

## Prophetic Word Confirmed 1

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I would like to turn to 2 Peter 1: 16 – 19.

*For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.*

Let us have another word of prayer.

*Lord, we do rejoice to be together in Thy presence tonight. Lord, as many are doing various things on a Saturday night, we have found within our hearts there is one thing necessary and Lord that is to come into Thy presence and sit at Thy feet. Lord, we offer ourselves to you for speaking and translating and hearing. That Lord through your anointing and enabling of your Holy Spirit, You will be able to accomplish all that is upon Your heart. Lord we are thankful that we can put our feet down and by faith claim this time for You; that we come to You with an expectant heart. Lord, we look away, we would say, ‘be still my soul’, and we would allow You to speak from heaven. We pray in Thy name. Amen.*

As I was looking at these verses in 2 Peter, there is a little phrase in verse 19 that caught my attention. It is the phrase ‘the prophetic word made more sure’. What is Peter saying here? I think what Peter is saying to us is that the word that I had heard had now become reality in my life. I had heard many prophetic words. I had heard the Lord spoke. I had been raised in the teaching of the Old Testament. And now in my life, as I was getting ready to depart, I wanted to testify to the reality of these words; that they were not just words that we heard but there was a reality there. We are like Peter; we can listen to much teaching; but the question before us is: has the teaching that we have heard become a reality in our life?

When Peter spoke of his experience on that mount of transfiguration where he saw the glory of our Lord and caught a glimpse of that kingdom, was the kingdom of God real to him at that point? No, I do not think so. He had a small glimpse of it; he could talk about it; he could tell us what he saw and what he experienced, but it was not real in his heart at that moment. We can think of the passage in Matthew 16 in a similar way. The Lord was asking His disciples, ‘who does man say I am’? And Peter said ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God’. And the Lord said, ‘yes and upon this rock I will build My church’. It was the first time Peter heard the word ‘church’. Do you think it was real to him at that

moment? No, he just had a small glimpse. And only through the experiences in his life did it become real to him. When the Lord first called Peter, the Lord looked at Peter and said, 'Peter, I am going to make you fishers of men'. Do you think Peter knew what that meant? No, he did not. But through life and experiences that prophetic word was made more sure to Peter. As Peter responded to the Lord and allowed the Lord to lead him; as Peter allowed the Holy Spirit to work within him, these prophetic words became real in his individual life; these prophetic words about the church and about the kingdom became real to him.

And what was the key to Peter here? If we look at verse 19, we see the key. In the English translation, the verse includes that little phrase 'in your heart'. In this matter of having things being made real to us, it is not a mental exercise; it is not just acquiring the knowledge, but it is real within our hearts and in our lives. You get great debates as to how this verse should be divided if you look at the commentaries. We can look at it in one way and that Peter testified we have that prophetic word made sure in our hearts. We want that word to be made sure in our hearts. We can also look at it in another way and what it says is that we do well to pay attention to these words in our hearts. We want our hearts to be alert and aligned to Him. I think as we look at this verse, we should just stay away from controversies. What we do is to allow the Lord to speak to our hearts. 'So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts'. Peter here was crying out to us, he was saying this is a heart issue that we are talking about.

Now we have been so blessed as we gather this time. And for many years we have the opportunities to hear the word of God. I understand the first conference here was in 1998. How many of you were at that conference? We have a room full of experts. We have no need for any other time. But the question is, as we have at this time, as we have at WCCC, as we have during worship in our assembly every Sunday morning, as we have during bible study every week, as we have in our daily devotional time, with all that we have heard, have the words been made real in our hearts? Has the prophetic word, has the word of God made more sure in our hearts? Or is it just still theory or knowledge. This is what is really upon my heart at this time together; that the reality of the word of God will be transferred from our minds to our hearts; that it will impact our lives; and that they are not just theories and knowledge; and that we have not just gained some talking points or knowledge about Peter's life; and that we will be more than just good moral people.

