



# The Way to the City of Peace

*Pieter Pietersz (1574-1651)*

Most of our readers are familiar with John Bunyan's allegory called *Pilgrim's Progress*. What few realize is that Bunyan's story was not the first allegory; in fact, it followed a number of other similar stories. The following was written 50 years before *Pilgrim's Progress* was penned.

As you read this Anabaptist allegory, think about how it compares with Bunyan's Puritan story. There is a major difference in outlook. Can you see it? ~

**Pieter:** Good day, friend. Where do you come from on your journey? Have you any news? What have you heard? (He. 12:22)

**Jan:** I have been traveling diligently in the wilderness of this world, seeking a city called the City of Peace, and through intense seeking have found it.

**Pieter:** Dear Jan, tell me something about it; I would love to hear nothing more eagerly, for strife and lack of peace is everywhere in the cities and villages. Can such a city still be found?

**Jan:** You will be surprised to hear it. This city is little known, and so many people pass it by without paying attention to what it is inside. (Mt. 7:14)

**Pieter:** Well, why does this happen? Why do people pass it by without looking at it? Does one not gladly go into a nearby city to look at it? What is the reason, is it attractive?

**Jan:** This city has such a narrow entrance, and the path branches away from where most people walk, that few people return to see it. (2 Esd. 7:7; 9:15; 8:3) Besides this, there is such heavy traffic on the broad way where most people walk, both young and old, since it offers pleasures for the eyes and the flesh, (Re. 18:11) with beer and wine in the celebration of the god Bacchus: whatever one wishes, to fill the stomach as each one pleases, as the masses go by, drunkards, whoremongers, exhibitionists, greedy people, haughty people, cruel people, selfish people; all these and many others pass by. (Ro. 1:29) Only seldom does someone turn around and come to the City

of Peace, so lonely, separated, and unwanted is this path to carnal people.

Also, as one seeks to enter the city one observes that the gate is very low and that one must bow down in order to enter (Lu. 13:24); those who are somewhat fat and coarse in their carnal desires cannot make it, (Ga. 5:20) or the clothes—called the old being—must be removed before entering that the old sinful flesh and blood may remain hanging at the gate posts. (Ep. 4:22; Co 3:8) Also, since the external city has no beauty or worldly splendor the carnal person does not want to enter, to press on despite the pain. (Is. 53:5)

Nevertheless, I have never seen or known of such a beautiful city with greater unity, where its citizens themselves are the living stones formed together (1 Pe. 2:5; 1 Co. 3:11), and where the foundation of the city was the indestructible foundation stone which no flood, thunderstorm, or earthquake can shake or move, even if the entire sea should flow against it. (Ps. 46:4) And those who live in it have such a firm faith in their king that they are secure under their fig tree without fear. (Is. 25:4; Wis. of Sol. 3:9) It was such that I was surprised that this could be found on earth, which is such a wilderness; but it must cost work, suffering, prayer, and tears before one can enter.

**Pieter:** Dear Jan, I must ask; tell me and I shall listen patiently: What kind of people live in this city? What kind of king does it have who has overcome others to win it?

**Jan:** I have found such a friendly fellowship in the City as though I were in another world. (Ga. 5:22) As I stayed there longer, I saw their noble virtues, how their nobility increased in humility the higher they were, and that their knights—who had the most respect—were the smallest among them. (Mt. 3:11; 1 Co. 15:8) Their noble fellowship consisted in that they never had strife among themselves, and their king, who has made knights of all of them, is king of the spiritual Jerusalem<sup>1</sup> where there is always peace.

**Pieter:** Well, when there was something to distribute, whether inherited or taken from others, did it go well, did no one look cross-eyed?

**Jan:** Oh no, for their king had given a law which stood in the midst of them, that they should love their neighbor as themselves. (Mt. 22:37-39) They believe this law so firmly, and cling to it so zealously, that they never begrudge others, unless it were that some felt that they had received more than their fair share. (Ro 13:9; Ph. 2:4)

**Pieter:** Well, Jan, there might well be greedy ones among them who would want the most?

---

<sup>1</sup> Remember ... the name Jerusalem means "City of Peace."

