

**LENT 2 - HE CHOSE THE NAILS**  
**MATTHEW 18:21-35, ACTS 2:1-12**  
**2025-03-16**

We began our Lenten series last week based on Max Lucado's book, *He Chose the Nails*. The emphasis is "You did this for me?" We discovered anew that Jesus will and has borne our dark side, loving us enough to become one of us—in fact, exchanging places with us. We gave Him our sin—which He willingly accepted, and in exchange, He gave us His righteousness. The verse in Scripture which captures that so completely is 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

This morning, I want to focus on forgiveness and that Jesus will speak to you in your language. If all goes according to schedule, sometime this month Ted and Sue Ann are going to move into their new house—big yay on that! Because, moving into a new place is very exciting. Hopefully no list develops of things that need to be fixed or that isn't working properly or this is the wrong colour or...you get the idea. Considering such a list of mistakes, causes me to think about God making a list of mine. After all, hasn't He taken up residence in my heart? If I see flaws in my house, imagine what He sees in me! The door hinges to the prayer room have grown rusty from underuse. The stove called jealousy is overheating. The attic floor weighted with too many regrets. The cellar cluttered with too many secrets. And please chase the pessimism out of my heart. The list of our weaknesses. Would you like anyone to see yours? How would you feel if they were posted high so everyone could see?

Well, it's happened. Christ has chronicled your failures in a public list. But neither you nor I have ever seen it. To Calvary. Jesus turns His face to the nail just as the soldier lifts the hammer to strike it. Couldn't Jesus have stopped Him. Is this not the same hand that stilled the sea? But He doesn't resist. Why? Because He loved us, you say—true, but only partially true. He saw the mallet, the nail, the soldier's hand, but He also saw the hand of God. It appeared to be the hand of a man—callous palms of a carpenter—appearing common, but anything but. These fingers formed Adam out of clay; with a wave, this hand toppled Babel's tower and split the Red Sea. The hand of God is a mighty hand. Hands of incarnation at His birth. Hands of liberation as He healed; hands of inspiration as He taught and hands of salvation as He died.

The crowd at the cross thought the purpose of the pounding was to skewer Christ's hands to a beam—only half right: through the eyes of Scripture we see what Jesus saw. "He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross (Colossians 2:14 NLT). Between His hand and the wood there was a list. A long list. A list of our mistakes: our lusts and lies & greedy moments. A list of our sins. Dangling from

the cross is an itemized catalogue of your sins—the bad decisions, the bad attitudes—in broad daylight for all of heaven to see.

Unlike the faults in a house, the list God has made cannot be read. The words cannot be deciphered. The mistakes are covered. The sins are hidden. Those at the top are hidden by His hand; those down the list are covered by His blood. Your sins are blotted out by Jesus. He's forgiven all your sins: He's utterly wiped out the written evidence of broken commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it to the cross. That is why He refused to close His fist. He knew the price of those sins was death. He knew the source of those sins was you and me and since He couldn't bear the thought of eternity without us, He chose the nails. The hand squeezing the handle wasn't Roman, the force wasn't an angry mob, the verdict wasn't decided by jealous Jews. Jesus Himself chose the nails. Jesus swung the hammer—the same hand that stilled the seas stills your guilt, the same hand that cleansed the Temple cleanses your heart. As the hands of Jesus opened for the nail, heaven's doors opened for you.

To change things up, how important is it to be able to read the signs of your spouse—I'm particularly speaking to you, men. Wise is the one who learns the nonverbal language of his wife, who notes the nod and discerns the gestures. It's not just what's said, but how. Not just how, but when. Not just when, but where. Good husbanding is good decoding. You've got to read the signs. Alas, sometimes we just miss the signs, like the take or bunt sign from the third base coach. God knows we sometimes miss the signs. Maybe, that's why He's given us so many. The rainbow after the flood signifies God's covenant. Circumcision identifies God's chosen, the stars portray the size of His family. Communion is a sign of His death and baptism a sign of our spiritual birth. The most poignant sign however, was found on the cross—trilingual, hand-painted, Roman-commissioned sign: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews", written in Hebrew, Latin & Greek. The Jews wanted Pi-late to change it to say that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews, but Pilate held firm.

Why is any sign placed over Jesus? Why does the wording trouble the Jews? Why does Pilate refuse to change it? Why is it written in three languages? Why is it included in all four Gospels? Could it be that this piece of wood is a picture of God's devotion? A symbol of His passion to tell the world about His Son? A reminder that God will do whatever it takes to share with you the message of this sign? There is no person he will not use. The sign bears immediate fruit.

The one criminal turns and says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom." He doesn't plead to be saved or beg for mercy. His appeal is that of a servant to a king. Luke makes the connection—the thief's appeal and the mention of the sign are four verses

apart. The thief knows he's in a royal mess. He reads a royal proclamation and asks for royal help. If that's so, the sign was the first tool used to proclaim the message of the cross. Because of the sign, a soul was saved. All because someone posted a sign on a cross.

Pilate didn't intend to spread the Gospel—quite the opposite. In his mind it said, “This is what becomes of a Jewish king. This is what the Romans do with him. The king of this nation is a slave—a crucified criminal.” The sign was intended to threaten & mock the Jews. But God had another purpose...Pilate was God's instrument for spreading the Gospel. He took dictation from God and wrote it on a sign

There is no one God won't use and there is no language God will not speak. Every passerby could read the sign for every passerby could read Hebrew, Latin or Greek. Hebrew was the language of Israel, the language of religion. Latin was the language of the Romans, the language of law and government. Greek was the language of Greece, the language of culture. Christ was declared king in them all. God had a message for each. Christ is King. The messages were the same but the languages were different. Since Jesus was King for all people, the message would be in the tongues of all people.

So, what language is God speaking to you? Not English or dialect...but in the day-to-day drama of your life. God speaks to us in whatever language we will understand. There are times when He speaks in the language of abundance. Is your belly full? Are your bills paid? Some money in your pocket? Don't be so proud of what you have that you miss what you need to hear. Do you have much so you can give much? God can give you more blessings than you need. Then you will have plenty of everything—enough to give to every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Or, is God talking in the language of need? We definitely prefer the language of abundance, but God doesn't always speak that way. You may or may not have experienced this, but I can tell you time after time, particularly when we were raising four expensive kids who actually expected to be fed and even clothed, we had lots of times when the numbers didn't add up. Regardless, we tithed faithfully and God carried us through one way or another. It's as if God said, “Doug, I'm involved in your life. I will take care of you.” Are you hearing the language of need? Or how about the language of affliction? Who wants that! But we know how clearly God speaks in hospital hallways and sickbeds. Nothing seems to turn our ears toward heaven like a frail body.

God speaks all languages—including yours. Has He not said, “I will...teach you the way you should go (Psalm 32:8)? Aren't we urged to “receive instruction from His mouth (Job 22:22)? Aren't you glad He is speaking? Grateful that He cares enough to talk? Your Father has learned to speak your language. “It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom

of heaven (Matthew 13:11). Would you like to thank Him for that? It might also be a good time to ask Him if you're missing any signs He is sending your way.

It's one thing to miss a sign from your wife about cleaning up a room. It's quite another to miss from God about the destiny of your life! Think about signs this week. Share what God puts on your heart with another.