

He Will Place You on His Shoulders and Carry You Home

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Just as the Good Shepherd finds His lost sheep, if you will only lift up your heart to the Savior of the world, He will find you.

One of my haunting childhood memories begins with the howl of distant air-raid sirens that awaken me from sleep. Before long, another sound, the rattle and hum of propellers, gradually increases until it shakes the very air. Trained well by our mother, we children each grab our bag and run up the hill to a bomb shelter. As we hurry through the pitch-dark night, green and white flares drop from the sky to mark the targets for the bombers. Strangely enough, everyone calls these flares Christmas trees.

I am four years old, and I am a witness to a world at war.

Dresden

Not far from where my family lived was the city of Dresden. Those who lived there witnessed perhaps a thousand times what I had seen. Massive firestorms, caused by thousands of tons of explosives, swept through Dresden, destroying more than 90 percent of the city and leaving little but rubble and ash in their wake.

In a very short time, the city once nicknamed the “Jewel Box” was no more. Erich Kästner, a German author, wrote of the destruction, “In a thousand years was her beauty built, in one night was it utterly destroyed.”¹ During my childhood I could not imagine how the destruction of a war our own people had started could ever be overcome. The world around us appeared totally hopeless and without any future.

Last year I had the opportunity to return to Dresden. Seventy years after the war, it is once again a “Jewel Box” of a city. The ruins have been cleared, and the city

It is, once again, a jewel box of a city. The ruins have been cleared, and the city is restored and even improved.

During my visit I saw the beautiful Lutheran church Frauenkirche, the Church of Our Lady. Originally built in the 1700s, it had been one of Dresden's shining jewels, but the war reduced it to a pile of rubble. For many years it remained that way, until finally it was determined that the Frauenkirche would be rebuilt.

Stones from the destroyed church had been stored and cataloged and, when possible, were used in the reconstruction. Today you can see these fire-blackened stones pockmarking the outer walls. These "scars" are not only a reminder of the war history of this building but also a monument to hope—a magnificent symbol of man's ability to create new life from ashes.

As I pondered the history of Dresden and marveled at the ingenuity and resolve of those who restored what had been so completely destroyed, I felt the sweet influence of the Holy Spirit. Surely, I thought, if man can take the ruins, rubble, and remains of a broken city and rebuild an awe-inspiring structure that rises toward the heavens, how much more capable is our Almighty Father to restore His children who have fallen, struggled, or become lost?

It matters not how completely ruined our lives may seem. It matters not how scarlet our sins, how deep our bitterness, how lonely, abandoned, or broken our hearts may be. Even those who are without hope, who live in despair, who have betrayed trust, surrendered their integrity, or turned away from God can be rebuilt. Save those rare sons of perdition, there is no life so shattered that it cannot be restored.

The joyous news of the gospel is this: because of the eternal plan of happiness provided by our loving Heavenly Father and through the infinite sacrifice of Jesus the Christ, we can not only be redeemed from our fallen state and restored to purity, but we can also transcend mortal imagination and become heirs of eternal life and partakers of God's indescribable glory.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

During the Savior's ministry, the religious leaders of His day disapproved of Jesus spending time with people they had labeled "sinners."

Perhaps to them it looked like He was tolerating or even condoning sinful behavior. Perhaps they believed that the best way to help sinners repent was by condemning, ridiculing, and shaming them.

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When the Savior perceived what the Pharisees and scribes were thinking, He told a story:

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

“And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”²

Over the centuries, this parable has traditionally been interpreted as a call to action for us to bring back the lost sheep and to reach out to those who are lost. While this is certainly appropriate and good, I wonder if there is more to it.

Is it possible that Jesus’s purpose, first and foremost, was to teach about the work of the Good Shepherd?

Is it possible that He was testifying of God’s love for His wayward children?

Is it possible that the Savior’s message was that God is fully aware of those who are lost—and that He will find them, that He will reach out to them, and that He will rescue them?

If that is so, what must the sheep do to qualify for this divine help?

Does the sheep need to know how to use a complicated sextant to calculate its coordinates? Does it need to be able to use a GPS to define its position? Does it have to have the expertise to create an app that will call for help? Does the sheep need endorsements by a sponsor before the Good Shepherd will come to the rescue?

No. Certainly not! The sheep is worthy of divine rescue simply because it is loved by the Good Shepherd.

To me, the parable of the lost sheep is one of the most hopeful passages in all of scripture.

Our Savior, the Good Shepherd, knows and loves us. He knows and loves you.

