

**“Aliens and Strangers-Part One:
Scattered and Chosen!**

1 Peter 1:1-2

Dr. Richard J. Alberta

Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Sunday October 2, 2011

Text: (NIV) ¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Today we start a new series rooted in Peter's letters to the young church. He begins immediately with a profoundly interesting description of the Christians to whom he is writing. He calls them “strangers in the world!” If you had to describe your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ...of all the things you might say about yourself...would you call yourself a “stranger in the world?” Let us pray.

Some time back, I read an article by a man who served as the Secretary of State a few Presidents ago. Honestly, I forget which Secretary he was but I do recall a fascinating comment that he made. He said that when Foreign Service Officers finished their many months of training, he would invite them to his office for a final chat. The last thing he would do was this: he would walk over to a large globe and ask the man or woman who was about to depart for Spain or Germany or wherever...to point to “their country.” Almost every time, the person would turn the globe and point to Spain or Germany or whatever country they were heading to. And he would always say “No. That is incorrect. Here is your country.” And he would turn the globe and point to the United States of America. Then he would say again “Here...is your country! Remember that you will be a stranger and an alien in the country of your assignment. You must be professional and respectful but do not ever forget that you are a resident of the United States! Always act accordingly! Be loyal to America! It is your country!” How remarkable was that statement!

The Apostle Peter was very much like a diplomat preparing men and women for Foreign Service. In Peter's mind, as long as we Christians were in this world, we were away from home...not in our own actual country. In that sense, he shared with Paul the strange viewpoint that only a Christian could have...that as wonderful as this world is and as much as we love family and friends...it would be better to leave here and be with Christ. Paul said:

Philippians 1:23 (NIV) ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

Here is a question. Do you see your life here as productive and fulfilling yet would you say it would be better by far to depart and be with Christ? Most people, including most Christians, are not adequately sold on that idea. I suspect that they believe it and are eager for Heaven but they are so comfortable here that in their hearts they can't agree with Paul. I struggle with this too. But do I understand that this world is not my home? This world is only a prolonged stop at a nice motel with a pool and a good dining room...but it is not my permanent home? Once I understand that more fully, I

will grow in Christ as a disciple. And friends, I am personally at this point in my ministry life, most interested in any one who really wants to grow as a disciple. These gatherings at Cornerstone are not about church unless they are about growing deeper as disciples.

This is not really a “seeker church” operating on the premise that we must package the Gospel and make it attractive to unbelievers. The Gospel is *not* attractive to unbelievers when it is accurately presented. Actually, it is offensive to unbelievers unless the Holy Spirit of God is at work in their hearts. Why? Because of FIVE THINGS ALL BEGINNING WITH “S” that Peter gives us in the Word of God!

FIRST: “To God's Elect, Strangers In The World...”

This is a hard and simple truth. As lovely as the world is to us, we are strangers who could not want to live here forever. In fact, John uses typical Biblical language to overstate the sense of alienation we Christians feel from the world. He writes:

1 John 2:15 (NIV) ¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Are you embarrassed by that verse because you love the world? Well, John is talking about the sinful desires of lost people in a world of vanity. The Christian can barely tolerate the world that hates God and never gives him a thought! The world that feeds itself on sensuality and vain pursuits and self-centered heroes. Wars and rumors of wars and false religions abounding. If you do not feel like you do not belong here in this world...if you do not feel like a stranger in this world then you may not have been born again by the Holy Spirit.

The interesting thing about being a stranger is that others perceive that you do not fit in very well either! How often have you been with a group where your Christian conscience prevented you from joining in conversations or behaviors or activities because those things were unappealing to you? Sooner or later, others perceive that you are not one of them. And if you compromise yourself as a Christian, you feel soiled? It's because you are a stranger in the world of sin and lostness and that can be a real burden.

SECOND: “Scattered Throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia”

Not only was it a burden for the ancient Christians to be strangers in the world, but very often their fellowship was broken up by being scattered! But God wanted it that way! The recipients of Peter's letter were largely Jews who were familiar with the word he used for “scattered.” It was “diaspora” which referred to the people of God being persecuted and driven to different parts of the ancient near east. The dispersion of people from their original homeland such as the Jews were during the exile. So, Peter is now telling them that they are strangers here to begin with and they should expect to be scattered!

Years ago, we heard a wise man say that “Christians only gather...to scatter!” God's highest priority for his people is for us to pull away from our earthly roots and, to some extent, to scatter among the lost. All of us in ministry know that men and women with whom we went to school have been scattered all over the globe. I sometimes read articles by former seminary classmates serving the Lord everywhere from Kansas City to the Congo! Those regions that he mentions...Pontus, Galatia etc.? They extended all

across Asia Minor. The Christian should expect to be used by God and sometimes he moves us to unexpected places even locally. But Peter goes on to say more. We read..

THREE: “Who Have Been Chosen [Selected] According To The Foreknowledge Of God The Father, Through The Sanctifying Work Of The Spirit...”

