

Week 37: HIS CHOICE

He never should have asked me to keep the list. I dread showing it to him. He's a skilled builder, a fine friend. And he has built us a great house. But the house has a few mistakes.

Until this week, I didn't see them. But, then again, until this week, I didn't live in the house. Once you take up residence in a place, you see every flaw.

"Make a list of them," he told me.

If you say so, I thought.

A bedroom door won't lock. The storage room window is cracked. Someone forgot to install towel racks in the girls' bathroom. Someone else forgot the knobs to the den door. As I said, the house is nice, but the list is growing.

Looking at the list of the builder's mistakes caused me to think about God making a list of mine. After all, hasn't he taken up residence in my heart? And if I see flaws in my house, imagine what he sees in me. Oh, dare we think of the list he could compile?

The door hinges to the prayer room have grown rusty from underuse.

The stove called jealousy is overheating.

The attic floor is weighted with too many regrets.

The cellar is cluttered with too many secrets.

And won't someone raise the shutter and chase the pessimism out of this heart?

The list of our weaknesses. Would you like anyone to see yours? Would you like them made public? How would you feel if they were posted high so that everyone, including Christ himself, could see?

May I take you to the moment it was? Yes, there is a list of your failures. Christ has chronicled your shortcomings. And, yes, that list has been made public. But you've never seen it. Neither have I. Come with me to the hill of Calvary, and I'll tell you why.

Watch as the soldiers shove the carpenter to the ground and stretch his arms against the beams. One presses a knee against a forearm and a spike against a hand. Jesus turns his face toward the nail just as the soldier lifts the hammer to strike it.

Couldn't Jesus have stopped him? With a flex of the biceps, with a clench of the fist, he could have resisted. Is this not the same hand that stilled the sea? Cleansed the temple? Summoned the dead? But the fist doesn't clench . . . and the moment isn't aborted.

The mallet rings and the skin rips and the blood begins to drip, then rush. Then the questions follow. Why? Why didn't Jesus resist?

"Because he loved us," we reply. That is true, wonderfully true, but—forgive me—only partially true. There is more to his reason. He saw something that made him stay.

As the soldier pressed his arm, Jesus rolled his head to the side, and with his cheek resting on the wood he saw . . . a mallet? Yes. A nail? Yes. The soldier's hand? Yes.

But he saw something else. He saw the hand of God.

With a wave, this hand toppled Babel's tower and split the Red Sea. From this hand flew the locusts that plagued Egypt and the raven that fed Elijah. Is it any wonder the psalmist celebrated liberation by declaring, "You drove out the nations with Your hand. . . . It was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance" (Psalm 44:2-3 NKJV).

The hand of God is a mighty hand.

The crowd at the cross concluded that the purpose of the pounding was to skewer the hands of Christ to a beam. But they were only half right. We can't fault them for missing the other half. They couldn't see it. But Jesus could. And heaven could. And we can.

Through the eyes of Scripture, we see what others missed but what Jesus saw. "He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14 NLT). Between his hand and the wood was a list. A list of our mistakes: our lusts and lies and greedy moments and prodigal years. A list of our sins.

God has done with us what I am doing with our house. He penned a list of our faults. The list God has made, however, cannot be read. 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 (TLB). "He has forgiven you all your sins: he has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it . . . on the cross" (Colossians 2:14 PHILLIPS).

This is why Jesus refused to close his fist. He saw the list! What kept him from resisting? This warrant, this tabulation of your failures. He knew the price of those sins was death. He knew the source of those sins was you, and since he couldn't bear the thought of eternity without you, he chose the nails.

Even as we progress more and more to a paperless society—one where a person wonders how we ever existed without online bill paying and the convenience of texting and social media—we still have not lost our esteem for recordkeeping. In the business world, we may no longer jot our lists of creditors and debtors on paper, but we are still scrupulous when it comes to data entry.

This leads us to the question. Based on what you have learned so far concerning the enormous charge Jesus paid, why didn't God keep our record of sin "on file"?

The hand squeezing the handle was not a Roman infantryman.

The force behind the hammer was not an angry mob.

The verdict behind the death was not decided by jealous Jews.

Jesus himself chose the nails.

So the hands of Jesus opened up. Had the soldier hesitated, Jesus himself would have swung the mallet. He knew how; he was no stranger to the driving of nails. As a carpenter he knew what it took. And as a Savior he knew what it meant. He knew that the purpose of the nail was to place your sins where they could be hidden by his sacrifice and covered by his blood.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

- The list of every human's failures and shortcomings is a long one.
- Between Jesus' hand and the wood was the list of *your* mistakes.
- The blood of Jesus on the cross blotted out the list of your sins.
- Jesus himself chose the nails—to erase the record of sins.

MEMORY VERSES

Your verses to memorize for this unit are Colossians 1:13–14. Take a few moments to review these verses, and then write them out from memory in the space below.

The Heart of Jesus



The trap had been set and the ambush planned. As Jesus and his disciples were spending the evening in prayer, the soldiers were sharpening their swords and lighting their torches. Gethsemane was quiet except for the murmured prayers of Jesus and the snoring of his friends. Then, suddenly, noise. Tramping feet, crackling firebrands, shouted orders. The disciples leapt to their feet, momentarily dazed by the light. A surge of men entered their circle. Peter, James, and John stood before Jesus in order to protect him. Peter drew out a sword, and in one clumsy slash, cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. A full-blown brawl was imminent. Jesus knew that the actions of this man would lead to him being carried off, beaten, taunted, bloodied, and nailed to a cross. He could have resisted. But instead, even in this tense moment, he had mercy on the man. He reached out and healed Malchus's ear (see John 18:3–11; Luke 22:47–53).

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

READ: ISAIAH 53:3-10 AND COLOSSIANS 2:9-15

1. The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah some seven hundred years before Jesus' birth. What did the prophet say he would endure (see Isaiah 53:3)?
2. Jesus could have halted his crucifixion at any time. What did he do instead? Why did he choose to go through with his painful execution (see verses 4-6)?
3. Jesus did not argue with his accusers or plead with the authorities to release him as he went to the cross. How does this fit what Isaiah said about him (see verses 7-8)?
4. Jesus was treated by the Romans in the same way that a criminal would be treated. But what does Isaiah say was different about him (see verses 9-10)?
5. Paul says "the fullness of the Deity" lived in bodily form in Christ (Colossians 2:9). What did Jesus' death on the cross allow you to "put off" (see verses 11-12)?
6. What did God do for you when you were spiritually dead in your sins? What was taken away when Jesus chose to be nailed to the cross (see verses 14-15)?
7. What do the passages you've studied this week reveal about the sins you've confessed to God? What does Jesus say about your sins that have been forgiven?