

## This Is Not My Home

Dear Friend,

There are millions of refugees all over the world. The classic definition of refugee is an individual or family who has fled into another country because of war, violence, or persecution. I have recently visited Ukraine and I had the opportunity to serve refugees fleeing the war with Russia. I heard their stories of the brutal persecution and violence Russia inflicted on them. When I think back on the men and women, children, and grandparents whose lives are ruined by this war, my heart breaks. What does the Bible have to say about refugees? What comfort, truth or hope does the Scripture offer to hurting people in this situation? What can Christians in the US learn from the lives of refugees in Ukraine? In this sermon, we are going to take a deeper look at what the Bible says about refugees.

Based on our classic definition of refugees, Israel is a nation of refugees. Israel was persecuted in Egypt for hundreds of years. God raised up Moses to lead his people into the promised land. Before they entered, Moses instructed them in the law of the Lord. This law set Israel apart as God's people. It instructed them in the fear and love of the Lord and how best to live in community with one another. The Hebrew word *gēr* means client, stranger, or foreigner. It often describes a person who has fled from their native country and now permanently resides in a foreign land. In Deuteronomy 10:17-19 we learn how God wants Israel to treat foreigners. The Bible says, **“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.” Deuteronomy 10:17-19** This is a remarkable passage for a number of reasons, but there are two particular things I want to point out: God is a Just God and Israel must mirror God. Israel should love foreigners because they themselves were foreigners.

In this passage God claims sovereignty over all other gods and lords. He is not bound to a country or land; he is not constrained in power or wisdom. God is Just, he always gives a person or nation what they deserve. This passage also points out God's great love for hurting and marginalized people. Orphans and widows were particularly vulnerable in the ancient world. God also cares for the foreigner, providing what they need to live. In this passage, God commands that Israel imitate him by loving the foreigner and God points out that Israel can relate to being foreigners. Israel was set apart from other nations to be a light and a blessing to all nations. Christians also have the same responsibility to be a light wherever they are. Matt. 5:13 I want to point out 3 characteristics that describe refugees that are similar to living as Christians in a broken world.

Refugees are often distrusted and disliked in the country they flee to. The natural inclination of the human heart is to distrust what it doesn't know. When people flee from their native land because of violence, the country they enter naturally marginalizes them. Refugees often speak different languages, dress differently and view the world in sharply different ways than the land they flee to. These differences often cause hatred and confusion as cultures clash with each other. Christians should be able to relate, because Jesus warned his disciples of the hatred of the world. In John 15:18-21 our Lord said, **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.”** John 15:18-21 Jesus warns of the hatred and persecution his disciples will face.

To be different is often to be hated. In this text we learn that Christians do not belong to the world, because Jesus has chosen us out of the world. Disciples don't choose Jesus, but Jesus chooses his disciples. This essentially means that as Christians grow in faith, they mirror Jesus more clearly. The closer faithful believers mirror or reflect Jesus, the more persecution and hatred they will face from the world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, disciples of Jesus put to

death the sins in their bodies. The world naturally will hate Christians for this, because the life of a Christian should expose the wickedness of the world. In this text we also learn how to test whether someone is a believer or not. Christians who truly have faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior will obey him as a servant obeys a master. Christians obey because they know that Jesus is the Son of God. The world cannot obey God because they don't have faith in Jesus. In the same way that refugees are hated for their differences, Christians will experience hatred because they are set apart by God. The more a believer grows in faith, the more foreign the world becomes to them.

As refugees flee into foreign countries, they often find everything in that country strange. They may struggle to adapt to the new country as they learn the rules and customs. There is a deep longing to return home, even though where they fled from is not safe for them. As refugees try to accommodate to a strange world, their hearts are set on what they know. The apostle John warns Christians to have the same attitude to the world. The believer's heart should be set on doing the will of God and loving others instead of loving the world. In 1 John 2:15-17 he says, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—The desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” 1 John 2:15-17 ESV** As Christians grow in maturity, the world becomes more foreign to them. There are three ways in which the world feels foreign to Christians.

