

## THE THIEF OFF THE CROSS

BY MATT CORDELLA

A ROSEDALE NETWORK PUBLICATION  
VOL. 56 | NO. 01

*This message has been adapted from a Sunday evening chapel service at the Lima Rescue Mission.*

### Part One

We love the story about the thief on the cross.<sup>1</sup> Why?

In those final moments of his earthly life, the thief doesn't endure a catechism class.<sup>2</sup> He doesn't submit to water baptism or stumble through an awkward interview about church membership with the elders. There's no congregational vote. He simply trusts in Jesus, receives assurance of salvation, and enters Paradise before the end of the day.<sup>3</sup>

The thief exemplifies the same gospel that Paul taught straightforwardly in Ephesus: "For by grace you have been saved **through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast."<sup>4</sup> Our works contribute nothing of merit to our salvation, which is God's gift to sinners who deserve His wrath.<sup>5</sup> We're saved by grace, through faith: a doctrine and a story each well worthy of our love.

Of course, if we're considering popularity, it doesn't hurt that the thief goes straight to Paradise without ever getting bullied into volunteering for VBS. Apart from a quick jab at the *other* thief on Calvary,<sup>6</sup> he doesn't have to wrangle with other people at all, let alone with the church's AV equipment. Perhaps more than any other figure in the gospels, the thief's salvation seems individual and private: "between me and my Jesus."

For skeptics outside of the church and fed-up Christians on the inside, "thief-on-the-cross-salvation" is an appealing prospect. A weary Christian might look back and forth between the thief on the cross and the church bulletin board, thinking to himself, "Well, cooking for the youth group isn't a *salvation issue*..."

He'd be right, just as surely as he'd be *wrong* to pass by the opportunity for service on the grounds that "it's not a salvation issue." After all, it's not as though Christians have only ever cooked their casseroles over the fiery pit of Hell. We have good reasons to take good works seriously, and zero of them involve a fear of condemnation or a vain attempt at earning salvation.

Call me crazy, but I'm beginning to suspect that many appeals to "the thief on the cross" are motivated by a desire to shrug off any clear expectations for the Christian life, more than by any commitment to sound gospel theology.

### Part Two

Imagine that Jesus ended His conversation with the thief on the cross differently.

Instead of Jesus saying, "Truly, I say to you, *today* you shall be with me in Paradise," imagine him saying: "Truly, I say to you, *one day* you shall be with me in Paradise. Now come down from your cross, and let your wounds be healed. Don't worry about the Romans; they won't bother you anymore." And the thief is released to live out the rest of his natural life on earth.

*cont'd on page 5*

<sup>1</sup>Luke 23:39-43.

<sup>2</sup>There are better translations than "thief." Most modern translations opt for "criminal," but the KJV and its successors preserve the compound structure of the Greek word [*kakourgos*] with "malefactor." "Evildoer" is probably the most straightforward translation, but I will keep calling him "the thief on the cross," because everybody else seems to.

<sup>3</sup>Luke 23:43.

<sup>4</sup>Ephesians 2:8,9, ESV.

