

Strange Days Indeed – 1 Peter 1:1-12

Preacher: Stephen Taylor

Bible Passage: 1 Peter 1:1-12

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Video available here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkL9OWK3oZc>

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When we moved from Tweed Heads to Newcastle a few years ago to minister in this place, for a while we felt like strangers. There were new people to meet, new schools to get involved in, new sporting groups, new neighbours, new doctors. It was all very strange. We didn't seem to fit. And I thought because I was not far from my old friends in Sydney that I might be able to link back into my old social networks but I didn't seem to fit in there either. In twenty years, they had all moved on. Yet when I spoke to people back in Tweed Heads and then later on when we went back to visit them, we didn't fit in there either! We were strangers. Strangers in a strange land. Strangers even in familiar places.

And it is been a bit like that over the last month or so, hasn't it? We are all trying to adjust to life under COVID-19. Social distancing. Working from home. Or worse still losing our jobs, our livelihoods, our income. We can feel like strangers in our own country, or own suburb, even in our own home.

And so, it is good to turn to the book of 1 Peter because in the very first verses we see that Peter wrote this letter to people who were exiles from their own home, strangers in fact. They don't seem to fit in any more. Being a Christian means they are now on the outer, alienated from the rest of society.

Actually, the truth is that all Christians are in some way strangers, exiled, from their homeland. Scattered by God around a foreign world. We are all square pegs in a round hole. The experience we are all feeling at the moment trapped in our homes, is a bit like the experience that we Christians should be always feeling. There is something wrong. We don't fit in. But Peter is writing to these exiles, these strangers and telling them how they should live. And you and I need help with that as well, especially at the moment.

And it is funny, Peter doesn't say as strangers withdraw from others, just weather the storm and look after number 1 and let everyone else find their own way forward. Nor does he say, join in with everyone else and try to fit in so you will no longer feel like strangers. He has a third approach that begins by acknowledging that we are indeed exiles but elect exiles, strangers yes but selected strangers. Let's see what I mean.

1. Strangers (verses 1-2)

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia". Peter starts by introducing himself rather simply. He is an apostle. One of those chosen by Jesus to be with him those 3 years that he ministered in Israel. And Peter is writing to a group of strangers who have been scattered throughout the Roman Empire, most specifically around what is now modern-day Turkey.

These guys are a bit like the Israelites were when Babylon came in and dispersed them throughout their ancient kingdom. At that time God's people were no longer in the place that God had given them to live, they now were homeless, stateless, strangers in a strange land. A bit like those refugees we have seen on our televisions over the last couple of years who have left Syria because it is no longer safe to live there and are now living in huge refugee camps or trying to find a home in Europe but are finding it hard to put down roots. These Christians in Peter's time may live in Turkey but that is not their real home.

And Peter says that is OK because you are selected strangers, you are elected exiles. You *“have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance”*.

Christians may not have their home in this world but they do have a home with God in heaven. Others may consider you an outcast, an alien, a stranger but not God. You might feel that you don't fit in at the moment but that is just not true. No siree! For Christians are *chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*. Chosen. Elected. Selected out of all the peoples of the earth to be God's very own family.

According to his foreknowledge. JI Packer once said, *“to be foreknown by God is to be foreloved by Him.”* It isn't that God knew about the choice that you would one day make, no he set his love on you so that you would make that choice. He knew that all of us human beings are dead in our sin, we are spiritually dead and so incapable of choosing him on our own. So, he chose us. He set his love upon us. Theologian Geerhardus Vos, put it wonderfully when he said, *“The best proof that God will never stop loving you is that He never began.”* He always loved his own! Elect exiles. Selected strangers.

But notice every member of the Trinity was involved in this process. The Father foreknew, the Spirit, (isn't it interesting it goes Father, Spirit, Son rather than the way we would normally take it Father, Son, Spirit), the Spirit sets us apart and sanctifies us, makes us holy, while the Son sprinkles his blood, he cleanses us of all sin and makes us acceptable to God.

That's how important we are to our God. We are not strangers we are family. He choose us before the beginning of the world, he confirmed his selection by 2000 years ago sending his son Jesus to die on the cross for us and then a number of years ago he sent his Holy Spirit into our lives to change us and mould us and make us more like Jesus.

And he did all of this for a purpose. *Chosen for obedience to Jesus Christ*, are the exact words of Peter. Chosen to obey. Chosen to be faithful. Chosen to be like Jesus. And so, Peter will write to this group of strangers in Galatia & Gateshead, in Cappadocia & Charlestown, in Bithynia & in Belmont and tell them how to live as strangers in a strange land. How we are to be obedient to Jesus Christ. How to experience his grace and peace at this time.