Our brother this morning spoke about good people. The Lord is looking that His son's life is expressed in these good people. And we see that as we consider this matter of the last days. These are the days that we are living it. These are the last days in Peter's life on earth. There are several characteristics in the end days. Daniel spoke of one characteristic in the last days. He said that in the last days knowledge will

increase. I used to think that speaks of worldly knowledge since we see all the technical advances and all the knowledge of the world are increasing in the different areas of sciences. I believe that is part of what Daniel was saying. But I also believe he was saying that there will be an increase in the knowledge among believers. Brothers and sisters, it is so easy to acquire knowledge about the Lord. It is so easy to acquire knowledge about the church. There are hundreds of books out there about the church. There are books upon books about the kingdom of God. There is so much knowledge about Christianity. But is the Lord after this? I do not think He is looking for just an increase in knowledge. Rather, He wants that word makes sure within our live. He wants a reality there; a reality of His life being expressed and lived out among His people. As we look at Peter's life, we want to take some of the lessons in Peter's life and allow them to be a help to us in our lives.

Now let us look at the reason that Peter wrote this second epistle. There is a little phrase that appears in the first chapter verse 13 and appears again in the first verse in the third chapter. And it is the phrase 'stirring up'. Peter said I am not writing to you anything new; but I am writing to you 'stirring up' – to remind you of what you have already heard. It is very interesting that we have a beautiful picture of this word 'stirring up' in the gospel. In Greek this word is only used in 2 Peter and only once in the gospel. Do you know where it is used? It was when Jesus was asleep in the boat, and there was a storm going on and the disciples were afraid. And in the gospel it said they roused up the Lord; woke up the Lord. This is the same word that Peter used. Peter was writing to wake them up; to stir them up so they were not just sedentary. But they would be awake and alert in the Lord. Would that the Lord stirs us up, wakes us up from our sleep and our slumber; that His Holy Spirit will be working reality in our lives.

I will be speaking three times at this conference. Tonight I would like to look at Peter's personal life. Tomorrow night if God willing, I would like to look at Peter's understanding of the church. And the third time, if God willing, I would like to look at Peter's understanding of the kingdom.

Now before we even start that, let us remember that these are all really interrelated and cannot be separated. What we do in our personal life affects the church; what we do in the church impacts the kingdom. It is really one life we are talking about. But because we have to fellowship this, we have to distinguish the three. Remember there is an interrelationship among the three. As we look at Peter's life, we will be looking at his life throughout the four gospels and the Book of Acts. And then as we look at 1 Peter, we really see Peter sharing his understanding of the church. And then in 2 Peter we see his understanding of the kingdom. Through these times, the burden in our hearts is that the Lord will make His words more sure in our hearts. And when we are speaking of His word being made more sure, let us remember we are speaking of His word, we are speaking of Christ Himself. We are not talking just the knowledge about Him, but the reality of His life impacting our life. Then we can be those who can truly hasten His return.

Where are we first introduced to Peter? As we look at the Gospel of John chapter 1, we have this picture of John the Baptist and he declared to his disciples ‘Behold the Lamb of God’ and two of his disciples in particular, saw the Lord. They saw who John was speaking of and they went over to the Lord. And the Lord asked them ‘what do you seek?’ and they said ‘where are you staying?’ And our Lord said ‘come and you will see’. Now one of the men was Andrew. Andrew was Peter’s brother. The first thing that Andrew did was that he went and got Peter. He came and brought Peter to the Lord. The Lord looked at Peter. He looked at him up and down and He said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called “Cephas” (which is translated Peter)’. ‘You are Simon but you will be called Peter.’ How was this prophetic word make sure to him? We will see how it was made sure to him through his life.

The next encounter that Peter had with the Lord was when the Lord gave him His first commandment. We see it in the Gospel of Mark 1: 16. Now this was after the first encounter in the Gospel of John chapter 1. And for some reason, Peter and his brother have gone back to fishing. They were with the Lord a little while but then they left Him and have gone back to fishing. In Mark 1: 16 – 18, it says ‘As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed Him’. And this is the first recording commandment the Lord had for Peter. Let us now turn to the end of the Gospel of John chapter 21.

While our Lord was upon this earth and was getting ready to depart, He left these last words to Peter ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.’ We see this was the last commandment that our Lord gave to Peter. As we look at these two encounters that the Lord had with Peter, the first commandment that the Lord said was ‘follow me’. The last commandment the Lord said to Peter was ‘follow me’. And this simple phrase carried the life of Peter with the Lord.

