

Our High Calling in Christ

by A.B. Simpson

A.B. Simpson's sermon emphasizes the believer's identity as strangers and pilgrims, called to a high and holy character in Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21, John 3:3, Ephesians 5:1, 1 Peter 1:1-2, 1 Peter 1:14-16, 1 Peter 2:5, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 Peter 2:11, 1 Peter 2:16

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Holiness and Obedience"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes our identity in Christ as 'strangers and pilgrims' in this world, highlighting that believers are chosen, elect, and called to a high and holy character. He explains that while we are to live in obedience and holiness, we must also maintain a childlike spirit, desiring spiritual growth and purity. Simpson further illustrates our roles as living stones in a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, called to represent God to the world. He warns against losing our separation from worldly influences, reminding us that our true home lies beyond this life. Ultimately, he encourages believers to live with a longing for their heavenly home, pressing forward in faith and obedience.

Transcript

"I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims." (1 Peter 2: 11.)

Peter has told us about Christ. Now, what has he to tell us about ourselves? His first epistle contains a number of significant titles and attributes of the believer.

1. Strangers. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered," etc. (1 Peter 1: 1.) This applies primarily to the Jews, as Peter was especially the apostle of the dispersion. How truly they may be called "strangers scattered abroad," a land without a people, a people without a land!

"Tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast,

Where shall you fly away and be at rest?

The wood dove has her nest, the fox his cave,

Mankind his country, Israel but the grave."

But the term also applies to the Christian of Gentile as well as of Jewish blood. This is not our home. We are strangers here, or should be.

2. Elect. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,"(1 Peter 1: 2.) Though strangers and aliens, for whom the world has no more place than for their Master, they are of great value to God, and they have been chosen and selected out of the great mass of the human family for the work of grace and the destiny of glory. But their election is not arbitrary and apart from their personal character and conduct. No man can plant his feet in dogmatic willfulness on the decrees of God and say, "If I am elected, I will be saved, whatever I do," for the Lord Jesus has given us the first test of our election in these simple words, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me," and if we have not come to Christ, it is as idle to talk about our election, as for a man to expect a civic election until he has first become a candidate. Then the apostle Peter has told us here that our election is through sanctification and to obedience. If, therefore, we are not receiving the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit and walking in obedience to Christ, we have no right to claim our election. The last phrase, "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," has a special application to the deeper work of our sanctification. The shed blood was the special symbol of Christ's atonement for our guilt. The sprinkled blood, applied in every case of fresh defilement, stands for the cleansing efficacy of that precious blood. God has called us, therefore, not to an absolute destiny so much as to a high and holy character, and we are to make our calling and election sure by claiming all the privileges of grace and giving all diligence to walk in all the will of God.

3. Begotten, born again, newborn babes (1 Peter 1: 3, 23; 2: 2.) This is translated literally, "regenerated." It refers, of course, to the work of the Holy Ghost, through which we become the children of God and partakers of the new life, and without which our Lord has told us that we shall neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God. But in the third of these passages is a special and most beautiful sense intended by the phrase, "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." The idea is not that at a certain stage of our experience we are to be newborn babes, but that this is to characterize our whole Christian life, and that the ideal spirit of the child of God is the simplicity, sincerity, docility, and sweetness of the little child. We are not to be childish, but we are to be childlike. The ordinary conception of Christian life looks back to the halcyon days when we first believed as a springtime that will never come again. We speak and sing of

"The sweet comfort and peace

Of a soul in its earliest love."

But our Lord severely rebukes the Ephesian church because it had left its first love, and He means surely to imply that we should never lose the tenderness of the newborn babe. This will keep us surely, as the apostle so well expresses it, from "all guile, and hypocrisies and envies, and all evil speaking."

4. Obedient children. "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy." (1 Peter 1: 14-16.) Literally this verse means, "As the children of obedience." That is, it is so natural to them to obey that they are, as it were, born of the spirit of obedience. The following verse suggests also the idea of imitating the Father. "As he which has called us is holy, so be you holy." It is the same thought expressed by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5: 1, R.V., "Be you therefore imitators of God as dear children." Obedience should be instinctive with us as God's children.

This is also suggested in the next term attributed to believers.

