

What about “Death Bed” Salvation?

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The emphasis of the Bible concerning salvation is always on “today.”

Quoting Isaiah, Paul said, “In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

When Jesus saw the interest of Zacchaeus, who had climbed a sycamore tree to see Him, He said, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house” (Luke 19:5). As Jesus forgave the sins of the thief on the cross, He said, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

It is never wise to put off responding to God’s love. Some, however, seem to be waiting until they are near death to make things right with God.

The book of Acts lays out God’s law of pardon for today. At Pentecost, Peter and the apostles made the first offer of pardon under the Christian Age. As the multitude understood they had crucified the Son of God, they realized they needed to respond to God’s love.

“They were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the

name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:37–38).

Other conversions in Acts follow this pattern. The Samaritans (Acts 8), the Ethiopian (Acts 8), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9, 22), Lydia (Acts 16), the jailer (Acts 16), and the Corinthians (Acts 18) realized their need for conversion to Christ, and their faith moved them to repent of sins, confess their faith, and be baptized. Not every conversion mentions each step, but every conversion account does mention baptism.

Does God change His law of pardon for the person on his death bed? There are no New Testament examples of such conversions, so there is no evidence to suggest that God has a different plan for those near death.

The thief on the cross is not an example for those living today because he lived under the Jewish law and was not subject to the new covenant of Christ (which came into effect after Jesus' death, Hebrews 9:15–17). He received the forgiveness of sin in the same way that others did during the public ministry of Christ—through the direct pardon of the Savior. He was not subject to the commands of Pentecost, because he lived before the establishment of the church on that day.

None of us is in the position of deciding the eternal fate of others. We are all in the hands of a just and loving God. By the gracious sacrifice of Christ, God set in motion the means of our salvation. It is up to us to respond to His love in obedience.

He has warned that the day is coming "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8).

Now is the time to obey Christ and live for him. As long as

there is life, there is hope to obey God, but many who plan to repent on their death beds will never have the opportunity.

-Bob Prichard