

# PLAIN SPEECH

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“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12)

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## WHAT ABOUT THOSE FAMILIAR WORDS?

Ever since beginning to sow the seed of the gospel, I have heard certain and familiar words come up time after time by some of those I have shared the good news with. The words are usually uttered in close proximity to the point being made that water baptism (immersion) is a command (**Acts. 10:47-48**) and that such is necessary in order for an individual to have their sins washed away (**Acts 22:16**). The words form a question; one posed in an attempt to counter the necessity of water baptism. The question, as you probably have deduced, is “*What about the thief on the cross?*”

Oh how many times those words have been uttered by those who are, sadly, blinded (**2 Cor. 4:3-4**). I wish I could say that said words only come forth from the lips of the sincerely ignorant (**Rom. 10:1-2**). Remarkably, the “thief on the cross” argument is espoused by those who are willingly ignorant (**2 Pet. 3:5**); i.e. apostate members of the body of Christ. For instance, Max Lucado has stated: “*How disturbing to theologians to ascend the mountain of doctrine only to be greeted by an uneducated thief who cast his lot with Christ. Here is a man who never went to church, never gave an offering, never was baptized and said only one prayer, but that prayer was enough*” (Demonstration of Devotion 3). Pitiful, isn't it?

Listen, an appeal to “the thief on the cross” in no way diminishes the fact that, today, all who wish to have hope for heaven must submit to water baptism. Let's put their argument to the test; thereby equipping ourselves (**1 Pet. 3:15**) for the next time someone appeals to the repentant thief crucified next to Jesus. Let's first note the text they appeal to and then offer three death-blows to their reasoning.

### Luke 23:39-43

“*And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*”

### The Argument Assumes That the Thief Had Not Been Baptized

Where is the proof that the thief had not previously submitted to the baptism of John? Scripture informs us: “*John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins*” (**Mk. 1:4-5**). Moreover, who is to say that the thief on the cross had not been baptized by one of Jesus' disciples? The Bible reads: “*When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee*” (**John 4:1-3**). True, we cannot prove the thief was baptized, but neither can anyone else prove that he wasn't. This is a key point.

### The Argument Ignores the Fact That Jesus Had the Authority to Forgive Sins While Upon Earth

**Matt. 9:1-5** reads this way: “*And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*” That Jesus forgave sin this way while upon the earth is not the point. The point is this: what did Jesus command after the cross; i.e. after the establishment of the New Covenant (**Heb. 9:17**)? The answer is clear: “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*” Hardly could anything be easier to understand.

### The Argument Ignores Plain Passages That Demonstrate the Necessity of Baptism Under the N.T.

I will share but one passage. Read again **Acts 2:36-38**: “*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. 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.*” Based upon the text, any honest and capable elementary school child would be able to tell someone what must be done in order to have his/her sins remitted. Would the child's answer be, “*Be saved like the thief on the cross.*” No!