

I've given today's message the title: Living as citizens of the Kingdom of God, in a land which is hostile to God...

In the very first verse of today's reading, we realise that disciples of Jesus, are fighting a war...

And for some of us, that might really pique our interest, and we go "*Yeah, those horrible evil people out in the world, and the evil social structures and political systems – we're at war with them....*

And if that's your reaction, you're going to be very surprised with what Peter has to say over the next few weeks:

You see, Peter's not highlighting any kind of war we have with the world – what he's highlighting, is the war that we have with what he calls, "**the passions of the flesh**". And the **passions of the flesh** are what wage war with our very own soul – And to yield to this enemy, is to allow our very selves to be taken captive...

V11 begins with the word "**Beloved**". It's a seemingly benign sort of a word, but my, what **power** that word carries, and what an encouragement that word is ... Because when Peter uses that word "Beloved", yeah, Peter probably loves those people he's writing to, but when Peter says "Beloved", he's one of the "beloved"; And **we** are "beloved"... This word carries power and encouragement, because we are the beloved of God...

We could happily spend all morning, reflecting on this, couldn't we – the:

- Privilege;
- Honour;
- Calling;
- Our identity of who we are as the Beloved of God;

It impacts

- The way we face trials;
- Confidence that comes with being beloved;
- Hope;
- Joy;
- Delightful feeling to be loved.

And if you're feeling a bit miserable this morning, that might be the only word you need to hear today – “**Beloved**”...

Doesn't that renew the joy you have in life... What a word

And as the beloved of God, one of Peter's themes that he keeps picking up through this letter, is that we are sojourners and exiles... And we've talked about this before:- **this** world, is not our home – it's our temporary place of residence – we're just passing through, because our real home, is a heavenly home – it's to be with Jesus Christ in glory...

But the thing is: Even though we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven/God, how we live today (in **this** world), matters a lot...

You see, even though we're passing through this world, we are to live **in** this world, **as** the citizens of the Kingdom of God (that we are)... And so we don't behave in the same manner as those around us. And as we live as good citizens of the Kingdom of God, (in most respects) we will be living as good

citizens (or even better than good) citizens in the society in which we live...

Now, some people like to embrace some kind of a social Gospel of reform; or a revolutionary gospel, where under the guise of the gospel, they rebel against the authorities, and they rebel against everything their nation represents, to bring about a revolution... But I don't think Peter would have any of that... Oh, he would have at some time,,,

And that's a testimony to how Peter changed... It was Peterⁱ, who, when they came to arrest Jesus, drew his sword, and swung it (obviously intending to fight to kill), because despite whatever evasion tactics the high priest's servant (Malchus) employed, he still managed to lose an ear...

You see, Peter went from "Fight to the death (for Jesus)",,,, to "Be a good citizen(for Jesus)"... That's an enormous turn-around....

And he didn't change his attitude because all of a sudden, his society became Christianised – in fact it was far from it.... Christians were being targeted; persecuted; victimised; slandered; abused; murdered... And it was from the top down – From the Emperor; to the Governors; to the populous,,, Christians were hated by them all... And it's in this context that Peter's saying "be a good citizen"...

Wow. That almost sounds like something that Jesus would say. After all, wasn't it Jesus who said, **Matthew 5:44** **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**

Anyway, we're getting ahead of ourselves....

Peter is urging his readers to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

So, what's that? When some people hear "passions of the flesh", and they go, "Oh, he's talking about sexual sin"... Well, it can include sexual sin, but the passions of the flesh are much more than that. It's that part of us which (even as committed Christians), we struggle with – it's that part of us which constantly tempts us to do wrong.

The Jewish Rabbis used to call it the *yetzer hara*.. it's the inclination to do evil, and to violate the will of God...

To explain this, I find the theology of Walt Disney quite helpful...

Have you ever seen a cartoon with Donald duck, and on one shoulder he has an angelic Donald Duck, and on the other shoulder is a devilish Donald Duck, and one's trying to tell him to do the right thing, and the other's trying to tempt him to do the wrong thing... Well, it's the devilish Donald Duck that Peter's talking about – the inclination that we have for evil... We've got this inner battle going on inside of us.

And I don't know about you, but I get really frustrated with myself (Oh, you get frustrated with me too) – I've been a Christian for decades... And I've lived with the hope that I might grow out of my evil inclination as I walk with God... But, you know what? I haven't. You might find this hard to believe because I'm so holy.... But of course, anyone who knows me, knows that's not true....

