
CHURCH OF THE
E T E R N A L

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all the nations; and then shall the end come." – Matthew 24:14

November 14, 2013

Dear Members, Co-Workers and Friends:

Something remarkable about the patriarchs of the Bible is their frequent movement from one place to another. It seems like they rarely stayed in one place for very long, and wherever they did stay, they were considered to be foreigners. The Bible describes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob each living out of tents in lands that they considered to be far from home. When Jacob fled hundreds of miles from his home, in fear of his brother Esau's wrath, he even used a stone as a pillow to rest his head (Genesis 28:11). The eventual place to where God individually led them all—the land of Canaan—was a foreign land that He had promised to them as an inheritance. It did not become their homeland at that time. Rather, it had been occupied primarily by other people, and the patriarchs were foreigners in the land where they dwelled.

How did these men and their families feel as they made a living in a foreign and frequently hostile environment? One can only imagine that it made them quite uncomfortable. Reading about the patriarchs is useful because these records help us to consider the stark contrast between the righteous way of living instructed by God, and the environment in which we are placed to live. The patriarchs did not always live righteously; they had to learn how to live godly in an evil society. Similarly, we are here living in this world, but we are not to be a part of it. When we are called into God's Family, when we begin to live according to the perfect law of God, and when we become baptized, we also become sanctified. That is, we are set aside for a holy purpose; we are set apart from the world where we live, just as the patriarchs were separate from the inhabitants of the land where they dwelt.

It is normally an uncomfortable feeling to be a foreigner. Ironically, this is a feeling that a true Christian needs to become comfortable with. Jesus Christ, in speaking with a prospective disciple brings this fact to light. In Matthew 8:18-20 we read, "And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, 'Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'" Jesus knew that there would be occasions when He would not even have shelter. (At that time, the Samaritans, because of their hostility towards the Jews, had refused to grant Him and His disciples a place to reside because they were on their way to Jerusalem.) Jesus points this out here to emphasize that in order to fully follow Him, one must not trust in the comforts of this world. It is much more than many can manage, but it is an important step in learning to live a spiritual life. The spiritual ways of God stand diametrically opposed to the carnal ways of this world, and indeed are quite foreign. This difference is no accident, but rather, it is intentionally designed that way by God.

When we live our lives in a way that is spiritually motivated, living in obedience to God, accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as an important requirement for our salvation, we take a part in the inheritance of the promise given to Abraham. This means that we too are foreigners in a strange land, citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20), and ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). If it makes us uncomfortable, like our forefathers, to be aliens in a world that is so different

than the way that we live, that's a good thing. The world is ruled by Satan right now, and it should not be a surprise that it is hostile to the truly righteous way of life. Jesus Christ reminds us in John 15:19, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." When we become too comfortable in the world we live in, we need to begin asking ourselves whether we might be compromising with the truth.

Fortunately, we don't have to live forever in a state of discomfort and frustration while we dwell in this world. The good news is that this is not our final destination. There is a better kingdom that we can expect to be established on this Earth, under the righteous rulership of Jesus Christ. At that time, we will receive the inheritance of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. It is truly something to look forward to. This vision that we have is the very same vision that was shared by the patriarchs of the Bible. They knew that they would not be foreigners for long. Hebrews 11:13-16 tells us, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." The city described here—the heavenly Jerusalem which will come down to a new earth—is what we look forward to.

It is important that we remember not to get wrapped up in the cares of this world, because it will pass away very soon (1 John 2:17), and give way to a much better age. If you can keep a tight grip on that valuable truth, with the faith of Christ working within you, you will have the strength that it takes to make it through anything this world might threaten you with.

Your brother in Christ

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eric Rank". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Eric Rank