

# Follow Me

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 12 April 2026

Preacher: Jeremy Martinson

[0:00] John 21. Our sister Kara is serving us this morning and she will read verse 1 down through verse 7. After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias and he revealed himself in this way.

Simon Peter, Thomas, called the twins, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing. They said to him, we will go with you.

They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, children, do you have any fish? They answered him, no. He said to them, cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish.

That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, it is the Lord. When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work and threw himself into the sea.

[1:17] Thank you. Father, we are grateful to be here this morning. We're grateful to have voices that we can use to praise you and worship you.

We're grateful that you have moved our hearts to be here today, that you have awakened us this morning into your world, given us air to breathe. Thank you so much for the weather this morning. And even though it is overcast, this seems so much more delightful and appropriate for a Sunday in April than last week.

And so we are just so grateful for your kindness and your goodness to us in small ways that we might forget to say thank you for, but also in very great ways.

Thank you for sending your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you for sending the Holy Spirit. Thank you for giving your word and revealing yourself to your servants who are inspired by you to write your word.

[2:25] Thank you for preserving it for us down through the ages so that we could have it even now in our own language and not only have it, but have freedom to enjoy it, to read it, to study it, to memorize it, to meditate on it.

Would you please help us as we continue in this time of worship, that you would be honored and glorified by all of the things that are said. And as we turn our attention now to the preaching of your word, would you please help me to be faithful to your word?

We want to see Jesus. We want to know him more fully. We want to love him more deeply. We want to obey him and we want to be like him.

And so would you please do those kind of miracles in our hearts this morning as we continue in this time of worship. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

In the fall of 2022, I faced a dilemma. How would I support my family?

[3:40] I had expected to serve the people of Grace City Church for the rest of my life, but then that ended. The church was gone and what I thought would be the rest of my life was irreversibly changed.

And when that happened, I didn't try to reinvent myself. I did not go to the police academy.

I did not become a car guy. I did not join up with any carpenters that you know as an apprentice and try to learn a trade.

No, I went back to what I knew and what I knew was technology. Here's what I've learned and maybe you have felt this also.

When life gets confusing, when things happen that you didn't choose and when you don't know what's next, we often go back to what we know.

[4:48] Old habits, old patterns of life, old ways of thinking. We don't go back to these things just because they're right.

We go back to these things because they are familiar. But I wonder that if we're not careful, familiarity that feels like stability is actually just drift.

This is where we find the disciples in John 21. Let's reconnect with the timeline. Jesus is crucified on Friday. Before sundown, he is buried.

On Sunday morning, the tomb is empty. Jesus reveals himself first to Mary Magdalene and then to the ten disciples. And a week later, Thomas is with them and Jesus appears again.

So let's be clear. The question is not, did Jesus rise from the dead? That's clear. By this point in John's gospel, there is no question that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

[6:06] He has proven multiple times he is alive. So then we should ask ourselves, why John 21? And I think at least part of the answer is because Peter.

Peter, who boldly proclaimed his willingness to die for Jesus in the upper room. Peter, who pulls out a sword and takes a slash at the high priest's servant's ear.

But then Peter, who that night denied even knowing Jesus. That Peter needs to be restored.

His love must be publicly affirmed. And he must be recommissioned into ministry. Some time has passed between that meeting in the upper room with Thomas and chapter 21.

We don't know exactly how much time has passed. But we know long enough for the disciples to go 75, 80 miles or so from Jerusalem back to Galilee.

[7:27] The disciples don't know what comes next. And so they go back to what they know. Verse 1.

After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. And he revealed himself in this way.

Simon Peter, Thomas called the twin, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, You may recall from last week when we gathered to celebrate the resurrection.

A statement can be true before you begin to live like it's true. Christ is risen, but the disciples are not yet living as though he is risen.

Peter says, I'm going fishing. And the other six say, we're coming with you. They go back to what they know. But there is a problem.

[8:41] They fail at what they know. Right in the middle of verse number 3. They went out, got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

This is biblical reason why I don't go fishing. I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. They fish all night. And they catch nothing. Now, I am not a fisherman. So let's just try this together. How does it feel when you go fishing and you catch nothing?

