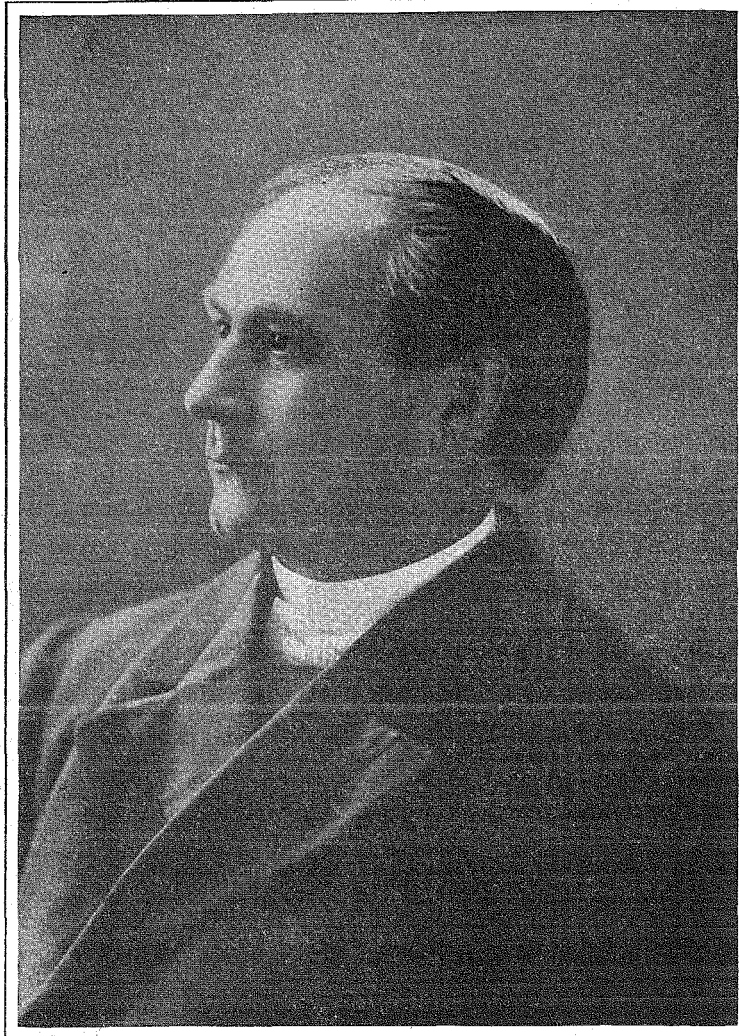


Walter B. Smith

Was The Thief on The Cross a Baptized Believer.



Sermon by **BISHOP R. C. EVANS**
TORONTO, CANADA

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Permit me to draw your attention to the gospel as recorded by St. Mark, 16th chapter, 16th verse, where you will read these words: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." You will now permit me to draw your attention to the story of the thief on the cross as recorded in Luke 23:39 to 46. The average parson takes the position that here upon the cross the thief first saw or heard of Christ, and was there and then converted; thus proving that conversion on the death-bed or the gallows is supported by scripture. This allegation we deny, and from the record will bring strong evidence to prove that the thief was acquainted with Christ and the gospel and that he was baptized a believer, enjoying the knowledge that can only be obtained by those who obey the gospel.

Now to the story. "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him saying, 'If thou be the Christ save thyself and us,' but the other, answering, rebuked him saying, 'Dost thou not fear God seeing thou art in the same condemnation?'" I will try and present this case as though a lawyer were presenting it to a jury to obtain a verdict, and while I may not be able to give the day and date of the thief's baptism yet link I hope to form the chain that will prove that he was a baptized believer.

Thief Had Knowledge of God

You will have already discovered there is a great difference between the two thieves and the first link formed is found in the words "Dost thou not fear God?" Mr. Thief, who told you that Jesus was God? The parson says you never saw Him or heard of Him till this hour. Was Christ God? Let the scriptures answer. Colossians 2:9: "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." But the thief continues—"And we indeed die justly for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss." Second link. "This man hath done nothing amiss." How did he know that Christ was immaculately pure if he had met him there for the first time? Let me illustrate:

A sick man is taken from the train, hurried to the hospital. The physician tells him he has but a few minutes to live. While pillowed up before the window, the gentle zephyrs blowing in to continue life, he sees the solemn march in the adjacent yard (which, by the way, is the jailyard)—a man accused of murder is being taken to the gallows to be executed. Suddenly the dying man cries, "Stop the execution. I must see the sheriff at once." Upon the arrival of the sheriff the dying man declares, "I am dying; I have but a few moments to live. I feel the blood in my veins is being frozen by the icy hand of death, but with my last breath I testify to you I know this man whom you are about to execute for the crime of murder, and I swear to you he is innocent; in other words, 'he hath done nothing amiss.'"

