

Following Jesus
1-2 Peter
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
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TEXT: 2 Peter 1:1-15



Good morning, Beloved. Thirty years in thirty minutes. How do you capture three decades of following Jesus in thirty minutes? That is what we have been listening to this summer. We have been listening to the fruit and the results of Peter's life of ministry outside of the Gospels, summarizing that back to believers in these two short but powerful letters.

This morning we start the second, and last, letter. Peter feels an urgency in following Jesus that is evident in his opening self-identification. How do you introduce yourself to someone? What are the first words that you use to describe yourself? For Peter, he identifies himself with two words in 2 Peter 1:1, as:

“Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ ...”

He could have said, “I was the first to confess Jesus as Messiah and Jesus called me the rock.” Or, he could have dropped, “I was an eyewitness to all these things.” Instead, his first predication about himself is that he is a servant. The second predication is that he is an emissary, or someone who has been sent on behalf of Jesus Christ.

There is Apostle with a capital “A,” in the sense of the twelve Apostles, but there is also an apostleship that all Christians share. Paul, in Romans 1, says we have received grace and apostleship through faith in Jesus. This is the sending that Jesus gave in John 20:21:

“As the father has sent Me, even so I am sending you,”

So in this small “a” sense, we are all emissaries or ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

In these two nouns—servant, apostle of Jesus—Peter reveals that this is a man who is saturated with Jesus Christ. This is the kind of person I love to learn from. Even in these opening fifteen verses, listen to how many times he mentions Jesus:

- “servant and apostle of *Jesus Christ*.”
- “by the righteousness of our God and Savior *Jesus Christ*.”
- “grace and peace ... to you in the knowledge of God and of *Jesus our Lord*.”
- These things will “keep you from being ineffective ... in the knowledge of *our Lord Jesus Christ*.”
- You will receive a welcome “into the eternal kingdom of *our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*.”
- And finally, in 2 Peter 1:14: “I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as *our Lord Jesus Christ* made clear to me.”

He is saturated with Jesus. When someone is saturated with Jesus, Jesus is not an add-on, but He is the One who is guiding and controlling his life.

Peter knows that his race is about to end. He uses the colorful image that he is about to pack up his tent. That is what he calls his body. “I’m going to pack up my tent and I will no longer be camping among you.” Yet in 2 Peter 1:15 he says:

“I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.”

So at the beginning of this second letter, Peter knows his time is short. It's about time to pack up his tent. He's going to leave this world. So he is striving in this letter to communicate to us vividly and memorably so that at any time, any place, we can remember what is really important. To do this, having clear convictions about the Lord, he uses artistic and skillful speech in this letter. I was stunned to realize this week that 2 Peter actually has the highest proportion of words used only one time in the Bible of any book in the New Testament. I was surprised by that. But it is part of his plan to communicate with memorable and vivid speech.

Remember that in first Peter he told us that “Silas helped me.” So sometimes we wonder, “How does the Galilean fisherman speak with such eloquence?” And Peter says, “I knew this guy, and he helped me really polish it up.” He doesn't identify who. It could have been Silas again. The early Christian scholar Jerome thought that he had another friend and that maybe this other friend preferred to remain anonymous, because the language of 1 Peter and 2 Peter is different. So we don't know for sure.

But the point this morning is that Peter says at the beginning of this letter, “I want to make sure that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.” So he communicates in a way that is vivid and memorable and powerful. I want to point this out along the way.

The opening verse identifies *us* as the recipients of this letter. It is sometimes called the general, or catholic with a small “c,” letter, because it seems to be addressed not to Christians in one location, but to Christians everywhere. It is for all believers. In 2 Peter 1:1, all believers are described in this absolutely stunning and unique way:

“... those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

They are described as those—this includes us—“who have obtained a faith of equal standing with our own.” That is just one huge phrase. The first thing he wants us to know is that there is no difference in the faith of the disciples and the apostles who walked with Jesus and the faith that is given to those who believe in Him subsequently. There is the same quality of faith, the same value of faith, and the same content of faith. This is what gives us this broad family in Christ, not only in our own generation, but across country and ethnic lines, and even across chronological lines. You could read the thoughts of someone that was following Jesus in the year 750 and feel like “I really know this person.” Peter wants to be absolutely clear that the faith we have is the same. The *ESV* says “who have obtained.” It is a word that is a little bit challenging to translate, but it's beautiful because it's the word that is used for divine apportioning. It is the same word that is used to describe the casting of lots when Zechariah receives the lot to offer incense in the sanctuary. It is the same language that is used throughout the Old Testament where God apportions times and places. So what Peter is really saying, in a very artistic and beautiful way, is that your faith is just as valuable as mine; you have received it by the act of God and so have I. That comes about through the agency of God and our Savior Jesus, His righteousness.

In 2 Peter 1:2, Peter expresses a prayer:

“May grace and peace be multiplied to you.”

Early Christians often combine this double greeting. It is a combination of two worlds in these two words. In Greek, the typical greeting when you meet someone for the first time is, “*charika*.” “I'm pleased to meet you.” It is related to the word “grace.” It is a way of saying, “May grace be on you.” When you meet someone in a Hebrew-speaking environment and you ask them how they're doing, you often ask, “*ma shalom 'cha?*” “How is your shalom? How is your peace?” Early Christians, in a subtle way, combine these two worlds in one double greeting: “May the grace of God, the peace of God, be multiplied to you.” This verb is fancy. It's

not easy to see, but it's a passive voice: "May it be multiplied to you." God is the unexpressed agent of the verb. But the spectacular part of this blessing in verse two is that the verb is in what grammarians call the optative mood. It's a rare thing. If you're really into statistics, then I am delighted to share with you that there are 28,121 verbs in the New Testament, but there are only sixty-eight optatives, less than 1%. It is a type of speech that is used in very formal ways. It is widely used in classical writing, but not so much in New Testament writing. New Testament writing is communication, often the language of everyday communications, called the *koinē* Greek, the language of common speech. That is why the New Testament is easy to understand for everyone. It is not that we don't understand the Bible that is so troubling to us, right? As Mark Twain said, "It's not the passages in the Bible that I don't understand that trouble me, it's the passages that I do understand that trouble me." But there is a formality to this verse: "May God multiply His grace and peace." Two initial expressions of beautiful speech. It sets us up for verses three and four, where we find an absolutely explosive sentence.

In 2 Peter 1:3-4, we read:

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

This is the kind of sentence that makes you think, "Wow! Look at this!" Verse three is the dependent clause; it's not even the main verb of the sentence. But just listen to it. The dependent clause says that "His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence." It is saying that God's great power, His divine power, has given us everything we need for life and everything we will need for godliness, and He gives this to us through the knowledge of Himself, because in Himself, He has glory and excellence, or virtue. It is by these very qualities within Himself that God has given to us, in verse four, "His precious and very great promises" expressed in His Word, so that through them you and I become partakers of the very divine nature.

This is a startling and unique statement: You share in God's own nature, having escaped the corruption, or the mortality, that is in the world because of sin. Sin leads to death in Scripture, and when you are cleansed from sin and filled with God, in the New Testament vision you partake of that most essential quality of God, which is immortality.

I think we think about this too little. I do, and I've started to think about it a little more. I think

about it more because I realize we really are made to live forever, not by our own merits. I have had the privilege, even in the last few years, of watching people I know and who love and trust in Jesus leave this life with peace and confidence, just stepping into eternity. If you do that, and you know that, that means that you also live *this* life differently. If I really believe that death has been defeated and that my sin, which produces death, has been forgiven, then there is a sense in which it unlocks my freedom to obey and live for Jesus wholeheartedly. So what's holding you back? Fear of public approval? If we are made for this eternal life that starts when we believe in Jesus, that is what Peter means. It doesn't mean we become gods. That would be heretical. But what Peter means by divine nature is that we escape from the corruption and the mortality and the dying, and we share in the living. We share in the living that is in God. This is so important. It produces a dynamic of our spiritual life that we need to remember. This whole beautiful sentence in verses three and four is a fancy way of saying that knowing Jesus will change your life. It is a fancy way of saying that knowing God's Word will give you everything you really need for life, for godliness. It is a fancy way of saying that following Jesus causes you to share in what God alone has within Himself: an eternal and imperishable nature. Following Jesus produces a dynamic and active experience of growth that will lead to real change and set you on a path that eventually resolves in a glorious entrance into His eternal kingdom. He wants us to know this dynamic. He wants us to remember what happens when we put our faith in Jesus.