For it is easy for us to feel forgotten, isolated at this time. The world is changing so where do I now fit in? What would God have me do? How can I love my neighbour in this current situation? What does worship, fellowship and evangelism look like today? Strangers who are

2. Strangely Hopeful

³*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* Peter firstly encourages us to praise God! Not to be defensive. Not to whinge. Not to complain but to praise the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise him for his great mercies. And that is true of any situation that we Christians find ourselves in. We always have a reason to praise God. We can always thank him for his mercy, his grace, his peace.

For friends we have a new birth. We have been born again! We Christians have all had this chance to start again and live not just as citizens of Lake Macquarie but citizens of heaven. So we are dual citizens. We have two passports so to speak. We might live in Australia but our home, our real home is with God in heaven. That is our hope. Our sure hope.

Now we might say to someone “I hope it doesn't rain this weekend” and what we are really saying is that I'd like it not to rain but I've seen the weather forecast and we really can't be sure of what will happen or

not. But Peter says we have a *sure hope* in our future because God did something in the past that *guarantees* what will happen in the days to come. God raised Jesus from the dead.

God allowed his son to die and then on the third day he made him come alive again. And God has done something similar to us as well. We were once dead in our sins, in our wrongdoings and yet God entered our life and gave us a new birth, a new life, a new start. The same power that entered the lifeless body of Jesus has entered into our lives as well. And so, because of where we have been, we now have an assurance about where we are going. God has written us a cheque, backed by the bank of heaven, so our inheritance is secure.

“An inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade”. We might be strangers but we are not poor. For what God has given us is imperishable, unable to be destroyed. It’s unspoilable, it will not be polluted or diluted in any way. It’s unfading, it will not be like our bodies and be subject to decay through time or sickness. It is kept for us safer than Fort Knox in heaven.

Robert Louis Stevenson in his poem “When the Stars are Gone” put it this way

<i>“The Stars shine over the mountains</i>	<i>The stars shine over the sea</i>
<i>The stars look up to the mighty God</i>	<i>The stars look down on me;</i>
<i>The stars shall last for a million years</i>	<i>A million years and a day</i>
<i>But God and I will live and love</i>	<i>When the stars have passed away”</i> .

God’s inheritance is kept for the believer and the believer is kept for their inheritance. *“This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time”*.

For Peter says that we are shielded by God’s power through our faith until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. No matter what happens in this world, we can’t lose what is going to be given to us in the world to come. COVID-19 can’t stop it. Trials can’t stop it. Death cannot stop it. We are in the grip of grace. In God’s grip of grace. We are safe. We are secure. We are not going anywhere. For we are in God’s safe hands.

Doesn’t that give you hope? Doesn’t that help you to praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? He has chosen you, elected you and will keep you. That’s our hope. But this hope is not a rocking chair where we sit back and await Jesus return, it is more a walking stick that we can lean on as we stumble our way through life. It is not a sedative to keep us calm. It is a shot of adrenaline to get us up and at it. It is not an anchor to keep us safe where we are, it is a light house showing us the way through the storms that are all around us. For yes, we are strangers who are strangely hopeful but we will also go through many

3. Strange Trials (verses 6-9)

“In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials”. Strangely this hope doesn’t just lead to joy it also leads to trouble, to difficulties, to woe. It was the poet William Blake who wrote these words

<i>“Joy and woe are woven fine</i>	<i>A clothing for the soul divine</i>
<i>Under every grief and pine</i>	<i>Runs a joy with silver twine</i>
<i>It is right it should be so</i>	<i>Man was made for joy and woe</i>
<i>And when this we rightly know</i>	<i>Through the world we safely go”</i> .

We rejoice even though we suffer grief, even though we go through many trials, even though we suffer. Now that seems counter intuitive, why would we rejoice in our sufferings? Because our sufferings are

necessary for the growth of our faith. ⁷“*These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory & honour when Jesus Christ is revealed*”.

Christian suffering is one way that God prepares us for our future salvation. It refines us like gold is refined. It gets rid of the dross, the impurities. It makes our faith even more valuable.

Peter says think about gold, fire does not destroy gold, it refines it. Gold that commodity that is known for its preciousness and long-lasting elegance doesn't just become durable by chance, it has to go through various tests and trials. Similarly, nickel has to be thrown into a furnace at some 2,200 degrees centigrade to get rid of the slag. That makes it 99% pure and then it has to be purified still further by acid until it was completely pure.

Do you think that we can be prepared for glory more easily than nickel can be prepared for earthly use? Do you think that this is OK for gold but not for Gods precious sons & daughters to go through the fire? Jesus had to die on the cross, his blood was sprinkled for our purification. Do you think there will be any other way to the crown but through the cross?

Gold is proved genuine by its testing and our faith is proved genuine by our testing. Now that doesn't mean that God doesn't know whether our faith is genuine or not and so he tests us to see if we pass the test. No God chose us. He gave us our faith in the first place. Testings **show us that our faith is genuine**. For when God takes away all other things that we can have our faith in, then we realise we don't need anything else but God. And that gives us a greater love for God.

