

“Receiving Back . . . “
 Sermon for 3 November 2019
 Genesis 22; Luke 9:18-56 & Mark 10:28-30

After my father Philip Richards died, an oil painting of a Union drummer boy, on the perimeter of the army encampment, came back into my possession. I painted it for him because he specialized in the American Civil War, and particularly the battle of Gettysburg which determined the outcome of that grievous conflict. He could describe the placement and activity of every soldier in the 20th Maine, under Gen. Joshua Chamberlain, on that fateful day as they repulsed the Confederate assault known as “Pickett’s Charge.” I can not even begin to tell you how formative my experience of all that exposure to our war, through the my father’s passionate interest. The ghosts of recollection float through my mind like smoke from campfires, or morning mists on battlefield greens. Except for this, you might well have passed on in life, oblivious to this part of who I am. And, I bring it up because it is applicable to my recollections of the Scripture here before us today. I mean, the whole episode of Abraham’s journey from Beersheba in southern Judah, three days, to Mt. Moriah where the future site of the Temple, and of Golgotha (where Jesus would be sacrificed for our sins). Going over these inter-threaded themes (the sacrifice of Isaac, the sacrifice of Jesus) exist both in the written Word and as “ghosts of recollection” in my mind and, I would suppose, also in some of yours. Sometimes we must return to the source to clear the smoke and fog of memory. Here’s some beacon verses for today as we look at 1. faith, 2. transformation, and 3. rewards:

Mark 10:28 **Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.” 29 Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, 30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. (NASB)**

Peter is asking for clarification on the matter of faith: **We have left everything and followed You.** So, what’s in for us? A one hundred-fold increase. The spiritual profit margin is 100%. There is a list of the items one might leave **to follow Jesus** and a review of that list in the return column. What is more, we receive that return both **now and in the age to come.** Some, orphaned by circumstances and life in this world, enter that reward through the family we obtain in Christ, in the body of Christ, in the church. We also know that the increase we obtain now is an eternal one—our brothers and sisters of the faith are our spiritual and forever family. That’s consoling.

The hundred-fold increase is automatic; it is a sure promise; however it is not a simple, uncomplicated matter. For as surely as we have the promise of God for this increase, we have an Adversary who seeks to rob us of our reward. He works overtime to diminish, disintegrate or destroy our reward. He wants us to believe that we won’t get the full 100%—we’ll get less, a lot less if he is successful in his opposition. Jesus says **he will receive** and Satan responds with, “But not so fast.” He will seek to undermine your faith, your confidence in Christ, and your valuation of the promised reward. He will

seek to convince us that the reward is simply not worth the sacrifice. . . not now, not ever. In this agenda, I hope to show, he overplays his hand. Always.

Because Abraham was willing, in response to the call of God to sacrifice Isaac, to go and offer Isaac up, his faith was vindicated and his strength was made adequate to this terrible summons. Then Abraham was stayed from sacrificing Isaac, and seized upon the ram caught in the thicket, offering it up instead, he received back his son.

When Jesus appeared to the watchmen at the tomb, then the women and then the disciples, after his resurrection, his followers received back their Lord. When he was raised, he returned the same and yet transformed—he was received back glorified!

When Jesus healed the centurion's slave, the centurion received back his servant. When Jesus raised the widow of Nain's dead son to life, he gave him back to her. ***She received back her son as surely as Abraham received back his beloved son.*** *This deliverance from death was more wonderful than his deliverance from the womb—hugely so. It was hope from ashes, from all lost to life regained!* When Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, and she stood up, when Jesus restored her to her parents. ***She was delivered from death to life and then received back by her grateful parents.*** While Peter, James and John looked on, those **astonished parents received back** their twelve year old daughter to life, to marriage, to whatever God had planned for her interrupted life. These acts of restoration are all examples of receiving back—the rewards of faith So we are not surprised to read in Luke 9, that Jesus, upon coming down from the mountain, in the company of Peter, James and John, delivers a demoniac child and **gave him back to his father.** (Luke 9:42) In the parallel account, Mark 9:23-24: 23 **And Jesus said to him, “If You can?” All things are possible to him who believes.”** 24 **Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”** Just to secure the assertion that this was a reward of faith.

