



## What If Jesus Was Right?

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

### Matthew 27:35-36

*And when they had crucified [Jesus], [the soldiers] divided his garments among them by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him.*

My grandma always told me that gambling was wrong. She said it was bad. She said God didn't approve of it. She warned me to stay far away from it.

That's why I was startled the first time I read this little piece of scripture. I was offended to find gambling in the Bible. I was appalled to discover people gambling in Jesus' presence. I thought it was vile. I thought it was disgusting. I thought those soldiers were terrible.

How could they do that - gambling in the shadow of the cross?

How could they do that - gambling while Jesus was dying right there above their little game?

How could they do that - gambling to steal away his last few remaining earthly possessions?

They had no right to do it. They were wrong. My grandma said so.

But over the years, I have come to think that those soldiers weren't the only ones who were gambling at the cross. They weren't the only ones who were casting lots, or taking a risk, or seizing the opportunity to throw the dice. They weren't the only ones gambling their last chance to get something better.

Grandma told me gambling was wrong. A few years back, I came across a poem that made me re-think grandma's rule. I don't know who wrote it. I don't know its name. I read it somewhere and kept a copy. Here it is:

And sitting down, they watched him there,  
The soldiers did;

There, while they played at dice,  
He made his sacrifice,  
And died upon his Cross to rid  
God's world of sin.  
He was a gambler, too, my Christ.  
He took his life and threw  
It for a world redeemed.

Sorry, grandma, maybe the biggest gambler of all was Jesus Christ.

When you think about it, it's true. After all,  
- he was the one who took the biggest risk;  
- he was the one who put his life,  
- and his future,  
- and all of his tomorrows,  
- up for grabs;  
- he was the one who took a chance  
- that his death could conquer sin;  
- he was the one who thought his suffering  
- could bring you forgiveness;  
- he was the one who trusted you enough,  
- to give up his life,  
- and throw it all away,  
- for you.

When grandma saw those soldiers gambling at the Cross, she told me not to be like them. She told me to stay away from games of chance.

So, I never gambled. I did play cards. I played solitaire, where the only person I could lose to was myself. I played bridge, where the only things I could lose were my pride and my wife's trump cards. I never played poker. Poker, grandma said, was a sin.

But lately, I have been watching the World Poker Tour on television. It's fascinating. It's exciting. It's interesting. I'm captivated by a move that can be made on the World Poker Tour. It's when a player goes All In.

When a player gets himself in trouble, or thinks he has a chance to wipe out the competition, he can risk it all by going All In. He pushes all his chips to the center of the table and declares he's All In. When he does that, he's risking it all on one hand, on one card, on one bluff. He'll either win it all or lose it all.

I'm sorry, grandma, but this is how it looks to me. Those soldiers at the Cross were gambling for used clothing, but Jesus was All In. He gambled everything for your soul.

What do you think? Are you worth it? If Jesus were to win you right now, would he think he hit the jackpot?

Jesus threw it All In, taking a chance that you would come to appreciate God's love.

Jesus threw it All In, gambling that you'd decide to follow his path.

Jesus threw it All In, betting that you'd take his place in the world.

Jesus threw it All In, wagering that you were worth it.

When next you see Jesus, what's he going to say to you? Will he say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant"? Will he say, "I took a chance on you. I trusted you to come through for me, and you paid off"?

Will he say that to you? Do you think he'll be pleased with how you're living your life right now? Do you think he'll decide you were worth the gamble? Will he be glad he suffered for you?

Do you think Jesus was right to go All In for you?

I'm sorry, grandma, but I think this little episode from the scriptures is there to let me know that reaching for the good life is always a gamble. I think Jesus can appreciate someone who is willing to take a chance and go All In for him.

I think the Christian life is risky business. I think the Gospels are clear on this point. I think Jesus said it over and over again. If you're going to be his follower, you've got to be willing to take a chance. You've got to be willing to step out in faith. You've got to be willing to gamble today's security for tomorrow's glory.

That's what I think Jesus said. What do you think he meant?

In the Parable of the Talents [Matthew 25:21ff] Jesus praised and rewarded the men who doubled their money, but he punished the timid one who was so afraid of losing a penny that he dug a hole and played it safe.

What if Jesus was right? Do you think there might come a time when Jesus calls you to take risks with your money and possessions? Do you think Jesus wants you to step out in faith and take a chance? Do you think he gets tired when you play it safe all the time?

Jesus told a story about a man who found a hidden treasure out in a field [Matthew 13:44-46], and Jesus said it was good when the man sold everything he had to purchase the field with the buried treasure in it.

He told another story about a man who found a perfect pearl [Matthew 13:45-46]. Jesus said the man was smart to sell everything he had so he could call that one perfect jewel his very own.

Jesus pointed out a poor widow {Mark 12:41f} who put her last penny in the offering plate, and he said we all need to remember how she had given everything she had, how she had trusted her future to God.

What if Jesus was right? Do you think there is some thing in this world that's worth risking everything you've got to own,

- some thing worth selling everything you've got to hold it in your hand,

- some thing worth gambling your future over so you can call it your own?

