

Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth: The Christian's Perspective on Life

Read Hebrews 11:13

Hebrews chapter 11 is referred to as The Hall of Faith. This Hall is decked with such names as Noah, Abraham, and Sarah just to name a few. Notice how all the faithful are described by the Apostle Paul in verse 13, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were **strangers and pilgrims on the earth.**”

When I think of a stranger I think of someone who is not known in the place where he is. He is from somewhere else, and his habits, his customs and maybe even his language are different. He doesn't know the people where he is and they don't know him.

We may join those who are mentioned in Hebrews 11 in confessing that we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth by setting “our minds on things above, not on things of the earth” (Colossians 3:2).

Paul reminds God's people living in this world that they are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. This means that Christians are expected to conduct their lives in such a way that they will seem like strangers in the world.

The worst thing an unsaved person can say as an honest criticism of a Christian is, "*I don't see anything different about you*". Christians should be visibly different, and as much as possible be separate from, the world around them.

A preacher once observed, "Contemporary theology seeks to make the Church fit the world and to make the world comfortable in the Church. This is not what Scripture teaches. Scripture teaches that we are to be salt and light. The world is darkness. There is no fellowship between light and darkness. The message of the Church must always be, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17b). We do the world no service by simply accepting it as it is. This in no way removes either the guilt or the punishment of sin. It simply deludes one into thinking that everything is ok when God is warning of things to come."

Christians are strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

When I think of the word *pilgrims*, my mind immediately goes back to the people who fled from Europe in the 17th century for religious freedom, and landed at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts in 1620 to start a new life.

A pilgrim is someone who is on a long journey. The trip may entail some extreme, and perhaps voluntary hardship. God's people are pilgrims passing through this world on our way to Heaven. We should live our lives as though that is where we really believe we are going.

I like how one author put it, "A Christian is a Pilgrim who is simply overwhelmed with God. My goal is God Himself, not joy nor peace, nor even blessing But Himself, my God. 'Tis His to lead me there, not mine, but His. At any cost, dear Lord, by any road."

How soon we forget as Christians that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and that heaven is our ultimate destination. The Bible exhorts the Christian to have the perspective of a pilgrim. He is a citizen of a better country. His present condition is temporary.

Such was our Great Master Jesus Christ. Far more a stranger than most of his disciples. He had no where to lay his head. He owned virtually nothing. Christ knew that his kingdom was not of this world.

Christ's gracious providence permits us the enjoyment of multiplied earthly blessings. But he requires us not to be of the world--to remember that the time is short. The fashion of this world passes away. Am I one of Christ's strangers and pilgrims on the earth? Is this the perspective I have of life?

The title of my message is, *Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth: The Christian's Perspective on Life.*

There are four things that should be true of every Christian Pilgrim. You could say that these four things comprise the Creed of the Pilgrim, what every true Christian believes as they sojourn toward the Celestial City.

1. The Pilgrim knows, “ I have a home in heaven and I must seek it.”

The stranger in any land must be a citizen of some other country. The Stranger's attitude is “I am a stranger on earth; but I have a home in heaven. My real self, is not my dying body, any more than my

outward garments. It is my lasting, living nature. It is my imperishable soul. That is my real self. And where is the home for that, but the place and presence of the Savior who has redeemed it.”

This home is what the Stranger seeks. He has never seen it. He was born in a foreign land. But it is described to him in the Bible, and he seeks the more earnest for it. It is secured for him by the blood atonement of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The Stranger is invited to it because he is robed in the imputed righteousness of Christ. Many of his brethren and sisters in Christ have already gone to it. His Gracious Savior urges him to be ready for it.

Thus does he desire to live always for his heavenly habitation. In every duty, in every trial, in every joy, in every arrangement, remembering his home, and making all his calculations for that.

The Christian realizes that, “I am not only a stranger, but a pilgrim also. It indicates motion, not rest. An end and object in my journey, not a bargaining and gaining in the foreign land. My daily course is a traveling onward. I am a home-bound pilgrim, traveling to Zion, with my face pointed there.

The pilgrim declares, “Every day brings me nearer. A pilgrimage is not a rapid journey; not a race. My life is also a race. But, as a pilgrimage, its characteristic is endurance and perseverance.

The fare may be hard. Difficulties may be many. Dangers may encompass. But there is a glorious convoy, and a heavenly guide. The circumstances are all arranged for me. What I am to look after is the pilgrim's mind. How happy will be my home! How attractive the distant gleams I get of it! How beautiful it appears as I approach it!

