



Chronicling the Anabaptist Rediscovery of their Special Spiritual Heritage

Introduction

By Jonas Kurtz

Welcome to Volume 4, Issue 2 of *The Awakening*! I hope this finds you experiencing the peace of God that surpasses all understanding—a peace that always accompanies the new birth. I also hope you are walking in obedience to our Lord Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, who lives in all who love and follow Him.

If I had receive this magazine in my mailbox six years ago, I would probably have thought what some of you may be thinking right now: “Here comes another letter from those wolves in sheep’s clothing” or, “They’re just trying to get others to join them so they can ease their conscience.”

In fact, I may well have been more upset than many of you. As a minister, I would not only have viewed this publication as an attempt to deceive me, but also as something that undermined what I was teaching.

What happened to change me from being a person who would have been upset by these letters in my mailbox to becoming someone who is writing and sending them? God arrested my attention and transformed me! Read all the details of my personal story in this issue to learn more.

One thing I have been blessed to discover over the last six years is that it is not a new phenomenon for people to experience a dramatic change in their faith and then seek to persuade others of what they have come to believe.

It first happened more than two thousand years ago on the Day of Pentecost, when the apostles urged their Jewish audience to reconsider what they had been taught and to follow Jesus as their Lord. Ever since then, those who have become Christ’s true disciples—by submitting their lives to His lordship—have shared that same passion. In fact, you can be sure any person or group of people that does not have a passion to persuade people to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ does not possess the

same faith the apostles did. Their faith was evident by their love, even for those who persecuted them. Our faith similarly compels us to share the love that God has showered upon us, and I have a special love for my people, the Amish.

This same passion played a major role in the historical persecution of the church. Consider Peter and John after God used them to heal a lame man at the temple gate (Acts 3). When they were brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders were not primarily concerned that Peter and John believed in Jesus. What they could not tolerate was their determination to persuade others that Jesus is Lord, that He forgives sins, heals the sick, and grants eternal life.

The same was true of the early Anabaptists. Had they quietly kept their beliefs to themselves, they would have faced far less persecution. In many cases, their opponents were willing to let them hold their beliefs privately. What they could not accept was their effort to share those beliefs with others.

There were many reasons for this resistance to the gospel. One was that the message was difficult to refute. The Scriptures supported what the first Christians believed and taught, and their lives gave further testimony to the truth of their message. The religious leaders of the day had no effective answer to what the apostles and first Anabaptists proclaimed. If they allowed the Christian teachings to spread unchecked, they threatened to undermine the foundations of the existing religious culture. Those religious leaders knew that their positions, influence, and comfortable way of life was at risk. It is often easier to attack those who speak the truth than to humble ourselves and align our lives with that truth.

It is also noteworthy that much of the persecution throughout history has been carried out by people who claimed to be serving God. One characteristic these groups shared was an unwillingness to consider the possibility that what they believed might be wrong. All of them stood proudly on the proverbial shoulders of their forefathers, defending what they thought was the original faith. But in every case what they were defending was not the truth of the gospel but the worship of a way of life and love of tradition.

I have not learned much in my short life, but I have learned this: if you approach the pursuit of truth having already decided that you will reject it if it challenges your existing beliefs, you will not find it. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

In the previous issue of *The Awakening!*, we asked our readers whether we should continue publishing. David and I have wondered whether it was time to “leave the dead to bury the dead” and invest the Lord’s resources elsewhere.

Some readers misunderstood our question and assumed we were struggling to raise the funds necessary to continue printing. That is not the case. We have always believed that if we are doing the Lord’s work, He will provide what is needed as we step out in faith and obedience. That has been true every time so far. The Lord has never failed us, and we have no reason to believe He will start now. We remain persuaded that “God’s will is God’s bill,” and that He will continue to meet the financial needs of ministry through His people.

Just yesterday, I corresponded with a brother in Christ from California. During our conversation, he told me that he and his wife would be sending a check for \$3,000 to help print this issue of *The Awakening!* When I thanked him for his generosity, he replied: “Brother Jonas, if we were sending you our money, then you could acknowledge our generosity. But it is not possible for us to be considered generous when we are simply sending someone else’s money. As God’s stewards, we send His money. I can confidently say that He told me both to send it and how much to send. Please give Him all the thanksgiving.”

Last week, an Amish man in Pennsylvania who has recently been born again contributed \$2,000. He even pledged to sell additional assets and give more if needed to help send out *The Awakening!* Like everyone else who has truly been born again, he and his wife want others to share in the same wonderful blessing.

Investments like this, along with the many phone calls, text messages, emails, and letters we have received urging us to continue publishing *The Awakening!*, have led us to believe that our work is not yet finished. There is still more to be done. The harvest is still ripe, and we are looking forward to helping more sincere Amish folks redis-

cover the original faith of their Anabaptist ancestors.

We will, however, begin publishing *printed* copies less frequently. Our goal is to mail at least one issue each year, and possibly two. In place of the quarterly magazine, we intend to begin a monthly e-publication delivered by email. It will be shorter than the printed version and will contain one article each month that is relevant to born-again Amish people and Amish-background believers.

To subscribe, you can email me at jonas@heavensfamily.org, call or text me at [814-952-7758](tel:814-952-7758), or write to:

P.O. Box 611
Punxsutawney, PA 15767

If you do not have access to email but would still like to receive those monthly teachings, please contact me, and we can print and mail them to you.

If you enjoy reading *The Awakening!*, we encourage you to prayerfully consider whether God may want to use you as one of the means by which He pays His bill. If so, you may send your contribution to the address listed above.

Finally, we love it when our readers visit us in Punxsutawney, PA. Our church, consisting of mostly born-again Amish-background believers, gathers every other weekend at my house (in my garage). On the off-weekends, we gather in small groups in each other’s homes. We also love it when we have the opportunity to visit born-again Amish believers and born-again Amish-background believers across the country. We’ve done that so far in New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Colorado, Maryland, Virginia, South Dakota, Kentucky, Michigan and Wyoming. Let us know if you would like a visit!

As always, we thank you for every bit

of encouragement you send us. Hardly a week goes by that someone doesn't contact us and tell us that their lives have been changed by the biblical truth they've read in *The Awakening!* Sometime they wait for months or even years to tell us. We always wonder to ourselves, *Why did you wait so long?* Your encouragement keeps us encouraged! Thank you! — Jonas

My Story, for His Glory

By Jonas Kurtz

This year marks ten years since I sat on a wooden bench with six other men, clutching an Ausbund tied shut with string. I was a naïve, brash, cocky teenager who had been married for only five months. I thought I had life fairly well figured out, but I was about to begin a journey I never expected.

