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What About the Thief on the Cross?

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There have probably been hundreds of thieves who have been crucified throughout history. Two were crucified when Jesus was nailed to the cross- one to the right of Him and one to His left (Lk. 23:33). One of the thieves crucified with Jesus railed at Jesus until the very end (Lk. 23:39). The other may have railed at Jesus in the beginning, but near the end of the ordeal this thief rebuked his partner in crime and asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom (Lk. 23:40-42). Jesus answered this thief by saying, *"Today, shalt thou be with Me in paradise"* (Lk. 23:42). It is this last thief that most people have in mind when they ask, "What about the thief on the cross?" Generally, they want to know if this thief was saved without baptism, and if so, how can it be said today that baptism is essential to salvation?

A study of Hades, the place where the spirits of the dead go to await Jesus' return and the judgment, would suggest that one who goes to *"paradise"* is comforted, hence, saved. There is nothing in the scriptures to indicate that this thief had ever been baptized. Jesus did not command him to be baptized on this occasion, and given the thief's precarious predicament, there was no opportunity for him to be baptized.

However, baptism in the name of the Lord was not required for salvation before the death of Jesus. Baptism in the name of the Lord is a part of the New Testament, not the Old Testament. The New Testament, the will of the Lord, did not become effective until after the death of Jesus. The scriptures teach, *"For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth"* (Hebrews 9:16,17).

The request made by "the thief on the cross" and Jesus' answer came before the death of Jesus and before Jesus' New Testament took effect. Hence, the thief was not required to be baptized in the name of the Lord to be saved. How could one be *"buried with Him (Jesus, ^{hh}) by baptism into death"* before Jesus died? (Romans 6:4). Baptism in the name of the Lord for the remission of sins would be preached beginning on Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:38).

While on earth, Jesus had authority to forgive sins. He could dispense forgiveness in any manner He wished that was consistent with His righteous nature (Mk. 2:5; Lk. 7:36-50). His authority has not diminished since His death and resurrection. Jesus now has all authority in Heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), but He has said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:16). No man can change Jesus' will, and only those who obey His word have the promise of salvation (Hebrews 5:9).

Many honest and sincere people have been misled by religious leaders and others who have deliberately or mistakenly pointed to the thief on the cross as their example of salvation rather than pointing to the words of the gospel and examples of conversions after Pentecost. What the thief did or did not do for his salvation has nothing to do with what the Lord requires today. The New Testament teaches that we must be baptized to be saved!

"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16)

All spiritual blessings are in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). We are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:27). Baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Through baptism we wash away our sins (Acts 22:16). Without remission of sins we could not be saved.

"Baptism doth now save us..." (1 Peter 3:21)

How David Handled The Worst of Times

David A. Cox

“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? — (Psalm 13:1-2).

It is often said, “Time flies when you are having fun.” How that is reversed when times are difficult. When the trials of life come, life seems to move in slow motion, and we wonder if it will ever change. As David pens Psalm 13, he repeatedly asks, “How long?” David is at a point where he wonders if he has been forgotten. Everyone can certainly relate to this at times. However, when David finds himself in deep anguish, he calls out to the Lord. Why does David do this if God has forgotten him? David has faith that even in the worst circumstances, he knows God is there and loves him. Let us notice this in the psalm.

David Pours Out His Heart In Prayer

The first thing David does is call upon the Lord in prayer. In this psalm, David is making a petition to the Lord about the things he is enduring. How much we need to see the value of the relationship between David and the Lord. David calls out to the Lord to “Consider and hear me” (Psalm 13:3). It is reassuring that even amidst the heartbreaks and disappointments in this life, we have a God who wants to hear from us (1 Peter 5:7). David’s relationship with God gave him an assurance that God would listen to, or hear him. David asked God to “enlighten my eyes.” David’s request was to see things the way God sees them. We often may not understand why we suffer the things we do, but may we ask the Lord to see things the way He sees them. David desires this understanding so that he will not fall prey to the enemies’ appeal to draw him away from the Lord.

Hope For Tomorrow

In all the difficulties David is facing, he still has hope. David proclaims, “But I have trusted in Your mercy” (Psalm 13:5). David has put his trust in the unfailing mercy of God. God is forever loving His people. Psalm 146:8 says, “The Lord loves the righteous.” What a wondrous thought that David could remind himself about God’s great love and mercy that never fails. In the best of times, and especially in the worst of times. Because of this great mercy and love, David would say, “My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13:5b-6). David expresses the truth that even in times of great trial, there is hope and rejoicing. In Romans 8:35-39, Paul makes the same point. In all the trials, hardships, and persecutions the first-century Christians suffered, Paul says, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). Why is this the case? Because nothing will separate us from the love of God.

As we see in David, let us learn the value of an unyielding faith. May we learn the value of our faith in the best of times but even more in the worst of times. May we always remember to look to the Lord from where we get our strength in every circumstance in life.

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