Some people like to think that we're all born good, and we learn to be evil. But you know what? I reckon it's the other way around. You see,

- I never taught my kids to hoard their toys, but I did have to teach them to share
- I never taught them to demand food when they're hungry, but I did have to teach them patience...
- Self-centred/think of others

And this is what we're at war with... Even as the saved; Even as the redeemed, you and I are at war with **the passions of the flesh.**

And if I let my passions drive my behaviour, I've lost the war ... And that's why I get really disturbed when I hear people telling us that God will only ever call us to some kind of service that fits our passions. What a load of rot... usually our passions are something we have to battle with... And that's why Peter gives us a command: **Abstain** from the passions of the flesh. Do you know what that means? Don't do it. Don't take part in it.

You **are** going to be tempted (just like I'm tempted). And we get tempted in all sorts of ways. And in these times of temptation, Abstain; don't do it; don't take part in it...

And we're going to see how to apply that more, shortly.

V¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable

Righto: When Peter's talking about the Gentiles, the Greek word is ἔθνεσιν (ethnesin) (Gentiles [non-Jews]; heathens; pagans; people of other nations) Basically he's talking about when we live among pagans – the Godless... And what he's saying is, as disciples of Jesus – as the people of God, how we live among the Godless, matters...

And you realise don't you, that the culture in which **we** live, is essentially a Godless culture... Our culture opens the door for all sorts of beliefs/philosophies/religions,, but the Christian God (above all), is despised; rejected; disparaged; ridiculed...

And so our culture, is largely a Godless culture...

And when we're living among the Godless, temptation often gets stronger... The passions of the flesh get all that much harder to battle, because we're living amongst a people who don't battle it, and in fact, they **embrace** the passions of the flesh...

And so the temptation to:

- swear;

- drink too much;
- tell a course joke; or
- even to belittle others; or
- to elevate our own importance
- to sleep with your girlfriend/boyfriend

The passions of the flesh are harder to battle when we're running with a crowd who are doing it...

And yet, it is within this very setting, that Peter's saying, "Keep your conduct among the godless pagans honourable.... – Why? – Well, it might surprise you why... so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Righto: Let's unpack that.

When most of us read that, we might take that as, "Oh, they'll see the good lives that we live, and they'll want to become Christians too..." How's that working out for you???

It does happen... But rarely does it happen... *When I was in Bible College, in the local church, I was leading a Young Adults Bible Study group. And we talked about how we were or weren't sharing our faith with others. And one young lad (really nice fella) said (quite unashamedly) I don't tell anybody about Jesus... The way I live my life will tell them about Jesus – they'll see and know... And do you know what I was hearing? Pride – I'm so good, all they've got to do is*

look at me, and they will know they need Jesus, so they can be just like me...

It does happen, but rarely does it happen...

Anyway, I don't think that's what Peter's saying here.

There's 2 separate time points in that sentence. One is today. And the other is the day of judgment – the day that Jesus returns, (the day of visitation)

2 different time points, and different things happen, at those 2 different time points.

The first time point, is what happens today: They speak against the Disciples of Jesus as “evil-doers”. Do you get that? In a Godless world, it's the **Christians** who actually get painted as the baddies...

Back in their culture, they were accused of:

- being cannibals, because they ate the body and the blood of this bloke called Jesus;
- they were incestuous, because they referred to each other as brother or sister, and yet they married;
- they were accused of having orgies because they had these things they called “love feasts”

- they were accused of being insurrectionists, because they didn't honour the Emperor by worshipping him
- And of course, they were accused of setting the fire that burned Rome.

That's the sorts of things they were accused of, but even today, we (the disciples of Jesus) get painted as the baddies.

I personally have been accused of:

- Intolerance, because when I teach from the Scriptures, I don't try to change God's word, and if God says that a certain behaviour is "sin", then that's what I teach;
- Hate speech for the same reason;

And Christians get denigrated as:

- Supporting slavery, because in the Bible slavery isn't forbidden;
- Get accused of supporting murder of those we disagree with, because in the Bible execution is the prescribed punishment for certain sins;
- Human rights deniers, because we say there's value in the life of an unborn child
- It's become a common saying: Most wars are fought over religion, and so Christians get painted as "warmongers"...

- The Muslims look at the ‘so-called’ Christian west, and they see adultery, homosexuality, infanticide,, and they say “That’s what Christians do”...

Christians cop it from all sides, and we get blamed for the sins of others...

- A few paedophiles have done horrible things in the church, and **all** Christians get tarred with the same brush.

And yet, it’s all false – it’s ridiculous isn’t it... They speak against us, and accuse us of being the evil-doers... And it’s happening today. But when that happens (today), Peter doesn’t tell us to fight back – he tells us to keep our conduct among the heathens, honourable...

Why???? So they will see our good deeds.

You know what? Often, it’s abstaining from our fleshly desires, that make the Godless hate us so much... When we don’t do what they’re doing, they feel judged. When **we** do good deeds, they realise **they** don’t stack up... And they don’t admire us for it – they hate us all the more... The godless love it, when a disciple of Jesus yields to the flesh, and fall into sin...

