

Life is Never Just a Throw of the Dice

Does it ever seem like life is happenstance and we are victims living under the circumstances? God's Word is always revealing, showing us the story behind the story. For instance, for the past few weeks we have been talking about our Lord's passion, what led up to it, what happened when He died and the triumphant victory of and beyond His cross. There is a telling verse that combines the story behind the story.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter was addressing the men of Israel and he made the statement, "...ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23b). Our Lord was taken in the Garden of Gethsemane and brought illegally before the Sanhedrin court. After this, Christ was taken to Pontius Pilate, then to Herod, back to Pilate, beaten mercilessly, walked up the Via Dolorosa (the Way of the Pain) and on top of Golgotha He was cruelly crucified. If all there was to Acts 2:23 was the statement: "...ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain," then it would appear that our Lord was the victim of unfortunate circumstances and taken advantage of by wicked men. There is a preceding statement that changes everything; the first part of the verse says, "*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God...*" (Acts 2:23a). Even while our Lord was dying, the soldiers "... crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, *They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots*" (Matthew 27:35). Casting lots was a type of throwing the dice or bones, a mere flipping of the coin to determine an outcome - "heads I win, tails I lose." Yet even the throwing of the dice was prophesied in the Old Testament, "*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture*" (Psalm 22:18). Yes, even the game of chance was no game of chance! As we with broken hearts relive Calvary, we must see that God was behind the scenes, not only in control, but controlling. As Christ said to Peter, who in an act of bravado pulled out his sword to stop the events, "*Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*" (Matthew 26: 53, 54). Jesus was showing Simon Peter that although this was going to be painful and bad as wicked men were taking Him away, God was in control and this most wicked display of man's depraved nature was working this all together for good. Our Lord's life was never just a "throw of the dice." Life for you and me is not either. Permit me to illustrate.

1. Consider God's Providence for people who are walking in the right way.

The servant of Abraham took a long journey far, far from home, to find a wife for his son Isaac. It seems almost hap-hazard as he asks the Lord to reveal it by a young lady who is not only willing to give him a drink of water, but his camels as well. Rebekah was more than willing to do so and the servant said, "*...Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren*" (Genesis 24:27). This was no "by chance" meeting.

I am sure many of our couples can look back at their courtship and see the hand of God. What a blessing to have the Bunnell family in our mission conference. Could we not all see the great love they had for one another and the perfect match that was made in heaven? As we look back in their life, we see that Andrew's father had been invited to preach a meeting in Colorado Springs. As little children, when there was often a social taboo at their early age that boys and girls did not play together, there was an unusual attraction that Sarah had for Andrew when he walked onto the playground. She told her little playmates, "I'm going to marry that boy." In the years to follow, although he traveled all over the country with his evangelist father and she moved to Iowa with her family, they would often find themselves in each other's company. It was so real with them, that they never showed interest in any other member of the opposite sex. I submit to you, nothing here was by chance. God governed every meeting, even the first introduction on the playground.

2. Consider God's Providence for people who have stumbled out of the way.

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Proverbs 16:33). The Hebrew word for “disposing” is “mishpat,” which is properly, a verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree. The Scripture is saying, it may appear to be just dice thrown randomly with a random verdict, but not so! God is designating the outcome.

Everything about the union of David and Bathsheba was wrong. After their great sin, her husband Uriah’s death and then the death of their child out of wedlock speaks strongly of God’s judgment. But after the death of their child, the Bible says, *“And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD”* (II Samuel 12:24, 25). God called Solomon, Jedidiah which means “Beloved of the Lord.” This young man grew up to become the wisest man in the world. His legacy of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon bear witness of Divine plan of God. If you ask me to explain all of this, I cannot. There is a beautiful phrase at the end of II Samuel 12:25 that says, *“...because of the LORD.”* Because of the Lord’s mercy, His plans take themes of our life and make something beautiful! In “The Imitation of Christ,” Thomas à Kempis said, “Homo proponit, sed Deus disponit” Translated means, “Man proposes, (but) God disposes!

3. Consider God’s Providence for people running away.

Jonah had been told by God to go to Nineveh and preach. He disobeyed and ran the opposite direction. God never lost track of him. While sailing the sea in an escape, God sent a mighty storm and the Bible records, *“And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah”* (Jonah 1:7). The dice landed on Jonah, he was thrown over board and swallowed by the great fish. *“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights”* (Jonah 1:17). God had begun preparing the fish before Jonah got on board the ship. God doesn’t make us go against our will, but He can certainly make us willing to go. Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity! God knows how to bring us back. I am thankful for the stories behind the stories. Life is never just a throw of the dice!

- Pastor Pope

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