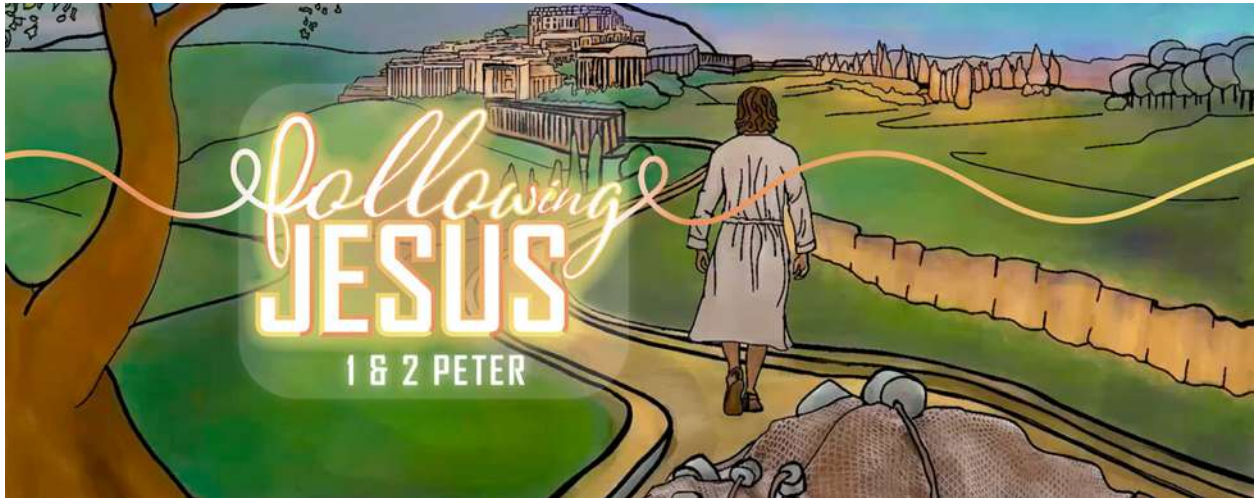


***Following Jesus***  
1-2 Peter  
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series  
Pastor David Palmer  
July 27, 2025

**TEXT: 1 Peter 4:1-19**



Good morning, Beloved. This summer we are listening to 1 and 2 Peter. We are listening carefully to 30 years of following the Lord compressed into 30 minutes. Peter's letters are short, but they are packed with mature knowledge of what it means to follow Jesus.

There is an English scholar named J.N.D. Kelly, who taught at Oxford University for a number of years. He has written some famous books: *Early Christian Doctrines* and *Early Christian Creeds*. One of Kelly's great insights was the importance of early liturgical formulas of Christian belief, early concise statements of what it means to follow Jesus that are sometimes tucked into the New Testament. These short statements or confessions of faith often form the raw material of Christian theology. In his writing, J.N.D. Kelly called this section of 1 Peter, chapter 4, the "baptismal life." The baptismal life is a life that has a past, a present, and a future.

The passage this morning, 1 Peter 4:1-19, lays out for us the experience of Peter, who had seen many people come to faith. He had led many people to faith himself. He had seen many people confess their faith in Christ. This shape of a baptismal life is laid out before us in this passage in this way:

Past – our old life now gone in Christ (1 Peter 4:1-6)

Present – our new life shared in Christian community (1 Peter 4:7-11)

Future – our unshakeable future hope as Christians (1 Peter 4:12-19)

The past, in verses 1 to 6, describes how our old life is now gone in Christ. The life that we once

knew, apart from Christ, is one to which we no longer have any obligation. The present, verses 7 to 11, describes a new life that we experience, not just individually, but together in the context of Christian community. We will see in this middle paragraph that this life that we share together is something experienced in community. Finally, in verses 12 to 19, we see the future, an unshakable future hope as Christians. I invite you to think this morning about your own story, your own life, your own baptismal life: What about your past? What about your present? What about your future?

