

March 26, 2017

Who are you?

"Therefore, remember that formerly you were separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you, who once were far away, have been brought near through the blood of Christ...Consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people..."
Ephesians 2:11-22

We've been hearing a whole lot lately in the news about immigrants. And, if we want to be honest with our own reality, each and every one of us is descended from immigrants. Interestingly, no humans originally inhabited the Americas. Even the First Peoples immigrated to this hemisphere from Asia.

In another sense each and every one of us is an immigrant in another sense. As one reads through the Old Testament of our Bible it becomes abundantly clear that the story there has little or nothing to do with those who would one day inhabit the New World. The Bible story is about God's chosen people Israel.

These people were chosen by God, as descendants of Abraham, to be the children of the promises that he made to that Patriarch in Genesis 12. Those promises were, for the most part, not for you and me. They promised that the descendants of Abraham would be a great nation and that they would possess the land of Canaan one day.

The nation that grew up as a result of those promises was the nation of Israel and, if nothing had changed, you and I would be considered aliens and foreigners by those people. We would be the ones who were not welcome.

That is who we would have been, but that is not who we are. Because of Jesus, the promises that were made to those people all of those years ago now apply to us as well. God promised Abraham there in Genesis 12:3, *"...all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you."* That part of the promise of hope that God gave to Abraham and through him to Israel, is also made to you and me. That blessing is Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ we, the unwelcome foreigners and aliens, *"...have been brought near through the blood of Christ."*

Think about what our lives would be like if there were no Jesus. If the promised Messiah had not yet come into the world you and I would not be believers because we would have nothing to believe in. The God of the Old Testament, the God of Israel, would still be just the God of that nation and you and I would be considered aliens and unwelcome foreigners. We would not be welcome to become a part of that nation and we would not be invited to share in the hope of those people.

Sometimes I wonder what we would worship if there were no Jesus. But, there is a Jesus! The Apostle wants us to understand that Jesus changes everything. We were born to be aliens and foreigners, but because of Jesus we are no longer immigrants. In his great mercy, motivated by his great love, God has welcomed us into his nation and made us *"...fellow citizens with God's people."*

In every way Jesus is our Statue of Liberty. Because of him we have been welcomed into a nation that was not originally our nation. We have been invited to become citizens in a nation where we could never be citizens, but would remain aliens and foreigners for ever. In Jesus, God made it possible for us to become the children of promise that we could never be without him.

Peter describes us this way, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* (I Peter 2:9-10)