I ask would a stranger bear such a witness if he there and then for the first time saw the supposed criminal? Even so we have the thief in his dying moments certifying that Christ was innocent, in the words "He hath done nothing amiss."

Knowledge Came From the Holy Ghost

Third link: "And he said unto Jesus, 'Lord, remember me'" Here we have the thief recognizing Jesus as the Lord, which proves he was in possession of a knowledge that the natural man could not obtain. First Corinthians 12:3, distinctly says that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost. This is supported by 1st Cor. 2:8, 14, where it shows the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God neither can he know them. And, further, that the carnal mind treats as foolishness the things of the spirit. Yet the parson would have us believe that this carnally-minded criminal had in his possession the most sacred knowledge regarding the Messiahship of the Son of Man.

Fourth link: "Remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom." By this statement the thief is shown to have a knowledge regarding the ultimate triumph of Christ that the average parson of to-day seems to be entirely ignorant of. The parson will tell us when we die we go straight to a place called heaven, far above the skies; or, if a sinner, to a place called hell, filled with fire and brimstone. The thief knew much better than that. He had, doubtless, heard Christ teach His disciples that He would come to earth again, and that His triumphant kingdom would fill the world, as the following scriptures will show: Matthew 6:10, In that memorable prayer they were taught to plead, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth." Acts 1:6, we find the disciples with this thought still in their minds, and they ask Him, saying: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Daniel 2:44, The Lord shows that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom upon the earth that should never be destroyed. This is further supported in Daniel 7:27, "And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heavens shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.",

Baptism Precedes Salvation

Fifth point: Jesus now speaks to the thief. He says: "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." If you will consult Luke 23:24, Luke 23:43, 2nd Corinthians 12:4, "Abraham's bosom," so the Jews styled Paradise, the place where the souls of good men remain from death to the resurrection. When Abraham's children meet in Paradise they know each other. This is the seat of happy spirits in their separate state between death and the resurrection. (Wesley's Notes). Whatever your preconceived ideas may have been with regard to this statement made by Jesus to the thief, you will admit that His declaring that He would meet him on that day in Paradise is tantamount to saying he was saved, or born again; or, in other words, had obtained the remission of his sins, and was accepted as a child of God.

The Baptized Can Do No Wrong

We are met here with a statement that this man was a thief and that this is prima facie evidence that he had never been baptized. Let us see how this will work. Suppose you have a watch. No other watch has the same number as yours. Perhaps your wife's picture is engraved on the case, or you may have other marks of identification. I am seen in your bedroom; your watch is gone; I am arrested. The watch is found in my possession. I am found guilty by the judge. Before the sentence is passed I request the privilege of making a statement. I go down into my pocket and draw therefrom a well worn paper and hand it to the judge. He reads thereon the certificate of my baptism having occurred 35 years ago, whereupon I say: "Judge, is not this positive proof that I did not steal that watch?" For all the parsons declare that the thief could not have been baptized because he was a thief. The fact is supported by scripture, that people after baptism very frequently do wrong. In support of this I submit the following: Ephesians 4:28. Paul is writing to the church and says: "Let him that stole steal no more." Evidently some of the church members had been stealing. Second Peter 2:12 to 22, we read of the awful crimes being committed by those who had been members of the church. We are told that they had "eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin." They have "forsaken the right way." We read in John 6:66, that when Christ presented to His followers the doctrine of the Lord's Supper it caused a general apostacy and it would seem from the reading that a great many of his disciples went back to the beggarly elements of the world. The Apostacy seemed so complete that Christ turning to the twelve apostles, said: "Will you also leave Me?" Peter informs us in second Peter, 2nd chapter, that those who leave the church will be compared to the "dog returning to his vomit or the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." And so, if it can be proved that the thief was one of those who had apostacized, it would be but the scriptural way of saying that he acted like the sow when she returned "to her wallowing in the mire." or, in other words, that he would return to the old ways of his former life.

The Thief a Prodigal Son

Jesus informs us in the pathetic story of the Prodigal Son, recorded in Luke 15:11-32, how he left home (the church) and went back into the world of sin, sinking to the lowest ditches of dissipation. And finally memory's hand reached backward to the dear dead years of his church relationship, and he decided to return. The story goes that the father met him, accepted his apology and restored him to favor, placing the best robe upon his shoulders, the ring upon his finger, and shoes upon his feet, declaring "this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found." Here, I believe, is a perfect picture drawn by the Master hand, of the Thief upon the Cross, who had gone back into the world, and upon the cross returned to his Father's house.