We have a way of making life so complicated. In this modern society, it is the more complicated the better. But the Lord wants us to return to that simplicity and purity that we have in Him. As we look at Peter’s life, as we see how the Lord did a great transformation of his life, what was the simple phrase the Lord told Peter to do; it was ‘follow me’. In the beginning of our Lord’s life, He said follow me. At the end of His life when the Lord was ready to depart, we would think that the Lord was going to tell Peter something special; He was going to give Peter the secret to go home without Him. But the Lord just said ‘follow me’. This is a simple truth, brothers and sisters, and the thing we have to ask within our own heart is ‘is it too simple for us?’ Do we want something more? The Lord has given the same command to each and every one of us. He simply said, ‘follow me; I will take care of everything’. How precious it is that the Lord did this in Peter’s life.

Now if you look back over the first part of Mark chapter 1 where the Lord called Peter, he and his brother Andrew were fishing. And who noticed who? The Lord saw Peter. Peter did not have his eyes on the

Lord but the Lord had His eyes on Peter. He never leaves or forsakes us. He sought Peter out. As He was walking by, He saw Peter. The Lord took that initiative. He called out to Peter. He told Peter to follow Him. And He said to Peter, 'as you follow me, I will make you a fisher of men'. He did not tell Peter, 'you know a lot about catching fish, now what I want you was for you to start catching men'. No, He told Peter 'I will make you a fisher of men; as you follow me, as you learn of me, I will work within you and you will be a fisher of men'. He was not asking Peter to do anything complicated. It was just simply to follow Him.

Again it sounds so simple. But what does it mean to follow someone? Following someone is just going with him and traveling with him. And the Lord was saying to Peter, 'I want you to come after Me and I want you to know Me as your master; I want you to learn of Me. Peter, I know you are very impetuous. I do not want you running ahead of Me. I want you to follow Me. I know you are capable in yourself. I do not want you walking alongside of Me. I want you to follow Me and as you follow Me, you will learn of Me. You will see how I handle things. And Peter, as I am calling you, I am calling you to follow Me'. Peter was not to follow someone else, he was not to follow a man but to follow the person, our Lord Jesus. Not the things of Him. He did not say Peter, 'follow My miracles'. He just said 'follow Me. As you follow Me, you will see all those signs and miracles. As you follow Me, you will learn of My teachings. As you follow Me, you will learn of Me. You will get to know Me'. How we need to know the Lord because as John testified in his gospel 'my sheep know My voice and they follow Me'.

Today there are many voices out there; do we know the voice of the Lord? Are we learning of Him? Are we allowing His voice to lead us into the fullness of Him that He has for us? Oftentimes people said 'how do I learn to know the voice of the Lord?' How can I hear the Lord? And then we try to make it so complicated. But then how do you learn to know anyone's voice? How does a child learn the voice of the mother? A child spends time with the mother. When a husband and wife spend time together, they learn of each other's voices. As we get to know Him, we know that voice. It is wonderful that no one has to teach a child his mother's voice. As that child grows up, he gets to know that voice. I remember when I was younger that out of all the voices that cried out, I could hear my mother's voice calling me to come home. A lot of times I would be out playing basketball or football. There were many voices all around. My mother did not have the loudest voice, but I knew that voice. I did not necessarily listen to that voice but I heard it. And you walk into a room; you hear a voice; it can be on the other side of the room; yet you know that voice because you know that person.

This is how the Lord wants us to get to know Him as we spend time with Him. Many times we say, 'how can we get to know the voice of the Lord?' How much time do you spend with Him? I am so busy; I do not have much time. If we do not have time to learn of His voice, we are not going to learn it. We need to take that time. Every day we need to take that time to know Him through prayer and through

fellowship. And when He said follow me, then we know it is He who said follow me. We will not be led astray by something else. And as you are following someone, particularly in a crowd, you stay close to him. As we get to know Him, we abide in Him, we stay with Him, and we keep our eyes on Him. If you are following someone through a strange place, your eyes are on him and you are not distracted by other things. And you trust him that he knows the way. Oftentimes we may not know the path.

