



“The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine;
for you are *but* aliens and sojourners with Me.”

Leviticus 25:23

THERE IS AN ODD PARADOX AT WORK in this world. The unbeliever, whose end is black death and an eternity isolated from God, lives happy as a clam in a fallen world. On the other hand, the believer, whose end is light and life in close fellowship with God, lives unhappily in the same world. The one who has everything to live for is content with nothing in a fallen world.

This does not mean that the Christian is perpetually morose, his chin dragging on the ground. Indeed, the active, serving believer can be the most fulfilled individual in the room. But that same person has the Spirit living within—the Spirit who informs him that he now dwells in a strange and alien land, a land no longer his home. And that is how it can feel; like a homesick traveler stranded in an unfriendly, inhospitable foreign land, the believer knows he is not where he belongs—and not where he would rather be.

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:13-16

Considering his future, the Christian should be the happiest person around, but, considering his present environment, is often the most miserable—if not on the surface, at least deep in his heart. For the Christian has had a taste of that which can be—a “foretaste of glory divine”—and thus pines for the perfection he knows exists somewhere other than where he now stands. Rewarding, even joy-filled work on the horizontal plane cannot remove the Christian’s longing for the vertical.

This world can indeed be a grim prospect for the believer, but there is beauty lying just outside the senses. There is beauty and grace waiting just beyond what we can see and touch. For while we

may dwell in an inhospitable land, the Lord has not abandoned us to it; while we may dwell in the brown and dull gray of a dying winter, the Lord's clean blanket of grace is always within reach of our soul.

There is a cleansing to God's grace. Before anything else is the gracious cleansing of our sins from Christ's blood. At the cross we permanently, irrevocably receive what king David had to request repeatedly.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.
Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Psalm 51:5-7

Like the cleansing blanket of snow falling upon dead and dirty weeds, our sins are covered by the redemptive blood of Christ. Once is sufficient; it need never be sought again. But as the believer proceeds through his journey in mortal flesh, inevitably he will become soiled by the climate of sin in which he must dwell. Both from without and within, he suffers from living where not everyone knows and belongs to his Savior. So it becomes necessary to seek out and find relief.

Even in those hard moments when we feel the most alienated from Him by our dead and dying environment, God patiently invites us, as if to say, *Call upon Me, and I can make all things white again. I can cover your transgressions with the blood of My Son, and I can soothe your aching soul with the balm of my daily, blanketing grace. Walk with Me. Learn from Me. I am still here.*

*O! why should I stray with the flocks of Thy foes,
'Mid the desert where now they are roving,
Where hunger and thirst, where affliction and woes,
And temptations their ruin are proving!*

*O! when shall my foes and my wandering cease?
And the follies that fill me with weeping!
Thou Shepherd of Israel, restore me that peace
Thou dost give to the flock Thou art keeping.*

*A voice from the Shepherd now bids thee return
By the way where the footprints are lying:
No longer to wander, no longer to mourn;
O fair one, now homeward be flying!*

Thomas Hastings