Christians are very special people because of God’s grace. We were individually chosen by God from before the foundation of the world...to be set apart. Whenever people say they have trouble with God’s predestination, I ask them to consider the chosen people...the ancient Jews. God said to them:

Deuteronomy 7: 6 (NIV) ⁵ This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. ⁶ For you are a people Holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

This is the tragedy of most modern preaching in the church. People are invited to think that they chose God and that they chose to believe and to become Christians! As if a baby conceived without any will of its own or any part in the event could claim to have arranged his or her own conceptions and birth! What the baby does one day is fully realize who mother and father are but their actions preceded his! Just as with ancient Israel, the Christian is someone whom God has chosen to be his own. And what were we chosen for?

We were chosen to be set aside. Allow me to remind you that the right way to study the Bible is to always ask who was writing what and to whom were they writing. This is important because Peter was writing largely to Jews of his day and the idea that they were “set aside” for “sanctification” was deeply ingrained in their DNA. In fact, I wish I could see in my own life and the lives of evangelical Christians such a sense of being people whose first priority was to honor God even if it cost something in the world.

In the next couple of weeks, we may see our Tigers in the World Series. But let me briefly tell you one of the great baseball stories of all time. In the nineteen sixties, a Jewish kid from Brooklyn, New York was drafted by the Dodgers. His first couple of seasons were mediocre but when the Dodgers moved to L.A. he became a star. His name was Sandy Koufax and for six seasons he was the most amazing pitcher in the game leading in every single category. He threw four no-hitters and one perfect game. He regularly struck out fifteen batters or more and his career record was 111 wins against only 34 losses. He had to retire in 1966 because of damage to his throwing arm. But in the World Series in 1965, against the New York Yankees, an amazing event happened. Koufax was scheduled to pitch the opening game and the entire sports world was watching. Others who did not even care took note. They came out to see Koufax. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were on the line and teams always pitch their best starter in the opener. But that opening day just happened to be the holiest day in the Jewish calendar... “Yom Kippur.” The Day of Atonement. Koufax informed his manager that he could not pitch that afternoon...not for the entire world. And despite all of the moaning and groaning and criticism, he did not pitch because he thought it would dishonor the God of Israel! Commitment to a higher concern!

When I think of Sandy Koufax I pray that he will meet his Messiah Jesus. And I reflect on how seriously a genuine Jew takes his or her status as a literal child of Abraham.

Moses had told them in **Deuteronomy 7:6** “**For you are a people Holy to the Lord your God.**” All the more said Peter are those who belong to Christ to be set aside for sanctification.

FOUR: “Through the Sanctifying Work of the Spirit...”

SANCTIFICATION! The word means “to set aside for Holy use!” This sanctuary is a large worship center set aside for Holy use! In the same way, the Christian is a stranger who will be scattered throughout the world for God’s set aside purposes. How is that done? How are we to cope with an indifferent world in which most people are actually enemies of God? How shall we go forth as those called STRANGERS who are SCATTERED and SELECTED? By yielding to the Holy Spirit for SANCTIFICATION!

It is very easy to lose track of our sanctification. Let’s make an analogy. Twenty years ago, when this sanctuary was brand new, I was invited to be the Senior Pastor. The very first Sunday as I leaving after the morning’s worship, I noticed musicians coming in. Base players and horns...and orchestra had been given permission to perform a Broadway musical here in this sanctuary. Someone in authority at the church had thought this was a nice idea. Good community relations I suppose. But that was their last concert in here. Why? Because it this sanctuary only has one use. It is sanctified for God’s worship and work and learnin. It’s one thing to have a meeting in here at which we discuss the Lord’s work. Quite another to perform “My Fair Lady” or “Oklahoma.” I spoke with the Elders and we agreed that this is a “set-apart” place...a Sanctuary for worship and the things of the Lord! I like musicals more than many people but not in here.

The same thing happens with us as individual Christians. We should always ask... “Is this activity in which I am engaged a righteous activity for someone who has been set apart for God?” Finally, Peter says we have been set apart for a reason!

FIVE: “...for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood”

Why does Peter say that we were “sprinkled” by his blood? Because there are several places in the Old Testament where we find blood being sprinkled either as a sign of death and inclusion in death or as a ritual sign of the cleansing of a sick or sinful person. Blood usually appears where covenants are made between God and man. So, after Moses reviewed the Law with God’s Old Testament people, they took a young bull and killed it. Then they took a bowl of its blood and had the people stand before the Priests. We read:

Exodus 24:8 (NIV) ⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

The blood signified the penalty for sin and the cleansing from sin by the sacrifice of the animal. That is why at the Last Supper Jesus said “This is my blood of the covenant.” So, when we became Christians it’s as if we stood before God and he took blood and sprinkled it upon us! [That by the way is why baptism by sprinkling is a perfectly legitimate entrance into the covenant.] In summary, the Christian is someone who has been:

1. Called to live on Earth as a STRANGER

2. Will be SCATTERED out among the people
3. Has been SELECTED by God for service to him
4. Is being SANCTIFIED and SET APART and
5. Has been SPRINKLED by the cleansing blood of Christ himself!

You may stand before a globe as an America or a Canadian or a Brit but your country is invisible. It is on that globe unseen but it goes out thru all the creation for your country is the Kingdom of God. Strangers, scattered, selected, sanctified and sprinkled! Let us pray.