5. Servants. "As the servants of God." (1 Peter 2:16.) Literally this is "as the slaves of God." Our ideas of service were unknown in classical times. A servant was a slave, his master's property, and belonged to him absolutely for purposes of pleasure, gain, or even crime. The apostle did not announce a crusade against slavery, though it was wrong in a hundredfold more aggravated sense than modern slavery ever was. But he told the slaves to be so true to their masters, and so blameless in their lives, that with well doing they should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Christianity does not call us to great socialistic movements against the wrongs of society, but rather to purify and elevate the individual influence of Christians, so abolishing as it has done, the wrongs of woman and the cruelties of slavery. But from the human relation of the slave the apostle rises to the conception so dear to all New Testament writers, of God's ownership of us and our absolute slavery to His authority and will. The term 'despot' is applied to God in this epistle, conveying the idea of the right of absolute proprietorship and control, and this the disciple loves to acknowledge and accept in implicit surrender and obedience.

6. The apostle now begins a series of figures with reference to believers, founded upon the types of the Old Testament and the calling of Israel as a people. The first of these is 'living stones'. "You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house." (1 Peter 2: 5.) This is an allusion to the Hebrew temple, and is connected with what he has already said about Christ, the Corner Stone. We are built upon Him and so attached to Him that we become partakers of His nature and His life. Just as you have seen a powerful magnet or loadstone attracting and holding to itself a great number of smaller pieces of metal so that they seem to be part of its substance and are held by an invisible and irresistible bond, so we are attracted and attached to Christ and built up in Him as a spiritual temple.

7. A spiritual house. (1 Peter 2: 5.) This carries forward the figure from the individual stones to the entire temple, and at once brings before our minds the splendid figure of the temple and tabernacle service as a type of our spiritual life. Each of us should be a miniature of that sacred temple, and our whole life a constant offering up of spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For God has said to us, "I will be to them a little sanctuary," and we may so "dwell in the secret place of the Most High" and "abide under the shadow of the Almighty," and have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus," that every moment of our experience shall be a rehearsal of the sacred service of that ancient tabernacle. It is a delightful spiritual exercise to come in the secret fellowship of the soul, first to the altar of burnt offering where we lay our guilt and sin upon the Lamb of God, and know that we are accepted through His precious blood as a sacrifice and a sweet smelling savor. Then we may come to the cleansing laver where first we see our sins in its mirrored bosom, and then wash them away in its flowing waters. Now we are prepared to enter into the holy place through the sacred door which the priests might enter, and claim the privilege of Christian priesthood. And this leads us to the next of these significant figures:

8. An holy priesthood. (1 Peter 2: 5.) For the priesthood is not now confined to any exclusive class as in the Aaronic line, but we are all called to be priests unto God. And yet that does not mean that all believers really enjoy the privilege of priesthood, although they are entitled to it, for we must first qualify for this high and holy ministry. We are a holy priesthood, and he alone that has clean hands and a pure heart can ascend unto the hill of God and stand in the holy place. Therefore we must wash in the laver and enter in by the door which is Jesus Christ Himself in the fullness of His life. For He has said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." The "more abundant" life is the holy priesthood of which we have just spoken, and the secret place of the Most High where we may dwell as His hidden ones. There stands the golden candlestick with its perfect and supernatural light. For there is

an inner light for the consecrated believer which the world cannot comprehend, but which speaks to the finer senses of the quickened spirit, and makes divine truth a vivid reality and Christ more real

"Than any outward object seen."

Next we come to the table of shewbread, a type of Christ our living bread, and find in Him the supply of all our need and the sustenance of all our life. A little farther on stands the golden altar of incense with the censer with burning coals and fragrant frankincense, and the whole chamber of this inner sanctuary is filled with the sweet odors of divine communion, "the peace of God that passes all understanding," and the very breath of heaven. Yes, and even farther in we may enter now, through the rent veil into the holy of holies, and dwell in the innermost presence of God where the Shekinah shines and the overshadowing wings of the cherubim remind us of our coming glory into which, indeed, in foretaste we may already enter. Thus we are a holy priesthood, and in the fellowship of the Spirit offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

