

INTRODUCTION

I’m beginning a new teaching series through the two letters written by the Apostle Peter. The theme of the series from 1 Peter is “aliens.” What do you think of when you hear the word? If you work for the immigration service you probably think of illegal aliens who enter America without the proper papers. Or maybe you thought of the trilogy of movies by that name in which Sigourney Weaver plays the character of Ripley (believe it or not) and whips some wicked looking space creatures. When most people hear the word “aliens” they envision some spacemen with big eyes like the kind who supposedly landed in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947.

Some really believe we’ve been infiltrated by aliens. As I was standing in line at the grocery store several months ago, I glanced at the headlines of one of the tabloids and read, “There are aliens among us!” The article was written by some pseudo-scientist who said: “They look and dress just like your average human being. They come in both male and female bodies. They come in all races. Some are short and skinny, and some are tall and heavy. They really fool you. All I can say, is you have to watch yourself. They are out to get you. You never know when you will encounter one of these aliens—in the workplace, in the supermarket—they could be sitting right next to you.”

But actually, I *do* believe there *are* aliens among us. Right here: WE are the aliens. Long before we ever had space aliens or illegal aliens, the word was used in the Bible to describe US. The theme for this book is found in 1 Peter 2:11 which says, “Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.” The dictionary defines alien as “belonging or pertaining to another; strange; foreign.” Our word is derived from the Latin word *alius* which means “another.” As followers of Jesus Christ, we don’t really belong to this world; we don’t fit in.

We don’t really fit in here, in fact the title of this first message is “Strangers in the World.” Years ago, Frank Sinatra recorded a song, “Strangers in the night, exchanging glances...” We used to change the words to say, “Strangers in the night, you’re strange in the daytime, but you’re stranger in the night.” In the first sentence of his letter, Peter points out that we are strangers in the world: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God’s elect, strangers [New American Standard Bible “Aliens”] in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 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.” (1 Peter 1:1-2) When we write a letter or email, we generally just list the person’s name, “Dear John.” But in the letters found in the Bible, the salutations are packed full of powerful truth. There is so much truth in this opening sentence it’s hard to know where to start. But today, I’m going to focus on the awesome activity of God in lives of those of us who are strangers in this world.

In these few words, we see the amazing truth of the Tri-unity of God, sometimes called the doctrine the Trinity. There is only one true God, yet He expresses Himself to us through three different persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this we’ll consider what God the Father has done in the past; what God the Son, did on the cross; and what God the Holy Spirit is doing in the present. So buckle up and let’s take off!

1. THE FATHER CHOSE YOU BEFORE THIS WORLD WAS MADE

Peter addresses this letter to those he calls “God’s elect.” Then he says we have been “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” There are a couple of important truths to consider dealing with God’s Election.

(1) God chose those who would choose Him!

Some Christians are confused when you talk about election because they suppose *they* chose God. You did, but because God’s foreknowledge is flawless He chose you first. I can remember when I was in elementary school; play time was my favorite class. We’d go outside and play my favorite childhood sport—kickball. At that time I wanted to grow up and become a professional kickball player. The teacher designated a couple of people to “choose sides” and we stood there as two kids started picking players to be on their teams. I can remember standing there with the other kids holding up my hand saying, “Pick me! Pick me!” It was a sign of honor to be picked first, but it was a devastating experience to be chosen last.

I’ve got good news for you today. Before God even created this world as we know it, He chose you to be his child. You didn’t have to stand there with you hand up begging Him, “Pick me! Pick me!” He chose you because He loves you—and you were the *first* one He chose!

When I was in college I visited the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome. I was amazed at the amazing painting of the Creation by Michelangelo. Michelangelo portrayed God as a stern old man with white hair and a beard, surrounded by childlike angels. God is pointing His finger. It’s almost looks like choosing sides for kickball. According to the scriptures, before God created the world, He pointed into the future and chose you. It’s as if He was saying, “I’ll take John Childs, I choose Mary Jones...” Ephesians 1: 4-5 says, “For he chose us in him (Jesus) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.”

