

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

The Disciple's Walk of Faith

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13)

Becoming a disciple of Christ is very exciting. We have a new life with a new Master who loves us and teaches us how to live. We have a new spiritual family who will help us to grow. All of these new things are great blessings, but many disciples struggle with the question of how to properly handle the "old things" in their life.

Disciples have chosen to leave this world and its sin behind in order to follow Christ. However, we are still in this world. As a follower of Christ, what kind of relationship are we to have with this world? How would the Lord have us view our place in this world?

What Are Strangers And Pilgrims?

The New Testament refers to followers of Christ as strangers and pilgrims. We have our own idea of what these words mean. To us, a "stranger" is someone we don't know, and a "pilgrim" is someone who came to this country on the Mayflower. However, if we are going to understand what the Lord would have us to be, then we need to understand what the Holy Spirit means when He uses these words.

The word "stranger" is translated from the Greek word **xenos** which literally means "a foreigner." Thus, a stranger is one who is out of his own country, someone who is in a foreign land. The word "pilgrim" is translated from the Greek word **parepidemos**. This word refers to a resident foreigner, one who lives among a people who are not his own. This person does not have the rights of a citizen, nor is he seeking a permanent residence. He is sojourning in a place for a time.

These words certainly applied to Abraham and Sarah. They left their home and family in Mesopotamia and traveled to a land that God would show them. They dwelt there among the people of that land in tents as those who were not residents.

Disciples must **walk** by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We may **live** in a physical world, but we **operate** by spiritual realities, standards, and promises.

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Although he had lived in that place for over sixty years, Abraham considered himself “a foreigner and a visitor” at the time of Sarah’s death (Gen. 23:4). He realized that he was not one of them, and he never tried to become one of them.

The Bible calls us as disciples to have this same attitude towards our relationship with this world. We are out of our own country in this world. We are not citizens; we are not seeking a permanent place to call our own, nor are we looking to fit in with those around us. We are passing through, seeking a homeland after this life is over.

What Makes Us Strangers And Pilgrims?

What makes disciples of Christ foreigners in this world we have known since birth?

1. Disciples Have Been Called out of This World and Made Citizens of a Heavenly Kingdom (Col. 1:13). Our citizenship is now in heaven (Phil. 3:20), not in this world. When we chose to follow Christ we made a choice to come out from the world. We are now identified with and loyal to a spiritual kingdom. People around us call this world their home, but it is not our permanent abode. We realize that we are here for a while, seeking a homeland and looking to a city that has been prepared for us.

2. Disciples are Following One Whom the World Has Rejected. Jesus said the world would hate His followers because it hates Him (John 15:18-21). The whole world lies under the influence of Satan (1 John 5:19). When we identify ourselves with Christ, the world around us suddenly becomes “enemy territory,” and we become outcasts. We should not be surprised when the world treats us the same way it treated our Master. The world does not know us because it does not know God (1 John 3:1). We are strangers **in this world** because we are strangers **to the world.**

3. Disciples No Longer Think Like the People of the World. In a previous lesson, we discussed how the Lord is the Potter and disciples are the clay. The Lord fashions and molds us through His teaching: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Becoming a disciple of Christ changes the way we think. No longer conforming to the way the world wants us to think, our minds are transformed or changed to thinking the way Christ wants us to think. Since we no longer

use worldly wisdom, philosophies, priorities, values, and goals, we no longer fit in with the people of the world. We are like strangers in a strange land.

What Does It Take To Live Like Strangers And Pilgrims?

Faith. Disciples must walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We live in a physical world, but we operate by spiritual realities, standards, and promises. To have a relationship with God, we must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). Abraham and Sarah walked by faith as they lived as strangers in a foreign country (Heb. 11:13-18). Consider the different ways their faith was shown.

1. Trusting in God's Promises. Abraham and Sarah did not receive all of the promises in their lifetime, but they saw them afar off, were assured of them, and embraced them. They trusted that God would keep His word (Rom. 4:20-21; 2 Tim. 1:12).

There is an aspect of uncertainty in living as a pilgrim. We have no stake in this world, no rights, no place, etc. Our faith must be shown by trusting in God to take care of us, to see us through this life, and to reward us in the end.

