

## OF LIVING AS STRANGERS.

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*And confessed that they were strangers.*—HEB. XI. 18.

You have here an account of the life and death of those faithful servants of God, the patriarchs. Of their death, 'These all died,' &c.; of their life, 'Strangers and pilgrims.' That they thus died, we have God's testimony, 'These all,' &c. That they thus lived, we have their own confession; they were strangers all their life, they were faithful to the death, and are thus recorded as examples to the people of God in all ages, that they may thus live, thus die.

*Obs.* Those that would die in the faith, should live as strangers and pilgrims.

For explication I shall shew, 1. What it is to die in the faith; 2. What to live as strangers.

For the first, it is to die as those ancient people of God did: 1. In the profession; 2. In the state; 3. In the expression; 4. In the exercise of faith, of which before.

For the second, I shall first shew the *ὅτι*, secondly, the *ὡς*.

The people of God in all ages thus lived. Jacob professeth it to Pharaoh, both of himself and his fathers, Gen. xlvii. 9. The Lord himself, in the following age, styles all the Israelites thus, Lev. xxv. 23. But they were not settled in Canaan, and that might be the reason. No. After it was given them as their inheritance, when they had possession of it, and had continued in possession some hundred years, in David's time, yet does he profess this of himself and all his fathers, Ps. xxxix. 12. But it may be David spake this when he was under persecution and in banishment, when he was hunted as a partridge, &c. No; it was when he was established upon the throne of Judah and Israel, when he had conquered all opposers abroad and at home, as it is evident, 1 Chron. xxix. 15. Nor was this the condition of God's people under the law only; no other is their state under the gospel. The apostle writes to them under this notion, 1 Pet. ii. 11. That it is so is evident; but in what respects are they so?

*Ans.* They are strangers and pilgrims:

1. In respect of their station, the place of their abode. While they are in the world, they are in a strange country; while they are present in the world, they are far from home. The world is a strange country, and their habitations in it, how much soever their own in civil respects, are but as

inns in that journey homeward. The land of promise was but to Abraham a strange country ; his dwelling there was but a sojourning, so far was he from thinking himself at home, ver. 9.

The world is a strange country to the people of God, and the men of the world are men of a strange language, strange customs, strange laws, far differing from that of their own country. A strange language, the language of Ashdod. To hear God's name profaned, his people reproached, holiness vilified, miscalled ; to hear unclean, unsavoury, revengeful language ; to hear men wholly taken up with discourse of the earth, and earthly things, oh this is, or should be, strange language to the people of God ; there is no such word ever heard in their own country. While in the world, they are amongst a people of a strange tongue, strange customs and laws too, such as were never enacted, nor had place in their own country. To neglect the worship of God in public, in their families, to make provision for the flesh, &c., to lay up treasure on earth, to neglect God, their souls, eternity, these and such like are customs of the world ; and they think it strange (so common is it) that God's people will not run with them, 1 Pet. iv. 4, not swear, be drunk. A people of strange doctrines, Heb. xiii. 9 ; strange vanities, Jer. viii. 19 ; of a strange God too, 2 Cor. iv. 4. He is their lawgiver ; the course of this world is according to his laws, Eph. ii. 2. The laws of their own country have no place here : the law of faith, love, self-denial, loving enemies, &c. Such a country is the world to the people of God, a strange country ; and in this respect they are strangers.

2. In respect of their design, their motion, it is still homewards. This strange country likes them not, nor they it ; they are travelling towards another, that which is, that which they account, their home, that better country, that heavenly country, that city prepared for them, that city whose builder and maker is God. Thus these faithful worthies, ver. 14, they that say, *i. e.*, that confess, &c., do plainly declare, ver. 16. That heavenly country is the place of the Lord's abode ; and because he is their God, this is their country, their home. This they look for, ver. 10, this they seek, ver. 14, this they desire, ver. 16 ; their expectations, their affections, their endeavours are for heaven, when they are like themselves. While they are present in the world, they are absent from home. So their life here is in motion ; they are in a journey ; they are travelling homewards, and that is to heaven. This is their journey's end, the end of their pilgrimage ; and till they come there, till they be at home in heaven, they are strangers.

8. In respect of their enjoyments. They are but accommodated here like strangers. Much would be a burden, a hindrance to them in their journey ; they have more in hopes than hand. These worthies died, not having received the promises, *i. e.*, all the good things promised : no, their richest enjoyments are at home ; no matter for state and superfluities in a journey. They are not known in those strange places where they pass, no matter how they seem to strangers. Though they be princes, sons of God, heirs of a crown, their Father sees it best, safest for them, to travel in a disguise. No matter what strangers take them for, 1 John iii. 2, what they now enjoy are but like the accommodations of an inn, enough for travellers. Their treasure, their crown, their glory is at home, their Father's house ; till they come there they are strangers.

4. In respect of their usage. They are not known in the world, and so are often coarsely used. In this strange country they meet with few friends, but many injuries. See how the world used those of whom it was not worthy, ver. 86-88. Here is strangers indeed, and strangely used. No wonder if

a stranger be jeered and derided ; his habit, his manners, his language, is not conformed to the place where he is. Their habit, language, practices, must be after their own country fashion, such as become heaven : now this being contrary to the world, meets with opposition, scorn, reproaches, hatred. This was the portion of Christ, of his disciples, of his people in all ages ; and this is the reason they are not of the world, they are strangers, John xvii. 14. If they have something that commands outward respect, it may be they will find some ; but the hearts of worldly men are against them, John xv. 18, 19.

