

"Dice"
John 19:23-24

March 29, 2013

Good Friday

We have once again come to the foot of the cross of Christ. We come with reverence and worship. During Jesus' time, people came to His cross but for other reasons. Some people came because they were morbidly curious. Some came because they enjoyed watching such a spectacle. It is like today, when an accident happens on the highway, many people are curious and want to stop and watch. Some people -- the Jewish leaders -- were there at Jesus' cross because they hated Jesus and were relishing in His death. They wanted to mock Jesus and see Him die. Some people -- the Roman soldiers -- were there because they had a job to do. They were the execution squad.

This was not a pleasant job. Nobody wanted to do it. It was for those soldiers lowest in military seniority. What made it so bad? There was the blood and the gore which could, at times, get to even the most grizzled veteran of crucifixion duty. There was also the time factor. These soldiers had a long wait because victims of crucifixion died slowly. Normally, it took several days for a person nailed to a cross to finally die. So what could they do while they waited? One thing they could do is plunder their victims' possessions for whatever they could get. This was perhaps the only perk they received for serving on the execution squad. It was disgusting, but, then again, this was disgusting duty and a disgusting death.

The soldiers in our text took Jesus' clothing and divided it among themselves. Each took part of Jesus' clothing -- his belt, sandals, outer garment and so on. This left the tunic which was more valuable because it was seamless. Instead of tearing it, they engaged in a game of chance to see who would get it. They cast lots -- gambled -- for the Savior's only precious possession. Therefore, our picture for this evening is a symbol for gambling: dice.

Many people today enjoy gambling -- going to Las Vegas, buying lottery tickets, or even patronizing the local casinos. Why? Gambling is exciting. People hope to "win the big one" and

become gloriously rich. Some people spend a lot of money in hopes of winning. Yet those are foolish uses of money. Do you know what your odds of winning the big lottery pay out are? Last year, the odds of winning the \$550 million dollar Powerball prize were 175 million to one. It is nearly impossible to win. The odds of getting hit by lightning in any given year are a relatively sure thing: 775,000 to 1. Yet that doesn't bother many people. Many people just keep on gambling away their money and their livelihood.

Many people are gambling with their spiritual lives as well. Many people are betting that there is no God so they refuse to believe in Him. Many people who profess belief in God are betting that God doesn't really hate sin and that He would never really punish people in hell. Many people are betting that they can get to heaven by living good and doing the best they can.

Are these good gambles – something you'd be willing to bet your eternal destiny on? Not at all. They are very foolish bets – even more foolish than buying lottery tickets and expecting to win. There *is* a God who exists. He *is* holy. And not only is He holy, He requires His creatures to be holy, too. He does hate sin and He will punish sinners. Doing your best is not good enough because His standard is perfection. Not even the most die-hard atheist would claim to be perfect. No one can do that. You can't do that. I can't do that. If we depend on ourselves or hope that God doesn't care about sin, then we have gambled very badly. The odds are stacked against us.

When Jesus was nailed to a cross, the odds were reversed. The odds were not 175 million to one or even a billion to one. Instead, the odds were One for billions. There, on the cross, was God's judgment against and punishment for the sin of the entire world. There, hung One man for billions of people. Jesus hung there for every person who has lived. Jesus hung there for every person who will live. Jesus hung there for every person who lives now. Jesus hung there for you and for me. He suffered God's wrath and endured the punishment for every sin, every transgression, every trespass, every iniquity and, every failure to do good. He did that for you, for me and for every one.

This was no accident. This is not a good man in the wrong place at the wrong time. Jesus did not gamble that He could change the hearts and lives of the Jewish nation, only to be persecuted by a corrupt religious establishment, killed by a Roman governor in order to be politically correct, and lose His life. All of this was planned. God planned this to happen for the salvation of people before the world began. God promised to send a Savior to Adam and Eve after they had sinned. God repeated His promise again and again throughout the Old Testament. When Jesus arrived on this earth, He said several times that He had come to offer His life as a ransom for many. God planned this for you and me before we were born because of His great love and mercy. He does not want the sinner to die and be punished. He wants every person to live with Him forever in perfect joy and peace. This [the cross] is God's great plan to save people. It is no accident.

Each of you is here tonight and it is no accident. Whether you are regular members who faithfully attend every worship service, members who come only occasionally, or even visitors, God has chosen you to be here tonight to hear the wonderful story of God's love. God has chosen you to receive forgiveness for all of your sins. God has chosen you to live with Him now and forever in heaven.

Don't gamble with your spiritual life! Put your trust in Jesus Christ. Whatever wrong you have done, it doesn't matter. Jesus has suffered and died in your place to pay the price for every one of those sins. God forgives you your worst sin and your most frequent sin because of Jesus. Whatever good you have failed to do, it doesn't matter. Jesus has fulfilled every one of God's commands in your place to satisfy the demands of God's holy law. God credits Jesus' perfect obedience to your account.

Even when you gamble with your spiritual life, being tempted to trust in something other than the Savior hanging on the cross, Jesus doesn't gamble with your spiritual life. Jesus is there to strengthen and reinforce your life in Him. Jesus continues to come to you through His Word to remind you of His great love. He comes to you with His body and blood in the Lord's Supper to assure you of

His forgiveness. His Spirit working in the Word and Sacrament will strengthen your faith and enable you to live with no doubts and no gambles.

Tonight, we measure the odds. Gambling in the casinos, the lottery, or by whatever means are pretty lousy odds. You probably cannot win. When we look at the cross, the odds are good. Jesus Christ has died and defeated the devil. The forgiveness of sins is a sure thing. Jesus Christ has died and defeated death. Because of His resurrection, our resurrection to eternal life is a sure thing. So, continue to live for your Savior -- serve Him, speak of Him to others, love one another -- and have no doubts. His love, mercy, forgiveness, help, and support are a sure thing. It's no gamble! Amen.