

MAKING THE THINGS OF GOD DIFFICULT

Luke 23:32-43

Introduction: There are many "Christian" denominations around today and each one thinks that it is the correct one and all the others are not. Isn't it strange how this has happened when there was but ONE to start with. People who became believers and followers of Jesus Christ began to be called "Christians" and there was but one way of belief. However through the centuries people have changed what God started and have made His things difficult. God said to believe in Jesus Christ and one would be saved, however today many things have been added to God's simple statement, thus making salvation more difficult and once it has been obtained, it can be lost again according to some "changes" people have made in God's plans.

The thief on the cross beside Jesus who was saved there on the cross, just before his death is an example of just how clear God's plan of salvation is.

I. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A HOPELESS CASE

1. The thieves on crosses on each side of Jesus were wicked men and were being put to death for breaking the laws of man.
 - They were paying their debt to society and had been pronounced guilty.
 - One of the thieves said, "*...and we indeed justly; for we receive the due rewards of our deeds...*" (v. 41)
 - This thief was sensitive about the evil he had done in his life.

II. ONE BECOMES A CHRISTIAN INSTANTLY

1. The thief who was sorry and repentant did not have to join a pre-baptism class to be saved.
 - He was not put on probation or have to attend a "new members" class.
 - He simply said with all his heart, "*...Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom...*"
 - Jesus immediately answered, "*...Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise...*"
2. Any person can be saved immediately when he/she repents of his/her sins in sincerity and puts his/her faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

III. NOT EVERYONE WHO "MEETS" JESUS WANTS TO BE SAVED

1. There were two thieves crucified with Jesus, both "met" Him, both talked with Him, however one was saved and the other was not.
2. Jesus died for sin.
 - One of the thieves died in sin, the one who refused to accept/believe in Jesus.
 - One of the thieves died from sin, the one who called upon Jesus to remember him.
3. Jesus died loving, even asking God to forgive those who had crucified Him.
 - One of the thieves died in despair, the one who rejected Jesus.

- One of the thieves died in faith, the one who repented and believed in Jesus.
4. Jesus died being a benefactor to all/for all mankind.
 - One of the thieves died a blasphemer, the one who would not look to Jesus for help.
 - One of the thieves died a believer, the one who was willing to receive whatever Jesus would do for him.

IV. ETERNAL LIFE IS FAR BETTER THAN ONE'S EARTHLY LIFE

1. Both thieves had spent their lives searching for things in their lives.
 - They wanted material things, stole many things, yet were never satisfied.
2. One can spend a lifetime pursuing things and still never be satisfied.
3. Finally, on a cross, one of the thieves found life's greatest things - Jesus Christ.
 - When a person finds Jesus Christ, he/she has found life's greatest value, treasure.
4. Nobody will ever be satisfied in life until Jesus is found and accepted.

V. SALVATION AT THE CROSS PROVES CERTAIN TEACHINGS OF MAN ARE FALSE

1. The saved thief could not join a "church" or be baptized or observe any church rites. He could do no good works nor serve Jesus in any way. He had no opportunity to live a holy life.
2. The one thief who rejected Jesus refutes the teaching/belief that everybody will be saved.
3. The saved thief went immediately into paradise, heaven to be with Jesus, not some "holding" place such as purgatory.
4. The saved thief going immediately into heaven to be with Jesus does away with man's teaching/belief that upon death, one enters a "state of sleep" of unconsciousness.

CONCLUSION:

1. All three on the crosses knew they were going to die.
 - Jesus knew where He was going.
 - The thief who turned to Jesus for help, knew what Jesus told him and believed Jesus that in just a little while, he would be with Jesus in Paradise.
 - The unrepentant thief didn't know what would happen to him.
2. *"...Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom....." ...Today shalt thou be with me in paradise..."*
3. Regardless what man adds or takes away from God's Word, nothing changes what God has said!
 - Believing in Jesus brings instant, permanent salvation.
 - Immediately upon a believer's death, he/she is in heaven with Jesus.