

Having a visitor mindset for God's glory

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[0 : 0 0] Now, our readings, our first reading is from Jeremiah 29, verses 1 to 14.

This is a letter that God directed Jeremiah to deliver to the exiles in Babylon. So, Jeremiah 29, from verse 1 to verse 14.

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets, and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

This was after King Jehoiachin and the Queen Mother, the court officials, and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers, and the craftsmen had gone into exile from Jerusalem. He entrusted the letter to Elasa, son of Shaphan, and to Gemariah, son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah, king of Judah, sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.

It said, This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and settle down.

[1 : 1 2] Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters.

Increase in number there. Do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says. Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name.

I have not sent them, declares the Lord. This is what the Lord says. When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me.

[2 : 1 8] And I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity.

I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.

And especially that emphasis on seeking the peace and prosperity of the city where they lived in exile. We'll see that sort of idea reflected in Peter's teaching.

So let's turn to 1 Peter chapter 2 and let's read at verse 11 to verse 17.

Let's hear God's word. Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

[3 : 21] Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority, or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

For it is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.

Live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor.

Now, let's turn back to our Bibles and to that passage that we read in 1 Peter chapter 2. And what we're thinking about today is the idea of having a visitor mindset for the glory of God.

I remember the first year that we were working with international students in Glasgow. We thought it would be a really nice thing and a big deal to invite some international students to our home to share Christmas with us, to share Christmas dinner with us.

[4 : 42] We thought it was a big deal. Everybody showed up, apart from one guy. He texted me about half three in the afternoon. Sorry, I slept through Christmas and Christmas lunch. It wasn't from our country.

It wasn't from our culture. Christmas was new to him. Not a big deal. And that's something that's true of visitors. Typically, as visitors to a country, we don't normally adopt the customs and the practices of the nation.

What else is true of visitors and strangers? Again, to borrow from my imaginary playground, I have vivid memories of my primary school playground in Skye of a new boy arriving in our little school, coming from this exotic, magical land I've never heard of before called Polmont near Falkers.

Whoa, this guy is so exotic. And visitors and strangers then stand out from the crowd. Maybe you've had that experience as a traveller.

Visitors can tend to be watched very closely to try and learn what they're all about. Of course, negatively, and we know this is true, visitors and strangers can face exclusion and persecution.

[5 : 57] And sometimes the news reports that the tragedy of racist abuse to refugees or asylum seekers. But Peter is writing to the church and he's saying, the Christian church, wherever we are, needs to have a visitor mindset.

So he pulls these different factors together. He says to them, like, remember in the first place your true identity. Remember where we were last week, chapter 2, verse 9, you're a chosen people.

You're a royal priesthood. You're a holy nation. You're God's special possession. The stamp on your passport now says kingdom of heaven. But they're living in the Roman Empire where Caesar is Lord, where Christianity is on the margins and where they're facing opposition.

So he urges them in verse 11, as foreigners and exiles, to have that visitor mindset. He urges them to live out the values and the practices of God's people.

He urges the church to stand out for the sake of God and the gospel. And he acknowledges people will be watching.

[7 : 08] And some will be watching with hostile eyes and wanting to persecute and make life difficult. But others will be watching and God will use your witness to turn them to trust in Jesus.

But he's saying regardless, our task, our calling is to live with that visitor mindset, to live as an exile for the glory of God.

And that works itself out in this passage in three different ways. He talks about good deeds, says live good lives for God's glory. Talks about submission. Submit to human authority for God's sake.

And he talks about freedom. And he says live with freedom as God's slaves. And we'll think about each of those. And this is essentially lifestyle evangelism part one.

So let's begin with good deeds. Live good lives for God's glory. We see this in verse 11 and 12. Let me read verse 12. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

[8 : 18] So these verses are a general introduction to what follows all the way to chapter 3, verse 7. And the general principle is live good lives and do good deeds.

Now, in chapter 1 and verse 17, he has reminded them that they are being observed by God. And so they are called to be holy.

But here, they're called to live good lives and do good deeds because they're being observed by the unbelieving world. Maybe you've heard that expression or that challenge.

You may be the only Bible somebody else ever reads. In other words, they're going to look at you as a Christian. That's where they're going to get that idea of God and his love and his salvation from.

Peter recognises that. Now, the question is then, what kind of good lives, what kind of good deeds does Peter have in mind? Well, from all that he's said, we can surely say that these are good deeds that flow from one's Christian identity as a life is built in and on Jesus Christ.