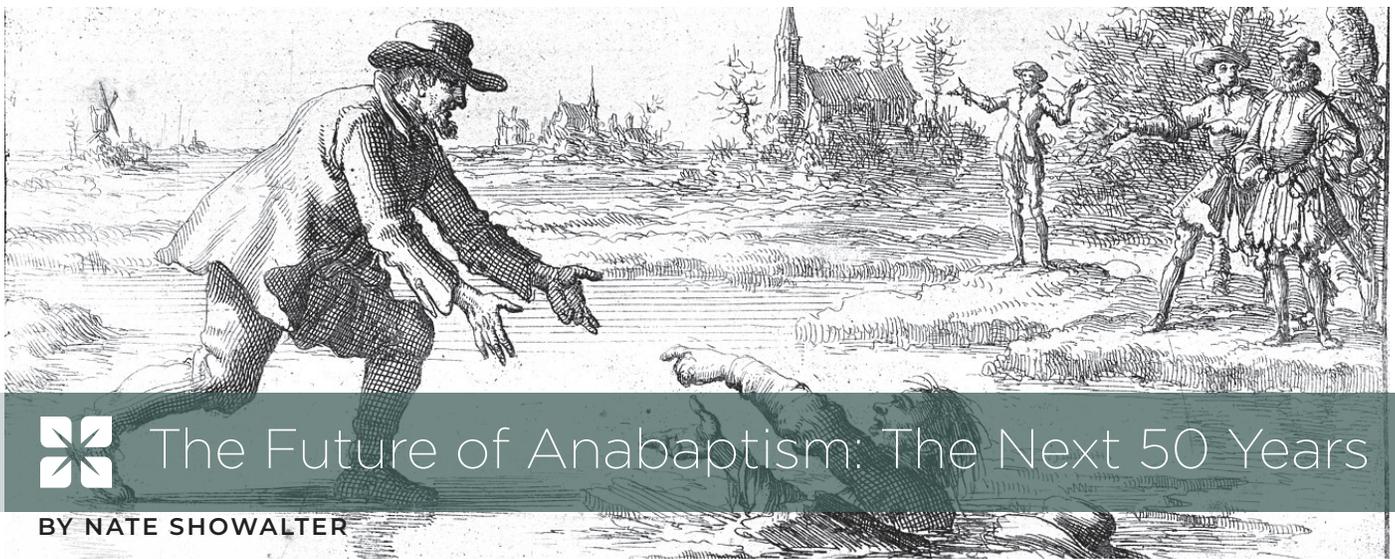
<sup>5</sup>Ephesians 2:1-7.

<sup>6</sup>Luke 23:40.

*Photo credit: Titian. Detail of Christ and the Good Thief. 1566, Pinacoteca Nazionale (Bologna, Italy). Oil on canvas.*



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# The Future of Anabaptism: The Next 50 Years

BY NATE SHOWALTER

## A Global, Cross-Shaped Movement

When we look back over 500 years of the Anabaptist story, it is natural to ask what the next fifty years might hold. Not as an academic question but as people committed to maturing and multiplying disciples in our congregations and communities.

I was raised in a Rosedale Network family involved in church planting in Eastern Kentucky. I later attended Rosedale Bible College and helped with the music program in its early years. I have since worshiped with Anabaptists and other Christians in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Across these years, two realities have become clear:

- The future of Anabaptism is growing brighter in the Global South;
- The future in North America is more fragile and will require deeper discipleship and more courageous leadership.

The demographic center of Anabaptism continues to move south and east. Many Majority World congregations worship with joy, persevere through hardship, and witness to Christ in places of uncertainty. Their vitality invites us into a humble partnership. Rosedale Network sees this through relationships with hundreds of congregations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, whose ministries enrich our shared mission. The Spirit is renewing the global Church in ways we did not foresee, often far from traditional Western centers of influence. The question for congregations in the U.S. is whether we are humble enough to listen, learn, and receive from these younger expressions of Christ's body.

Meanwhile, churches in North America face polarization, secularization, and cultural fatigue. Believers in the Global South face different pressures—authoritarian governments, tribal conflict, and economic instability. Without humility, each context can misread the other; with humility, we can grow together into the likeness of Christ.

## As Anabaptists, we need a mature peace witness.

At the center of our shared life is the kingdom of God. Christ is Lord, and His kingdom is visible in the church. His people follow Him in love, peace, and self-giving service. His gospel forms communities of reconciliation and hope. In the challenges that lie ahead, we will continue to return to this center with renewed clarity.

The gospel frees us from tying our faith to political identity—and frees us from despair. We follow a crucified and risen Lord, which guards

us from both triumphalism and hopelessness. In a polarized age, the church must breathe the peace of Christ.

The church in North America may become smaller, but it can grow deeper. Depth is shaped by practices that form Christlike character—Scripture, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, hospitality, disciple-making, and strong families. Programs may fade; practices endure. As we grow deeper, we will grow outward—multiplying disciples who carry the life of Jesus into the world.

As Anabaptists, we need a mature peace witness. A biblical peace witness is not passive; it is Christ-shaped. A mature peace listens across differences, cultivates reconciliation, rejects contempt, works to reduce the conditions that lead to violence, and models Jesus' love for enemies. Our children will see peace lived in our families, congregations, and communities, not only taught from our pulpits.