I was born the fifth of six children into an Amish community near DuBois, Pennsylvania. My early years are filled with many pleasant memories: procrastinating on chores with my brother Raymond when Dad wasn't around, building hideouts behind the barn and in the hayloft, shooting BB guns (and suffering the consequences of filling the vinyl siding on our house with holes), and going night fishing with Dad. I could go on and on.

I can vividly remember church Sundays as an Amish boy. We would rise early to harness the horses before heading back inside for breakfast and then dressing in our Sunday clothes. It felt like a small freedom to go to the barn without suspenders and wear a white T-shirt instead of traditional Amish attire.

In my mind, I can still feel the dew on my bare feet as we parked our buggy in the grass. I remember how barnyard

dust stuck to my feet when they were wet and how difficult it was to keep my pant legs clean. I also remember the embarrassment of me and my brother being the only boys wearing shoes—or not wearing shoes—or the only boys still wearing our zippie capps (beanie) at the end of winter.

I remember shaking all the girls' hands on the way into church, the handing out of hymnals, the frustration of my feet not reaching the floor because the bench was too high, and the shame of being reprimanded by Dad when I swung them anyway.

I can still hear those old German hymns and how they reverberated when I repeatedly plugged and unplugged my ears with my fingers. By the second verse of *Lob Lied*, drowsiness would begin to overtake me. My head would start to bob, and more than once I fell off the bench asleep, only to be jolted back to reality.

More than anything else, I remember the sermons. I remember feeling frustrated when a minister spoke too long on a stuffy summer day, or hopeless when a sermon seemed to present an impossible standard. One phrase especially stands out in my memory:

“Tut buze, denn das himmelreich ist nahe herbeigekommen.”

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

We heard those words week after week.

On the Sundays between church services, we would gather in the living room and take turns reading a chapter from the German Bible, verse by verse. If you got distracted and missed your turn, you might receive a spanking.

All in all, I had a wonderful childhood. Even as a teenager, life was only as hard as I chose to make it. Dad believed

in hard work, and my brother and I began alternating workdays at his sawmill as early as fourth grade. By the time we graduated from eighth grade, we were working full-time. It never seemed unusual because all my friends were doing the same thing.

I share all of this because, from my perspective, I had a great upbringing. I was raised to be a good Amish boy, and I never really considered wanting anything else.

In fact, if I had to identify one weakness in my upbringing, it would be this: I grew up believing I was in a better spiritual position than most people simply because I was Amish. My parents never explicitly said so, but it was woven into the culture and the sermons at church.

I can still remember ministers saying things like, “Just think—you could have been born to worldly people. Thank God you were born Amish.” Or, “We have it so nice here; you could have been born anywhere in the world, but God allowed you to be born here.”

I now wonder if it never occurs to those ministers that perhaps God loves everyone equally, no matter where they were born—and that He wants to use those born in nice parts of the world to serve those in not-so-nice places.

In any event, I grew up believing I was one of a lucky few. All I had to do was live a good life, believe in Jesus as the Son of God, and I could hope to inherit eternal life.

But by the time I was 16 years old, I had pretty much figured out I wasn't that great of a person. I was a rebellious teenager, and I knew if I died I would go to hell. But being good enough for heaven seemed pretty well impossible, so I logically concluded I might as well “live it up.” In fact, I was so persuaded I was bound for hell that on hot

summer nights I would cover up with extra blankets. My logic was I would be conditioning my body for the hotter temperatures of hell which was surely my eventual destination.

The day of my ordination was a somber one. Before long, the six-hour service was over and it was time to choose the men who would enter the lot. I wasn't particularly concerned. Not only was I young, but I had also been a bit of a hellion during rumspringa. I assumed those casting votes still remembered that. After all, it had only been five months since my wife and I were married in what was referred to as a "shot-gun" wedding—a scandal for the ages.

Soon everyone shuffled back into the room, and Mahlon, our bishop, announced that seven men had been placed in the lot. Each man would choose one of seven books tied shut with string. Tucked inside one of those books was a slip of paper containing Acts 1:24. Whoever selected that book would become the next minister.

Mahlon began reading the list of seven names. It felt like all the air was sucked out of the room as he called each one. Last of all, I heard my own name.

I was surprised, but still not overly concerned.

One by one, the other six men selected their books. I was last. Then we sat in a row at the front of the room. Since I sat down last, my book was opened first.

After what felt like an eternity, Mahlon looked down and said, "Here it lies in Jonas Kurtz's book."

I was stunned.

The last thing I expected was to be ordained. I knew as well as anyone how unqualified I was. Yet in that moment I resolved that I would give it my all. I would do whatever it took to become a

godly man and be a good minister. God had chosen me.

After the ordination service, I hurried home so I could be the first one there. I had beer cans lying about in my barn, and I wanted them gone before company arrived that afternoon.

True to Amish form, fifteen or so families showed up to offer their condolences and sympathize with me for being ordained into the ministry.

Over the next month, we continued receiving visitors almost every evening. As people came to express their sympathy, I began reaching out to other ministers for advice. What should I read? Where should I begin?

I knew it would not be easy. I did not have a personal relationship with the Lord, yet I was expected to study the Bible—primarily in German—and prepare sermons. I was attempting to teach God's Word without the help of the Holy Spirit. At that time, I didn't even understand who the Holy Spirit was, let alone possess Him. To Mahlon's credit, he had given me an English King James Bible for when I struggled with the German text.

Among those who visited were Bishop Mahlon and Minister Junior—two men I still love today. I asked them where to begin my studies. Their advice was: read Revelation, but study the Sermon on the Mount. Mahlon cautioned me against diving too deeply into Revelation, warning that people who spent too much time there often ended up with "a new faith."

During those early days of ministry, I was trying to understand more of what I was reading in Scripture. One day I asked Mahlon and Junior a question I thought would have an obvious answer: "What is the Holy Spirit?"

I expected these seasoned ministers

to explain who this Comforter was whom Jesus spoke of and how His power worked in the life of a believer. I was taken aback when, after a long silence, one of them said, "No one really knows. It's hard to explain."

During my first few years as a minister, I assumed our older ministers had things figured out. Whenever I encountered a passage that seemed to conflict with Amish teaching, I concluded that I simply did not understand it yet. I trusted that the older ministers—and our forefathers—were on the proper track and honest with Scripture.