And (back to Luke 9) all were astonished at the majesty of God, and while they were marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples (this being the marker signifying private speech, or instruction of his disciples' ears, away from the seething crowds), **“Let these words sink into your ears: ‘The Son of Man (Jesus' preferred self-ascription of himself as *the messiah of God!*) is about to be delivered into the hands of men.’” But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it.** Meaning that it was hidden just where, at the right moment, it could be discovered! **And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.** (vv. 43- 45)

Concealment takes the form of abbreviation in Luke. Luke's narrative abbreviates certain things—he even delete's certain details entirely. It seems as if he is choosing to be *kind* or defensively *gentle* with the disciples' reputation, saving their face so to speak. For instance, see how Luke records the great confession of Peter: **You are the Christ of God** (v. 20) but proceeds to leave out the rebuke and exchange which followed that declaration between Jesus and Peter. Luke relates Jesus speaking of his **suffering, being killed and on the third day be raised from** (we supply “from the dead”)—the rebuke by Peter of Christ (!) is deleted! **Far be it from you, Lord; this should never happen to you.** (Matt.26:22) **The Lord's get thee behind me, Satan, . . . thou art a**

hindrance and thinketh only in human terms is also redacted. However, a synopsis of Jesus' **journey**, *what he would suffer*, is retained.

Indeed, that **journey** remains central to the summons (**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.** (v.23) Furthermore, Jesus' **journey** features highly in the exchange between Jesus and **the glorified Moses and Elijah**¹ (v.31). You might have missed that "glorified bit." Don't. Moses and Elijah **appeared in glory** because that is their present and real state in heaven—they made it into heaven! And what we learn here about them is stunning. We learn that the saints, in their glory, are recognizably themselves. They are who they truly are and they are exactly as they appear. So shall all who believe on Jesus be. They are fully realized individuals not recycled, glorified not reincarnated.

That aside, I want us to focus on the **journey**—*what Jesus would suffer, his death, burial and resurrection.* And I do not mean to reduce these events to sheer history. They are more than factoids. They **discuss His decease**—meaning his **departure from this world**.² Jesus suffered intensely on his mission/journey (as did Abraham). He suffered greatly for us, for our salvation, our deliverance from the power of sin. He suffered that we might escape sin, inherit the kingdom, walk in forgiveness by the redeeming grace of God. That mission is the point of *the journey* meaning the Son of Man's sojourn here (why he took on human flesh and why he took his human flesh with him when he departed for heaven)—and not his burial clothes. And there is a parallel between the journey of Isaac to the altar on Mount Moriah—to the very site where sacrifices for sin would transpire in the house of God, the Temple. Yes, sacrifice as a mode of atonement was prefigured first in the ordeal of Isaac (and so of Abraham), centuries before the construction of Solomon's Temple and a thousand years before the perfect sacrifice on Calvary—the eventual outcome of Jesus' **journey**!

Jesus like Abraham **suffered** meekly, humbly, with gentle endurance. That is the example for our sojourns here! That is how we are to suffer if we hope to engage and defeat Satan, the enemies of God and, yes, even our own personal opponents. The passion of Jesus is terrifyingly calm—he doesn't rant, scream, or rage. He doesn't curse, threaten or revile. Those passions are storming all around him, but Jesus doesn't embrace, endorse or participate in them. Steadfast, calm, determined, and focused! Salvation now, judgment later. I think that is why the centurion exclaimed **Surely this man was the Son of God**—Jesus died exceptionally, unlike any other man that officer had seen crucified, or killed. *That, again, is our example.* He died winningly, with meekness *and so can you.* It is likely that some have never considered such a thing. Is it possible to die winningly? Yes, indeed it is. Jesus did so *for our sakes; he died as the Savior of mankind should die . . . let us take note of that manner of dying* confident that we shall rise, see our Redeemer face to face and live fully forever.

