

God's Goodness — Man's Depravity  
John 19:23-24

We have just seen in this passage of Scripture Pilate's order of the sign to be placed above the cross of Jesus announcing his crimes. And it is incredible that he does this in three languages, and really he does better than he means to do. Jesus truly is the King. Look at verse 19, "**Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.'**" He is none other than the long awaited Messiah. And Pilate meant it as a derision to the religious leaders and the nation. Look how weak you are, and how ignoble your king. But Jesus could not be more powerful than he was at that moment. We realize that he is none other than the King of glory.

The next picture or scene we have is the soldiers dividing up the garments of Jesus among them. This is the first of four prophecies given from the Old Testament that prove beyond any doubt that the one who is controlling all of these events is none other than God. In verse 28 we have the cry of Jesus, "**I thirst,**" fulfilling Psalm 69:21. Then we have in verse 36 that not a bone on his body was broken fulfilling Psalm 34:20. Then we have lastly in verse 37 that he was pierced by a sword, fulfilling Zechariah 12:10. Every aspect of the death of Christ was planned and orchestrated by our great God. Nothing is left to chance, but all is under his control. It was really the will of the Lord to crush him and put him to grief.

And today we come to the first of those prophecies. And as you look at it, there might not seem to be much here, but we realize God has meaning and purpose in everything that takes place. And throughout the whole of the crucifixion you have two things that stand side by side. One is the absolute depravity of mankind. The cruelty and the barbarity just seems to know no end. To not only torcher someone but to take great delight in the suffering and the agony of another's death and to realize you had a hand in it, seems to be a picture of the coldness and deadness and wickedness of humanity. We often say when we see evil committed, "How can someone do that to another individual?" But here in this passage of Scripture, "How can anyone do that to the Lord of glory — the one who came to do such good — gave people a taste of the kingdom and preach the best news that could ever be preached — you can come into God's kingdom through the merits of another." And yet this is the response.

And we might ask of evil, "how can anyone ever do that?" But the truth is that same evil that we see in our world today is in us. Jeremiah 17:9, "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?**" None of us know the extent of the wickedness and evilness of our hearts. We can grow in seeing the evil that is in us, but there is no one who has ever realized the depths of his depravity or how great a sinner he or she really is. Certainly it is God's grace when we see our need of the grace of Christ, the need of a Saviour, the cost of our sin, but none of us can fathom how great that need really is. But can we grow in seeing it, and as we grow in seeing it, we start to see more and more sin in our lives even as believers.

Here is the thing we often wonder, after God has shown us such extensive grace, doesn't he ever get tired of us and giving that undeserved favour? Doesn't he ever get tired of our moral failures in our lives? Doesn't he ever get tired of loving

individuals like us? Have you ever thought that? I mean we make a pledge after heavy sorrow over sin that we will never go back there again. Maybe we lost it with our child. That is it, never again will I let anger control my heart! Or maybe we went down that hill of accusation and said things we ought not to have said to our spouse. Never again! Or maybe we look at things on our phone or tablet, never again. But what happens? We are there again. God must be tired of me in the midst of my constant struggle with sin.

But here is the thing about the love of God and you see it in the cross. It has never been about you. Your sin or immensity of sin or your continual sin is not the reason why God loves you. No, the reason why God loves you is simply this — he chose to love the unworthy. He chose to love us when we were the enemies of Christ. We never get to a point where we become deserving recipients of his love. You see all these scenes around the cross are a constant reminder of who we are. We are the ones pictured here. We are the Christ haters. But it is also a picture of the absolute love of God in the face of such sin and evil. How could God love such a people? How could Jesus die and even pray for those who hurled abuse at him? And the only answer that comes back is he chose to love us. And I want us to see both of those halves.

1. In order to appreciate divine grace, we need to see the hardness of the human heart. V. 23-24a.

One of the things I tried to do several years ago is stop watching or reading the news. I might not be as well as informed as others, but I still know enough of what is going on in the world. One of the things the news does is constantly every day show the massive evil in our world, and human suffering. And having these images before our eyes and minds doesn't cause us to be more feeling or sensitive to the suffering of others, but actually hardens our hearts to the untold pain and anguish of others. Social media also does the same. As you scroll through your feed, you bypass somethings and stop at others. But you pass by what the Duchess of York might be wearing at some regal event, and then the bombing of some village in the Ukraine, to some story about Donald Trump having a twin who is really running the country. We no longer discern what is important or true at the same time. Social media sears our minds and deadens our hearts to the plight of those suffering and the cost of sin, how ugly sin.