I must be ready. I am almost at the river's edge. Tomorrow I may cross. Oh, let me arise and wash my clothes, and trim my lamp, and bind up my treasures, and be ready to leave behind all that my pilgrimage has required, with gratitude, but without regret. Blessed prospect of my happy rest!”

The pilgrim believes, “I have a home in heaven and I must seek it.”

2. The second thing the Pilgrim believes is, “ I must not become entangled with the world.”

We read in 1 Peter 2:11, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”

Abstain from freshly lusts. Such desires and passions as the carnal appetites must be avoided by the pilgrim. These fleshly lusts will slow him down, and divert him from his heavenly destination.

Therefore, a pilgrim on the earth does not give himself up to the indulgence of sensual appetites, or to the soft pleasures of the soul. All these would hinder his progress, and turn him off from his great design.

A Bible Commentator writes, “As ye are strangers and pilgrims, and profess to seek a heavenly country, do not entangle your affections with earthly things. While others spend all their time, and employ all their skill, in acquiring earthly property, and totally neglect the salvation of their souls; they are not strangers, they are here at home; they are not pilgrims, they are seeking an earthly possession.

Heaven is your home, seek that; God is your portion, seek him. All kinds of earthly desires, whether those of the flesh or of the eye, or those included in the pride of life, are here comprised in the words fleshly lusts.”

The Pilgrim can honestly say, “there is nothing that I have ever seen, for which I would exchange my heavenly home. There is much that is pleasant; much that is worthy of notice; much for which I may well be grateful, on my journey. Food for thought, for reflection, for admonition, for improvement.

But I must gather up these materials, and hasten on. This present world is not my rest. I am sometimes very wearied-often strongly solicited to evil! Too often strangely indolent and inclined to yield. But it will not do. I can give no slumber to my soul here. I must start afresh, and shake myself from the dust, and press on. I must have no unfinished works in the wilderness.”

The Pilgrim is determined, “As each day's journey is finished, I would have it completed really, and not feel that I have to go back over it again. Happy is such a pilgrimage! Entangled with snares nowhere. Thus would I journey on.

3. The Pilgrim understands thirdly, “ I realize my life in this world is short.”

He lives in view of eternity. I have only one life to live on earth, and it must count for Christ.

James describes the mindset of the pilgrim in James 4:13-15, “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”

The word vapor means a mist, a smoke; such a vapor as we see ascending from a stream, or as lies on the mountain side in the morning, or as floats for a little time in the air, but which is dissipated by the rising sun, leaving not a trace behind.

And then vanisheth away. Wholly disappears. Like the dissipated vapor, it is entirely gone. There is no remnant, no outline, nothing that reminds us that it ever was. So of life. Soon it disappears altogether.

The works of art that man has made, the house that he has built, or the book that he has written, remain for a little time, but the life has gone. There is nothing of it remaining--any more than there is of the vapor which in the morning climbed silently up the mountain side. The animating principle has vanished for ever. On such a frail and evanescent thing, who can build any substantial hopes?

Job says, "O remember that my life is wind; Mine eye shall no more see good (Job 7:7).

We read in Psalm 78:39, "For he remembered that they were but flesh. A wind that passeth away and that cometh not again."

The Pilgrim understands that his life in this world is short."

4. The Puritan believes, "I know my journey will come to an end in heaven."

Remembering my heavenly home will cause the Pilgrim to be earnest and persevering in his journey towards Immanuel's Land. Never entangled or dallying on his way. Always contented and thankful for every blessing. How happy is the pilgrim's lot!

The Pilgrim sings the song, “How gracious the guidance I receive! How bountiful the love which upholds me! How glorious the home which welcomes me!”

Paul wrote in Romans, “Be not conformed to this world but be transformed” and the Apostle John told the readers of 1 John not to “love the world.”

Both inspired writers were encouraging all believers to live as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Jesus surely had this in mind when He said, “Store not up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...” This earth is not our place of permanent dwelling. All believers are destined for something far better than this.

Charles Wesley reminds Christians that they are Pilgrims on the earth with these words,

*“Strangers and pilgrims here below,
This earth, we know, is not our place;
We hasten through this vale of woe,
and, restless to behold Thy face,
Swift to our heavenly country move,
Our everlasting home above.*

*We've no abiding city here,
But seek a city out of sight;
Thither our steady course we steer,
Aspiring to the plains of light,
Jerusalem, the saints' abode,
Whose founder is the living God."*

In closing, the Bible exhorts God's people to live their lives on the earth as strangers and pilgrims. The Christian has a home in heaven and must seek it. They must not become entangled with this world. The Pilgrim realizes that life is short and that this journey will soon come to an end in heaven. May the Lord help us to keep the perspective of strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Let us pray!