About two years into my ministry, I was talking with Junior (Jonas Miller) the other minister in our district. He was widely respected as an intelligent and godly man, and I believe he was both.

During one conversation, Junior mentioned a pamphlet from a Mennonite organization called *Reaching Out*. The pamphlet discussed what it called "the missing cog in Amish belief: the Great Commission."

"One thing I believe the Amish church is at fault for," Junior told me, "is our failure to fulfill the Great Commission."

He acknowledged many Amish strengths and practices, yet could not escape Christ's command in Matthew 28 to go into all nations, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey His commands.

Unlike many Amish ministers, Junior did not try to explain the passage away. He believed it still applied. The question, in his mind, was how we were supposed to obey it—and why it was being ignored. But ultimately, both he and I concluded that our forefathers must have known what they were doing, and it was better to honor the old way than to obey what seemed so plain in Scripture.

There were other things Junior saw in Scripture that did not fit neatly into traditional Amish teaching.

For example, he was the first person who ever told me it was possible to know that you are born again.

He pointed me to 2 Timothy 4, where Paul confidently speaks of the crown of righteousness awaiting him. Junior noted that Paul did not say it was reserved only for himself, but for all who long for Christ's appearing.

"It seems irrefutable," Junior would say. "Paul knew he was going to heaven. And he makes it clear others can know as well. So it must be possible to know—I just can't figure out how."

We had that conversation many times. Usually Junior brought it up.

"Our forefathers taught that you can't know," he would say. "But Scripture seems plain. I just hope someday I can have the confidence Paul had."

Looking back, I believe this is where both Junior and I were held back. We were convinced that Amish leaders of the past had largely been right. As a result, whenever Scripture challenged tradition, we struggled to follow it to its logical conclusion. We doubted our ability to understand Scripture and trusted that others had understood it better. Sadly, they likely doubted themselves too, and were trusting others. What a quagmire.

I also remember asking Junior about the *Vostelling*. For those unfamiliar, it is a short historical overview given by the bishop before communion and ordination services.

My question was this: Why do we go through the *Vostelling* twice—both in communion and ordination services—when ministers then repeat the same message in greater detail? It seemed

like a waste of time. But no one was willing to challenge the old way. Somewhere, someone had started the practice, and there had to be a reason. Therefore, we dared not question it.

It's a good thing past generations weren't idol worshipers, or the Amish world might still be worshiping idols! Or perhaps what I have just described is a form of idolatry? That is, trusting tradition and previous generations above the Word of God. Food for thought.

Junior's answer was typical: "I don't know. I guess we've always done it that way."

It reminds me of the story of a young wife who always cut the ends off a ham before putting it in the roaster. One day her husband asked why.

"I don't know," she replied. "My mother always did it."

So they called her mother and asked her.

"That is what my mother always did" she said.

So they called the grandmother.

"Oh," she replied, "because my roaster was too small to fit the entire ham."

What began as a practical necessity had become a tradition long after the original reason no longer existed.

For years I approached Scripture the same way. Whenever I encountered a passage that seemed to contradict what I had been taught, I assumed I was the one misunderstanding it. I trusted that those who came before me must have been right. If I could just emulate them, I would be in a good position.

About three years into my ministry, I called one of those roadside billboard ministries. You've probably seen the signs: "Are You Going to Heaven or Hell?" or, "Jesus Is Alive."

During that conversation, the man on the phone challenged me regarding the Amish practice of excommunication.

Many Amish churches use excommunication not only for those who leave the church, but also as part of the process of dealing with certain sins. For example, someone who confessed sexual sin might be shunned for a period of time and then restored. In some cases, this process was viewed as necessary for forgiveness and reconciliation.

The man on the phone challenged that understanding from Scripture.

The conversation was very unsettling because I knew he was making valid points. As we talked, it became increasingly clear to me that biblical excommunication was intended for unrepentant sinners—people who refused to turn from sin—not for those who had already confessed and desired forgiveness.

I did not want to admit it, but I knew he was right.

For several more years I pushed those thoughts to the back of my mind. The issue continued to bother me, yet I avoided dealing with it honestly. I knew that if I openly questioned the practice, I would likely be viewed as having "a new faith."

During those years, my wife and I occasionally talked about heaven. Those conversations made me uncomfortable because I knew intuitively that I was not a good person. Something didn't feel right. Of course, life should not be based on feelings, but it was deeper than that—like I was missing the purpose of life. I knew I wasn't connected with God, and I certainly didn't possess a faith like what I read in the Scriptures. Someday, I resolved, I would have to knuckle down and get serious about this Christian thing.

By the fall of 2021, tensions had begun to rise within our church. A newly ordained bishop, Levi Kurtz, had been telling people who confessed their sins that they should go directly to God for forgiveness and that excommunication was not necessary for repentance.

As he continued teaching these things, he increasingly found himself in the crosshairs of other ministers and bishops.

The more I studied Scripture, the more I became convinced that Levi's position was closer to what the Bible actually taught than our traditional practice.

I also knew that when the day came that Levi was disciplined for those beliefs, I would not morally be able to remain silent.

So in the fall of 2021, I told my wife, Ida, that we were going to read the Bible with fresh eyes. No more dismissing difficult passages. No more assuming someone else had already figured everything out. No more filtering Scripture through tradition. We were going to read God's Word honestly and follow wherever it led.

At the time, I expected only one outcome. I thought Scripture would confirm that the Amish method of excommunication was wrong and I would be forced to stand for what Scripture taught on that matter. I was prepared to face church discipline if it came to that to defend the truth on that matter.

What I was not prepared for was what God was about to show me.

Looking back, I believe 2 Corinthians 3 describes exactly what happened.

Paul writes that after receiving the Law from God on Mount Sinai, Moses covered his face with a veil as he gave the Law to the Israelites because the glory of God shone from him. The Israelites

could not look into or experience the glory of God as long as they thought the law could save them (because it only condemned them). Paul then explains that a similar veil remains over the hearts of those who continue looking to the law that condemns them for salvation.

That was my condition.

For years I had trusted in just following the old way and doing the best I could. I was attempting to earn peace with Him through good behavior and religious performance. A veil covered my eyes. I trusted what I had been taught. I trusted that previous generations must have understood things correctly.

But just as the Israelites could not experience the glory of God through vain attempts to keep the Law, neither could I.

If one continues reading in 2 Corinthians 3 the solution is revealed. Verse 16 says that when we turn to Christ the veil is taken away. When Ida and I finally resolved to read Scripture honestly and simply follow wherever it led, that veil began to lift.

