



The Amish Voice

MAP ♦ 575 US Highway 250 ♦ Greenwich, OH 44837 ♦ (419) 962-1515 ♦ January 2025

The Secret of the Strength

— by Peter Hoover

Continued from November 2024...

CHAPTER 14 On to Community

Greed and Property

Constantly on guard against the danger of “laying up treasure on earth” (Mt 6:19), the Anabaptists of southern Germany and Austria condemned the twin evils of *Geiz* (greed) and *Eigentum* (private property). No matter whether they lived in spontaneous or in total community of goods, the south German Anabaptists saw the holding of property only for oneself as sinful. They believed, like the early Christians, that everything we have belongs to God and our brothers.

Leonhard Schiemer, baptized and ordained by Hans Hut, wrote before they beheaded him at Rattenberg on the Inn:

Whoever gives himself to God under the cross is a child of God. But this is not enough. He must separate himself from all those who have not given themselves to God, and he must practice love and community with all those who have

done so. For these are closest to him and with them he must hold in common all gifts received from God, whether instruction, abilities, property, money or anything else. What God lends to him, he must invest for the common good.²³

Hans Betz wrote:

God’s church holds only to the customs of God. Her Gemeinschaft is in Jesus Christ and in His true peace. Like bread made of many grains that have all become one loaf, so is God’s church community that has freed itself from private property.

No person can live with a desire for wealth in God’s community. Where there is greed, the Lord Christ is not. Greed is of the devil. The devil was the first to take private property (*Eigentum*) when he rebelled against God, the creator of life. For this reason, God drove him out and consigned him to hell. The devil wanted to be like God (the true owner of property), but God could not tolerate that...

History tells us about greed. God gave the Israelites manna to eat.

²³ *op. cit.*

But those who gathered more than they needed found it full of worms...Ananias, driven by greed, lied to the Holy Ghost and God punished him. Judas, driven by greed, ended up hanging himself. In this way, God punishes the greedy.

Everything on this earth was created to be free. The one who claims it as private property breaks the command and robs the glory of God. For this reason, he will receive his wages with the rich man in hell.

God’s church, washed in the blood of Christ, is to be holy and pure. He who wants to be in it must purify himself by giving all he has to be used for the glory of God. He gives to his neighbor as he has freely received...Oh how pleasant it is in Jesus Christ where brothers live together in unity and have all their property in common!

The members of Christ share their spiritual and material gifts because they hold the kingdom of God in common...They alone are the bride of Christ...Oh church of God, keep your marriage pure! Do not let yourself be carried away!

Turn from the enemy and his teachings. Do not let yourself be tricked like Eve who paid attention to his talk. Even if the serpent tries hard and long, do not let yourself be moved. Always follow Christ and you will live with Him forever.²⁴

The first Anabaptists could not continue hand-in-hand with the world's way of doing business. Hans Hut wrote:

Everyone says that we should keep on in our business like we did before conversion. If this is so, why didn't Peter remain a fisherman, Matthew a tax collector, and why did Christ tell the rich young man to sell what he had and give to the poor? If it is right that our preachers may have great possessions, then the rich young man would have been in the right to keep his possessions, too. Oh, Zachaeus, why did you give up your property so frivolously? According to those preachers' rule you could have kept it and still been a good Christian!²⁵

Equality

Powerful writers and leaders of the early sixteenth century, such as Thomas Müntzer in southern Germany and Michael Gaismair in Austria, pointed the Anabaptists on to equality in Jesus. These men held a deep conviction that the hoarding of material goods was wrong. They believed that Jesus came to bring equality and material peace to men. Michael Gaismair wrote about Jesus' kingdom in 1526:

All city walls, as well as all fortresses in the land, shall be broken down so that there will be no more cities but only villages. Then there will be no distinctions among men, and no one shall consider himself more im-

portant or better than anyone else. It is from differences of rank among men that dissension, arrogance and rebellion arise. But there is to be absolute equality in the land.²⁶

The first Anabaptists made humble equality in Jesus their ideal. They rejected wealth, rank and power. Hans Hergot, executed at Nürnberg in Bavaria, in 1527, published a tract that described it.

In Hans Hergot's tract, Old Testament times were the "age of the Father." New Testament times are the "age of the Son." And now, at the end of time, there is to be an "age of the Holy Spirit" (the millennium). Before this millennial age comes upon us, there are three tables in the world. The first one is the table of superfluity. It is loaded and running over with too much on it. The second one is the table of moderation (comfortable poverty). It has just enough on it to meet necessity. The third one is the table of miserable poverty. It has hardly anything on it, but the people seated at the table of superfluity are still trying to grab what they can from it. Then a fight breaks out. God intervenes and both tables (the table of superfluity and the table of miserable poverty) are turned over. Then everyone must sit at the middle table of moderation.²⁷

The first Anabaptists took Paul literally where he wrote:

"For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing

over; and he that had gathered little had no lack" (2 Cor. 8:13-15).

After quoting this excerpt from 2 Corinthians, Peter Walpot wrote:

By this the apostle makes it clear that the rich who come to the church should have no more than the poor, and the poor should have no less than the rich—but that among them there should be Christian community and equality.²⁸

Peter Rideman wrote:

Since all the saints have holy things in common, and since they all have Christ in common, they claim nothing as their own. God did not give His gifts to an individual, but to the whole body of believers. Therefore, they are to be shared with the whole body.

The same is true of natural things. They are not given to one man to enjoy, but to all men. Because of this, the community of the holy ones shows itself not only in spiritual, but also in earthly things. Paul taught that one should not have an abundance while the other suffers a need, but that there should be an equality of goods...

One can see in all things created, that God, from the beginning, did not want things to be privately owned, but to be held in common. Only after man fell into sin did he claim things and make them his own. Then his possessions grew and he became materialistic. Through this collecting of created things, man has been led so far from God that he has forgotten Him and has begun to worship created things instead of the Creator...

Those created things that are out of man's reach are still held by all of

²⁴ *Ausbund*, 108

²⁵ *Von dem geheimnis der Tauf*, ca. 1526

²⁶ From the *Landesordnung* of 1526, a document that came from the Gaismair movement in South Tyrol.

²⁷ From Hans Hergot's *Von der neuen wandlung eynes Christlichen Lebens*, ca. Dec. 1526.

²⁸ *op. cit.*

us in common: the sun, the heavenly bodies, the light of day and the air we breathe. It was the will of God that His creation should be like this. But the only reason these things are still held in common is because they are out of the reach of man. So evil and so greedy has man become that if it were possible, he no doubt would have claimed these too.

That created things were not made to belong to man in private property is shown by the fact that when we die we leave everything behind for others. We can lay no permanent claim to anything...

Because the things of this earth do not belong to us, the law said we should not covet them. They belong to someone else. We should not set our heart on earthly things because they are not ours. Whoever wants to follow Christ must forsake the ownership of created things and private property, as Christ said: "*Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple*" (Luke 14:33). If a man is to be made new in the image of God, he must forsake all that draws him away from God—the lure of private property—for he cannot become like God if he is drawn away. Christ said: "*...Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein*" (Mark 10:15).

