

***STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND*****1 Peter 1:1-2**

**INTRO:** Having experienced the Lord's Supper as we just did makes this talk even more poignant. What I mean is, Peter, who wrote the letter of First Peter which is the next in our series, Little Letters BIG MESSAGE, was one of the participants in that that holy meal. He had come a very long way from the crude fisherman he had been when Jesus called him from his family business on the shore of Galilee. But he still had a long way to go and over the next 50 some days after the Last Supper, God filed and smoothed off a lot of those rough edges and took him from a blustery disciple with good intentions, to a passionate pastor with a heart for his parish – a parish that was a large section of the known world.

By the way, if you saw the link on this letter that I posted on Facebook and sent via email on Friday, I hope that you got a chance to take the 8 short minutes it takes to give you a great overview of First Peter.

Now for some quick background before we proceed with a look at the first couple verses of the letter. I need to read them to you because I'm going to comment on who he is writing to and how they saw him.

**(Read 1 Peter 1:1-2)**

This letter was probably written between 65-70 A.D. and that is evidenced by his references to persecution that we see later in the letter. After enjoying relative peace at the hands of the Romans for almost 30 years, the Emperor Nero has found it expedient to find a scapegoat for his extensive political problems, not the least being the burning of Rome. And he found a convenient group to point his blame deflecting finger at in the growing church. And with that in mind Peter is writing to people in "*the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*" which is no small area. In actuality it was a major chunk of what was known as Asia Minor which is most of what is now modern Turkey.

Peter is specific as to which community he is sending his encouraging words to, he is writing to God's elect who have been scattered through this huge area with its large population. This also points out how far and how effective the spread of the Gospel had been. In little over 30 years since Jesus's resurrection, the mission work of his followers had been quite extensive.

And this is a pastor's letter to his beloved flock full of the kind of affection a pastor soon feels for his people. You see pastors get attached to their congregation. (Explain my dream after leaving Speedwell)

Peter, as I said, was a rough fisherman whose first language was Aramaic, but since Greek was the language of the Empire would have been fluent in that language. Even with that in mind, it is clear that he probably had a person to whom he dictated his letter, and that person was probably none other than Silas who was Paul's partner on his second mission journey. The evidence for this is all the way at the final verses of First Peter where he says *With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.* 1 Peter 5:12.

That's enough background, let's move on.

When Emily was little we put together an experiment, I think for school, but I can't quite remember. I DO remember the outcome though. We mixed shampoo with baking soda and the result was a white creamy paste – but for the whole thing to be successful we needed one more ingredient. Without that ingredient the paste just lay there looking pasty and creamy and white. So we added the last ingredient – vinegar – and the mixture foamed out of the glass like a flood at an *ALKA SELTZER* factory.

Our homes, our workplaces, our community, this country, this very culture we live in; is like that mixture without the needed ingredient – the message of grace, peace and hope is the ingredient needed to change it and we are the bearers of that message. In order to transform that paste into a foaming and active mix – we had to pour the vinegar into it. In order to transform culture we need to be poured out, into a society that increasingly thinks we are strange or even worse, irrelevant. The longer we go in history the more we are different from the culture we live in. So what do we do? Do we go to a commune in the middle of the prairie and keep ourselves safe from the evils of a decadent society? Do we shun modern conveniences in an effort to keep from being influenced by evil modernity like the Amish? Do we board ourselves into our church and hold the world at bay until Jesus comes?

**NONE OF THE ABOVE!!!!** We are to do what Jesus Christ and the early church did – be strangers in a strange world – just passin' through, as it were, but striving with all we have, to help the people around us to be strange too, by the transforming power of God's forgiveness and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, you're going to think this is strange, but look at each other and ask: *Do you think I'm strange?* Ask each other, we already know I'm strange. (Pause) Well our text says that we are. It says we are strangers in this world. We are not to make this world our home. It's a great place to visit but I wouldn't want to spend eternity here. It's like my trip to India back during my sabbatical – I loved my visit – but it was not my home. Home is where Kathy is. Home is where my family is. Home is where you are. But that trip wouldn't have been worth the time or money if I hadn't made the best of my time while I was there. It was a wonderful trip and it was an awesome experience, BUT it was so good to be home! I was a stranger in India.

We are to be strangers in the world too. Literally, this world is not my home. One commentator, writes, that we are "*Exiles of eternity, apart from it but not aloof from it.*" In fact the word for strangers in the original language which is just pointed out was Greek, uses a word that is used for traveler. The idea is that while we're travelling here we need to make the best of the trip so let's take a brief look at what makes us so strange. And you will see that it's in a kind of Trinitarian formula. First . . .

#### **As Strangers we are the Father's Elect**

- It's funny that what makes us strange is what also makes us special. Verse 1 says that we have been chosen. Before, to be God's chosen you had to be from the children of Israel, but because of the Cross all are offered the possibility to being part of the chosen ones.
- And lest we get chesty about the fact that we are chosen, we need to remember that being God's elect does not make us better, it only means that we know we have a job to do and we had better be doing it.
- We are here because God wants us to be – we have not been chosen because we have special worth in God's eyes, because, the truth is, he loves all humanity equally with such an incredible love that he gave his only Son to die for our salvation. Instead all believers are chosen to carry out a responsibility – the message of joy and salvation for the harried and lost culture we live in.
- So . . .

#### **As Strangers we are the Son's Cleansed and Obedient Servants**

- Christ Followers are God's chosen. It's like this, when you receive Christ, you become God's chosen. As a result you are now a citizen of the Kingdom of God and that make you an alien in this world – a stranger as it were, with a mission to carry out.
- Everything good is from God and it's ours. He has given us the best – his very Son – the least we can do is pass on that blessing.
- The sprinkling of blood here refers to the ancient Jewish ritual of sprinkling the blood of a sacrificed animal on the altar. It was a cleansing ceremony – we have been cleansed by Christ and readied for the journey.
- Once we are cleansed we need to obediently carry out God's plan of transformation. Notice, we are not forced into this mission, it is our prerogative. If we were forced we would be robots or slaves. Instead, Jesus allows us to determine how and when we get down to business. But in Matthew 28:19-20 he tells us to go, and as we are going, to make other strangers, also known as disciples. With that Great Commission we know that . . .

#### **As Strangers we are Set Apart for Service by the Holy Spirit**

- Because the Christ Follower is chosen, we are set apart by the Spirit to be tools for transformation.
- The word *Holy* means to be set apart. Which means we are different. Which means we are strange.
- But it does not mean we are aloof, or better or untouchable or unapproachable, instead . . .
- It means we are to stay away from the traps of this world. It means that sin is something we flee from, not flock to. It means we reflect Jesus in all we do and say. In other words, we have been set apart to help change the world. It's a tall order and easier done than said – but it is our high calling.
- I don't take use a chainsaw to mow the lawn – I use it on trees and reserve the lawnmower for the grass. In the same way that there are specific tools for specific tasks and they are set apart for that specific task, we have a specific task and have been set apart for it. Christ Followers are called to share the love of Jesus.

**Conclusion:** We are the Father's elect, we are the Son's obedient servants, and we are set apart for service by the Holy Spirit.

So, do you realize that God knows you? Do you realize that God loves you? Do you realize that you're strange? We are the church, the church is a bunch of strangers in a strange land. It is our job while we are travelers here to spread the message that the grace and peace that is ours is for all who receive it. And we will not fail in that task

because the outcome does not rely on us, it relies on God who will not fail. This culture needs to hear the message of peace and grace, we need to be telling it. That's strange, but that's what is going to change it. Amen.