

# Thief on the Cross Proves Baptism Unnecessary — Cheat-Sheet

## CORE CRITIC CLAIM

The thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) was saved without baptism, proving baptism is not required for salvation.

## KEY DEFENSIVE POINTS

- **"Paradise" is not "heaven."** Greek *paradeisos* is not *ouranos*. Jesus had not yet ascended to the Father on Sunday (John 20:17), so "paradise" on Friday was the spirit world, not final exaltation.
- **The thief died under the old covenant.** The new covenant was not in force until after Christ's death (Hebrews 9:16-17). The thief's case cannot establish new covenant requirements.
- **The Bible explicitly requires baptism.** John 3:5: "cannot enter the kingdom of God" without water and Spirit. Mark 16:16. Acts 2:38. 1 Peter 3:21. Romans 6:3-5. One narrative episode does not override multiple doctrinal statements.
- **Every Church Father taught baptismal necessity.** Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, Chrysostom — none used the thief to argue baptism is optional.
- **The thief may have been previously baptized.** John's baptism was widespread (Matthew 3:5-6). The text never says the thief was unbaptized.
- **Baptism for the dead resolves the pastoral problem.** 1 Corinthians 15:29; D&C 128:15-18. Those who die without baptism can receive vicarious ordinances.

## KEY SCRIPTURES

Scripture	Point
John 3:5	"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"
Mark 16:16	"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"
Acts 2:38	"Repent, and be baptized every one of you... for the remission of sins"
1 Peter 3:18-21	Christ preached to spirits in prison; "baptism doth also now save us"
1 Peter 4:6	"The gospel preached also to them that are dead"
1 Corinthians 15:29	Paul references baptism for the dead
Romans 6:3-5	Baptism = participation in Christ's death and resurrection
Acts 22:16	"Be baptized, and wash away thy sins"
John 20:17	Jesus had "not yet ascended" — paradise is not the Father's presence
Hebrews 9:16-17	New covenant in force only after the testator's death
D&C 128:15-18	Baptism for the dead

## ONE-LINE OBJECTION RESPONSES

Objection	Response
"Jesus said 'today you will be with me in paradise.'"	"Paradise" is the spirit world, not final heaven — Jesus had not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:17).
"Baptism is a work; we're saved by grace alone."	The "works" Paul opposes are Mosaic Law, not new-covenant ordinances — Paul himself was baptized and baptized others.
"John 3:5 means natural birth, not baptism."	Every Church Father understood "born of water" as baptism; the natural-birth reading is historically novel.
"What about people who die before being baptized?"	Baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29; D&C 128) — the most complete answer in Christianity.
"Jesus forgave sins without baptism."	Jesus had personal divine authority; He also established baptism as a universal ordinance (Matthew 28:19).
"A loving God wouldn't condemn the unbaptized."	He does not — He provides vicarious baptism and spirit-world teaching (1 Peter 3:19; 4:6; D&C 138).
"One exception disproves the rule."	A king can pardon a prisoner without abolishing the law; Christ's personal act does not eliminate His general commands.

## QUICK PATRISTIC REFERENCES

Father	Source	Position
Justin Martyr	<i>First Apology</i> 61	Baptism = regeneration/illumination
Tertullian	<i>On Baptism</i> 12-13	One exception does not make a rule; John 3:5 stands
Cyril of Jerusalem	<i>Catechetical Lectures</i> 13.31	Thief's case is exceptional, not normative
John Chrysostom	<i>Homilies on John</i> 25	Thief demonstrates Christ's authority, not baptism's dispensability
Augustine	<i>On Baptism</i> 4.22	Baptism normatively necessary; "baptism of desire" for catechumens only

## ESSENTIAL LINKS

- [Baptisms for the Dead — Gospel Topics Essay](#)
- [FairLatterdaySaints: Baptism](#)
- [FairLatterdaySaints: Baptism for the Dead](#)