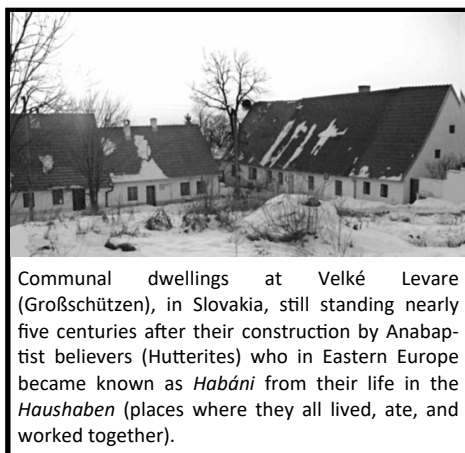
The one who has freed himself from earthly things lays his hands on what is true and what is of God. When he does this, it becomes his treasure. He turns his heart toward it. He empties himself of everything else, claiming nothing for his own, but regarding everything as belonging to God's children as a whole.²⁹

²⁹ *Rechenschaft*, 1540

Mine and Yours

When my older brothers got married, my father told them, "Now you must stop saying, 'This is *mine*,' and start saying, 'It is *ours*.'" The first Anabaptists applied this principle, not only to marriage, but to baptism in the Lord's community. Peter Walpot wrote:

In the day of grace, men observe a great Sabbath. They observe one Sabbath after another and lead the most peaceful life on earth because they lay aside the words *mine* and *yours*, which do not belong to the nature of things. These words have been the cause of much warfare, and are still so today. Where do war and bloodshed come from? Where do contention and strife come from? Why is there so much disunity and division? All these things come from the desire for property and for claiming things as one's own.



Communal dwellings at Velké Leváre (Großschützen), in Slovakia, still standing nearly five centuries after their construction by Anabaptist believers (Hutterites) who in Eastern Europe became known as *Habáni* from their life in the *Haushaben* (places where they all lived, ate, and worked together).

Those who have become slaves of the words *mine* and *yours*, that is to private property, are friends of covetousness. The two daughters of shameful covetousness are called *Give Me This* and *Bring Me That*.

Just like the earth that can never soak up enough water, like the fire that never says, "It is enough," or like the one who suffers from drossy and gets thirstier the more he drinks, the devil, death, and hell

can never be satisfied. The more men have, the more they want. He who wants much needs much. This is the greatest poverty and the most miserable bondage on the earth. It is that from which Christ saves us when we become part of His household—when we begin the true Sabbath, Pentecost, and Easter Day.³⁰

Temporal goods (*zeitliche Güter*) were seen as a necessary but dangerous thing to work with. Johannes Brötli, who had been the state church pastor of Zollikon in Switzerland, wrote to his friends in that village before his execution as an Anabaptist messenger in 1530. He warned them that their love of material possessions made it hard for them to stay true to their baptismal vows: "Oh woe to temporal goods! They hinder you! Christ said it in his holy Gospel."³¹

Leonhard Schiemer spoke of those who loved and claimed temporal goods as their own:

They pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," but as soon as God gives it, they don't think of it as *ours* anymore, but as *mine*. It isn't enough for them to concentrate on today, rather they are concerned about tomorrow, contrary to God's command. God commands us not to take thought for the morrow, but they take thought not only of tomorrow, but for the whole year; not only for one year, but for ten, twenty, thirty years. They are concerned, not only for themselves, but for their children, not only when their children are young, but also after they're grown up.³²

Expressions of Community

Most early Anabaptists, even though they believed in community of goods and rejected private property, did not live in organized Bru-

³⁰ *op. cit.*

³¹ *Quellen...*Zurich, 54

³² *Quellen...*3, Glaubenszeugnisse, 1: 70

derhöfe (communal households). Persecution would have made that difficult. Even beyond this, there was a freedom in their Gemeinschaft which kept them from making laws exactly how it should be lived out³³

Leupold Scharnschlager wrote:

The example of the first Christians is often misunderstood, and because of it, some try to make laws, put on pressure, and get people into a corner with what appears to be a human or carnal way of “becoming righteous.”

We should remember that the community of the first Christians in Jerusalem was totally voluntary. Even after the Christians were scattered, Paul kept on teaching about giving over material things and community of goods (*Handreichung und Gemeinschaft der Güter*). We should seek to do this after the apostolic pattern, without forcing it upon anyone, but allowing people to be led into it...

Some say that since the Lord Jesus expects everyone to live in community of goods, we should boldly require it of everyone. But the Holy Spirit does not want it that way. It is not man’s work to force others into community, just as community itself is not a work of the flesh. We should not go about it in a fleshly way, but in a spiritual way, being careful not to violate the free will of the Lord’s

people (*dem Herrn sein Volk verstören in der Freiwilligkeit*).³⁴

Balthasar Hubmaier wrote:

A man should always have a concern for the next one, that the hungry be fed, that the thirsty get something to drink and that the naked be clothed. No one is really the owner of what he has, but the caretaker and distributor of it. But we should by no means take by force that which belongs to another and make it common. Rather we should be ready to leave our cloak along with our coat³⁵

Georg Blaurock, when questioned before the Protestant court in 1525, told Huldrych Zwingli that he “taught the believers to have all things in common after the example of the apostles.” In a later court session, he explained what he meant. He said that having all things in common was to share possessions freely with those who needed them. Felix Manz said the same.

Menno Simons lost a brother in the Münsterite revolts of the Netherlands, where economic communism and rebellion against the government went hand in hand. The peasants, stirred up by false prophets, had revolted against the wealthy and had taken their riches by force to distribute them to the poor. Against such an ungodly “community of goods,” Menno was strongly opposed. But he wrote in 1552:

We teach that all Christians are one body (1 Cor. 12:13). All partake of one bread (1 Cor. 10:18). All have one God (Eph. 4:5- 6). It is only reasonable that Christians care one for another. The entire Scriptures

speak of mercy and love, the sign by which true Christians are known. “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*” (John 13:35).

It is not normal for a person to care for one part of his body and leave the rest uncared for and naked. No. The intelligent person cares for all his members. It is this way in the Lord’s church as well. All who are born of God and called into one body are prepared to serve their neighbors, not only with money and goods, but like Christ did, with life and blood. They show mercy as much as they can. No one among them is allowed to beg. They take strangers into their homes. They comfort the afflicted, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and do not turn their faces from the poor.

Such a community we teach—and not that anyone should take and possess the property of others... Our property has to a great extent been taken away from us. It is being taken away. Many a godly father and mother is put to the sword or burned at the stake. Obviously, we cannot enjoy a free home life. Times are hard, yet none of those who have joined us, nor any of their orphaned children have been forced to beg. If this is not Christian practice, then we may as well forget about the gospel. We may as well forget the holy sacraments and the Christian name, saying the life of the holy ones is all a fantasy or a dream.³⁶

A great many Anabaptists never found their way into the Bruderhöfe, but those who did built

³³ Jobst Möller, captured with his wife and fourteen others at an Anabaptist meeting at Frankenhäusen in Thüringen, in 1534 professed before the Lutheran court that he believed it was wrong for Christians to own private property. He said the congregation to which he belonged taught community of goods. But the judges noted that he and the other members lived in individual dwellings, here and there throughout the area. Jobst explained that their goods were in private use but belonged to all the believers and were available to them as needs arose. This, no doubt, was the practice of most persecuted Anabaptist congregations in the early years of the movement.

