

## Nail Pierced Hands

Luke 23:32-34 (NIV)

<sup>32</sup> Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. <sup>33</sup> When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup> Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Good Friday was a historical event. We know it happened. Multiple historical sources outside of the Bible even confirm it. Crucifixion by the Romans was a real thing. We know that this is the day Jesus died on the cross. But, as the hymn asks, were we there?

“When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.” (verse 33) Maybe because we read it out of a book, we let the words wash over us. Yeah. He was led out to be executed. Place looked like a shape of a skull. He was crucified. No emotion goes into it, no feeling, just matter of fact.

Yet the act of crucifying is something more out of a horror movie. “The Passion of the Christ” movie as it tried to accurately depict Christ’s crucifixion deserved its “R” rating. I’ve only ever watched that movie once, because that’s all I could handle. The violence against Jesus makes me squeamish: the fist strikes, the spit hurled by those who despised him, the crown of thorns not gently placed on his head, but bashed onto his head with a staff, the scourge made up of bits of metal and bone designed to sink in and tear into the skin, thick, rough nails pounded through his hands and into the wood of the cross. It’s body horror, almost like a Saw movie. Jesus is lifted up in between two criminals, before his enemies, before some of his followers, before the soldiers doing their jobs.

We shake our head at the tragedy, not allowing our minds to dwell on the scene for long because it is upsetting. An innocent man, the Son of God, a perfect one, is horribly executed. Yes, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (verse 34)

Forgive them, those guys who were there. Forgive those awful, religious leaders who deceitfully plotted, illegally and wrongfully convicted Jesus. For those two criminals who are unwitting bystanders in this, but who also heaped insults on Jesus. Those soldiers who had no mercy or compassion, who delighted into getting a little swag as they cast lots for Jesus’ clothes. That Pontius Pilate who didn’t have the spine to stand up against this gross injustice and had an innocent man publicly executed so that he wouldn’t have to face the backlash from the people. For the disciples – John and the women – who did nothing more to prevent this tragedy, just watched with tears in their eyes and grief in their hearts. Forgive them because I wasn’t there.

Were you there? Not physically, no. But there were more who were there than maybe we realize, more than maybe we want to admit.

God was there. He was there as the Word made flesh, the Word who was with God and was God, the Word through whom everything came into existence at the creation of the world. Jesus was not just the Son of God, a lower or created being, but also God himself, God with no beginning and no end. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit were also there. Jesus called to his Father to forgive all of the people who were there as he subjected himself to the will of God, just as Isaiah prophesied: “Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer... the LORD makes his life an offering for sin...” (Isaiah 53:10a)

The prophet Isaiah who lived some 700 years before this event was there. In that same prophecy, Isaiah understood that this crucifixion was for him. “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5-6) It was for his sins that Jesus was pierced and crushed. Jesus’ punishment was owed to him because Isaiah had gone astray. But by this Servant’s suffering, Isaiah would benefit, would be healed.

It wasn’t just Isaiah’s and the Israelites’ transgressions and iniquities that this servant of God was punished for. The LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us turned to our own way. No exceptions. No exclusions. Your sins were there.

Aside from “The Passion of the Christ” being the highest grossing “R” rated movie of all time, there’s another bit of trivia that you might not know. The famous director, Mel Gibson, made a cameo. No, you won’t see his face in the crowd or as a disciple. You see only his hands. His hands drove the nails into Jesus’ hands. Mel didn’t want his face in the movie, but he understood that it was his sins which were there when they crucified his Lord. In this way, he was expressing how he was there on that Friday.

When we sin, when we break any of God's commands - intentionally or unintentionally, ignorantly or willfully, in thought, word, or deed – we often don't see immediate consequences. It feels as if it didn't matter and that we got away with it, that there's really no harm done. We don't see the damage, what our sins actually cost.

Your sins were there when they crucified our Lord. Every time that you spoke some very colorful names and insults at the person who was driving erratically on I-15 as they cut you off – *hammer strike*. Every time that you gave in to your anger, yelled at your spouse, your kids, your employees, your boss – *hammer strike*. Every time that you looked down on that person on the street wondering why they can't get their life together and you thanked God that you weren't like them – *hammer strike*. Every time that you entertained a lustful fantasy with a look that lingered for as long as you could maintain it or that website that you click on in the privacy of your home in the dark of night – *hammer strike*. Every time that you have nurtured and spread discontent with what you have in life – *hammer strike*. Every time you called those other people idiots – *hammer strike*. Every time that you spread a juicy story damaging another person's reputation and lifting yourself up by comparison – *hammer strike*. Every time you failed to help when you could have – *hammer strike*.

When those nails were hammered into Jesus' hands to hang him on the cross, it was for us, for our sins. Every sin we commit is like one more hammer strike, pounding those nails farther into his flesh and into the splintering wood of the cross. Our sins were there when they crucified our Lord, nails piercing his hands.

By extension of our sins being there, like Isaiah, we were there too. And so the prayer of Jesus was prayed for us. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (verse 34) Forgive them because they don't realize what it costs to take these sins away. Forgive them because I am here paying the price. Forgive them because I have paid their debt in full. Forgive them because there is nothing more owed. It's finished. There is nothing that they have to do or accomplish in order to get this. It's all completely paid for, a gift waiting for them to receive by faith, by believing that I have really paid it all for them.

Jesus willingly and purposefully took every hammer strike of those nails piercing his hands so that our debt of sin would be wiped out. He did this so that his prayer to the Father would be answered without question and without hesitation. Jesus used those nails to pierce his hands so that your sins would hang there, on Jesus, on the cross, not on you. That's why we call this Good Friday.

Jesus' crucifixion is a gruesome scene, and we have to admit that we were there. His nail pierced hands are a painful reminder of what our sins cost, especially when we often don't give them a second thought. But God doesn't give them a second thought either because Jesus paid our entire debt of sin for all of us. There is nothing else owed to anyone. Jesus took on the payment. We are forgiven. The prayer has been answered. Believe it. It is yours. It is finished. With Jesus' nail pierced hands, we leave tonight knowing that nothing else is owed. His punishment brings us peace. By his wounds, his nail pierced hands, we are healed. Amen.