5. In respect of their continuance. Their abode on earth is but short. A stranger, a traveller stays not long in one place. Upon this account does David call himself and the people of God strangers, 1 Chron. xxix. 15. They dwell but as Abraham in tabernacles, ver. 9, in tents, moveable dwellings, quickly, easily removed ; no dwelling that has a foundation that is lasting, durable, till at home, ver. 10. Continuance on earth but a shadow, but a passage.

6. In respect of their relations. Their dearest relations are in another country. Their Father, their Husband, their Elder Brother, their dearest Friend, their Comforter, and the far greatest part of their brethren and fellow-members, are all in heaven. He that lives at a distance from his relations may well pass for a stranger.

*Use 1.* Reproof of those who profess themselves to be the people of God, and yet live not like his people ; live on earth, as though earth was their home, and mind heaven as little as they mind a strange country ; suffer their thoughts, affections, endeavours, to be so taken up with the earth, and the things of it, as though the world were all the home they expect ; instead of being strangers to the world, are strangers to the thoughts of, to the employments of, to the endeavours for heaven ; rise up early, &c., to lay up treasure on earth, and lap up their hearts and souls with it. No wonder if these people be unwilling to die, since they must part from the world as one parts from his own country to go into banishment. They that thus live in the world cannot expect to die in the faith. Whose image and superscription do they bear ?

*Use 2.* Exhortation to the people of God. You are strangers and pilgrims, oh endeavour to live as strangers. You expect to die in the faith, oh live then as you may so die.

(1.) Be not familiar with the world. Let the pleasures, the carnal interests of it, be strange things to you, 1 Pet. ii. 12. ‘ Be not conformed to the world,’ Rom. xii. 2. If you count heaven your home, your country, disparage not heaven so much as to prefer the customs, the fashions, the practices, the language of the world, before those of your own country. To be ashamed to hold forth a heavenly conversation before the world, is to be ashamed of your own country, of heaven. Let your lives testify that you are citizens of heaven, that you are strangers.

(2.) Be patient under sufferings, under the affronts, reproaches, hard usages you meet with from the world. It is the portion of strangers. If ye were known, ye might expect better usage ; but here you are strangers, you must put up wrongs and injuries. What folly for one in a strange country to seek to right himself ? Expect no vindication till in your own country.

(3.) Be content with what things you enjoy. Though it seem small or poor, it is enough for a stranger. More would be a burden to you, and travellers should avoid burdens, if they long to be at home. The things of

the world are cumbersome; they may make your journey tedious, and keep you longer from your desired home. Be content for a while; it is but a while, and you will be at home, and then you will find better entertainment, and more plenty.

(4.) Set not your hearts upon any thing here below. Remember, while you are on earth, you are but in an inn. What folly would it be for a traveller, who has far\* home, to fall in love with, and fix himself in his inn? Such folly, or worse, would it be for you to fix on the world. Mind the things here below as *in transitu*; use them as though ye used them not.

(5.) Make haste home. Make no longer stay than needs must in this strange country. Make straight steps to your feet; disburden yourselves of worldly cares, projects, fleshly lusts, that weight that does so easily beset you. What you have to do here, do it with all your might, that you may be fit for home. Despatch, make haste; remember whither you are going, and to whom. Your Father expects you; the Bridegroom thinks long till you come, he that will delight in you for ever. You are but now contracted; the marriage will not be solemnized till you come home; and there he stands ready to entertain you, to embrace you in the arms of everlasting love. Hear how sweetly he invites you: Cant. ii. 10, 'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.' Oh turn not aside into by-paths of sin and vanity. Look not back, close with sweet exhortation, Heb. xii. 1, 2. Oh let the sight, the thoughts of Jesus, quicken your pace. And while you are absent in the body, let your hearts be at home, your hearts in heaven, where are your treasure, your joys, your crown, your glory, your inheritance, your husband. Oh, is not here allurement enough? This is the way to be at home while you are from home.

(6.) Be not too fearful of death. It is a sleep now; Christ's death did change the property of it? and will a pilgrim, a weary traveller, be afraid of sleep? When you are come to the gates of death, there is but one step then betwixt you and home, and that is death. Methinks we should pass this cheerfully, the next step your foot will be in heaven. How does it cheer the weary traveller, to think this is the last day's journey; to-morrow, to-morrow I shall be at my own home, with all my dear relations. There I shall have ease and rest, and many welcomes. Suppose this last be the worst, the most stormy day of all my journey, to-morrow will make full amends for it.

Now such a day is the day of death, the last day of a wearisome pilgrimage, and that which brings the stranger to his long home, into the bosom of God, into the embraces of Christ, unto all those joys and engagements that his own country afford, such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, &c. This is partly the way to live as strangers, to live so as ye may die in the faith; and those that die in the faith die in the Lord, and those are blessed.

\* Qu. 'a fair'?—ED.