

The Cast Lots

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After crucifying him, they divided his clothes by casting lots. Matthew 27:35

Human chance or Divine Choice? The ancient practice of the casting of lots appears 77 times in the Bible. There is speculation as to even what a lot was – perhaps a pebble or small piece of wood - to our modern equivalent, the roll of a die or flip of a coin. Surely “chance” means to take human decision out of any equation; the practice was also used by pagans – but for gambling and fortune-telling.

The Lord was the one who directed and used the action of casting lots, so surely the outcome was His good and gracious will for rescuing humanity broken by sin. Prophecy would be fulfilled in that foretold in Psalm 22:18 written before the birth of Christ and found preserved for all in the Dead Sea Scrolls, “they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” “They” were the pagan Roman soldiers assigned as executioners for the Son of God - God is and remains in control of the outcome of all things!

Only John’s Gospel reveals that there were four soldiers present at Jesus execution. Each soldier was an eyewitness to the extraordinary events that would occur before and after the death of the Son of God at what they thought was just another routine day of executing the most shameful and cursed of criminals.

Scripture does not reveal which of the soldiers “won” the tunic - that valuable, priestly, woven one-piece undergarment that was the only piece of clothing for which lots were cast. Tradition tells us that one of the soldiers converted to Christianity. We can ponder the mystery of whether that soldier might have been the one to whom the lot fell and the fruit of his conversion in witnessing Christ crucified!

Jesus – thank you that you willingly endured the shame and suffering, separation and death that belonged to us, so that we might undeservedly partake of your righteousness and thus receive the free gifts of redemption and eternal life. Lord Christ, let us boldly speak of your personal, present love and saving grace – you remain our ultimate High Priest, the only perfect sacrifice and the one who spoke words of forgiveness even as you were dying – that you might conquer death for all who would believe. Amen.