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The Secret of the Strength

— by Peter Hoover

CHAPTER 7 On to Conviction

Nestled into the northern shoulders of the Swabian Alps, lies the old German city of Schwäbisch-Gmünd. The Romans knew this place. Its Johanneskirche (St. John's Church) dates from 1230, and its Cathedral of the Holy Cross was already old in 1528 when a strange man came to town.

The young man, Martin Zehentmayer, came from Bavaria and was an artist—at least he had been an artist learning to paint in the city of Augsburg in Bavaria. There, they said, he had joined a fanatical sect and had been expelled. Now he was in Schwäbisch-Gmünd.

None of the respectable people in town would have anything to do with him, but Martin made his presence known. A poet who wrote songs, he went from house to house calling on people to follow Jesus. The young people fell for him. His sincerity deeply impressed them and what he said cut right through the stuffy formality of Schwäbisch-Gmünd's socie-

ty to the innermost longing of their hearts: a longing for peace with God in brotherly community. Before the townspeople caught on to what was happening, Martin had baptized over one hundred people and was secretly celebrating the Eucharist in their homes.

They caught him on a winter night in February, 1529, in a secret meeting—right in the act of "deceiving" the young, the simple, and the poor people of town. They also grabbed forty others, including nineteen girls and women. They soon let many of them go for their "innocence," but they kept Martin and the most outspoken among them on bread and water in the tower prison on the city wall until the end of the year.

The people in the city who had come to the meetings did all they could to stay in contact with the prisoners. Some women and children climbed the city wall at night to reach the tower and talk to them. They read to the prisoners and sang together, but this stopped when the guards discovered them and prohibited further contact.

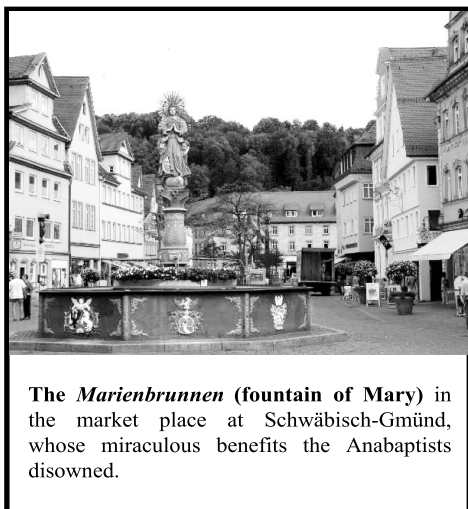
They tortured Martin on the rack, accusing him of sexual impropriety, but he had little to confess other than his

desire to live like Jesus and his conviction (ridiculous from the authorities' point of view) to hold with the believers all his possessions in common.

On December 4, 1528, they finally brought the seven "obstinate ones" out of their cells and tried them publicly for the benefit of the town. Among the seven stood a woman and the young son of the miller.

The seven prisoners continued in their "stubbornness," so the town council convicted them of heresy and sentenced them to death. Then, three days later they led them in chains from the tower prison to a bare frozen field outside the walls of the city. A contingent of the Swabian League (under the provost, Berthold Aichele) surrounded them. Noblemen, lords, and judges followed on horseback, and the townspeople, a great crowd, came along behind. The beating of drums made it hard to speak or to be heard.

The soldiers formed a large circle on the field with the convicts, the guards, and two executioners in the center. Then, what was that? The youngest of the seven, the miller's son, was shouting something.



The *Marienbrunnen* (fountain of Mary) in the market place at Schwäbisch-Gmünd, whose miraculous benefits the Anabaptists disowned.

His voice above the sound of the drums was clear, and many could understand what he said, "Stand off from your sins! Turn to God! There is no other way to heaven than through the Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross to redeem us!"

Some women in the crowd shouted back: "Keep up your courage, young man! Be strong!"

It was too much for one of the mounted noblemen. He could not bear to see the young man killed. Demanding permission, he rode into the ring to speak with the boy.

"My son," he said, "stand off yourself from the error you are in, and make things right! Do not lose your young life! What do you think you will have for it? I will take you home and keep you with me. I will give you a permanent inheritance as my own son and see to your needs for life. You will have many good things. Now come! Come with me and be my son!"

The young man answered him distinctly, "God does not want me to do that. Should I choose a worldly life and forsake God? I would do evil by making such a choice, and I will not do it. Your wealth can help neither you nor me. I choose greater riches by persevering to the end. I will surrender my spirit to God and commend myself to Jesus so that His bit-

ter suffering on the cross will not have been in vain for me."

They beheaded the seven on the bare frozen field. It was December 7, 1528, and great fear came upon the people. Someone said he saw lights that night and heard the singing of angels. The city council, just to be sure, kept the soldiers of the Swabian League on round-the-clock duty.

Convicted

Who was convicted at Schwäbisch-Gmünd?

The city court convicted the seven prisoners and sentenced them to die. But did they die for that conviction?

No. They died because their hearts had been touched with an infinitely higher conviction—the conviction that they were doing right by following Jesus no matter what it cost.

Inwardly sure that following Jesus was the right thing to do, nothing could make the Anabaptists feel guilty. They followed Jesus into baptism, into the breaking of bread, into turning the other cheek, into a new and totally different economy, into every area of His life and teachings, even into suffering and death, without it ever occurring to them that they could be wrong. The people who killed them sensed this, and it frightened them. They sensed that against such conviction—conviction that chooses capital punishment over a nobleman's inheritance—no tradition, nor law, nor family, nor emperor, nor sword, nor pope, nor church could stand, because it produces martyrs.

The First Martyr

For the Anabaptists, the first martyr was not Stephen, but Jesus,¹ and it was easy for them to see their lives as parallels—imperfect human parallels—of His.

Jesus Christ refused an easy life, earthly glory, and all the kingdoms of the world. He withstood His family, the religious leaders of His day, and the government of the Roman Empire. He walked without hesitating to a gruesome death (even when twelve legions of angels could have saved Him) because He felt in His heart the calm assurance that He was doing what was right.

The first Anabaptists, following Him, were touched with that same assurance. And from there it was a small step to calling their own religious leaders "the crowd of Caiaphas" and their own government officials "Pilate's children."² It was also a small step to drawing the final parallel between them and Jesus in a martyr's death.

The Anabaptists saw Jesus as one who did what was right even when every soul on the earth abandoned Him. And in that "loneliness of Christ," where every man must take up his cross to follow Him, they found inner communion with Him. In it they came to "know Christ and the Gemeinschaft of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death," and in it, they hoped to attain with Him, "to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10).

At the close of the Dark Ages, following the martyr Christ, the Anabaptists, chose with Him the way of the cross that leads to eternal life and light.