This is the heart of the passage. To help us remember this dynamic, Peter uses a rhetorical device called *sorítēs*. You have read and encountered *sorítēs* a few times; you just didn't know it. Sorites in Greek means "a heap" or "piling up." A *sorítēs* is when you take a set of statements that proceed step-by-step to a climactic conclusion, with each statement picking up the last word of the preceding one. Let me give you an example. Paul uses sorites in Romans 5:2-5 when he says:

"We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

That's *sorítēs*: AB, BC, CD, DE, glory. It always ends with a bang. It ends with something like "YES!" Here's another one, from Romans 10:14-15. It's a *sorítēs* with questions. Paul says:

"How then will they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of Whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News!'"

And you say, "Praise God." Now you know that that is a *sorítēs*. At the end of Romans 10 you

say, “I want to support the mission.” At the end of Romans 5 you say, “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

So, let's look at Peter's *sorítēs* which contains eight elements. In 2 Peter 1:5-6a, he begins that in light of God's promises and work in our lives:

“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control.”

Trust in Jesus, faith, leads us to pursue what is excellent. There is no halfhearted following of Jesus. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ—He gave His all for you—the most natural thing is for you to give your all for Him, and to pursue that excellence or virtue, the very character of God in verse three.

Virtue, that excellence, instills in us a desire for knowledge, not the knowledge that puffs up, but the knowledge sought when we are in pursuit of excellence. People who really want to be excellent at something, get into it. They want to know about it, and they love to learn about it and discover more, because that knowledge is then in support of the pursuit of excellence.

A knowledge of the Lord, then, and of His Word and His will and His ways produces another result. Knowledge brings with it self-control. The more you know about something, the more you are able to exercise restraint. People I have known in my life who know a lot about a subject are the first ones to tell you how little they know. It is the mark of someone who really knows. People who don't know what they're talking about just go on and on. They don't even know that they don't know. When you know the Lord, though, and His Word, it makes you a person who is more under control, not more out-of-control.

But this *sorítēs* is only halfway finished. Let's go for the rest, found in 2 Peter 1:6b-7:

“... and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”

Self-control, that self-restraint, produces in us a steadfastness, because when you are under control, you can pace yourself with endurance. Consistency is the key to everything important. It is hard to be consistent or have even pacing if you're out of control and your walk with Jesus is spluttering, or sometimes accelerating in a way that is dangerous. Self-control produces steadfastness, consistency.

Steadfastness and consistency form the very habits of godliness. Godliness at its heart means less selfishness. More godliness, less selfishness.

Godliness, in turn, produces a real affection for other people who are in pursuit of the Lord. Peter calls this brotherly affection. It is that love that you have for a brother or sister in Christ. It is a love that starts to emerge within you when you are getting to know a friend and you are in the process of sharing Christ with him and you feel this very real and genuine affection for him. This brotherly affection in Christ sometimes seems to surpass our own biological kinship relationships and we feel closer to people that are in pursuit of Christ.

The capstone of Peter's *sorîtēsis* love. Faith in Jesus has a chain reaction. Faith in Jesus leads us to pursue virtue, or excellence, and excellence knowledge, knowledge self-control, and self-control steadfastness, steadfastness godliness, godliness brotherly affection, and that affection for one another leads us to the summit of the sorites, which is the love that we have for God and for people around us.

Faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, a memorable set of items that belong together. The rhetorical device of sorites, a stacking up, or a piling up, is a chain linked together and easy to remember. Remember, Peter said that his goal was that we would be able to remember this at any time. He wanted to express it because it is so vital. The more you think about this, the more this one rhetorical device encapsulates so much about following Jesus. Faith in Him leads me to pursue excellence in knowing Him. Faith in Him and the excellence in knowing Him leads me to a deeper hunger and desire to know His Word. Knowing His Word starts to make me more self-controlled, which helps me steadily pace myself in my walk with Him, to be consistent in godliness, producing an affection for others on that same path, and leading to this climax of love for God and for other people. Powerful. Memorable,

I have been turning these eight words over in my mind all week. Peter said, "I want you to be able to have this at any time." So his expression of it is very artistic and beautiful, elegant, sophisticated. I want to give you the Palmer version that I use to help me remember this sorites. Since Peter said these are supplements—and when I hear the word supplements I think of vitamins—I've been saying all week that "fresh vitamins keep saints strong, growing, building, and loving." There's nothing really spectacular about that statement, but it is helpful in this regard: It's a mnemonic aid for me, and now for you, if it's helpful, because the first letter of each of those words in the sentence is the sorites of 2 Peter 1:5-7. Let's highlight the first letter of each word:

"Fresh Vitamins Keep Saints Strong, Growing, Building, and Loving."

If we keep that first letter but take the words out, we have the first letter, and now we can remember Peter's *sorîtēs*. Let's see if we have it. Try to fill in the blank:

F____ **V**____ **K**____ **S**____ **S**____ **G**____ **B**____ **L**____

Faith Virtue Knowledge Self-control Steadfastness Godliness Brotherly affection Love

If that mnemonic helps you, I commend it to you. If it's distracting to you, forget about it. It is not inspired from the Lord.

What *is* inspired from the Lord is this picture of the spiritual life. In 2 Peter 1:8, Peter says:

"For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In 2 Peter 1:9, he says if you lack these qualities you will become so nearsighted, or myopic, that you are blind:

"For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."

You are blind because you have forgotten that you have been forgiven. We need to be reminded that we have been forgiven and we don't have to live that way anymore. A new life in Christ can move forward.

Peter's conclusion is in the William Carey style of preaching. Lots of preachers, like myself and Pastor Scott, without even realizing it, when we wake up in the morning we think in threes. Many preachers do. But the William Carey style of preaching, because William Carey was a shoemaker, is to think in twos, pairs. One of his famous sermons that launched the modern mission movement had the memorable two-step thesis of: expect great things *from* God; attempt great things *for* God. So memorable!

Peter has a simple double conclusion. One is for us and one is for him. The conclusion for us starts in in 2 Peter 1:10. Peter says:

"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall."

"Be all the more diligent" is the same verb that is used earlier: "to make every effort." "Make every effort" means "give this your all." Make it your prime intention. Give it your maximum and dedicated effort to confirm your calling, to really live this out. If you practice these things, you will never stumble, he says. But instead, as he says in 2 Peter 1:11:

"... there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

The challenge for us as a group, from Peter, is to give following Jesus our very best effort.

The conclusion for himself, he says, is essentially the same. He says, I intend to remind you of these things, so though you know them, and are established in them, I want to stir you up, he says, rouse you. As he puts it in 2 Peter 1:12:

"I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have."

By way of reminder. We sometimes need to be roused from slumber, complacency.

He says in 2 Peter 1:14:

"I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me."

If we look in the *ESV* we will see that the translation "body" in the text is actually the word "tent." This is a first century idiom for talking about our dwelling. Your mortal body is like a tent. Tents are different from houses in their very temporary nature. So Peter says, "I'm about to pack up my tent and I'm not going to be here anymore." But he says of himself, in 2 Peter 1:15:

"I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things."

What a beautiful statement as you near the end of your earthly life. I am going to give my all so that you can give your all to follow Jesus. What a picture of disciple-making: skillful speech, memorable maxims, and a clear conviction about the Lord.

This double conclusion from Peter calls us to action this morning:

First, it calls us all to **pursue excellence in our following of Jesus**. I mean really pursue excellence. We all tend to try to do our best when we feel certain pressures. As a student, you are motivated often to do your best because you know you are going to be evaluated and graded at the end. We sometimes feel as employees, "I want to do my best because my annual review is coming up." Sometimes we think, "I want to do my best as a parent because I want my children's life one day to be better than mine." There are all these ways that we to a certain degree feel a right pressure to strive for excellence. But the greatest motivator for excellence should be in our following of Christ, to give following Christ our very best effort. "Make every effort," Peter says.