One of the most beautiful words in the Bible is the word “adopted.” The word “adopt” means, “to take into a new relationship.” Those of you who have adopted children, or you have been adopted are blessed because you can better comprehend what it means for God to take you into a new relationship. Adoptive parents have the blessing of being able to choose the child they will adopt. Sometimes a couple makes arrangements to adopt a child even before that child is born, or in other cases the child is already born, but the fact remains adoptive parents make a choice to accept, care for, and love that child as much as if that child was their natural offspring. In the vast majority of cases, the adopted child accepts the parents’ choice and chooses to be adopted. There must be a few rare cases, however, where a child was old enough to refuse to be adopted by the parents who chose them. That must be a painful experience for the parents.

That’s the difference between human adoption and God’s adoption. If we had perfect foreknowledge, adoptive parents would only choose children to adopt who would choose to be adopted. God *does* know who will choose to accept Him, so before we do it, He chooses us first. If God chooses you, you are predestined to be His child.

The second truth about election is:

(2) God didn't choose anyone to be eternally lost!

Some people teach what is often called “double-barreled predestination” whereby they believe God not only chooses some to be saved, but He chooses the rest to be lost, but the Bible never teaches that. Predestination is not some inflexible doctrine based on chance. Salvation is not some divine crap-shoot where you try to roll the right numbers. It's not some heavenly lottery based on the luck of the draw. God doesn't say, “You're number five, you stay alive. You're number six, you're in a fix; You're number seven, you go to heaven. You're number eight, so you incinerate; you're number nine, you'll be fine. You're number ten, I'll take you in.”

While God doesn't choose some people to be lost, that's a choice many make for themselves because the Bible teaches not everyone will go to heaven. Jesus said, “Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” (Matthew 7:13) Sadly, hell will be populated by millions of people who rejected God's free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. The Bible says in Revelation 20:15, “If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:15) There is a hell, but it's not God's desire for people to spend eternity there. In Matthew 25:41 that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels.

God's desire is for *everyone* to be saved. He offers forgiveness to everyone, but not everyone will accept His offer of grace. The Bible says, “Now, he (God) commands all people, everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:30) “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

So, if you have accepted God's offer, you can't boast because He chose you long before you ever chose Him. Salvation is a gift of grace and there is nothing you ever did to deserve it. In this amazing sentence we not only see the work of God the Father, we see the work of God the Son:

2. JESUS HAS CLEANSED YOU FROM THE FILTH OF THIS WORLD

In the last words of verse two we read they have been cleansed by the “sprinkling by his blood.” God created a perfect world where there was no sin, sickness, death or disease. But human sin destroyed the perfection of paradise, and now we live in a dirty, polluted world. God made arrangements to clean up the sin problem, however. In the Old Testament He taught the Jews sin could be forgiven through a blood sacrifice. He was teaching them a life had to be sacrificed to make atonement for sin. Every year on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest killed an animal and sprinkled the blood on the Ark of the Covenant kept in the Holies of Holies. At first, the Holy of Holies was a room in a portable tent called a tabernacle, and then later it was located in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Bible describes it this way, “He (High Priest) shall slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and sprinkle it on the atonement cover (mercy seat) and in front of it. In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been.” (Leviticus 16:15-16)