¹ The *Martyrs Mirror*, first published by the Anabaptists of the Netherlands in 1660, begins with the account of "Jesus Christ the Son of God, crucified in Jerusalem". The third song of the *Ausbund* begins even further back, with the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist.

² The *Aelteste Chronik* especially, uses these terms, but they also appear in the *Ausbund*, the *Martyrs Mirror* and elsewhere.

What Made the Dark Ages Dark?

Up to the time of Ulfilas, the early Christians, followed Jesus, but the light went out when they became afraid to do what was right (like Ulfilas among the barbarians) alone.

Afraid to do right if "the whole group" was not behind them, the early Christians stopped being a movement of convicted believers and became an organized religious body. They stopped being "rebels," "fanatics," and "those who tum the world upside down" to become a respected element of society. The world stopped fearing them. With that, it stopped hating them, and the age of persecution faded away.

Within the church, conviction died as "submission" took its place, and "God-ordained authorities" found it necessary to tell everyone what to do and what to believe. The voice of the church took its place above the voice of a Christ-directed conscience, and "Christian Europe" lay for a thousand years in ignorance, bondage, and fear.

Ideas from the "Infidels"

The church of the Dark Ages tried to control everything the people of Europe did. Even worse, it tried to control what they thought. The church had long convinced the people that it was more important to submit than to think. The people no longer dared to think. In fact, after a thousand years, almost everyone had forgotten how until strange things began to happen.

To keep the church of the Dark Ages together, the pope called, in the name of the Lord Jesus, for "Christian crusades." No longer united by love nor by principle, the church sought unity in common hatred of the Muslims who had taken over the Middle East and northern Africa, and were pushing from all sides into Europe itself. The "infidels" had overrun

"Christian" Spain and now threatened to take even the Spanish town where the apostle James' bones were said to lie.³

In the 1400's the pope and the Roman Catholic rulers of Spain finally drove the Muslims back, but in that conquest, the "Christian" armies of Europe (unwittingly, like the Germans a thousand years earlier) brought back with their plunder their own undoing. This time it was not a Cappadocian boy, but a collection of old Muslim and Jewish books. The books were translations from Greek, and after the invention of printing in the 1450's, they released a flood of new ideas upon Europe. These exciting ideas gave birth to a new faith in man and a new hope for his future—the movement called *humanism*.

The humanists, after a thousand years of darkness, once more dared to "think for themselves." They even dared to question the traditions of the church, and in so doing, they set parts of Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland on a course to the Protestant Reformation.

This led to greater discoveries ...

Beyond Humanism

Like the popes and bishops of the Dark Ages, the Protestant Reformers knew nothing but to build churches on the principle of submission to God-given authority, but they did so with a much more impressive authority than the Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholics' only claim to authority was their continuity—their "apostolic succession." The Reformers had something far better. Their claim to authority was sound doctrine (*sola fide*) and the Bible itself (*sola scriptura*). Against such a church, a

³ Compostela, in the northwestern corner of Spain (Galicia), a major pilgrimage site in mediaeval Europe.

"Biblical church," who would dare to rebel?

Johannes Denck dared.

A university student at Ingolstadt in Bavaria, Johannes Denck did not look like a rebel. He was "tall, very friendly, and of modest conduct."⁴ He was also intelligent. One professor described him as "surpassing his age and seeming older than what he was."⁵ Enrolling in the university when he was seventeen years old, he graduated two years later with a bachelor's degree, fluent in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. In his first job, he undertook the editing of a three-volume Greek dictionary.

At 23 years of age, Johannes Denck (*Hans* as everyone called him) accepted an appointment to the position of rector at the Sankt Sebald school of Nürnberg in Bavaria. He married a young woman of the city and they had a baby.

But all was not well.

Deep down in his heart, Hans (who had learned to "think for himself" in the university) knew his thinking was getting him nowhere. Like his "enlightened" Protestant friends, he had no victory over sin in his private life. He felt guilty and disappointed. "Surely there must be more to life than this!" he told himself "But what?"

Hans was not the only one to ask this question. All around him people were grumbling about the "Reformation farce." Some were actually going back to the Roman Catholics. Then, Hans found the answer in the call of Jesus, "Follow me!"

⁴ From Johannes Kessler's *Sabbata* a cultural and church history written at Sankt Gallen, in Switzerland, in the mid-1500's.

⁵ Joachim von Watt (Vadian), the reformed scholar of Sankt Gallen.

It changed his life. Hans took as his motto, "No one truly knows Christ unless he follows Him daily in life," and began at once to follow Him to the best of his ability. That made trouble. The faculty and board of Sankt Sebald's school roused themselves. His parents-in-law told him to be careful. But Hans did what he believed was right—even when they summoned him to court.

The city court of Nürnberg demanded an explanation for his "odd behavior." Hans replied in writing:

I confess that I am a poor soul, subject to every weakness of body and spirit. For some time I thought I had faith, but I have come to see that it was a false faith. It was a faith that could not overcome my spiritual poverty, my inclinations to sin, my weaknesses and my sickness. Instead of that, the more I polished and adorned myself on the outside (with my supposed faith), the worse became my spiritual sickness on the inside.... Now I see clearly that I cannot keep on in this unbelief before God, so I say, Yes Lord! In the name of the Almighty God whom I fear from the bottom of my heart, I want to believe. Help me to believe.⁶

In spite of his humble testimony, the court decided Hans could not stay in Nürnberg. On January 21, 1525, in the dead of winter, he was expelled with orders not to come closer than ten miles, on pain of death, for the rest of his life. His property was confiscated to support his wife and child who had to stay behind, and he found himself on the road among the mountains and snow-laden forests of southern Germany with nothing but the clothes on his back—and the conviction that he was doing what was right.

⁶ From Hans Derrek's confession of faith, written on January 14, 1525.

Joy in Surrender

By the time he left Nürnberg, Hans Denck had rejected his humanistic education that had taught him to "think for himself." Inner peace, he now knew, is not discovered in thinking for oneself, but in thinking like Jesus and in following Him, no matter if one has to do it alone.

Once he comprehended this, Hans entered, with the Anabaptist movement, into actual Gemeinschaft with the martyr Christ, and in this he discovered with them, the joy of submitting to Christ within us, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

In prison, before they beheaded him at Rattenberg on the Inn, Leonhard Schiemer wrote in 1527:

There are three gifts of God. The first gift is the Word given to us by the Father. It is the law, the light of God within us. This light of God within us shows us what sin is, and what it is not. All men have this light, but not all of them make use of it.

The second gift is Christ, the righteousness of God. The first light (the light within us) is our guide to this second light which is Christ. But there is only one way to get to the second light. It is through the melt-oven of true surrender (Gelassenheit)...