First, Christians are loved by God and love God not the World. When the apostle John says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world.” he does not mean that Christians must reject everything in the world. Instead, he is warning Christians not to devote themselves to a world system that is opposed to God. There is no country, no government, no political party that represents God and His Word perfectly. Christians are called to devote themselves to God and not to any world system while on earth. God loves His children, and His love produces love for God. This means that the more Christians grow in maturity, the more they understand and know God's love for them. This understanding produces a deeper

devotion and love for God. The more believers grow in their love for God, the more they love what comes from God.

Second, Christian's love what is from the Father. The apostle John helps clarify what comes from the world and what comes from God. John warns about three dangers we naturally experience as sinners. He warns about the dangers of out-of-control desires. One example of the desires of the flesh, and the eyes and the pride of life is food. Humans need food. God created the body to need food. However, a devotion to food, a breakdown in self-control when it comes to food is really bad. When you make food your god, your eyes can't get enough. Have you ever heard the phrase, "Your eyes are bigger than your stomach." This means that you piled way too much food on your plate, because it all looked so good. I believe this is what John is talking about when using the phrase "desire of the eyes." When you love food more than God, pride grows in your heart. You essentially say, "I can eat whatever I want, whenever I want, however I want it and no one can stop me." The temptation to devote yourself to food comes from the world, not from God. The Word of God reveals the Will of God for His children.

Finally, Christians set their hearts on eternity. The apostle John points out how everything natural in the world is passing away. Our bodies decay and die. The earth erodes and changes constantly. Even the stars die. When Christians focus on doing God's Will on earth, we set our hearts on eternity. God's Will is that we love Him and love our neighbor. This takes daily practice, because the desires of our flesh, our eyes and our pride fight for our devotion. The life of a faithful believer is strange to the world. We are called to live in the "already, not yet" tension. Believers are already justified in the eyes of God our Father, but we are not yet fully sanctified. This means we must set our hearts on pleasing God every day. Refugees also experience living in a foreign land. Even though they live in a foreign country, their hearts are set on home.

The idiom, "Home is where the heart is." is kind of like Jesus' saying, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt. 6:21) The idea is that what and who we love is really where we feel most comfortable. Refugees know what it's like to have to flee home. Even though they may be removed physically from their home, their heart is still set on what and who they love. We as

Christians also know what this tension feels like. This world is not our home. Jesus promises us that he will return and bring us into a glorious new home. In John 14:1-4 Jesus says, **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”** John 14:1-4 Jesus promises his disciples that he will come again and bring them home. This truth is incredibly comforting, especially when we experience trials and persecution on earth. Just like refugees, we can take comfort in the work that Christ Jesus has done on the cross and the promise of a future, glorious home.

Israel is a nation set apart by God to glorify and honor Him. The Old Testament is a record of the history, purpose and vision set down by God for His people. Israel knows what it feels like to be a nation of refugees, being separated and marginalized, far from home. Jesus Christ fulfilled the law when Israel failed to do so. When he did this, he opened the way for all people to enter into the family of God through faith in Jesus. The children of God not only receive justification for their sins, but also eternal life with God. This life is the home of true believers and the source of all comfort and hope in this broken world. Let’s take some time to think through how this truth applies to our lives.

I noted in the beginning of this sermon that there are many similarities between a Christian and a refugee. The Bible is a love story between God and humanity. It is a story which exposes the selfishness and sin of the human heart and the radical grace and love of the King of the universe. This story describes the rejection of humanity and God’s pursuit of humanity. Refugees are cast out members of society. They are removed from their homes, all that they know and love. God’s Word is THE source of comfort and hope for rejected members of society. Christians are cast out members of society as well. They are persecuted, because their lives shine as lights in the darkness. Their hearts are not set on the world, because the world is not their home. Instead, Christians wait eagerly for the day when their Savior comes again.