At the time I did not realize what was happening. I only knew that the Bible was suddenly coming alive. Passages I had wrestled with for years while preparing sermons began to make sense. Truths I had overlooked became clear. In the process we began to realize other things had taken a more important role in our life than Jesus. For example, as Junior had laid out to me, I knew we were not obeying Jesus' Great Commission. Yet Ida and I had chosen to disregard that because it didn't fit well into our culture, proving that we deemed our culture more important than the commandments of the Lord Jesus.

No longer would that be the case. We decided we would obey Jesus supremely, believing the He and only He should rule our lives. It was January of 2022

when Ida and I, for the first time in our lives, knew that we had been born again and that eternal life awaited us.

Now, I don't want to be misunderstood. We did not believe that simply praying a prayer guarantees heaven regardless of how a person lives. Nor did we believe that genuine faith exists if there is no change of behavior.

We believed then, as we do today, that a person is born again through faith in Jesus Christ, and that genuine faith produces obedience—obedience first and foremost to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. A person who continually and deliberately lives in rebellion against Christ while claiming to belong to Him is deceiving himself. And a form of living in rebellion against Christ is honoring and obeying tradition, authorities, church leaders, forefathers, or anything else that takes precedence above the Lordship of Jesus.

Once the initial shock wore off, we knew this was news others needed to hear.

We met David (co-publisher of *The Awakening!* who had been born again 45 years earlier) shortly after our conversion. David's son had recently bought a house from my sister. When he and his wife discovered that they had encountered some Amish that were open to having spiritual conversation they soon introduced David to my sister, who then in turn introduced him to me. Through David's encouragement, and together with Levi and others, we began inviting friends and family into our home to study the Bible.

I knew that Bible studies were a bit controversial, and having them might result in discipline from the church, but now Jesus was my Lord. I was suddenly consumed with obeying Him supremely, and helping others to see their need for doing that. We had heard from

a young age that having Bible studies was not allowed, and that people who had Bible studies developed a new faith and rarely remained as members in good standing of the Old Order Amish. Oddly, it wasn't a good thing to dig too deeply into God's Word.

Now when I look back, I wonder how I ever believed that. Should there not have been a lesson to me that those who study their Bible were being cast out from among those who weren't studying their Bibles? Logically speaking, which group do you suppose would be closest to obeying God's Word? How can studying God's Word lead you away from God's Word?

Over the following months, half a dozen different Bible studies sprang up. People began reading Scripture for themselves. Many came to faith in Christ and experienced real freedom from sins that had enslaved them for years.

We saw people set free from alcohol, addictions, and other destructive patterns they had never been able to overcome.

Some had been excommunicated multiple times for the same sin and still found themselves trapped in the same cycles. Yet when they surrendered their lives to Christ and devoted themselves to Him, something changed. They experienced freedom from sin's power and began living transformed lives.

I didn't know how all of this would end, but it didn't take long for it to come to the attention of the local ministry.

I won't share every detail. Many things happened during that season, and I have no desire to make others look worse than they were. But about three months after we were born again, as word of our Bible studies began to spread, we

were silenced by the church and were accused of having "a new faith."

The reason was, we were teaching that no one can be good enough to earn heaven and that being Amish, by itself, does not save anyone. A person can follow every church rule and still be lost.

Even after we were born again, Ida and I did not desire to leave the Amish. I remember telling her, "We'll probably still be Amish ten years from now." At the time we were silenced by the church we were still living as Amish people in every outward sense. We dressed Amish, did not drive, and continued following the church rules. We decided as long as we could be Amish without compromising our faith we were going to stay.

But, six weeks after being silenced, we were excommunicated by the church for preaching a new gospel. At that point we knew there was no going back. In order to be re-instated as members we would have to deny that what we had been saying was true by professing that we had earned this "discipline" from the church. We knew that wasn't possible for us. It would require us to deny the One who has given us His Spirit and transformed our lives. It certainly hurt to be cut off from people we loved and had spent years of our life with. To this day the one thing I miss about being Amish is all the relationships that are now either strained or non-existent. People whom I spent a lot of time with have turned their backs on us and hardly acknowledge our existence.

It certainly hurt to be cut off from people we loved and had spent years of our life with. To this day the one thing I miss about being Amish is all the relationships that are now either strained or non-existent. People whom I spent a lot of time with have turned their backs

on us and hardly acknowledge our existence.

Since being born again four years ago, Ida and I have lived lives defined by obedience to our Lord. Of course, everyone allows their lives to be defined by obedience to something, but too often it is their money, their status, their culture, their (fill in the blank). But someday everyone will have their eyes opened and confess that Jesus is Lord (see Philippians 2:10-11). They will realize that other things that took pre-eminence in their lives should not have. But it will be too late. Don't be one of those people. Someday you WILL acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus. Why not do so now while there is time?

I now work full time for *Heavens Family*, a non-profit organization that serves in developing nations around the world. I have had the opportunity to travel to nine countries throughout Africa and Asia, where I have witnessed things that have had a profound impact on me.

I have stood on a hilltop in Rwanda, Africa, as a 1994 Genocide survivor named Frank pointed out the hillside his family had fled to when he was three years old. He told me how the government had lured his family and many others out of the surrounding hillsides by proclaiming through a loudspeaker that they would protect them. Once the government had lured them all into the town hall, they locked the doors and went person to person, killing each one as they went. The only reason Frank survived is because his mother set him in a corner and then sat directly in front of him so he was unseen and passed over, even though his mother was slaughtered.

I have sat in a circle with 6- to 12-year-old children in Myanmar as they prayed and worshipped, and watched them sob as they told stories of hardship those of us in the U.S. cannot fathom. Each

child was given one piece of chicken, a coca cola, and a small handful of french fries for their meal. Not a single child ate more than a few bites. They took the rest home to share with their families, likely the only meal they would eat that day.

I have visited a brick kiln in Pakistan where families are digging clay out of the banks and forming it into bricks, not because they want to, but because they have inherited a debt from their parents, or grandparents, or great grandparents and they are obligated to pay it back to the brick kiln owner. The 200% interest rate and their illiteracy is leveraged by the kiln owner to keep them forever indebted. A 5-year-old-boy—who was afraid to take a break before his mud pan was empty for fear of a beating at the hands of the kiln owner—has no other future to look forward to except growing up and inheriting his family's debt, and then spending his life working to pay towards it. It is estimated that there are three million people in this type of slavery in Pakistan. They are often held generationally-captive by a debt of less than two thousand dollars.

