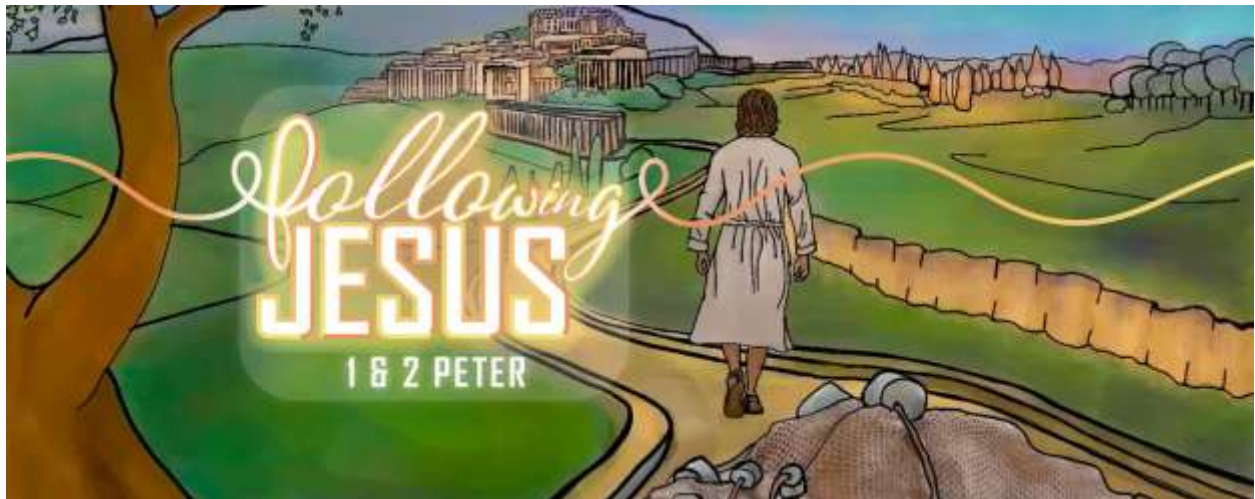


Following Jesus
1-2 Peter
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
June 15, 2025

TEXT: Luke 5:1-11 and 1 Peter 1:1-2



Good morning, Beloved. Praise the Lord. What a blessing to be here, gathered as God's family to worship, to learn of His Word, to hear of His work in our lives. This morning, we start our summer series, "Following Jesus: 1 and 2 Peter." From the moment that we meet him in the Gospels, Peter's discipleship is so relatable, so instructive for us. We see someone who is bold and willing to follow Jesus. We also see someone who has moments of tremendous failure and even denies knowing Jesus. Peter's life of following Jesus in the Gospels continues in the book of Acts. Jesus takes him into new places of ministry and to new aspects of disciple-making. His life from Galilee has a great northwesterly trajectory as he follows Jesus from Galilee and ends up living in Rome, far from where he grew up.

Peter's final words to believers in Christ are two letters, 1 and 2 Peter. They are not very long. It takes 30 minutes to read both out loud. In these letters, we have 30 years of following Jesus summarized in 30 minutes. We are going to take the summer to listen to these letters carefully.

This morning, before we get too deep into the letters, I want to take us on a biographical journey through Peter's life and what we learned from his following of Jesus. Peter is mentioned more than any other disciple. He was one of Jesus' first followers. He was present for the Sermon on the Mount. He heard Jesus' public teaching. He was present at significant moments in Jesus' life. He was there at the transfiguration. He never forgot it. He was there when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. He was present in the Garden of

Gethsemane where he fell asleep as Jesus was praying. Peter is prominent in the first half of the book of Acts. He preached the first Christian sermon. He was present at the first large all-church meeting to make a decision about the status of people from different ethnic backgrounds who had come to believe in Christ, and he spoke up saying they are full brothers and sisters—no bleacher seats in the Kingdom of God. He followed Jesus for decades.

How do you share what you have learned about following Jesus for 30 years in 30 minutes? It's going to take us all summer to reflect and meditate on this. This morning, I want us to consider three lessons. As I have read through Peter's life and experience in Scripture and have been immersing myself in this, there are three thoughts, three lessons, that I have seen:

The first lesson is to notice and prepare ourselves that **following Jesus will change us**. Some of us love change, and many of us do not. The change that Jesus produces in us is for the better, and it happens in all kinds of ways we will look at.