To show you the great probability in favor of the thief having been baptized I submit the evidence found in Matthew 3:5 and 6, "Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the regions round about Jordan and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."

I would not argue that because the word "all" is used there that it means absolutely everyone in that country, but a great multitude was baptized. Who is to say that the thief was not one of that great multitude, and that he also was one of those who left the church as referred to by Matthew, already cited?

A Thief Before or After Baptism

There are two positions that may be occupied on this question, either of which may be right. The first is the thief was baptized by John, or Christ, or some of the apostles, and was a reformed man. Let us suppose, as many of our converts do now, he meets with the saints in prayer meeting. He there confesses that he had been a thief, that he was one who took part in the stealing of diamonds at the palace of Pontius Pilate, and that he now was saving his money, and in a short time he would go to Pontius Pilate and pay him for the diamonds stolen. As the result of a good faithful life this man is enjoying the spirit of God, developing character and prospering in church circles. Let us suppose, as is frequently the case, this man's prosperity excites the jealousy and envy of a less faithful member of the church, and he secretly seeks an avenue to destroy his brother. This is not an imaginary matter, for there are many bleeding hearts who have suffered as the result of a cunningly-planned attack by those within the circle of the church.) We follow this green-eyed, jealous member. He enters the palace of Pontius Pilate, recalls the facts of the stolen diamonds and proffers the information that the man who took part in the robbery can be found at the Wednesday night prayer meeting of the Nazarene's at Mark's dwelling on the back street behind the temple. The officers find him there, and he is arrested; found guilty, and pays the penalty upon the cross. For you know the fact of his having been baptized would not secure him clemency at the hands of those who knew no mercy when dealing with the early-day saints. Hence, this man may have committed the crime of theft long before his baptism.

The second proposition is that after his baptism, as already stated, he apostatized from the church, went back into the world of sin, was detected in the commission of crime, and, as the prodigal, returned home by way of the cross.

Thief Was Probably an Insurgent

To show you that I am not alone in the thought that the thief was probably a member of Christ's church before he met Christ upon the cross I submit the following by Doctor Kitto found in the Gospel Standard for February 16, 1903: "Some eminent writers are of the opinion that he (the thief) was in all probability not a thief who robbed for profit, but one of the insurgents who had taken up arms on a principle of resistance to the Roman oppression and to what they thought an unlawful burden, namely, the tribute money. They are of the opinion also that it is far from certain that his faith or repentance was the fruit of this particular season, (that is the meeting of Christ upon the Cross). He must have known something of the Saviour, otherwise he could not have said: "He hath done nothing amiss."

He was convinced of the Lord's Messiahship. Upon the authority of Kocher and others we can further say that it is a very ancient tradition that the thief was not converted at the cross but was previously imbued with a knowledge of the gospel."

Cannot Enter the Kingdom "Except"—

Now I wish to put Christ upon the stand as a witness in this case. God stated to Isaiah, 55th chapter, 4th verse, "Behold I have given Him for a witness to the people." We will now ask Christ to testify regarding this doctrine of baptism. John 3:3-5, "Verily, verily I say unto thee except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said unto Him, "How can a man be born again when he is old?" Jesus answered, "Verily, verily I say unto thee except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." I ask, if this testimony be true, that a man cannot enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and of the spirit, did the thief enter that kingdom without the water birth? It will not do to say that this water birth does not refer to water baptism, for I have already in a former sermon given you a host of quotations from leading ministers and church disciplines that this very quotation is used in support of water baptism. Again, Acts 2:33, Here the disciples are meeting in an upper room. Christ, prior to His leaving them, promised to pray the Father that He would send them the Holy Ghost, and that remission of sins was to be preached in His name, beginning at Jerusalem, and that when this Holy Ghost came upon them He would bring to their remembrance that which Jesus had taught them. The Holy Ghost falls upon them and they speak with other tongues to sixteen nationalities represented upon that auspicious occasion. Here we have God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost all engaged in this matter, and the word sent by God through the Holy Ghost to the disciples answers the most important question ever propounded by the sons of men. The narrative shows that a great multitude was converted to the great truth that Jesus was the Christ and they asked: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Hear the answer:

"What Shall We Do?"