In every country I have visited, I have heard and witnessed scores of similar stories. Stories of poverty and injustice. Stories of suffering and heartbreak. Stories of almost unimaginable difficulty.

Visiting these people has taught me many lessons: Lessons in resilience and contentment. I have been humbled as I have visited people's homes who don't know if they will eat next week, yet they prepare the best in their home for visitors like myself. People who have seemingly nothing to give, yet anything they do have they are willing to share.

And always on my long flights home I am thinking. Thinking and wishing.

I think of how petty are the things on which the Anabaptist world focuses.

Does God really care whether someone wears a straw hat or not when six hundred and seventy million people face hunger every day? Is God actually proud of the Anabaptist world's alleged non-conformity when the preservation of that non-conformity has contributed to neglecting Jesus' Great Commission in light of the fact that twenty-five percent of the world has not heard the name of Jesus?

And I wish. I wish I could take every single Amish person in the world to Pakistan with me to visit Naveed's widow. To hear the story of how her husband was shot and killed for sharing the gospel. I wish I could take them to Myanmar to visit Daw Chin Ma and her family who had to flee their home due to civil war, and spend the next year living in a chicken hut on a benevolent pastor's land because he simply had too many other refugees living with him to offer them anything better. I wish I could take them to Africa to hear the stories of people who don't know if they will have a meal tomorrow.

But most of all I wish I could show North America's four hundred thousand Amish people how far they have drifted from things that actually matter. How they are "straining out the gnats and swallowing the camels" to borrow Jesus' words.

And I wish I could persuade them all, to make Jesus their true Lord. Then they would focus, not on minor things, but on what He said were the two major things—loving Him and others, and especially other believers around the world who are suffering because of their faith. May God help us.



A Different Gospel?

By David Kirkwood

A brief history lesson:

Before 509 BC, the world was ruled 100% by kings, pharaohs, and chiefs.

Between 509 BC and 27 BC, the world was ruled 95% by kings. Only two republics appeared during that period—Athens and the Roman Republic (which later became an empire under Augustus in 27 BC).

Between 27 BC and 700 AD, the world was again ruled 100% by emperors, kings, and caliphs.

Between 700 AD and 1800 AD, the world was ruled 98% by kings. Republics existed only in a handful of places at various times.

In 1776, as you probably know, a new republic was born: the United States. That historic event and its fruit have since inspired the world and spread. Yet even today, 70–75% of the world's people live under authoritarian, one-party, or hybrid rule. Many nations call themselves "republics," but they aren't. Think of China, Russia, and many Middle Eastern and African states.

Here's a helpful rule of thumb: Kings ruled 97% of humanity for 97% of recorded human history.

All of this is to say that those of us who have lived our entire lives in relatively democratic countries are at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the concept of kings. *Kings rule.* They govern *kingdoms*. They embody the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government in a single person. There is no balance of powers or rule of law. Kings wield supreme authority. They do what they want, when they want, and treat others however they please.

Think of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker in the time of Joseph. They "offended their lord" (Gen. 40:1) and were promptly thrown into prison. Three days later, during his birthday feast, Pharaoh decided to restore the cupbearer and execute the baker. His orders were carried out immediately. That scene reminds us of what King Herod did regarding John the Baptist during one of *his* birthday parties. Both stories illustrate the absolute authority of kings. Kings expect to be feared and obeyed.

Your 16th-Century Anabaptist ancestors certainly knew something about the authority of kings and king-like rulers. Thousands of Anabaptists were executed by their decrees.

Even though history is filled with mostly self-serving kings—making the very word "king" carry a strong connotation of corruption—it is a title Jesus willingly embraced for Himself. When Pilate asked Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth" (John 18:37; see also Matt. 25:34, 40; 27:11; John 12:13-15). Twice in the book of Revelation, Jesus is called "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). The message there is unmistakable: Jesus is the Supreme King. All other kings should look to Him as *their* King and obey Him.

Lord of lords

We have also largely lost the concept of "lords," who belong in the same category as kings. Lords, too, were to be obeyed. Jesus certainly embraced that title (John 13:13), not because He identified with any of the lords of history, but because He is the "Lord of lords" who has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18).

He expects to be obeyed. That is why He once asked, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

What is both amazing and tragic is that the King of kings and Lord of lords has been reduced—by many who claim to believe in Him—to someone we only need to "accept." That idea is constantly proclaimed from American church pulpits (not in Amish churches, however) every Sunday morning. And, if you point out that perversion, you risk being attacked by the people who are promoting it.

I've heard it said hundreds of times: "I accepted the Lord" or, "She accepted the Lord." Those phrases make no sense. Lords are not *accepted*. It's like saying, "I walked a carrot" or, "I climbed a cloud."

People who have convinced themselves that Jesus is someone to "accept" clearly do not believe in Him as He has revealed Himself—as King of kings and Lord of lords. They actually believe in an idol they've carved and named "Jesus."

If you've read the New Testament, you know Jesus never asked anyone to "accept" Him. He wasn't looking for *accepters*—He was looking for *followers*. More precisely, He never even *asked* people to follow Him. Rather, He *commanded* them to follow Him (see Matt. 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 19:21; Mark 1:17; 2:14; 10:21; Luke 5:27; 9:59; 18:22; John 1:43; 21:19, 22). That is just what we should expect of someone who is the King of kings and Lord of lords!

How heaven must cringe every time a pastor says, "Jesus is asking us to..." Jesus does not ask. He commands. He gave us commandments to obey, not suggestions to consider. He didn't say, "If you love Me, you'll do what I've

asked you to do." He said, "If you love Me, you will *keep My commandments*" (John 14:15).

In light of this tragic distortion of Christ by people who claim to believe in Him, it should be no surprise that the same people have also altered the message He commanded His followers to proclaim. What was that message? After His resurrection, Jesus told the Eleven that "repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations" (Luke 24:47). That is the gospel—the good news. God is making a gracious offer through Jesus: the opportunity to have all of our sins forgiven.

It is, however, a *conditional* offer. Receiving the benefit requires meeting the condition. That condition is repentance.

This divine, conditional offer was not new to the disciples. John the Baptist had preached "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Jesus preached repentance from the very beginning of His ministry (Matt. 4:17; 11:20; Luke 13:3, 5). The disciples had heard Him emphasize it almost daily for at least three years. When He sent the Twelve out to preach, He instructed them to proclaim repentance (Mark 6:12).