Last night we trusted Jason to lead us here, and I am glad he knew the way because it was pretty complicated. And we got here. I remember years ago Stella and I were visiting Los Angeles. And one Sunday morning we were following someone to a meeting, and these words 'follow me' was made real in our hearts. We were in a rental car following this family that we were staying with to this meeting. And we were staying real close to them. Actually I was pretty rude and did not have a Christian testimony. I would not let anybody come in between us. Even if they had to turn, I would not let them come in between us, because we were following this family. We changed from one interstate to another, and in the middle of the turn, I looked over and got distracted. There was this huge rock quarry and I looked over at it. When I turned back around, there were two identical vehicles in front of us. They were Mazda mpv and there were 4 people in each one. There was a father, a mother, a daughter and a son. And they were both the same. I looked at one and then I looked at the other. And we did not know which one was which. How do we know the difference? If you share this with the young people they will say you just memorize the license plate. But I did not do that. As we looked at these two vehicles we looked inside of them; we knew the life inside one and we did not know the life inside the other. And we followed life. Brothers and sisters, in the days we are living in, there are many things out there that have the name 'Christian' on it. But is it really of the Lord? When He said follow Me, do we know that voice, do we recognize that life? As we look into it, and if this is not the life of the Lord, then we know there is something strange about it even though it has the name 'Christian'. I believe you can use the right phrases and words, but something about it are just not right. Then we see the one who calls and we recognize the life. As the Lord is calling us to follow Him, we are following His life. We need to know His life because there are so many voices these days. May we take that time to know Him in a fuller way. It is tragic out there today that there are so many counterfeits. Most of us cannot tell the difference in counterfeits. They talk about counterfeit money and when we look at a \$50 bill, most of us cannot tell what it looks like when we see it. We will not know a real one from a fake one. But those who are trained can tell the difference. And to me it is a great spiritual lesson also. Within the FBI when they are trained to spot counterfeit money, you know what they teach them? They gave them \$50 or \$100 bills; they learn the paper; they learn the ink; they learn all the marks. But one little thing they never see during their training is that they never see a counterfeit bill. They focus on what is real and when you know what is real, then you will know what is false.

When we get to know our Lord in reality, there is life. We can see that when other voices come along that it is not Him. Peter learned that in his life. We know at times Peter listened to the wrong voice. When you look at his later life, Peter listened to his own voice and he denied the Lord. He did not listen to our Lord's voice. Peter learned some hard lessons. What Peter wanted us to learn is to learn the simplicity of following our Lord; and getting to know Him in a real and intimate way. Sometimes when we talk about following the Lord, we can put on our rose color glasses and think that everything is wonderful and beautiful; and we say we will go where He goes.

But let us look at our Lord's life. He was born in Bethlehem. He was born in humility. Are we willing to walk that way of humility? And then those many years that He lived in Nazareth, He lived a hidden life. That is so hard for our flesh. We hate having to live a hidden life. We want people to see us. But we need to take that time to live that hidden life with Him. Then when He calls us, we can leave there and go on with Him. As Jesus left Nazareth and came to Jerusalem, though He came to His own, His own receive Him not. He was rejected by the ones He came for. Brothers and sisters, we are together in an assembly, and our brothers and sisters do not accept us. They do not accept us the way we think they should. Maybe we will feel rejected. What do we do? Do we just quit and go somewhere else? No, we follow Him. We go through that period where the Lord teaches us about rejection. And then as we follow Him, we see we end up in the garden of Gethsemane. And how wonderful and easy it is to pray that prayer, Lord not my will but Thy will be done. We always pray that prayer. We learn it is a good phrase. When we are in a prayer meeting and we pray, Lord, not my will but Thy will, everyone will think that we are spiritual. If you want to impress your parents, if you want to go to one university and they want you to go to another university, you know how you can impress your parents? You pray, Lord, not my will but Thy will. You know well in your heart you want to go there. We are not just paying lip service; this is where the word is being made sure in our life.

It is a fearful thing before the Lord to pray not my will but Thy will be done. It is a sobering prayer. I remember a story of a brother. And he could not pray that prayer. But what he prayed was Lord, make me willing to be willing. The Lord knows our heart. He is not looking for our performance or our great words. We said in the beginning that He is looking for our hearts. Do not play games with Him. If He calls us to somewhere and we do not want to go, just tell Him that. But also pray, Lord make me willing to do Thy will. You see, our Lord as He wrestled there in Gethsemane, He said, Father if this can happen, let the cup pass, but not My will but Thy will. We know that in His will, He went to Calvary. Are we willing to go that way of Calvary? Praise God that it did not end in Calvary. We know that up from that grave He arose and now He is seated on the throne. Now we like to be there at the throne, but are we willing to go the pathway with Him? Praise God, Peter was willing to go through this. Peter was willing

to go through the training process. And Peter left his nets and followed the Lord. And the Lord started working in Peter's life.

