

THE MOST FAMOUS THIEF OF ALL TIME

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If one were to ask the question, “Who is the most famous thief of all time?,” it is likely that a myriad of answers would be given. Depending upon one’s age and interests such names as Bonnie and Clyde, Billy the kid, Jesse James, John Dillinger, or even Robin Hood might be given. However, the most famous thief in the religious world is the thief on the cross.

It is likely that no other’s name and circumstance has been evoked as often as his during conversations regarding the necessity of baptism. Many different denominations use the thief on the cross to cast aside scriptures such as Mark 16:16, Acts 2:28, Acts 22:16, or 1 Peter 3:21, all of which teach that baptism is a necessity for salvation, and that its purpose is to remove the past sins of the new believer. However, there are more than a few problems associated with using the thief on the cross as an example of baptism not being a condition of salvation.

First, the assumption that the thief was not baptized cannot be verified. In fact, there is more evidence in the Bible that points to his having been baptized, than to the contrary. It is said of John, “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:1-2). Notice the results of his preaching, “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and **all** Judaea, and **all** [emphasis mine] the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mt. 3:5-6). Is it not reasonable to think that the thief may have been in that number? Think back to the thief’s statement, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy **kingdom**” [emphasis mine] (Lk. 23:42). The thief would have learned about the kingdom from either John or Christ Himself and both taught the necessity of baptism in regard to salvation (Mk. 1:4; Mk. 16:16).

Second, those that use the thief as an example of how they can be saved, assume that one can be saved exactly like the thief was. In order for this to be the case, one would have to be beside the Lord on a cross and hear the words, “**Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.**” It has to be remembered, while on the earth the Lord could dispense spiritual blessings and forgive sin as He saw fit. Recall the words of Christ to the one with palsy, “**Son, thy sins be forgiven thee**” (Mk. 2:5). What Jesus did for the thief on the cross, under peculiar circumstances, has nothing to do with our salvation today.

Third, the assumption is made that one is bound by the same law under which the thief lived. He lived under the Old Testament Law, which was in effect until Christ died on the cross (Heb. 9:16-17). The Hebrews writer stated that, “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12). Christ is now our High Priest (Heb. 8:1) indicating a change of the law. Today, Christians live under, and all people are bound by, the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). If, by chance, the thief was not baptized there is still no argument that says we do not have to be; because the law under which he lived did not necessitate baptism. Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, nor any of the other great prophets of the Old Testament were ever baptized.

However, the law under which we live does teach baptism; as a condition for salvation (Mk. 16:16), for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), for us to have a new life (Rom. 6:3-4), to put on Christ (Gal. 3:27), and to place one in the church of Christ (Acts 2:47), the church that bears His name (Rom. 16:16). One should never allow an assumption to compromise his/her salvation!