³⁴ *op. cit.*

³⁵ From Balthasar Hubmaier, *Schriften, Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, Gütersloh, 1962.

³⁶ *Een weemodige ende christelicke ontschuldige... ouer die bitter nydige loegen, ende valsche beschuldige onser misgongstigen... 1551*

model communities that won the respect of contemporary society. An eyewitness described them in 1568:

No one stood around with nothing to do. Everyone did what was asked of him, what he was able to do and what he knew how to do. It did not matter whether one was of noble birth, rich, or poor. Even the priests who joined the community learned how to work... Everyone, no matter where they were from, worked for the common good and advantage of all. A helping hand was given where needed—it was nothing else but a complete body in which all the members served one another.

It was like the works of a clock where every cogwheel drives another, and everything turns in an orderly way, or like a hive of bees where all work together, some making wax, some making honey, and some carrying nectar to the hive....

In all this, there had to be order. Only through the keeping of order can a work go on—especially in the house of God where Christ Himself is the One who says what needs to be done. Where there is no order, things end up in chaos. God cannot live there and everything goes to pieces.³⁷

³⁷ *Geschichtbuech*

Community Under Test

Long after the Anabaptist movement began to decline elsewhere, the communities in Moravia kept on prospering in a phenomenal way. Messengers sent out every year brought back new believers. But the violence of the sixteenth century could not pass Moravia by. In 1535, King Ferdinand of Austria banished the Anabaptists. The community at Austerlitz fled.


Ulrich Stadler and a number of families reached Poland. Jakob Wideman fled with a small group to Austria where he was captured, tortured and put to death in Vienna by the Roman Catholic authorities.

For two hundred years after this, the communities in Moravia and Slovakia passed through great tribulation. Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Turkish armies passed through the area time after time. They burned the communities. On one day, the sky turned dark as twenty-five Bruderhöfe went up in flames at once. The soldiers slaughtered the men and chased the women and children from their homes in the dead of winter. They sought shelter in the woods and dug vast networks of underground tunnels to escape their enemies. Turkish soldiers grabbed their children,

tying them together by their feet to sling them over their saddles, one on each side with heads hanging down, and galloped off to sell them as slaves. They violated the women, the children, and the teenagers of both sexes in public. They undressed, tortured, and mutilated the men—singing off their hair, hanging them up by their genitals, beating them or cutting them to pieces in front of their wives and children until they died. They robbed the communities of their food, their animals, their tools and their clothing, until only a small remnant survived to flee across the mountains through Hungary and Romania to Russia.³⁸

But in the face of the most brutal violence, the highest command of love did not die. As long as the Anabaptists lived in real Gemeinschaft with Jesus and with one another they shared what they had, and Jesus led them ...

³⁸ This remnant survived as the Hutterite movement, still alive in hundreds of communities in North America and elsewhere, today.



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The Amish Voice
575 US Highway 250
Greenwich, OH 44837

Overcomer

—by Gerald Hochstetler

I used to want to do BIG things for God. I am now satisfied knowing it is God doing big things, not us.

Human weakness is good. It is there that God seems greater. It is there that God's presence is more cherished.

Every mile of the journey is a good mile.

There is a scripture we hardly ever hear of when we talk about overcoming. Usually overcoming is self-reflecting. This verse had blessed me many times.

Maybe the secret to overcoming is believing that Jesus is who He says He is.



Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5:5

The Greek word 'nikos' translates to overcome or victory in this verse.

The grammar implies a continuous victory, both in the present and in the future.

**REGISTER
NOW!**

Step Out of the Boat Conference

March 12-15

Greenwich, OH (419) 962-1515

Jesus signaled His disciples to get into a boat and sail ahead to the other side while He dismissed the crowds. After sending the multitudes away, He climbed a mountainside to pray, finding alone time with His Father.

Meanwhile, the sun disappeared, the night sky settled in, and the disciples were out in the middle of the sea. Suddenly, the wind picked up causing huge waves to splash against the boat. As the night deepened, the storm picked up even more. The waves grew fiercer and more powerful. The wind and waves tossed the boat everywhere, leaving the men with little to no protection. Undoubtedly, the disciples felt hopeless and desperate and wondered if they would make it out alive.

Suddenly, Jesus approached them, walking on the water. When the twelve disciples saw Him, fear gripped them, and they exclaimed with a loud voice, "It is a spirit!" They cried out in terror, unsure of what they were witnessing.

Now, I want to pause for a moment and reflect on a few things:

1. While we may have never been caught in a vicious storm in the middle of a vast open sea, we can relate. Life is filled with storms.
2. About the time we come out of one storm, another storm hits us broadside.
3. Storms make us feel helpless and often hopeless. It is easy to take our eyes off God and put them on ourselves. We begin singing songs like "Poor Me" and "Me, Myself, and I."

Most people will do precisely what eleven out of the twelve men did on the ship that night. They pulled away from the storm. They licked their wounds, found comfort zones, and avoided as much of the storm as possible.

However, Peter, one of the twelve, recognized Jesus' voice when He called out of the midst of the storm and said, "...be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

The Bible says in Matthew 14:28-29, "*And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*"

Let's pause again and reflect:

1. People have traveled to the moon and back, but only Peter has ever walked on water.

2. Peter did what very few others ever do. Instead of holding back or running away, he stepped further into the storm and faced his worst fears head-on.

3. All it took was for Peter to hear Jesus' voice, and he immediately followed His command. The waves, the wind, and the ocean's depth never crossed his mind or got in the way of Jesus.

Considering how you have handled storms in your past. Would you have obeyed Jesus' command to come to Him, or would you have stayed in the boat with the majority?

We often claim to be people of faith, yet many of us would likely have stayed with the eleven, choosing the safety of our comfort zones over putting our faith into action.

Could it be that our lack of faith in the Lord is causing us depression, anxiety, sickness, desperation, sleepless nights, mental breakdowns, and fighting among each other? I genuinely believe it is.

So, what can we do about it? Furthermore, what can YOU do about it?

Let me tell you about the Step Out of the Boat Conference. On March 11-15, 2025, we are once again putting together an event so you can hear the stories of others who left their comfort zones, walked into the storm, and took hold of Jesus's hands. It will be our fifth conference. Already, people have signed up and are coming from various parts of the United States, Canada, Germany, and Ireland.

We are gathering for one purpose: to hear 25-30 testimonies from everyday people who pushed forward in times of storms and saw God do something unique, powerful, and so amazing that they want to tell others.