He knows when you are lost, and He knows where you are. He knows your grief. Your silent pleadings. Your fears. Your tears.

It matters not how you became lost—whether because of your own poor choices or because of circumstances beyond your control.

What matters is that you are His child. And He loves you. He loves His children.

Because He loves you, He will find you. He will place you upon His shoulders,

rejoicing. And when He brings you home, He will say to one and all, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."³

What Must We Do?

But, you might be thinking, what is the catch? Surely I have to do more than simply wait to be rescued.

While our loving Father desires that all of His children return to Him, He will force no one to heaven.⁴ God will not rescue us against our will.

So what must we do?

His invitation is simple:

"Turn ... to me."⁵

"Come unto me."⁶

"Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you."⁷

This is how we show Him that we want to be rescued.

It requires a little faith. But do not despair. If you cannot muster faith right now, begin with hope.

If you cannot say you know God is there, you can hope that He is. You can desire to believe.⁸ That is enough to start.

Then, acting on that hope, reach out to Heavenly Father. God will extend His love toward you, and His work of rescue and transformation will begin.

Over time, you will recognize His hand in your life. You will feel His love. And the desire to walk in His light and follow His way will grow with every step of faith you take.

We call these steps of faith "obedience."

That is not a popular word these days. But obedience is a cherished concept in the gospel of Jesus Christ because we know that "through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."⁹

As we increase in faith, we also must increase in faithfulness. Earlier I quoted a German author who lamented the destruction of Dresden. He also penned the

German author who lamented the destruction of Dresden. He also penned the phrase “Es gibt nichts Gutes, ausser: Man tut es.” For those who do not speak the celestial language, this is translated as “There is nothing good unless you do it.”¹⁰

You and I may speak most eloquently of spiritual things. We may impress people with our keen intellectual interpretation of religious topics. We may rhapsodize about religion and “dream of [our] mansion above.”¹¹ But if our faith does not change the way we live—if our beliefs do not influence our daily decisions—our religion is vain, and our faith, if not dead, is certainly not well and is in danger of eventually flatlining.¹²

Obedience is the lifeblood of faith. It is by obedience that we gather light into our souls.

But sometimes I think we misunderstand obedience. We may see obedience as an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. Or we may pound the metaphorical hammer of obedience against the iron anvil of the commandments in an effort to shape those we love, through constant heating and repeated battering, into holier, heavenly matter.

No doubt about it, there are times when we need a stern call to repentance. Certainly, there are some who may be reached only in this manner.

But perhaps there is a different metaphor that can explain why we obey the commandments of God. Maybe obedience is not so much the process of bending, twisting, and pounding our souls into something we are not. Instead, it is the process by which we discover what we truly are made of.

We are created by the Almighty God. He is our Heavenly Father. We are literally His spirit children. We are made of supernal material most precious and highly refined, and thus we carry within ourselves the substance of divinity.

Here on earth, however, our thoughts and actions become encumbered with that which is corrupt, unholy, and impure. The dust and filth of the world stain our souls, making it difficult to recognize and remember our birthright and purpose.

But all this cannot change who we truly are. The fundamental divinity of our nature remains. And the moment we choose to incline our hearts to our beloved Savior and set foot upon the path of discipleship, something miraculous happens. The love of God fills our hearts, the light of truth fills our minds, we start to lose the desire to sin, and we do not want to walk any longer in darkness.¹³

We come to see obedience not as a punishment but as a liberating path to our

divine destiny. And gradually, the corruption, dust, and limitations of this earth begin to fall away. Eventually, the priceless, eternal spirit of the heavenly being within us is revealed, and a radiance of goodness becomes our nature.

You Are Worthy of Rescue

My dear brothers and sisters, my dear friends, I testify that God sees us as we truly are—and He sees us worthy of rescue.

You may feel that your life is in ruins. You may have sinned. You may be afraid, angry, grieving, or tortured by doubt. But just as the Good Shepherd finds His lost sheep, if you will only lift up your heart to the Savior of the world, He will find you.

He will rescue you.

He will lift you up and place you on His shoulders.

He will carry you home.

If mortal hands can transform rubble and ruins into a beautiful house of worship, then we can have confidence and trust that our loving Heavenly Father can and will rebuild us. His plan is to build us into something far greater than what we were—far greater than what we can ever imagine. With each step of faith on the path of discipleship, we grow into the beings of eternal glory and infinite joy we were designed to become.

This is my testimony, my blessing, and my humble prayer in the sacred name of our Master, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.