

GIVE ME [INSERT DESIRED LOCATION] OR I DIE

A Devotional Meditation on Vayera (And He Appeared)

Genesis 18:1-22:24; 2 Kings 4:1-37;
Isaiah 61:1-2; Matthew 11:4-6, 20-23, 12:38-42; Luke 4:16-19

Albert J. McCarn

November 14, 2024

My favorite of the great Reformers is John Knox of Scotland (c. 1514-1572). His life is summed up in his prayer, "Give me Scotland, or I die." That is a prayer born of a passion to see his people saved. In his day, Scotland was thoroughly corrupt, from the highest circles of the aristocracy and clergy, down to the common folk. Even so, there must have been a few righteous people in Scotland who prayed for God to send a deliverer. His answer was John Knox.

It's hard to say whether Knox made a difference in the heart of the notorious Mary, Queen of Scots, although he preached uncompromisingly to her. Perhaps he did have an impact on Mary's son, James VI of Scotland. Knox delivered the sermon at the infant king's coronation in 1567. Years later, when the young monarch became King James I of England, he commissioned the English translation of the Bible that bears his name, and that has inspired generations of Christians to live for God in the way John Knox did.



John Knox Admonishing Mary Queen of Scots. Engraving by John Burnet after a work of Sir William Allan, 1824, [Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art](#).

Saintly people like John Knox inspire us because they continue to intercede and to live out their righteous principles even in the face of persecution, poverty, sickness, and exclusion from society. Their assignments are always difficult, but sometimes they seem impossible, as when Jonah was called to carry God's message to Nineveh, the enemy of his nation of Israel. Similarly, Lot picked up an impossible assignment when he chose to live in the thoroughly debased city of Sodom.

Nothing is impossible with God, though. Yeshua reminded the people of his day about that. He said if the works done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, that wicked city would not have been destroyed, and that the people of Nineveh would condemn the generation of his day because they repented at Jonah's preaching. Even Yeshua's cousin, John, needed reassurance that his labor to proclaim the coming of Messiah was not wasted. Yeshua gave him a cryptic response:

Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

Matthew 11:4-6 ESV

Yeshua did work miracles, which is what probably comes to mind when we read this passage. What is greater, though, the miracles, or the message to which those miracles

testify? Yeshua answered that question in the way he lived out his righteous calling. He announced that calling when he read from Isaiah in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor. . . .

Isaiah 61:1-2a ESV (quoted by Yeshua according to Luke 4:16-19)

From the time God called Abraham, everyone who has known the Lord has known of his intent to bring liberty to those held captive by sin and death, to bring the good news of his salvation to the poor in spirit, and to bring healing to the brokenhearted. Abraham did that wherever he went. The Bible doesn't tell us whether he worked any miracles like Yeshua and some of the prophets did, but it does tell us he was kind and just, even when it meant taking a firm stand for righteousness. He made mistakes, but he learned from them and continued to walk with God. That's why God said of him:

Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

Genesis 19:17-19 ESV

These are the reasons God trusted Abraham with the mission to intercede for wicked Sodom on the brink of its destruction. The fact that Sodom was destroyed was no fault of Abraham's. He did what God expected by praying for mercy on the city. In the years before that, he had lived and taught God's righteous ways. Abraham's nephew, Lot, learned the path of righteousness from his uncle, and thus was in the position to help the Sodomites turn from their wicked ways.

We know Lot was wealthy when he moved to Sodom, but we don't know what he did with his wealth. If all he did was spend it on a big house and a comfortable place in society, then he failed. Maybe it would have been better to give all his wealth to establish a shelter for orphaned children and widows, and in that bit of charity demonstrate to the doomed citizens of Sodom that there was a better way than the broad path of death on which they travelled. If Lot had done something like that, would there have been ten righteous people there as Abraham prayed so that God would have spared the city?

We could ask a similar question about Jonah. After he grudgingly delivered his message of judgment to Nineveh, why didn't he stay and help the repentant Ninevites learn the ways of the Lord so their revival could extend into future generations, and God could transform their city and nation into a force for good rather than a dreaded enemy?

These are the questions God asks of us even now. It's interesting that Peter, the apostle who first confessed that Yeshua is the Messiah, was the son of a man named

Jonah. We saw in his story the transformation of a man from one who likely would have done as Jonah did in Nineveh into a compassionate, wise, elder who counseled Yeshua's followers to live righteously and make a difference in a lost and broken world. That may be what Yeshua meant when he said the gates of hell could not prevail against the community he would build on the revelation of God's Messiah, his Anointed One.

That, too, goes back to Abraham. Because of his faithful righteousness, God promised that Abraham's descendants would possess the gate of their enemies. Think about the spiritual application of that promise in the context of Yeshua's declaration. The revelation of God's redemptive work through his Anointed One and through those living in the spirit of his Anointed One would break through the gates of sin and death and bring freedom to the captives, good news to the poor, and healing to the brokenhearted. That's why he has his agents in every place and in every generation positioned to pray and labor for their assigned places as John Knox prayed and labored for Scotland. The question is not whether we are called to such a work, but whether we will follow the examples of Lot and Jonah, or the example of John Knox.