

**The Thief on the Cross**  
**Luke 23:39-42**  
By Russ Earl

Thesis: I want to show the importance of understanding the scene with the Christ and one of the thieves on the cross.

Intro:

1. How many times have you heard someone bring up the thief on the cross when the subject of salvation is brought up?
2. Today we will address the scene of Christ and the conversation He had with one of the thieves on the cross.

- I. The Thief lived & died under a different law than what we are under today.
  1. A person lives and dies in accordance to the law they are under.
  2. A law not yet in affect has now power. It is only logical that a law not in affect is not one we have to submit to.
  3. The old law was still in affect at the time of Christ being on the cross and during his entire earthly ministry. He kept the law and fulfilled it (**Mt 5:17**)
- B. The New Testament law was not in affect when the thief was on the cross.
  1. The promise to the thief was made while both were still under the old law.
- II. The Thief died before Christ ever said “He who believes & is baptized.”
  1. The great commission given by Christ that INCLUDED baptism wasn’t given until after His resurrection (**Mt 28:19**).
  2. Christ would not speak the words of **Mark 16:16** until 43 days after his statement to thief on the cross.
  3. It wasn’t until 50 days after the scene on the cross that Peter would tell me what they needed to do in **Acts 2:38**.
  4. The statement on the cross was made years before (3 or 4) before Saul was told to wash away his sins in **Acts 22:16**
  5. It was about 8 years before Cornelius and his household were baptized (**Acts 10:48**)
  6. It was about 30 years before Peter would write that “baptism now saves us” (**1 Pt 3:21**).
- III. The church was not in existence when the thief was on the cross
  1. Since the establishment of the church it has been God who has placed every member into the Church (**Acts 2:47**).
  2. Every spiritual blessing is in the body of Christ, the church (**Eph 1:3, 22-23**).
    - a. Since salvation is a spiritual blessing then one must be a part of the church to be saved.
  3. How does one get into the church were these spiritual blessings reside? Notice what Paul says in **Galatians 3:26-27**.
    - a. Thus, the door to the church is baptism (**Rom 6:3, 1 Cor 12:13**).
    - b. The thief lived before the church was in existence thus he was an exception since the church was not yet in existence.

IV. Christ could use His power as He chose during His lifetime.

1. During the life of Christ on the earth He had the ability and authority to do certain things.
  - a. One included the forgiveness of sins (**Mt 9:6**).
2. While on the earth Christ dispensed blessings as was His will, or as He saw fit.
  - a. Christ makes this point in the parable of the vineyard in **Matthew 20:15**.
3. Christ had the ability and the authority to forgive sins, perform miracles, and bestow his blessings as He saw fit. *One of which was pardoning one of the thieves on the cross and granting entrance into paradise.*
  - a. Many times in the N.T. it is clear that Christ knew the hearts and minds of men.
    - i. Knowing their minds/thoughts - **Matthew 9:4; Luke 11:17**
    - ii. Knowing hearts – **Luke 9:47, John 16:6**
  - b. Thus, it is fitting that He knew the heart and mind of the thief and saw fit to pardon him and grant him entrance into paradise.
    - i. He is the righteous judge (2 Tim 4:8).

Conc:

1. We have seen from the scriptures why we today cannot be redeemed without baptism.
2. What we have to ask ourselves is not how to answer the question about the thief on the cross, but why so many appeal to the thief on the cross.
3. We must understand that we must obey the law in which we are under. Today, we **KNOW** we are under the New Testament law, therefore we today cannot be saved unless we follow the commands found in the New Testament law.

### **Hear**

Romans 10:17

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

### **Believe**

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever + in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

### **Repent**

Luke 13:3

I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

### **Confess**

Rom 10:9 — Rom 10:10

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

### **Be baptized**

Acts 2:38

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 22:16

And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’

### **Remain Faithful**

Revelation 2:10

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.