The third gift is the gift of joy. It is the promise of the Holy Spirit and of the glory of God. The life of the world begins in happiness but ends in sadness. The life of the one who fears God has a sorrowful beginning; then the Holy Spirit comes to anoint him with unspeakable joy.⁷

With Hans Denck and Leonhard Schiemer, the first Anabaptists found Christ, the "true light which lighteth every man that cometh into

⁷ From the article *Was die Gnad sey* . . .

the world" (John 1:9), and the great joy that comes in total surrender to Him.

Like a Willing Bride

God, the Anabaptists taught, gives to all of us the freedom to think and to believe what we want. But God, they also taught, convicts all of us when we sin and gives us a longing to do what is right. This gift from God, this knowledge of the truth—our *Gemüth* (intuition)—is a light within us to guide us in the choices we make. We all have the freedom to choose to follow it and to find joy in Gemeinschaft with Jesus, but many of us do not "make use of it."

The Anabaptists respected the conscience (*Gewissen*) highly. Menno Simons spoke of guarding what we learn "in the little chest of the conscience." But they saw the *Gemüth*, our inborn knowledge of the truth, as a yet higher authority than the conscience.

The conscience can be wrong. The Anabaptists, when they left Catholicism, struggled with their consciences about leaving the "holy, mother church." But another voice within them, the voice of truth working through their *Gemüth*, compelled them to override their consciences and do what was right no matter what they felt like doing. It was this obedience to the truth that disentangled the Anabaptists from the Dark Ages and set them free-free to think, free to believe, and free to stand for what was right.

The first Anabaptists used their freedom to think, but not to "think for themselves." They thought like Jesus.

The first Anabaptists used their freedom to believe, but not to promote their own beliefs. They believed like Jesus.

The first Anabaptists used their free-

dom to stand, but not to stand for "personal convictions." They stood for Jesus, and Jesus within them became the conviction that carried them through prison, through torture, through violence and death-to eternal life.

Free to choose, free to live like they pleased, the first Anabaptists knew that they were totally free. But they chose to give their freedom to Jesus and follow Him. Hans Denck taught that the highest thing we can choose with our freedom of choice is to choose to give our freedom of choice back to God, and that there is "no other way to blessedness than to lose one's self-will completely." This, for the Anabaptists was the way to *wahre Gelassenheit* (a true "letting loose" or surrender), and it led them to community with Jesus and his body, even in material things.

Hans Denck wrote that "the church surrenders her freedom of choice to Christ like a willing bride surrenders herself to the groom."⁸

Menno Simons wrote:

*We have but one Lord and master of our conscience, Jesus Christ, whose word, will, commandment and ordinance we obey, as willing disciples, even as the bride is ready to obey her bridegroom's voice.*⁹

Michael Sattler wrote:

*They threatened us with bonds, then with fire and the sword. But in all this I surrendered myself completely into the will of the Lord, together with all my brothers and with my wife, and prepared myself to die for His testimony.*¹⁰

Shortly after Michael Sattler and his

⁸ *Was geredt sey . . .* 1526

⁹ *Dat Fundament des Christelycken Jeers* ... 1539

¹⁰ *Ein Sendbrief an die Gemeine Gattes in Harb*, 1527

companions died in public executions, Heinrich Hug, the Roman Catholic chronicler of Villingen wrote, "It was a miserable affair. They died for their conviction."

A young Anabaptist, Hans van Overdam, wrote before they burned him at Gent in Belgium, on July 9, 1551:

*We would rather suffer our bodies to be burned, drowned, racked or tortured, whatever you may wish to do with them, and we would rather be whipped, banished, or driven away, or robbed of our goods, than show any obedience contrary to the Word of God.*¹¹

This true surrender (a true "letting loose") became within the Anabaptists the conviction to follow Jesus no matter what it cost-and it led them to decisions like that of the miller's son.

What happened at Augsburg

After eight months of wandering through the mountains of Switzerland and southern Germany, Hans Denck reached the old city of Augsburg in Bavaria, by September, 1525. He was tired and ready to stay at one place for the winter, but he found the city sharply divided and in a turmoil. Some followed Luther. Some followed Zwingli. Some had remained Roman Catholic, but very few, only two or three people in the city, seemed to show interest at all in following Jesus.

Everyone fought about doctrine—"correct, Biblical doctrine." Everyone fought to have the most members and for the control of the city. But the "light of God" within them, Hans observed, they totally ignored. "What

¹¹ *Ein Brief van Hans van Oberdam, der er an die Herren des Gerichts zu Gent und an die Ratsherren den Tag var seiner Gefangenschaft gesandt hat*, 1551

would it help you if you should reject all ceremonies?" he wrote in frustration to one Protestant leader. "Or what would it help you if you should keep all of them? What you need is to teach one another to know God...I see not only the people of this city, but also the pastors going astray."¹²

Hans felt great disappointment in the "Christians" of Augsburg, but he knew that no matter what they did, he needed to follow Jesus. He found a job teaching Latin and Greek to a nobleman's children and met from time to time with a few seekers who wondered where they should go.

Joining the Roman Catholics was not an option for any of them. The Lutherans had some impressive arguments. The Zwinglians seemed more sincere. But finally, with Hans' encouragement, they decided to take as their criteria nothing but the life and teachings of Jesus. They decided to ask this question about everything: "Is it like Jesus?" Then, whatever doctrine, whatever practice, whatever church, whatever tradition, whatever law, whatever decision was not like Jesus, they would simply ignore ... to follow Him.

This led them to meet on Easter Sunday, 1527, in a house near the Gate of the Holy Cross at Augsburg where Balthasar Hubmaier baptized five people upon the confession of their faith. Hans Denck was one of them. A year and a half later the congregation numbered over a thousand souls.

¹² *Wer die Wahrheit vvahrlich lieb hat . . .* 1526

Continued in the Next Issue



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Throughout history, Anabaptists have practiced “closed Communion” or “close Communion.” In “closed Communion,” only members of that specific church will partake in Communion together. “Close Communion” allows those of “like-minded faith” to also partake with the congregation.

I personally attend a church that practices “close communion.” As a young believer, I never questioned this. But as I got older and saw how this affected other believers who worshiped with us but did not dress and practice everything that the rest of the congregation did, I began to wonder about it. I saw the hurt and rejection in their eyes, and I wondered why Communion had to be refused to them. I decided to go to Scripture to see what God’s Word says regarding communion.

I already knew what our church taught. I knew why they had this particular tradition, but I wanted to see what the Bible itself had to say regarding Communion. I wanted to know why Communion was only for certain believers but not others.

