

“But What About the Thief on the Cross?”

by Bryan Gibson

All I did was read to her first what Jesus said told His apostles to preach, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16), and then what these same apostles spoke in the name of Jesus, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). I guess she didn’t agree with Jesus, because she responded with this question, “But what about the thief on the cross?” She didn’t have to explain; I knew where she was headed. Jesus saved the thief without baptism, so why couldn’t he do the same for her.

That Jesus saved the thief is without question. He forgave the thief (Luke 23:43), just like he forgave the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12), and the woman who washed his feet (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus had “power on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10), and that power was demonstrated when He simply spoke their sins away. But what about the words Jesus spoke through His apostles, after He left this earth to go back to His Father? Don’t these words have power, too? Can we really afford to ignore them?

To that end, here’s my Biblical response to the question about the thief. “But what about the 3000 souls on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-41), and what about the Samaritans (Acts 8:12-13), the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:26-40), Saul (Acts 9:18; 22:16), Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:48), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-34), Crispus and the other Corinthians (Acts 18:8), and the twelve men in Ephesus (Acts 19:5)?” These people were all baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins, and they did so in obedience to the will of Christ, a will which came into effect AFTER the death of Christ (Hebrews 9:15-17).

Remember—the thief, the paralytic, and the woman who washed the feet of Jesus—these three people were all saved while Jesus was on the earth, and before His will and testament went into effect. What does His will and testament teach US to do to be saved? That’s really the only question that matters.

The person I referred to at the beginning of this article, the lady to whom I read the words of Jesus—I couldn’t persuade her to be baptized for the remission of sins, but perhaps I can persuade you. Imagine for a moment that one of your loved ones has passed away, and the entire family is talking about how much they loved and admired this person. Maybe it’s your father and you’re talking about how much he sacrificed for the family. A few days pass and it’s time to execute his last will and testament. After all that talk, can you even imagine ignoring his will, or perhaps changing it in some way to suit your own needs? No you can’t, but that’s exactly what some try to do to the last will and testament of Jesus Christ. We love and admire Him, and we certainly appreciate the sacrifice He made for us all. The best way to prove it is to faithfully execute His will. “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).