The second lesson we see in the life and experience of Peter is that **following Jesus will have its ups and downs**. We have moments where our following of Christ is faithful, we are committed, and things are going well. Then we may turn and face-plant in our discipleship and do something that we cannot imagine we would do. Yet, following Jesus continues. Jesus never quits on us.

The third lesson I have seen is that **following Jesus will bind us to other followers of Jesus**. Other people who follow Jesus will become to us relationships that are even more important to us than our biological ties. This is a result of following Jesus that we see in Peter's life.

Let's take a look at these together. **Following Jesus will change us**. We see this in Peter's initial meeting with Jesus in Luke 5:1, where we read:

"On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on Him to hear the Word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret..."

Jesus was teaching by the Lake of Gennesaret, and the crowds were pressing in on Him. "Gennesaret" is the English transliteration of Luke's Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word "*kinneret*." The word "*kinneret*" is a Hebrew word that means "harp," and the shape of the traditional Davidic harp is the shape you see in the photo. You might be wondering how the ancients perceived this harp shape without drone technology or satellites.



Sometimes questions like that come up, and we wonder: Can the Bible be trusted? Is this a later description? Familiarity with the geography of Galilee helps us because the Sea or Lake of Galilee is far below sea level. As you approach this body of water, which is the largest freshwater body of water in Israel, you actually look down on it, and you really can see the shape.

As Jesus was teaching by Gennesaret, or Harp Lake, He saw two boats. The fishermen had gone out of the boats and were washing their nets. Jesus got into one of the boats, and here we learn that this was Simon's boat. Simon was Peter's given name. "Simon" is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name "*Shimon*," which is the most common male name in Israel in the first century. Jesus asked Simon to put out his boat a little from the land so He could teach the people from the boat. In Luke 5:4, we read that when Jesus had finished speaking, He said to Simon:

"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

Again, this is a small detail of the reliability of God's Word. The verb used for "*let down your nets*" is the precise word that was used to describe trammel fishing. Trammel fishing is the kind of fishing where fishermen work together to lower large rectangular nets into the water, and another boat drives the fish toward the nets. Fish get stuck in the nets, and the fishermen bring them up. It's a way of doing commercial fishing; it's not recreational fishing. No one does trammel fishing in the back pond. No one does trammel fishing on a family outing. This is fishing to catch a large number of fish for commercial purposes.

Sometimes fishing is unsuccessful, and Simon said to Jesus, "*Master [a term of respect], we toiled all night and took nothing! But at Your word I will let down the nets.*" They go out and lower the nets, and their nets became so filled with fish that they were about to break. They signal to their partners, who we learn are James and John, to come and help them. They fill both of their boats. Picture two boats coming together, raising these large nets, and imagine the catch that would be so great that it could sink a vessel. This is a wonderful scene of bringing in so many fish that the boat is about to sink. The next line is surprising. In Luke 5:8, we read:



"But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'"



Jesus changes Peter's vocation, the first big change. In Luke 5:10, Jesus says to Simon:

"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."

This change of vocation and purpose is a recognition that, as we get close to Jesus, one of the first things that happens to us is that we become much more deeply aware of our unworthiness and sinfulness. We are tempted to step back from Jesus or to ask Jesus to step back from us, but we find right at the beginning that Jesus comes close to sinners, and He wants to change us. Praise God.

Simon is no longer prioritizing commercial fishing. He has a change of vocation with a disciple-making interest in people. Later in his life his name is changed. We just learned in the Gospels that his father's name was Jonah. In the Gospel of John his name is the short form John. Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter, or Cephas. In Aramaic it's *Cepha*, which means "rock." Peter or *Petros* is the same term. We are used to calling him Peter, but we must never forget that Peter is his nickname, and it's a nickname that is given to him by Jesus. This name change becomes the name by which he is most often remembered and celebrated. God often delights to change names in Scripture. Abram's name is changed to Abraham, and Jacob's name is changed to Israel. Peter is the name change given to him by Jesus.

But there are other changes that happen in this man's life. He experiences a profound change in his view of the cross. Peter was scandalized by the cross, and he tried to prevent Jesus from going to the cross when he first heard that this was to happen. He did not understand it. He thought the way of salvation would be to embrace violence. Peter is the one who strikes the high priest's servant Malchus with a sword. Yet, over the trajectory of his life, Peter embraces the cross as God's way of salvation. He also embraces nonviolent resistance to persecution through suffering. The cross, according to early Christian testimony, looms large in Peter's own life. Jesus predicts at the end of the Gospel of John that Peter himself will die in this way. Early Christian testimony tells us that Peter is crucified. At the very end Peter said, "I'm not worthy to imitate my Lord," so he asks to be crucified upside down. This is a big change.