But not only that, this all has a toll in how we view suffering even among those who we know. It actually hardens our hearts We have a hard time entering into, carrying burdens, or empathizing with others. We want others to feel our pain and help us, but seldom do we ask and really listen to other sufferers. And we might be tempted to think of how few people have entered our suffering, but turn the question around. Have you entered the sufferings of others? Have you sought to truly feel the pain of others and carry the burdens of others? This is part and parcel of our care to truly weep with those who weep. We love entertainment and laughter but never seek to have deep relations, and seek to truly care for others. And there truly is a crisis of caring in the church of Christ. We calloused our hearts and pass by people every Sunday rather than entering their pain, let alone trying to contact them through the week.

And right here in this verse is a picture of what happens when we are constantly around pain and anguish and hurt and suffering. We stop seeing people have worth or significance or even made in the image of God. This is exactly how our Saviour was treated. He was treat of no worth or no value. Look at the verse here, and see if you

see anything in yourself that is in the heart of these soldiers, **“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.”** It is amazing how often when we cannot see anything in a passage how we want to read another message in there, how we want to somehow is some sort of allegory or symbolism, and we often just miss the apparent message. Some have postulated that the four soldiers represent the four corners of the Gentile world. Some look at the seamless tunic of the Lord to speak of his impeccable life that he was absolutely sinless. Some see it as the perfect righteousness of Christ that has never been torn. But there is really no allegory but just the mere facts of what is taking place.

But that does not mean there is no significance here. There is. And one is the absolute indifference of the soldiers. The verse starts, **“When the soldiers had crucified Jesus.”** Think of it, they take the bloody and battered and beaten body of Jesus. You can imagine his weakened state after being flogged and beaten, and the agony of this man, and they seemingly are indifferent as they lay him on the cross and pound the spikes through his hands and feet, and then thrust the cross upright. And the reason why we know they are indifferent is what they do next, and they divide up the last of his belongings, his clothes. The victim of crucifixion was usually crucified naked. It was a further humiliation and added suffering to the one being executed. This would have included his head covering, which was either a scarf or turban, his belt, sandals, and outer robe. This was usually a small payment for the death squad — the last of the belongings. And this is where their attention is, and they are indifferent to his agony. They just are preoccupied with how they can profit from what is left over. They are preoccupied with self rather than the one only a few feet from them is in utter agony and torment, along with the other two victims of their crosses.

And we wonder how can individuals get to the place of being so hard and indifferent? And the answer is one sin after another. They callous their hearts that they cannot see the obvious. But again, it is a picture of both our lack of love for God and our lack of love for others. And one really causes the other. The less we love God the more we are going to be callous about the very sins we commit against others.

But there is another message here. And that is the picture we have of Jesus. The soldiers dividing up his clothes is a testament that Jesus really dies on the cross. Jesus doesn't need a belt or sandals or a tunic. Why? Because dead people do not need these things but only the living. We also see his utter humiliation as he hung naked on that cross. Exposed to all to gawk and see. We realize when Adam and Eve sinned, they tied leaves together to hide their nakedness, to not expose their shame. Here is we see the utter shame brought on Jesus.

And think of it, because if you want to see the goodness of God and the love of Christ, remember, this is the one who spoke and all the soldiers fell before him during his arrest in Gethsemane. He could call ten thousand angels down to rid and judge all of humanity. He is not a helpless victim. He is none other than our Lord, and right here our Saviour. He is stripped down in utter humiliation, exposed so that our sin will never be exposed or judged. He is stripped down in utter humiliation that we might be clothed in his righteousness forevermore. And who does he do this for? For people like

the soldiers, for the crowds who passed by and shook their heads at him, for the religious leaders who mock and ridiculed him as he writhed in pain. He did this for people like you and me who have such callous hearts at times. He didn't love the lovely but the exact opposite. Our acceptance before a holy God is never based on us or our character but on our God who chose to love us in the most extraordinary way. So why would we ever think that his acceptance of us now rides on whether we live a stellar life or not, whether we are perfectly obedient or never struggle with sin? God has chosen to love us, and chosen to love us comprehensively and fully. No one ever loved us or loves us as Christ loves us.

And here is the paradox of that love, the more we recognize that love and see and savour and rest in that love, the more he changes us. The more we not only love God but the more we have a caring and patient and kind love toward others. The more we enter the pain and turmoil of others and seek not only to truly weep with them, but carry their burdens. We truly become more characterized by the sacrificial love of our Saviour. We give that love even to people who do not deserve it because we do not deserve it. The key to fighting indifference to sin in the plight and suffering of others, is seeing and savouring the amazing God-centred love of God for people like us.