[9 : 23] To borrow from verse 3, these are part of our spiritual sacrifices that we offer as a royal priesthood. And the aim of those good deeds isn't to make a great name for ourselves, but to give glory to God.

Good deeds motivated by faith. Now, what will this involve? It will involve, on the one hand, verse 11, abstaining from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

It will mean engaging in spiritual battle and recognising that often that battle lies within. It will mean conquering the evil desires that characterise them in their past.

So in chapter 1, verse 14, he can say, As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. Live as a child of God. And that means abstaining from certain things, seeking to conquer evil desires for the sake of your Christian witness.

And they're also told to live those good lives among the pagans, so that others may see their good deeds. Now, so remember, this isn't monastery life.

[10 : 35] The church in the past, some branches of it thought that it meant sort of retreating and forming monasteries. But Peter is saying we're called to live as exiles for God's glory in a religiously diverse and sometimes hostile society like we recognise in our own time.

And what's the goal of these good lives and good deeds? Again, the emphasis until now has been the glory and honour of God. We do those good deeds as a grateful response to the goodness of God in sending Jesus to be our saviour.

And that remains true. But here, there's an emphasis on looking ahead to the day God visits us. In other words, looking ahead to the day of judgment. So the return of Jesus is in mind.

Jesus as judge. And the hope that Peter offers is that some who slandered the church, some who accused Christians, will be saved.

And they will testify, I came to trust in Jesus through watching your lives. And that mirrors that teaching of Jesus that we shared with the boys and girls.

[11 : 47] Let your light shine so that men may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Let me share a story to illustrate from the life of Jim and Elizabeth Elliot, who were missionaries in Ecuador.

So they were working in Ecuador. But Jim felt compelled to go to this tribe, the Oca people, who were known for being very hostile and aggressive to outsiders.

In a previous century, there'd been exploitation of the land during a rubber boom and with oil exploration that had gone on. So they were very hostile and suspicious. But Jim wanted to share Jesus with them.

And so he found a team of five young men who flew into this remote island. And their first meeting, they brought gifts and they met the tribe. And the first meeting seemed positive.

And so they were encouraged to come back a few days later to hold a worship service on the beach. But as they landed and as they got out of the plane, each of those missionaries was speared to death.

[12 : 54] Two years later, so that was 1956. Two years later, Elizabeth Elliot, the widow of Jim, arrives to live among that tribe.

And the result of her forgiveness of them, her love towards them, her acceptance of them, was that many of them turned to trust in Jesus Christ.

The very first convert to Christianity was a man called Minkai who had personally speared two of those missionaries. Their lives are a powerful example of good lives and good deeds for God's glory.

That God, in the fullness of time, has used to make a huge impact on that tribe. So still today, they reckon 20% of that tribe is still Christian.

And especially the older generation who remembers those first missionary visitors. Many of them are followers of Jesus. Now, what lessons can we draw for ourselves as we are told to do good deeds and live good lives?

[14 : 03] One, let's think about public goodness. Jesus said the church was called to be a city on a hill. The light of our lives is to be attractive.

It's part of God's means of saving people. The way we live matters. And that means we need to be in the world but not of it. We need to live among our neighbours, our colleagues, our family and friends who are not Christians.

And at the same time to stand out as being different, as being God's people. There's also implications for church goodness. Because remember, this is written to a church, a community.

Yes, they were scattered, but they were also, there was pockets of believers together. And he's encouraging them towards that powerful witness of, what can we call it, family love.

Within the church that can break down barriers. That can unite very different people. And to become a powerful testimony to the power of God's saving grace.

[15 : 09] Those good lives and good deeds can clear barriers away. We can clear barriers by goodness. Barriers that stop people considering God, considering Jesus.

Sam Chan, an Australian evangelist, has written a very helpful book, Evangelism in a Skeptical World. And one of the things he emphasises is the power of hospitality and community to change perception.

One Christian on their own at a distance from others. It's easy to label that Christian as weird.

But bring someone into your home or bring someone into Christian community where they're enjoying friendship with other Christians. All of a sudden you'll find that some people will begin watching and thinking.

And in the fullness of time and by God's grace, some people will become worshippers from weird to worship. As our goodness, our kindness, our welcome can clear barriers.

[16 : 09] I've been reading a short book by Roger Carswell, a British evangelist. And he spoke of 28 years of showing hospitality and kindness to a man who'd been a teacher, colleague, an atheist.

But 28 years of spending time with him and his wife until they both came to Christ. It's wonderful. But are we ready for that kind of commitment?

I think it's one of the reasons why we long for open homes so that we can begin to clear some of the barriers and misconceptions by inviting people in. We're also reminded from verse 11 that we need to fight for goodness within.

