



and BELIEVE in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, YOU WILL BE SAVED” (Romans 10:9-10, emphasis mine). “REPENT, and each one of you BE BAPTIZED in the name of Jesus Christ FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS” (Acts 2:38, emphasis mine). “Baptism now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21).

Conclusion

When the subject of salvation arises, the question is often asked, “What about the thief on the cross?” Hopefully it has been demonstrated that an examination of the text shows this story to be, not an instruction manual for salvation, but a contrast between two attitudes and a snapshot of what Christ’s sacrifice would ultimately mean for all who choose to follow Him. Further, it would be good for us to remember that this criminal was under the Old Covenant, thus was not saved in the same way we are today. Ultimately, though, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. We must conform our lives to what He has instructed us to do.

I could not begin to deny that faith saves. There is simply too much evidence in Scripture that says it does. Likewise, I could not begin to advocate that ONLY faith saves. To the contrary, if we truly have faith in the gospel of Christ we will desire to conform our lives to His teaching. We will repent of our sins, confess Him as our Lord, and be immersed in water. The Scriptures tell us that all of these things are necessary for salvation in Christ today. Let’s have enough faith in Christ to submit to Him completely!



of salvation. However, following Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, He told His disciples what they were to teach. “**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**” (Matthew 28:18-19). The disciples obeyed. They taught men “**to observe all**” that Christ commanded. What did they teach? “**If you CONFESS with your mouth Jesus as Lord,**

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16.10

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

March 9,
2014

Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Eddie Cook
Steve Dixon
Jack Langley
Neil Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott

Evangelists:

Kyle Pope
Andrew Dow



What About the Thief on the Cross?

(Luke 23:39-43) By Andrew Dow

In the midst of our Savior’s crucifixion Luke records:

One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, ‘Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!’ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, ‘Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he was saying, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!’ And He said to Him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise’” (Luke 23:39-40, NASB).

It is not uncommon for the denominational world to use these verses in an attempt to prove their “faith only” position. This account is offered as an example of one who expressed faith in Christ and, apart from any other act of obedience, was offered the free gift of salvation. After all, they would argue, if Jesus can pardon this man without some prerequisite such as baptism, then can He not do so for us as well?

Is this an accurate representation of what the text teaches? Does this coincide with truth found in the entirety of Scripture? If we look at this text in conjunction with the rest of Scripture we will be forced to

conclude that our salvation is not a matter of simple faith, but rather we are saved when our faith moves us to obedience. Let's begin with a closer examination of the text.

Examining the Text

Luke first introduced us to these condemned criminals a few verses prior where he wrote, **“When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left”** (Luke 23:33). It appears that Jesus went through the crucifixion procedures along side these two men. The trio died together. However, what immediately sticks out is the



obvious contrast between the two men on either side of our Lord. We're told that **“one of the criminals... was hurling abuse at Him,”** while the second man was **“rebuking”** the first for his actions (Luke 23:39-40). This a contrast of attitudes. The first man is self-serving. This attitude is demonstrated in that he said to Jesus, **“Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”** (Luke 23:39). The second man is sorrowful and repentant. Such an attitude is evident by his recognition that **“we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds,”** and his humble plea, **“Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”** (Luke 23:41-42).

Observe now another aspect of the text. The mocking of Jesus comes from three sources in this text. First, the bystanders and the rulers **“were sneering at Him, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God’”** (Luke 23:35). Second, the soldiers taunted Him by saying, **“If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!”** (Luke 23:36-37). Finally, the unrepentant criminal **“was hurling abuse at Him, saying, ‘Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!’”** (Luke 23:39). There can be no doubt that these things were said in a sarcastic, derogatory tone. Did you notice, though, the common theme among each of these statements? Our Lord was mocked because He would not SAVE HIMSELF from the cross. The people participating saw this as a victory. They assumed that if Jesus really was God, He would have saved Himself. Do not look past the irony of these statements. While they were telling Christ to save Himself, He was dying in their place.

Finally, Christ's words to the repentant criminal are especially noteworthy. Jesus told the criminal, **“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise”** (Luke 23:43). This is one of only seven recorded times Jesus spoke while hanging on the cross.

Why did Jesus say this? In this short account, Christ simply demonstrated from the cross what His death would mean for those who would conform to His will. While the mob was calling for Jesus to save Himself, our Lord saved a criminal—one who admittedly deserved death. Therefore, this is not an instruction manual for salvation, but a contrast between attitudes. Jesus' words to the second man clearly demonstrate which attitude is desirable.

Some More Considerations

Having looked at some things specifically regarding the text, let's note a few observations that may help us understand the issue as a whole. **First, was the thief on the cross a Christian?** Many people will argue that since Jesus saved the criminal outside of baptism, baptism must not be necessary for salvation today. This argument suggests that this man obeyed the gospel and became a Christian in the same way that we are commanded. That simply is not the case. Remember that the Law of Moses was still in place when Jesus pardoned this criminal. Paul wrote, **“I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you... by which also you are saved... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”** (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The gospel message that saves us today concerns Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. When the criminal on the cross received salvation Christ had not died, let alone been buried and raised. Therefore, we cannot use this man's salvation as our pattern.

Second, Jesus has the authority to forgive. We can observe Jesus using this authority throughout His work on earth. On one occasion, our Lord, upon seeing a paralytic, said to him, **“Son, your sins are forgiven”**

(Mark 2:5). When the scribes began to question Christ's ability to do this, Jesus demonstrated His authority to forgive sins by healing the man physically as well (Mark 2:8-12). We see this again when a woman came to Christ, anointing His feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair (Luke 7:44). Jesus said to this woman, **“Your sins have been forgiven”** (Luke 7:48). This authority astonished those who were present (Luke 7:49)! What is the lesson here? Jesus has the authority to forgive sins in whatever way he sees fit. We see several instances of Him dismissing the sins of others, but those in no way set a pattern for our own forgiveness of sins. For that, we must look to what He has revealed to us about salvation.

Finally, what are we commanded? If Luke 23:39-43 was the only inspired text given to us, it might be appropriate to conclude that faith in Christ is the only condition