**Jan:** There is not a single greedy person living in the City of Peace for they cannot enter the narrow gate and remain greedy. (Ep. 5:5) Greed is ungodly and the root of all evil which has no inheritance in the kingdom of God and can therefore also not be present in the holy church of God, except of course by the clever ones who carry the name, but in vain. (Mt. 19:22; 1 Ti. 6:6; Co. 3:5)

**Pieter:** But someone else could enter; wouldn't it happen then?

**Jan:** If that should happen, the City would be destroyed in that moment and her beauty lost. The citizens are those who have been washed in the blood of the

Lamb: no one can become a citizen

in this city unless they first humble themselves under the king who has built it in great love. (Ga. 3:27; 2:21)

While this city seems poor in the eyes of others and he himself, when he was building it, was very poor according to the riches of this world, not even having a place to lay his head, (Mt. 8:20)

he has nevertheless, unlike other kings who take riches from their citizens for themselves to protect their wealth, provided the City with great abundance of riches, riches which are hidden from the carnal eyes of the world. (Ep. 5:27; 2 Co. 8:9, Ep. 1:11) Not only this, but when he ascended to the heavenly Jerusalem, he promised them that he would come again to give eternal life, and to live together with them in eternity. (Ac. 1:11; Mk. 16:19)

While he does all of this out of his great love and goodwill, still, no one can enter the City until he has reached agreement with the king, and is united and accepted by him. (Jn. 14:5; Co. 3:1-11)

**Pieter:** Does this king watch closely, is he particular?

**Jan:** Oh yes, for he has eyes of fire (Re. 1 and 2), which see through the human heart and no one can deceive him with an appearance that is not genuine. This king is such an enemy of greed that he himself left his own kingdom in order to build this city and to share his kingdom here, and all of this because of love. (Ph. 2:5-8) Therefore no one can walk honestly in this fellowship unless he is an enemy of greed and is of one mind with this king and follows him with a pure and honest spirit free of false pretensions, secret hatred, deception, conceit, spiritual pretensions, or self-righteousness. (Ps. 24:4; 1 Th. 5:22) All this must remain outside the City of Peace. (Mt. 23:26; Lu. 18:11)

**Pieter:** I can understand this, but I must ask further. While I feel that this is a wonderful city, I see in the cities

and towns all around a running and a chasing after riches, a holding on to your own advantage, insisting upon your right. Do the citizens of the City of Peace also judge: Surely there must be judges, for it is so tense among people that it is difficult to satisfy everyone, even between husband and wife.

**Jan:** Oh, no, Pieter, the people in the City of Peace are so far from clinging to their own and insisting upon their rights, that they would rather give their coat also in addition to what is asked. Their king has taught them that

if anyone wants to have their coat, they should give them their cloak as well (Mt. 5:40), so that the citizens see their gain in giving and forsaking the things over which others quarrel. (1 Co. 6:7) This always wins, for there is always peace, and in their giving they sometimes win others and bring them to conversion. (Pr. 9:6) All are thus minded, both men and women, and as they walk this path with joy they find great rest for their souls. (Mt. 11:29) If you could only taste how sweet it is to have inner peace with God, and how difficult it is

to live in strife and for the sake of perishable things (Ja. 3:16; 1 Co. 6:7), you would undoubtedly choose the good before evil and the most before the least.

**Pieter:** Yes, yes, Jan, one would then indeed become totally poor and forsake all. Please tell me what your counsel would be then?

**Jan:** Yes, Pieter, that is the reason why most people fear to go into this city; they are afraid of poverty and the loss of their possessions, but this is because of their blindness and ignorance. (Ep. 4:28; Is. 5:8-10) First, people always look upon their physical, earthly well-being, not upon the welfare of their souls, and therefore choose darkness rather than light (Jn. 3:19), calling the good bad and the bad good, choosing the temporal before the eternal, and hold on to these things so firmly that they cannot depart from them. (2 Pe. 2:13) Their own will has chosen their own righteousness and their own self-love.

