

What About the Thief? Luke 23:39-43

While each of the other accounts of the death of Jesus tells of two men, or thieves, that were crucified with Jesus, Luke is the only one to relate this story for us.

- I. Notice some facts about the other two men that were crucified with Jesus.
 - A. These two men were common criminals (23:32).
 1. In fact, each of the accounts, except John, call them a criminal or a thief.
 2. They were getting their just punishment.
 - B. These criminals were on opposite sides of Jesus (23:33).
 1. There was one on the right hand, and the other on the left.
 - C. These thieves were also mocking Jesus.
 1. All who passed by mocked Jesus while He was hanging on the cross (23:35-38).
 2. Even the thieves began to revile (lit. “defame”) Him.
 3. Mt. 27:44 - **Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.**
 4. Mark 15:32 - **Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.**

- II. Notice the circumstances surrounding this story.
 - A. One thief is blaspheming Jesus (23:39) (apparently, the other had a change of heart).
 - B. The other condemned himself and defended Jesus (23:40-41).
 - C. This second thief then makes a request of Jesus (23:42).
 1. This thief has admitted to doing wrong.
 2. Now he is asking Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into His kingdom.
 3. This thief was asking for eternal life.
 - D. Jesus response: **"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (23:43)**

- III. As we begin this study, we must ask ourselves the question: *“Was this thief saved?”*
 - A. If the answer is no, then we have no need of proceeding in this discussion.
 - B. If the answer is yes, then we need to understand why he was saved and see if that applies to us today.
 - C. Of course, we know that the thief was saved on this day because Jesus told him that they would be together in Paradise.

- IV. Notice some arguments from some about the salvation of this thief and how it applies to us today.
 - A. This story is widely taught to teach that faith alone will save a person.

1. It is also important to note that this is **not** an example of salvation by faith alone.
 2. Of course, the thief believed that Jesus was the Son of God (we know that based on his actions).
 3. However, he did not have the kind of faith that is required for salvation today.
 - a. Rom. 10:9 - *that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*
 - b. To have salvation today, we “believe in [our] heart that God has raised Him from the dead.”
 - c. This thief could not believe that Jesus was raised from the dead because He had not even died yet.
- B. Some also argue that because the thief was not baptized, we do not have to be baptized today.
1. There are several problems with this theory.
 - a. The thief did not live under the law of Christ, but rather the Law of Moses (Jesus had to die before the New Law would take effect).
 - 1) Col. 2:14 - *having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*
 - 2) Eph. 2:13-16 - *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. {14} For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, {15} having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, {16} and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*
 - 3) Heb. 9:16-17 - *For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. {17} For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.*
 - 4) Heb. 10:9-10 - *then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. {10} By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*
 - b. In baptism we have forgiveness through His blood (Eph. 1:7), but His blood had not been shed at this point.
 - 1) Rev. 1:5 - *To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,*

- c. Also, from the time of the resurrection of Jesus until now, baptism has been required of man.
- 1) Mt. 28:19-20 - Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, {20} teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.
 - 2) Mk. 16:16 - He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.
 - 3) Acts 2:38 - Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
 - 4) Acts 9:18 - Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.
 - 5) Acts 22:16 - And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.
 - 6) Acts 10:47-48 - "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" {48} And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.
 - 7) Acts 16:33-34 - And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. {34} Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.
 - 8) Rom. 6:1-4 - What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? {2} Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? {3} Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? {4} Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.
 - 9) Gal. 3:27 - For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
 - 10) Col. 2:11-12 - In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, {12} buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

- 11) I Pet. 3:21 - There is also an antitype which now saves us-- baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
- C. Some argue that Jesus was referring to what would happen later (for eternity), not that he was going to heaven that day (the sentence structure would be: “Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise”).
1. Jesus uses the name “Paradise,” not heaven.
 - a. This would be the same as “Abraham’s bosom” (Lk. 16:22).
 - b. In fact, Jesus Himself says that He did not go to the Father until the ascension (Jn. 20:17).
 - c. This argument also depends upon the assumption that while Jesus body was in the tomb, His Spirit was there as well.
 2. Jesus did, however, go to Hades (the place of the dead).
 - a. Acts 2:27 - For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
 - b. Acts 2:30-32 - Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, {31} he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. {32} This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.
- V. Notice some other information to consider.
- A. We need to understand that when Jesus was on this earth, He had the power to forgive the sins of whomever He wished.
 1. Notice some examples
 - a. Mark 2:1-12 – Jesus forgives a paralytic
 - b. John 8:1-12 – Jesus forgives an adulteress woman
 - c. Luke 9:36-50 – Jesus forgives a sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus with fragrant oil.
 2. However, now that He is not living physically on this earth, we can only be forgiven according to His will.
 - a. Notice the following example
 - b. As long as a man lives on this earth, he may do whatever he wishes with his possessions. However, when he dies, his possessions can only be given according to what his will states.
 - c. Heb. 9:16-17 - For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. {17} For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.
 - B. The main thing to remember is that this story recorded by Luke is not one of means of salvation, but rather one about forgiveness.