The future church is global, multilingual, and multiethnic. Rosedale Network already reflects this, and the next generation will deepen it. We are becoming congregations where longtime Mennonite families and new believers stand together in worship, leadership, and mission.

Three practices can guide us:

**We remember our baptism.** We belong to Jesus and follow Him in the unity and mystery of the Trinity.

**We return to the table.** In the Lord's Supper, the potluck meal, the kitchen table, is where reconciliation takes root and strangers become family.

**We recover the cross as a way of life** in daily habits of self-giving love in all our relationships.

The future of Anabaptism is not guaranteed. But the future of Christ's Church is sure. May the next fifty years find us faithful, unified in mission, and open to the Spirit's surprising work around the world. 

Photo credit: Jan Luyken, *Martyrs Mirror*



Nate grew up in a Rosedale Network family involved in church planting in Eastern Kentucky. He attended Rosedale Bible College and has worshiped with churches in the U.S., Asia, and Africa.



# Revive Us, Lord: Part 1

BY ANTHONY CONTE

I'm guessing a variety of thoughts cross our minds when we hear this word—*revive*. Perhaps hope and excitement, or maybe suspicion and skepticism rooted in excesses of past revivals? Or maybe revival/renewal in the church is a subject you are relatively unfamiliar with.

In the words of revivalist R.A. Torrey, “revival is a time when God visits His people, and, by the power of His Spirit imparts new life to them, and through them imparts life to sinners dead in trespasses and sins.” Stephen F. Olford said it is “that strange and sovereign work of God in which He visits His own people, restoring, reanimating, and releasing them into the fullness of His blessing.”

I came across another definition I like: “Revival is nothing more than having our experience catch up with our theology.” This is likely an over-generalization, but it also contains profound truth.

## Revival was and is God's idea.

Revival is the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit—a reality that reveals why natural language cannot truly communicate its deepest nature. It is the Spirit's ability working upon our inability to produce “...exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph. 3:20 NKJV).

In any discussion of God's supernatural work through revival, let's remember that it is not a phenomenon that only first materialized some 400 years ago during the First Great Awakening. It was not pioneered by Wesley, Whitefield, Edwards, Finney, or any other man. Revival was and is God's idea.

In the Old Testament, Israel received national renewal in multiple instances under godly kings and prophets. Under King David, the presence of God was once again honored as essential to the flourishing of the kingdom as David moved the Ark of the Covenant from Kiriath-Jearim to the tent prepared for it in Jerusalem.

Over 100 years after David's death, King Jehoshaphat of Judah became so burdened with the spiritual state of the nation that he went throughout the land exhorting the people to return to the Lord (2 Chron. 19:4). Revival was sparked throughout the land, and ultimately Judah was delivered from the vast army of Ammon, Moab, and Edom because of their renewed faith in God.

Notable revivals were also witnessed under Jehoiada the priest, King

Hezekiah, and King Josiah.

In the New Testament, Acts is filled with stories of God moving powerfully in and through the early church. At Pentecost alone, the church grew by 2,600%. The early church embodied Jesus' words to the disciples, “As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give” (Matt. 10:7-8 NIV).

God worked powerfully both through the apostles and the deacons. Stephen and Philip preached powerfully and performed miracles. God healed the sick and raised the dead through Peter and Paul. Additionally, the early Christians were radically generous, freely giving and sharing what they had with those around them.

Certainly, it seems that the early church lived with greater fervor under an increased measure of the Holy Spirit's presence than what appears to be normative for us today. Was it simply God's design and desire to move in these supernatural, awe-inspiring ways just to kickstart the church at its birth?

I don't think so. “Acts” is not isolated to the first century. There is a rich history of post-Acts revivals from Savonarola, the Catholic monk who God used to usher in revival in Florence in the late 1400s, to John Wesley and George Whitefield, who were the Lord's instruments in the 18th century in birthing the Great Awakening in England and beyond.

History continues to bear witness in the 19th century with God working powerfully in and through people like Charles Finney during the Second Great Awakening, as well as D.L. Moody. In 1904, Evan Roberts led the Welsh Revival. There was renewal in the Hebrides under Duncan Campbell, 1949-1953, and the Brownsville Revival, 1995-2000, to name a few.

