Note: It is recommended that you read chapter 3, “I Loved You Enough to Become One of You,” in He Chose the Nails before the sermon so you will be well acquainted with the stories and principles from Max Lucado.

I. Introduction

A. It’s staggering to consider that the eternal and all-powerful creator God of the universe “chose to be one of us.” The boundless God chose to enter time and space and become bound as a finite human being. He chose to become imprisoned in flesh, “restricted by weary-prone muscles and eyelids.”

B. For more than three decades, God chose to limit his once-limitless reach to the stretch of an arm. Why did he do it? The Bible tells us that he did it for us. He chose to become flesh in order to give his life for our sins.

C. In many ways, Advent points toward Lent, for at the cross God gave us many amazing and wonderful gifts. In this series of messages, we will consider five of those items associated with the death of Jesus on the cross.

D. Today we will consider the first item—the crown of thorns—and see in it the staggering beauty of God’s forgiveness.

II. Teaching

A. When God became one of us in Jesus Christ, he stepped into our limitations. “In the beginning was the Word . . . the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:1, 14 NIV).

1. God traded eternity for living in time, just like we live. Jesus often said, “My time has not come” (see John 2:4; 7:6; 12:27; 17:1).
2. God's everywhere presence was limited to a human body, just like ours. “A body you prepared for me” (Hebrews 10:5 NIV).

3. God traded sinlessness for the sins and rebellions of the world. Thorns represent the painful consequences of human sin (see Genesis 3:17-18).
   a. Thorns represent godlessness. “But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides” (Numbers 33:55 NIV).
   b. Evil and evil people are called “thorny” in Scripture.
      i. “Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards his soul will be far from them” (Proverbs 22:5 NKJV).
      ii. “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:16 NIV).

B. Jesus wore a crown of thorns, which represents how he took on the whole world’s sinfulness. “The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace. . . . They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him” (Mark 15:16-17 NIV).
   1. The crown of thorns was woven crudely in mockery and scorn of Jesus.
   2. God in flesh—Jesus—gave up so much for us. We stand amazed that he gave up the glorious crown of heaven for the bloody crown of thorns.
   3. That crude crown of thorns was God’s beautiful gift to us. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV).

III. Application
   A. Max concludes, “I emphasize the [sharp, sticking] ‘point’ of the thorns to suggest a point you may have never considered: if the fruit of sin is
thorns, isn’t the thorny crown on Christ’s brow a picture of the fruit of our sin that pierced his heart? . . . What is the fruit of sin? Step into the briar patch of humanity and feel a few thistles. Shame. Fear. Disgrace. Discouragement. Anxiety. Haven’t our hearts been caught in these brambles?”

B. God become one of us in order to wear a painful crown of thorns. God did it in Jesus to take away our sin and invite us into a loving relationship with him.

C. Do you believe this? Have you received the gift that the crown of thorns represents—the forgiveness of your sins? If not, today in this season of Lent is your day to receive a wonderful gift from God. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV).
Note: It is recommended that you read chapter 4, “I Forgive You,” in He Chose the Nails before the sermon so you will be well acquainted with the stories and principles from Max Lucado.

I. Introduction
A. Picture the Roman soldiers at Jesus’ execution as they shove him to the ground and stretch his arms across the beams. One soldier presses a knee against Jesus’ forearm and places a spike against his hand. Jesus turns his face toward the nail just as the soldier lifts the hammer to strike it.

B. What did Jesus see? Of course, he saw the cross beam. The soldiers. The mallet. The nails. But he saw something else. “He saw the hand of God. It appeared to be the hand of a man. Long fingers of a woodworker. Callous palms of a carpenter. It appeared common. It was, however, anything but.”

C. Today we will consider the next item—the nails that pinned Jesus to the cross—and see them not only as an ugly feature of Roman justice but also as a beautiful gift of God’s loving heart.

II. Teaching
A. Seeing only Jesus on the cross is seeing only half of the wonder of his death.

1. Paul wrote, “[Jesus] has forgiven you all your sins: he has utterly wiped out the written evidence of broken commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14, PHILLIPS, emphasis added).
2. Max suggests, “Between [Jesus’] hand and the wood there was a list. A long list. A list of our mistakes: our lusts and lies and greedy moments and prodigal years. A list of our sins.”

3. It was as if the list of our sins was nailed to that cross, and Jesus paid the debt for those sins through his death. Because of this act, God now offers us life eternal as a gift.

