

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS (1)

By Keith Greer

In today's religious world's understanding, the thief on the cross remains the most popular thief who ever lived. Even though nothing in his life commends him to others or encourages them to follow his example, which led him to death on a cross, untold millions glorify him. How so? They use him as an example of how to be saved today. Truly in one respect, he really is an example for those who desire to be saved without meeting God's terms and conditions for salvation.

Just tell someone what Jesus said about baptism, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." {Mark 16:16}; many often counter with, "**the thief on the cross was saved without being baptized and so can I.**" Sadly, the thief has misled legions of followers seeking to replace God's plan with one more appealing to them. Unfortunately, they forget that two thieves died there, and that both taunted and reviled Jesus before they died.

The thieves conduct. Consider what God said concerning the conduct of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. "Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads...Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing." {Matthew 27:38,39,44} "Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him." {Mark 15:31,32} How much difference do you see between the two thieves? Both reviled Jesus and cast the same in his teeth! Look at Luke's account. "Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, 'If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.' But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.'" {Luke 23:39-42}

Please take the time to put this all together. The first of the two thieves unselfishly asked Jesus to save Himself and both of them. The second thought only of himself. Were they sincere? Earlier they had reviled Him, and said the same things as the chief priests who called Him the King of Israel. Where did they get the idea that He was a king? It had been written in derision above His head. Did the thief understand the concept of the kingdom? Remember, the disciples had been with Jesus for three and one-half years, and after His death they would return to their fishing nets.

Did the thief's salvation occur without baptism? We have no proof that he had not been baptized. The Bible says, "Then 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." {Matthew 3:5,6} The thief may have been in the number of those who obeyed. Jesus promised the thief that he would go into the realm of the unseen with Him—because he was going to die like Jesus. To be sure, God knew the thief's heart, and whatever his outcome, the Son would judge him justly. While there is much debate concerning whether the thief was saved or lost, we must, in the end, leave it up to the Lord—His Judge in the end.

{2 Corinthians 5:10}.

Now you know the background of the event under discussion. We will examine some sound reasons why people today cannot be saved like the thief. Despite popular religious teaching, people often forget some of the finer points – the thief on the cross is not an example of how we are saved today! ***