Jesus came to fulfill the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Back in the 1970s when I was a long-haired Jesus freak, I worked as a Youth Minister in Prattville, Alabama. Every Saturday night we had a coffee-house we called The Liberation House. We served free cokes and chips, and I led the teenagers in songs with my guitar. We'd have testimonies and we usually some kind of funny skit. One of the skits was about some space men who landed on planet earth. The teenagers playing the space invaders used plenty of aluminum foil to make themselves look extra-terrestrial. In the skit, the earth kids encountered the aliens and asked, “Who are you?” The space men answered, “We're from the planet Zuron and we've been sent here to investigate if anything significant has ever happened on this planet.” The teenagers said, “Well, we have televisions and can watch programs that were filmed any place on earth.” The spacemen seem bored and said, “Really, we've had that old technology for thousands of years. What else?” The teenagers conferred and one said, “Oh, we have jet airplanes that can travel faster than the speed of sound.” The Zuron leader laughed and replied, “Are you kidding? We traveled here from Zuron faster than the speed of light. Has anything important ever happened on this planet?” As the teenagers struggled to come up with an answer, until one of them said, “Well, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *did* visit our planet 2,000 years ago, some people said that was important.” At that point, the Zurons got so excited they almost lost their aluminum foil antennas. The leader said, “Jesus Christ? The Son of the Creator of the Universe visited THIS planet? Wow! Did you honor him with expensive gifts? Did you enthrone Him as king? Did you run through the streets celebrating and singing? Tell us what did you do?” After a pause, all the teenagers answered, “We killed Him.”

Jesus came to this planet to die for our sins. God's perfection had been marred by human sin so He sent His perfect Son to detoxify the harmful fallout after the explosion of human wickedness. This happened when Jesus shed His blood for us on the Cross. God had promised through the prophet Isaiah “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as white as snow.” (Isaiah 1:18) When Jesus died on the cross, He was making a way for our filth and sin to be washed clean. God had “The blood of Jesus Christ, his son, purifies us from every sin.” (1 John 1:7)

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CHANGING YOU TO LIVE IN ANOTHER WORLD

In verse 2 Peter writes of the “sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.” We've seen the work of God the Father choosing us before the earth was created. We've seen how the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross can cleanse us of our moral and spiritual filth. Those two events took place in the past, but the Holy Spirit is doing something *right now*. He is living in you to change you. Salvation is a something that takes place in three tenses: You have been justified (declared forgiven); You are being sanctified (it's a process); and one day when you stand before God you will be glorified.

When Jesus saved you from your sin, He wasn't finished with you. Forgiveness was only the first step. Philippians 1:6 says, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” That's the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit who lives in you. Unless you are already perfect like Jesus, you are still a work in progress.

The moment you repented of your sin and received God's free gift of the salvation, the Holy Spirit came to live in your heart. The Holy Spirit has never left you since that moment He came to

take up residence in your heart. You can quench the Spirit’s leading, and you can grieve the Holy Spirit, but you can’t shake Him. He is living in you, and when you get out of line, He lets you know. The Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, and He is working on you from the inside out to make you more like Jesus. God’s purpose for your life according to Romans 8:29: “For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son.” Most of us have plenty of “rough edges” still in our lives and the Holy Spirit is constantly changing us. If you are yielding to the Holy Spirit, you should be more like Jesus today than you were a year ago, or ten years ago. The way you know you’re becoming more like Jesus is when other people see in you the personality of Jesus expressed in the fruit of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control. (See Galatians 5:22)

The word “home” is a powerful word. It means so much more than a house or an apartment where you live; it’s a place dear to your heart. Have you ever lived somewhere or visited somewhere and you seemed “out of place?” In your heart you felt a longing and a tugging to return home? We call that homesickness. As you grow closer to Jesus through your relationship with Him, the more out of place you will feel in this world. You’ll find yourself becoming homesick for heaven, and the pleasures and allures of this world become less and less appetizing.

There’s an old gospel song entitled, “This World is not My Home” that says, This world is not my home I’m just-a-passing through / My pleasure and my hopes are placed beyond the blue / Many friends and kindred have gone on before / And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore / Oh Lord you know I have no friend like you / If heaven’s not my home oh Lord what will I do / Angels beckon me to heaven’s open door / And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.