9. A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people. (1 Peter 2: 9.) Now just as the previous phrases were all connected with the tabernacle and temple, so this series is similarly connected with the calling of Israel as a people. They were an elect race, a holy nation, a kingdom of priests, and a people for a possession. Had they fulfilled their high destiny, they would have become to the world what the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures are to the heavenly temple. They would have represented God to men and become the custodians of His sacred oracles and the leaders of His worship and His work among the nations. But Israel failed to understand and fulfill her high calling. Instead of being a peculiar people, she sought to be like the nations. Instead of recognizing God as her King, and being a theocratic kingdom as He had intended, she said, "Give us a king that we may be like the rest of the nations," and soon her kings and people were sunk in all the gross idolatries of the nations around them. No sooner had the kingdom reached its zenith in the glory of Solomon that he introduced not only the luxuries but the abominable idolatries of Egypt and the world. And God had to rend the kingdom and send its people into captivity and even give over the sovereignty of the world to the Gentile nations, until Israel should learn that her only place must ever be that of a kingdom of priests and of a peculiar people. To that high destiny she is once more to come in the glorious day of her restoration under Christ her King. But now having lost her national calling for the time, God has called His Church to take her place, and to be instead His chosen generation, His holy nation, His royal priesthood, His peculiar people. Let us not forget that we can only enjoy this high destiny in separation from the world; and that when we become like the present evil age, we lose our separation and our glory, and the Lord will have to reject us too. This indeed is the sad picture of the last stage of Christianity as set forth in the Laodicean church just before the coming of the Lord. But while the Church as a body and a visible institution may thus be rejected by her coming Lord, the true Bride of the Lamb, the little flock of His hidden ones shall be kept true and pure as a people for His possession. Let us remember that this is our calling, to belong to Him and to Him alone, to represent Him to the world and to wait for our kingdom and glory when we also shall be glorified at His coming.

10. Strangers and pilgrims. (1 Peter 2: 11.) The apostle began with one of these titles. It is fitting that he should return to it again at the close of this series of sacred names and titles for the people of God. Literally these terms may be translated sojourners and pilgrims. The first expresses the idea that we have no home here; the second, that we have a home beyond, that we are pressing forward to it and that we are having it ever in view. One may be a stranger without being a pilgrim. A stranger is a tramp. The pilgrim is a traveler. The tramp is homeless. The traveler is going home. Both should be true of the child of

God. We should be weaned from the world as a resting place or a goal of final hope and expectation. We are in it but not of it. We have our earthly duties, occupations, and relationships, but it is only a stage on our journey home, and the true heart will often be lonesome for the home beyond. A poor Irish laborer who had spent forty years of his life amid the brick and mortar of the great city, went out to the country for a few days to work at a special job, and one morning as he stood in the field he heard a sudden whir of wings and saw a little speck shooting up into the air, and immediately there came a burst of music that filled his eyes with tears, and sent him to sit down on one of the rough building stones until the flood of memories that song awakened had surged through his simple heart. An American who had never noticed the song of the lark asked him what was the matter. "Oh," said the poor Irishman, "that bird made me think of the ould counthry and the days long gone by." Poor fellow, he had not heard the lark since his childhood, and it made him feel that he was a stranger in a strange land. Beloved, do you know the home longing? and best of all, are you going home? Are you not only a stranger, but a pilgrim too? They say the Swiss soldiers, when they sometimes hear the old horn that calls the sheep and cattle home at night in the Alpine valleys, throw down their arms and cannot be restrained from starting home. Is the heavenly country drawing you? Can you say like the little fellow whose kite was out of sight and someone asked him how he knew it was there, "I feel it pull"? Is your life projected on the heavenly scale? Are your friendships, your ambitions, your occupations, your money, your studies, and your life plans invested where moth and rust cannot come, nor thieves break through and steal?

"I am waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom in the air,

I am longing for the gathering of the ransomed over there;

I am putting on the garments which the heavenly Bride shall wear,

For the glad homecoming draweth nigh.

"I am letting go the pleasures and the treasures worldlings prize,

I am laying up my treasures and ambitions in the skies;

I am setting my affections where there are no broken ties;

For the glad homecoming draweth nigh."

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