

Following Jesus
1-2 Peter
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
August 24, 2025

TEXT: 2 Peter 2:1-22



Good morning, Beloved. We continue in our summer series, listening closely to 1 and 2 Peter. Peter, who was one of the first to be called to follow Jesus, is mentioned more than any other disciple in the New Testament. He is writing near the end of his life. He spent 30 years following Jesus, and then he talks to us for 30 minutes at the end in two letters. Everything in these letters is carefully chosen. The letters reflect the maturity and deep wisdom of someone who has followed Jesus for a long time.

Last Sunday, we heard Peter stress the importance of giving our attention to God's Word as a lamp in a dark place. That means we need God's Word to light up our past. We can see clearly where we are going. It also means that there is darkness around us. Sometimes that darkness is felt most acutely within us. We need God's Word, and we are challenged to pay close attention to it.

I was reflecting this week on the sermon Pastor John preached last Sunday and thinking about what happens to me, what happens to us, when we really take that seriously. What happens to your mind, to your heart, when you pay attention to God's Word? I think that paying attention means a regular reading and a listening. It means a reorienting. This week I found myself, my own soul, to be reoriented daily in some very specific ways. I found myself reminded of who God is in passage after passage. Every year I pick a different way of listening through the whole Bible. This year I am following Robert Murray M'Cheyne's path. It is somewhat challenging, with

four readings every day. You can do it as a morning and evening devotional on your own and then the other pair as a family. Or you can do it as I do, listening to all four on the drive to work and sometimes catching up on the way home. It does not really matter. I found that what happens to me is that I am reminded of who God is. I am reminded of what He is really like, what He loves, how He acts, and I need daily reminders of that. I also hear what He requires of me in explicit commands.

I find that, as believers, we are socialized into a world of meaning. We are all being socialized right now. What I mean is that we are being shaped by patterns of behavior that we all see around us. I love the socialization that happens on a public bus in Greece. It's really moving to me. One of the things that happens is that whenever an elderly person gets on the bus, younger people leap out of their seats and give that seat to the elderly person. No words are spoken, but we are all socialized in that moment to think that someone who is older than I am deserves the seat, and I am giving up mine. It's really a beautiful echo of a biblical value.

When we read God's Word, we get socialized into a way of seeing the world. God is the Creator. We are made in His image and likeness, but we have fallen, and we sometimes do not reflect that image and likeness very well. The storyline of Scripture is that we are redeemed and rescued, and the ending of the Bible is a glorious new creation where God makes all things new and evil is banished forever. That's a story we are in. It's a true story. We get socialized into seeing our place in the world, our mission to reflect God's character. Our primary task, given to us by the resurrected Lord Jesus, is to make disciples of all nations. If you have ever wondered what we are supposed to be doing, that is what we are supposed to be doing.

We also get our minds and hearts filled with examples, positive and negative. There are great examples of God's use of people in their weakness, as when God appeared in the burning bush, commissioning Moses to speak to Pharaoh. Moses said, "I don't speak well," and God subtly said, "That's exactly why I am sending you."

There are negative examples like Korah, who rebelled against those placed in authority by God and wanted to do his own thing. He led his family and everyone who followed him into total disaster. That can happen to us.

Why am I recapping last Sunday's sermon? It's because, for Peter, what he just said is crucial for what he says this morning. Knowing the truth of God's Word is really urgent. It's not a secondary thing. It is, in fact, a life-and-death type thing because not all prophetic voices are true. Not all teachers are true. The sobering and critical point to be made is that what's in view here is not non-Christian voices from the culture. That has its own challenge. What's in view

here are people that come and seem to be Christian or to speak within the body. In 2 Peter 2:1, Peter says:

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.”

That happens as part of Christian life. I have been following Jesus myself for over 30 years, and I have seen false teaching and the consequences of it. I think you have probably seen that, too. What's important for us and for Peter is to say, right out of the gate, “How do you recognize that?” Notice what he says. He says that false teachers act in secret ways. They are not straightforward. False teaching loves the shadows. It loves an unclear statement. False teachers bring in division. The word “heresy” means division. So false teaching makes us feel ill at ease. It comes from the shadows and creates division.