Strangely and perversely, many in the "accept Jesus" camp claim that repentance doesn't involve actually turning from sin. It merely means, they say, changing your mind about Jesus. Since they don't actual view Him as King of kings and Lord of lords, "changing their mind" requires no turning from sin.

It's too bad John the Baptist didn't know that. He gave specific instructions about sins his listeners needed to forsake (Luke 3:8-14). So did Jesus—repeatedly. His Sermon on the Mount is filled with warnings about specific sins that could lead people to hell (Matt.

5–7). Paul did the same (see 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-5). He warned the Corinthians about those who had specifically “not repented of the impurity, immorality, and sensuality which they have practiced” (2 Cor. 12:21), and he urged them to examine whether they were truly in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5).

God has been making this same gracious but conditional offer for a very long time. Through the prophet Isaiah He declared:

*Let the wicked forsake his way
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
And let him return to the Lord,
And He will have compassion on him,
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:7).*

Peter preached the same message shortly after Pentecost: “Therefore *repent* and return, *so that your sins may be wiped away*” (Acts 3:19, emphasis added).

What Does it Mean to Repent?

Simply put, to repent is to make *the Lord your Lord*. Before repentance, Jesus is not your Lord—as proven by your disobedient lifestyle. You have not yet believed in Him (even if you say you believe in Him or think you believe in Him). When you repent, He will become your Lord—as proven by your new obedience. If you have never repented in this way, you have never truly believed in Jesus. You are not yet born again. God’s Holy Spirit does not yet dwell in you. If you die in that state, you will be condemned when you stand before Him in judgment.

But you can change all of that right now! Simply do what the apostle Paul told the convicted Philippian jailer to do when he asked, “What must I do to

be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Paul replied, “Believe in the *Lord Jesus*, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31, emphasis added). The Philippian jailer, like everyone in his day, understood the concept of lords. He, like them, lived in an empire ruled by an emperor. When Paul told him that he would be saved if he believed in the Lord Jesus, he knew what Paul meant. To believe in the Lord Jesus meant to start obeying Him as the supreme authority.

The same promise Paul made to the Philippians jailer applies to you and everyone else. To be saved, you must believe in the *Lord Jesus*. That means making Him your Lord. If you do, you will go from the state of being unsaved to the state of being saved. You will be born again. That is exactly what Jonas and Ida Kurtz experienced, as you know if you’ve read Jonas’ testimony in this issue of *The Awakening*.

Had that Philippian jailer died of a heart attack one second after he believed in the Lord Jesus, he would have died a saved man and found himself in heaven. If he continued living after he believed in the Lord Jesus (which he did, according to the Bible), and he continued believing in the Lord Jesus, then he continually lived with the assurance that, if he died of at any time, he would have died a saved man.

That’s the reason both Jonas and myself (and millions of other Christians around the world) live with continual assurance of our eternal destiny. *We believe in the Lord Jesus, and that is what is required for salvation*. Anyone can look at our lives and tell that we believe in the Lord Jesus because we’re striving, albeit imperfectly at times, to obey Jesus’ commandments. What I am doing right now, for example, that is, writing these words to you about how to be saved, I am doing out of obedience to Jesus. He commanded His followers to proclaim

“repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 24:47). That is what I’m doing. I’m proclaiming to you that you can have all your sins forgiven if you will repent, making *the Lord your Lord*. If only one person who is reading this does that, it will have been worth my time and effort.

And I’m doing that knowing full well that I’m going to receive negative letters in the mail from some of you who will persecute me for telling the truth. But it doesn’t matter to me, because I believe in the Lord Jesus, and obeying Him is much more important than protecting myself from a little persecution.

When the Philippian jailer asked Paul what he must do to be saved, Paul did not tell him, “Just accept Jesus as your personal Savior.” That would have been a “different gospel” (Gal. 1:6). Neither did Paul say, “Start keeping rules passed down from your ancestors that Jesus never mentioned, and then you *may* have a chance of being saved in the end, but you can’t ever know for certain, and if you are certain, you are full of pride.” That—as most readers know—is the most common version of the “Amish gospel”—which directly contradicts Paul’s gospel. It, too, is a “different gospel.” I know that some readers will bristle at what I’ve said, but as Paul once asked, “Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16).

Once you believe the gospel Paul declared to the Philippian jailer (the biblical gospel), you can no longer believe the Amish gospel, because the two contradict each other. The biblical gospel *promises* (guarantees) salvation whereas the Amish gospel only offers a *possibility* of salvation. The biblical gospel is based on *faith* whereas the Amish gospel is based on *works*. To summarize, the biblical gospel is a *sure promise* for those who *believe*. The Amish gospel is

an *uncertain hope* for those who *work*.

Jesus' Gospel

Paul's gospel, of course, agreed 100% with Jesus' gospel. They were identical. Here is proof:

Jesus declared, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *believes in Him* shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Paul told the Philippian jailer, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus*, and you will be saved." Both Jesus and Paul agreed that salvation is gained by believing in a divine Person. That person is the Lord Jesus. Belief in him naturally starts with repentance and continues with obedience. So, when anyone hinges a hope of salvation on keeping man-made rules inherited from their parents and grandparents, they contradict Jesus and Paul, and they are preaching "a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6).

Concerning that idea of preaching a "different gospel," Paul sternly warned, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" (Gal. 1:8). That could be paraphrased, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel that is contrary to 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved,' he is to be accursed!" If you are a bishop or minister who has been preaching the Amish gospel of salvation-by-keeping-rules-inherited-from-parents, Paul's warning applies to you.

Having received hundreds of letters from sincere Amish folks, ministers, and bishops, I can anticipate the objections (all of which I've answered in my book, *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*.) The main objection is, "We Amish don't preach that salvation is gained through keeping the rules we've inherited from our parents. In fact, we

often tell our church congregations that the ordnung can't save them." Let's consider that claim.

Every Amish person knows that, if he decides to stop keeping the inherited rules (to almost any degree) he will be excommunicated and shunned, even by his closest family members, and he will be told that, unless he repents and once again starts keeping the ordnung, he will go to hell. I do realize that this is practiced by varying degrees of severity by Old Order groups. Regardless, how is that not communicating "salvation-by-keeping-inherited rules"? How can any Amish bishop or minister claim that they don't preach "salvation-by-ordnung-keeping" when they tell ordnung-breakers that they will go to hell if they don't keep the ordnung?

And this is why all Amish people believe that ordnung keeping is necessary to gain heaven and escape hell. And that contradicts what Jesus and Paul taught. It's a different gospel, and according to Paul, gospels that are different invite God's curse.