Because of the indwelling of these evils they always remain the old being, but this must be forsaken and die which is to them as bitter as death itself. (Mt. 23:27; Lu. 9:23; Jn. 9:4) Through their darkened understanding they believe they are right but their vision has been blurred by their stubborn minds. Therefore their trust and refuge remains in the present carnal and temporal riches, believing themselves to be secure but even that which they believe is their assurance of rest brings them the greatest unrest,

*The citizens see their gain in giving and forsaking the things over which others quarrel.*

and that which they believe will be their greatest security in time of need turns out to have forsaken them when that time comes. (Je. 17:5; Lu. 12:19) Thus their assumed wealth brings them into their deepest poverty. (Lu. 16:25)

**Pieter:** Nevertheless Jan, it is generally believed to be good to have some possessions; those who do not are not as respected?

**Jan:** Pieter, my friend, listen carefully to what I have to tell you. What you have said is indeed what the whole world says, but I tell you that those who put their hope in things, as many do, are worshiping an idol named Mammon, before which all people kneel as before a golden portrait. (Mt. 6:24; Lu. 12:19) Let me assure you that as long as you place your well-being there, your heart will not be unburdened of worry and fear, of unrest and torment. (1 Ti. 6:9; 1 Co. 6:6) It is precisely what people consider to be their welfare that causes the lack of peace in the world, the cause of judging<sup>2</sup> and fighting, of wars and strife, of hatred and envy, and selfish profit with each one seeking to win the largest share for themselves. Therefore, people run stiff-necked into each other, buying, selling, lying, deceiving, each one seeking to undercut the other in order to possess the god of gold. (Am. 8:5; Bar. 3:17) This is why there is no peace in the world. Open your eyes!

**Pieter:** Well Jan, tell me further: If the citizens of the City of Peace do not seek to become rich, how can they then feed the poor?

**Jan:** Oh, no, they do not seek earthly treasures, but they can feed the poor for God's blessing is upon the righteous who are content with little. (2 Co. 8:2) They respect the command of the king when he says: do not gather for yourself riches which thieves can destroy and steal (Lu. 12:33), and because they need little for themselves, they are busy sharing their abundance with the poor. They heed the warning of the king when he says: It is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, and easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom. (Mk. 10:23; Mt. 19:23) Since God is the comfort and strength of the faithful and multiplies their small gifts, so their trust is secure in God and they taste the sweetness of heaven rather than what is earthly. (Co. 3:2)

This Paul taught when he entered the City of Peace and became a citizen, that what he had formerly counted

as gain he now regarded as loss because of the king and the love he had experienced from him. (Ph. 3:7) Therefore he also warns his brothers to avoid those who place gain before godliness, as do most of the citizens of Babel. (1 Ti. 6:5) He counted it great gain to be blessed and content, for we brought nothing into the world and it is clear we will carry nothing out; therefore as we have shelter and food, let us be content. Those who want to become rich fall into many temptations and are trapped and condemned by harmful desires and greed, which is the root of all evil.

The citizens of the City of Peace consider this teaching so worthy and avoid the temptations of wanting to become rich, so that I did not find a single one who was a true citizen of the City who sought wealth through greed or the pursuit of money. If the Lord so blessed their work that they have more than they need, they know that these things belong to God, lent to them not that they might attach their heart to them as a treasure, but that they, according to the will of God, will use it to serve their neighbor. (Jb. 31:24; Ps. 50:10; Mt. 6:11) Thus the perishable goods will not soil their heart nor draw it to the treasure as though that was their wealth; rather their riches and treasure are in heaven where they are registered in the book of life. That is the treasure they seek. (Lk. 10:20)

**Pieter:** What counsel do you have, dear friend, for a poor family with a house full of children, who have no income, who cannot work in difficult times because they are sick, or they would like to but cannot work, what then?

**Jan:** Oh, my friend Pieter, do listen to the full provisions in the City of Peace, where they are much better provided for than are those who have chests full of gold, for it is God who cares for them out of his abundance; he has also assigned his angels to watch over them so that they lack nothing. Those who are rich in this world also fail, and suffer want, but those who trust in God have every need met. (Ze. 2:5; Ps. 34:8; Ps. 121:4)

**Pieter:** Is it true that angels watch over those who fear God? This is invisible, which makes me think that there must be some money or visible material things which these people can find and feel secure.