Then Peter goes right to the heart of it and says that false teaching denies the purchase of Jesus Christ. If we listen with great care, false teaching in all its variety will move us off the center of Jesus Christ and His crucifixion, because that's the central conviction of the New Testament: that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, has purchased your life and mine, that His blood was shed to purchase you, to acquire you. It's a language of redemption to be bought out of slavery, to be set free. It means what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

I love this. I am so glad. Aren't you glad that you are not your own person? I am so glad that I do not belong to myself. What a depressing life. *“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God with your body.”* We do not belong to ourselves. We belong to Jesus Christ who acquired us with, according to Peter, the infinitely valuable purchasing power of His own shed blood, not silver and gold, but with the infinitely powerful blood of the Lamb.

Notice that Peter does not identify the doctrines of false teachers at this point. Their mode is secret, creating division, denying Christ. In 2 Peter 2:2, Peter says that, tragically, many people will follow:

“And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.”

This is tragic because sometimes false teaching can be really popular. Popularity is never a good gauge of the truth. False teachers also cause the Christian faith to be scorned and ridiculed, and this is devastating.

This summer I ran out of bookshelf space in my office. It was a sad moment. I had stacked

books on the upper tiers, and I had to do something, so I went through a purge. I gave some books away, and then I went through the depressing part of the library purge: I pulled books from Christian authors that I could no longer recommend. Another staff member came by, and we decided to sell these books to Half Price Books and use the funds for outreach. She had a little pile of books, too, and she said those are the Christian books where there has been an ethical breach by the author. Should we sell those? Give them away? I was not sure what to do.

Peter said false teaching brings with it a motivation of greed. In 2 Peter 2:3, he writes:

“And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

The ESV says *“they will exploit you with false words.”* The Greek text is vivid, saying literally *“in greed with plastic words they will sell you.”* That is unforgettable. Plastic is fabricated, man-made. It's the opposite of what Peter said earlier in 2 Peter 1:16:

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

It's a warning, a flashing light, when a Christian ministry just has something to sell you. False teaching is a real and present danger in Peter's day, in pastoral experience throughout church history, in my own Christian experience, and, undoubtedly, in your experience.

Peter models his own attention to God's Word, and he signals in the examples he gives from God's Word the specific false teaching that was in view. The false teaching that he faced was a false teaching that denied God's righteous and final judgment. We see that that's the specific teaching in the passage that follows in 2 Peter 3:4, where scoffers said:

“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.”

Peter responds in 2 Peter 3:7:

“... the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.” and “the Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise of His return, but is patient in His delay so that everyone should have the chance to reach repentance.”

In 2 Peter 3:9, he continues:

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

Denying the right judgment of God was of great concern to Peter, and this teaching is actually

having a modern revival in different forms. I see this burden in Peter's letter, so I want to call this out for us. Maybe you have heard of it, maybe you have not. Sometimes it's called ultimate reconciliation, which is kind of a flowery term. Sometimes it's called with the Greek word "*apokatastasis*," which means restoration. What is this teaching? The teaching of ultimate reconciliation is the teaching by supposed Christians that God will ultimately reconcile every single person at some point, so all people who have ever lived will spend eternity with God. That teaching is not new, although it pretends to be. That teaching was formally condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. That teaching is not scriptural.

In his 2010 book *Love Wins*, Rob Bell dismissed the theological position of God's judgment. I'm quoting him. He said:

"A staggering number of people been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment with no chance for anything better."

There are subtle words in there that show how he's stepping forward to speak for God, e.g., "a select few," as opposed to "many."

Another teacher named Gary Amirault, founder of The Tentmakers, claimed this:

"The Bible, correctly translated, teaches Jesus Christ, the Chosen One of our Heavenly Father, will save the whole world. Hell will be empty when Jesus and His believers (His called out ones) are finished."

"Correctly translated"—that always makes me nervous. Any time someone steps forward and says, "I am the only one who knows this," that's a danger. He closes with an invitation:

"Experience your Heavenly Father's and Son's unfailing love for you. Be set free from the fear that you or a loved one may be eternally damned to hell. Beloved, because you are loved, now you can be love."

That's not true, and it's dangerous. It's just one form of false teaching.

Professor James DeYoung concisely states:

"Universal Reconciliation is biblically groundless and is untethered from the historic teaching of the church. Further, it offers false hope to the lost and, in turn, undercuts the church's commitment to missions."

Peter gives four examples of God's right judgment, and these are all taken from Genesis. It's as if Peter is reading Genesis in canonical order.