Paul Doubles Down

After Paul *first* warned about embracing a different gospel, he repeated himself: "As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Gal. 1:9). At the risk of being redundant, that could be paraphrased, "As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved,' he is to be accursed!"

Then, in his very next sentence, Paul revealed what was motivating him to make such bold declarations:

For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still try-

ing to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

Anyone who is seeking the favor of men rather than God is not a bond-servant of Christ. Here's another way of saying that: *Jesus is not Lord of those who live to gain the favor of men over the favor of Jesus*. They are not His bond-servants. They don't believe in Him. That is, they don't believe in the *Lord* Jesus. If keeping inherited rules defines your life rather than keeping Jesus' commandments, then parents, not Jesus, is Lord.

And that is my loving warning to Amish bishops and ministers who, whether they admit it or not, are conveying to the people in their churches that keeping inherited rules is required for getting into heaven. I am writing this with tears in my eyes: You are proving that you are not a bond-servant of Jesus Christ because what you are communicating contradicts His gospel. You, unlike Paul, are seeking the favor of men rather than God. You actually don't believe in the Lord Jesus, as proven by the fact that He is not your Lord.

You can, however, start believing in Him right now, and if you do, that will be the end of your preaching salvation-by-keeping-inherited rules. If you truly believe in the Lord Jesus, making *the Lord your Lord*, obeying *Him* will become the most important thing in your life, regardless of what it costs you. It will be more important to you than the approval of family, friends, and other ministers, just as it was to your Anabaptist ancestors long ago, many of whom paid with their lives for their faith. Remember, Jesus said:

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matt. 10:37). We can determine who we love the

most by who we are most trying to please. Many Amish people are trying to please other people more than they are trying to please Jesus. That is obvious, because keeping Amish traditions and man-made rules is more important to them than obeying Jesus' commandments. Jesus is not their Lord. Again, it proves they don't actually believe in Him.

Am I misreading Jesus' words in Matthew 10:37? No, we can read immediately before them:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his household" (Matt. 10:34-36).

Family division was inevitable as a result of the Lord Jesus coming to earth as a man. Some would believe in Him and thus make Him their Lord. Some would not believe in Him, and thus He would not become their Lord. When that occurs within a family, there is division, and the unbelievers, full of the devil, hate the believers, who are filled with God's Holy Spirit. I've watched that occur so many times in the Amish world. What makes that family division even more tragic is that the people who are full of the devil think they are believers in Jesus. But they prove they are not by their persecution of those who are following Jesus and obeying His commandments rather than the traditions of men. As the apostle John wrote:

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother (1John 3:10).

So the all-important question is this:

Is the Lord Jesus your Lord? If He is not, you don't believe in Him. If He is, then your supreme goal every day is to obey His commandments. Pleasing Him is more important than pleasing anyone else. Thus, if you are forced to choose between pleasing Him or pleasing someone else, you will choose to please Him. If you are forced to choose between keeping an inherited rule or choosing to obey Him, you will choose to obey Him, no matter what the consequences. If you choose to obey the inherited rule over Him, you show that your parents and grandparents are your lord. You don't believe in Him because He is not your Lord. It is just that simple.

Jesus told His followers that it was impossible for anyone to serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). There can be only one master, because masters demand supreme devotion. Jesus cannot be your master along with someone or something else. Clearly, Amish ordnunge compete for mastership with the Lord Jesus. It is impossible to serve them both. It must be one or the other. Tragically, most Amish people chose the ordnung over Jesus. When someone from within their ranks makes Jesus their Lord because they actually believe in Him and start to obey His commandments, they cast him out! This has occurred in the Amish world thousands, if not tens of thousands of times. And the persecutors imagine that they are Christians as they persecute actual Christians! It is tragic.

Allow me to share an analogy, although like all analogies, it is imperfect:

Imagine a village named Ancestorville—in the great nation of Godsdom. Ancestorville has existed for hundreds of years, and what makes it unique is that it is administrated from the grave by former residents.

Everyone in Ancestorville believes that the former residents from long ago were smarter than them. Therefore, they believe everyone should live their lives exactly like their ancestors did. As a result, Ancestorville's residents are governed by hundreds of rules that regulate every aspect of their lives. There are scores of rules about what everyone can and cannot wear, so that everyone essentially wears uniforms. There are rules about what they can and cannot own, so that everyone owns and doesn't own the same things. There are rules about what they can and cannot do on certain days of the week, so that everyone keeps the same general daily and weekly schedule. And there are many, many other rules in Ancestorville.

All of Ancestorville's rules are strictly enforced. If anyone is caught breaking any of them, they are confronted, and if they don't publicly confess and repent, they are forced to leave Ancestorville and say goodbye to their family members and friends. That fear helps motivate everyone to keep all the rules, or to at least to only break them when no one is watching.

Everyone in Ancestorville is also convinced that, if they don't keep all the rules, or if they ever move away from Ancestorville, when they die, they will be thrown into a great fire where they will be burned alive. That terrible place is called Perdition. But, if they remain all their lives in Ancestorville and keep all the rules, they might be considered worthy to live in a place called Paradise—but only if they keep the rules sufficiently. But no one ever knows if they are keeping the rules sufficiently. That helps motivate Ancestorville's residents to keep all the rules.

One day, one of Ancestorville's residents has reason to travel to the city of Gracetown, the capital city of Godsdome, for the first time in his life. When he arrives, he is surprised to see that no one in that city is dressed like him, nor are they keeping any of the rules that residents of Ancestorville keep. When he inquires further, He learns that Gracetown has no mayor. Rather, it is ruled by a person whom everyone calls the "Great Judge," who not only rules Gracetown, but the entire nation of Godsdome. He also learns that no one has ever seen the Great Judge, because he is invisible, but that he lives right in Gracetown, and he has spoken in the past through prophets who recorded his words. He revealed Himself through them as both righteous and merciful. Everyone believes the Great Judge is the one who decides if people go to Perdition or Paradise after they die.

Surprisingly to the visitor, everyone in Gracetown also seems to be certain that they will be in Paradise after they die, even though nobody is keeping the Ancestorville rules. So he begins asking Gracetown residents about their confidence. Most of them give him the same response: "At one time, none of us believed in the Great Judge, and it was obvious, because we all did many evil things to each other. But when we finally believed in Him, we naturally turned away from our evil lives because we knew that pleasing Him was the most important thing. He's the Great Judge! He decides if we are sent to Perdition or Paradise!