I will warn you ahead of time: the Step Out of the Boat Conference will challenge you to the core and cause you to love and know Jesus more. You will meet people like yourself who came to the conference to strengthen their faith in God and what He is doing in our generation.



We will feed you home-cooked meals, provide an atmosphere of sweet fellowship, love on you, and make you feel right at home. Will you come?

If the conference cost is too much, let us pay your way. If staying at a motel is too costly, let us put you in a home. We want you to come and let God change you from the inside out. We want you to experience a greater abundance of life in Christ Jesus.

Jesus said in John 10:10, *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.”*

Jesus is the only door to abundant life. Life is energy and mental strength. It is the opposite of perishing—it is deliverance from condemnation and death. Life is forever. Life is the very life of God Himself (Jn 17:3).

Bring your whole family. Bring your friends. Come let God fill you, challenge you, and forever and ever change you.

Pick up the phone and call Holley at (419) 962-1515. Let her know who you are, and how many are coming. We must have a total number of people coming so we know how much food to prepare. If you can pay the registration fee, we can take credit cards over the phone, or you can mail a check to MAP, 575 US Highway 250, Greenwich, OH 44837.

Dates: March 12-15, 2025

Location: 575 US-250, Greenwich, OH 44837

Website: stepoutoftheboat.org

Email: info@stepoutoftheboat.org

Phone: (419) 962-1515

Cost: Register before March 1 and get the early bird special: Single person \$110; Couple \$190; Family (children five and under are free) \$220

Registration covers breakfast, lunch, and dinner throughout the conference.

Lodging in Ashland, OH:

- ⇒ Wingate by Wyndham (800) 337-0077
(ask for discounted conference rate)
- ⇒ Hampton Inn (419) 903-0900
- ⇒ Quality Inn (419) 281-8090
- ⇒ Super 8 (419) 281-0567
- ⇒ Motel 6 (419) 496-0377

We can't wait to meet and greet you!

Embrace Grace —by John Weaver

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That, in a nutshell, is God's plan of salvation.

grace: to impart strength to endure trial and to resist temptation.

We hear the first part often. When a person goes through a trial, we hear that God's grace is sufficient. The last part of this definition does not get rightful recognition. Grace imparts strength to resist temptation. If we are under the law, we try to resist temptation with our own power. If we have died to the Old Covenant and have embraced the New Covenant, then grace imparts power to live above sin.

We need to recognize this and embrace grace. Hebrews tells us to:

“...come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Many people would rather try to resist Satan's temptations and then ask for mercy after they fail, whereas a New Covenant follower of Jesus would instead ask for grace to help overcome the temptation.

Somehow, the meaning of God's grace has been misunderstood in so many people's minds. One reason is that some claim Christ but live after the flesh. I call them the “name it and claim it” group.

God's word is very clear. *“But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound”* (Romans 5:20b). So the question is asked, *“Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”* (Romans 6:1b). Absolutely not! How could we?

Allow God's grace to work in you. Embrace His grace. Ask God to show you His genuine grace. Ask Him to empower you with Himself. You will never want to return to trying to please God with anything you have if you allow His grace to flow in, through, and out of you. As it flows out of your innermost being, it will become contagious. People will want what you have. And it will go on and on.

Some may embrace a cheap grace or claim a grace that doesn't exist. Don't let that hinder you from the real deal. Let your light shine brightly. After all, we are called to:

“shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9b).

The following article was taken from
The Topical Sermon Notebook, End Times
 by Dr. Alan Carr, Lenoir, NC.
www.sermonnotebook.org

Revelation 21:1–27

Intro: An elderly preacher had always secretly dreaded death and was powerless to console others who were facing that prospect. Eventually, he moved from the area where he had lived and ministered for most of his adult life. When all the furniture and boxes had been placed in the van, he lingered in the home where his children had been born and where he had enjoyed so many blessed hours of communion with the Lord. Just then, an intimate acquaintance who had been helping with the packing came and tapped him on the shoulder. “**Pastor,**” he said, “**Come with us. Your new home is better than this one.**” The man didn’t know it at the time, but he had preached a powerful “sermon” to his friend. His words caused the minister to see that his home in heaven would be far superior to the things of this world. After that, the pastor no longer dreaded dying.

As we come to the end of this series of sermons centering around the end times, I can think of no better way to end it than to end with a sermon about heaven: the blessed home of the redeemed. Thank God, there is a blessed home waiting on the children of God that is far better than anything we have down here. I would like for us to join John as he records the sights and sounds of that blessed place we call heaven. I would like to share some of what the Bible teaches about this place where all of those who are saved by the blood of Jesus will spend eternity. Let’s peek through the gates together as we catch **A Glimpse of a Place Called Heaven.**

I. Heaven is a Genuine Place (v. 1–3)

A. **A Real Place**—Heaven is as real as this place we are in today! In fact, there are really three heavens! That’s right! First, there is the **Terrestrial Heaven**—This refers to the atmosphere of the earth and the air above us. Then, there is the **Tellestial Heaven**—This is where the stars and the planets are. Thirdly, there is the **Celestial Heaven**—This is the place where God lives. The place all the saints of God dream about. This is the place we long to be. This is the place we call home!

It is a real place! Paul was taken there—**2 Cor. 12:2–4**; John was taken there in his vision—**Rev. 4:1–5:14**. That heavenly land is as real as New York, Los Angeles, Tokyo or Morganton. It is a real place where a real God lives, Who will be joined one day by those who are really saved. Heaven is real!

B. **A Resting Place**—**Heb. 4:3–11**—The Bible tells us that we are “**pilgrims and strangers**” in this world right now, **Hebrews 11:13–16**! When we enter the gates of that city, we will have laid down the burdens of this existence and gone to a place of peace and rest, a perfect place where burdens cannot follow and troubles cannot come. When we get there, we will be home! It is a place to rest from our labors, our cares, our worries, our trials, everything that hindered us here will not be welcome there! We will rest when we get home!

C. **A Residing Place**—Heaven is a place where some beings make their homes. The angels live in heaven. In fact, every glimpse into that country features the presence of the angelic host.

God the Father dwells in heaven, **Psa. 11:4**; **Rev. 4:1–5:14**. The redeemed of

the ages will also live in heaven with the Lord God. The night before Jesus went to the cross to die for the sin of the world, He gave His disciples a glorious promise. He told them that He was going to prepare a place for them: a mansion in His Father’s house, **John 14:1–3**! When we arrive there, we will be home in a mansion prepared just for us by the precious Lord Jesus. We will be forever home!

II. Heaven Is a Glorious Place (v. 1–7, 9–26)

A. **Glorious in its Beauty**—Never has there been a city described like this city! To attempt to describe its glories is to exhaust all the adjectives and descriptive language known to man. Paul must have had this in mind when he said, “**But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him**” (**1 Cor. 2:9**). There is no way that I can adequately describe this city in all of its glory, but I do want to just mention three quick thoughts.

1. **Its Creation**—Note the use of the phrase “**I make,**” **v. 5**. This is a city built by God Himself. He created it! He formed it! He furnished it! It is a city that bears the stamp of His power and personality. He built a city that reflects His glory. The beauty, the glory, the wealth, and lavishness of this city are only limited by those aspects of God Himself! Since He knows no limits in those areas, then this city is unlimited as well. It will be more glorious than the mind can comprehend!

2. **Its Duration**—All the cities of this earth crumble and decay. Every building made by the hand of man must constantly be renovated and repaired! Not heaven! It is a city of such construction that it will never crumble or decay, **1 Pet. 1:4**. It will never need paint, carpet

or repair. It will not need dusting, mopping or vacuuming. It will never be turned into a slum or bulldozed to make way for a mall. It will stand forever! The perfect example of what a perfect God can do by His great power! In fact, this city is so filled with glory that even eternity itself will not exhaust all that God has prepared for you and me, **Eph. 2:7**.

3. **Its Examination**—In this chapter, John tries to describe this city as he examined it. Notice some of the things he tells us about this glorious place called Heaven.

a. **It's Size** (v. 15–17)—Ill. The city—1,500 miles square. Possibly a cube, or a pyramid! Perhaps a sphere! It would have a diameter larger than the moon. If it were set along the east coast, it would stretch from the Atlantic to Colorado, and from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico. Ill. The Wall stands approximately 216 feet tall. Beauty rather than protection is the basis for the design. Ill. Jasper everywhere! The glory of God will radiate and be reflected from every surface.

b. **The Wall** (v. 18a)—Clear Jasper.

c. **The City** (v. 18b)—Pure Gold. (Ill. Pure gold is transparent!)

d. **The Foundations** (v. 19–20).

1. Jasper—Clear—(Ill. Icicles)
2. Sapphire—Clear Blue
3. Chalcedony—Yellowish Green
4. Emerald—Deep Green
5. Sardonyx—White with layers of red.
6. Sardius—Fiery Red
7. Chrysolite—Golden Yellow
8. Beryl—Sea Green
9. Topaz—Greenish Yellow
10. Chrysopasus—Golden Green
11. Jacinth—Violet
12. Amethyst—Purple.

Ill. The brilliance of the glory as the light from Jesus Christ blazes through the twelve foundations and is reflected and prised by the Jasper of the city.

(Ill. The Rainbow—The City will be a brilliant testimony to the great glory of God.

e. **The Gates** (v. 21a)—Gigantic pearls.

f. **The Street** (v. 21b)—Transparent gold. Ill. Only one street!

g. Suffice it to say that this city is far more glorious than anything the human mind can ever hope to comprehend. The best thing a man can do is make the necessary preparations and go see it for himself!

B. **Glorious in its Blessings**—

While all the glories of heaven mark it as a place unique from any other in the universe, it isn't the physical attributes of this city that make it so special! There are two great truths mentioned in these verses that tell me that heaven is the place I am looking for.

1. v. 3, 22 **The Presence of God**—According to these two verses, and **Rev. 22:3–4**, when we get to heaven, we are going to see God Himself! Right now, we are separated from Him by this flesh that we wear. One day, we will stand in His presence, free from this flesh, and we will see Him in all of His glory!

In that day, we will be able to bow at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One Who willingly left heaven above and went to the cross for me! Friend, that will be enough for me! I really think that everything else will fade away when He comes into view!

2. v. 4–5 **The Promise of God**—These verses tell us the precious truth that all

the things that hinder and ruin life here will not be allowed into that place. None of the things that bring tears to our eyes will be there! Even the tears themselves will be forever banished from that land! What a glorious future awaits the children of God!



III. **Heaven Is a Guarded Place** (v. 4–27)

A. **Guarded for the Saved**—“*To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,*”, **1 Pet. 1:4**. Heaven is an exclusive place! Really, it has been created for a select group of individuals! Only those with the proper credentials will be allowed within the gates of that city! In fact, the entrance requirements are so strict that there is only one way to get in! If anyone tries to get in another way, they will be forever banished from that city! There is only one Door, **John 10:9**, and His name is Jesus, **John 14:6**.

The only way to get into heaven is through faith in Him! You see, the Bible says, “*Ye must be born again*” (**John 3:3, 7**). This means that you must trust Jesus and Jesus alone to save your soul. Religion will not work.

Church will not work. Being good will not work. The only thing that will save you is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, **Acts 16:31**. Are you saved this morning? Are you sure that if you died today that you would be granted access into heaven? If there is even the shadow of a doubt in your mind, then I beg you in the name of Jesus, please get that thing settled today!

B. Guarded From Sorrow—I have already touched on this thought today, but you need to know that nothing from this world will enter that world! In fact, in these two chapters, there is an extensive list of “**no more**” things. Notice a few of them:

1. v. 1 **No More Sea**—Division and separation
2. v. 4 **No More Sadness**—Tears
3. v. 4 **No More Sleep**—Death
4. v. 4 **No More Sorrow**
5. v. 4 **No More Suffering**
6. v. 22 **No More Sanctuary**—Temples
7. v. 23 **No More Sun**—Not needed!
8. v. 25 **No More Sundown**—No night
9. 22:3 **No Scourge**—No curse there!

(Ill. Hallelujah! That sounds like the place I want to go! How about you?)

(Ill. An elderly Christian lady lay dying. Her beloved husband sat by her bedside tenderly holding her hand. They both knew that the end was near and that they soon would be parted. As their eyes met, a tear flowed down the old woman’s wrinkled cheek. Gently, her husband wiped it away. Then, with a quaver in his voice, he said, “Thank God, Mary, that’s the last!”

When ties of love are broken, tears flow freely, and this is as it should be. But for the one who is going to heaven, as well as for us who remain, the parting is not final. Our hearts rest in the assurance that one day separation and tears will give way to unending joy.)

C. Guarded from Sin—Verses 8 and 27 tell us the precious truth that there will be no sin in heaven! What a blessing to finally be free from the wickedness and wretchedness that marks this old sin cursed world! How wonderful it will be to be forever free from the presence of the devil, of temptation, of this old flesh and from all sin! That will be glorious!

However, as great as that will be, we must also acknowledge the fact that there will be no sinners in heaven either! There will not be one single person who has denied the Lord Jesus as his personal Savior! You see, God might as well allow the devil into heaven as to open the gate to one unsaved person! They would defile that glorious city and bring it crashing down in ruins. Heaven would become hell if just one sinner were allowed inside!

God has pledged to protect that city from all wickedness and sin! The only way to enter that place is to have your sins washed away in the blood of Jesus, and the only way to get that done is to receive Him into your life by faith. Have you done that? If not, what are you holding on to?

(Ill. “There was an old man on the isle of Crete, and during his lifetime he loved many things. He loved his wife, his children, and his job, but most of all he loved the land. He loved the very ground he walked on, worked, and fought for. When it was time for him to die, he had his sons bring him outside his stone cottage and lay him on the earth. He reached down, grabbed a handful of Crete’s soil and was gone.

“He arrived at the gate of heaven, and the Lord came out dressed in the long robes of a judge and said to him, ‘Old man, come in.’ As the old man moved toward the gates, the Lord noticed something in his hand and asked, ‘What are you clutching in your hand?’