Example 1: ***God did not spare the angels from judgment when they sinned.*** In 2 Peter 2:4, we read:

“... God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;”

The Bible does not tell us as much as we want to know about this, but Peter is probably referring to the reading of Genesis 6:1 where the sons of God intermingle, and I think that's what he is referring to in 1 Peter 3 where Jesus proclaims His victory to the imprisoned spirits. The angels who sinned were cast into hell and committed to darkness until the time of final judgment.

Example 2: ***God did not spare the ancient world of Noah from judgment.*** He brought a cataclysmic flood on the ungodly. In 2 Peter 2:5, Peter writes:

“... He did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;”

I will never forget reading the Bible with our son Jonathan when he was a little guy sitting on my lap. We were reading the Reader's Digest version of the Bible, which has really nice pictures. We got to the story of Noah and the flood, and there was an image of the ark with Noah and his family in the ark. It was a child-friendly painting, but you could see people in the water. Jonathan asked, “Dad, are the people in the water dying?” As a young dad, I was uncertain how to answer, and all I managed to get out was, “Yes.” Jonathan finished the thought from Scripture on his own and he said, “That's why I want to be in the ark.” That's the truth. Denying God's judgment and pretending to frontload His love is actually unloving, and it's discrediting the knowledge of God. God judges the ancient world and rescues Noah and his family.

Example 3: ***God did not spare the ungodly cities of Sodom and Gomorrah from judgment.*** In 2 Peter 2:6, we read:

“... by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes He condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;”

We see that Peter is modeling what he told us to do: Pay close attention to God's Word. He is just reading Genesis. God condemned these cities, and He made an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.

Beloved, let's be really clear about this. Sometimes I hear people say, “Well, God rescues me from separation from Him.” That's not true. Sometimes I hear people say, “God rescues me from myself.” That's not true. You do not pose the greatest danger to yourself. God rescues us

from His righteous wrath and judgment against our sin. That's why Jesus dies. That's why the sky turns dark for three hours in the middle of the day when Jesus was crucified.

When I was brought to faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit was working in my life, and I felt my own sinfulness in a way that I never had before. I am so grateful that my best friend did not say, "Oh, that's okay. God loves you. He accepts you as you are." He looked at me, and he said, "That's why Jesus died: to forgive and to cleanse us from unrighteousness." I took hold of the Gospel as the lifeline that it is.

Example 4: *God rescued Lot from judgment.* In 2 Peter 2:7-9, we read:

"And if He rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment."

Peter's point is that God rescues the godly Lot. Judgment and salvation are two pieces of one picture in Scripture.

Jesus likens these examples in His own teaching. In Luke 17:26-30, we read:

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

God rightly judges sin, and deep down we long for this to be true: that God is holy and righteous and God sees what's evil and says, "That's evil." The glory of the Gospel is that God provides a substitute to atone for my evil and yours. That is why, in Revelation 5, all creation bursts into adoration of the Lamb who purchases men, women, and children from every nation with His own sacrifice.

It's painful to see false teaching and its consequences. The next section of this passage is particularly vivid and describes the life and the character of false teachers and those who follow them. Sometimes we imagine that just a little bit of false teaching is okay ("Maybe I'll experiment with it or tolerate it"), but false teaching always leads to false living. Who we worship always plays out in how we live. The false teachers in 2 Peter 2:10 are bold and

arrogant:

“And especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones.”

They despise authority, and in a sense they claim to be the ones to speak for God. Peter says they blaspheme things they do not really understand, and ultimately their lives start to fray.

In 2 Peter 2:17, he describes them with two very memorable metaphors:

“These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.”

In the first metaphor, he says they are “*waterless springs*.” If you go hiking in certain wilderness areas, knowing where the springs are can be a matter of life and death. When you hike in hot temperatures with a trusted guide, and the guide is taking you to the spring where you know you can refill your water bottle, that is the most glorious thing. How devastating it would be to be on the edge and get to the spring and find out there is no water.

In the second metaphor they are “*mists*,” which suggests that they are temporary in nature. The picture here is that they are a mist that appears. When we see a mist in the morning, it's usually a harbinger of rain that is to come in a positive way. But he says their mist is being driven forward by a storm. What we see there seems to look good, seems to be promising, seems to offer freedom, but there is a hurricane coming right behind, so be alert. Peter says in 2 Peter 2:19:

“They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.”

Peter ends this section with two unforgettable Proverbs. In 2 Peter 2:22, he says:

“The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.”