Let's look at this together. Peter begins with our baptismal past. Our old life is gone in Christ. In 1 Peter 4:1, Peter says:

*"Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin..."*

Jesus died for sinners, so Peter says, *"Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking."* If you have suffered in the flesh, you are united with Christ, who suffered and died for sin, then you have ceased from sin. The power of sin in your old life is broken. Arm yourselves with this way of thinking. Peter uses a verb from the Greek noun *"hoplite."* If you came across a hoplite in the ancient world, you would never forget meeting him because hoplites form a striking picture. *Hoplite* is the Greek term for a heavily armed warrior. Hoplites are impressive. Their main equipment is a shield and spear. The shield is large, about a meter in diameter. It has a strap and a handle for the warrior's left arm and hand. I have seen some of these shields, and it looks difficult even to carry one of these.



The term *"hoplite"* first appears in the poetry of Pindar. The poet Homer calls a heavily armed warrior a *panoplos*, meaning someone who has all the equipment. This is where we get the English word *"panoply,"* meaning all the gear, an impressive collection.

The New Testament writers were used to seeing men in military uniform. They were used to seeing Roman centurions, Roman soldiers, and yet the New Testament writers consistently use military imagery not to suggest that Christians need to be physically armed. They use this language to say that we need to be armed for the real battle, and the real battle is a spiritual one. When we say *"spiritual,"* it doesn't mean unreal. It means that's the really real battle. What is the equipment that we need for that? Peter says we must have the same mindset that Jesus Christ had if we are going to fight this battle. In 1 Peter 2:11, he says the battle is happening within us: *"the passions of our own desires, which wage war against our souls."* Peter's thought here of having this equipment for a victory probably is connected to the ending

of chapter 3, where he celebrates the total victory of Jesus over all spiritual powers.

We know, and we will discover later this summer, that Peter not only knew Paul but read Paul's writings. He has a great line in 2 Peter where he says, "There are a few lines in Paul's writings that are hard to understand." We know he read Paul. Paul also uses this language. In Romans 13:12, he says:

*"The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."*

In Ephesians 6:11-12, he says:

*"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*

Peter, after decades of following Jesus says to us, "You have to arm yourself, not with a sword, not with a gun, not with a stick or stone, but with the mindset of Jesus Christ." The mindset of Christ is that, since Christ died for our sin, the power of sin is broken. In 1 Peter 4:2, Peter says:

*"... so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God."*

We live the rest of our time in our bodily lives no longer enslaved to our own desires. There is a great shift from past to present, and that shift is no longer living for myself or what I want, but for what God wants. That is a big change and a life-giving change. It is actually freeing not to care about what you want and to start asking, "What does God want?" What God wants for us and for the people around us is so much more satisfying than what we want.

We talked about our passions a couple weeks ago—these out of bounds, inordinate desires for all kinds of things: fame, recognition, food, drink, wealth, social status, intimate relationships. They are dangerous when they lead our lives. Instead, we trade these out for the will of God. Sometimes, when we think of the will of God, we imagine that God has an IEP for every single human being. We may think that God has a very specific set of instructions for each and every one of us and that our main task is to discern God's specific program for us. Now it's true that God wants to lead and direct our lives, but the will of God is something more broad than just for me. The will of God for Peter is doing good. The will of God for Paul is that which is good, acceptable, and perfect. The will of God for John is that the one who does the will of God abides forever.

The will of God is revealed, first and foremost, in His Word, in His commands, in His expressed

will. What I learned from the Alpha course of how you discern God's will is something I still use, I taught it to our kids, and I want to remind you of it very quickly. It's the five CSs:

The first is the **Commands of Scripture**. If we pay attention to the commands of Scripture, there is the will of God.

The second is the **Conviction of the Spirit**. If we pay attention to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, He will lead and guide us to do this or not to do this.

The third is the **Council of Saints**. Godly people will speak into our lives and help us to recognize God's will.

