

The Nails
John 19:12-22
April 14, 2019

Palm Sunday is also known as Passion Sunday. It is not only the day to think about the meaning of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, but also the day to think about Christ's passion. As we know, Jesus was crucified on a cross. He was nailed to a cross.

Nails are very common and useful objects that we use to fasten wooden pieces or use as a peg to hang things such as pictures, signs, clothes, or decorations. According to historians, the first-nails were made of wrought-iron, and the oldest ones the historians have discovered have been dated to 3400 BC. They were made by the ancient Egyptians.¹

Technology has not replaced nails. After thousands of years, we still use them for all kinds of thing. Today, I want to talk about the nails of the crucifixion and their possible meanings.

Crucifixion was a method of capital punishment. The victim or criminal was tied or nailed to a large wooden cross and left to hang there for several days, until the victim was dead from exhaustion and suffocation. A horrible way to kill a person. No doubt that this was one of the most painful and gruesome forms of execution. This method was invented by Persians around 300 or 400 BC,² and it was perfected by the Romans.

Many great painters depicted Jesus' crucifixion. Many of them drew it as if he was nailed through his palms. This probably is not correct because the weight of a fully-grown man cannot be sustained that way. The hands would have ripped between the fingers. The Bible says that when Jesus was crucified his hands were nailed.³ That is why they drew the picture that way. However, in biblical Greek, the word "hand" refers to the lower part of forearm, wrist included. So most likely, Jesus was nailed through the wrists. In fact, when people were nailed to the cross in those days, they were nailed through the wrist.

¹ Paul Fourshee (2014). "The History of the Nail". In Michael Wenkart. *50 Scientific Discoveries That Changed the World*. pp. 220–223.

² <https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/jesus-nails-faq.htm>

³ John 20:20

The nails were 7 to 10 inches long. When they nail the victim to the cross, they made sure they would not sever the arteries. There is a space between eight small bones which is structurally able to sustain the body weight.

They used two nails to fasten the hands and one nail to fasten both feet. Why was Jesus crucified? There were many different ways to kill a person. Why crucifixion? Could there be any meaning that Jesus died this way?

What do we do with a nail?

First of all, we use nails to fasten things in place. When something has been nailed down, it does not move. It should not move. The nail has two purposes. One, it is to fix things in place that were loose or broken. Two, it is to hold things in place so that they would not break any more. In other words, it fixes things, and once it is fixed, it is permanent.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, his death was not only to fix the broken lives and broken world, but also it was to make his fixes permanent. In Galatians 2:20 Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live; but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Christ died not only to give us a new beginning and to make us like him, but also to make us permanently his. We are to die to ourselves so that we may live to Christ. However, this restoration, the restoration of our lives takes a long time. It is not an instant process. It takes time.

You might remember comedian Yakov Smirnoff. When he first came to the United States from Russia, he was pleasantly surprised by the incredible variety of instant food available in American supermarkets. Instant soup, instant gravy, instant mashed potatoes, instant noodles, instant porridge, the variety was endless.

Smirnoff says, "On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk. You just add water, and instantly, you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice. You just add water, and you get orange juice. And then I saw baby powder, and I thought to myself, "What a country!"

Smirnoff is joking; but we make these assumptions about Christian Transformation—that people change instantly at salvation. Some people call it "repentance and renewal". Some call it "Sanctification of the believer". Whatever you call it, most people expect some quick transformation of life. They expect you to become some sort of saint right away. According to this belief, when someone

gives his or her life to Christ, there is an immediate, substantive, in-depth, miraculous change in habits, attitudes, and character.

We go to church as if we are going to the supermarket, looking for “Powdered Christian.” Just add water of baptism and disciples are born.

Unfortunately, there is no such powder. Disciples of Jesus Christ are not instantly born. They are slowly raised through many trials, sufferings, failures and renewals. A study has found that only 11 percent of churchgoing teenagers and 32 percent of church going adults have a well-developed faith. Why such a low number? Because true-life change takes time, a long time. It begins at salvation; but it takes training, trials, sufferings, and dying to oneself.⁴

The nails fix things and hold them permanently. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everything that is messed up and broken in our lives can be nailed down and fixed, and fixed permanently? When our lives are given to Christ, when we surrender ourselves to the Lord, our lives will be fixed, but the truth of the matter is that as much as we surrender, that much will be fixed. Transformation of lives will take time, but it will happen with obedience.

Second, a nail binds two or more things into one unit. A simple nail can bind many different materials into one, like wood, rubber, metal, plaster board, and others. It can hold things together. On the cross, the nails held the flesh and the beam together. In our lives, Jesus binds God and us together. He can hold very different kinds of people together: the people of different culture, different background, different taste and opinions, and he calls us to bind and hold each other.

Third, a nail supports and holds things up. Nails in the wall can hold up pictures and decorations. It can also hold up a person. The Bible tells us that Jesus took the sins of the world upon himself. Not only your sins but you can rest everything on Jesus: your worries, your frustrations, your loneliness, your past, your future, your struggles. Lean on him. He will hold you up.

Dr. Ralph Earle was a great biblical scholar who taught at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City. He also helped to edit The New International Version of the Bible. Dr. Earle often told the story of Dr. John G. Paton who was a pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides, an island in the Pacific Ocean. Dr. Paton tried to minister to the natives on the island. But soon he

⁴ Adapted from James Emery White, *Rethinking the Church*, Baker, 1997, p. 55-57.

discovered that the natives' language did not have some important words like love, joy, peace, or faith. So, without those words, it was very difficult to introduce Jesus and the gospel, and to ask them to believe in him. They did not have a word for "believe". It was almost impossible to explain what it meant to believe in Jesus.

One day he was in his hut filled with frustration. An old native man came and sat in a chair exhausted from a long journey. The man said, "I'm leaning my whole weight on this chair." What he was saying was that it was really nice to be able to truly rely on that chair. Then suddenly something clicked on Dr. Paton. "What did you say?" asked Dr. Paton. The man repeated, "I'm leaning my whole weight on this chair." Immediately, Dr. Paton cried, "That's it!" From that time on for that primitive tribe, "Believe in Jesus" became "Lean your whole weight on Jesus."⁵ Isn't that what faith is, leaning your whole life on Jesus?

Jesus can hold you up. The Psalmist said, "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes"⁶

When Jesus was crucified on the cross, the very nails that killed him brought us life, brought us a new beginning. Like nails, Jesus can sustain us and hold us up.

⁵ From [Golf in the Real Kingdom](#), by Robert R. Kopp, an illustration from www.esermons.com

⁶ Psalm 118:8-9 NIV