Now we turn over to Matthew 16. Many of us are familiar with this chapter. We all say that this chapter is Peter's revelation of Christ and His church. And we are thankful that in this chapter that Peter received the revelation of Christ and His church. We will spend more time on it tomorrow evening. And after Peter received that revelation, the Lord also told Peter and His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffered. And He was going to be killed but on the third day He would rise up. And Peter intervened and said, 'Lord I am not going to let you go'. Peter tried to stop Him from going to the cross and the Lord rebuked Peter with a pretty strong rebuke. After the Lord rebuked Peter, He taught Peter a lesson. We look at verses 24 and 25 'Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it'.

Do we want to enter into the reality of His life? The Lord is showing us a pathway here. The pathway to life and the pathway of life are the cross. And this is the initial revelation of the cross to Peter. The challenge that each one of us faces is that there are two paths that face us. Are we going to walk that pathway of life which is His will and His way? Or are we going to walk the pathway of death which is our will and our way. Now to be really honest, most of us want to walk on both paths. There are things of the Lord that we really like; we want to walk on that one; but there are also some other things that we like in our lives; our own desires, and we want to walk on that path also. If we want to walk on both paths, then it is a pathway of death. And we are only kidding ourselves if we think we can do that. It came a point in Peter's life that he needed to make this decision. In John chapter 6, the Lord was sharing some difficult things with the disciples and they said these are hard words. And many others left. But Peter spoke up and said 'Lord, we have nowhere to go, You alone have that word of eternal life'. And Peter followed Him. Brothers and sisters, there came a point in the disciples' life where they had a choice to make. Some chose to continue to follow the Lord, but others did not. They had an alternative.

Do we have alternatives in our life? Do we have options that we can opt out on? When the Lord calls us to follow Him the number one alternative that most of us have is 'tomorrow'. You know who is the number one advocate for us to serve the Lord tomorrow? The enemy loves for you to serve the Lord tomorrow. The enemy has no problem that you say you will serve the Lord tomorrow. Because the enemy knows tomorrow will never come. The lord's word is not tomorrow but today. Today if you hear My voice. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day for My father's business. Today follow Me. It is always tragic how so often we want to put things till tomorrow. We always have the alternative and this has been going on throughout Christianity. I read a sermon in the past about C.H. Spurgeon. He was addressing this problem over 100 years ago. A lot of us who are in school will say let me get out of

school and then I will serve the Lord. After we got out of school we want to get married. We say after I get married I will serve the Lord and we keep putting it off till tomorrow. And tomorrow never comes. And we found out sooner or later we are too late to serve the Lord. But we thank the Lord that in reality we are never too old to serve the Lord. We can always start today. Do not put anything off till tomorrow. Serve the Lord right where He asks you to today. This is one of the secrets of Peter's life. Wherever Peter was, He was following the Lord; he was serving the Lord. He did not know what was ahead but he trusted the one who was leading him. Peter was experienced in the reality of the way of the cross. What does the way of the cross mean to us? If we are honest, the way of the cross is not attractive to us. But there is a great discovery we can make. As we start the way of the cross, we will find the cross is our best friend because it sets us free from this body of bondage of death. We have this enemy of self within us and we are always wrestling with self. But praise God, as we learn the way of the cross, it sets us free. The enemy will tell us that the cross is bondage. No, this self life is bondage. But as allow the cross to work within us; as we say no to our will and yes to His will, it sets us free from this bondage and we are free indeed.

Today we always want freedom. I want to be free in the Lord. The Lord has a glorious way to set us free. Just as He sets us free from the death of salvation, He can set us free from this self life from death through the way of the cross. We read those verses in Matthew 16:25 'For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it'. That is speaking of our soul life and Peter learned the reality of that. When the Lord first said that to Peter, he did not know what the Lord was talking about. But in I Peter, what did Peter testify of? Peter said, as you go through these trials in life the outcome of the trials is the salvation of the soul. You are free indeed. We try so many ways to escape the way of the cross. But through the Holy Spirit we can see what a friend we have in the cross. We need to allow the cross to work within us. And if we really follow Him through the cross, we will know that glorious will of the Son of God.

