

May 4, 2014
Easter 3

"I'm But a Stranger Here"

1 PETER 1:17-21

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Twice in this letter the Apostle Peter calls the dear Christians going through intense persecution "strangers." The dictionary defines a stranger as someone who is an outsider, a new-comer, someone not familiar to us. The Greek word has the thought of living beyond our boundaries or parameters.

Christians are strangers in this world. This is not our real home as we just sang, "I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home." I may live at 4263 Harmony Lane in Santa Maria, California, but my real home is in heaven with Jesus. I will enter that home when Jesus returns in glory and raises me to life again.

There is no comparison between the place Jesus has prepared for me and the life I live here on this earth. At times this old world may seem like a dingy, dirty, roach and rat infested apartment right next to the 101 Freeway in downtown LA. Sin is destroying the culture in which we live. It destroys the lives of people we love and even invades our own personal lives. We long and yearn for heaven which the Bible describes as our home of righteousness. Paul wrote, "I long to be absent from this body and present with the Lord."

Before we pack our bags and sit on the street corner to wait for the Lord's return, let's listen to what Peter tells us about the important calling we have here and now even though we are strangers in this world.

You have a purpose in life

"Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers in reverent fear." We live our lives as strangers in reverent fear. We believe there is so much more to life than this present world and what it has to offer. At the same time we believe every moment in this life is a golden opportunity to live in fear or awe of our God. Jesus said we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Later in this letter Peter writes about the value of life here and now with these words, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

In our worship together we sing of the greatness of our God. We also live each day in

reverent fear of God. You want everyone around you to see your God's greatness in the way he created the heavens and earth. You want everyone to stand in awe of the way our Father sent his Son to die for us to spare us from the judgment to come. Jesus wants us to interact and interface with people so they can see the greatness of our God through us.

Peter writes that we call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially. Who will tell people the truth that the God who created us also knows every sin we have every committed? It scares us to think the federal government can track our phone calls and emails or even spy on us from satellites high in sky. It is even more scary to think that the almighty God, the creator of the heaven and earth, knows every thought that we have in our minds. Psalm 139 says, "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down, you are familiar with all my ways." The Lord sees everything. He sees every key stroke on the computer, every text message or image ever sent, and every thought of the heart. There is no privacy with God. Your life and mine, and the life of every person on this earth, is an open book to God. He knows. He judges and finds everyone lacking. The Lord knows and judges these thoughts. He is not impartial. He does not cut us any slack. Anything that falls short of his glory is judged as sin and it must be punished. There is nothing I can do save myself from this all seeing eye of God and his righteous judgment. Listen to these words of Romans 3, "There is none who does good, not even one." I desperately need Jesus, and so do you, and so does the rest of the world.

Don't think for one moment that your life as a stranger on this earth is not important. The Lord is not going to send angels to this earth to warn people that he knows everything about us. He will not send angels to warn about the judgment to come. He will not send angels to tell people how Jesus has rescued them. That's your purpose and calling in life as strangers who pass their time on this earth in reverent fear of God.

Let me illustrate your important purpose as strangers in this world by telling about a twenty one year old man who died saving his girl friend. You heard about the terrible storms that hit the southeastern part of our country this past week. Many lives were lost. The winds were so strong they lifted one car and carried it over twenty miles. A young man and his girl friend ran to safety, but the wind was so strong it threatened to blow over the concrete wall behind which they were hiding. As the wall started falling over, he braced himself against the wall and told his girlfriend to get out. She was able to make it out safely but the wall collapsed on him. Your life is important to let the world know where they can find forgiveness and rescue from the judgment to come, not in themselves but in Jesus.

You are loved

How can I carry out my tasks to serve the Lord and give glory to him knowing this is not my real home? Strength comes from knowing how much I am loved. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish and defect."

I once asked a group of young people what our greatest need in life is? One young man said, "To be loved." We find our value and worth in the people who tell us how much they

love us and care for us. How do I know for certain that God loves me and cares about me? The answer lies not in who I am or what I have done, but in what Jesus has done for me. He has redeemed me, not with gold and silver, but with his precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. He redeems us from the empty way of life handed down to us by the fathers.

Silver and gold cannot pay off any part of the debt of sin we have accumulated in this life. Money may buy material things that can bring joy in life. Money may help you have more friends and a better place to live. Money can make people look up to you and regard you as someone important. Money cannot remove sin. Even if we use money to help others, these good deeds cannot remove the debt of sin from our lives.

About ten years ago the rich man Warren Buffet made the news when he pledged 1.5 billion dollars to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The money was to be used to help find cures for some of the world's worst diseases. After pledging the money, Buffet, was quoted as saying, "There is more than one way to get to heaven, but this is a great way." The Oracle of Omaha has made a lot of money in investing, but when he speaks about earning his way to heaven by giving away his money he is totally clueless. Peter calls this "the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers." All of us were programmed by our fall into sin to believe that if I do something good for other people and for God, I will be rewarded.

The blood of Jesus redeems us and forgives us because it is the blood of God's Son himself that was shed for us at the cross. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

How do you know that God loves you and you have a home waiting for you in heaven? You know God loves you because God chose his Son from all eternity to be the one to rescue you and save you. Peter says, "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake." Way back in eternity, even before the world was created, our God planned out how he was going to rescue us through his Son. If you are going through major surgery, the doctor will take the time to tell you what he is going to do with your body. Then he follows the plan carefully. God our Father carefully planned every detail of Jesus' suffering and death. Then Jesus executed that plan perfectly. It all depends on Jesus. Our hope of forgiveness lies with Jesus. On the night of the resurrection, Jesus carefully showed the disciples the words of Scripture that told everything that would happen and they were filled with joy.

How do you know that you have been redeemed and that Jesus loves you? We know how much we are loved because God our Father raised Jesus from the dead. "Through him you believe in God, who raised Jesus from the dead, and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God." If every sin were not paid for at the cross, the Father would not have raised his Son to life again. The nail marks in the hands of Jesus tell us our forgiveness is real. This world is not our real home. "I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home." I am a stranger here but still every minute of this life has meaning and purpose as the Lord uses us to direct people to see the nail marks in the hands of Jesus and what that means for them. "I am a nobody telling everybody about somebody that can save anybody." There's a stranger living at 4263 Harmony Lane longing to go home to heaven and also longing to tell everybody about Jesus. That is an honor and privilege that makes every

day of life on this earth special. Christ has risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.