"When we repented, he sent us a wonderful message that he would not be holding against us any of the evil we had done. He wouldn't be taking it into consideration when He judges us. Then, he gave us some

special food to eat every day that would help us to always do what is right. And he promised us that, even if we did make a mistake and do something evil, he would not hold it against us if we just sent him a short note of apology. He really loves us, and He is a gracious judge! We have all heard a rumor that somehow His own past sufferings made it possible for Him to forgive us. And he even said that he has adopted us as his own children, and that he is now our father!"

The visitor from Ancestorville was stunned. The mayor of Ancestorville had told the Ancestorville residents about the Great Judge, but he had convinced them that the Great Judge could only be pleased if they kept the hundreds of rules passed down through their parents. Yet it was obvious that no one who lived in the same city as the Great Judge was keeping any of the rules kept in Ancestorville.

So the visitor continued his inquiry, "This all sounds so wonderful! But you still haven't told me what rules the Great Judge has given to you that He wants you to obey! What are they?" And again, just about everyone he asked gave him the same response: "To make it easy for us, he gave us two rules that, if we keep them, we will automatically keep any and all other rules he could give us. The first rule is that we love him, the Great Judge, supremely. And the second one is that we love each other as he has loved us, treating everyone else just as we want to be treated. He wants us to show our love by making sacrifices for others who are suffering. By those two rules He will judge us, and he has even promised to give us extra reward in Paradise for even the smallest acts of love!"

Again, the visitor from Ancestorville

was stunned. He suddenly realized that the majority of rules followed in Ancestorville had nothing to do with loving other people. In fact, the rules actually caused many divisions among Ancestorville's residents, which is why Ancestorville consisted of 100 neighborhoods that were separated from each other by high walls. Although they agreed on most of his rules, they didn't agree on all of them. Some neighborhoods added their own additional rules.

Not only that, but all of the rules had destroyed families whose members didn't agree about them. Many family members had been estranged from one another for years, separated by high walls. It was tragic! How much better it would be, the visitor thought, if Ancestorville only had two rules. Then all of the residents would no longer have to fight about so many other rules. And all the broken families could be reunited in love.

The visitor from Ancestorville was overwhelmed by the wonderful news about the Great Judge. He believed it. He believed in the Great Judge. Because he did, he felt remorse for his selfishness and how little love he had shown to others—even though he had done a pretty good job of keeping all of the rules of Ancestorville when other residents were watching. But his heart had now changed, and he was sure the Great Judge would keep his promise to not hold against him any evil thing he had done. Now he was determined to live his life to please the Great Judge.

And now, just as suddenly, all of the Ancestorville rules became meaningless. He knew he would not be focused on them any longer as he had been all of his life, but rather, he would focus on loving the Great

Judge, loving others, and making sacrifices for those who are suffering. And he couldn't wait to travel back to Ancestorville to tell everyone the good news.

That is, as I said at the beginning, an imperfect analogy, as are all analogies. But it makes my point clear. Once you truly believe in the Lord Jesus, you will repent and become His follower, regardless of the cost. You will become His bond-servant and no longer live to please others at the expense of pleasing Him. You will no longer focus on man-made rules.

If the visitor to Gracetown had returned to Ancestorville and continued life just as before, it would have been proof that he didn't believe in the Great Judge or the message of the residents of Gracetown who loved him so much. So it is for everyone who, after hearing the gospel, continues trying to work their way to heaven by ordnung-keeping. The repentance that accompanies genuine belief in the Lord Jesus is so profound that the Bible refers to it as being "born again." It is akin to starting life over again as a baby. You may have been told that you were born again when you were baptized as a teenager, but when people are genuinely born again, no one has to tell them they are born again. They know it. It is so profound that, from then on, they view their life in two parts: before, and after, their rebirth. To whatever degree the ordnung may have previously helped them regulate their moral behavior, they now see it as completely unnecessary, because they are inwardly motivated morally by their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for Him. They realize that ordnungs are for spiritually dead people who have not been born again, and who don't have the Holy Spirit living in them. Ordnungs influence outward, public behavior through social pressure, but do nothing to change inward thoughts

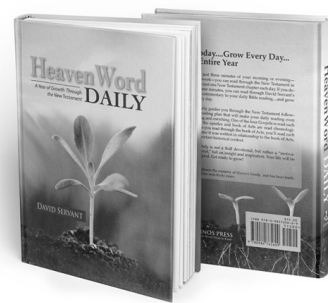
or private actions. In contrast, the new birth changes hearts, which influences both public and private behavior, as well as inward thoughts, through love for God. Jesus promised:

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him (John 14:23).

When you first begin to love Jesus, you start keeping *His* word. That is, you start obeying *Him*. And as soon as you do, the Father starts loving you in a special way, and He and Jesus both come to live in you through the Holy Spirit. You become a "new creation in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17a) and are able to say, "the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17b).

Don't wait another second. Make Jesus your Lord. Then watch Him do a miracle in your life!

For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom. 14:9).



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By

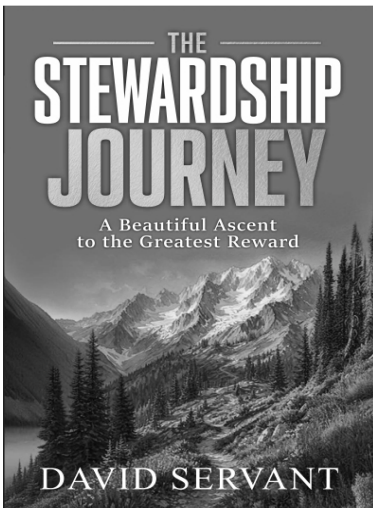
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During His earthly ministry, Jesus told at least six parables about stewards. He wanted His followers—then and now—to understand that our relationship with God is fundamentally a stewardship. We have all been entrusted with time, talents, and treasures, and one day we will give an account.

Jesus made it clear that not all stewards will receive the same reward. Our eter-

IT'S TIME TO BEGIN YOUR ASCENT

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Remembering “The Least of These”

Jesus commands us to love and care for “the least of these.” It's not an option or an add-on to our faith.

If the testimony and message in this issue has encouraged you, and you would like to join in what Jesus is doing around the world to build His Kingdom, I would invite you to consider partnering with Heaven's Family. It is a ministry I am honored to serve with, and one that I believe faithfully stewards the resources entrusted to it for the advancement of the gospel.

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The Awakening!



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- **My Story for God's Glory**
- **A Different Gospel?**
- **The Stewardship Journey**