**Jan:** Well, Pieter, you should be ashamed to answer that way; do you think that your money can protect them better than the care of God? That sounds too heathenish and godless. (Lu 12:20; Mt. 6:32-33) Listen further and

*Therefore no one can walk honestly in this fellowship unless he is an enemy of greed.*

---

2 Lawsuits ...

understand. I have told you that they have a rich king who sustains every living thing of earth, the fish in the sea, the birds in the heavens, and above all the people; but this king is so rich that he sustains everything without his wealth being diminished. But the most unusual fact is that he has tied himself to these citizens of the City of Peace with a covenant in which he promised that he would never leave them nor forsake them and further asking them to cast all their burdens upon him for he will care for them. (He. 13:5)

He also urged that we should seek his kingdom and his righteousness and everything will be supplied for us; yes, above all this, that he will be our Father and we shall

**These citizens prefer doing useful work and look upon useless trade and shameless profit as useless, in contrast to which their work meets general human need and the welfare of their brothers.**

be his sons and daughters. (2 Co. 6:18) Do you think, O doubting Pieter, that this rich, good father would allow his children to suffer want, that he will forsake them? That is impossible, for with mighty promises he told his people, saying that even if a mother forsakes her child, and does not take pity upon the fruit of her womb; what do you say to this, my friend, must you not confess that it is impossible?

**Pieter:** Well, yes, that cannot be a motherly heart.

**Jan:** But now listen with intent to what the Lord says: And if a mother should leave her child, I will, nevertheless, not leave you. (Ps. 37:5; Mt. 14) Let this be a comfort to you, my friend, together with many other examples. That he used a raven to feed Elijah, Daniel in the lions' den, and three men in the burning oven, and many similar powerful deeds and promises are imprinted on the heart of those who truly believe, that they lose their fear and pagan worries, trusting fully in their Lord who alone is their helper. (Da. 3:21; Jn. 6:13; He. 11:1; Lu. 8:22) That is their firm confidence, and if he is with them they fear no evil nor poverty. (Ps. 23:1)

**Pieter:** Although you admonish me, Jan, because of my question, you speak as though God tosses everything in to you through the window; and will you not then remain lying on your back and say: "God will supply it?"

**Jan:** Well, Pieter, how difficult it is for you to grasp and understand the truth. (Lu. 24:21) Do you think we are so blind that we would tempt God? Why did God create everything, simply in order that it might exist? Oh, no, God in his wisdom has ordered everything: the sun, the moon, the stars, the winds, summer, winter, everything in its order, and in addition, also all creatures, with human beings as the principal image of God in his creation. (Ge. 1:26) And all this not in order that people should become infatuated with creation and lose their heart to it, but in order to cultivate the earth and to eat their bread in the sweat of their brow. (Ps. 62:11; Ge. 2:15; 3:19)

That is why you find few idle people in the City of Peace, profiting no one; each one receives their work under the blessing of the Lord and sustain them by his order of all things, so that the citizens see their calling in the fear of the Lord, working in a quiet manner that their heart may not be depressed or burdened with clinging to earthly things, but completely trust the promises of the Lord. These citizens prefer doing useful work and look upon useless trade and shameless profit as useless, in contrast to which their work meets general human need and the welfare of their brothers. (Lu. 12:31; 2 Th. 3:12) For they seek only to supply their own needs.

Selfish concern or not to care for the neighbor's welfare as well as one's own, or to interfere in the work of others, is hardly found in the City of Peace. (Ph. 2:4) If it were otherwise, there would be no peace or contentment. Therefore, these citizens look upon big banquets, excessive drinking, expensive clothes and jewelry, large houses and decorations as needless expenses. These things do not fit into their manner of living. They are unhappy with ostentation and pride.