B. The hands of God and Jesus expressed great love in many ways.

1. God’s hands formed Adam (see Genesis 1:27), stopped the construction of Babel (see Genesis 11:1-9), split the Red Sea (see Exodus 14:21-22), and drove out the nations in the Promised Land (see Psalm 44:2-3).

2. Jesus’ hands touched the leper (see Luke 5:13), raised the dead (see 8:53-54), fed the hungry (see 9:16), and healed the blind (see 18:42).

3. Ultimately, the wonder of God’s love is that Jesus’ hands took the nails. Jesus himself said, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13 NIV).

4. Because Jesus did not close his hands to the nails, he opened the doors of heaven to us.

III. Application

A. Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), a German reformer, theologian, and hymn writer, once declared, “For all at once all sin is atoned for on the Cross, the entire Fall is erased, and the whole obligation to Satan and the entire sentence passed upon the fall of Adam is torn up, cancelled, and annulled by the nails of Jesus.” The nails of Jesus—a beautiful gift.

B. The very hands that formed you in your mother’s womb are the hands that were stretched out and willingly nailed to the cross on your behalf. All your sins—all your greed, lies, jealousy, pride, acts of rebellion—and all your mistakes were nailed there with Jesus.

C. How should you respond?
1. If you are a Christian, you should renew your love for Christ in view of his love for you as demonstrated at the cross.

2. If you are not a Christian, consider God’s love for you as shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Choose to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior today and invite him into your life.
**Note:** It is recommended that you read chapter 8, “I Will Give You My Robe,” and chapter 9, “I Invite You into My Presence,” in *He Chose the Nails* before the sermon so you will be well acquainted with the stories and principles from Max Lucado.

I. **Introduction**

A. Mark Twain once remarked that “clothes make a man.” The idea behind the expression in simple: when people see someone who is well dressed, they assume that person is successful, capable, and probably has some wealth. While this is certainly not always true, our clothes do play a role in our lives.

B. Max found this to be true one time when he went to a classy restaurant that had a dress code. He was required to have a jacket, but he only had a sports shirt. He thought that would be sufficient—after all, it was clean and tucked in. But the maître d’ would not budge on the policy. Finally, after seating a number of guests who were dressed up ahead of Max and his wife, the maître d’ ended up going into the cloakroom and providing a lime green jacket for Max.

C. The Bible doesn’t tell us much about the clothes that Jesus wore. However, there is a reference in John 19:23 to one of Jesus’ garments: “When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom” (*NIV*). Let’s consider Jesus’ robe as a beautiful gift to us from God.
II. Teaching

A. The robe of Jesus was a gift, well-crafted, and represented the life he lived.

1. According to Rabbinic tradition, robes were a gift from Jewish families when a young man left home. It represented the family name and tribe.

2. Jesus’ robe was of excellent quality, and the Roman soldiers did not want to tear something that valuable apart. “Let’s not tear it, they said to one another. ‘Let’s decide by lot who will get it’” (John 19:24 NIV).

3. Max notes, “Garments can symbolize character, and like his garment, Jesus’ character was seamless. Coordinated. Unified. He was like his robe: uninterrupted perfection” (see Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 1:3).

B. Jesus gave up his seamless robe of perfection for the robe of indignity.

1. Jesus chose the indignity of nakedness. He was humiliated before his mother, his friends, the religious leaders, and all onlookers.

2. Jesus chose the indignity of failure. He was mocked as rejected by God, as a loser, and not the King of the Jews (see Matthew 27:40-42).

3. Jesus chose the indignity of sin.
   a. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13 NIV).
   b. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV).

III. Application

A. When Max needed a jacket for the fancy restaurant, the maître d’ found one for him. But Jesus did something far better. He gave us his own garment of righteousness—the garment of his seamless character.
B. If clothes are a symbol of our character, what does our moral wardrobe look like? What’s hanging in our soul’s closet? Jesus makes it possible for us to have a total wardrobe makeover.

C. Because Jesus let go of his seamless robe and took on the rags of our sin, we can now put on his righteous life. We can put on a new self, “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24 NIV).

D. Will you make that great exchange today? Will you see Jesus’ robe as a wonderful gift for you? Let nothing hinder you from receiving Jesus as your Savior right now!
Note: It is recommended that you read chapter 12, “I Will Love You Forever,” in He Chose the Nails before the sermon so you will be well acquainted with the stories and principles from Max Lucado.

I. Introduction
   A. There is a story about a judge whose son was brought before him for a crime the boy had committed. As the evidence was presented, the courtroom sat in silence, wondering how the judge would react. When the ruling came, the court was shocked when the judge handed down the maximum penalty. There was no way the boy could pay the fine, and it looked like he would go to jail. But then, the judge stepped down from the bench, took off his robe, and paid the fine.
   
