

# The Print of the Nails

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon emphasizes the significance of the print of the nails as a symbol of Christ's love and the call for Christians to reflect that love in their lives through selfless service and sacrifice.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:31, John 20:25, Romans 12:10, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:32, Philippians 2:3-4, 1 Peter 4:10, 1 John 3:16

**Topics:** "Christian Love", "Sacrifice"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the significance of the 'print of the nails' in understanding Christ's identity and mission, as exemplified by Thomas's doubt. The marks signify not only Christ's sacrifice and love as our Redeemer but also challenge believers to embody this love and selflessness in their own lives. Miller illustrates that true Christian love is demonstrated through acts of service, especially towards those who are difficult to love, and that the essence of Christ's character should be reflected in our actions and attitudes. He encourages Christians to seek the 'print of the nails' in their character, showing love and sacrifice in everyday interactions. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a life marked by selflessness and service, mirroring the love of Christ.

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## Transcript

"Unless I see the print of the nails in His hands, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side--I will not believe it." John 20:25

Thomas had missed seeing Jesus in the upper room, when he showed his wounded hands to the disciples and he declared that unless he saw the hands for himself and the print of the nails in them--that he would not believe. In a sense Thomas was right. If the print of the nails had not been in the hands of him who stood in the midst of the disciples that night--it would not have been the Christ. Nothing is Christ or of Christ--which does not bear the mark of the nails.

What does the print of the nails stand for? We know what it meant in the hands of Christ. It told the disciples that night, that this man they saw before them was their friend who had died on the cross. It was the infallible mark of identification. It also proved to them that he was risen and alive again. They thought they had lost him--but now they had him again. It was the proof, too, that he was the Messiah, as they had believed. Their hopes had not perished. All this, the print of the nails meant to the disciples.

As we look at his hands--what do they tell us about Jesus? That he was dead! Yes--but why? The wounds in his hands--tell us that he died as our Redeemer. He was the Lamb of God, who took away the sin of the world. We have it in the old prophet: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." That is, the print of the nails tells us that Jesus Christ loved us and gave himself for us. It means, then, love and sacrifice.

But it is not only in the Christ dying that we find this mark, this print of nails--it was just as plain and clear in his whole life before he died--as it was when he was on the cross. Wherever we see him--this mark is on him. He did not love us any more the first Good Friday, when he was dying for us in the darkness, than he did the day he took the little children in his arms and blessed them, or the day he fed the hungry people in the wilderness. His whole life was one of love and sacrifice. He was always loving. He was always forgetting himself. He was always serving.

Christ wants to see the print of the nails also in us--in our hands, in our hearts, in our lives. This does not mean that we must be nailed on a cross as our Master was. There is no need for another sacrifice for sin. Neither does it mean that we must wear actual nail wounds in our flesh.

One of the old legends tells of a certain 'saint' who gazed so continuously upon the crucifix, that in his hands came the actual print of the nails as if he had been crucified. But even if this had actually occurred, and if in our hands came also these physical marks of crucifixion, it would not meet our Lord's desire. What he wishes is the print of the nails, not physical marks in our bodies--but in our character, in our disposition, in our conduct, in our serving of others.

What then does it mean for us to have in us the print of the nails? The cross meant LOVE--love that stopped at no sacrifice. The deepest meaning of Christ's cross, was vicarious suffering. "He gave himself for us." Then we turn to John's Epistle and read this: "He laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." This may not be required literally--but it is required in life, in spirit, in act. How is it necessary for every Christian to lay down his life for others?

Someone writes: "The nails of the true cross today, are precisely those acts and decisions of ours, which crucify our selfishness. Whenever we deny ourselves willingly for the love of others who do not love us, whenever we spend pains and patience to understand those who have no sympathy with us, whenever we give up ease, profit, or reputation for the unthankful and the evil--we are beginning to receive upon us, these sacred marks of the Crucified."

You have your own work or your own pleasure planned, and someone needs you. It may not be one of your own family, or one whom you call a friend, or one for whom you are proud to do a service. It may be one who has no claim of kinship or friendship on you, one you do not care for, one you even dislike. Yet one, someone, any one, needs you--and you sweetly give up your planned work or pleasure and turn cheerfully, with love, to do the thing that is needed instead. That is a print of the nails.

