

## THE MOST POPULAR THIEF IN THE WORLD

Text: Luke 23:32-33, 39-43

INTRO: Throughout history, many well-known criminals have somehow managed to capture the imagination of the general public & become folk heroes. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century there was Robin Hood. In the 1860' & 1870's, it was Frank and Jesse James. In the 1930, it was Bonnie Parker & Clyde Barrow, among others. A few years later it was D.B. Cooper.

But no other thug in history has ever captured the imagination of religious people like the "thief on the cross." Many have been heard to declare: "I don't want to be baptized. I want to be saved like the thief on the cross."

Let's examine this thinking.

### I. THE N.T. IS A LEGAL DOCUMENT: THE WILL OF JESUS.

#### A. Throughout the N.T. heaven is viewed as an inheritance.

Matt. 25:34

1 Peter 1:3-4, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope thru the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

1 Cor 6:9, Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God...

#### B. Also throughout the N.T., Christians are referred to as heirs of God

Gal 3:29, If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Gal 4:7, Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

II. CERTAIN CONDITIONS ARE INVOLVED IN MAKING A WILL.

- A. The testator must be of age.
- B. He must be of sound mind.
- C. He must have something of value to bequeath.

Ps 50:10-11, For every beast of the forest is Mine,  
& the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of  
the mountains, & the wild beasts of the field are Mine.

Gen 14:19, Blessed be Abram of God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;

- D. The will must be couched in language which can be understood by the heirs so that they may meet its conditions.  
Acts 2:36-41

Gal 3:26-29, For you are all sons of God thru faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

III. A WILL TAKES EFFECT AFTER THE DEATH OF THE TESTATOR.

Heb 9:16-17, For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

- A. A man on earth disposes of his wealth as he sees fit.
- B. But after he has died, his wealth can only be distributed according to a legal document—his will.

IV. WITH THIS BACKGROUND, LET US TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR THIEF.

- A. Fact is, he may have been a baptized backsliding Jew.

Matt 3:5-6. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, & all the region around the Jordan went out to [John] & were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

John 4:1, Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John tho Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples).

1. Further, it is evident that the thief knew something about Jesus' kingdom, apparently had a better understanding of it than His immediate disciples did at that time. "Remember me..."
  2. So all in all, it is certainly possible that the thief had been baptized either by John or by Jesus' disciples at some earlier time.
- B. But the thief's baptism or lack of it has no bearing on our situation. That robber lived & died **before** the will of Jesus took effect.
- C. Let's make a comparison. Did you know that Abraham Lincoln made \$25,000 a year as President but never paid a penny in income tax? Why? Because he lived & died before the income tax law ever took effect.
1. Lincoln died in 1865.
  2. Congress passed the 1<sup>st</sup> income tax law in 1910 but the Supreme Court threw it out.
  3. Congress tried again in 1913 & again the Supreme Court overturned it.
  4. Finally, after vacancies on the Court were filled with liberal judges Congress succeeded in establishing an income tax in 1916. But Lincoln had been dead for 51 years. He never paid a penny. But **we live after** the income tax became the law of the land, & we must pay even tho Lincolns & others in his time did not do so.

D. Forty-three days **after** the death of the “thief on the cross,” Jesus told His apostles what to teach & what to do after His ascension to heaven: Mark 16:15-16.

That is what we must teach & that is what we must do to have an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. The thief may (or may not) have gone to Paradise without being baptized, but we must meet the conditions of the written will of Jesus.

CONCLUSION: The thief came to believe in Jesus, and he repented of his sins. If you should be motivated by faith & repentance, you will obey the revealed will of Jesus. To refuse to be scripturally baptized is to show an absence of real faith in the will of Jesus & a lack of real repentance regarding our sins. If you haven't already done so, won't you become an heir of God by meeting the conditions of the will of Jesus Christ?

La Porte, TX, September 14, 1980

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, September 12, 2004