It is always so tragic today that there are so many miserable Christians. We have the way right in front of us and yet we are not following Him to enjoy the simplicity and freedom that we have in Him. If we look at these verses in Matthew, He threw this wide open when he says 'if anyone desires to come after me'. He is not going to force us to go after Him. He said if anyone desires. Do we have that desire within our heart? Maybe some of us do not. And that is alright if you admit it. You go to the Lord and say, Lord, I do not have the desire to come after you but I desire that desire. Do you know what He shows us? It is not what He shows us but who He shows us. He shows us more of Himself. He shows us more of His great love. He invites us to 'come after me and see more of the riches that I have'. He throws open this great love to come after him. This was Paul's testimony in his life. The testimony of Paul is that the great love of Christ controlled me.

Brothers and sisters, Christ sang a beautiful love song at Calvary. Have you heard that song? As you look at the cross, as you look at what the Lord did, this is most beautiful love song in eternity. Has it captured our hearts? There is a story in Greek mythology. There was this set of sisters that live in one of the islands in the Mediterranean. And they were called the siren sisters. And as the ship went sailing by, they would sing these beautiful songs. And these sailors would hear this enticing music and they would hear these women singing and they would turn their ships and sailed towards those voices. But as they sailed close to these islands, there were a lot of underwater reefs and the ship would crash and everybody would be killed. These sisters would get the plunder from the ship. Now one time Odysseus sailed by there. He had heard of these sisters. And what He did was the ingenuity of the world. He plugged up the ears of all his men so they could not hear the music. But he wanted to listen to it. He told his men to tie him to the mast and to ignore whatever he said. So they sailed by and he heard this music and he wanted to go there but he could not. And then there was one man called Orpheus and as he was sailing by and his men started to hear this music, he started singing himself. He had a beautiful voice and he out sang the sisters. And he was singing and singing and his song was a song of life because the ship was not destroyed.

And we can see a beautiful spiritual picture here. Today there are two songs being sung to us. The world is singing the song of death. But Christ is singing a song of life. Have we heard that song? Are we closing our ears to the song of this world? And have we heard the love song at Calvary. Now this is what Peter heard and he followed the Lord. And we saw how critical it was at that moment in time because when was the matter of the cross revealed to Peter? It was revealed to him right after he testified Thou are the Christ. And he also received the revelation of the church. The cross is the key to making the word of God more sure within our hearts. Peter simply followed Him. And the Lord drew Peter into a greater fullness of Himself. Without the cross there is no Christ. Without the cross there can be no church. Brothers and sisters, we need to see the cross in a different perspective. Hear that love song from Calvary. That the words we have heard can be made sure in our hearts and in our lives. When we are talking about Peter we said one of the principles of following someone is staying close. We know later in one of Peter's training he denied the Lord. There is an interesting phrase as you look at the chapter in Peter's denial of the Lord. All of a sudden it spoke of Peter and the Lord. Peter was following at a distance; he was not following closely. Peter was now following at a distance. Peter's denial is very gradual. Most of us do not fall away from the Lord in an instant. It is usually gradual. And that is what happened with Peter. He was just boasting of himself. When the Lord said, Peter, you are going to deny me. He said, no, I will never do that. And then the Lord asked him in the garden to watch Him pray. He fell asleep. Then he followed at a distance. We know because of that he ended up denying the Lord. What a lesson we have here. Often as we start getting through some struggles in life, maybe some

questions, maybe some doubts, there is a voice within us which said you need to get away and have some time to yourself; you need to figure this out for yourself. When we are going through those times of difficulty, trials and uncertainty, we do not need to get away. We need to get closer to the Lord and closer to one another. Find the brother and sister and say, I am having trouble, walk with me through this. Then the Lord can hold us and sustain us. So often, we start withdrawing and it will only lead to further disaster. We see this disaster in Peter's life. We praise God. Even though Peter lost sight of the Lord, the Lord never lost sight of Peter. We know that the Lord restored Peter both privately and publicly. His wonderful love, His love song is always there to draw us back because the Lord said 'follow me'. And when you fall, not if you fall, but when you fall, He is there for you to pick you up and help you get back on that trail. We thank the Lord how He fully restored Peter. And we see within Peter's life how he was able to publicly testify of the marvelous way that the Lord recovered him.