The Body of Christ

From the following verses, two things stood out to me.

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor 10:16-17).

This phrase in particular seemed to leap out at me: “For we being many are ONE bread, and ONE body: for we are ALL PARTAKERS OF THAT ONE BREAD...”

The first thing that I concluded was that we, as Christian believers, are all part of the same body of Christ. Different denominations may be different parts of the body, but we are all part of the same body of Christ.

The second thing that I saw is that there is only ONE bread. No matter where you partake of communion, when a fellow believer who is part of that ONE body of Christ offers you the communion bread, it represents the same ONE bread that is offered everywhere— in every denomination. That ONE bread represents Christ’s physical body being broken for us. No matter what denomination, all who believe the Bible agree that Christ laid down His life for us and we do this in “remembrance of” Him. (Luke 22:19)

As I read these verses, I also wondered if there was another aspect of Communion that we have missed. Could it be that the Church, spread over the world, who now represent Christ’s body, is also supposed to remember that they are all ONE body— because of what He did— as they partake in the communion bread?

Remembering Together

Denominations have differing viewpoints regarding what partaking in Communion does for the believer. Some believe it is a holy ritual that you must partake in order to “stay saved.” Some believe Jesus is physically part of the elements; some believe He is spiritually part of the elements. Mennonites take the view that the elements represent what Christ did only in a symbolic way, but all denominations believe that we remember how Jesus’ body was broken for us, and we remember with gratitude that He laid down His life so that we could be forgiven for our sins.

*And when He had given thanks, He brake it and said, Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do **in remembrance** of me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, **in remembrance** of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lords’ death until He comes”* (1 Cor 11:24-26).

So, if all believers have a common belief that we are remembering what Christ has done for us (regardless of differing views of the elements— which is all extra-Biblical anyway), why can’t we just all remember together? Do we as Mennonites believe Christ’s body was broken for only certain believers and not others? If not, than why can we only remember what He did with certain believers and not all?

In both close and closed Communion, we give the bread and wine to only those who believe the same and dress the same as we do. Closed Communion requires that you believe the same as I—on pretty much everything. Close Communion is a little less rigid. Basically, it says you must be Mennonite. (And for conservative groups, that includes only Mennonites that wear a head covering.)

All churches that practice close or closed Communion, can give you a good explanation of why they do, but none have a Scripture reference to back themselves up with. Regardless of their reasons, when another believer visits our church and we do not allow them to participate in Communion with us, this is the unspoken message they receive (or perceive that we are telling them): “We don’t really believe that you are a member of the body of Christ, regardless of what you tell us. You must be a Mennonite in order to prove to us that you are really part of the body of Christ.”

Is this really what we believe? Is this the message we want to give them?

The only other time that Mennonites refuse to give someone communion is when someone is excommunicated. A person who is willfully sinning and refuses to repent—even when they have been confronted (following Matthew 18) gets excommunicated (following 1 Corinthians 5). Are we equating anyone who is not Mennonite with this?

Excommunication

The passage in 1 Corinthians 5 that

speaks of excommunication was the source of the schism between the Amish and Mennonites in 1693. Disagreement over whether to withhold Communion or whether to socially shun anyone who refused to repent of outward sin was the source of the split.

“Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be an new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with idolaters; or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then ye must needs go out of this world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye

judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor 5:7-13).

We are not to **keep company with**, we are not to **eat with**, and we are to **put away** from ourselves people who claim to be believers but live in obvious sin. Whether the phrase “with such a one not to eat” is speaking of communion or a social meal, the rest of the verses are just as important. If this is speaking of communion, then the rest must also be followed. We are not even to keep company with such a person.

If we have believers in our midst but we refuse to give them the communion cup because they aren’t members, or because they don’t wear a covering, we cannot use these verses as the reason we are refusing them because we aren’t following all of it. If it is not speaking of eating communion bread and only speaking of eating a meal together, we must still follow the rest of the commands. We are to “put away from among” us that wicked person. They should not even be in our midst.

DAMNATION

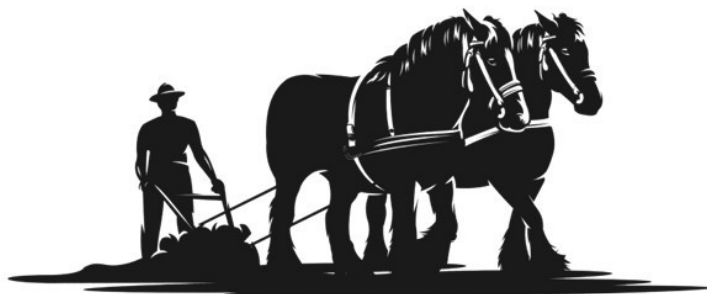
“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Corinthians 11:28-29).

Does this apply to all believers or only Mennonites? Aren’t we all accountable to God when we participate in Communion? If we have hidden sin in our lives, we “eat and drink damnation” to *ourselves*, not to others.

So *what are we afraid of* when we refuse to give the communion cup to other believers who are not Mennonite? Do we have a fear of what other Mennonites will think? Are we afraid if we give the cup to someone with hidden sin that God will punish *us*?

Does the possibility of a Mennonite with hidden sin in their lives feel safer to us than a non-Mennonite with possible hidden sin?

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Sheer Neglect

—by Gerald Hochstetler

"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

John 7:38



The enemy of our soul must find it very annoying when we are so immersed in the new life, the born again life, the ever-living life, that we overcome sin by sheer neglect. We are so busy living the God-life that we forget to sin. That is some glorious Christian living that, unfortunately, we seldom see because we are busy trying to behave and reform the old nature. Thus, all of the attention is on us rather than on God.

Many years ago, a named Ezekiel, said that God would put His Spirit in the people and cause them to do His will.

He used the word "cause" because the inner life, the God-righteous life within, wells up and bubbles over. Trying to work from the outer to the inner is like trying to nail down Jell-O. You will be busy until your dying day just trying to be a decent human being - working at things like forgiving, loving, and just all around decent things.

I know what some of you are thinking. Modern theology says that we are mostly "good" people. A man once tried to flatter Jesus by calling Him "Good Master." Jesus corrected him and said, "...Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God" (Mark 10:18). Yes, that is in the Bible!

There is a NEW life to live. I experience bits and pieces of it. It's a good life. It's a holy life. It's the life of God flowing through us. There is assurance and peace there.

I'll say it again, It's a good life.

