

The Sojourner

By George Davis

" . . .and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:20-21)

Looking back over the reformation trail, several things become painfully clear. Man's disdain for a simple walk with God was outdone only by their ambition to build. Preoccupied with erecting and maintaining shrines they never so much as lifted a gaze to consider the pathway set before them and the ongoing journey standing between them and the full restoration of all things. Due to the sheer weight of their religion they were unable to follow on, being tethered to their temples and their personal stake in them, which served as their ball and chain, the altar upon which they sacrificed their mobility.

The period known as "The Reformation" marked the end of what is presently referred to as the Dark Ages. What little light there was, if contrasted on the dark backdrop of the times, appeared incredibly bright by comparison. We chuckle under our breath thinking, "Had we been there things would have been different." What makes us so sure? What is so different about what the church is doing today? The reformation is not over, and yet few are moving on. The reformation continues and yet many act as though it ended with their particular denominational movement, acting as if even God himself could not imagine a religion superior to theirs. They resist change, and the messengers who bring it. What is wrong with being a little stubborn about our religious heritage? Aren't we suppose to contend for the faith once delivered to the Saints? What makes us think that the current religious practices constitute the sum total of the faith that was once delivered to the Saints? Is there not one thing needing improvement?

There are many temples strewn along the pathway to the restoration of all things. They are mementos of religious man's inflexibility. Their fixed walls are memorials to his stubbornness, and their lofty steeples, a parable of his pride.

In the first century, there was one church, which was not divided by titles of distinction. There was only one Church in each city. They had not learned nor mastered the art of division yet. Seven major persecutions served to remind them of the enmity between

them and the world. The world hated them as the Lord had warned, "If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John:15:18-19.)

The recognition of Christianity by the Roman Empire tended to narrow the gap between the Church and the world. The Christians were no longer pilgrims and strangers in a strange land. The officials of state were "Christians," and Constantine the emperor, who himself was the final court of appeals, and who called himself "a Christian," was as pagan as they come. Are things really that different today? We live in a so-called "Christian country." Our politicians have a revival of the faith every election year. We have lowered the bar of Christianity so low that we must scuff our feet to stub our toe on it. If a mouse is found in a biscuit tin, is it a biscuit? Being born in America does not automatically make you a Christian. Being born into a Christian family does not make you a Christian either. No. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John:3:3).

Once a person is born again, they become citizens of a different Kingdom. They are divinely transported from the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of God's dear Son. (See Colossians 1:13.)

Jesus said of himself: "I am not of this world" (John:8:23). He was from another world. He was a stranger and sojourner here. He came to His own and even His own did not know Him or receive Him. The disciples wept and lamented at Christ's death, the world however rejoiced. (See John:16:20.)

Jesus said,

"That in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John:16:33)

Jesus called his disciples "out of the world" (John:17:6).

We are no longer a part of the world system. Our membership in the kingdom of Christ frees us from slavery to the world. As light and darkness will not mix so we cannot be citizens of both kingdoms, it will be one or the other. Like Jesus, the Christian is not of this world.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through your truth: Your word is truth. As You have sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. (John.17:16-18)

The Apostle John advanced a simple test; the man who loves the world does not love the Father.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." (1 John:2:15-16)

Do we love the world?

"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4)

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:1-2)

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13)

"And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear. . ." (1 Peter 1:17)

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. . ." (1 Peter 2:11)

I remember as a child, sitting in a church building, hearing these words sung. "This world, this world is not my home, this world is not my resting place, this world, this

world is not my home." So it was that even as a young child my concepts were being shaped, concepts regarding the believer and this world. I knew as a young boy that a decision for Christ was a decision against the world. All citizens of God's kingdom are pilgrims on the earth. Like Abraham, we have no permanent dwelling place here, but look for a city whose builder and maker is God. We are otherworldly. Our affections are set on things above. We are not of this world. We are sojourners here.