Because you know as well as I do that the world is looking for an excuse to say, see, I told you following Jesus is no good. I told you Christians are just hypocrites. So we need to pursue holiness and obedience and integrity because we don't want to be the obstacle that turns people away.

And remember too that the gospel is what fuels our goodness. We need to keep coming back to God's goodness to us in Christ.

[17 : 26] When we feel disheartened and discouraged and rejected, remember that God in Christ has loved you and turned you from being an enemy to being a friend of God.

That you came with your guilt and your sin and that God's goodness in Christ has purchased your forgiveness by the precious blood of Jesus. Spiritually dead in Christ given eternal life.

And that goodness that we receive and we reflect on is that goodness that we then extend to others. So a visitor mindset lives good lives for God's glory in a hostile world to point others towards Jesus.

And then it begins to take a very particular shape from the general to the specific. Over the next three Sundays, we'll think about how Peter applies this principle into three different life settings.

Here, it's our response to government and governing authorities. Next week, the image of slave and master and workplace. And the week after that, family and marriage.

[18 : 36] So here, the call is to submission. Submit to human authorities for God's sake. And that's what we have in verse 13. Submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

So remember our setting. This is Roman Empire. So we're not yet at the stage where there's a full blown cult of the emperor, like similar to what we have in North Korea, I guess.

But we know from chapter 1, verses 6 to 9, these are Christians who are beginning to suffer for their faith, certainly in their family and in their community.

But also they're beginning to experience oppressive government. And that government, that power of the empire, would soon turn to executing Christians.

Now, why is it important to remember that? Because it's in that context that Peter calls the church to submit to governing authorities. See, the temptation that we might well have is to say, but hang on, Peter.

[19 : 44] You don't know my prime minister, my first minister, my president. Peter knew firsthand oppressive government. Peter witnessed oppressive government colluding with religious authorities to kill Jesus.

All that to say we are not the exception to this rule when we're asked to submit to governing authorities. What's the command? Simply to submit to the human institutions of government.

The general principle for the people of God is that we should submit respectfully and obey. Yes, there are exceptions, but we're dealing with the general principle that we're called to submit and to obey.

With a particular Christian motivation. So what's the Christian motivation? Verse 13, do you see it? We submit for the Lord's sake. We look first to God.

We recognise we belong to God. So we have that visitor mindset. But then in obedience to God, we submit to those rulers who have been appointed for us in God's wisdom.

[20 : 51] Romans 13 and verse 4 makes that clear. Verse 14 is showing us God's proper aim for government. To punish wrong, to commend what is right and just.

And we are called to honour and obey as governing authorities serve to carry out God's design. Again, what's the Christian motivation given in this section?

Again, we are to live out our identity. We are to submit as a way to show our obedience to God. As a way to honour God by honouring those institutions he and people he has established.

And there's also the Jeremiah 29 principle that we are to seek the welfare of the city. And verse 15, it is God's will that by doing good, by doing the good of submitting, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

By living as good citizens, they will silence some of the slander, some of the prejudice that's being levelled against the church. People were really suspicious of this new Christian faith.

[22 : 03] They thought Christians were bad citizens. They were disloyal. They were engaged in weird practices. And so Peter says, for God's honour and for the sake of your mission, live good lives.

Submit, be a good citizen. Now, I want to make three direct applications to ourselves. Because I think we need to hear them in the time that we live in.

First one, we must as Christians honour our governing authority, our prime minister, our first minister, our present, whoever you happen to be.

They have been appointed by God. And they are made in the image of God, as we'll think about in a few moments. So they deserve our honour and respect.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean we agree with them on every point. We can disagree, but we must disagree respectfully. What we cannot do is we cannot dehumanise them.

[23 : 13] We cannot slander them. We cannot mock them. So we need to examine our words. How do we talk about our governments?

How do we type about, blog about, comment about our government? And that's so important for us today, I think, because we live at a time when there's no question that the media now gladly engages in a greater level of tribalism and personal attack.

And when social media disconnects us and allows just trash talking others at a safe distance. Will we as Christians stand out by honouring, by talking respectfully of those God has appointed over us?

So it's a really important issue of honour. There's also the need for humility, humility to receive authority, because naturally you and I are anti-authority.

That's what the Bible teaches, what we know about human nature. You think about the Garden of Eden. Not content to have all the privilege and glory of being with God and being made in the image of God.

[24 : 33] Adam and Eve wanted to be God-like and so they rebelled against God's authority. Think about childhood. It doesn't take long for a child to begin imposing their own will.