When a dog vomits, you may see the dog eat the vomit. The point Peter is making is taken from Proverbs, and it's a disturbing image of returning to something that made you sick. He likens this to a pig. After being washed clean, it often rolls back in the mud. The conclusion is implied: If you have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ, do not go back in the mud. If you have taken something into your life that has made you sick, and Jesus Christ has set you free from it, do not go back to it. Leave it in the past.

Beloved, this is a necessary and important part of God's Word that we have before us this morning. I need it. You need it. It calls us to action by the great imperative from last Sunday:

Pay close attention to God's Word as the light in the darkness. If you are not a regular daily reader or listener of the Bible, why not start today? You could start at the beginning. You could start with the Gospel. You could start with a listening plan. I love the Dwell app, which I use all the time. I feel happiest when Siri gives me my weekly stats, and the most use of my phone is for Bible listening. It's really powerful for a husband and wife to read a paragraph of God's Word together as you begin the day and let that paragraph shape your prayers for the day. Or you can do that at night, but give it your best attention. Remember that your attention is the currency of the digital age. It's your most valuable thing, and everybody is trying to sell it and buy it from you, so give your best attention to God voluntarily. Jesus Christ purchased you, so give your attention back to Him in worship.

Be alert to teaching that comes in sideways or secretly, creates division, and makes the death of Jesus and His rescue of sinners something other than the absolute center. That's how you can spot it. You will always recognize false teachers by the way they live. When I was a seminary student, there was a foundation that was new and offered all kinds of funds for Christian organizations. It was called the New Era Foundation. They had fancy marketing materials, and they said they had a secret donor, an anonymous donor, who would match all the contributions. So all these Christian organizations, including the seminary where I was a student, gave some of their endowment funds. People gave over \$500 million to this New Era Foundation. Praise God for accountants because there was an accountant at Spring Arbor University in Michigan who looked at the financial statements and said, "This doesn't seem to be adding up." At first glance, the president of Spring Arbor University said to the accountant, "Everything is fine." Accountants are not like that. The accountant said, "No, this is not right." He was the one who exposed this as a giant Ponzi scheme. In the end, the president had the godliness to come back to the accountant professor and say publicly, "You were right, and we should have listened to you all along."

You will always recognize teachers by the way they live. I do not mean that someone never sins again after following Jesus. I sin. Our other pastors sin. Our elders sin. You sin. But we are in an earnest commitment to follow Jesus, and we will never put you up for sale. We believe that Jesus Christ has already brought you and that you are not for sale.

I believe, because I believe God's Word, that **God will judge the unrepentant ungodly**, and that's a critical adjective. The gospel is to be shared with all the world. Jesus said, "*Make disciples of all nations.*" There is no one you will ever meet that is disqualified from receiving a gospel invitation, but the unrepentant—those who do not repent and turn to Christ—face God's right judgment in the end. This is not always easy to think about, but one of the most concrete consequences is that it motivates us to share.

I had breakfast with one of our members this week, and in the midst of breakfast we got on a roll of sharing all the moments in this week where we had seen the gospel being shared in our own lives. It was thrilling. You do not share Christ out of a guilt trip. You share Christ because you know the truth, and the truth is that Jesus Christ offered His life to save sinners. Without Christ, we are lost, and so we praise God for that.

I felt prompted by the Spirit on Wednesday to cut my lawn. Does the Holy Spirit tell you to cut your grass? I really did feel it, and I am saying that because the clouds were coming in and it looked like it was going to rain. My Greek mother-in-law said, "You can't cut the grass now. It's going to rain." But I felt like I was supposed to cut the grass, so I went out and cut the grass. I got rained on just a little. I finished cutting the grass and was blowing the clippings when my neighbor, who is an F-18 pilot, and his high school son walked over. They had a little gift bag for us because we had watered their plants while they were away. His son started talking to me, and he had all these questions about Christianity. It seemed like his son was either just crossing the threshold of faith or just about to, and so we stood in my front yard and talked about Christ for 45 minutes. It was awesome. I was talking with the son, but I knew I was really talking to the dad.

Beloved, don't let anyone or any teaching knock you off center. You have been purchased. You belong to Jesus, and we are here in the world to make disciples, and we praise God for that. We have a Gospel that can be shared with and for anyone.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, You are awesome, and we praise You. We delight in You. Lord, I pray for these, my beloved brothers and sisters, and I pray for myself that You would help us to devote ourselves to Your Word, that we would recognize false teaching in whatever guise, and stay back from it. I pray that You would help us, Lord, to be fully engaged in what You are doing in the world, which is extending Your glorious Gospel throughout all the world.

Bless us, we pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.