Jesus said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). "As you have sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). "And the Word became flesh and dwelt (skay-no'-o, to tent or encamp) among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus pitched his tent among us. Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, dwelling in tents. Peter makes his appeal for purity among believers upon this basis. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. . ." (1 Peter 2:11).

A sojourner is one who lives temporarily in a place. A stranger is one who lives temporarily in a place without the right of citizenship. A pilgrim is one who comes from a foreign country into a city or land, to reside by the side of the natives. The word sojourner denotes our temporary stay here on earth. The word stranger communicates two things.

1. We are not citizens of this world.
2. We cannot acquire citizenship in the world.

The word *pilgrim* implies that we are citizens of another country. We are not people without a country. We are not people without a destination. Our citizenship is in Heaven, where our affections ought to be. It is my conviction that this mentality is escaping the twentieth century church, like water from a cracked cup. And that these scriptures have a liberating effect. Not freedom to be a part of this world system and its values, but freedom from it. In the same way that a citizen of another country is unconcerned about American politics, and the preservation of our freedoms, our thoughts return to our fatherland. Our affections reside there. We are homesick. This world is not our home. We like Abraham have set our affections on that city whose builder and maker is God. Settlers love to build kingdoms. Sojourners look for that city

that God is building. Abraham lived in tents. He did not build castles. He had no vested interest here on earth.

Abraham was a nomad in a land, which God had given to him. Abraham was not a settler, or kingdom builder. He was simply following the Lord wherever he led. History is replete with evidence of man's kingdom building propensity. From the tower of Babel, to the first kingdom, over which Nimrod was god, the mold was cast, indicating the true nature of all such kingdom building, i. e., the deification of man, the enthroning of self.

Many simply exchange their pagan idols for Christian ones. With this kingdom building propensity unchecked, they build cathedrals instead of castles, trying to find a place of permanency here on earth. Sojourners tabernacle with God, they follow the cloud. To tabernacle means "to pitch a tent," and as used by nomads, tents gave them the freedom to move at a moment's notice. I am not saying that we should all sell our homes and move into tents or that it would be wrong to own a home. It is a matter of where our treasures are stored. For where our treasure is, there our heart will be also.

Jesus said, "I will build my church." He did not subcontract the task. Our part is to pull up stakes, grab out tents and move when the cloud moves.

On what is now called "The mount of transfiguration," Peter, James and John revealed their understanding of the Kingdom of God. Seeing Jesus, talking with Moses and Elijah, Peter interrupted by saying, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But While Peter was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and a voice came suddenly out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (See Matthew 17:4-5.)

The disciples wanted to build and settle on the mount, to enshrine the perfect religious experience. However, before Peter had finished, God interrupted, directing their attention to what is truly important, not building, but his Son. The disciples wanted to camp around this experience, but the cloud moved on with Jesus. Cluttered with churches built upon mountain top experiences, history cries out "Oh wisdom where are your children?" God was there, revealing Jesus in new and exciting ways, but in many cases all that remains are cathedrals. Throughout the reformation, every move of God solidified into an institution, while Jesus and the cloud moved on. What was once teaming with divine life, soon fell to the level of a humanly maintained organization,

persecuting those who dared to move on with God. Sojourners are slow to build, they are utilitarian, building only what is necessary for the moment. They are detached and ready to move on without regrets. For they have no continuing city here but look for that city, which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Do I mean that we should not live in the same city for an extended period of time or attend the same gathering of believers twice? Certainly not! However, we must have the freedom and mobility to move with God, finding our worth in him not in the works of our hands.

Who will build him a house?

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. . ." (Acts 17:24-27)

We must abandon all our efforts to build a house for God. From an eternal perspective it is an utter waste of time. Let us instead set our affections on things above and one day we shall see that city, the New Jerusalem, descending from heaven, like a bride adorned for her husband. This city's foundations are sure and permanent. Until then, we follow the cloud for God continues to lead us on to the "Restitution of all things." Let us pull up our stakes and follow without hesitation, for Jesus is on the move and those who follow him will never walk in darkness.