

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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The Thief of the Cross Revisited

"Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." (Psalm 19:12-13).

I have addressed the subject of the "Thief on the Cross" in a previous post. However, some keep referring to his example of forgiveness as an example of salvation today by faith *only*. I cited the verses above from the book of Psalms to make a point about "presumptuous sins." Too many today base their religious beliefs on false assumptions because they make speculations for which they have no facts. They "presume" something to be true when they have no facts to back up their conclusions. Such actions are risky to say the least and when they lead one to base religious conclusions and practices on such speculative reasoning, they are guilty of "presumptuous sin." Please, think about it and be careful, very careful how you handle the Word of God.

Disciples of the Lord are to "KNOW the Truth" (John 8:32). Not speculate, guess, or make assumptions but "KNOW." So, when someone says the thief on the cross was saved and was not baptized, how do they "KNOW" that? Answer: they do not. They are guessing and for those who believe in salvation by faith only, hoping that he was not baptized. John the baptizer baptized hundreds if not thousands of people who went out from all of Judea to be baptized by him (Mark 1:5). Jesus is said to have made and baptized more disciples than John (John 4:1-2). Of the thousands of people that John and Jesus baptized, how does anyone "KNOW" that the thief was not one of them? Someone might ask, "Well, why did he end up on the cross if that were the case?" Good question. There were disciples who followed Jesus but when they heard His hard sayings, it was said of them "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (John 6:66). Could the thief on the cross have been a former baptized disciple of our Lord who had walked away, gone into a life of crime, and ended up on the cross next to his Lord he had formerly accepted and then rejected? Well, no one "KNOWS." This is exactly my point. I could speculate and make assumptions about the thief being a repentant former

believer that are just as valid as the speculations that Baptist, Methodist, et. al. preachers make that the thief was not baptized. The fact of the matter, no one "KNOWS" whether the thief was baptized or not. So, instead of basing our beliefs on what we do not "KNOW," let us talk about what we do "KNOW." Ready?

1. We "KNOW" that whether the thief on the cross was baptized or not has nothing to do with us and is not an example for us today for salvation. How so? The thief was alive while Jesus was on earth and our Lord had the power to forgive sins under any condition He chose. "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)" (Mark 2:10). The Lord had previously announced to the man his sins were forgiven. Here is something I want my Baptist and Methodist friends to notice: "When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." (Mark 2:5). Notice that Jesus forgave the man of his sins when He saw the faith of the man's friends. No word is said about the man who was sick having faith and absolutely no confession from his mouth that Jesus was Lord. The Lord responded to the faith of His friends in removing the man's sins. Now, I wonder why my Baptist and Methodist friends do not refer to the example of the man who was sick as an example of how a person can be forgiven of their sins? No faith and no confession. While on earth and before His death, Jesus could forgive a person because of the faith of that person's friends. It was the Lord's right to do so. Folks, we live after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Before His death, Jesus' testament was not in force and He had the power to bless others with or without conditions with forgiveness of sin. However, after His death, burial, and resurrection, we must look to what was said and done for forgiveness because His testament is now in force. "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth." (Hebrews 9:16-17).

2. We "KNOW" that after His death Jesus said, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15-16). "And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:46-48). "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:18-20). So, we "KNOW" after His death, Jesus declared salvation would occur as a result of the preaching of the gospel (God's power to salvation – see Romans 1:16; 10:10-17), people would hear and believe the gospel message, then

by faith respond in obedience by repenting and being baptized. This began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost as the disciples "tarried" there per the instructions of our Lord (Luke 24:49).

3. We "KNOW" that the Lord now uses His disciples to take the message of salvation to a lost world. "(For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Corinthians 4:5-7). What did those disciples (earthen vessels) preach to others they needed to do for salvation after the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord? Well, my friends, the book of Acts has many examples. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:37-38) "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." (Acts 8:35-38). If baptism is not necessary for salvation, then why stop the chariot? Why do we see a sense of urgency in the book of Acts with the examples of people being saved to be baptized the "same hour" in which they believed? (Acts 16:33). Please study the other examples of conversions in the book of Acts to see what was taught and believed after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

4. We "KNOW" the thief on the cross is not an example of conversion for us today no more than the sick man whose sins were forgiven because of the faith of his friends, a man who nothing is said about him believing or confessing Jesus as Lord. Oh, someone might say that the Lord knew the man's heart. Yes, Jesus knew and knows the hearts of people. However, there is nothing revealed in the Bible that Jesus forgave the man because of what was in the man's heart. You can speculate and presume, but you do not "KNOW." What we do "KNOW" is that Jesus saw the faith of the man's friends and forgave the man of his sins. Now, how many Baptist and Methodist preachers will use this example of forgiveness and teach that you do not have to believe or confess Jesus as long as you have friends who are believers? I doubt we will hear that. Here is the point, if one can turn to the example of the thief on the cross to dismiss baptism as a prerequisite

to salvation, then one can turn to the sick man and dismiss faith and confession. If not, why not?

Please study these things carefully and have your faith based on the facts we "KNOW" are revealed in the Bible. We do not want to see you or anyone else lost because of believing in the wrong things. If you want to study more about this or would like to receive our free Bible correspondence course, contact me at the address on this bulletin. I pray this information is accepted in the spirit of love it is offered. I pray for you all.

- Keith Hamilton

- * "Having truth decay? Brush up on your Bible!"
 - * "God's forgiveness marks our obligation 'paid in full!'"
 - * "History repeats itself because people don't listen!"
 - * "Hope: birth, life, re-birth, death, resurrection!"
 - * "If you don't care where you are going, any road will get you there!"
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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)