10:19-20**
 - a. **“consecrated” (v. 20)** – *egkainizō* – “to bring about the beginning of someth., with implication that it is newly established, ratify, inaugurate, dedicate” (BDAG)
 - b. **9:18** – **“dedicated”** – *egkainizō*
 - c. **“through...His flesh”** – **10:5-10** – a body prepared, do the will of God, takes away first to establish the second.
 - F. The New Covenant requires baptism for the cleansing of the evil conscience – **Hebrews 10:22** (cf. **1 Peter 3:21**)
 - G. The New Covenant provides salvation that should not be neglected – **Hebrews 2:1-4**
- V. What about all the conversions in Acts?
- A. The book of Acts is a historical account of Jesus’ chosen ambassadors carrying out the mission He gave them to accomplish with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

- a. They had the keys to the kingdom – **Matthew 16:19**
 - b. They had the authority to forgive sins – **John 20:23**
 - c. They verified that everyone is saved in the same way – **Acts 15:11**
 - d. Every conversion account in the book of Acts demonstrates the way of salvation provided by Christ, and they all include the necessity of baptism.
- B. Jews on Pentecost – **Acts 2:38, 41**
 - C. Samaritans – **Acts 8:12**
 - D. Ethiopian Eunuch – **Acts 8:38**
 - E. Saul – **Acts 22:16**
 - F. Cornelius – **Acts 10:48**
 - G. Lydia – **Acts 16:15**
 - H. Philippian Jailer – **Acts 16:33**
 - I. Corinthians – **Acts 18:8**
- VI. What about him? What is that to you? You follow Jesus!
- A. “You must believe and be baptized to be saved.” (**Mark 16:16**)
 - B. “But what about the thief on the cross?” (**Luke 23:39-43**)
 - C. The scripture records a similar dialogue between Jesus and another – **John 21:18-22**
 - a. Peter’s initial reaction to Jesus’ foretelling of his death is met with a direct and unmistakable statement of authority.
 - b. **When the Lord of the universe tells us we must do something to be saved, we must not ask, “but what about that man?” We must simply submit to Him in obedient faith.**

Conclusion

1. When our Savior and Lord tells us to do something as plain and simple as repenting of our sins and being baptized for forgiveness, appealing to the thief on the cross for a reason NOT to do what He commands is unwise to say the least.
2. What does asking, “What about the thief on the cross?” say except, “Why should I have to do what Christ said when he didn’t?”
3. This is not a sober approach to the question of salvation.
4. Instead, we should all simply accept the clear requirements of scripture on salvation.