2. Obeying God's Instructions. By faith Abraham obeyed God (Heb. 11:8). If Abraham had not obeyed, we would not know anything about his faith. Walking by faith does not mean that we just believe in God. Walking is an action. Walking by faith means we trust God enough to do what He says. Saving faith is a faith that moves us to be obedient unto God. Faith is made known by its works (James 2:18-26).

3. Coming out from the World. We may be **in the world**, but we are not to be **of the world**. Our faith is shown in the way we conduct ourselves during the time of our sojourn here in this world (1 Pet. 1:15-17). We are to be holy as God is holy.

As sojourners and pilgrims, we are to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage a war against our souls, pulling us away from Christ and causing us to forfeit our home in Heaven (1 Pet. 2:11). We are not to love the world, or the things in the world (1 John 2:15-17). If we fall in love with this world, and become attached to this world, we will perish with this world. A desire to be friends with the world will make us enemies with God (James 4:4).

We are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, knowing such associations pose a threat to our faithfulness unto God (2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 Cor. 15:33). Instead, we are to come out and be separate from the sinful thoughts and actions of the world around us. Only then will God claim us as His children.

We know we are to come out from the world, yet how many disciples of Christ act as if they are at home in this world? When one gives more time, energy, and attention to laying up treasures on earth than to exercising himself in godliness, he shows where his heart truly lies (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 4:7-8). A love for the world is seen in the way some disciples choose to act and dress (Prov. 4:23; Luke 6:45). Choices in the area of entertainment and recreation can portray one's true love for the world. When one takes his family away from worship assemblies for things like tournaments, competitions, reunions, hunting trips, vacations, etc., he demonstrates that he has a greater attachment to the world than to Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

4. Delaying Gratification. Abraham and Sarah never received the fulfillment of all of God's promises during their lifetimes. They saw them through faith, and longed for them, but never enjoyed them in this world. The same is true for us. While there are some temporal blessings in Christ, we know that the best is yet to come (Heb. 4:1, 11; 1 Pet. 1:4). We are not to be like Esau who sold his birthright in order to fulfill an immediate desire (Heb. 12:15-17). He regretted his choice when it came time to receive his inheritance, and so will we.

5. Commitment (Seeing It Through to the End). "These all died in faith" (Heb. 11:13). This means that they walked by faith until the very end. They could have given up on the Lord and gone back home (v. 15), but they did not. We can give up on the Lord. Some have (Demas – 2 Tim. 4:10), and others still do. However, when we do, we forfeit our home in Heaven. God has prepared a city for those who seek a homeland, who look toward the heavenly country and embrace it until the end (Heb. 10:34-36; Rev. 2:10).

Conclusion

Jesus was a stranger and a pilgrim here in this world. It may have been His creation, but it was not His home. He was not seeking an abode while He was here (Luke 9:58), nor was He seeking to establish an earthly kingdom (John 18:36). He walked by Heaven's decree and looked to return to its glory. Jesus calls us out of this world to follow Him to that same heavenly country for which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob longed. Heaven can be our home if we will live as strangers and pilgrims in this world.

Questions

1. What does the word "stranger" mean? _____

2. What does the word "pilgrim" mean? _____

3. How does Abraham view his relationship with the citizens of Canaan (Gen. 23:4)? _____

4. How does our becoming a disciple of Christ change our citizenship (Col. 1:13; Phil. 3:20)?

5. What kind of treatment does Jesus say His disciples could expect from the world? Why? (John 15:18-21) _____

6. Why should a disciple consider the world to be "enemy territory" (1 John 5:19)? _____

7. Why does Peter say that the world will think we are strange (1 Pet. 4:1-4)? _____

8. What does it take to live as a stranger and a pilgrim in this world (2 Cor. 5:7)? _____

9. Abraham and Sarah did not receive all of God's promises during their lifetime, but they _____ them afar off, were _____ of them and _____ them (Heb. 11:13).
10. By faith Abraham _____ God (Heb. 11:8).
11. What admonitions does Peter give to sojourners and pilgrims (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11-12)?

12. What are the consequences of loving the world (1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4)? _____

13. Upon what condition will God receive us as His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:17-18)?

14. Why does Esau lose his birthright (Heb. 12:15-17; Gen. 25:29-34)? _____

15. What do followers of Christ need in order to receive the promise (Heb. 10:36)? _____