The fourth is **Circumstantial Signs**. Sometimes God acts in such a way that we see the circumstances around us and recognize the work of our Heavenly Father guiding us.

The fifth is **Common Sense**. It is sometimes neglected by even the most dedicated Christian. If you have a child getting ready to go to college, and there are two acceptance offers, and one comes with a full ride scholarship, you do not have to pray about that for very long. You can just recognize the will of God in that one comes with a full scholarship.

Peter says the time is past for doing what the nations do. The nations without Christ live in ways that are very predictable. Throughout Scripture the devil has no new ideas. I call these ways the big six: sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and idolatry. It's a six-pack of destruction, readily available, and the ancient version of it mirrors the modern version of it. Sometimes when I teach seminary classes for Gordon-Conwell, I leave early Friday morning to get to a 6 a.m. flight departure, and at times I have seen the bar packed at 6 a.m. My pastoral instincts were triggered by that. I wanted to go in there and give a speech or sermonette. This kind of life does not lead to happiness. It actually produces a lot of regret. The big six will always let you down and leave you with less of yourself. In 1 Peter 4:4, Peter says that when you stop joining in with the big six your friends are startled and surprised:

*"With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you...."*

The word "debauchery" that is used in the ESV is the same word used in Luke 15 to describe the life of the prodigal son, who received his inheritance, journeyed to a far country, and squandered his wealth in reckless living. The word that is used here really means non-saving or destructive, and that's what is at stake. Sometimes when you begin to follow Christ your current friends find it strange that you are not going along with this anymore. Sometimes they find it more than strange. They may malign you or think Christianity is no fun at all. In 1 Peter 4:5, Peter reminds the believers that non-Christians will give an account to God:

*"... but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."*

Peter encourages us to trust God even if some people misunderstand our new faith and even when people ridicule us. I remember that when I first became a Christian one of my relatives just blasted me and said, "I can't believe you're full of that same Christian \_\_\_\_ [and a few extra words that don't belong in a sermon]."

In 1 Peter 4:6, Peter says:

*"For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does."*

This verse at first glance seems a little perplexing. Who is preaching, we wonder. "The gospel was preached" is passive. Jesus is never the subject of this verb in an impersonal construction, so this is not Jesus preaching. This is the gospel being preached. So who preaches the gospel other than Jesus? You do, and I do. The gospel is preached, so the preachers are Christian evangelists. Who are the dead? They are not the imprisoned spirits from chapter 3. That's a totally different expression. It's not a postmortem evangelism by Jesus. The Bible does not teach that you get a second chance to receive the gospel after you have died. Hebrews 9:27 says *"it is appointed for man to die once"* and then we face God's judgment. It's not a metaphor for the spiritually dead. That would require a different sense of the word "dead" in two verses. I think it's a close parallel to what we see in 2 Peter 3:3-4, where Peter says:

*"... knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.'"*

What's happening in this passage is that Christians are being maligned for their faith. They are being ridiculed for trusting in Christ. Some of that ridicule is from people saying, "People who believe in Jesus have already died. What about them? When is Jesus coming back? Why is He delaying? All things just continue; nothing has changed." Peter gives strong encouragement that believers who have died are not dead. I love the CSB translation of 1 Peter 4:6, which makes this a little clearer:

*"For this reason the gospel was also preached to those who are now dead, so that, although they might be judged in the flesh according to human standards, they might live in the spirit according to God's standards."*

The great truth for all who trust in Christ is that the moment you die you are alive in the presence of Jesus Christ. I really believe that, and I believe I have seen it with my own eyes, that someone departs from this life and then appears alive in the presence of Jesus. No matter what anyone might say about how foolish Christianity may seem to be, Peter says the gospel is

received and even believers who have died are alive in the presence of Jesus Christ. Have no concern with any slander or ridicule you may ever receive.

