

***The value of something depends on whose hands it's in.*** A basketball in my hand is worth about \$15, but if you put this same basketball in the hands of Giannis (**picture**), it's suddenly worth \$27 million dollars. Put a baseball bat in my hand and it's worth maybe \$15. But put a bat in the hands of Vladimer Guerrero, Jr. (**picture**), it becomes worth \$28 million dollars. A golf ball and a club in my hands is worth about \$100 bucks. In the hands of Phil Mickelson (**picture**), it's worth \$400 million dollars.

The value of something depends on whose hands it's in. Here's one more example. Give me a nail and with some help from Ron Strelow or Gary Thompson, I might be able to tack down a roofing shingle so that it stays there a few years. But as Calvary's Cross proves, in the hands of Jesus a nail has infinitely greater value. *"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross."*

Jesus' nail was more like a railroad spike (**picture**). Those nails, that piece of steel held Jesus' hands and feet in place when He hung on that cross. Before we share in communion today, I want you think about that nail and consider the power that Jesus displayed with those nails. As we partake of this memorial meal I want us to remember all the things Jesus has done with those nails, things that make those ancient fingers of steel infinitely valuable. As we consider the power of those nails, I want us to think about why it is that, as the hymn writer put it, Christians *cherish the old rugged cross*.

**1. Those nails in Christ's hands are so valuable because with them Jesus washed away the sins of all mankind.** As 1 John 2:2 says, Jesus hung on the cross as, *"...the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."* As uncomfortable as this fact is, all of us were and still are sinners who desperately need saving. Romans 3:23 and 6:23 say, *"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God... and the wages of sin is death."* Isaiah 53 says, *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* Each of us have used our hands to sin and we do this every day.

Did you know that approximately 13% of all Americans have spent at least one day in jail? According to a Zogby poll 12.9% of U.S. adults have spent at least one of their nights in jail. 21.5% of men have had personal experience with the local jail yet less than 5% of women have done so.

When it comes to sin, we bat 100%. In response to an article in *The Times of London* entitled, "What's Wrong with the World?" noted Christian writer, G. K. Chesterton (**picture**) replied, *"I am. Yours truly, G. K. Chesterton."* That's what Scripture teaches...we are wrong with the world.

That's one reason these nails are so precious, because Jesus used the nails in His hands to wash all our sins away. In Romans 1:16 Paul says, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."* This is what he's talking about in 1 Corinthians 1:18 when he says, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

With those Roman nails, Jesus paid our sin debt. He died in our place, freeing us from the fear of death.

**2. Those nails in Christ's hands are so valuable because with them Jesus demonstrated to us how much God loves us.** Christians cling to the old-rugged cross like a life-preserver because we all have this inborn need to know that in spite of our sin we are still loved.

I remember reading about how the diary of the late Madelyn Murray O'Hair, (**picture**) the founder of American Atheists, was auctioned off by the IRS in an attempt to raise money for back taxes she owed. It was discovered that on several different occasions this devoted atheist had written in her diary, *"Somebody, somewhere, please love me."* Throughout her life, as she was seeking to be loved, she fought against the God she believed didn't exist. Tragically, she ran from the God Who loved her in the way she desperately wanted to be loved, needed to be loved. We're all like Ms. O'Hare in that all of us are sinners with an inborn hunger to be forgiven and loved by our Heavenly Father.

Listen as I read these words from Frederick Buechner (**picture**): *"The love for equals is a human thing--of friend for friend, brother for brother. It is to love what is loving and lovely. The world smiles. The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing--the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world. The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing--to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich, of the black man for the white man. The world is always bewildered by its saints."*

*And then there is the love for the enemy--love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured's love for the torturer. This is God's love. It conquers the world."*

You and I need to know that in spite of our foolish choices, in spite of our rebellion, in spite of our sin, our Heavenly Father loves us and the nails in Jesus' hands are precious because they tell us that yes, He does. As the Contemporary English Version translates Romans 5:8: *"God showed how much He loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful."*

**3. Those nails in Christ's hands are so valuable because with them Jesus freed us from the power of sin and enabled us to live abundant lives.** 1 Peter 2:24 says, *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you were healed."* Before Jesus held those nails in His hands on the cross of Calvary, humanity was in bondage to sin, a truly terrifying way to live. Remember? Before we became Christians every moment of every day we were powerless when it came to withstanding the temptations that come with living in a fallen world. But with those nails in His hands Jesus changed all that. Paul writes in Romans 6, *"For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died had been freed from sin. Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead, you are free by God's grace"* (Romans 6:6-7, 14).

As this text and dozens of others like it say, thanks to the nails in Jesus' hands, we have access to God's power, power that enables us to say no to sin. Through His death Jesus freed us from sin's tyranny, and made it possible for us to pursue holiness and righteousness.

Jerry Bridges (**picture**) writes, *"We can now stand up to sin and say no to it. Before we had no choice, now we have one. When we sin as Christians, we do not sin as slaves, but as individuals with the freedom of choice. We sin because we choose to sin."* Because of the nails, because of the cross, we can at last choose to be all that God intends us to be and in that decision experience *"...life in all its fullness"* (John 10:10).