Pastor Alex Aronis, who was pastor here at Kenwood for twelve years and then was our emeritus for a number of years, is now with the Lord. We used to meet together once a month, and I would ask him one question about serving Jesus as a pastor. He would take a month to

think about it, and then he would give me great advice. At one point he said, "Look ..." He was Greek, so he was blunt and direct, and I appreciated that. He said to me, "Look, the gospel is a gift of grace." But then he raised his Greek finger and he said, "But following Jesus takes effort." Before he was a pastor, Alex was on the cover of *Bodybuilding* magazine, so he was probably the most pastorally buff person I had ever seen. So when he said, "It takes effort," there was something to that.

But his word is true. Sometimes we trust in Jesus, but we just kind of drift along. Then we wonder, "Why is my affection for Jesus kind of low? My love for brothers and sisters tepid?" Make every effort in the pursuit of our excellence in following Jesus.

Secondly, remember to **be able to call to mind**. Maybe make up your own sentence. I have been pondering this *sorîtēs* all week, and it has so blessed me as a way of summarizing what happens when I follow Jesus: that my faith in Jesus leads me to pursue virtue and excellence, and excellence leads to a desire to know Him and His Word better, and that that makes me then more self-controlled, more consistent and steadfast. That produces godliness. It produces a very real brotherly affection for the people around me who are pursuing Christ, and ultimately deposits more love for God and for other people inside of me. I want to be able to remember that. I want you to be able to remember that. When we trust in Christ, it will change us, and that change will happen over time. Sometimes that change is very rapid. Sometimes our sin is more deeply rooted than we imagined, and it takes a while for the Lord to remove it and uproot it.

My mom sent me a gift recently. She told me, "I'm sending you something. You've got to have this." I didn't know what it was. The box came, I opened it, and I pulled out a sharp, big knife. I thought, "What was my mom thinking that I had to have this?" Then I thought, "Was this an Amazon shipping mistake? Is this my neighbor's?" But it was my name on the box. So I called her up.

"Mom! Thank you for this knife!"

She said, "No, no, no. It's not a knife! It's a hori hori."

I said, "What's that?"

She said, "Every gardener has to have a hori hori."

It turns out that this Japanese gardening tool balances just so in your hand; it has a blade to prune; and it is the ultimate weed assassin, it's so sharp. You just stick it in the ground, turn it, and the weed just pops out, root and all. It's awesome. Having the right tool. Pursuit of excellence. Remember what is vital. That dynamic gives you great love for the Lord and other

people.

So, beloved in Christ, I challenge you from God's Word to make following Jesus the thing that you give your very best effort. Go after the weeds that keep coming back, and if you need a spiritual hori hori to get it by the root and throw it out, go for it. Don't tolerate it. Let following Jesus be the thing that drives your ultimate pursuit of excellence, excellence not in a way that would puff you up or make you seem great, but excellence in a way that stays inside the dynamic of the sorites and produces in the end great love, love for God and other people. The more we love God, the more we go back to the beginning of that chain and trust Him more. Every bit of trust in the Lord that you place releases this dynamic. It will produce more love, and then you can go back and do it again. Let us be about that as a community that is following Jesus.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, You are good and great and we stand in awe of You. We thank You for the ways that You use us. Thank You for the gifts that You have given to each one of us. Thank You Lord, for the example of Peter, who acknowledges that he works with other people to help express his thoughts and ideas with vocabulary that is vivid, and here, in this text, the rhetorical device so that we can remember this at any time. Lord, You know that I have been helped this week. I have been helped to remember that faith in You drives me to excellence in knowing You and that that puts me in my bounds. Lord, thank You for helping me to be more consistent and godly. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the affection, the very real affection I feel for these my brothers and sisters. Thank You, Lord, for the love for You that is growing in my heart. I pray, Lord, that we would give following You our best effort. I pray You help each of us to uproot those persistent weeds that seem to want to take back over the land. I pray, Lord, that You would help us to strive in our following You, not by our own effort, but by remembering that it is Your divine power and Your divine promises that give us everything we need for life and godliness. We give You the glory for all You are doing here at Kenwood. We praise You, Lord Jesus.

In Your Name, Amen.