2. In order to see God's grace, we need to see the plan of God. V.24.

I am always amazed when I look at Scripture to see the human will and divine will side by side throughout the Scripture. People and individuals do what they want to do, and they are culpable and responsible for their wicked and evil acts. They cannot blame anyone else or even God but only self. Every knee will ultimately bow and every tongue silent before the judgment of God when all see the wickedness of self and holiness of God. God is just in his judgments of all. But right beside that truth of human will and responsibility is the divine will of God. God orchestrates all the events that come to pass and ordains all that comes to pass but in some mysterious way he is never culpable for evil. Both are taught in Scripture. Listen to James 1:13-14, "**Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.**" There it is. People are responsible for the very evil they commit. It originates in their own hearts. Don't blame God!

But then we read in Lamentations 3:38, "**Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?**" The mouth of the Most High, God spoke everything into existence. So this is speaking of his doing. Now the word for "bad" here is the word the Hebrew word that is translated "evil" in other places. God has ordained these events. And many people are bothered by this and say things like, "God was not in it." And what they mean is God would not have ordained such suffering, or bad or evil events to take place.

But there are two things I want to say about that. First, is there really any comfort in that? God is all good, and he could not have done that. But this is what you are saying, God who is a God of all power stood by and did nothing when he knew that evil or that horrendous accident or whatever would take place. We have a God who really is uncaring, and there is no purpose or reason for your suffering and heartache. But what if God planned all the suffering and even the evil that happens in our lives

because he has the highest purposes — none other than our conforming to the image of Christ. Listen to Romans 8:28-29, **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”** There’s the comfort! He has the highest purposes. No suffering or adverse circumstance or even evil done against us is purposeless. God is truly in control and all his good purpose will come to pass. He truly is conforming us into that blessed imagine of our Lord and Saviour.

But the second thing in denying that God even ordains evil things is the passage right here, because look at what John records about the soldiers here, because it seems like such a random event but even this event is under the sovereign and perfect plan of our Lord, **“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.”** So here is this seamless tunic, and they would normally tear the garment and divide the fabric up among themselves. It is also amazing the stories that have arisen about the power of the garment, but the focus is not on the garment but on the fulfillment of Scripture. Look at how it is stated, **“This was to fulfill the Scriptures.”** The word “fulfill” does not have the meaning of God looking down the corridor of time and then predicting what would come to pass, but it speak of a predetermined plan that has come to pass. So if I have a plan of today to mow my lawn, and I accomplished it, I have fulfilled that plan. God’s plan is fulfilled simply because in the wickedness of the soldiers human heart, indifferent to the pain of the One on the cross, they look at this garment too valuable to rip so they all want all of it for themselves, so they decide to cast lots. They all have a one in four chance of it coming to pass.

But what comes to pass is Psalm 22:18, **“they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”** Psalm 22 is a Psalm of David during a time when his enemies have all come around him. But the Psalm looks beyond the suffering of David to none other than the suffering of our Lord. In fact listen to the first verse of that Psalm and see if you recognize it, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?”** We see that quoted in Matthew 27:46. The Psalm ends with these words in verse 31, “that he has done it,” which literally can be translated, “It is finished,” the statement that we see in this chapter just before Jesus expires. And listen to verses 6-8 of this Psalm because they go along with all the sneering and scorning and ridicule of Jesus in Matthew 27 also, **“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ‘He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!’”** The Psalm talks about his body and bones out of joint, his thirst and his pain.

And here is the point in all this specific detail. The one who is in control of all this is none other than God. To say that God does not control the evil in this world, would be to say that God was not in control or did not plan the events of the cross. But it is the exact opposite. He is in full control. And what man means for evil, God means for

good. So let's draw a couple of conclusions. One is that this is the extent of God's love for you. God planned that Jesus would hang on that cross and pay the penalty of your sin so that you could be clothed forevermore in the perfect righteousness of Christ. Your level of acceptance has never been nor ever will be your performance. See the glory of your Lord. See the immensity of his love for you, and grow in that. His love for the undeserving, and we never become deserving is what really changes our lives. Do you want to be a more loving spouse, better parent, more committed to Christ, then look to him, look at him. See his love. It is that love of our great God for unworthy individuals like us that change us from one degree of glory to another.

And the other is to realize his control and goodness in your life right here and right now. At the cross all the horrors and powers of hell were thrown at him, all humanity seemed to be gathered against him. It was the greatest evil by humanity and we are all culpable. We have all cursed Christ. But what came out of that is the great hope — our eternal welfare. If God is able to take the greatest evil and create that much glorious good out of it, do you really believe he is not sovereign and he cannot bring good power whatever you are going through? Come trust in him. Rejoice in the goodness of God. We might not know what he is doing, but we know the character of the one who controls all. Comfort yourself in the exhaustive sovereignty of Christ. He even controls the gambling around the cross. Your life and my life are never out of control, but under the loving care of our great God.