The Thief on the Cross

The situation regarding what's often called the thief on the cross

A Teaching by Keith Blades | Enjoy the Bible Ministries®

Study Overview & Lesson Summaries

About This Teaching

This teaching considers the situation regarding what's often called the thief on the cross, in Luke 23, beginning in verse 39 — a passage oftentimes spoken about as if it's an exception to the rule. You're forced into saying something ridiculous like that if you fail to recognize the things talked about for the last 10 lessons. The only thing involved here is justification unto eternal life; the rest of Israel's salvation package deal has no bearing upon this man whatsoever. He is not an exception to the rule: he is justified unto eternal life by a faith response to the message God said he would justify unto eternal life by.

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At a Glance

Teaching	Core Focus
Clip	The Thief on the Cross: Not an Exception — Luke 23, from verse 39: Justification unto Eternal Life, Not the Whole Package

Summary

Clip

The Thief on the Cross: Not an Exception *Luke 23, from verse 39: Justification unto Eternal Life, Not the Whole Package*

Spoken About as an Exception to the Rule

- With the thief on the cross there is no water baptism, no discipleship, no endurance possible; no animal sacrifice can be offered and no works can be done — a tough situation for those who hold to a combination of faith plus works
- Yet in view of what the Lord says to him, he is justified unto eternal life, saved from the debt and penalty of his sins; some say he is an exception to the rule, since he couldn't produce the works

The Other Malefactor: What He Understood

- The malefactor who railed has only a physical salvation in view — he doesn't want to physically die; the concern here is the other, beginning in verse 40
- He recognized that his deeds merited death and that he was dying justly; he

had the same understanding the law condemned him with — his sinner status and his just condemnation with death

- He rebuked the other malefactor with the "fear God" concept; what he did didn't only violate Roman law or Jewish law, it violated God's law; what's operating in his heart is the schoolmaster of the law, and nothing unfair was taking place

Whom He Recognized the Lord to Be

- He recognized that Jesus of Nazareth was entirely different from him — not simply a man but his Lord; he knew the name Jesus meant Jehovah the Savior, and knew he was Adonai Jehovah, his Lord, in human flesh
- He knew the gospel of the kingdom was true and that what the Lord was going through was not a stumbling block to the establishment of that kingdom: not "if you get yourself out of this," but "remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom"

The Only Issue: Justification unto Eternal Life

- The only thing involved here is justification unto eternal life; the rest of Israel's salvation package deal has no bearing upon this man whatsoever — give the Lord the credit for understanding that
- He's going to physically die within a few hours; he has no need to begin to participate in the prescription for cleansing, in which that first baptism, John's baptism with water unto repentance, would make a physical manifested mark of disassociation between himself and apostate Israel; he wasn't going to be around to put that into practice
- The only thing God is concerned with in him is the initial justification in the justification and/or salvation package deal preached and taught during this time — that's the only thing this man needs

Not an Exception to the Rule

- Based upon his faith response to the truth of his natural condemned status and his need for the Christ, Jesus said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise"; he had forgiveness of sins and justification unto eternal life at the very moment the Lord said that to him
- He is not an exception to the rule: he didn't need the whole package, only justification unto eternal life — in that salvation package deal as the fundamental issue, and there all along before the gospel of the kingdom even began to be preached in Israel

Key Doctrinal Distinctions

Israel's Salvation Package Deal and Its Fundamental Issue

The only thing involved here is justification unto eternal life; the rest of Israel's salvation package deal doesn't even come into the picture, because it has no bearing upon this man whatsoever. The issue is to understand Israel's salvation package deal and that he didn't need the whole package. Justification unto eternal life was in that salvation package deal as the fundamental issue, and was there all along before the gospel of the kingdom even began to be preached in Israel.

Physical Salvation vs. Salvation from the Debt and Penalty of Sins

The question is whether the malefactor who railed is asking to be saved from the debt and penalty of sins, or has only a physical salvation in view: he doesn't want to physically die. For the other malefactor, the only issue is justification unto eternal life, salvation from the debt and penalty of his sins.

The Only Way Justification unto Eternal Life Could Ever Take Place

There is only one way justification unto eternal life could ever take place, whether in God's program of Israel or in this dispensation of grace. That way is a simple faith and faith alone response to the information God gave, whereby he said a faith response would be met by him with justification unto eternal life; that's what this man responded to. He is not an exception to the rule: he is justified unto eternal life, saved from the debt and penalty of his sins.

Key Scripture References

Luke 23:39	The malefactor who railed has only a physical salvation in view; he doesn't want to physically die
Luke 23:40	The concern here is the other malefactor, who rebuked him with the "fear God" concept
Luke 23:41	"we indeed justly": he recognized he was dying justly; "this man hath done nothing amiss": Jesus of Nazareth was entirely different from him
Luke 23:42	"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom": he recognized him to be his Lord and knew the gospel of the kingdom was true
Luke 23:43	"Verily": truly, this is veracity; both are going to the place no one can enter with sin charged against them; forgiveness of sins and justification unto eternal life at the very moment the Lord said it