

289 Strangers and Pilgrims

Almighty God is permanent and eternal. By contrast, this, His creation, will one day pass away, and meanwhile all within this creation, including we ourselves, are only passing through (eg., II Peter 3.1-13, KJV). No wonder that the Holy Spirit through Peter bids us to “be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace without spot, and blameless” (3.14).

In the roll-call of the great saints in Hebrews 11 we are told how - “these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off ... confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (v 13). Even though we now live within the long-promised blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, we too see that some scriptural promises are yet to be fulfilled, and we too are still “strangers and pilgrims” as we pass through our lives on this earth (eg., I Peter 2.11). Truly – “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Hebrews 13.11), and - “our conversation (KJV, better translated here as “citizenship” or “community”) is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ ...” (Philippians 3.20). This looking-for refers to the “rapture”, (I Thessalonians 4.13-18 / I Corinthians 15.51-52), an event that is clearly prior to, and distinct from, the Lord’s coming publicly and in great glory at the end of the seven years of Tribulation (eg., Matthew 24.29-31).

So there is the context in which we are living this stage of our lives – a passing-through, a readiness for the rapture, and with no fears along the way about death or beyond because, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5.1). What an abundance of blessings! – none of which is even remotely deserved (eg., Ephesians 2.8-10).

As “strangers and pilgrims” we thus do well to travel light, having our affairs in order concerning our future departure by either physical death or the rapture, and having our homes de-cluttered and our lives lived simply.

We greet each day as a God-given gift – “this is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118.24) - as if a field of fresh snow in which we will leave our tracks, for good or ill, before we pass on to the field of tomorrow. We seek to make proper use of those things which the Lord has entrusted to us, as responsible stewards who are accountable to Him: our time and energy each day; our particular gifts, to be used for the building-up of the body and the general blessing of others; and our money.

We recognise that we are always in the presence of God, even though we are not always conscious of that when concentrating on particular tasks. Just as the Lord Jesus so constantly did with His heavenly Father, we too walk with the Lord through each day, attentive to His bidding, (rather than expecting Him to walk with us each day, He to be attentive to our bidding – a subtle but rather important difference!). We seek to abide as the branches in the Christ-Vine (John 15.1-8), rejoicing, praying, giving thanks, “quenching not the Spirit (I Thessalonians 5.16-19), and wielding aright “the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God” (Ephesians 6.17). We walk in grateful obedience, mindful of the two great commandments, and seeking first “the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 22.37-39 and 6.33).

Each evening, under the Lord, we can look back over the tracks we have made in the snowy field, humbly saying our sorrys where necessary, claiming His fresh forgiveness, and learning the lessons of today for the next field of tomorrow.

For those of us of a certain age, we see that “retirement” has little meaning in the Christian life, for it is more about a change of income-source and activity than about our sitting endlessly in the garden or on the deck of a cruise ship! Equally there is no guilt when we have our God-ordained “one time off” for rest, after our “six times on” spent in His service (Genesis 2.2-3). While physical and mental frailties may enter in with the passing of the years, we know that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8.39); and we shall only learn in eternity how great have been the effects of the prayers of elderly Christians in furthering God’s causes and in protecting God’s people.

In Christ we are indeed strangers and pilgrims, passing through towards unimagined greater blessings still to come. Yet along the way, through this world which God loves so much, we have the extraordinary privilege of holding forth God’s love and truth in Christ, by our words, deeds and lives.

May our tracks across the snow always honour Christ!

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