   B. As a judge, he was committed to uphold the law and and enforce the penalty for those who broke it. But as a father, he wanted to show mercy to his son by paying that penalty out of his own pocket. The judge was just, but he also was merciful to his son. The same is true of our heavenly Father. As a just God, he has to punish sin. But as a merciful God, he chose to show his love for us forever by taking that punishment on himself.
   
   C. Let’s consider this incredible gift of the cross. From a historical viewpoint, it is just two crude boards put together by soldiers. But from a heavenly angle, the cross is a beautiful work of art, a gift, declaring God’s love for the world.

II. Teaching
   A. The cross is the symbol of the Christian faith (see 1 Corinthians 2:2).
1. The cross is unlike the symbols for other faiths. Judaism has the Star of David, Islam has the crescent moon, and Buddhism has the lotus blossom. But Christianity has a symbol of execution. Today it would be like having a hangman’s noose or electric chair for a symbol.

2. The cross is the symbol of a magnificent intersection. The horizontal beam points outward, expressing God’s great love. The vertical beam points upward, toward God’s infinite holiness.

3. The cross is the place where God forgave us without lowering his standards. The cross reveals that God is holy and just, but also loving and kind.

B. At the cross, God put our sin on his Son and punished it there.

   1. Paul wrote, “Christ never sinned! But God treated him as a sinner, so that Christ could make us acceptable to God” (2 Corinthians 5:21 CEV).

   2. Would you give up your child for another person? Max notes, “There are those for whom I would give my life. But ask me to make a list of those for whom I would kill my daughter? The sheet will be blank. I don’t need a pencil. The list has no names.”

   3. God gave his one and only Son for us because of his great love for the world. God gave his Son. Jesus took the cross.

III. Application

   A. The cross was the Roman Empire’s bloody instrument of death. But Jesus’ death on the cross transformed it into a symbol of God’s deep sacrificial love for you and me—even for the whole world.

   B. Jesus’ blood poured out at the cross means we are forgiven. The cross fulfilled God’s requirements for payment of our sins. “The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22 NIV).

   C. Jesus’ death provides eternal life for all who receive him. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23 NIV).
D. We love God “because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19 NIV). Will you see the cross as a gift from God to you? If you have not accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, will you receive him today?
Note: It is recommended that you read chapters 13, “I Can Turn Your Tragedy into Triumph,” and chapter 14, “I Have Won the Victory,” in He Chose the Nails before the sermon so you will be well acquainted with the stories and principles from Max Lucado.

I. Introduction

A. Rafael Rosales was a minister in El Salvador. The Salvadoran guerrillas, viewing him as an enemy, left him to die in a burning car. Rafael escaped the car and the country, but he couldn’t escape the memories. The scars left on his body that he saw in the mirror reminded him of his tormentors’ cruelty.

B. But one day, the Lord spoke to Rafael’s heart and said, “They did the same to me.” As God began to minister to Rafael, he began to see his scars not as a reminder of his pain but as a picture of Jesus’ sacrifice. Rafael was able to forgive his attackers. He returned to El Salvador to start a new church.

C. God brought victory out of tragedy for Rafael. He did the same for the world when Jesus walked out of the tomb on Easter Sunday. Today, we will look at the remarkable gift that God provided through the empty tomb.

II. Teaching

A. The Bible tells us that after Jesus was crucified on the cross, his body was laid in the borrowed tomb of a wealthy man.

1. Joseph of Arimathea requested Jesus’ body and laid it in his own tomb before sundown on Friday (see Matthew 27:57-60).
2. When women came to care for Jesus’ body on Sunday morning, they met an angel who told them Jesus was alive (see Mark 16:4-6).

3. The disciples John and Peter, on hearing the women’s report, ran to the empty tomb (see John 20:3-7). The folded grave clothes they saw suggest the tomb had not been robbed. Max writes, “Through the rags of death, John saw the power of life.” John “saw and believed” (John 20:8 NIV).

B. Jesus’ dead body was raised to new, glorious, physical life.

1. The risen Christ appeared to many of his followers before ascending to heaven. The Bible records many appearances:
   a. Mary Magdalene (see Mark 16:9-11)
   b. Other women at the tomb (see Matthew 28:8-10)
   c. Peter (see Luke 24:34)
   d. James (see 1 Corinthians 15:7)
   e. Two disciples on the Emmaus Road (see Luke 24:13-32)
   f. All the disciples (see John 20:19-20)
   g. More than 500 followers (see 1 Corinthians 15:6)

2. Jesus’ resurrection means that sin and death have been conquered and we can share in Jesus’ victory. “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15 NIV).