In his book, *Grace Awakening*, Chuck Swindoll (**picture**) puts it this way: *"Each moment of every day we choose whom we wish to follow. If it's the Savior, the benefits are many. If it is sin, the consequences are destructive and miserable. Before Christ, we had no choice. Sin was our one and only route. All of life was marked by unrighteousness. But once we came to the Cross and gave the Lord Jesus the right to rule our lives, we were granted a choice we never had before. Grace freed us from the requirement to serve sin, allowing us the opportunity to follow Christ's directives voluntarily."*

Calvin Hunt (**picture**) was one of the lead tenors in the famous Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. Calvin had a powerful voice and recorded two CD's of his own. Jesus Christ revolutionized his life but years ago both he and his wife Miriam were addicted to crack cocaine. Every week they would spend his entire paycheck financing their habit. Eventually, due to the influence of her brothers, who were Christians, Miriam gave up her habit and put her faith in Christ. But Calvin refused to do so, and continued his life of slavery to this powerful addiction. His drug use eventually caused him to lose his job. He'd spend long periods on binges, away from the family. In spite of this Miriam's faith grew and as it did she dedicated herself to praying for her husband. In fact their entire church prayed that Calvin would come to Christ and be freed from the power of sin in his life.

Miriam said, "I knew Calvin was in a prison. Being an ex-addict myself—I had done heroin before I ever met him—I knew the unbelievable power of this kind of substance. That's why I prayed so hard, crying out to God to set him free, and got all my friends to pray with me. Every mealtime prayer with my kids, every bedtime prayer included, 'O God, please set Daddy free!'"

Three years passed and Calvin got worse instead of better. At one point he was actually sleeping in a large doghouse in somebody's backyard. It became Calvin's practice to sneak into their apartment on the nights that he knew Miriam and the girls were at church to get food and clothing or to find things to sell to finance his habit. On one such night, he heard someone weeping. He thought that perhaps someone was home after all but he looked and found no one. He started to lie down for a nap but something inside him seemed to say, "If you go to sleep tonight, you'll never wake up again." This caused him to panic and he ran from the apartment to the subway where he caught the train that would take him to the church so he could find his family. When he finally arrived at the church he burst through the back doors and when he did he heard the same sounds of weeping he had heard in the apartment earlier, only much louder.

He discovered that the sound of weeping was coming from the entire congregation. All of them were in earnest prayer, calling out his name to God in faith! He was thunderstruck as he slowly moved down the aisle, gazing at the tears running down the faces of the people as they bowed and prayed, saying: "O God, wherever Calvin Hunt is, bring him to this building! Don't let this family go through this horror another day. Lord, You are able! Set him free from his bondage once and for all!"

Soon Calvin found himself at the front, right in front of the pulpit. The pastor in charge opened his eyes, took one glance and then gazed upward toward heaven as he said into the microphone, "Thank you Lord! Thank you Jesus! Here he is!" With that, the congregation opened their eyes and saw Calvin, and when they did, they went absolutely crazy.

Think about it! They had been calling upon the Lord to bring Calvin to himself and it was happening right before their eyes! Falling on his knees, Calvin burst into uncontrollable sobs. Miriam and the girls came to huddle around him as he prayed, "O God, I don't want to be this way. Please come into my life and set me free. O Jesus I need You so much!"

That night was the turning point for Calvin Hunt because that was the night that he clung to the precious Cross of Christ. It hasn't always been easy for him, he went through a very difficult six month treatment program, and there were numerous times that he was tempted, but he found that every time he has faced temptation, when he turned to Jesus for strength, he found it. Down through the centuries all who have turned to Christ have discovered what Calvin did, that with the nails in His hands Jesus gives us the power to be free from the bondage of sin.

Thanks to Calvary when we are tempted to sin we can, "...*approach the throne of grace with confidence, and receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need...*" (Hebrews 4:16) The nails in Jesus' hands are precious because they remind us that Jesus died so that we could live, really live. Gipsy Smith (**picture**), a powerful evangelist of another age, put it this way, "*I am not afraid of the cross. I know that men used to come there to die, but since Jesus died they come there to live.*"

As we remember all Jesus did with these nails in His hands, do you understand now why they are so precious? In His hands Jesus used them to make it possible for the sins of all mankind to be forgiven. With these nails, He showed us the extent of God's love. With these nails in His hands Jesus freed us from sin's power and made it possible for us to live righteous, abundant lives.

Remember these things as we share communion this morning, this meal that Jesus gave us to help us celebrate these truths. And as we come to the Lord's Table, let me invite all Christians present to partake with us. If you're a Christian, if you are His, this is Yours.

1 Corinthians 11:23-24 says, "*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'*"

**Conclusion:** But today if you've never responded to that invitation, if you've never asked Jesus to forgive you of your sin and come into your heart and life, let me urge you to do so this morning. Jesus stands at the door of your life knocking with His nail pierced hand, please let Him in.