

Question #2: What about the thief on the cross?

In Luke 23:39-43, we have the account of the thief being crucified next to Jesus. The thief calls out to Jesus: *“Remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”* Jesus replies, *“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”*

So, Jesus had mercy on this man, and his soul (as I understand it) would go to Paradise or Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22). This is the resting place of the dead for those who died under the Old Testament (OT) and pleased God through their faith (see Hebrews 11). In this sense, we can say the thief was certainly “saved.”

What is important to understand here is that the thief was pardoned and given salvation by Jesus directly, when Jesus was alive in His human body on earth. Scriptures such as Mark 2:10 clearly state that Jesus had *“authority on earth to forgive sins”* as the Son of Man. During His ministry while here on earth, Jesus could forgive people at any time, under various circumstances, for whatever reason He chose.

A good analogy is seen in a millionaire who loves to give out \$100 bills. While he is living, he can give out money to whomever he likes, whenever and however he decides. But once he dies, the estate is locked up and his money is only distributed according to the written conditions of his will (or testament)—by those given the authority to do so.

So it is with Jesus. He could pardon anyone, for any reason, whenever He decided to, while He was living on earth. Once He died, the salvation He purchased was locked up and is now only given out according to His written will—the New Testament (NT). Hebrews 9:16&17 is clear on this matter: *“For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is only valid when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.”*

The thief was promised Paradise directly by Jesus, face to face, while Jesus was living. Once Jesus died, a short time after “saving” the thief (Luke 23:46), salvation became available only through compliance with the instructions given in the NT. We who are now living must receive salvation according to the terms of Jesus as written in the NT Scriptures. (This is why the information given in Acts chapter 2 is so important, as the terms for salvation by Jesus under the N.T. were given for the first time at Pentecost 33 A.D.) The thief on the cross obtained his salvation under the OT, directly by Jesus when He lived on earth.

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