And that's a trait that we struggle with and that continues through our lives. But here we are called to humbly listen to what our Creator says to us.

And our Creator calls us to submit first to Jesus as Lord and then to government in obedience to the Lord. So there's a call to humility.

I would suggest too there's a call to prayer for the Christian church, to pray for governments and lawmakers. Here in summary is a good design for government to punish wrong, to pursue justice and to commend right, positive justice and peace.

So let's pray for our governments, for lawmakers, to pray for Christian MPs as they look to bring the light of Christ to bear in public debate and policy.

[25 : 40] Pray that peace and justice and flourishing of good would be seen in places where it is not like Myanmar and like North Korea. So we pray. But Peter reminds us a visitor mindset chooses to submit to authority for God's glory in a hostile world to silence criticism of Christianity.

And connected to this idea, but expanding it slightly, he moves on to talk about freedom. Live with freedom as God's slaves.

Verse 16. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil. Live as God's slaves. So this connects with what's come before. So verse 16, you're a free people.

You've been set free by God's grace. God has sent Jesus to be the saviour of the world. And by looking to him, by trusting in him, your sin is forgiven.

Yet you're no longer a slave to sin and guilt leading to death. And you belong to God. So God has first loyalty. And that means you're living as exiles.

[26 : 54] But Peter says that freedom has limits. What's the limit? Verse 16. Don't use your freedom, verse 16, as a cover up for evil.

So we're not allowed to say, well, now Jesus has saved me. Now I can live as I please. I'm a follower of Jesus. I can treat people however I want. I'm a follower of Jesus.

So I can mock the government. No. No. We are set free for lives of obedience. We are set free to enjoy life within the proper limits that God has established.

This always makes me think of goldfish. We have a couple of goldfish in our dining room. And sometimes we forget to feed them. And so imagine the goldfish sees us tucking into our dinner and think, oh man, if I can just escape the confines of this bowl, there'd be food to be had.

The goldfish manages to break free. What's going to happen? He's not going to last very long, is he? He was made for the water. You and I were made to live well within the boundaries that God set.

[28 : 06] If evil is slavery, then God sets us free to do good, to submit to God's authority. That influences the honour that we show. It influences the submission that we give.

And the point then leads to verse 17. Freedom influences how we relate to others. It influences relationships. So if we're set free by God to live for God, it means show proper respect to everyone.

So honour everyone. This goes back to Genesis 1. Recognise everyone is made in God's image, has dignity and value, and treat them as such.

Second, love the family of believers. Love the church family. And remember that in Christ we have a special bond to other Christians. We have one Father, our Father in heaven.

We have one Lord, the Lord Jesus. We have one Spirit living in us who's testifying to the fact that we're children of God, who's revealing to us more of the glory of the Father and the Son. Remember, we're one people with one mission.

[29 : 11] So we love the church family. Fear God. That's a reminder of where ultimate loyalty and honour lies. Not with the Emperor, but with God.

But, verse 4, then number 4, we honour the Emperor. Which involves the submitting and respecting that he spoke of earlier. In other words, every area of life is governed by our faith.

And two points to consider in this regard. One, again, in a sense, a warning about the polarised culture in which we live. It's very easy and it's very tempting to divide into them and us.

And we see it all the time. And it's very easy and tempting to delight in attacking the other. To delight in those likes that we might get for sarcastic or disrespectful comments.

But to do that is to dishonour Jesus. We need to fight to show honour.

[30 : 18] Even to and especially to those who we disagree with. It will mark us out as positively different. And in this regard, let me also remind you of the beauty of the Gospel.

Using freedom to live as slaves. Because remember the words of Jesus in Mark chapter 10 and at verse 45. Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.

And to give his life as a ransom for many. He is the foundation of our faith. And he sets us free that we might love like him. So a visitor mindset chooses to freely honour and love others to the glory of God.

Are we ready to live with a visitor mindset this week? Our starting point, your starting point must be to have faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. He must be the foundation of faith, the source of your identity.

If you're not yet following Jesus, let me encourage you today to turn from your sin. To trust that when Jesus died on the cross, he died to forgive your sin.

[31 : 28] To bring you into the kingdom of God. To live with him as your Lord. And then, as those who know that we belong to God. That heaven is our true home.

And with God's help, will we this week live good lives for God? In our unbelieving world. Will we willingly submit to authorities and respect them for the Lord's sake?

Will we use our Christian freedom to honour and to love others? Yes, by some we may be regarded with suspicion and we may meet with rejection.

But others may be led towards Christ as they see Christ in us. We may be