What about our present life together? Beginning in 1 Peter 4:7, Peter says:

*“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.”*

The New Testament witnesses that the end of the world has indeed started with the death and resurrection of Jesus. “Be self-controlled, sober minded, so that you can pray.” Prayer is one of the great privileges of the Christian life. How is your *keva* and your *kavanah*? Do you remember those words? We balance our *keva* and our *kavanah* prayers.

<b><i>Keva</i></b>	<b><i>Kavanah</i></b>
Fixed	Free
Scripted	Spontaneous
Traditional	Creative
Order	Outburst
Community	Individual

*Keva* means fixed prayers, regular prayers. People coming to worship the Lord in a more liturgical tradition are familiar with *keva* style prayers. Another example of a *keva* prayer is when we recite the Lord's Prayer, where the language is fixed. In some traditions, the time of prayer is fixed or the number of times per day. The New Testament writers often pray three times a day, following the pattern of Daniel and imitating the hours of the temple service. Then there is *kavanah* prayer, and some of us are just all *kavanah*. These prayers are free spontaneous prayers, and they are prayed out of the abundance of the heart. There is no fixed wording or set time.

Both types of prayer are important for the Christian life. I am blessed by written prayers of other believers, and I often use those written prayers and make them my own. One of my favorite prayers is one I use when I sit down at my desk and I'm ready to start working. What do you pray when you are ready to start working? This is what John Calvin prayed:

“My good God, Father, and Savior, grant me aid by Your Holy Spirit to now work fruitfully in my vocation, which is from You, all in order to love You and the people around me rather than for my own gain and glory. Give me wisdom, judgment and prudence, and freedom from my besetting sins. Bring me under the rule of true humility. Let me accept with patience whatever amount of fruitfulness or difficulty in my work that You give me this day. And in all I do, help me to rest always in my Lord Jesus Christ and in His grace alone for my salvation and life. Hear me, merciful Father, by our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

What a great way to start your workday.

In 1 Peter 4:8-9, Peter tells us:

*“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”*

Then we have this precious image, unique in the New Testament, that each one of us receives a gift. In 1 Peter 4:10, we read:

*“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace:”*

We are to use the gift as a good steward of God’s multicolored or variegated grace. Isn’t that a compelling picture?

Paul uses the image of the body with many parts. Peter uses the image of a painting with all kinds of colors. I remember my first paint-by-number kit. My sister gave it to me as a gift. I remember seeing this white thing with all these numbers on it, and I wondered how this could turn into anything. I followed the numbers patiently, and after a few hours this great picture emerged. Each one of us has a color to contribute to the stained-glass window. Each one of us has something, such that, without you, the painting lacks.

Peter, the practical fisherman, gives us this image of the great pluriformity of the church, the variegated colors. But then Peter the fisherman makes this extra clear. While Paul gives long lists of spiritual gifts, Peter says, “Look, there are two types: people who talk and people who do.” In 1 Peter 4:10-11, we read:

*“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

You might be a talker (praise God for talkers), and talkers talk in all kinds of ways. The grace of God can be given to you for teaching, preaching, greeting, sharing the gospel, praying, giving a word of encouragement, sometimes a word of correction, a rebuke. The wounds of a faithful friend can bring healing. Sometimes it’s a prophetic word. But Peter says that in any way, in any form, that you do your talking, let your talking be from the Lord. That is a good test for all our talking. Is my talking from the Lord, or is my talking from me? If we evaluate our talking in that way, then some of our talking should stop, and other talking should move forward.

Others have the gift of serving or acting. The grace of God in acting can be anything that we do: serving, visiting someone, showing hospitality, administration. One of my favorite church gifts is the clean-up crew after a big event. It's like the parting of the Red Sea when this happens. There is a big event, everyone is exhausted, you're at the end of your rope, and then all of a sudden here come ten people who volunteered to come at the end. You sigh in relief.

There is a group of men who have been running electrical wires and knocking out walls, working on the Magnify for Kids project. They are serving with the gifts God has given them. There are others who have been painting. I never saw the painting in progress, but I saw the results. Whether you are a talker or a doer, Peter says, "Talk as though you are speaking from the Lord. And when you serve, serve and do with the grace and strength that God gives you." And, PS to everything: "to God be the glory forever and ever and ever and ever. Amen."