It’s probably a bit of a silly example, but when I was a student at Ag College, one of the boys in my dorm, made it his mission to try and teach me to swear... And to my shame (after a bit of coaching), I managed to string 4 words together in a row...

You see, I went along with it, and made a joke out of it, so I could fit in...

What are we supposed to do, when we get made out to be the baddies?

Live as citizens of the Kingdom of God. And that's not about casting judgment – it's about **us** being the citizens of God's kingdom (in a Godless world).

It seems like every week, we catch another glimpse of Peter remembering the teaching of Jesus...

Matthew 5:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ **In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

And Peter wrote: ¹² **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 even though sometimes, some Christians might get a bit of recognition for their good deeds, it doesn't often equate to the godless giving glory to God because of it...

... But they will

Which brings us to the second point in time. Alright, so the false accusations against us, are happening today. We live as good citizens – we live honourably (in a Godless world), **today...** But now we come to the 2nd point of time: **on the day of visitation.**

Many of us will know that bible verse that says that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lordⁱⁱ,,, but when is that going to happen? Is it talking about every single person, coming to a saving faith in Jesus? Sadly, no...

It's talking about the day of judgment... When Jesus returns and the dead shall be raised, and we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. Those who are disciples of Jesus, will be raised to life, and those who have rejected God, and rejected the salvation of God through His son,,, will fall to their knees,

Oh no. What have I done? Jesus is Lord... And I rejected Him, and it's too late, but He's Lord...

It's not a confession that will save them – it'll be too late by then. They've had their chance to be born anew, and to give their lives to God, but they've rejected Him.

But God will be glorified, when they confess that the judgment of God is justified...

Let me explain: When Peter wrote: **they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.** , he wasn't making that up. He was referring back to an incident in the Old Testament (Joshua 7:19)...

There was a man who had disobeyed God, and he wouldn't own up to it. But God revealed who had done this terrible thing. And when he was found out, and just before he was executed for his crime,

Joshua 7:19 (ESV) ¹⁹ Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me."

And he spilled his guts – he confessed everything he had done... He knew that nothing was hidden before God, and that he deserved the judgment of God that he was about to receive, because he had deliberately gone against the word of the Lord. And so God was glorified by him confessing what he had done, and therefore God is just in His judgment...

And this is the image that Peter's using here – he's using the same language. Even the ungodly will give God glory, because their judgment is justified... And so, on the day of Judgment – the day of visitation. God will be glorified, when justice is served.

And on that day, those who have rejected God, will glorify God for the good deeds that they observed Christians doing... They'll be confronted with their bias against God, and their false accusations against God's people (that they've made throughout the years)...

There's a word in the English language we don't use much anymore "Vindication". (proved to be right) (the slander will be revealed for the slander it is) (justified).

And on the day of judgment, God's people will be vindicated. All the false accusations will be shown for what they are – false. All the ridicule and mocking we have received over the years – "You're an idiot to believe in God – what are you? A simpleton?" They're going to eat their words... "We were wrong. Jesus is Lord"...

And so God's people will be vindicated, and in this judgment, and in the vindication of His people, God will be given glory, even by those who are being judged...

This has turned into a rather sobering message, hasn't it...

Now, I need to remind you at this point, these are words which were written to the beloved. And as the beloved of God, we have a real mixture of emotions when we consider the day of judgment.

On one side of the coin, we really look forward to Jesus returning; vindication; reward; culmination of what we look forward to...

But aren't our hearts also filled with sadness that many will continue to reject God, right through until the day of visitation...

And it's ok to feel that sadness – in fact, it's Godly to feel sadness... Because, if I'm not sad about those who reject God, then I'm not like my heavenly Father.

And that's why, we have to live as good citizens of the Kingdom of God, and not just as good citizens of Australia...

Our good deeds, probably won't convert anybody, **but the power of God's word will**. Peter told us that (Chapter 1). The Good news was preached to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is the word by which we are born again.

And so, as good citizens of the Kingdom of God, we also share the Good News of Jesus Christ (with anyone who's willing to listen), because we love them enough to not remain silent.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the Good news of the Gospel that was preached to us.

We thank You for the life of obedience that You've called us to.

And Lord, we ask that when the world would slander/ridicule/malign us, that You would give us strength and resolve, to live honourably, in this world who reject you, and hate your children.

Lord, we look forward to the day of visitation, when Jesus will return, when Your people will be vindicated, and even the Godless will glorify You.

But until that day, help us to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God, and to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our Lord who saves,
Amen.

ⁱ John 18:26

ⁱⁱ Phil 2:11