“He said, ‘It is Crete. I go nowhere without it.’

“The Lord said, ‘Leave it, or you will not be allowed in.’

“The old man held his clenched fist up and said, ‘Never!’ And he went and sat beside the outside wall of the heavenly city.

“After a week had passed, the gates opened again and the Lord appeared a second time, in the guise of a man wearing a hat and looking like some of the old man’s buddies down in Crete. He sat down next to the old man, threw His arm around his shoulder and said, ‘My friend, dust belongs to the wind. Drop that piece of earth and come inside.’ But the old man was still adamant, ‘Never!’

“During the third week the old man looked down at the dirt he was clutching and saw that it had begun to cake and crumble. All the moisture of the earth had gone out of it. Also, his fingers were arthritic and could hardly hold it. The earth began to trickle through his fingers.

“Out came the Lord, this time as a small child. He came up to the old man and sat next to him and said, ‘Grandfather, the gates only open for those with open hands.’

“The old man thought about this, finally stood up, and did not even look down as the crumbled dirt of Crete fell out of his hand. The child took his hand and led him toward the glorious gates. As the gates swung open, he walked in. Inside was all of Crete.”

Now don’t build a theology on this story for it is only a story to illustrate a point many of us must be reminded of from time to time. There is nothing here that is worth missing heaven in order to keep. Whatever it is that you are allowing to stand between you and an eternity in heaven, believe me, it isn’t worth going to hell over! **Mark.**

8:36–37. My friend, allow nothing to keep you out of heaven!

Conc: The great 18th century Bible commentator Matthew Henry, anticipating that some would unduly mourn his passing, wrote these words of comfort and assurance: *“Would you like to know where I am? I am at home in my Father’s house, in the mansions prepared for me here. I am where I want to be—no longer on the stormy sea, but in God’s safe, quiet harbor. My sowing time is done and I am reaping; my joy is as the joy of harvest. Would you like to know how it is with me? I am made perfect in holiness. Grace is swallowed up in glory. Would you like to know what I am doing? I see God, not as through a glass darkly, but face to face. I am engaged in the sweet enjoyment of my precious Redeemer. I am singing hallelujahs to Him who sits upon the throne, and I am constantly praising Him. Would you like to know what blessed company I keep? It is better than the best on earth. Here are the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. I am with many of my old acquaintances with whom I worked and prayed, and who have come here before me. Lastly, do you want to know how long this will continue? It is a dawn that never fades! After millions and millions of ages, it will be as fresh as it is now. Therefore, weep not for me!”*

Where will you be when you die? Will you go to heaven with all of its glory, or, will you go to hell? The answer depends on what you do with Jesus! If you need to be saved, if the Lord is dealing with your heart this morning, I beg you to come. Don’t wait! Don’t hesitate! Just come! One day, you will leave this world and you need to be ready when that day arrives. Where will you go when that time comes?

This concludes the Alan Carr sermon series on end times.

My Grace is Sufficient

—by Joe Keim

The real gospel, the one that Paul preached, is simple. It does not require a bunch of hoops to jump through. It is easy to understand, simple, and without strings attached.

But I fear, lest by any means, **as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty**, so your **minds** should be **corrupted** from the **simplicity** that is in Christ.

For if he that comes preacheth **another Jesus**, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive **another spirit**, which ye have not received, or **another gospel**, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4

Paul writes, I declare unto you the gospel: Jesus died for our sins. Jesus was buried. Jesus rose again on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4).

Paul warned the believers at Corinth to be careful. The warning continues to stand in 2024: Be careful! Sooner or later, a person will come along and preach another Jesus, influenced by another spirit, and another (or false) gospel.

These preachers and ministry workers live in our neighborhoods, are part of our earthly families, have large followings on

YouTube, and attend our churches. They are kind, convincing, and dead wrong.

How does one separate the true gospel from a false gospel?

Paul writes, I declare unto you the gospel: Jesus died for our sins. Jesus was buried. Jesus rose again on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4).

There it is again. It really is that simple. Do you believe it? If you do, how has it impacted your life for Jesus?

The author invites you to text or call if you have questions or comments!
(419) 651-6813

The Seven “I Am” Statements of Jesus

“I am the bread of life”
John 6:35-38

“I am the light of the world”
John 8:12

“I am the way, the truth, and the life”
John 14:1-6

“I am the good shepherd”
John 10:11-14

“I am the door of the sheep”
John 10:7

“I am the true vine”
John 15:1-5

“I am the resurrection and the life”
John 11:25

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January

Is There a God?

Is there evidence outside of the Bible that helps us answer the question of the existence of God? Has science disproven God? Message by Ed Stetzer.

Made Whole by God

(part 1 of 5)

Man was created in the image of God, with three distinct parts making up the whole: Body, Soul and Spirit. Sin destroyed our Spirit and took control of our Soul and Body, but Jesus came that we would be made whole. Message by Duane Sheriff.

A Goose, a Swan, and a Reformation

The most important question you can ask: Is certainty of salvation possible? In this sermon, Dr. Erwin Lutzer shares the great lessons from the heroes of the Reformation that continue to encourage us as believers today.

In the Hands of a Rapist

Kidnapped from a Kmart parking lot, Margy Mayfield spent the next 10 hours with a violent and dangerous criminal. Stephan Morin had never known anything but driving hatred, until he experienced the love of Christ. What happened on their journey is nothing short of miraculous!

February

Can I Know God Personally?

If God exists, can I know Him? What would that look like? Pastor Ed Stetzer describes how we were created by God to know Him personally, but separated from God by sin. Yet God provided a way for us to be adopted into a personal relationship with Him through faith in Jesus. By grace we can be changed from orphans into heirs of God. We can know God personally, and more incredibly, God knows us and cares for us.

Made Whole by God

(part 2 of 5)

Jesus came that we would be made whole. Message by Duane Sheriff

God, the Cross, and You

On reformation Sunday, Pastor Erwin Lutzer returns to the pulpit for a special message from Romans 3. How can we be right with God?

New Life

In Ephesians 4, Paul is saying, "In God's family, we choose to live differently." Now that we are members of His family, the house rules have changed. This new family doesn't live like other families do. It's all different. Message from Phillip Miller.

March

When Uncertainty Terrorizes

(part 1 of 4)

How can we keep the uncertainty of today's world from impacting our faith? As Chip Ingram opens the book of Psalms, he will help us prepare for and get a handle on the most dangerous emotions we will face in life.

Made Whole by God

(part 3 of 5)

Jesus came that we would be made whole. Message by Duane Sheriff

The Dangers of Legalism

Legalism is believing that we can earn or keep favor with God by what we do. It flows from the failure to be humbled, broken, amazed, and satisfied by the grace of God. In this sermon, we learn about three dangers of legalism to avoid: a judgmental spirit, an insistence on man-made rules, and a marginalization of Christ as our supreme focus. Message by Bill Bertsche.