One way, for instance, in which the print of the nails is shown--is in getting on happily and kindly with disagreeable people. A plain woman gave this definition of Christian love, "Loving people you don't like." Another Christian woman tells of her own experience in trying to do this. She asks, "Did you ever have a person in your home who acted as a perpetual irritation on the feelings of your household? I had," she continued. "One day I had nearly lost my faith and was sinking in the black waters of despair. I called on Christ to help me, or I would perish. And what do you think he asked me to do? To love this woman. This was the only ladder he offered me up out of the black depths. Then I grew uglier than ever, and almost

hated my Savior. The struggle went on until I could stand it no longer. In anguish I rushed to my closet and again besought Jesus to help me. It seemed then as though, in a most tender, loving voice, he asked, 'Can't you love her for my sake?' I said, ' Yes, Lord, I will.' At once a peace filled my heart. My feelings toward her had changed entirely. I had yielded my will to Christ." We see plainly and deeply marked in this new love--the print of the nails.

It is easy--it leaves no wound prints--to love those we like, those to whom our hearts go out in affectionate tenderness, those who are naturally dear to us. But that is not all that is required, and does not test our lives. We are to love the disagreeable, those who irritate our feelings by their presence, their manner, their bearing. It is when we love such as these, and get along sweetly in their company--that our Master sees the print of the nails in us.

Or take it in our service of others. Jesus humbled himself and took upon him the form of a servant. The highest exhibition of this, was on the cross when he died serving us--serving those who hated him. But his whole life was serving. He altogether forgot himself. Love led him on from self-sacrifice to self-sacrifice. When he found a need, whatever it was, he stopped and relieved it. He never passed by a distress without heeding it. He never excused himself when anyone needed him. He never said he was too tired to help. He literally poured out his life in doing good to others, oftentimes to those who were most unworthy and most ungrateful! The print of the nails appears in all his story.

That is what it is to give our lives for the brethren. That is what it is to have in our hands the print of the nails. Anybody can do gentle things for gentle people. Anybody can serve kind and worthy friends. There is no print of the nails in such service. The good Samaritan served a man who would have spurned him, if he had met him on the street.

A Christian man was called upon by another who had wronged him in ways most malign and offensive, asking now, however, in a great and pressing need, for help. Other people had been appealed to by him--but had refused to do anything. Even his own brothers and sisters had turned away, saying they would do nothing for him. All the world had grown tired helping him; no one was left. When the appeal came to this Christian man to relieve the distress, though there was no confession made of the grievous wrong done in the past, no apology offered--he quietly and without a word, at sore cost to himself--cheerfully gave the help that was needed. See the print of the nails.

Christ wants to see the print of the nails also in our spirit and disposition. Do we really often think of what it is to be Christlike in spirit, in temper, in mood, in manners? Some people, Christians, too--are so touchy that their friends have to measure all their words most carefully lest they offend them. Some people, Christians, too--seem to have no control whatever of their temper. Some people, Christians, too--are so hard to live with or to work with, that they have scarcely a friend. These are not prints of the nails of Christ's cross.

It is not easy always to keep sweet, for we all have causes for irritation. It is not easy always to be patient, to keep good temper, to give the soft answer that turns away wrath, to offer the other cheek when one has been smitten, to return kindness for unkindness, to overcome evil with good. Yet these are the print of the nails, which are the true adornment of Christian life and character. "Love is patient, and is kind"--never grows unkind. Love "is not provoked"--does not lose temper, keeps always sweet. Love "seeks not its own"--always forgets self and thinks of the other who needs.

We see the print of nails in Christ's own life. He never did a selfish thing, never spoke a selfish word. He never winced, showing repugnance, and acting disagreeably. It was not easy, either, for him--but the love in his heart never failed. It is in doing the hard things of love--that the print of the nails is seen.

We show the print of the nails in our own hands, when we prove honest and honorable in our dealings with others even at cost and loss to ourselves.

Robert Ogden relates the following incident: "I will tell you what I consider an example of business honesty. A friend of mine, who died not long ago, held securities of a certain railroad property. Shortly before his death someone told him, on unimpeachable authority, that the railroad was about to go to pieces, and that he had better unload the securities. But he refused to do it, for someone else would have been the loser. And he was not a man of means. Sure enough the railroad company went to pieces. It was put into the hands of a receiver, and my friend's securities were reduced to almost a nominal value."

"How can I learn the lesson?" someone asks. Christ will teach you. He says, "Come unto me, and learn of me." Our poor, cold, selfish hearts--are capable of being wonderfully ennobled and adorned by the riches of His love, compassion, sympathy and bountifulness.

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