*cont'd on page 5*

*Photo credit: Anthony Conte*



*Anthony lives in Plain City, Ohio, where he serves as youth pastor at Shiloh Mennonite Church. He is passionate about seeing young people grow more fully into Christ's image and the church flourish in all it was created to be.*



# 2025 Through the Rearview Mirror

BY MIKE

Happy New Year, Rosedale Network of Churches! I pray that you have enjoyed time with family and found moments of rest and reflection during this holiday season. As the year ended, I'm sure many of you took the time to share a recap of your year with friends and family; in that same spirit, I'd like to reflect on God's faithfulness to Rosedale International (RI) in 2025 and look ahead to 2026.

**This year, we celebrated new beginnings.** Six interns joined us in January, followed in August by fourteen REACH participants—the biggest teams since 2021 and 2019, respectively. We welcomed three staff members to our team in Columbus: Sophia, hospitality coordinator; Yemiru, immigrant church growth consultant; and Lloyd, interim director of Rosedale Business Group. We celebrated as several staff and worker families grew. We also celebrated new spiritual life, seeing over one hundred baptisms across the regions of the world where RI workers and local partners serve!

**We traveled overseas to see workers in Spain, the Mediterranean, and West Africa, and spent time in Europe praying for revival.**

**We traveled countless miles.** RI staff visited five schools and twenty-six churches, attended five conferences, led four retreats, and hosted three special events across fourteen states. We traveled overseas to see workers in Spain, the Mediterranean, and West Africa, and spent time in Europe praying for revival. During the summer months, seven worker families returned to the States on home assignment. We also celebrated the twentieth anniversary of Ride for Missions.

**We ended 2025 in the black.** As I write, it appears that RI will finish the year in a good place financially. We are grateful to our Ride for Missions, Missions 101, and Antioch partners for helping us meet the deficit in our general budget each year. Thank you to each church and every individual who supports, prays, and stands with us in ministry; we could not do this work without you.

**We said goodbye.** After eighteen years with RI, Garret, former director of Communications, felt God calling him to something new. Larry and Dot, who led Rosedale Business Group for the past twelve years, retired in October. These goodbyes will follow us into 2026—we

anticipate several transitions in the office due to retirement, growing families, and new opportunities, both home and abroad. We will also see transitions on the field as Angel and Sydney return from Ecuador, and Tom and Candice complete their time in Thailand.

Looking toward 2026, we are excited to see new workers launched in the Mediterranean and North America. We are excited to welcome a new team of interns this month and to reunite with the REACH teams in early May. We are excited to meet the new staff we know God will provide, and to rejoice with our former coworkers as they head into new areas of life. We are excited to travel, both in the U.S. and internationally, and look forward to spending time with many of you in your churches. We are excited to host Family Challenge in the spring and City Challenge in the summer. We are excited to watch Ride for Missions continue to grow even after twenty years.

**I invite you to pray for us as we step into the new year.** Pray for us as we seek new employees and say goodbye to others. Pray for the workers who will launch in early spring. Pray for financial provision, asking that we will have wisdom to know how to use what God has given us. Pray that we would continue to see movements to Jesus spark as we take His good news to the world. 🙏

Photo credit: [Jorge Caetano on Unsplash](#)



*Mike serves as Rosedale International's Director of Partner Development. He attends London Christian Fellowship and is active in youth ministry. He, his wife Karen, and their five children previously served in West Africa.*

## The Thief off the Cross cont'd from page 1

How will “the thief on the cross” live, now that he has become “the thief off the cross”? Whether the thief is on or off the cross, he’s saved through faith—and God’s Word has provided us with a clear picture of faith in life. Consider how the “faith, not works” teaching that Paul delivered to the Ephesians continues: “...for we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**”<sup>7</sup>

A so-called faith that does not produce good works is dead.<sup>8</sup> Doubtless, God saves us apart from our works, but Paul reminds the Roman church that this is no license to work sin.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Paul begins and ends his letter to the Romans by declaring that God’s saving work produces “the obedience of faith” in His people.<sup>10</sup> Christ commands His disciples to discern between true faith and counterfeits, and the test is simple obedience to the will of God the Father,<sup>11</sup> perfectly revealed in Jesus the Son.<sup>12</sup>

