



A Spiritual Encouragement Message
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Baptism & The Thief On The Cross

by Andrew Lemus

Often times when studying the gospel with someone and teaching them about baptism the question arises “What about the thief on the cross?” You see, when Jesus was on the cross there were two criminals that were crucified next to him. One of the criminals ridiculed Jesus and the other responded by saying “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” (Luke 23:39-41) The criminal that defended Jesus then asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into His kingdom (Luke 23:42). It was then that Jesus told the criminal that “today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

The valid question that is often asked is how was this criminal able to go to heaven if he wasn't baptized? The best answer is a fairly simple one. Jesus had the power on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:10). When he told the thief on the cross he was going to paradise, he was going to paradise (Mark 2:10).

There is also the truth that the criminal on the cross couldn't have been saved the same way we are today because the gospel was not complete when the criminal died. The gospel includes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1Corinthians 15:1-4). When the criminal died Jesus hadn't been buried and raised from the dead. When someone obeys the gospel today their sins are forgiven through the death of Jesus and they are made spiritually alive through the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 5:10; 1Peter 3:21; Colossians 2:11-12). When the criminal died on the cross, he was unable to partake in the gospel because the gospel wasn't completed.

In order to be saved like the thief on the cross you would need to have Jesus physically on earth with us and you would need Him to tell you that your sins are forgiven. But Jesus is not here on earth physically but has ascended to heaven and is now sitting at the right hand of God (Acts 1:9, Ephesians 1:20). He has told us how to be saved and that is through hearing the gospel, believing it, repenting of your sins, confessing Jesus as Lord, and being immersed into Christ. If the criminal that was on the cross was

instead alive today in our generation and asked the Lord in heaven to save Him, his salvation would come the same way it comes to all who live today, and that is through faithful obedience to the gospel (Romans 6:17; Mark 16:15-16).

So if you find yourself sharing the gospel with someone and they question the validity of it due to the thief on the cross, remember that Jesus had the power while on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:10) and that the thief on the cross could not be saved by the gospel because it had not yet been completed (1Cor. 15:1-4, Rom. 1:16).