What do you think? Frustrating. Frustrating. Waste of time. Waste of time. A waste of time. They're cheating with a net.

They do have a net. And yet, they are still failing. Disappointing. Frustrating. Discouraging. Hungry. Hungry.

[9:44] Thank you, Tim. Very good. Now, take what we would feel. Because we're all just hobbyists. This is a pastime for us.

No one here is making a living doing it. Not anymore, Clifford. No one here is making a living catching fish. But at least three of these guys were professional fishermen.

They are not out to relax and enjoy time on the water. This is their work. Their livelihood. Their identity. This is how they provide for their families. They go back to what they know.

And now they can't even do this right. I suspect the mood in the boat was not good. Verse 4.

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore. Yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

[10:54] Jesus said to them, Children, do you have any fish? Your Bible may say friends. If we were British, we would say lads.

We might just say guys. It's not necessarily children here. He's just calling out to them. Guys, do you have any fish?

And they answered him, no. He said to them, cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.

So they cast it. And now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of the fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved, therefore said to Peter, it is the Lord.

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord. I love this guy. He put on his outer garment for he was stripped for work and he threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

[12:14] They work all night. They catch no fish. But obeying Jesus, casting their net on the right side of the boat. When Jesus says to cast the net on the right side of the boat and they receive the blessing.

More fish than they can pull into their boat. They drag the net to the shore. And they discover that Jesus already has breakfast ready. Verse 9.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place. With fish laid out on it and bread. And Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish that you have just caught.

I confess, I have never thought of verse 11 before. Read it carefully with me. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore full of large fish, 153 of them.

I think this is a very large gentleman. He hauls it. They couldn't get the net into the boat. And yet he pulls this net to shore. I wonder if the disciples are a little hesitant.

[13:35] They know that it's Jesus. There's no denying that it is Jesus.

That he is alive is undeniable. And yet they still seem uneasy in his presence. Jesus, verse 12, said to them, come.

Come have breakfast. Now, none of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? They knew it was the Lord.

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them. And so with the fish. And this was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

They finish eating breakfast. And perhaps then an unspoken question causes a bit of a hush to settle around this charcoal campfire.

[14:44] What about Peter? What will happen with Peter? Jesus is so full of grace.

He speaks. Verse 15. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

And he said to him, yes, Lord. You know that I love you. And he said to him, feed my lambs. And he, Jesus, said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

And he said to him, yes, Lord. You know that I love you. And he said to him, tend my sheep. And he, Jesus, said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter was grieved. Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything.

[15:59] You know that I love you. And Jesus said to him, feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted.

But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this, he said to him, follow me. Three denials on the night when Jesus was arrested.

Three declarations of love here on the shore of Lake Tiberias. Three times, Jesus restores him to ministry.

Take care of my flock. What Peter broke in his failure, Jesus restores in full.

[17:15] But notice this also. Following Jesus and serving his church will cost Peter his life.

When Jesus says in verse 18, you will stretch out your hands, he is not being vague. They would have understood that to stretch out the hands used this way, he is telling him, you are going to be crucified.

You following me will eventually take you to the cross where you will stretch out your hands and you will be crucified.

The one who denied Jesus will also die for Jesus. But I love how the spirit of God through the writer John says, he said this to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.

What do you think this did inside of Peter to hear these words? He is given the command to follow me. And he's repeatedly said, take care of my church, tend my lambs, feed my flock, care for my church, Peter.

[18:41] And in the end, after you have followed me with your life, after you have been faithful to me, you will be faithful all the way to death.

And you will stretch out your arms. And even by your death, Peter, you will glorify me. When Jesus says, follow me, he is not just saying, come take a walk with me.

This is a call to a way of life. It's a call to a transformed kind of life, a life of trust, a life of obedience, a life of suffering.

It does seem like perhaps right here in the narrative, as we read, Peter may have stood up and actually began to act this out, actually began to follow Jesus.

Cause look what comes next in verse 20. Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. The one who had, who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?