¹ We see Moses and Elijah as they are now yet we recognize them by name, despite that glory! Persons who lived centuries ago, whom we have never met in person, or interacted with, or even called by name. The durability of person, and individuality, is stressed here, I think.

² This word, decease, has a curious usage history. When we say "deceased," we mean "dead." The dead are referred to as "deceased" when we mean they have *departed* from this world and are no longer "here."

That is how Jack Trennelworth died back in 1978-79—a gruff, coarse man given to strong drink died like a patriarch, blessing his gathered family, blessing each one, speaking peace to them and, at the end, a shaft of brilliant light shot up from his heart to heaven . . . leaving us gasping in awe at the beauty of his death. And so died a lonely Italian matriarch, in her tiny motel room . . . departing as a belle invited to a ball for angels.

For the Spirit-controlled believer, one's passions should be considered, constrained or even treated as temptations. Take heed with them. Our passions are *stirred up* as a satanic device so as to derail us, entrap us or ensnare us. Haters, the enraged, constitute spiritual “strikebreakers”; they assist demons, the full time workers in Satan's kingdom. The demonically oppressed are his slaves, servants—even his employees, as it were. They are tireless, active, busy about their work; they are neither lazy, or idle—which is how they are able to out maneuver the saints all too often. Our world is truly infested with these evil spirits, and their collaborating sinners, with pesky intemperance, bitter complaining and extremist protesting—all “inflamed passions” fueled by pride and outrage and cultivated in the soil of resentment, envy and unforgiveness. Loudness, clamor and agitation are their atmosphere.

Is there any higher heaven, or better, more peaceful option to be had? Consider, by contrast, God's calm dealings with Cain and Jonah—how *gentle* his ways are! God and Moses have a similar meekness about them—*patient, long suffering*. **Where is your brother?** God asks. (Gen. 4:9) **Do you do well to be angry?** God queries. (Jonah 4:4, 9) Yes, it is true that God can be tempestuous—that tempestuousness was probably loud and boisterous. And we do have the thunderings and earthquakes on record at the giving of the Law on Sinai. He spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. (See Job 38 and 40.)

But Jesus when he was insulted, reviled and viciously accused—reviled not back, bore it all quietly, silently even. And that, frankly, is our model and our example. Abraham was exemplary in this manner also. Some commentators work up Jesus' driving the money-changers out of the temple (**he formed a scourge out of rope and drove them out** (John 2:15) to the pitch of frenzied rage. But I find that an isolated incident to be out of the ordinary, exceptional, atypical of Jesus. He did get openly angry (enraged? infuriated? Perhaps not.) at religious hypocrites. As Jesus re-enters the world, following the transfiguration, he was met with a **great crowd** and they were riled up, **And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.** (v.40) **Bring him here. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.** (v.42) There is again, the receiving back! We covered verses 42-43 already. I should note that Jesus foretold his death earlier (vv. 23-24) and this later reference merely, summarizes all of that into **delivered into the hands of men**. As you may recall, the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus for further details of this “**saying.**” (v.45) The parallel passage (Matt. 17:22-23) simply records as being **greatly distressed**.

In both passages following, an argument broke out as to which of them was the **greatest**. He sets a child in their midst (Luke 9:46-7) saying, **Whoever receives this child in my name receives me.** (v. 48) This is very different from **Let the children come to me, for such belong to the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever**

does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. (Mark 10:14-15)
And that differs again from Matthew 18:2-6:

2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”³

This last citation from Matthew comes down on the humility piece (*as prefigured in Abraham’s journey of faith*) that I have been trying to draw out this morning as an attribute of Jesus’ exemplary life, and how to bear up under suffering (**persecutions**, particularly).