"Repent and be baptized, everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Here is the law plainly laid down under the Father Son and Holy Spirit through the accredited ministry that baptism is for the remission of sins unto those who have faith and repentance. The parson may say: "I don't believe that baptism is for the remission of sins." Christ's reply to that would be: "He that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16.) Now that we are at Mark 16:16, let us finish it. Christ is about to leave his disciples and He gives to them the last commandment and the great commission whereby the world is to be evangelized. Hear Him. He says: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Now, if we were to parse this we would say He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; principal clause. "He shall be saved." What person? That believeth and is baptized, no other. Let the parsons wriggle as they may belief and baptism are here placed upon a par, both essential to salvation.

Belief and Baptism Go Together.

It has been said by Paul: "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Some affirm this has reference only to the marriage covenant. We opine that while it has reference to the marriage covenant, it has reference to anything else that God has joined together and we insist that when Christ here joined belief and baptism together, no creed on earth has the right to separate them, making one essential to salvation and the other, a non-essential. Christ never came to preach, and suffer, and die to establish non-essentials, and hence it is written: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Therefore, we take the position that the thief in order to be saved was not only required to believe, but to be baptized for the remission of his sins,

thus making his faith alive by his works. For we are informed as stated in last Sunday's lecture that faith without works is dead.

The Thief in Hymnology

Having proved baptism to be essential to salvation from a Bible standpoint, and admitting the thief was saved, we are compelled to believe that he was a baptized member of the church prior to the crucifixion. Now we will go to the good and popular sectarian hymnbooks:

"There is a fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood Lose all their guilty stains.

"The dying thief rejoiced to see That fountain in his day,
And there may I, though vile as he, Wash all my sins away."

If language is a science to convey ideas there is baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and the thief submitting to it and receiving pardon according to that law. Let us see. Here is the fountain which we will call the baptismal font. The blood referred to is typified in the water. He plunges beneath the flood showing it to be immersion. He washes his sins away, therefore, baptism is for the remission of sins.

But where did they get the subject matter upon which they wrote this hymn? You will find it in Zachariah 13:1, and, by the way, right in the hymn book, this quotation is given at the top of the page and reads as follows: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." If my hearers will read the 12th, 13th and 14th chapters of Zachariah they will read something like this: The Jews are to be persecuted among the nations, yet they will prosper and finally return to their own land. Let us see how this is being fulfilled. To-day you see Isaac with a bag on his back crying aloud, "Bones and rags." The next day he has a little cart, and the following a horse and wagon. Soon he has a second hand store and by and by he is a banker loaning money to the nations. If he can prosper amid the great oppression, what will he do when he reaches the promised land where under the blessing of God it yields three crops a year? But we need not look to the future; even to-day the Jew is the money-lender of the world. Well, Zachariah shows that the nations, depleted financially because of their wars and other extravagant methods of modernism, will make a covenant to go up and rob the Jew. They will meet in battle. The Jew is being defeated, and is retreating in confusion, when suddenly the old battle-cry that inspired Israel in the days of her prosperity under Joshua is heard amid the depleted ranks. Inspired by an overwhelming force under the hand of this mysterious stranger, who has suddenly made his appearance among them, the ranks are reformed—they offer battle to the nations and under this leader's inspiring commands they win out. At the close of the battle they surround their new and strange commander. Someone recognizes that he is wounded and they say: "Whence received ye these wounds in your hands and feet?" Then shall the stranger extending his form in the shape of the cross reply, saying: "These wounds received I in the house of my friends." There, standing before them, Israel beholds the Messiah whom their fathers had slain. Then shall be brought to pass the prophecy uttered to Isaiah, 66th chapter, that a nation shall be born at once.

It is shown to be a gospel work, in that first they have faith in the new found Messiah; second, that they repent, in that every family will mourn apart; and third, that they approached the baptismal font which is opened to them for the remission of their sins. Hence we have the Jews returning to God by the way of the gospel and the cross, and accepting the principles of the gospel which their fathers rejected and which they have continued to reject, as Jesus said they would, till, in their distress, their eyes would be opened and they would say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Baptism Certainly Was Commanded

The Latter Day Saints have obeyed the gospel as Christ and the apostles taught it, and they insist that no man nor set of men has the right to tamper with the Word of God, to change the ordinances presented by Christ, nor to make the commandments of God of no effect. We take the position that the Bible clearly teaches the baptism of believers in water for the remission of sins, that it is the Bible doctrine, and that the creeds have fulfilled the prediction made by Christ as recorded in Mark, 7th chapter, wherein He says: "Howbeit in vain do they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, for laying aside the commandments of God, we hold the traditions of men. Full well ye reject the commandments of God that ye may keep your own traditions." Baptism is certainly a commandment. By the modern teaching that it is non-essential they make that commandment as Jesus said, "of none effect." Now, brethren, if we are to be judged according to the gospel or by the Word of God, do you not think that the safe plan is to render a perfect obedience to the perfect law that emanated from the perfect God, so that when we stand before the judgment bar we can look up into the face of the Judge and say: "I have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine that you died to establish, believing that you spake the truth when you said that the gospel was the power of God unto salvation."