The Grace Awakening

When three people from different worlds collide in one space, you never know what will happen! A Pharisee, Jesus, and a sinner end up at the same dinner. Message by Phillip Miller.

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The cost to print and distribute *The Amish Voice* is \$.75 a copy and is totally funded by readers from across our great country who appreciate the ministry and care to support it. If the Lord would lay it on your heart to come alongside of us by helping with expenses, it would be a great benefit, as well as highly appreciated. Thank you. —Joe Keim, Executive Director

I recently heard of a conservative Anabaptist father who asked if he could be involved in the baptism of his son. Even without knowing the details, anyone of a conservative Anabaptist background knows that he was, of course, turned away. He was told that in our tradition, only the ministry can do the baptizing.

This is the tradition of our people, and in most of our congregations, we limit it even further to saying that it should be only the bishop who can do the actual baptizing. It brought some questions to my mind. What is our tradition based on? Is there Scriptural reasoning behind it? What does Scripture say about those who baptize? Are there Biblical qualifications that must be met before one can be involved in a baptism?

What does the Bible say?

Jesus never baptized anyone, but He Himself was baptized and He spoke of baptizing. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, and by that account we can draw two conclusions. First, the One being baptized approached the other and asked to be baptized by him. Second, the one doing the baptizing did not need to be greater than the one he was baptizing— although John initially protested about that.

The book of Acts gives the most accounts of people getting baptized, but *who* is doing the baptizing is not usually emphasized as much as the name of the One they are being baptized in.

— Acts 2:38-41

Peter preached and the people asked, “*What shall we do?*” Peter answered, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...*”

In verse 41, it says that “*they that gladly received his word were baptized...*”

about three thousand souls.” No mention is given of who did the baptizing.

— Acts 8:12

Philip preached in Samaria, and when the people believed Philip “*concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized*”. Again, no mention of who was doing the baptizing.

— Acts 8:30-39

The account of Philip baptizing the eunuch is the only time in Acts that it says specifically who did the baptizing.

— Acts 9:17-18

Even when the Apostle Paul got baptized, it never says specifically who it was that did the baptizing. Only that Ananias laid hands on him, he received his sight, and was baptized.

— Acts 10

In this account of Peter taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, the “*Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word*” (v 44). Peter then commanded them to “*be baptized in the name of the Lord*” (v 48).

— Acts 16:30-36

When Paul and Silas were in prison, the jailor got saved and “*was baptized, he and all his, straightway*” (v 33). There is no mention of who did the baptizing.

— Acts 19:1-8

Those who had been baptized by John in Ephesus were re-baptized in the name of Jesus. There is no mention of who did the baptizing.

It is safe to assume, however, that those involved in presenting the Gospel were then also involved in the baptism.

However, it is also safe to assume that the writer of Acts thought *who* was getting baptized and *why* they were getting baptized was more important than *who did the baptizing*.

We know that Paul did baptize people because he talks about it in 1Cor. 1:11-17. However, he makes it clear that who did the baptizing was of no importance and says that he’s glad that he didn’t baptize very many “*lest any should say that I baptized in mine own name*” (v 15).

Why do we baptize people?

Jesus spoke of baptizing when He gave the great commission to the eleven disciples. He said, “*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*” (Mat. 28:19-20a)



This is understood to apply to all followers of Christ, not just the apostles. This is evidenced by Philip the Evangelist and deacon— not to be confused with the apostle Philip— who baptized the eunuch and others in Acts 8.

If we believe that the Great Commission applies to all Christians, is it wrong to apply only part of it to all Christians and assign the rest to only the bishop or ministry team? Jesus simply said “Go,” “Teach,” and “Baptize.”

Could I be so bold to say that either *all* of it applies to *all believers*, or *all* of it applies to only *specific believers* that hold a ministry position?

Until the 1860s there was one group of Amish, but after the first split it seemed like splitting became part of the Amish DNA.

The Amish During the World Wars

During World War I, the Amish and other peace groups were looked down upon for not going to war. As Conscientious Objectors, they were sent to camps where they were often humiliated, especially since they had German roots and spoke a German dialect. The public was suspicious of whether they affiliated with the enemy. They did not understand that the Amish did not identify as German, nor as American. They were simply Amish. Once again, the Amish and Mennonites were tested on their non-resistance beliefs.

During the 2nd World War, the government had a milder approach towards CO's. They were offered alternative service and often worked in hospitals and other facilities. Even though most returned to their Amish communities, a significant number felt they did not fit in anymore and left the Amish, often joining other peace churches.

Amish life since 1945

Tourism

After the war, American life focussed on wealth and enjoyment despite experiencing a life of hard work. People began taking vacations. The Pennsylvania Department of Commerce issued an advertisement encouraging visitors to take a post-war vacation. The ad pictured an Amish buggy with the caption "Pennsylvania's Plain People." It clearly implied that Old Order folks should be a part of every family's excursion.

Since then, the relationship between Amish and tourism has grown extensively and has always been ambiguous: on one hand, the Amish prefer to be private and interact little with outsiders.

This is especially true for the more conservative groups. On the other hand, many Amish partly depend on tourism for their income by providing buggy tours, selling furniture and quilts, or having a grocery stand on the road side.

Struggle for Freedom of Education

Another issue that arose and caused much trouble in Amish communities was the consolidation of schools. More states made an end to the one room, local schools. They decided that children should receive more in-depth education, and progress beyond 8th grade. One room school houses were closed and school busses were organized to transport students to large, regional schools. Education became required up to the age of sixteen in most states.

The Amish balked at this idea. The new system loosened ties with local communities. The teachers were unknown to the parents and less involved in their student's daily lives. Secondly, the new educational system focused on self-development more than on basic skills, which is contrary to the Amish belief of self-denial. Lastly, the Amish found that education until the 8th grade was sufficient to equip their children for a useful life within the community.

Because of these reasons, most Amish refused to send their children to public schools. Some Amish men had to pay for taking this stand by going to prison. However, as time passed, public opinion changed in favor of the Amish. Some English lawyers defended the Amish. The National Committee for Amish Religious Freedom (NCARF) was formed, including lawyers, academics, and Christian and Jewish religious leaders. This is somewhat remarkable because the Amish held a belief that they were not to not go to court to defend themselves. In the end, the case "Wisconsin v. Yoder, et al"

was at the Supreme Court in 1972. The court decided that, because of freedom of religion, the Amish could organize their own schools with a two specifications: lessons were to be taught in English, and the state could check on the quality of their education. The Amish were free to decide to what degree they wanted to include science in their program, as long as the basics (reading, writing, arithmetic, and American History) were up to standards. In some states, a vocational school was required to meet the state's standard of education until the age of sixteen.

The Amish started to purchase old one room school houses and place parochial schools in them. Currently, most Amish children receive their education in these type of schools. There is still a minority of Amish school children (for example, in Holmes County, Ohio) who attend public school. Often, they have separate classes with only Amish children and an adjusted program. Some parents, however, do approve computer lessons for their children so they will learn how to use computers for business purposes. The Amish children who do attend public schools are usually from the less conservative groups.