The last part of our passage points us forward to our baptismal future. He wisely tells us in 1 Peter 4:12:

*"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."*

Beloved in Christ, do not be surprised when the heat turns up. We need this; we need to be reminded. Peter experienced this in his own life. He was in jail multiple times. He was beaten for his testimony of Christ. He endured great hardship in his travels. He had moments of failure, where he failed the test. He failed the test initially in the Gospels when Jesus told him that Satan has asked to "sift you like wheat," but Jesus said, "I have prayed for you." Even though Peter stumbled, Jesus used that test to refine him. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:6-7:

*"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 honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

When Jesus returns in glory, those difficult times, those tests, those trials actually work in us an eternal weight of glory that's beyond comparison. I do not know what you are facing right now, specifically, but whatever the shape of that test, that trial, that difficulty, where you seem to be at the end of yourself, Peter knows from following Jesus, that that heat is actually a refiner's fire. It's not heat to destroy you; it's heat to destroy anything in you that is not trusting in God. It's heat that destroys the power of indwelling sin in us. It's a refining fire, and the refinement enables us to rejoice. In 1 Peter 4:13, we read:

*"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed."*



As we look forward to Jesus' return, we live in this world, sojourning through our earthly pilgrimage, and we bear the name Christian. In 1 Peter 4:16, we read:

*"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."*

The word "Christian" appears only three times in the New Testament. This is the only time in all the New Testament letters that the word "Christian" appears. This word was coined in Antioch by the surrounding society as a nickname for us—people who have Christ in common, faith in Christ shared. Agrippa said to Paul in Acts 26:28:

*"In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"*

Peter names this name, and the name Christian is a sweet name. It's a name that represents a shared identity, a familial bond that we have. We bear the name of Jesus, and we bear it well, looking forward to an unshakable future hope that we share together. Jesus Christ will return in glory, and everyone will see Him. Those who have believed in Him, at the seeing of Him, will rejoice with a joy that is almost inexpressible. I am looking forward to that, and I want you to be looking forward to that.

This passage this morning presents to us our baptismal life. What do we have in that? We are armed with the mind of Christ. Our past life of not following Jesus we leave in the past. We say goodbye to our old life, and this also means that we can live free from regret and remorse. Sometimes the devil has a way of trying to bring our past forward to say, "That's what you did, and you still live in shame." Jesus Christ died for that, and He will never die again for that. That is over, and that means we do not have to fall into old patterns. Those who identify with Jesus have ceased from the power of sin. What is past is past, no matter what anyone would say. We practice the present in Christian community. We use our gifts, speaking or serving, loving one another earnestly in a way that reflects the love that we received from Jesus. As we look forward to His return in glory, we wear His name well. We wear the name Christian well, because the way we live, the way we love, the way we make the gospel known, highlights the true identity of Jesus in the world. This is the baptismal life we get to share in Christ: our past, present, and future hope.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we love You. You first loved us, and we thank You, Lord, that You left Your heavenly glory to willingly suffer and die for us. Thank You for breaking the power of sin in our lives and offering us full forgiveness. I pray, Lord, for any of us this morning who are struggling with the past, that You would allow us to let it go. With the cross of Christ, put that to death. I pray, Lord, that You would come, Holy Spirit, in the present and that our experience of following You

together would be a source of great joy and encouragement and that You would let each one of us add our color to the mosaic, to the stained-glass window, to the masterpiece painting that You are producing. Lord, I pray that not one color, not one shade, would be missing and that You would help us to discover where we can serve, where we can speak. We pray, Lord, that You would cause us to live and to bear the name Christian well, that our future hope in Jesus would be vivid and real. We give You our praise, and we thank You for the baptismal life that we share together in Jesus.

In His Name we pray, Amen.