Questions About God

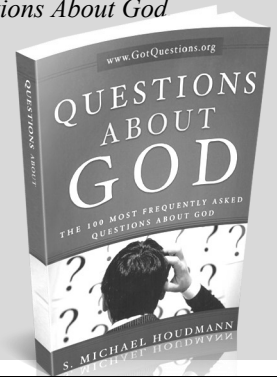
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I Will Have Mercy

—by John Weaver

One time, Jesus was in a house having a meal when publicans and sinners crowded around Him. They wanted to hear more from Him. He had a message that resonated with them, but it upset the Pharisees, who were the religious people of their day.

Jesus told the Pharisees, *“But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* (Matthew 9:13).

Today, I think Jesus would again tell the religious leaders to learn what it means to have mercy, or to show mercy, or to represent Jesus as a merciful God.

Where did people, preachers none-the-less, ever get the idea to preach condemnation to sinners—to try and show a God of harsh judgement, instead of a God that delights in mercy?

It is only those that hear the word, and decide to reject it, that the judgement of God comes upon. I look at the way Jesus mingled with sinners, again and again, and how He was criticized for it by the elite religious people, and I say, Lord help us. Give us a vision to really help people. Give us Your compassion.

At one time I would have agreed with street preachers who stand on a corner and shout condemnation to the people passing by. That is the concept being given to people about Jesus, and it is, oh, so wrong.

Go and learn what this means: I will have mercy instead of sacrifice. Jesus came, not to bring condemnation, but to give life and hope to sinners. Jesus was hard on the ones who thought that they themselves were righteous and who despised others.

Sinners were drawn to Jesus. He had a message of hope, love, mercy, and repentance. Yes, He always told the peo-

ple to turn away from a life of sin - like the woman who was caught in adultery. He said, *“...Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more”* (John 8:11).

Jesus did not preach hell-fire and brimstone to sinners. Neither should we.

I am fully aware that there is another ditch: that there are those who misrepresent God as a big Santa Clause who overlooks sin regardless, and that everyone will get to heaven.

If our message of the gospel causes people to be fearful, we are preaching another Jesus. The real Jesus, the one we should all serve and promote, came to call sinners, not the righteous, to Himself.

This is one of those areas where some people have missed the mark, just like the religious leaders did in the days of Jesus. The way to cleanse the church is not to keep the sinners out. It is to have the sinners come and be transformed by the power of God and then become new creatures.

Lord, today we repent where we have misrepresented You. Teach us what it means to have mercy instead of sacrifice. Help us to lift up Jesus. He Himself said if He is lifted up, He will draw all men to Himself. Amen! Let it be so.



A PRECIOUS GEM

Sympathy for others
Is a trait we all shall need.
Showing kindness and compassion,
Will sow much gospel seed.
Those who have not cultivated
This worthwhile loving goal,
Will never find the pleasure
Of fulfilling life's true role.
If we really know our Savior,
And learn to think like Him.
Then this grandest of ambitions
Will seem a precious gem.
For when we follow Jesus,
We find the secret of our living
Is found, in reality,
In a constant life of giving.

by Kathryn Search



Mark your calendar and plan to join us as we soak in the encouragement of 20 people, each relating their personal story of stepping out of the boat and following hard after their Savior, regardless of the cost.



The following article was taken from *The Topical Sermon Notebook, End Times* by Dr. Alan Carr, with permission. www.serrmonnotebookorg, Lenoir, NC.

Continued from July 2023 issue...

Matthew 24:1–31

II. How Tribulation Continues (v. 15–29)

A. They Are Treacherous Days (v. 15a)—This verse refers to the Antichrist breaking his covenant with the nation of Israel. This was prophesied by the prophet Daniel, **Daniel 9:27**, and will be fulfilled during the Tribulation Period. The Antichrist's sin will amount to him entering the Holy of Holies in the newly constructed Temple in Jerusalem. He will declare himself to be God and will demand that the world fall before him in worship. The Bible tells us that this will most assuredly happen, **Rev. 13:1–8**.

(III. What is it that motivates the world to give their worship to this mad man? The Antichrist will be assassinated, **Rev. 13:3, 14**. Then, before the wondering gaze of a watching world, he will arise from the dead. When this happens, the world will fall at his feet in worship. It is ironic that sinners will refuse to bow before a risen Jesus, but they will bow before a risen devil. The reason? One promises them everlasting life. The other prosperity! It will be at this time that the Antichrist institutes some sort of a marking system that must be possessed before a person can either buy or sell.)

(III. Before this prophecy can be fulfilled, the Temple must first be constructed in Jerusalem. For many years this seemed to be an absolute impossibility. However, recent years have seen the rebirth of the nation of Israel, and have brought about the real possibility of this happening in the very near future. Friends, you can count on it!)

B. They Are Terrifying Days (v. 16–29)

(III. These verses bring us into the second 3½ years of the Tribulation. They will be days of such a horrible nature that they are almost unbelievable. However, the things we will encounter as we study this section of the text are as sure to happen

as anything else contained in the Word of God. Let's take some time to look into the truth behind the awful days.)

1. v. 16–20 **Days Of Intense Persecution**—Jesus reveals to the Jews that when they see the Antichrist claiming to be God, they are to flee. It seems that this will usher in a period of persecution against the nation of Israel like nothing the world has ever seen. In fact, it will be the goal of this mad man from hell to totally destroy the people of God from off the earth, **Rev. 12:1–17**. (III. The woman in this passage is Israel, and the dragon is the devil. He has tried for centuries to destroy the Jewish people. He has failed! This will be his last great effort.) Of course, the 144,000 Jewish preachers will be unable to die. Sadly, the same cannot be said for the rest of the human race that falls under the Antichrist's murderous gaze.

(III. Jews will find themselves traveling one of three possible roads at this point.

1. **Many Israelites will die—Zech 13:8.**

2. **Some will follow the Antichrist—Matt. 24:10–12; Rev. 2:9; Rev. 3:9.**

3. **A Remnant will be saved—Rev. 12:14; Zech. 13:9.)**

2. v. 21 **Days Of Intense Pain**—In this one verse, the Lord Jesus capsulizes one of the most horrible times in human experience into one verse. I would like to spend a few minutes looking at this time in a little detail. It seems that the tragedies I mentioned that would occur during the first portion of the Tribulation are going to intensify and be far worse during this period. A little glimpse of some of these things may be helpful to our understanding.

There will be two sets of intense judgments that will take place during the latter half of the Tribulation. These judgments are known respectively as Trumpet Judgments and Vial Judgments. Let's take a moment to look at these terrible events.

a. The Trumpet Judgments

1. **The First Trumpet—Rev. 8:7—**1/3 of the green vegetation on the face of the earth is destroyed.

(III. This will have an impact on oxygen levels around the world. In fact, in the US, we have denuded our nation to the point that we only produce about 60% of the oxygen we consume!)