⁸“*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls*”. For the Christian, going through the woe does lead us to sorrow but also to a joy, inexplicable joy. God shows his love to us in the midst of pain. He reveals his care for us when we are full of sorrow. He holds our hand. He helps us stand. He is with us in the storm and in the rainbow.

The English Christian Malcolm Muggeridge once wrote “*I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have ever learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness... In other words, if it ever were to be possible to eliminate affliction from our earth existence... the result would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal and trivial to be endurable. This of course is what the Cross signifies. And it is the cross more than anything else that has called me inexorably to Christ.*”

So you feel like a stranger at the moment? You feel like a stranger when you try to follow Jesus and everyone else is doing their own thing? Don't rage against the machine, this is gold, pure gold. God is working on you as he is working on me. He is taking my fears, my insecurities and my sinful habits and turning them upside down. He is refining us. Now I am not saying I am enjoying this particularly at the moment, but a loving heavenly father uses all things for good for those who love him. Strangers with a strange hope going through strange trials to receive a

4. Strange encouragement (verses 10-2)

For the way of glory, God's glory has always been sufferings first then onto glory. It was what the prophets went through, it was what Jesus went through & it is what you and I will go through. Because that is the message of the whole Bible! Look at what Peter says next. ¹⁰“*Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹trying to find*

out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow”.

The prophets who wrote Scripture were constantly talking about the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that were to follow. That’s what the OT is all about. It is about Jesus. Jesus suffers in death and is glorified in the resurrection. But notice who was it that wrote the OT? Well the simple answer is the prophets, but Peter goes deeper than that. It was the Spirit of Christ, also known as the Holy Spirit. He wrote these words.

But there is more. ¹²*“It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things”* Can you imagine it, the prophets didn’t really know what they were talking about. Primarily they were not prophesying for their own time but for a time such as ours. They were working for us. They were preaching for us. They were warning us. Thus, we need Christ shaped glasses to understand the OT.

But there is even more. ¹²*“It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven”.* The witness of the OT prophets is backed up by the witness of the NT preachers & even by those who preach from the NT today. For they also talk about Christ. They preach the gospel about the sufferings & glories of Jesus. And once again the agent that drives that message home is the Holy Spirit.

So today we are not even in the same room, maybe not even hearing this gospel message at the same time that it is being preached and yet the power is not in the preacher or in the quality of the video or the sound, it is the power of the Holy Spirit. I am struggling with how to speak on a video or on ZOOM, where to look, how long to go on but that is not the issue.

As the larger Catechism puts it. *“The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners, of driving them out of themselves and drawing them unto Christ, of conforming them to His image and subduing them to His will, of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions, of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.”*

And this is so amazing that even the *“angels long to look into these things.”* They would like to trade places with us today. Yes, they are God’s messengers but they would like to be on the receiving end of this good news as we are today. As would the OT prophets, they would love to be cooped up in their houses hearing the word of God today. You think you want to go back in time, to Genesis 1 or the Exodus or the crossing of the Jordan or the time of Jesus? You would like to go back in a time machine to ancient times? Well they would like to trade places with us today and hear about the mercies of God, about the grace of God. Hear about how God is bringing good even out of trials and hear about how God is refining his people and preparing them for heaven.

Friends we are so privileged to live between the resurrection and the second coming. For Peter is reminding us today that God has chosen us, loved us, protected us and informed us of his eternal plans. Yes, we might feel like strangers even in our world today, we might not fit in with everyone else here in Australia but we are receiving the fullness of our salvation and it is all through Jesus Christ.

What a hope we possess, a living hope. What an inheritance is ours, kept for us in heaven. What a faith he is producing in us, as he gets rid of the dross in our lives, and what a love he has for us in that he is opening up the curtain for us on the mysteries of this world and sharing us his creatures, his eternal plans.

I read recently about the building of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Apparently, when they began construction, they didn't use any safety equipment and about 23 people fell to their deaths. And so, after a while they rigged up a sort of net under the bridge to catch people if they slipped and fell and for the rest of the construction period only 10 people fell but each one's lives were saved. But the interesting thing was that 25% more work got done on the bridge each day after the net was installed. Why? Because there was a safety net. They knew they were being looked after. They were safe.

How much more would we do in God's service if we knew that underneath our lives was not a safety net but God's everlasting arms. Ready to catch us when we fall. Ready to protect us when we are in danger. Always ready to one day take us to our eternal home. Well God has chosen us as Christians. He is saving us as Christians. He is keeping us as Christians and he is preparing us as Christians for glory. Friends let's get out there with joy, hope and love and be obedience to the cause of Christ, wherever he sends us to go.