It may well be that a person can wear poor clothing and their heart still be selfish and full of pride, but nevertheless, an upright, humble heart cannot produce arrogant fruit. (Mt. 7:19; 11:29) They are humble, first, because they wish to follow their king in his humility; second, because all unnecessary concern people have about things forces them to run and work to the extent that they forget the work of the kingdom. (Ph. 2:7; Mt. 11:29) Third, it would be so difficult for the heavenly citizens, who are pilgrims here, to so tie themselves to their desires through the lust of the eyes, that they would easily be lost in the world. (Mt. 22:5; Lu. 14:18; Ph. 4:11)

Therefore, these citizens reject these desires and are content with simple clothing and, even if they had only bread and water, would thank their king more than those who have a big stomach because of all their celebrating, for to them their belly is their god. (Ro. 16:17) Therefore, these citizens of the City of Peace receive everything out of the hand of God and say with David that although my soul and body may perish, you (O Lord) are still my heart's desire and comfort. (Ps. 73:25) This is what sustains them in peace and their hearts in full contentment.

**Pieter:** I understand Jan, that it is true that those who are content with little are the most at rest. But Jan, people also want to be known in the world, they treasure being called an important person, they also like to have a good table in order that a friend may be invited, they also like to have good clothes when necessary. (Mt. 6:1) I can understand when you say that these citizens are very different from the common people, they are attractive and honest, and therefore it would seem that they would also have some wealth to work with. Therefore, I must ask further whether there is no citizen in the City of Peace who has more on hand than they need for their daily needs?

**Jan:** Oh, my friend, listen with understanding. It seems that you and most people look only upon the present life; what you need is a living faith which hopes firmly in God and will yield better goods than you can find here on earth. You want to reign already here on earth and be respected. You would rather sit at table with the rich man than with the poor beggar Lazarus. What you need are the words of Scripture in which Paul writes in Philippians 4:8: Whatsoever is honest ... But before he says, Dear Brothers, whatever is true—it must be in harmony with eternal truth. Therefore your last question about whether there are any citizens here who possess more than necessary for their daily needs, I answer yes, there are citizens here who carry a heavier burden than those who have nothing, for their king has installed them as managers. (Lu. 16:1) This is a greater burden than the poor have. Yet even so they are so surrendered to their king, whether they have the burden of these goods or not, because they carry it out of love for the Lord and a service to their neighbor.

Therefore, they have extra treasure added to them not in order to use for themselves, as some might say “this is mine; I can do with it as I please.” Oh, no, they only use this when there is a need, as their teacher taught them, being sober and righteous, etc., and what they have left, which they do not own, but call it that of their Lord, that they use for the needs of their fellow brethren and keep it for those places where their king has ordered their treasures to be kept. (Ti. 2:12) Therefore, they are not con-

cerned about this added treasure, that they should not be angry, not hoping for uncertain riches but alone upon the living God who has enabled them to use all things abundantly.

Therefore, they have learned this lesson well that they with a mild hand can distribute these goods not unwillingly but gladly, whether they possess them or as if they did not, and through this cheerful, generous giving lay up treasures in the coming life, knowing that their Lord has promised to repay a hundredfold here, and finally eternal life. (1 Ti. 6:17; Mt. 19:29) Even if they did not have these promises of a great reward, their king is so dear to them that they give much more out of love than for the sake of reward. Particularly since they know the love and faithfulness of their Lord who has bought them with his own blood in love, which drives these citizens to eagerly share this love with others. (Re. 1:5; 1 Pe. 1:19; 1 Jn. 4:6-8)

**Pieter:** Well, but are they not afraid that this generous giving will make them poor?

**Jan:** Oh, no, Pieter, these citizens are careful to avoid the fellowship of those who worry first about the fear of poverty, second about heathenish worry, third about greed, and fourth, love of money. These four guests come as though it were their right and mostly speak to warn these mild citizens, seeking to hang towels over their eyes, thereby hoping to cover the eyes of faith. These towels are dyed with a color of mistrust against God, but since these citizens have the laws of their Lord so firmly in their hearts, they are careful with these serpents, not letting themselves be deceived, thus resisting this fellowship. (Ps. 37:31; Mt. 10:16; 24:4) For these are thieves who steal peace, which would be enough to take away contentment and trust in God, though they appear to be innocent. In order to recognize these thieves, they have

**Pieter:**  
Well, but are  
they not afraid  
that this  
generous giving  
will make them  
poor?  
**Jan:**  
Oh, no, Pieter ...

anointed their eyes with a salve which prevents them from being deceived. (Re. 3:18)

**Pieter:** Well, Jan, it is not necessary to think back, the times are difficult as it is and we ourselves have many needs: one might fall ill or become helpless, one wants to go through this world with God and honor, one prefers to stay in one's own home for that is honorable, it is more blessed to give than to receive, those who do not take responsibility for their own home are worse than unbelievers, so if one keeps something it is satisfying to our nature, but to make ourselves naked in order to clothe another is going too far. (1 Ti. 5:8)

**Jan:** Oh, my friend Pieter, I can see how the deceiving fellowship I mentioned has darkened your eyes, so it is good that we think back since the times are evil, but do you want to withhold it from the poor in order that your own needs may be met? (1 Co. 9) Oh, no, my friend, for if the times are difficult they suppress the poor more than others, but it is necessary that the evil guest is not mentioned in our house; that is a damaging guest who always complains about what is good, whose eyes lust for more, and whose tongue longs for the best food. Yet this must be for their belly is their god who controls them (Ph. 3:19), and this idol with his unwholesome fellowship makes the times difficult. That which the truly poor need this guest does not understand and must therefore be pushed out of the door without mercy, which our citizens are mindful to do; and when this evil guest has been locked out God will bless that house so that, though they might themselves have been in deep poverty, they will have overabundance in mercy. (Ac. 11:29; Jn. 2:16; Ro. 13:13)

You also mention what is well known, that one may become sick. But, Pieter, it appears as though you have thrown your trust in God behind you, whereas these citizens hold that for their true security in all emergencies. (Ps. 46:2; 55:23) You also mention that one would like to walk through the world with God and honor. Oh, Pieter, the first of what you mention is so certain here in the City of Peace that no evil times can rob us of that, for over a long period of time and from the prophets of the old City of God has come the lesson that those are blessed who put their trust in God; they are as a tree planted by the water, bringing shade and fruit. When drought comes they do not wither, so you see that they cannot miss; they are always fortunate with God in the world. (Je. 17:7)

You speak of honor and dignity. Pieter, do you seek vainglory? These citizens bring all honor to God, because of which they are always completely satisfied as far as it concerns themselves, so long as all honor comes to God their Creator. Nevertheless in their minds they are aware

that they should do a hundredfold more according to the worthiness of God to whom praise and thanksgiving always belong. (Ps. 100:4)

You also say that one prefers to stay in one's own place. But these citizens possess everything. If not, it is as you said that giving is more blessed than receiving. I also know, my friend, that I myself prefer this. The citizens of the City of Peace would rather give than receive, but if God wills otherwise, since everything is under him, they are also fully content with his will, saying with Job: The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. (Jb. 1:22)

You also spoke of managing one's own household, that it is worse than an unbeliever not to do this. In this the citizens are very careful that they always follow the laws of their king, therefore managing their own household, particularly in following the holy example of Christ. (1 Pe. 2:11; 1 Co. 8:2) It happens then that they may suffer damage inflicted by other people, or that they need to give much and their goods be diminished, of that in helping the poor they sometimes neglect their own needs. Yet they consider this their profit: they would rather eat dry bread with peace than have a house with many things but with strife and no peace. They consider it managing their own household well if they have followed the teachings of their king in sobriety, moderation, a careful use of time, but they reject the desire for unnecessary things in order that they may give more generously. Thus their work is an asset to their house and to the house of God. (Ti. 2:2) They do not consider your last question valid, that nature should have its own right, but we admit that we sometimes suffer loss for the sake of others, not seeking costly clothing, but rather what is simple in order that they may clothe the naked. (Mt. 25:36) This produces a good conscience and a peaceful soul. ~

From *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*, translated and edited by Cornelius J. Dyck. Copyright © 1995 by Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa. Used by permission.

---

Did you see it? Did you recognize the great difference in perspective between Bunyan and Pietersz?

The difference is, of course, that the Anabaptist view is that the City, the kingdom of God, begins here on earth, with the citizens living out here and now the virtues and character that Christ defined in His Sermon on the Mount. The Puritan waits until death to enter the City.

That difference may seem insignificant to you. If it does seem insignificant, you need to seriously consider what the gospel of the kingdom really is. ~