2. **The Second Trumpet—Rev. 8:8–9—**1/3 of the oceans become blood and 1/3 of the life in the sea is destroyed. 1/3 of the world's shipping is also destroyed.

(III. Imagine the impact this will have on world food supplies. No doubt this will bring about even more death by starvation.)

3. **The Third Trumpet—Rev. 8:10–11—**Perhaps this refers to a meteor that falls into the water supplies and pollutes 1/3 of the freshwater of the world. This poisons the water and many more people perish in this plague.

4. **The Fourth Trumpet—Rev. 8:12—**This takes place in the heavens and the sun's light is diminished by one-third. One-third of the light of the other heavenly bodies is also destroyed.

(III. Before the Fifth Trumpet sounds, an angel flies through Heaven and pronounces three woes upon the earth. The reason? Things are about to take a turn for the worse. **Rev. 8:13.**)

5. **The Fifth Trumpet—Rev. 9:1–12—**The earth is invaded by an army of demons from the pits of Hell. The demons have the power to torment men for 5 months. They won't kill men, but the pain will be so intense that men will want to die, but they will be unable to achieve death! Hell will literally visit the earth!

6. **The Sixth Trumpet—Rev. 9:13–21—**A demonic invasion of an army that numbers 200,000,000. The results of this invasion will be that 1/3 of the human population will be destroyed. Note: when this event is coupled with the 4th Seal, it means that over 1/2 the population of earth has been killed. But, what is the reaction of humanity? **Rev. 9:20**

—21, they remain unrepentant!

(III. Notice that before these 6 judgments are poured out on the earth, there is a time of silence in Heaven, Rev. 8:1. It appears that what is about to happen is so severe that it calls for a time of silence and of mourning. All of God's judgment is performed out of holiness and not a desire to make men suffer! God does not like to destroy the wicked. But, His righteousness demands it!)

7. The Seventh Trumpet—Rev. 11:15–19—This trumpet announces the soon return of the Lord Jesus. It also introduces the seven Vial or Bowl Judgments.

b. The Vial Judgments

1. The First Vial—Rev. 16:2—Some kind of vile cancerous sore is poured out on mankind.

2. The Second Vial—Rev. 16:3—The waters of the sea are turned to blood and every creature in the sea dies.

3. The Third Vial—Rev. 16:4–7—The fresh waters of the earth are turned to blood.

4. The Fourth Vial—Rev. 16:8–9—The sun's heat is intensified and men's bodies are burned by the heat of the sun. Yet, with all these torments, they do not repent!

5. The Fifth Vial—Rev. 16:10—This plague brings darkness and intense pain to the inhabitants of the earth: again, so intense that they gnaw their tongues in their pain, yet they still refuse to repent.

6. The Sixth Vial—Rev. 16:12–14—The Euphrates River is dried up, preparing a pathway for the nations of the earth to descend upon Israel for the final conflict.

7. The Seventh Vial—Rev. 16:17–21—This vial brings with it a terrible cataclysm in the earth. There is an earthquake of such magnitude that the islands of the sea sink and all the mountains of the earth fall down flat. On top of this, all the major cities of the earth will be destroyed! Then, hailstones fall from the heavens that weigh in at around 125 pounds each.

(III. This is just a portion of the events that will take place during the Tribulation. It will be a time of unspeakable horrors and trials. However, no one in this room should ever have to worry about this. If you are not saved, I challenge you to come to Jesus and be born again!)

3. v. 23–28 Days Of Intense Personalities—During the Tribulation, there will be many personalities involved in the devil's work. It will be a time of great deception. Surely, some will be looking for a means of escape. However, no false Christ can offer humanity the peace and salvation that comes only through the Lord Jesus Christ, John 14:6.

4. v. 29 Days Of Intense Presentations—These events have already been touched on previously. However, suffice it to say that there will come a day when the moon will turn to blood, the sun will be darkened and the stars will fall from their sockets. There will be signs in Heaven surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus.

(III. I remember that as a child I would hear adults speak of these things. I remember being terrified by them. I remember seeing that big, red, harvest moon as it hung on top of the hills. I remember thinking that the end had arrived. I knew that I was lost, but I never tried to do anything about it. Then, when I got saved, I learned the truth. Now when I see that red moon, I rejoice! It just reminds me that Jesus is coming soon!)

C. They Are Temporary Days (v. 22)—The Bible tells us that, even in the midst of His wrath, God remembers mercy. **Hab. 3:2.** He will accomplish His purposes, but He will preserve the remnant of them that love Him to the end. Even while He judges the world, He still deals with His people in love!

III. How Tribulation Concludes (v. 30–31)

(III. These truths will be covered in far more detail in later messages, but for now, I will just say a word about each of these three things.)

A. The Triumphant Savior's Appearing (v. 30a)—Verse 30 tells us that Jesus

will return in great power and glory at the end of the Tribulation Period. When He returns, He will destroy the Antichrist and all his followers in one moment of time. Jesus will rule the world in an instant! These things will be covered in more detail in just a few weeks, but for now, you can read about them in **Rev. 19:11–14.**

B. The Terrified Sinner's Agonizing (v. 30b)—When the world experiences the return of Christ in glory, they will react in terror. They have gathered their armies together at Jerusalem to fight what is known as the battle of Armageddon. It is at this battle that the blood will run "*to the horses bridles*", **Rev. 14:20!** However, the armies of the Antichrist and of all the other armies of the world will be destroyed with the Word of the Lord Jesus! These people had refused to bow before Him under grace, they refused to bow under judgment. Now it is too late for them to bow. The time has come for them to reap what they have sowed. They will be judged and they will be destroyed with the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, **Rev. 19:15–21.** The Antichrist and the False Prophet will be cast alive in the Lake of Fire and all their followers will be obliterated in an instant of time! Jesus will return, not as a meek Lamb, but as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah!

C. The Tribulation Saints Assembling (v. 31)—After Jesus has returned and defeated the armies of His enemies, He will gather together those people who believed the preaching of the 2 witnesses and the 144,000 Jewish preachers. They will be gathered together and they will enter alive into the Millennium. Again, there will be more about this later!

Conc: My friends, we have just touched the surface of the events of that terrible seven year period that is to come upon the earth. It will be a time more terrible than men can imagine. I just praise the Lord that the people of God do not have to fear these things. The question that must be answered: Are you ready for the return of the Lord Jesus? Are you saved and sure that you will not be here for these terrible days? If not, you can be. All you need to do is to come to Jesus by faith and He will save you. If you are saved, praise the Lord! Go out and share Him with a world that needs to hear about Him and what He can do for their souls!