Some people who claim to follow Jesus love this world and don’t really look forward to the next world—that’s a pretty good sign about the condition of your heart. The Apostle Paul had a faithful companion named Demas. He was like a right-hand man to Paul in his ministry. But as Paul was suffering in prison, he made this terrible statement about Demas, “Demas has deserted me, having loved this present world.” (2 Timothy 4:10)

People who don’t know God think this world is all there is, and since you only go around once in life, you should grab for all the gusto you can get. But we are aliens because we believe there is another world, and we don’t feel at home in this world. We know deep down in our hearts that there is another world. People often laugh at us because we believe in heaven saying, “All you Christians care about is heaven; you aren’t living in the NOW.” I disagree. Most of the Bible is about how to live NOW. The Bible has more to say about “Steak-on-the-plate-in-the-nasty-now-and-now” than it does about “pie-in-the-sky-in-the-sweet-by-and-by.” But the Bible *does* teach there is another world, and you don’t have to be an intellectual runt to believe in it.

One of the greatest minds of the 20th century was C.S. Lewis. He wrote: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” “There is no need to be worried by facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of Heaven ridiculous by saying they do not want ‘to spend eternity playing harps.’ The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them. All the scriptural imagery (harps, crowns, gold etc) is a symbolical attempt to express the inexpressible. People who take these symbols literally might as well think

that when Christ told us to be like doves, he meant that we were to lay eggs!” (*Mere Christianity*, p. 120)

If death is the end, that means growing old and sick is a depressing, hopeless experience. But if there is another world and we can live in after we die, we should live every day until we die with a positive, hopeful, joy-filled anticipation! The Bible says, “Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:1,18)

Look around at some of the things you can see today. Look at this building, look at the trees, look at the planet itself, look at these bodies—all these are temporary! Now fix your eyes on what you can’t see: God, God’s love, God’s grace, God’s forgiveness, God’s heaven. Can you see them? No. But those are the eternal things. Inside this shell of a body is a soul and a spirit, and although my joints ache a little more than they did 20 years ago, I’m happier in Jesus today than I was 20 years ago. Because I know that in a billions years from now, long after the sun has stopped shining, and the stars have been plucked from their sockets, that I will be living on with the Lord. I can’t see it with these eyes, but I can see it with eyes of faith.

CONCLUSION

For centuries people have looked up into space and wondered if there is anybody else “out there” in space. One American astronaut said that’s why men and women will barrel into space inside a giant rocket built for the government by the lowest bidders—to find out what is “out there.” Americans have an unquenchable curiosity about space.

Carl Sagan, one of the most likeable, educated astronomers of the 20th century, consulted for NASA, hosted “Cosmos” on PBS and wrote many books including *Contact* which was made into a movie starring Jodie Foster. Carl Sagan spent most of his life examining the heavens, but he never found God. He wrote: Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.” (*Pale Blue Dot*, p. 8, 1994) A few months before he died on December 20, 1996 from bone cancer he wrote: I would love to believe that when I die I will live again, that some thinking, feeling, remembering part of me will continue. But much as I want to believe that, I know of nothing to suggest that it is more than wishful thinking. (“In the Valley of the Shadow”)

You can’t see God with a telescope and heaven can never be reached with a spaceship. If you look to the stars, you’ll never see God; you’ll only see His signature. On April 12, 1961 Soviet Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space as his Vostok I rocket circled the earth one time and returned safely 108 minutes after take-off. When he returned, Gagarin supported the Soviet atheistic philosophy by saying, “I have been to the heavens and I did not see any god.” That’s like saying I’ve seen the Mona Lisa, but I didn’t see any Leonardo Da Vinci!

In commenting on Yuri Gagarin’s statement a Russian Pastor said: “Those who do not see God on earth; will never see Him in heaven.” The Bible says the heavens “are the work of God’s fingers.” (Psalm 8:3) You won’t find God looking through a telescope or riding on a space craft.

God is ready to reveal Himself to you today. Turn from your sins, and place your faith in Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you and the Holy Spirit will come to live inside of you to prepare you to live for eternity in a better world than this one!

OUTLINE

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For he chose us in him (Jesus) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. *Ephesians 1:4-5*

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...the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, purifies us from every sin. *1 John 1:7*

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CHANGING YOU TO LIVE IN ANOTHER WORLD

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Through OUTWARDLY we are wasting away, yet INWARDLY we are being RENEWED day by day...So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. *2 Corinthians 4:1, 18*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes