

# Being the church in a hostile society

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[ 0 : 00 ] So this morning we're going to be reading from actually three different passages in 1 Peter. So we're going to be starting with chapter 1, verses 1 to 9.

So from verse 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood. May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in a last time.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[ 1 : 44 ] We'll move on now to chapter 2, verses 4 to 12. So from verse 4. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in Scripture. Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. And a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

They stumbled because they disobeyed the word as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

[ 3 : 15 ] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. And lastly, we'll move on to chapter 4, verses 12 to 19.

So from chapter 4, verse 12. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

[ 4 : 30 ] Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. Well, good morning, everyone.

Why don't we pray as we come to God's word. Father, I pray that you would fortify us in the message of your gospel, in the mercy we've received.

Lord, fill us with joy in the hope that you've given us and give us a high sense of calling to proclaim that hope to a world that so desperately needs it.

So please be with us as we come to your word. Humble us. We always need your help to understand what you're saying and we always need your help to change our attitudes and hearts. So please be with each one of us. Please speak through me and may you be glorified in our time now. In Jesus' name, amen.

[ 5 : 42 ] Amen. Well, I suppose I want to start with a few caveats. As we come to the topic of being the church in a hostile society, I don't want to cause alarm or panic, and yet the scripture does call us to be prepared to count the cost.

I'd really... I want to be balanced. The church in Australia has huge freedoms. The fact that we're here today, I don't think anyone was expecting the police to stop here.

There's so many tax helps that the church receives in Christian schools and hospitals. We have huge freedoms. A Christian can become prime minister.

So let's be balanced here. But I want to be real about the common pressure that comes with being a Christian in Australia today.

I also don't want to limit what hostility looks like. I think there can be hot and cold forms of hostility. The hot is obvious when you're insulted, when you're threatened, but the cold is still very hostile.

[ 7 : 13 ] So, for instance, you think of a married couple who are arguing and all of a sudden the arguments stop. Has the hostility gone? Not necessarily. Indifference, it can be...

It's still hostility. It's cold. So there's a lot of indifference in our society and that can be infectious. So there's different forms of hostility.

So having said all that, people smarter than me have observed that Australia is now a post-Christian society. Just think of some of the great European countries of the Reformation, like Germany and France, where all these battles were fought.

The church in other parts of the world are sending missionaries back to those countries. They're post-Christian and Australia is heading in a similar way. Stephen McAlpine, I've really benefited a lot from this book.

It's only, I don't know, 100-odd pages if you listen to audiobooks. I don't know what that would be, two hours in your commutes. It's a really good book and that's where I've stolen that title, Being the Bad Guys.

[ 8 : 31 ] His main thesis is Let's Be the Best Bad Guys That We Can Be. Anyway, that requires more clarification. You're going to have to listen to it, read it. You need to be living under a rock not to notice the social and political pressure that the LGBTQTI plus inclusion and celebration, it's a movement built on the view that the world is material, there is nothing above us that we can't see and therefore the individual can be enthroned over our lives because there is nothing else.

You're enthroned and it's promoting a new social definition of love. It's tolerance, it's inclusion, it's celebrating authenticity where you expect to be welcomed as a society if you express what you feel on the inside.

So it's important for us to understand the goal of this movement isn't just to loosen sexual morals. The goal is actually offering a totally different hope.

It's a different gospel. How are we going to get peace as a society? How are we going to get meaning in our life? What's our purpose? I think we feel the conflict with this different gospel when someone can earn their way to become head coach of Essendon Football Club and the next day, because of their church ties, has to resign.

I think we can feel this clash of gospels around the family dinner table when teenagers who are being disciplined online and at school are just confronting with their parents and grandparents going, whoa, you are intolerant.

[ 10 : 30 ] You are outdated. So it's a conflict of gospels. It's conflicts of different hope for the world. I think I got a glimpse of the passion of this gospel in a TV interview with Rikki Coghlan, hopefully I'm pronouncing her name right, over the swimming decision about whether to include transgender women in women's swimming.

Halfway through the interview, she just becomes really clear and really passionate and this is what she says. We're talking about people's lives and identities here.

We're not just talking about swimming. We're talking about people's lives and identities. We're also talking about the kind of world we want to live in. If you want to live in a one-dimensional world where we see ourselves as less diverse and a place that's less welcoming of difference or if we want a world that is more open and generous and inclusive, it's a different hope.

And many have observed that the cost of this agenda is free speech and it's not just religious free speech. Many are feeling the pressure to be quiet.

Many, many, not just Christians, many are feeling this pressure. Now I think the natural response is fear. It's fear.

[12:09] It's a natural response, but I think if we stay in fear, I think it pushes us towards building the wrong house. I'm going to describe three different ways I think it pushes us to a wrong house to build.

One is Christians think that the agenda now is to build a political kingdom. Let's regain the ground. We need that kind of political house.

We are winning or losing depending on whether Christian morals are in law or not, as if that's our main agenda. I'm not saying it's wrong to say these things.

It's compassionate to our society to say what's true or not, but it's not our primary calling. God's agenda isn't winning or losing depending on whether Christians hold the places of influence in society or not.

The other wrong type of house is we could be tempted to attract people into the church by being like the church. Being like the world, using the same values, trying to be relevant.

[13:23] Not attracting by being different, offering an alternative, but by being similar. Hear how Jesus can make your life better. It's still built on the self as ruling your life.

Even using the language of let's be authentic and inclusion. We will get numbers. If we do that, we will get more numbers.

But the cost is we've got no hope. We've got no difference. We're just a religious form of the world's gospel.

The third kind of house is, well, as individuals and as families, just keep your head down and build your family, build your home, build your career.

Just don't be too radical for Jesus. Just keep your head down. Build your prosperity. I think we're very tempted down that line.

[14:27] I think all these are motivated by fear. Fear that we're losing the political power. We might just try and build up the numbers when the census says we're losing numbers by just being like the world.

Or we just cave into the gospel of this world and go, you can have it all. Just be quiet. Build your house.

Build your home. Build your castle. None of these houses are God's building project, as we've seen this term. Don't waste your life in what will be burned up when God's judgment comes.

Jesus' glory in the church, as it's saying. So why should we as the church respond with joy, not fear?

I was trying to avoid that word joy because I was like, gee, that's unrealistic. But then 1 Peter just kept pushing me back to the word joy.

[15:41] I don't think it's optional. We're told to move from the natural response of fear into a place of joy because that's where the gospel puts us. And that's the only way we will glorify God if we know our joy.

I've picked four things from 1 Peter. I really benefited from just sitting in the whole letter. It's not a long letter. Small groups may want to read it. If you're following the sermon series, you may want to read it in one hit.

Just a suggestion. I'm going to look at four things. Don't be surprised. There's nothing new here. Let's not be rattled. There's nothing new about this.

Secondly, rejoice in our living hope. Thirdly, rejoice that you belong to the people of God. And rejoice that God is using the fire to refine your faith.

And once we can rejoice, that's when we can get on with our calling to proclaim his excellencies. So that's where we're headed. So we're told in 1 Peter 4.12, if you might like to, well, please have your

Bibles open.

[ 17 : 00 ] Make sure what I'm saying is actually in there. We're told in 4 verse 12, beloved, beloved, beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

Don't be surprised. What's new? What's new about people claiming that they can dethrone the creator and sit on the throne of their lives?

There's nothing new. What's new about a society trying to create the kingdom with all its blessings without the king? There's nothing new about that. All societies have been hostile to God since sin entered the world.

We've got to own our hostility to God. We worship the one, chapter 2 verse 4, who's rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious.

It is plain sight. It is central to our worship of Jesus dying on the cross, that we are coming to the one who is rejected but chosen.

[ 18 : 25 ] It's always been suffering now, glory later. Hebrews 11, read through it. All the scripture, it's always been suffering now, glory later.

You're in a great company of people who have trusted God's promise, that glory is coming. There's a better city. So we shouldn't be surprised.

It's not new, which means I think we should also pause and make sure we're interpreting the narrative of hostility to Christianity in Australia correctly.

Are we romanticising past generations? Like I hear about the Freemasons as just one example. You could be at the top of your business and stuff and be part of this religious organisation that there is this divine being but just don't mention Jesus.

That was big in the past. It's not true spirituality though. And is it a good or a bad thing for the church now needing to stand out from the beliefs and values of society?

[ 19 : 41 ] Are the numbers declining? Well, yes, as an institution. But is the people with true faith who aren't just in it for the social benefit of being labelled as a Christian?

Now that those immediate benefits are being taken away, maybe all that's happening is that those who love Jesus for his own sake are being revealed.

Maybe it's not declining at all. Historically, there's a saying that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church to grow. God often uses persecution for growth.

God often uses the seed of the church to grow. Is it a good or a bad thing for our youth and our children to now know that they can't have a foot in both worlds?

Is it a spiritually good or a bad thing? That could be very good. Count the cost. Jesus is worth it. So let's not be surprised or unnerved.

[ 20 : 45 ] Nothing strange is happening. Let's stand firm in our faith knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. In fact, the type of hostility that we might be experiencing today is very similar to 1 Peter.

The things talked about here, I can directly relate to them, or at least I know people who can. If you don't join in in the wild partying, people just, you're weird.

That is so weird. And they'll say all sorts of critical and insulting things. You won't be part of the group. I felt that in uni days.

You just can't. Anyway, I won't go into that. Being excluded and insulted online or disadvantaged in work and sport and whatever, just because you're a Christian, that's what they were facing, that kind of thing.

It's very similar. Accused of wrongdoing. People speaking maliciously about Christian ethics.

[ 22 : 05 ] It's very similar to what we might be facing today. And Peter encourages the believers not by downplaying the cost, but by reminding us of our hope. That we shouldn't be afraid, but we should rejoice.

So let's look at three reasons we can rejoice. Rejoice in our living hope. So you might want to flick back to chapter one.

If you received a letter and a phone call that said that you've come into a massive inheritance from a distant rich relative and your solicitor confirmed that this isn't a scam, like this is legit, and you're on your way to the bank and your Toyota Camry breaks down and you just sit on the side of the road weeping and complaining and just discontent.



We're children of the king. A holy nation. A people for his own possession. Out of all the world, God owns everything, but he looks at his church and goes, I love my church.

[ 30 : 29 ] We should have a high sense of privilege, gratitude, humility, because this is by mercy, and stability, knowing who we are.

We don't belong because we are the people of God. What a privilege. It even transforms insults into a reminder of who you are.

Chapter 4, verse 14. If you're insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

It transforms. It won't feel very glorious, but it actually reminds you, you are the people of God. And Peter is clear in this section, don't call everything persecution.

If you're arrogant online and just meddling, looking for a fight, don't call that persecution when people, you're not acting like Christ.

[ 31 : 39 ] If you are using company time to do church-related activities and you're called into the office, don't call that persecution. You should be working.

Okay? Okay? So, be clear here. It's not everything is persecution. But, I know of two people who had severe pressure to leave their jobs simply for Christian convictions.

Like in Newcastle, we're talking. If that happens, you're blessed because it's happening because you belong to God.

People are noticing the spirit of God on you. So, insults are actually turned into a reminder of who we are. We are weird because we've been taken out of the world and sent back in.

Individuals in our society are lost, searching for who they are. But, church, we know who we are.

We are weird. We are weird. Because we have such a high status in deep humility belonging to the people of God.

[ 33 : 01 ] And we are dangerous. Because we are saying there is a Lord. That will threaten anyone who thinks they are Lord.

That is a dangerous teaching. Let's do it with gentleness and respect, we're told. When they speak against you as evildoers, may they see your good deeds.

And some will even glorify God voluntarily or they will glorify God when Jesus comes back. Could I encourage you, when the boss inquires into a complaint made against you, make it really, like, make it so that they have to be so creative in firing you.

Because you have just spent years devoted to the company and such good works that no one can say anything bad against you. Just make it as hard as possible. Make them be creative.

So that the gospel is adorned by your conduct. We can rejoice in our living hope.

[ 34 : 13 ] We can rejoice we belong to God's people, Jesus' church. And we can rejoice that God is using the fire for a very good reason, to refine our faith.

Like, our society's authentic self-gospel has very little to say about people in pain and suffering. There's very little positive to say about it.

Not so the Christian. We have so much resources to think on to see a bigger perspective to our suffering and hardships. The Christian knows who the creator is and therefore nothing is outside his jurisdiction.

Not a drop of suffering is wasted in God's economy. The suffering is limited. We're not alone in it because Christ suffered for us.

We saw early in chapter 1 that God keeps us safe for our inheritance and he uses means. And then in verse 6 to 7, we hear part of that means is that in this you rejoice, the inheritance, and that you're kept safe to get it, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.

[ 35 : 32 ] Here's the purpose of them. So that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Picture that image. It is a furnace boiling away any impurity that is not a pleasant, I do not want to be in there, but God does put us there through various trials and he has a very good reason.

It's to purify our faith. It's to keep us trusting him. It's to remove anything that gets in the way of trusting Jesus, any false hope we're placing our lives in.

It's so that the testing here, by the way, the genuineness, I don't want anyone to be rattled by this. This word tested is saying God isn't unsure whether you're going to pass or not.

This is like Job, the book of Job. God knows you're going to pass. This is to prove the genuineness of the faith that his gospel has produced in you.

[ 36 : 49 ] It's not to see if you pass or not. This is to go, this is to show it. When you trust Jesus, when he costs so much relationally, financially, you still trust him and love him, it makes him look amazing because he is amazing.

It proves the genuineness of faith. And I think that's similar to what Peter is talking about in chapter 4, that it's time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

4 verse 17. It can't be judgment in an absolute sense because Christ has borne our sins in his body on the tree. But Peter quotes Proverbs and he might have Ezekiel 9 and Malachi 3, the images and wording there, pick up those two passages.

In both those passages, the picture is God begins his end of time judgment at his temple, at his people. And then he goes out into the unbelieving world.

But there's two different purposes. It's for refinement, preparing us for glory for his church, for his temple. But wow, if it's that hard for his people, what is coming for those who don't obey the gospel?

[ 38 : 17 ] We should be in dread for what unbelievers are going to face. Understanding this just helps us step out and get a big picture of what's going on.

It feels like all those with power are the ones lighting the fire. And they might be lighting the fire. But it's actually God using it for our good.

He's in control. And he's doing it to purify us, make us holy, ready for glory. That's a great reason to rejoice.

Have a thought, though, for those who are going to experience that fire, who aren't protected in Jesus. I think this pushes us to go, pray for those who persecute you.

Which obviously our Lord did and many Christians have done in history. So how do we respond with joy and not fear?

[ 39 : 32 ] Well, we shouldn't be surprised. There's nothing new here at the hostility. Nothing new. Let's not be allured by what this world offers.

Because we have such a great inheritance. And we're being kept safe for it. There's no reason to be ashamed of being associated with the church.

If you go to the Christian lunchtime group, there's no reason to be ashamed of that. If you belong to the king.

And we know that any trial, any drop of fiery trial, the people causing it aren't the ones ultimately in control.

God is. He's using it for our good and the glory of his name. We can rest in that. We can even love his discipline.

[ 40 : 35 ] That's how we know he's loving us. So we've got lots to rejoice about. So let's not live in fear of building the wrong house.

Let's not build a political kingdom. Let's not build this church by just trying to be relevant to society's values. Let's not just keep our head down and build your family home.

Don't build those houses. We've got a different calling. We've got a different agenda. I've lost my pace.

I'm into two people. I've got to go back. Our agenda is in verse 10. That's not going to help you.

Chapter 2, verse 9.

There it is. Chapter 2, verse 9. You're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

[ 41 : 36 ] Here's our calling. That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Proclaiming our God's excellencies. We know here in the church what it is to have peace with God and true community based on mercy, created by mercy and characterised by mercy.

We have a hope to proclaim to our world. We have a great saviour who's excellent.

Let's not build up our walls to protect our church to be comfortable. Let's not do that because he's worthy of being proclaimed.

Let's not create a religious monastery bunker where we are pure and we're just waiting for God's judgement like an atomic bomb to hit out there. Let's not do that because he is worthy of being proclaimed.

[ 42 : 48 ] He is worthy of sharing in his sufferings. His excellencies are worth proclaiming in words and by our conduct.

His excellencies are worth proclaiming in words and by our conduct. His excellencies are worth proclaiming in words and by our conduct. His excellencies are worth proclaiming in words and by our conduct. Which means the greatest threat to our church fulfilling this calling, our high calling, isn't anything out in the world.

That's not the greatest threat. The biggest threat is anything that gets in the way of my heart and my mind seeing the excellency of God and his salvation in Jesus.

Anything that gets in the way of that. It's inside. That's where the battle is. Anything that gets in the way of seeing Jesus as truly worth it.

He's my life. He's worth my all. That's the battleground. And it's only in the church, in the ministry of the church, that you're going to keep being reinforced, you and I, in the excellencies of God.

[ 44 : 03 ] Are you hearing it out in the world? I'm not. It's in the church that we go deeper in understanding him. In every person ministering to one another.

Being refreshed to go back out into our week so that Jesus is honoured. It's as the church that the people of God, we display how good belonging to Jesus is.

As we give a foretaste of the hope of heaven. The house we're called to build is a living one. The war is inside us.

Any attitude that gets in the way of loving Jesus, the war is what characterises this community. Is it characterised by mercy and the love of Jesus? We can respond with joy, not fear, because our future hope is certain as he is alive.

We have no reason to be ashamed but honoured that we belong to the name of Jesus. And we know that he's got good purposes, even when the trials come.

[ 45 : 17 ] So let's be ready to give a reason for the hope that we have. Because our world needs hope.

Let me leave you just with a question. Which house are you building? Well, let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to us even when we rejected you and wanted you out of our lives.

You pursued each one of us to bring us to know yourself. To bring us into this glorious inheritance. And thank you for your humility in becoming like a man and being a servant.

Being a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Even going to the cross for our sake. Lord, fill us, your people, with your spirit.

We know you have given us your spirit. Just top us up. Fill us up. So that we might see how excellent you really are.

[ 46 : 43 ] And not be taken in by this world. But proclaim you to this world. So that you might be honoured and people brought into a living hope.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.