Due to the shift in occupation and the change in education, the interaction with the outside world is now, in most cases, exactly opposite from what it used to be. In years gone by, Amish children would interact with English children in school, but after school they would be involved with their own community, as most Amish were farmers. It is currently the other way around in many communities. The Amish children connect among themselves in their parochial schools, but in their work life, they have English co-workers.

Main source: *A History of the Amish*, by Steven M. Nolt

On a recent family trip to the Ark Encounter, the door really stood out to me. It is the most photographed part of the whole display! The door was compared to Jesus. The question was asked, do we just come to the door, or do we pass through the door? It really inspired me to think deeply on what that means.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

Are we content to just come to the Door, maybe join church, be baptized, follow rules, and participate in all of the church rituals and ceremonies?

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:5).

Do we attempt this without ever truly giving our lives to Jesus Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit, and committing to following and fellowshiping with Him at all costs?

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).

There is truly a cost involved in making that commitment and accepting the pure Gospel that says, there is NOTHING we can do on our own to get to Heaven.

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

So, what does it mean, to pass through the Door? It means to humbly come before our Savior, ask Him to forgive all our sins, ask Him to live in us, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in ALL that we do and think.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

Probably the hardest thing is to accept that our salvation is assured by simply having faith in the grace of God through the death of Jesus on the cross, and humbly believing this with all our heart.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (Rom. 10:13)

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (John 5:24).

We need to fully believe we are lost sinners, regardless of how well we live, and understand that the blood of Jesus, the resurrection, and His ascension to His throne in Heaven are ALL we really need, and we fully trust and rely on that fact.

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

“Quench not the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19).

Brothers and sisters, read the Bible and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom as you read that truth will be revealed. The words and verses will start to come alive and speak to your heart if we read and study without letting our preconceived ideas and opinions rule. Remember, opinions do NOT count before God, only His word! When you question, is this an opinion or truth, always see if it is spelled out in God's Holy Word. If it isn't, it goes on the scrap pile of opinion.

“And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:4).

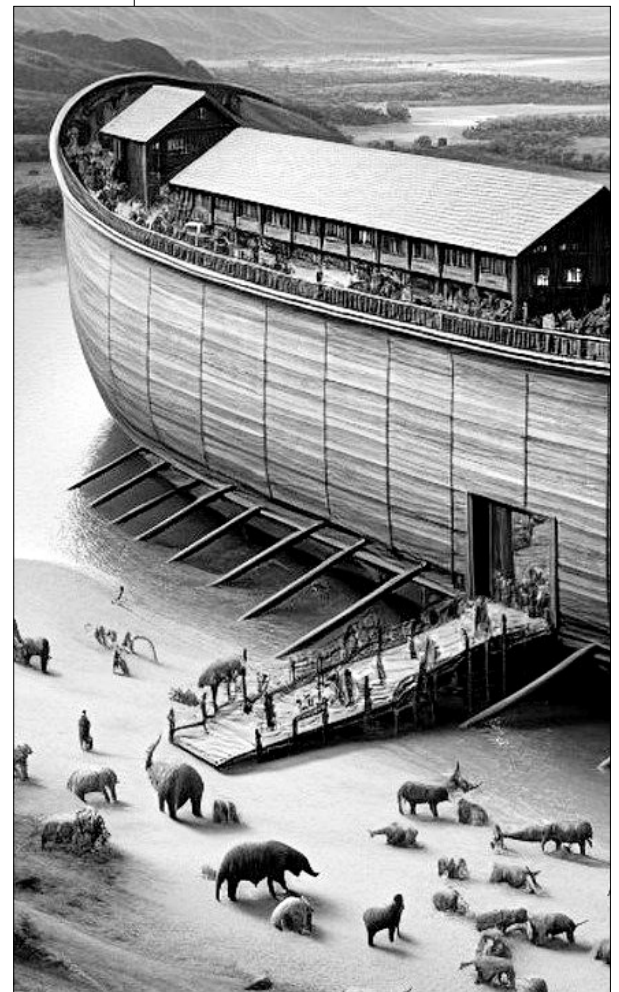
Now, it is our own choice. Will we pass through the Door, fully relying on grace through faith alone, trusting in Jesus' imputed righteousness, and giving EVERYTHING to Jesus?

“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

Or, will we stand at the door having only knowledge and belief, but relying on our own works and righteousness?

“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth” (1 Corinthians 8:1b).

Please, for the sake of your eternal destiny, step out in faith and pass through!



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Wise Men

—by Terrell McCullers

Have you ever been on a hunt for something significant — a crucial answer, a better job, a trade, a spouse, a breakthrough, a discovery, a hidden treasure, or a championship?

Embedded early in the post-Christmas narrative is the scene of the visiting Magi dropping in on Bethlehem. They were a squad of distinguished, Eastern wise men on a westbound road trip, looking for an epic new king to honor.

Their mission was costly, consuming, suspenseful, and significant. Ultimately, they found what they were looking for and experienced great fulfillment.

They found Jesus.

In examining the specific moves these wise men made, we may discover some wisdom wins, too. Here is the breakdown:

WISE MEN SEEK. They live in search mode, not allowing themselves to think they have already arrived. They don't settle for comfort or easy answers.

They seek the best and don't stop until they find "it." And they seek to notice way more than to be noticed ... it's not about me (Matthew 2:1,2,9-12).

WISE MEN QUESTION. They don't just come with answers; they search for them. They live in a humility that breeds beautiful inquiry and lets their curiosity loose.

Their questions don't halt them; they drive them to ask until they find answers (Matthew 2:2).

WISE MEN ACT. Their questions set them in motion. They reject passivity. They make moves, believing that in seeking they will find. Sitting and waiting will not always do (Matthew 2:1,9,11,12).

WISE MEN SEE. They see beyond. They train their eyes to see farther than others. They see consequences early on. They see into the future. They see greatness and good, royalty and redemption. They see trouble coming, too (Matthew 2:2,7-12).

WISE MEN FIND. They believe seeking has its reward, just like God says. They persist by faith until what's sought is found (Matthew 2:11).

WISE MEN WORSHIP. They are committed to worship. Their end game is to worship God. And this worship is extravagant (Matthew 2:2,11).

WISE MEN GIVE. They come prepared to contribute. They want to be known as givers more than takers. They come to gift and serve generously (Matthew 2:11).

WISE MEN ADJUST. They reroute. They sense trouble and traps coming and steer clear. They bring their wisdom to bear when danger calls (Matthew 2:12).

WISE MEN PRESS ON. They know life has chapters and seasons. They don't get stuck in the past. They stride forward with gratefulness, confidence, and hope. They apply what they learn (Matthew 2:12).

Like the Magi, let's love making these nine wise moves too!

Reflect: How are you like/unlike the wise men? Where might passivity be holding you back? Have you discovered and experienced Jesus lately? If so, where/how? If not, why not?

A prayer to consider: LORD Jesus, wise men still seek You. May I be one. Help me question, act, see, find, worship, give, adjust, and press on.

