

# What About the Thief on the Cross?

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Regarding this common “argument” that one can be saved without baptism because the thief on the cross was saved, here are six responses:

1. One doesn't know that the thief wasn't baptized under John's baptism. It would be impossible to prove one way or the other that the thief on the cross was baptized. In fact, there is more evidence that he was baptized than that he wasn't baptized.
2. Jesus had power to personally forgive sins on earth ([Matthew 9:6](#), [Mark 2:10](#), [Luke 5:24](#)). While Jesus was on the earth, he had authority to forgive whomsoever He willed. Today, however, forgiveness is based upon our relationship to Christ through His covenant.
3. The thief showed faith in Christ when most of the world was reviling Him. The fact that the thief knew who Jesus' was shows something regarding the thief's knowledge. It means that the thief had heard someone teach regarding Jesus.
4. The thief recognized the true nature of the kingdom putting faith in Christ that he was going to come into it despite Jesus present circumstance of hanging on the cross. The thief told Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into His kingdom ([Luke 23:42](#)). The fact that the thief knew something about the kingdom of Jesus also attests to the thief's knowledge. Somewhere someone had told him about the coming kingdom and someone had told him that this kingdom belonged to Jesus. The thief had heard and believed the preaching of the gospel.
5. Jesus had not yet died, and so the New Covenant had not come into effect ([Hebrews 9:16](#)). Everyone that lives today is under the authority of the New Covenant, not the Old. Since that is the case, the thief could not have been forgiven under the terms of the New Covenant, but the Old. I would have just as much authority to build an ark in order to be saved as I would to appeal to the thief on the cross. Those things happened under a different covenant and hence are not applicable to my circumstances today under the New Covenant of Christ.
6. The terms of the New Covenant had not yet been given. Jesus told Peter that he would give him the keys to the kingdom in [Matthew 16:18, 19](#). Those keys had not yet been given at the time of Jesus' death. Those keys were finally given in [Acts 2](#). It wasn't until those terms were given that one could know what to do to have forgiveness of sins under the New Covenant. The thief couldn't have known what those terms were, but today, we can.

Can a person be saved in exactly the same way that the thief on the cross was saved? No. Today we must be saved under the authority of the New Covenant and under the terms of that covenant. Today that is accomplished through submission to God's command through the apostles to be baptized, for the remission of sins ([Acts 2:38](#)).

The thief on the cross is a great example of forgiveness. It shows us that it is never too late to come to the Lord in this life. However, the thief on the cross is not an example of what one must do to be saved today as his salvation was based upon a different covenant, different circumstances, and a different relationship to Jesus.