He changes from being a local Galilean businessman to a global missionary. That's a big change. He changes in his perspective of greatness. Remember, he and the others were arguing about who would be the greatest, and he changes to define greatness as humility. He sees leadership in following Jesus as being last, not first. He changes from being blunt and brash in the Gospels to being gentle in his letters where he urges us to share Christ in the world with gentleness and respect. These are massive changes, and if Jesus changes this man's life as he follows Him, we should expect the same. By faith we have to trust Jesus that these changes will be for our good.

Following Jesus has its ups and downs. This is humbling, isn't it? It's always good to be humble.

Dear friends of ours used to be part of the worship team at Kenwood. Both of them are beautiful people from Christian families. They had a Christian arranged marriage in that their families arranged for them to meet. She had returned home to India, and he was very excited and flew to India to meet her and propose. They met and they talked. The rules are that each of them had veto power, but the families thought they were a great match. He thought she was a beautiful, godly woman and decided, "Yes, wonderful, praise the Lord!" But she said, "I need a couple days to think about it." He called me from India and said, "Pastor David, of all the scenarios I had envisioned, this was not one of them." He had never considered that he would be in suspense. I said to him, "This is humbling, and that is always good." After she reflected on it for a couple days, she said, "Yes," and they have a beautiful family now and are serving the Lord.

Peter's walk with Jesus is humbling. It has its ups and downs. One moment he's willing to walk out on the water and follow Jesus. But as he gets out on the water in the midst of a storm, he becomes frightened. The text in Matthew 14:30 translated this as *"he doubted,"* but the actual verb that is used means that he stood back, or held back. It was in his holding back from Jesus that he began to sink. When we follow Jesus, we do not sink. But Peter held back and began to sink. In Matthew 14:31, Jesus said to him:

"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Later, in John 21, after Jesus' resurrection, Peter is fishing again in Galilee. Jesus appears on the shore, and John recognized that it was Jesus and said, *"It is the Lord!"* This time, when Peter heard it was the Lord, he threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came and dragged in a second miraculous catch. Isn't that beautiful? Jesus gave us this inclusio of His life.

Peter has a great "up" in Caesarea Philippi. In Matthew 16:15-16, when Jesus asked the disciples:

"But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

This is a high point in the gospel narrative. Yet, right after that, as Jesus begins to explain that as Messiah He must suffer and die, Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him. This is a big "down," and Peter does not understand it.

I want you to know that pastors also have these ups and downs. Faithful followers of Jesus have these ups and downs. There are moments where we think, "I've got it," and then moments where we think, "That can't be the Lord," but we find we are dead wrong about that. The good news of following Jesus is that Jesus does not leave us there. He keeps instructing us again and again and again. I love to ask pastors or seminary professors this "secret" question: "Is there

something you have changed your mind about in the last few years?" If I am talking with someone who is interviewing for a position on staff here, and they say, "I haven't changed my mind about anything for the last 10 years," that sounds like a stagnant discipleship. Jesus should be changing our minds regularly, remaking them.

Peter's failure in the courtyard of the high priest is unforgettable. Peter says, *"I'll die with You,"* and Jesus says, *"You will deny that you even know me three times."* There in the courtyard of the high priest, as Jesus is being interrogated, Peter is asked three times about his association with Jesus, and he denies it. This devastating failure caused him to leave the courtyard and weep bitterly. But notice the kindness of Jesus, and you, my beloved brothers and sisters, should expect the same kindness in your own life. Following our biggest failures, Jesus Christ, in His kindness, will bring you back to the same place to an opportunity for redemption.

In John 21:15-19, after His resurrection, Jesus asks Simon three times, *"Do you love Me?"* and each time Simon says, *"I love You."* It's a threefold repetition, giving Peter the chance to say publicly, *"I love You,"* and heal the wound of his threefold denial of Jesus. Not only does it heal the wound, but in Acts 4:5-12, Peter, who is then filled with the Holy Spirit, is back in the same courtyard, the place of his shame and disgrace and denial, and he is speaking about Jesus. He is asked by the rulers and elders and high priestly associates by what power or name he spoke. They tell him to stop speaking about Jesus, and Peter answers this time. In Acts 4:11, we read that Peter says:

"This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone."

Continuing in Acts 4:12, Peter says:

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

This is so beautiful, and it is extra beautiful because it's the very same spot where Peter had failed.