On Good Friday, the thief entered Paradise through faith. But this faith was no momentary “decision for Christ.” It was not the kind of “commitment” that bears no lasting implications for works. The very same faith, seen off the cross, moves sinners to repent continually; to follow Jesus in discipleship; to share in the fellowship of Christ’s people, whom God is building into a spiritual temple of living stones.<sup>13</sup>

### Part Three

Too often, we have reduced faith to a momentary event, rather than honoring faith as a spiritual reality that will endure long after the spiritual gifts have passed away.<sup>14</sup> More than *distinguishing* faith and works, as Scripture does, we have taken the unbiblical step of *detaching* them. We have read our faulty understanding of faith back into the story of the thief on the cross. How else could we be so blind to the good works that the thief performs on Calvary?

The faithful thief hears another crucified “evildoer” mocking Jesus, echoing the taunts of Satan in the wilderness.<sup>15</sup> In turn, the faithful thief rebukes this blasphemy and urges the evildoer to “fear God.”<sup>16</sup>

The faithful thief confesses that he and the blasphemous thief are, alike, justly condemned for their sins. But in the same breath, he declares that Jesus dies unjustly, as a man who has “done nothing wrong.”<sup>17</sup>

Knowing himself worthy of condemnation, the faithful thief throws himself upon the mercy and grace of the Crucified One who has done nothing wrong. He appeals to Jesus as the Old Testament saints appealed to the LORD: “Remember me!” He recognizes Jesus as the Christ—the anointed king of God’s kingdom—and pleads for Jesus to favor him with kingly power.<sup>18</sup>

Even as he dies with his hands and feet nailed to a cross, the faithful thief brings forth good works. He confesses his own worthiness of condemnation, rebukes blasphemy, calls sinners to fear God, recognizes Jesus as both the LORD and Messiah, and throws himself publicly on the Savior’s grace and mercy. *None* of these works earns the thief’s salvation, but *all* of them spring from the only kind of faith that receives assurance of salvation from Christ.<sup>19</sup>

If the thief did these things as he died on a cross, how can we—“thieves *off* the cross”—possibly do less? 🙏

<sup>7</sup>Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>8</sup>James 2:14-19.

<sup>9</sup>Romans 6:1,2.

<sup>10</sup>Romans 1:5-6,16:25-27.

<sup>11</sup>Matthew 7:15-23.

<sup>12</sup>John 5:30, 6:38, 8:29, et al.

<sup>13</sup>Matthew 6:18, 1 Peter 2.

<sup>14</sup>1 Corinthians 13:13.

<sup>15</sup>Luke 23:39 ESV supplies “railed against,” which obscures a perfectly good cognate [*blaspheméo*] (cf. 4:1-12).

<sup>16</sup>Luke 23:40 ESV supplies “rebuke” [*epitimáo*]: a word that Luke associates with Christ’s campaign against the demons (4:35,39,41; 9:42).

<sup>17</sup>Luke 23:41 (cf. Is. 53:9, Col. 2:13,14).

<sup>18</sup>Luke 23:42. There are 8 exact matches for the phrase “remember me” [*mnēsthēti mou*] in the

Greek OT (LXX). In seven of these instances, it is a prayer for God’s favor: e.g., “Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!” (Ps. 25:7). In the remaining instance, it is a petition from Joseph to Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer (Gen. 40:14), and it goes unheeded (40:23).

<sup>19</sup>Luke 23:43.

## Revive Us, Lord: Part 1 cont'd from page 3

Reading revival history challenges me. If God has continued to work in His church in an Acts-like manner, then shouldn’t we be hungry for the same manifestations of His glory in our day? “Will you not revive

us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, Lord, and grant us your salvation” (Ps. 85:6-7).

Next month, I’ll continue the theme of revival with specifics from the story of the United Prayer Revival of the 1800s that especially challenge me. 🙏



The archival highlight this month features a written exchange between a well-known Rosedale Network minister (Richard Showalter) and a well-known Mennonite author and historian (John Christian Wenger). The first page has illustrative photos, followed by an article published in an Eastern Mennonite College newsletter, followed by a postcard and response. For those who might wonder what all the fuss is about, the “plain suit” was an important marker of nonconformity for men for several decades. Deciding to wear it or not to wear it was often a major consideration. [View article.](#)