3. At the cross, God won the victory. “But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!” (1 Corinthians 15:57, MSG).

4. We share in Christ’s victory. “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in victory through Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14 NIV).

III. Application

A. Max concludes, “We all face tragedy. What’s more, we have all received the symbols of tragedy. Yours might be a telegram from the war
department, an ID bracelet from the hospital, a scar, a court subpoena. We don’t like these symbols, nor do we want these symbols. Like wrecked cars in a junkyard, they clutter up our hearts with memories of bad days.”

B. What tragedies have you faced? How has God been at work in those very things to bring about a triumph? As Max notes, “God will turn tragedies to triumphs if you only wait and watch.”

C. Death can be a final tragedy, yet even death has been conquered by Jesus. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26). Do you believe Jesus? This Easter, Jesus offers you eternal life. Will you receive it as God’s gift to you?
SERMON OUTLINE 6

WHAT WILL WE LEAVE AT THE CROSS?

GOD’S PROMISE IN THE GIFTS OF EASTER

Note: The purpose of this sermon is to provoke your congregation’s reflection and response to Jesus’ “gifts of Easter” and to offer direction on living out what they have learned. It is recommended that you read chapter 15, “What Will You Leave at the Cross?” in He Chose the Nails before the sermon so you will be well acquainted with the stories and principles from Max Lucado.

I. Introduction

A. Max invites us to linger in the shadows at the foot of the cross on the hill called Calvary.

1. The friends and family of Jesus have left.
2. The religious leaders have stopped mocking and returned home.
3. Like Jesus, the other two crucified with him have died.
4. The Roman soldiers are feeling the satisfaction of a job well done.
5. Joseph of Arimathea has taken away Jesus’ body for a hasty burial.

B. In the shadows, we see the three iron spikes that held Jesus to the cross. We see the rough, prickly crown of thorns. We see the jar and the rag on a stick soaked with wine and gall. We see the bloodstained dirt at the foot of the cross. We can barely read the sign on the cross: “Jesus of Nazareth: The King of the Jews.”

C. All the symbols of a horrifying, humiliating Roman crucifixion have become signals of the infinite love of God for people like us. What kind of God is this that will go to such lengths to save us?
D. Noticing all that Jesus brought to the cross, we sit in silence and ask, “What will we leave at the cross?”

II. Teaching

A. What do we leave at the cross? We leave our bad and mad moments, our anxious and final moments.

1. Jesus died for all our bad (sin) moments. Our sins are forever gone as far as God is concerned. He remembers them no more (see Isaiah 43:45).

2. Jesus will transform our mad moments. Rather than being bitter at people, we can learn to bless and serve others (see Romans 12:17–21).

3. Jesus will receive all our anxious moments and give us peace (see Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Peter 5:7).

4. Jesus defeated all fear of our final moments of earth, because he defeated death itself (see John 11:25–26; 1 Corinthians 15:55).

5. Application: How will our lives be different as we leave all these moments at the cross? Why do we carry these things anyway, knowing what Jesus has done for us?

B. What else do we leave at the cross? We leave a wrong way of seeing God, ourselves, others, and life itself.

1. We see God as loving and inviting, not as distant and accusing (see John 3:16–17; Hebrews 4:16).

2. We see ourselves—sinful and wrecked as we are—as deeply loved and fiercely pursued by God (see Luke 19:10).

3. We see others as God sees them: so valuable to God that he sent his own son to be a sacrifice for our sin (see John 1:29; 1 John 2:1–2).

4. We see life, even its many tragedies, as a grand story in which “God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them” (Romans 8:28 NLT; see also Genesis 50:20).
III. Application

A. Max writes, “How do we explain the impact of Jesus on this world? Jesus was a backwater peasant. He never wrote a book, never held an office. He never journeyed more than 200 miles from his hometown. Friends left him. One betrayed him. Those he helped forgot him. Prior to his death they abandoned him. But after his death they couldn’t resist him. What made the difference?” When Jesus died, so did your sin. When Jesus rose, so did your hope.

B. Who in your world needs to meet Jesus and be saved? Who will tell them? The great story of Easter and all its gifts is a story for sharing with the world. Begin praying for a friend or two or a family member who needs Jesus. Ask God to give you loving courage “to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.”