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September

The Painful Discipline of Our Heavenly Father

God is not an emergency room doctor responding to our hurts; He is the master surgeon who plans our hurts in order that He might do us greater good. Message by John Piper.

Parenting Kids When You're Far from Perfect

When it comes to raising kids—what if perfection isn't the goal? Dave and Ann Wilson dive into the monumental task of parenting kids right here, right now.

Have You Seen These Crazy Cycles Between Managers and Employees?

Men and women need love and respect as human beings in the workplace. Though there are daily demands to fulfill the mission of the organization apart from these emotional attitudes toward each other, that company will perform well when the men and women...

Success and Money

Do you know what true success is all about? Message by Charles Stanley.

October

When Faith Seems to Fail

(part 1)

In this message, Adrian Rogers gives insight for those who struggle to endure when times get tough and faith seems to fail.

When Faith Seems to Fail

(part 2)

Well-Watered Women

Feeling dry, unsatisfied, restless? Author Gretchen Saffles believes your life can be more—and you can be among well-watered women. Here's how.

At the Right Hand of God

Jesus Christ came to this earth to suffer and die, was buried and rose from the dead after three days, and then ascended back to the Father in heaven. But until the time of His second coming, He is still busy at work for all those who believe. Message by J. Vernon McGee.

November

What is the World Coming to?

(part 1)

In this message, Adrian Rogers gives insight into what this world is coming to, and how we are to conduct ourselves as we near the Last Days.

What is the World Coming to?

(part 2)

When You're Lonely In Marriage

Feeling lonely in marriage? Dr. Greg Smalley offers ideas to help you resolve conflict, start talking about what you're carrying—and move back together.

What Are the Two Key Ingredients for Successful Relationships?

(Part 1 of 2)

Rick Warren invited Emerson Eggerichs to speak at Saddleback Church on the topic of relationships. Presented to more than 20,000 people, listen in as Emerson focuses on three areas.

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Letters from our Readers

1 I just read “The Timing of the Rapture” by Roger Moyer (*The Amish Voice*, March 2023 issue).

First of all, there is nothing in the verses he quoted that even mentions the timing of it. You have to read the verses in the Bible in proper context to the rest of the chapter they are in. yes, there will be a rapture. But teaching that it will be pretribulation is heresy.

In the 3 gospels where Jesus mentions it, He first speaks of great tribulation and except that the Lord will shorten those days, no flesh shall be saved. There will still be a small faithful remnant when Christ returns. False prophets and false Christs will come. Satan will be working hard to deceive us. We need to be prepared for persecution. The flesh shrinks from this, but may God strengthen us to stand to the death.

Paul and John don't mention tribulation in surrounding scripture, but in the verse quoted in Peter (I Peter 1;7), the trial of faith is mentioned as more precious than gold. Can we view persecution as an opportunity to bring praise, honor and glory to our Lord, the one who suffered and died for us? —Sincerely, DY

2 Good morning brother Joe. Just got *The Amish Voice* newsletter yesterday and I read the article about our anabaptist history. I study a lot of our history as well, and this is so true that I want to shout it from the mountain tops. Can't hardly wait till the next one comes with the rest of that story. It is so much my own story as far as getting all the information I can get to see what these anabaptist people had that made it so that they could walk right up to the fire and give their lives for a testimony. —AH

3 Good Morning, friends. I am ordering the set of books, “Teaching and Equipping Our Children for Life” and the Bible course, “ABCs of Christian Growth.” We are excited to start with these courses. Thank you for everything you do. Our children have been doing your Bible courses or lessons for the last four or five years. So here we are very thankful for the journey God has us on. And we are thankful for people like you. God bless you and the work you do. —J&VS

The Secret of Paul's Contentment

—by David Bird, Australia

Paul's contentment was not dependent on his outward circumstances. It was rooted in CHRIST. Christ was Paul's strength. He was not relying on his own strength or self-sufficiency. He was relying on God to give him the strength he needed. That's why he was able to do all that God wanted him to do and finish the task that God had assigned for him.

But his dependency on God was something that Paul had to LEARN (Phil 4:11). It is not something we can learn from

reading a book or by listening to a message. It comes as we DENY ourselves, take up our cross DAILY and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23).

Whatever our circumstances in life, if we are walking faithfully with Jesus like Paul was, we too can know Christ as our all sufficient One, and say with Him:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”

Philippians 4:13

Praise the Lord!



How in the world do you write your grandmother's funeral sermon? How do you summarize 91 years of life? This task was one of utmost privilege and also utter drudgery.

My grandmother was an amazing person! My earliest memories go back to sitting at her table, drinking cream and sugar with some coffee, eating pancakes, and playing canasta. At that same table, I heard countless hours of stories and continuous laughing. Laughing and telling stories were probably two of the greatest lessons Grandma taught me. She also taught me the way to love people and especially how to socialize over coffee, which I am enjoying now (with only cream) as I remember her and write this.

In honor of my grandmother, I want to tell you a story. A story not about what was, but about what is to come: a story about my grandma from the time she said goodbye until now. There is a lot that has transpired since her passing that I don't know, but I am going to take what the Bible says and tell it like the stories I used to hear from her.

Grandma never met a stranger. Even as she strolled into heaven, it was no different. In Grandma-like fashion, she walked into the gates of heaven with joy and laughter. The angels (she loved angles) greeted her at the gate. They said, "Barb, just through those gates, we have a party we are about to throw just for you! First we need to know why we should let you into heaven." Peter described this party in 2 Peter 1:11: "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

PAUSE!!

This very moment is when Grandma's friends and family would love to testify on her behalf.

Just look at her family! Look at her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren! Look at the life she lived and the love she gave to others! Come on angels, she had a cabinet in the corner of her dining room full of you all!! LET HER IN!

Yet, Grandma didn't panic. She didn't even gulp. As cool as could be, she gave the answer she knew they needed to hear. She knew this one was not about her...but Him. Jesus. She looked them in the eye and said, "I have had a wonderful life. I was loved by many. As Solomon said in Proverbs 17:6, 'Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.' Even with all of that, I have done nothing to deserve all of this!! You should let me in because of my love and faith in Jesus and because of what He has done for me. He saved me from who I was and gave me eternal life. He forgave me of all I have ever done. I am simply claiming that today, Angels."

And with that she was given a hero's welcome.

For the first time in her entire life... SHE WAS SPEECHLESS!!

She stood amazed to see that "...city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10)

"Oh," she thought, "If I could just yell back down to earth and let everyone know what this is like! NO mere man has ever "...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).

And the king, King Jesus—how amazing! He was nothing like she had ever seen. He was body, soul, and spirit; and yet, so was she. In this state, she saw a throne that was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. "...in the midst of the

throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain..." (Rev. 5:6).