Following Jesus will change us. Following Jesus will have its ups and downs. And finally, this morning, as we embark on this journey together, we see that **following Jesus will bind us to other followers of Jesus**. In the book of Acts, Peter preaches a sermon at Pentecost to a mixed crowd of people visiting from many nations. As he is preaching and teaching, he is raising up church leaders and disciple-makers, he is praying for people in need, and then he begins to cross cultural boundaries that are significant. In Acts 8, Peter goes to Samaria. As you may remember from the Gospels, Jews and Samaritans hated each other. This is like a Palestinian being sent to preach the gospel to Israelis. This is the worst conflict that you can imagine. And

then Peter, as an ambassador for Jesus, crosses that barrier and welcomes the Samaritans into the family of God. Do you know that the gospel is the only force powerful enough to reconcile people? It is the only way.

In Acts 10, Peter goes further by the leading of Jesus, when he goes into the home of the Roman soldier Cornelius. He is there by a prompt from Jesus in a vision. Cornelius has a similar vision. Peter prays and preaches, and the Holy Spirit comes on this Roman family. Just one day before this, Peter could not have gone to Cornelius' house for theological reasons, so Peter's visit is a profound change.

Our neighbors are Muslim, and we have tried to reach out to them and befriend them. We have had moments that seemed like it's really advancing. One of those moments was really surprising. We were hosting missionaries from Kenwood who are Koreans serving in Thailand—the Kim family. The Kim family was there while we were trying to make inroads with the Muslim family. The grandfatherly patriarch of the Muslim family, who is from Uzbekistan, was there, and he spoke Russian and Korean. Somehow our Korean missionaries, in all their linguistic skills, ended up breaking down the barriers, and we had a multilingual backyard conversation that turned into a barbecue. It was our first opening.

Soccer camp was our second opening, the first time that the family allowed the children to come with us off-site. We got into the car, and we had Pastor John with us. My wife and I were in the front seat, and Pastor John and the kids were in the back seat. Before we even left our neighborhood, the Muslim son said, “Could you talk for a little bit about the reliability of the transmission of the Greek New Testament?” I just held onto the steering wheel and looked quietly at my wife. We were praying in the front seat, and Pastor John did a beautiful job in the back seat, explaining the textual transmission of the Bible. The son had been taught that the Bible is corrupted, and when he had the chance to ask, he went for it.

This spring was another turning point when the son texted me, “Hey, Mr. David, could I ask you some questions about your church?” I replied, simply and profoundly, “Yes.” It turned out that he had some volunteering to do, so he asked if he could volunteer in some way. I talked with Melody, and she suggested that he could be a tutor in reading and math for the kids on Wednesday evenings. So he came into this building, the first time in his life he was in a church. We walked around. He had not quite realized that I was the pastor. I'm not sure even knew what that was. I took him all around, and I had complete confidence and trust in all of you. I introduced him to many of you, and at the end he said, “Everybody seems to know you.” You reflected the love of Christ to him in a very concrete way.

It's following Jesus that will take us into places we could never have imagined, and we will be bound in that journey with other followers of Jesus. That's what happens to Peter. Peter is used by the Lord to announce the gospel and confirm it to the Samaritans and to the Romans. He stands up for those who are of faith at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. What is required for someone to be a full member of God's family? Do you have to use a certain Bible translation? Do you have to have a certain point of view on spiritual gifts? What about your eschatology or the role of women in ministry? None of those things are at the gates. There is just one thing: Do you believe in Jesus Christ and His death for your sins? If you do, then you have a seat at the table.

Jesus Christ changed Peter profoundly. As we finish this morning, we come to hear his voice, his opening sentence of this letter. How do you summarize 30 years of following Jesus? This is what he says in 1 Peter 1:1-2, which is a single sentence:

*"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."*

He says, "I am Peter and the first thing to know is that I am an emissary dispatched from Jesus Christ." "Apostle" just means someone who is sent. It's the language of being a missionary. "I am sent by Jesus Christ. He is the sender." The recipients he calls "*elect exiles of the Dispersion*," which is kind of a tongue twister. Remember, at the end of the letter he says, "Silas helped me write this," so maybe Silas suggested it. It's a paradoxical formulation, but it's one of the most important concrete lessons and the first lesson that he gives after decades of following Jesus. What does this mean? "Dispersion" means we are scattered all around the world. These letters are in fact addressed to people living in four Roman provinces and 129,000 square miles. This is like sending a letter to all the Christians who live east of the Mississippi River. Paul's letters are to individuals and churches. Peter's letters are to this vast, enormous group.

