

## Sermon 31<sup>st</sup> 1 Peter 1: 1 - 9

Have you ever found yourself a stranger in a strange land? Have you ever felt completely out of place in another country, struggling to understand what is happening or indeed why it is happening?

I have never felt more of stranger in a strange land than when Tim, a colleague from the Fishermen's Mission and I arrived in Casablanca in Morocco. We were competing in the Plymouth to Gambia rally trying to raise money for the Fishermen's Mission. We had planned to spend New Year's Eve in "Sam's Bar" in Casablanca, yes it was a replica of the bar from the famous film with Humphrey Bogart. We discovered on our arrival in Casablanca that it has more roundabouts than any other city on earth. However, it appeared that none of the locals had an idea of how to use them. Each roundabout we encountered resulted in cars pulling out in front of us, enraged locals shouting at us and a cacophony of blaring car horns. This reached a climax when a police car pulled on to the roundabout we were going round resulting in us swerving wildly on to the pavement to avoid it. The two policemen got out and angrily harangued us in French which neither I nor Tim understood. We had no idea what was going or why we were in trouble. A large crowd gathered and joined in shouting at us and jostling us, the strangers, Tim and I were at a loss to know what to do. It took the intervention of a kindly local who interpreted for us. Apparently, the traffic law in Casablanca is from the time of French control and states that cars on the roundabout have to stop and allow cars to join, who knew? The result was a supposedly a fine of 60 euros that went to the police, although the money went in to the polices officers' pockets and no documentation or receipt was provided and 20 euro for our friendly interpreter.

Peter opens his first letter by describing his readers as "God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia." The idea that Christians are strangers in the world is a key theme in his letter. Peter calls his readers "strangers" or "foreigners" and "aliens and strangers".

This is idea of God's people being strangers in a strange land, of not being at home of searching for their promised homeland permeates the Bible. Here Peter's is writing to

believers scattered among five Roman provinces in modern-day Turkey, probably seeking to hide for safety from Nero who is burning Christians at the stake and having their lands confiscated. It is important to highlight that the terms “aliens” and “strangers” describe real social realities. Here these groups of Believers live their lives on the margins of society, as strangers in a strange land. They were strange as they were neither Jew or Pagan, they have a different accents, they don’t act or behave like everybody else, they share a message of hope that is contrary to all that people have ever heard, they are undoubtedly very, very strange.

You may ask, so this is relevant to us why. Well, it is relevant to us here this morning because to be a Believer, to be a follower of Jesus is to be a stranger in a strange land. Last week we looked at Jesus’ command to share freely what you have received from Him. To not only to hear Jesus’ words but to live out Jesus words and in the living out Jesus’s words we would become living gospels proclaiming His word to all men. That living out of Jesus’ words makes all Believers at all times strange because they live differently. Each of us has experienced the conflict that arise daily between the way Jesus commands us to live our lives and the way the world wants us to live our lives. The Believers Peter was writing to weren’t just strange because they came from a different country, no they were strange because they lived there lives differently. They did not conform to the ways of the societies they found themselves in, as Peter writes later in the letter “They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you” 1 Peter 4:4.

When I came to faith my friends cared little about what I now believed, however they were outraged that I would no longer do many of the things we had done together in the past. In a way I had become a stranger to them, and they did not like it at all. Believers have become strangers because we have become strange! Our values, lifestyle, and priorities are radically different from the surrounding culture. Our faith makes us strangers in our own land, amongst our own friends or even in our own homes. We do not fit in and that my friend is difficult. Richard Nyquist was the school friend who witnessed to me for years before I came to faith. Now Richard was very different from most of us who attended Alva Academy and being different in Alva Academy caused you a great deal of problems. Richard arrived at Alva Academy mid-way through year 8 after he moved with his family from England. Although Richard

was a Scot, he had an English accent, that was strike one, Richard lived in the very expensive part of Alva in a huge posh house, that was strike two and the final most damning strike against him was he was a confessing Christian. Richard stood out like a sore thumb and suffered all the bullying and spitefulness you would expect. Richard was a stranger in a strange land he did not fit in to Alva Academy. In spite of the bullying Richard neither compromised his beliefs or behaviour nor did he strike back at those who persecuted him. He simply lived out his school years in Alva Academy as stranger in strange land. As the years passed Richard became my closest friend, someone I choose to spend time with, someone I admired, someone who earned the right, at least in my eyes to share the Gospel with me. Richards school days was the Living Gospel I read daily when I went to school. It was this Living Gospel that validated the truth of Jesus words for me and that spoke far more clearly and loudly to me than any passage from the Bible ever did.

It is fair to say that Richard suffered for being a stranger in a strange land. One of the things that should comfort believers in this world, especially amidst suffering, is recognizing that they are the elect of God. The word *elect* really means to be chosen by God as mentioned in verse 2. The world rejects believers because of their belief system, their lifestyle, and because they choose to not condone or participate in sin. However, even though they are rejected by the world, they are chosen by God. Christ said this to his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” John 15:16.

Election is often a doctrine that gets many people upset, but as we see here, this doctrine was the treasure of the Believers. In fact, the idea of being chosen by God became such a source of comfort for the Believers the eventually started calling themselves the “Elect”.

Why did God choose these Believers? It had nothing to do with their good works, but it was a work of sovereign grace. Look at what Paul says in Romans about the election of Jacob:

Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Romans 9:10 – 13

In Jewish society the oldest was always chosen to receive the blessing and the inheritance, but in God's economy it is always a work of grace—unmerited favour. God chose Jacob not based on anything he had done, for the twins, Jacob and Esau, weren't even born yet. God selected the younger brother to receive the blessing. In the same way, election is a mystery to us. It is based on God's sovereign right as king and not on the basis of anything we have done.

Look at what Christ says in John 15:19, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you".

Christ chose us out of the world, and because of this, the world hates us. Election is a sovereign right of God. We are no longer part of this world because God chose us out of it.

Peter returns to this idea of being chosen later in his letter. But before we read his words think who he is writing; to a group of refugees who had fled persecution who have lost their homes, lands and probably most of their worldly possession. They were not rich, nor famous, nor powerful, nor influential they were people just like you and me. They were like us trying to get by day to day, "suffering grief in all kinds of trials." as Peter writes in verse 6. So, as I read Peter's words, I would like you to hear them as if Peter had written them to you where you are today. For although they are Peter's words they are God's truth for each of us this day. 1 Peter 2: 9 - 12 *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*

God's truth is that we have each been chosen to let God's light shine for all men to see.

**Kenny Basset**