There was no way to describe this scene in her own words. The best way for her to describe it was by quoting Isaiah's description after he saw this scene: "...I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke" (Isa. 6: 1-4).

The singing going on around His throne was beyond words! Glorious hymns such as "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty. Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee. Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee. Perfect in power, in love, and purity." "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." "How Great are you God!"

Even with her confidence and her habit of giving everyone she knew a hug and a kiss, upon seeing Jesus she simply fell at His feet, despite how desperately she wanted to do the same with Him. He then laid His right hand upon her, and said, "Fear not; I am the first and the last. This is a celebration just for you! Welcome, my child."

Then the Angels picked her up and assured her it was all okay.

Having built a house, and having a husband and a son who had an excavating business, Grandma could not help but notice the architectural structuring of this glorious place.

The whole city itself was pure transparent gold - like glass! The wall was made of jasper and was built on twelve layers of foundation stones inlaid with gems. This amazing city was suspended, yet sitting upon a solid foundation. *“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”* (Revelation 21:14).

From what only a heavenly mind could possibly know, she actually perceived the gates to be 1,400 miles high. Not only that, they were made of solid white pearl (Rev. 21:12-13; 21). She was astonished! She loved her “bling.”

Speaking of bling... the street... the street was made of solid gold! *“...and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass”* (Rev. 21:21b).

There was so much to take in. Interestingly, she didn't see any type of sun or created light. Although she was actually a few heavens above the sun, this heaven was so bright she should have needed sunglasses. Miraculously, her eyes were able to take in all of her surroundings. She did not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God was all the light she needed (Rev. 22:5).

There was a fountain there that my grandmother had to see immediately! From each place she had been, she could hear it, but had yet to see it. From this fountain flowed the River of Life! He then said, *“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely”* (Rev. 21:6).

The River of Life ran through the center of heaven and made for a beautiful landscape. Along the river she could not only see the Tree of Life, but a forest of trees (22:1-2). In each season these trees grew beautiful fruit. And even though my grandma had no known needs at this time, this tree satisfied a need she didn't even know she

had. The fruit seemed to be very therapeutic.

There is so much to take in she will need all of eternity to do it!

But honestly, for Grandma the most shocking thing for her was not what she did see, but what she didn't see, or should I say, whom she didn't see. She

Grandma some of the saddest words spoken in heaven, “Their works were not enough. They could never be enough. Even when they implored and stated that they had done many wonderful works in My name, I declared to them, ‘...I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity’ (Matthew 7:23).”



Image by Tumisu from Pixabay

expected to see many more members of her community there. Actually, there were several people she was shocked not to see there. It finally clicked in her mind what Jesus meant when he said: *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matthew 7:13-14).

When she asked her sister-in-law where they were, my great aunt took her back to Jesus. He affirmed that she was right in her observations of the good they had done on the earth. He then told

“And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Rev. 21:27).

Please don't miss this wonderful place! Don't miss meeting my grandmother, but most of all, don't miss Jesus!

Please don't put off accepting Christ as your Lord and Savior any longer. Listen! Our souls were created to live, and we will live forever one day in ether heaven or hell. God has paved the way for you to go to heaven. All you must do is accept what He has done for you.

Don't wait.

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The Brass Serpent

—By Joe Keim

Depending on which commentator you follow, there may have been as many as three million Jews who left Egypt. Finally, the Israelites were free from slavery. Soon they would move into a land that was not originally their own—a land flowing with milk and honey.

But then something started happening that was not good. The children of Israel began to murmur and complain. In Numbers 21:5, the Bible says that the people spoke against God and Moses.

They said things like:

“Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?”

“We are sick of this manna!”

Numbers 21:6 says the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people. The poisonous serpents must have appeared everywhere, even inside people’s tents. Many people got bitten. They got sick, and they died. Imagine getting bitten while you slept or while burying loved ones. It must have been awful!

The Bible says, “Therefore, the people came to Moses, and said, we have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he takes away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people” (Numbers 21:7).

In verses 8-9, the Lord told Moses to

make a serpent out of brass and hang it on a pole. Everyone who was bitten, when he beheld the serpent of brass, lived – was healed. What a miracle! What a lesson! Life after the poisonous serpents went on. I’m sure the story was told and retold for generations.

Have you ever wondered what happened to the brass serpent on the pole?

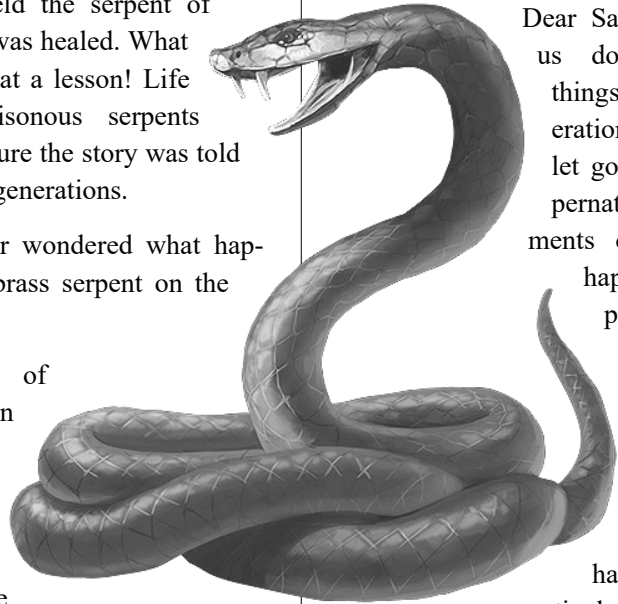
The children of Israel hung on to it! For 750 years, they dragged that brass serpent along. We are told in 2 Kings 18:1-4 that Hezekiah, age 25, began to reign as King of Judah. He did that which was right in God’s eyes. He removed the high places, broke all the images, cut down the groves, and get this... the king “**brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it...**” (2 Kings 18:4).

For 750 years, the children of Israel hung onto a piece of brass that had been used to deliver their forefathers from death. They added the worthless piece of brass to their hour of worship.

It had become a distraction, an idol, and bondage.

Dear Saint, many of us do the same things in our generation. We must let go of those supernatural movements of God that happened in the past. We must stop duplicating and manufacturing supernatural events that happened at a

particular location or specific place far away. They are distracting us from the real thing. They are bondage and idol worship. Let us be like Hezekiah and keep our eyes on the One and Only Living God of the universe. He does not own assembly lines and cookie cutters. He works in no one’s box.



If you were moved by this article or would like to discuss it further, the author invites you to call or text him. He would be delighted to hear from you!

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