We, as a people, prefer to stand by Christ and the word spoken, even though by so doing we call down upon ourselves the ostracism and condemnation of the popular creeds, believing that in the judgment day if we walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, with all lowliness and meekness, Christ will say: "He hath not been ashamed of me, nor of My word," hence, before the Father and the holy angels He will delight to call us brethren, and to bid us enter into His glory. Having with Him carried the cross we hope to be entitled to wear the crown.

We are told if we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him and so with Him we endure the contradiction of priestcraft, superstition, idolatry and man-made creeds, and hence we have our Gethsemane, our cross to carry, our Calvary to climb, our crucifixion to suffer at the end of which we hope with Him to live and reign. Having preached for you now for seven years, I call God to witness that I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God and while it may have called down upon me the denunciation of the clergy yet I am assured that God by His Holy Spirit has comforted my heart and inspired my mind and made me a blessing in His hands to many thousands. I am content to be ostracized by the society of "Christianity" if I can at last by having kept the word of God finally enter into that sweet rest of which we have known so little here.

Permit me to say we have no disposition to limit the mercy of God toward the man upon the gallows or the deathbed, but we are not authorized to make any promises to the man who lives in sin to the last hour, but refer him to the Judge of all the earth who will do right.

Absurdity of Death-bed Repentance

Before closing, permit me to cite to you another doctrine which is voiced in one of their popular hymns. It reads as follows:

"While the Lamp of Life holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return."

Let us reduce this to practical life. I have buildings on my land valued at \$40,000. The insurance agent tells me the danger of fire, the necessity of insurance, but I spurn him from my door, refusing to purchase a policy. By and by I have spent my money lavishly that should have gone to purchase insurance, but a lightning flash comes and my buildings are burned to the ground. In the morning I walk over the still hot ashes, and I chance to strike a burning ember. I look up the road and there I see coming the insurance agent. I call loudly: "Come at once, let not a moment be lost," He hastens to my side, I bid him write a policy immediately for my buildings. He inquires what building, and I reply, these buildings.

The poor fellow looks at me as if I had gone insane, crazed by my heavy loss. While he pities me he has no authority to misrepresent the company; he must act according to the laws and regulations of the company. They have made no provision for the insurance of hot ashes, he is compelled to refuse to write a policy. I then plead with him, saying: "Do you see this burning ember?" While there is a spark yet on it, surely it is not too late to take out a policy?" The insurance agent refuses to comply with my request and you will say that he was just and right. Now apply that to religion. A man hears the gospel. God's representative minister pleads with him to obey. He refuses, lives a life of wickedness and sin, and finally lands upon the gallows. In the face of the Bible doctrine taught from Genesis to Revelation and very plainly expressed in Galatians 6:7, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," how can we as ministers of Christ contrary to all the law promise that man salvation? Or, in other words, write him a policy on the burning building?

The Hopelessness of Crime

Brethren, I refuse to believe that a man, with his hands still stained with the blood of his victim can step aside and play on a harp of a thousand strings in heaven. I refuse to believe that a man can change his black cap of criminality for a golden crown. I refuse to believe that the hands now tied behind his back, in a moment can be fingering a harp in the presence of the angels. I refuse to believe that those feet now pinioned as the result of crime, the next moment can be walking through the streets of the New Jerusalem. In a word, I refuse to believe that when the justice of earth is passed upon a man, and has said that he is unsafe and unfit even to live within the stone walls of an earthly penitentiary, that that character is worthy to dwell in the presence of God, and immediately become an associate with the angels. I don't believe it!

The Triumph of Character

Now you may come to me and say, what about the "eleventh hour" in the Bible? What about the thief on the cross? My only reply to that is this: I have shown to you the doctrine that faith alone is not a "good and wholesome doctrine," that it is not "very full of comfort"; but that it resembles a putrefying corpse that will spread pestilence—physical disease on the one hand, spiritual disease on the other hand. I have, moreover, shown you that man is to be rewarded according to his work; that it is character and not reputation that counts before God. I have shown you that a man must obey the Gospel in order to be saved and that the man pinioned on the gallows cannot do that; therefore, your death-bed repentance and your gallows conversion is unsupported in the Bible.

PREACHING SERVICES BY
 Bishop R. C. EVANS
 Shea's Theatre, Sunday 7.30 P.M.
 (Richmond & Victoria)
 Soho St. Church, Sunday 11 A.M.