

“What About The Thief On The Cross?”

Ever had this discussion?

You have to be baptized to be saved.

Yea, then what about the thief on the cross?

Ummm.....

When discussing how to be saved, people often find teachings about baptism, and rightly so. Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16)

This clearly places baptism before salvation. In other words, a person cannot be saved before being baptized.

But then we remember the thief on the cross. There were actually two thieves, but we’re referring to the one who acknowledged his sins, spoke up for Jesus when the other thief was mocking Him, and petitioned Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. Then Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43)

We know the thief died while on the cross, so he was saved without being baptized.

But this is not an exception or a special case.

1. Remember what baptism is. Baptism is a *burial* in water, symbolic of the death of our old man of sin, and our rising to walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:1-4)

2. Remember what the gospel is. The basic facts of the gospel are the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), which are pictured in baptism.

3. Notice *when* Jesus said this:

Before He was buried, or was resurrected. The events of the gospel had not yet been accomplished.

Before He told His disciples to “preach the gospel to every creature.” (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16)

Before the Old Covenant was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Jesus and the thief (assuming he was Jewish) were born and died under the Law of Moses. (Galatians 4:4)

Before the New Covenant was in place. (Hebrews 9:16-17)

Before the gospel was preached for the first time on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit guided the apostles. (Acts 2)

Summary:

The thief was not expected to be baptized in the name of Jesus. Jesus had not yet been buried or raised. Jesus had not yet instructed His apostles to make disciples by baptizing them. The gospel had not yet been accomplished or preached.

Asking the thief to be baptized would’ve been like asking George Washington to get a driver’s license! (Yes, he lived before cars had been invented. That’s the point; it’s a matter of *timing*.)