Turn over to Acts chapter 3; this is being referred to as Peter's second sermon. He and John had been on the way to the temple and they had restored the health of this lame beggar. Everybody there was full of amazement of this healing. And then Peter stood up to share the word. We are not going to go through the whole sermon. If you look at verse 14, it says 'But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you'. In the English version, most use the word 'deny'. In the New American Standard, it uses the word 'disown'. But it is interesting when you look at this verse. You may say I like looking at words because the author of this book is so imaginative. The Holy Spirit is never careless with His words. This word here for 'deny' that Peter used in front of these thousands when he said you denied the Holy One, is the same word used when Peter denied the Lord. When the little slave girl came up to Peter, it said that Peter denied that he knew Him. Another servant asked Peter the same question and Peter again denied knowing Him. Brothers and sisters, this is a beautiful picture of how the Lord fully restored him. If Peter had not been fully restored and the word of restoration had not been made sure in him, the word of forgiveness had not been made real to him, how can he with a clear conscience stood up and spoke to others about denying the Lord? I do not believe when Peter was delivering this message and challenging the others about denying the Lord that it came across in a condemning way. Rather, I believe it came across with understanding and compassion. It was the love of Christ there. These people knew what Peter had done. Peter was saying, I denied Him more times and see what He had done in my life. You denied Him but look what He could do in your life. This is the word of God made sure within Peter's life. And this is what the Lord wants to do in us.

He wants us to know of His great salvation and the forgiveness in Him. It is tragic today that so many believers know in their minds that their sins are forgiven, yet they still live under condemnation. We can quote the verses that our sins are forgiven, but then when the Lord calls us to serve Him, we say, we cannot because we are too evil. We are denying the work that He did at Calvary. How can Peter who had

denied the Lord stood up and charged the people denying the Lord? Only one who had been fully restored and fully knew all that the Lord had done for him could do that. May that reality work within our hearts and our lives. Praise the Lord that there came a time and a point in his life.

When the Lord was on earth Peter denied the wrong person. But we know later in Peter's life, he denied the right person. He loved not his life unto death. Peter learned many lessons. Let us turn to John 21. Let us see this last command the Lord spoke to Peter about following Him. The Lord had restored Peter publicly and we will look more at this tomorrow night. He had given Peter this commission. He had given Peter the commission to care for His sheep. The Lord was doing this work of transforming Peter from a rough fisherman into this gentle shepherd. And after Peter was restored, what did the Lord say to him? We see in these verses that earlier the Lord said follow me. The Lord actually had to tell Peter to follow Him twice here. He said it at the end of verse 19 and then at the end of verse 22. Now what happened in between? The first time the Lord said to Peter to follow him, what did Peter do? He turned around and looked at the apostle John. The Lord had just told Peter how he was going to die; when you are old people will take you to places you do not want to go. And it was not very pleasant. Peter looked around and saw the apostle John. And Peter asked, Lord, what about him? He said to the Lord, you are telling me how I am going to die, what about him? And the Lord said what is that to you, you follow me. This is a big lesson we need to learn in life. We get so distracted at times for our brothers and sisters. Peter was not distracted by something bad here. He was distracted by the apostle of love. But the Lord had a way for John to go. The Lord had a way for Peter to go. The Lord has a special path for each one of us. Each one of us is fearfully and wonderfully made. And He has such a wonderful way with His work that He wants His work to be real and wonderful in our life. But oftentimes we look at others and get distracted. How come others get to do things I cannot do. It is wonderful to have a retreat, because you have so many opportunities to learn lessons like this. As you are sitting there, you say how come you let that brother go up there and lead the hymns. I have a better voice than he does. Why they do not let me do it? Why do they make me sit in the back? Why do I always have to sit in the back and push all these buttons up and down? How come our brother stands up there and translates in front of everyone and then someone else has to translate in the back and nobody sees her. We can laugh but we have these thoughts if we are honest because we desire recognition. Self wants to get recognized. But the Lord knows how to work with each one of us. What a wonderful opportunity we have to deny ourselves. We should be honest with the Lord and thank Him for showing us that we are ambitious. I have a desire for my brother and sister to see me. Lord, I know that is not pleasing to you. I want to deny myself and to take up that cross and follow you. When we have these thoughts within us, so often it is the Holy Spirit who brings them to light. Because out of His love, He is showing us things He wants us to change and to

deal with. But do we cooperate with Him or do we just sit there and get mad because they would not let me lead the hymns?

