

"Gambling under the Cross"—John 19:23-24

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "Gambling under the Cross", is John 19:23-24 → *When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also His tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

A perusal through your local shopping mall could make you think that life is all about clothing, fashion and jewelry. Store after store places before your eyes "designer fashioned" clothing and jewelry meant to make you look just right for every occasion and everyday life. Remember those old jeans with the knees worn out and all patched up? You should have kept them because now they are sold as a "fashion statement" of some kind for more money than many of our grandparents made in a month!

Picture yourself as the average person in your town having only a few

pieces of clothing to your name. Hard to imagine, isn't it? Most of us have been blessed with so much clothing that we periodically have to "purge" our closets and stock the local thrifts stores and good will centers. Jesus is described in Scripture as having only one set of clothing to His name. Yet His clothing was important in God's plan of salvation for you even at His crucifixion.

Under the cross of Jesus we hear about the soldiers who appeared to be insensitive and indifferent to Jesus' plight. Apparently their primary concern was dividing up Jesus' clothing—something most people would consider trivial, if not cruel, while He was dying. Verse 23 of our text says the soldiers *took His garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also His tunic*. These *four parts* were likely divided into a belt, a head covering, sandals, and an outer garment. However, they ran into a "snag" with Jesus' tunic. It was *seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be."* (cf. Verse 23-24)

Why are these soldiers so concerned about Jesus' clothing? Maybe it was just to pass the time away with some "gaming" while waiting for the execution to be done. One may even be shocked by their indifference and insensitivity to Jesus' plight while being so near the cross. However, these soldiers were simply "doing their jobs" as they had done so many times before. In fact, getting the victim's clothing was

part of the “perks” of their job! They were so near their salvation and yet so far away in their everyday life distractions. Sound familiar?

It wasn't until the execution was all over that one of the soldiers finally took notice of Jesus and realized that He was near to God Himself. Mark 15:39 tells us: *When the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that in this way He breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”*

Many people today react to the crucifixion of Jesus in much the same manner as these soldiers. They are so near to Him and yet so far away. In fact, the cross itself has lost its gruesome ugliness for many in the realm of fashion. Many wear the cross as a beautiful piece of jewelry with no thought as to the obedience to God which it demands. Many wear the cross as kind of a “magical” or “mystical” charm for protection without a thought of their having been crucified with Jesus in their baptisms and their need to be crucified with Him everyday through repentance of their sins and faith. (cf. Romans 6:4; Galatians 2:20) Such perspectives of the cross are actually standing and viewing the cross from a distance with indifference and insensitivity, as did the soldiers in our text who were just “doing their jobs.”

While the devil deceives you into thinking that such a view of the cross is actually a “safe place” it actually leads to hell. The cross of Jesus will always confront you with your sins which put Him on that

cross. Without faith all the cross will show you is God's judgment upon your disobedience to His Word and will. You will end up condemned with Jesus.

And yet people don't realize how near to salvation they really are. Viewing the cross of Jesus is being near to the **only One** Who can take care of your guilt and sin once and for all! As these soldiers were just passing time by gambling for Jesus' seamless garment in the shadow of the cross they were missing the display of Christ's grace **for them**, a sign of which they were holding in their hands! In fact, their gambling for Jesus' garment was a part of God's plan foretold by King David about a thousand years before Jesus' crucifixion in Psalm 22:18 → *They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.* God was working in the midst of their job to fulfill His plan of salvation for them!

The seamless garment could also picture the Old Testament high priest's garments, of whom Jesus is a type. (cf. Hebrews 4:14-5:10) Just as the high priest offered the sacrificial lamb to God for the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement, so Jesus offered Himself on the altar of the cross as *the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!* (cf. John 1:29) Thus, Jesus' seamless garment pictures for us that He is our great High Priest Who offered Himself to God on the cross for our sins!

Yet, Jesus was greater than those Old Testament high priests as

Hebrews 7:26-27 says: *It was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for His own sins and then for those of the people, since He did this once for all when He offered up Himself. Jesus' clothing was important to God . . . only from a different perspective.*

This handling of the bloody garments of Jesus by the soldiers also reminds us of our need to be clothed properly **in God's sight**. Your relationship with God is described throughout the Scriptures as being clothed in some way. Isaiah praised God saying, *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in My God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.* (cf. Isaiah 61:10) It is a picture of remaining near to God's righteousness, which is yours only by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. It is a picture of remaining near to God's salvation, as near as your clothes are to your body.

Galatians 3:27 says that *all of you who were baptized into Christ have **clothed yourselves with Christ**.* (NIV) In this new "clothing" of faith you remain near to the cross in order that you might be "clothed" in the forgiveness of God every moment of every day! In this new "clothing" of faith you do not stand near the cross with indifference and therefore miss its significance for each day and every part of your life. Rather, you

desire it to affect how you “look” by your words and actions. This is why God tells you *to clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*. (cf. Colossians 3:12 NIV) This was the real “clothing” which Jesus displayed on the cross.

This new “clothing” of faith accompanies you into eternity as well. It will involve sharing in Christ’s suffering, maybe even *to the point of shedding your own blood*. (cf. Hebrews 12:4) However, such sacrifice is nothing compared to the sacrifice of Jesus, Whose *blood . . . cleanses us from all sin*. (cf. 1 John 1:7) It is the robe of righteousness, made *white in the blood of the Lamb*, which brings you *before the throne of God*, to be sheltered with *His presence* eternally, near to Him **forever!** (cf. Revelation 7:13-15) Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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