What do you think? Is there some thing worth giving up everything you've got in order to make God smile?

When Jesus walked down the shore, down by the Sea of Galilee, and called his disciples to come and follow him [Matthew 4:18ff], he didn't give them a chance to tie up any loose ends,

- or save for a rainy day,

- or pack for the journey,

- or buy some American Express Travelers' Checks,

- or give two week's notice at their jobs,

- or feed the cat,

- or even say good-bye.

Jesus expected Peter and Andrew, James and John to drop what they were doing, turn around, and follow in behind, immediately!

What if Jesus was right? Do you think some opportunities come your way and you don't have time to think about it, or plan out your options, or wait for it? Do you think Jesus ever calls you to act spontaneously? Do you think he wants you to jump up and do something right away? Do you think there might be some things that just can't wait for tomorrow?

Jesus was looking out over lilies in the field and watching the birds fly through the air [Matthew 6:31f], when he said, "Don't worry about what you're going to eat, or what you're going to wear, or what's going to happen tomorrow; God will take care of you." After that, he went on to say, if you "seek first God's kingdom" everything else will be yours.

What if Jesus was right? Do you think he meant it when he said you're supposed to trust God to take care of you? Is it possible that all your

worrying and fretting, all your stewing and nervousness - could they be just a waste of your time? What if you really are supposed to spend your days working for God's kingdom, spreading the good news to anyone who will listen, reaching out to make life better for somebody else? What if that's how you're supposed to spend your days?

Jesus said {Matthew 7:7-8} all you've got to do is ask for what you want, and you'll get it. All you've got to do is seek the good life, and you'll live it. All you've got to do is knock on the door of the God's kingdom, and it will open up for you.

What if Jesus was right? What if you can get what you want? What if it's already in your grasp? What if it's right there in front of your eyes?

Jesus might be right, you know. So, what's holding you back? What's keeping you from living the Christian life? What's standing in your way? Don't worry about what my grandma used to say. It's worth the risk. If you want to be a Christian, all you've got to do is act like one.

Jesus was right!

When you're driving down the street,  
you can't avoid every bump in the road.

When you're out on the lake,  
you won't get anywhere if you don't make some waves.

If you want something better,  
you have to take a risk.

Jesus was right!

The good life isn't about being comfortable.

Life's not meant to be easy every day.

Controversies can't always be avoided,

especially when you learn to stand for something.

Jesus was right!

It's taking a risk that counts.

It's the challenge that matters.

It's the trying that pleases.

It's the struggle that builds something better.

There's an old story about Sir Francis Drake. He was trying to recruit boys to sail off on his adventures with him. The first thing he did to try to get more sailors was to take the boys up on a hillside overlooking the sea. As they gazed out toward the horizon, Sir Francis told the boys about all the beautiful and wondrous sights that awaited them on the other side of that horizon.

He told them about sunrises where the water was so still, the surface of the ocean looked like a huge mirror. He told them about sunsets so brilliant that they looked like the sun was sizzling in the water. He told them about gentle breezes so welcome that they would think they were in paradise. And, he told them about the thrill of adventure that would fill their souls as the wind filled the sails, pushing the ship forward.

Sir Francis painted a beautiful picture of what was out there in the unknown beyond. He described the wonders of exploration. And when he finished, not a single boy signed on for the trip.

So, Sir Francis changed his story. The next day he took a group of boys back up on the same hillside. They gazed across the same ocean waters. They looked out toward the same horizon. But this time, Sir Francis told them a different story.

“Lads,” he said, “there will be days when the ship will be blown the wrong way, and you won’ t think you’ ll ever see land again.

“There will be days when you’ ll be so thirsty, your throat will scream for a cool drink of fresh water.

“There will be days when the sun will parch your lips and you won’ t even be able to swallow.

“Some days you’ ll be so hungry you won’ t even be able to stand on the deck.

“There will be days when you’ ll think you just can’ t go on.

“But if you do,

“if you can handle the hardships,

“if you can handle the fear,

“if you can handle the uncertainty,

“if you can handle the danger -

“the joy of discovery and the rewards of exploration will be beyond your wildest imaginings.”

Some of the boys never went home to tell their parents good-bye. They jumped on board and accepted the challenge.

They caught a vision of something that would give value to their lives.

They caught a vision of something worth suffering for.

They caught a vision of something worth the risk.

They caught a vision of a challenge they were willing to die for.

Isn’ t that what your life if Jesus Christ is supposed to be like?  
What if Jesus was right?

If you listen, you can hear his challenge.

Don't ever get the idea that being a Christian is safe and easy.

Don't suppose that following Jesus will make you comfortable.

Don't assume that being a disciple is risk-free.

What if Jesus was right?

The testimony of the scriptures is clear. Jesus says:

- it's the challenge that counts,
- it's the risk that makes you grow,
- it's the gamble that brings something good.

Grandma might not like the words, but even she would agree - we've got to go All In for Jesus is our lives are going to count.