When I was in the university I was on the track team. You can probably tell I am not a runner. I did the putt, discus and the javelin. We got to watch the runners and one thing that they always told the runners in the race was to keep looking ahead. Because if you started looking around, distracted by others, you would trip over your feet. It slowed you down. If you are running those races, looking over your shoulders really slows you down. In this race we need to keep our eyes on Him and not distracted by brothers and sisters. Now remember Peter was distracted by the apostle of love. We are not talking about the bad brothers and sisters. We know there are plenty of them. What we are talking about are those good brothers and sisters. One of the good things being out here now is that many people asked us about the meeting in Richmond. We say thanks, Richmond is well. All the problems are in California. When you look at an assembly, again it is not good brothers or bad brothers; we are all brothers and sisters together. There are no good in us except the life of Christ in us. But as we see His life, we can encourage each other. Praise God, brothers and sisters. We have talked a lot about the cross working in us. We follow the Lord and we go the way of the cross. Praise God that it does not end there. Where did we say it end? It ends at the throne.

Let us finish by looking at Revelation 14 where we have this beautiful picture of the 144,000 singing before the throne. And they are singing that new song and they are worshipping the Lord. If you look at the middle of verse 4, who are these ones? It says 'These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These *are* the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb'. Brothers and sisters, when we follow the Lord, at times it can seem so lonely. Even when we have others around us, we still feel this way of following the Lord is so lonely. Praise God that we when are there at the throne, we see the 144,000. The Lord is doing a great work among many. So many are there singing with one voice. Can you imagine a multitude of 144,000 singing with one voice? Why are they able to do that? It is because they follow the Lamb. They kept their eyes upon Him, not distracted by other things. Denying themselves, allowing the cross to work in them, following Him all the way. Do we have this desire in us? We need to look in a fresh way; to focus our eyes upon Him; to get to know Him; to allow Him to lead us into a fuller way; and not be distracted by many things.

When I was in the military, I was on a drill team. When I was in basic training, I was put into this team where each one of us was given a shiny rifle and a shiny band hat. We learned to march and to drill and put out many performances. I remember one time we marched in a football stadium and we would throw towards one another our rifles and the band hat. We were all marching along in unison. Even though there were many of us, we sounded as there was only one. There was one secret to our marching in

unison. As we were going through our many exercises and drills, what we would do was that we would keep our eyes on the leader. We always knew where we were in relation to him. I do not know whether you have seen a parade. And sometimes while the band is marching it seems the lines are waving instead of being just a straight line. And what happens there is that you are looking at the person next to you. And then everyone ends up adjusting and waving along. But when we were on this drill team, each one of us was not looking at one another; we knew our position in relation to the leader. And when each one of us was in our right place, we did everything correctly. What happened sometimes was when someone was in the wrong place and he threw you the rifle, it would be difficult to catch. Sometimes you missed the rifle; you caught the band hat and that was not good.

As I reflect back on that drill team, the spiritual lesson that I learn is that each one of us has to keep our eyes on our leader. Each one of us has to keep our eyes on the Lord. There are many things going on in these days. But praise God as the Lord worked in Peter's life; as Peter followed the Lord; that prophetic word of making Simon to become Peter was made sure to him. That prophetic word was made real to him in making him to be a fisher of men. Rough Peter was transformed into a gentle shepherd. And it was all done by the simplicity and purity within Christ.

Let us not make this life more complicated. He said follow me. May we respond to that simplicity, hearing His love song, seeing Him daily, obeying Him, learning of Him and simply following the Lord wherever He goes. We can then end up before the throne. And we can be the testimony that He desires us to be in these days. We see this in Peter's individual life how that word was made real to Peter. If God is willing, tomorrow night we will look at how that word was made real to Peter concerning the church. And I think this is something we all need to take seriously. We have heard so much teaching on the matter of the church but is the life of the church being expressed in our lives? May the lord prepare us and open our hearts.

Let us pray.

Lord we are so thankful for Your unending love towards us. And Lord we are thankful for the simplicity of Your call to follow me. But we have to return and repent before You for making this Christian life so complicated. Lord, with Your Holy Spirit, search us and Lord, where we just have knowledge in our minds, will you work within us in such a way that it will become reality in our hearts? Lord, we have a desire that Your words will become very sure within us that it will be made real within us. We desire to cooperate with You. In Thy name we pray. Amen.