

47-05-03-Gambling with God

gambling, risk, trust, faith, confidence, free will, adventure

2 Cor 5:7

Christian faith is a holy bet on God against all odds in a fallen world.

INTRODUCTION:

–Humans are born gamblers—born *risk-takers*. When people gamble their lives to rescue others, we praise it as a *virtue*. But if governed by folly or greed, gambling becomes a *vice*. Society condemns the gambler who wastes his income at casinos, while his family starves in poverty.

–Most sermons condemn this *vice*. I’m preaching its *virtue* in the realm of faith. [John Wimber said, “Faith is spelled R-I-S-K.”] Faith is *risk-taking*.

HOM.idea. [In the 1920s, in a “My Religion” series of essays for a London paper, an “*Unknown writer*” wrote, “The gambling instinct, so often perverted and used for unworthy ends, is one of the most valuable instincts possessed by man, and nowhere does it find a truer or more complete outlet and fulfilment than in religion.... Religion is betting your life there is a God. I decided to bet my life there was a God, and more and more as the years go by I find that in so far as I yield up my will to God and open my heart to His indwelling, in so far as I try to live out my life in the Christ-spirit, the experiment works.”] That perfectly introduces my 1st point:

I. The Faithful Gamble on God

- A. [When **Daniel** was brought captive to Babylon (**Dan 1:8-16**), he and his 3 friends resolved not to defile themselves with the food the king required them to eat. He made a 10-day bet with the royal steward to let them eat only vegetables. They not only won the bet but hit the jackpot for having a better physical appearance than others.] (The world pressures us to place our bets on its ideals to win happiness. But the faithful don’t follow suit. They play a trump card based on God’s principles.)
- B. The stakes were higher when Daniel’s 3 friends refused to bow down to a royal idol— **Dan 3:16-18**, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (They weren’t despising earthly authority, but betting on higher authority. Their risk-taking paid off. God spared them from a fiery doom by going with them through it.)

TRANS: *Risk-taking in itself isn’t a virtue.* [Short French film about an art teacher entering a high school class to find all her students stark naked with their clothes in a pile and refusing to sit for her lecture. One boy went to the chalkboard and wrote, “Faites comme nous” (“Do as we”). Feeling intimidated, she complied and undressed. Turning to the chalkboard, she began drawing diagrams as she lectured about “perspective.” But while her back was turned, each student quietly retrieved their clothes from the pile. The film ended as the classroom door suddenly opened pouring light on the naked teacher and a whole class of fully dressed students. She had the trump card, but gambled by following suit, and lost.] If you’re not betting on God, gambling is risky, especially when your trust is elsewhere....

II. The Unfaithful Gamble on Uncertainties

- A. Gambling can be *risk-taking without certainty*— **James 4:13-16**, Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.
1. Business ventures, insurance policies, the stock market, voting for politicians, and many other choices... are all a gamble.
 2. There’s no certainty in most human choices that involve risk (If we sow seeds, there’s no guaranteed harvest, unless we sow in the context of God’s promises— **Psa 126:5-6**, Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.)
- B. [Luck is the lady most gamblers want as their escort to gambling casinos], but most ordinary risk-taking trusts in resources such as information, skill, or tools, all of which may fail (skills may prove inadequate, tools may malfunction, information may be false or incomplete).

TRANS: Christians also do this ordinary kind of risk-taking, but we put our greatest trust not in visible resources, but in our invisible Maker— **2 Cor 5:7** (NKJV), For we walk by faith, not by sight. Christian faith is a divine bet on God against all odds in a fallen world. Situations can look so bad that logic tells us to “throw in the cards.” But the faithful don’t because their heavenly Father didn’t. Humans are born gamblers, because they bear the image of a risk-taking God. Our Creator revealed this aspect of His nature in the way He gambled on us.

III. The Creator Gambles on Humanity

- A. It’s hard to understand this, but Genesis speaks as if God was

gambling by putting free-willed humans in charge of creation.

1. Everything was lost, when He lost that risky bet. (The whole created order was thrown off course by Adam and Eve's failure.)
 2. **BUT** God didn't leave us in the hands of sin, Satan and death at the game-table! Instead, He raised the stakes by stepping into humanity Himself. Through Incarnation, God became one of us.
- B. Most ideas about the Incarnation are squeamish, hesitating to see Jesus as becoming a *real man*, when "the Word became flesh." (It's not the Bible, but wimpy theology that says,
1. "Jesus wasn't really tempted in the desert, because He was God."
 2. "He really didn't weep at the tomb for His dead friend Lazarus, because He knew He was going to raise him from death." or
 3. "He had no emotional struggle at Gethsemane, because He knew that resurrection after the Cross was a sure thing." (Jesus **knew** it ONLY because His Father **promised** it. He had to trust God just as we learn to do! God knows what it means to gamble on God!)
- C. **Listen:** The Son of God became a true human being, just like us. By stepping into humanity, God was betting that He could be a human the right way, where Adam failed. *What does that mean?*
1. God made Himself the bet in order to re-establish His human project for governing creation. (God became the **ransom**!)
 2. God risked putting Himself in the same place as the first Adam, (Heb 4:15b) able "to sympathize with our weaknesses," because "tempted in every way, just as we are" (If He couldn't have failed, 1) He was not a true 2nd Adam, 2) He didn't really become one of us, and 3) His cross wasn't really a substitute death for a fallen human race.
- D. This astronomically exalts the meaning of "the Good News of Jesus Christ." God didn't beat Satan *as GOD*, but as *a real human being*, He won back all that was lost by the original human failure. Jesus is the victorious HUMAN Champion over sin, Satan, and death!

CONCLUSION:

—Helen Keller: "Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing." She was onto something. It's all about risk, about *adventure*, about *reaching out in faith*. But it's *a loser's game in this fallen world* unless we're betting on God. **Christian faith is a holy bet on God against all odds.**