

Question – answer:

Leon in visiting with a friend this week, we talked about becoming a Christian and she mentioned that she knew baptism wasn't necessary for us to be saved since the thief on the cross was saved without being baptized. How would you answer her?

There are a couple of very important points to consider on this question. First, it should be remembered that the thief lived and died under the Old Testament law. The New Covenant, or law of Christ wouldn't take effect until Peter preached on Pentecost in Acts 2. The Old Law was nailed to the cross (Romans 7:4-7; Colossians 2:12-16). The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). It makes no more sense to use the example of the thief and how he was saved than to use the command Jesus gave to the rich young ruler on how we are to be saved. Yet, I've never once heard anyone say, "I want to be saved in the way Jesus commanded the rich young ruler to be saved." Remember Jesus told him to keep the commandments and he said he had since youth, then Jesus told him to go sell all he had and give it to the poor and then come follow me." Why do we rush to the thief on the cross as an example but never to the rich young ruler?

The Other thing that should stand out is that we do not know that the thief had not been baptized. Remember that during John the Baptist ministry all Jerusalem and Judea went out to him to be baptized. How do we know that the thief wasn't among those who went to John or to Jesus' disciples to be baptized for the forgiveness of his sins? The thief definitely understood things about Jesus that the other thief nor the people in the crowd understood. He declared that while he and his fellow thief deserved what they were getting Jesus hadn't done anything to deserve such punishment. He knew that Jesus was about to establish a kingdom. He pleaded with him, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He understood Jesus was more than just a man and had power beyond death. The fact it wasn't mentioned that he had been baptized earlier doesn't necessarily mean he hadn't been.

Think of one point beyond that. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Salvation is in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10). The only means the New Testament gives for us getting into Christ is by being baptized into Him based on our faith. (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27).