He calls us "elect exiles," a strange and peculiar formulation. If you look at other translations, you will see that the word "exiles" is translated in a lot of different ways. It's translated in some versions as pilgrims, sojourners, refugees, or resident aliens. It's a word that, in its most literal sense, means a visitor. It is used in Acts 2:11 for visitors in Jerusalem. It can also refer to someone who is living in a place, permanently or semi-permanently, that is different from their place of origin—a foreigner, noncitizen, or resident alien. Sometimes we are tempted to theologize this and say, "We are pilgrims in a foreign land on our way to our heavenly home."

That's 'preachable' and edifying but actually not what he is saying here. Peter's concrete instruction is that following Jesus means that we live in a precarious and vulnerable position. It means that we do not hold onto societal power in any conventional sense. It means that we will often be viewed by society with suspicion, and this can erupt with violence, persecution, slander, false accusations, and even imprisonment, torture or martyrdom. All these things happened to our Lord, and all these things happened to Peter.

Peter wants us to know that you and I, as followers of Jesus, from the perspective of this world are in a place that appears to be vulnerable. That's not where our strength comes from. The strength comes from this precious adjective that is attached to the word "exiles." Peter is the first one to use this expression—to call us "elect exiles." It means that we are strangers to this world, but we are beloved and chosen of God. Sometimes the word "elect" has been over-theologized, and it makes people nervous. (What are we talking about? Is this a theological debate? What is he going to say next?) I want to keep this word closer to our hearts and closer to our lives. This is a word that Peter knows well and has used. It's a word that he uses to describe Christ as chosen and beloved, and through faith in Him we are God's people. "Elect" does not mean we are better or more deserving. If you hear the word elect and it makes you proud, you have not understood it. "Elect" means that God has brought us into His family by grace. "Elect" is a grace word. It's like the feeling of a young man when he asks a woman to marry him and she says, "Yes," and he says, "Praise the Lord."

Chosen does not make us passive and withdrawn; it makes us active and engaged. It means living out our faith in a concrete social situation where we will have difficulty. That's the truth. If we face no opposition from our following of Jesus, then our following of Jesus is indistinguishable from the non-Christian lives around us. The real test of our following of Jesus, as Peter will tell us in his letters, is how we respond to that, and he will have much to tell us. According to Peter, we are here, following Jesus, by the Trinitarian work of God. What is our place of origin? In 1 Peter 1:2, we read:

"...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."

He puts the fatherhood of God over all who believe. We are here by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, who sets us apart from ordinary use to God's use. Why are we here? We are here for obedience to Jesus Christ. We are here to obey Christ. What is the last instruction of Jesus in the Gospels to us? It is to *"make disciples of all nations."* We are here, he says, for *"sprinkling with His blood."* We are here to tell the world that you can be forgiven through the blood of Christ, and without that testimony, the world has no access to that information.

If you do a Siri search or an artificial intelligence search of the question “How can I be forgiven for my sin?” you will not find that it is through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. AI will never lead you there, but the living testimony of a real forgiven human being who has followed Jesus can tell you that, and that is why we are here.

This is going to be a great summer. As we finish this morning, I want to ask you this: If following Jesus changes us, where is this happening for you right now? Celebrate it. If it's not happening, I want to ask you this: “Are you open to allowing Jesus to change you, to change your opinion, to change your conduct, to change your calling, to change your theology, to make the cross more central?” If following Jesus has its ups and downs, are you up or are you down today? The truth is that either of those is okay. Sometimes the deepest lessons of following Jesus are revealed in the downs. Following Jesus does not mean that we never fail. It does mean that we keep going. Finally, following Jesus binds us to other followers. Are you trying to follow Jesus alone, or are you bound with a familial bond with other brothers and sisters in Christ? Stay on mission, suffer when required, and refuse to separate when social pressures push inside or outside of the church.

Peter will have much to share over the summer. This morning, I want us freshly to resolve to commit ourselves to following Jesus. For Peter it was a great northwesterly trajectory, and for us it is wherever Jesus may take us, let's follow and do that together.

Let's stand and pray.

Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Word. Lord, it is a big task to summarize a whole life of following You in one sermon. I ask, Lord, that You would impress upon us the truth of Your Word and the patterns of Your discipleship. Jesus, You are the great disciple-maker, and the way that You make disciples is the way that we must, so we ask that You seal what You have shown us in Your Word in the life experience of Peter into our lives this day.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.