

So You Think That You Can Be Saved Like The Thief On The Cross?

You hear it preached everywhere all the time. You can be saved just like the thief on the cross was saved. Just pray and ask Jesus for salvation and you can receive it. This is the "sinner's prayer." But does the Bible teach that salvation is received by the "sinner's prayer" or does it teach something else?

Actually, the Bible teaches something else. This is difficult for many people to accept because of the preponderance of religious groups that promote a "faith only" salvation. Just believe in Jesus and you can be saved they say.

The "faith only" doctrine has been erected upon the false premise that the way in which the thief on the cross received salvation is the way that people can receive salvation today. But those who are open to hearing the actual truth and who will allow the Bible to speak for itself will recognize that the "thief on the cross faith only salvation" doctrine is not true for men and women seeking salvation today.

Here are the reasons that no one today can be saved like the thief on the cross was saved.

The first reason is because the thief on the cross lived under the Old Testament dispensation. That dispensation ended when Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, was crucified, shed His blood, was buried, and then resurrected. The New Testament dispensation was inaugurated at that time with the Old Testament dispensation being nailed to the cross. It is not possible to live under the Old Testament Mosaic Law and those who are familiar with the weakness of that Law surely are thankful that they do not.

The second reason is because now, unlike the thief on the cross, one must be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ to receive the forgiveness of

sins. The thief did not. Those who object to the necessity to be baptized use the thief as an argument against baptism in water. "The thief was never baptized!," they say. But the Bible does not say that he never was. Nor does it say that he was. But it is very probable that he was. After all, Matthew 3:5-6 says that "...Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins." No one can say with any certitude that the thief was not among those who was baptized. But, of course, even if he had been, his immersion would not have been for the remission of sins because that was not possible to receive until the blood of Christ was poured out on the cross.

The third reason is because Christ is not ministering on earth today as He was in the days of the thief. During the time of His earthly ministry He could "speak salvation" to whosoever He willed. He did this not only in the case of the thief but also for the woman in Luke 7, the paralytic in Mark 2, blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10, the Samaritan leper in Luke 17, and the blind man in Luke 18. The case of forgiveness to especially remember is that of the paralytic. In Mark 2:10 Jesus said: "...that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins..." While Jesus was on earth, and He was when the thief asked Jesus to remember Him when Jesus came into His "kingdom," He could dispense salvation to whosoever He willed. But Jesus is not ministering on earth today and in His New Testament He has inaugurated a new way to receive salvation.

The fourth reason is because the thief did not obey the gospel. Of course, he could not obey the gospel. The gospel was not yet effective. Jesus had not died. He had not yet been buried. He certainly was not yet resurrected from the

dead. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the gospel says I Corinthians 15:3-4. Today, in this New Testament dispensation, one must obey the gospel to be saved. Listen to II Thessalonians 1:8. The Lord Jesus will return "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Obedience to the gospel is essential to receive salvation. Listen to Hebrews 5:9. Jesus "became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Obedience to the gospel is essential to receive salvation. Listen to I Peter 4:17. "...what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" Once gain, obedience to the gospel is essential to receive salvation.

Now remember, the New Testament - the new will of Christ - states that one must obey the gospel. But how does one obey the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? One cannot unless one believes in Christ. An obedient belief is essential. If one does not believe he will, of course, not obey. But if he truly believes, he will do whatever Christ's will is to be saved. What does Christ say must be obeyed?

First, one must believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. John 8:24 - "...if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

Second, one must repent of sin. Luke 13:3 and 5 - "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Repentance is the dying part of the gospel; it is turning one's back on sin, determined not to sin any more. One who truly repents is like a person who is physically dead; sin no longer has control of one's life.

Third, one must be baptized, immersed, in water

in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. This is the buried part of the gospel. Just like Christ was buried in the tomb, being immersed is taking the dead person who has repented and then burying him. This is what you do with people who have died; you bury them. You place them in a tomb and cover them up with dirt. In conversion this is a spiritual death and a spiritual burial. The person who has died spiritually to sin must be buried, not in a plot of earth, but in a body of water. Listen to what your Bible says in Romans 6:3 and 4 - "...do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death..." One who is Scripturally baptized is baptized into the death of Jesus of Nazareth. It was at or in His death that He shed His blood. If one is baptized into His death, one is baptized into His blood that saves.

Fourth, one must resurrect. Unlike the physical death of a body that is buried in the earth and awaits the coming of Christ, the spiritual death and spiritual burial of one's spirit is resurrected from the spiritual tomb, or grave, of water. Again, returning to Romans, consider verses 4 and 5: "...just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."

The Word of God says that men and women must obey the gospel of Christ for salvation. To obey the death of the gospel, one must die in repentance; to obey the burial of the gospel, one must be buried - baptized - in water; to obey the resurrection of the

gospel, one must resurrect from the grave of water into which he was buried. There is nothing difficult or mystical about any of this but the proliferation of false doctrine has clouded the simple truth.

There is one similarity between the conversion of the thief on the cross and the conversion of men and women who live under the New Testament dispensation. Both are crucified with Christ. Of course, the thief was literally crucified at the side of Christ on Golgotha. But those converted to Christ today are crucified with Christ spiritually. Romans 6:6 says, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him..." When did this crucifixion take place? In the context of Romans 6 it was when one died in repentance, was buried in baptism, and was resurrected from that grave to "walk in newness of life."

No, one cannot be saved in the same way that the thief on the cross was saved; but, than God, one can be saved and one will be saved when he obeys the gospel terms of salvation. It is our prayer that many will.



(A detailed booklet on this subject and others concerning the necessity to be immersed in water for salvation is available from this ministry. Write for further information.)

Multiple copies of this tract are available from:

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