Now I find it fascinating that Peter, James and John, the inner circle of Jesus’ disciples, is engaged in some of the most powerful ministry moments (the healing of Jairus’ daughter, and the transfiguration) they also come in for the sharpest of rebukes. Peter, when he remonstrates with Jesus, for the assertion that he must suffer, be killed and rise again is told, **Get thee behind me Satan, you think as the world thinks. You must be more heavenly minded.** When the mother of James and John requests the two places of honor in Jesus’ coming kingdom receive this: **You have no idea what you are asking. Are you able to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?** (Meaning death on a cross!). The two brothers also received, in response to their idea of **calling down fire to destroy those who rejected Jesus (v.54). . . you do not know what spirit you are made of—the Son of Man came to save the lost, not to destroy them!** (Luke 9:55b not in all manuscripts). Then Jesus suggests, “Let’s move on.”

Closing: Who do you think was the greatest hater? Cain, Jonah, James, or John? Remember, Jesus wants to return back one hundred-fold increase on your faith and sacrifice—Satan opposes that promised return. He seeks to diminish it, reduce it if not eliminate it entirely. **AND NOW THAT I HAVE TOLD YOU ABOUT THAT PROMISED RETURN YOU CAN EXPECT A COUNTER-OFFENSIVE and it will take the form of sin, spiritual attack, temptation and testing.** Satan is so predictable, rather unimaginative. He aims to injure your faith, damage your testimony, reduce your confidence in exchange.

Therefore the Devil wants to **inflame your passions** and draw you into murdering your brother (Cain, or the brothers of Joseph), into wanting whole city to be destroyed (Jonah), into wanting heavenly fire to destroy a whole village who rejected Jesus **because his face was set toward Jerusalem, because he had a journey to take and complete, because his mission was not their mission!** Some of that same set

³ Once again we see demonstrated both Lukan abbreviation and a decrease in depth and detail as we move away from the later texts to the earlier tradition. Luke apparently edits the narrative material and not simply aimed at increasing interest through concentration.

of face was on Abraham as he set out for Mt. Moriah, with son and donkeys to perform the sacrifice that God had commanded of him. That face, set to walk by faith can be very off-putting to those who have no call! It was a hard, hard thing that God required of Abraham—a thing that only faith could undertake. A lesser man would have cracked. In fact, a man of lesser faith would have not even set out on the journey!

When tempted to be angry, to fly into a rage . . . DON'T. Choose to set the example of Jesus before yourself. Meditate on the Lamb. Choose to leave vengeance to the Lord. Let God repay for he repays fully, precisely, justly and mercifully. That's unbeatable! **AS SURELY AS HE RECOMPENSES THE WICKED—JUST SO HE WILL REWARD THE RIGHTEOUS.**

*Whatever we are unwilling to let go of, whatever we are unwilling to sacrifice, that very thing is what we can never have back noe hundred-fold! Isaac is a son of two miracles: first, there is the miracle of being born so late in life and second is being received back. **Lay not your hand upon the lad! For I see now that you fear God, that you were willing to sacrifice even your only son—trusting only in the reality that God will provide. Jehovah-Jireh is his name.*** (Genesis 22:12)

The “Lord will see,” “the Lord who provides,” is “the Lord who will see to it.” All of these significations, all of these meanings (or definitions) fit the Hebrew, Jehovah-Jireh. They convey a certain fullness and that fullness is most applicable to our faith. They are, without a doubt, the articles of faith that Abraham needed most on his long, anguishing journey to the altar of Moriah. They foreshadow the very same articles of faith that needed to attend the steps of our Lord on his journey to the cross: God will see the affliction of my soul on behalf of his people, God will provide resurrection power so that having died for their sins I might rise to their everlasting life and redemption, God will see my missions through to its glorious end, the purpose for which I came and lived and suffered and died. The example of Abraham's faith, the example of Christ's faith both serve us. They are the pattern we are to follow on our pilgrimage. They are the pattern of the servant of God in every time, every age, every place—that patterns is shared by every Christian in goals, in actionable beliefs, in fruit and outcome and character. We are all as truly the same in Christlikeness as we are different in our individuality. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Father of us all—one eternal family in glory with many unique testimonies through which to glorify our God.

AMEN