[20:13] John is giving us little eyedropper clues of who is writing this, gospel. And who is this disciple whom Jesus loved? He's talking about himself, but he doesn't want to mention himself.

Lord, who is it that is going to betray you? When Peter saw him, John, following him in Jesus, Peter says to Jesus, Lord, what about this man?

And Jesus said to him, if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me. So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die.

Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die. But if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Even back then people love a good conspiracy theory, don't they?

Based on a misunderstanding, word begins to spread around the Christians, the followers of Jesus, that John is not going to die.

[21:24] Jesus is going to come back before John dies. And John clarifies for us, I was there. I heard it. That's not what he said. This is what he said.

If it's my will that he doesn't die, what is that to you? Peter has just received his calling and he turns and he looks at John.

What about him? Now, just maybe Peter, having heard that he was going to suffer and die on a cross, just maybe Peter is concerned about John and wondering, will John also have to suffer such a horrible death?

Maybe Peter was asking if John would also die for Jesus. But even if that is true, Jesus calls his attention back to his own calling.

What is that to you? We might say, that's none of your business. It's not your business. You follow me.

[22:34] That's your calling, Peter. Your calling is not John's calling. Your path is not his path. Your job is not to compare how good or how bad your life is with John's life.

It's your job to follow me. Isn't this us? Don't we sometimes also get caught up with an idea of comparing our lives to others?

What about that person? Why is their life easier? Why does it seem like always everything seems to go well for them? Have they ever had any adversity in their lives at all?

Why is their life so easy? Why is their calling different from mine? Why do they get to do those things? And why can't I do those things?

Why does their path look better? You don't need to figure out their life. You don't need to compare yourself to them.

[23:44] You follow him. You follow him. You follow him. And that raises a question for all of us. How would you live if you knew how you would die?

Peter knows. He now knows how he is going to die.

We know from church history that he is going to serve the Lord for perhaps three decades or so. And then he will be crucified. How would you live if you knew how you would die?

Peter knew. And in knowing, it didn't cause him to draw back. Isn't that good? It didn't cause him to draw back. To quit.

Knowing how he was going to die compelled him to move forward. To be faithful. To follow Jesus.

[24:54] And to be willing to lay down his life for Jesus. I love this text from Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 39.

We are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are saved. We're not draw backers.

We're not shrink backers. We are those who have faith and are saved. Don't be too busy comparing your life to others.

That you fail to follow Jesus for yourself. Sometimes your faithfulness to Jesus will encourage someone else to be faithful to Jesus.

This happened to me on Friday, Thursday morning. I was in a training session and as part of the training, we're sitting around a table. And we had to each talk for 90 seconds around this table.

[26:05] And we were supposed to answer three questions. Who am I? What do I do? And why am I here? 90 seconds.

Which doesn't seem like all that long until you start talking about yourself. And then it is very miserable. That is a long time. Here's what happened. A woman, a dear sister of ours, sitting next to me at the table, said this.

I'm a believer. First thing she said. And then she went on to explain some of the other things in her life that define her. She's a mother.

And she's a daughter. And she's a friend. And she's a project manager. I happened to get to go last. She had to go first. I was the timekeeper. And so I got to go last. So it goes all the way around this table. So I have plenty of time. 90 seconds times seven of us to think about, well, now what am I going to do now?

[27:13] What am I going to do? Who am I? I know how I should answer that question. But I'm a little afraid. But she said she was a believer.

I'm going to follow her example. And so when it came to me, I just answered this way. These were the first things that I said. I'm a follower of Jesus. I'm just a follower of Jesus.

And then I went on and said the other ways that who I am and what do I do and why am I here? Her faithfulness to follow Jesus in that very simple little moment around a table encouraged me to follow Jesus.

I don't know what I was going to say. But when she answered the way that she did, it became very clear to me what I ought to say. I think we should stop comparing and start following because there are people who are looking at us and watching us.

And some of them are other believers. And some of them are our unbelieving coworkers and neighbors and friends and people that we sit by at restaurants. And they are watching us, observing us, noticing our behavior.

[28:37] How do they respond when things go well? How do they respond when things go poorly? What words come out of their mouths?

What attitudes do they display? What's their body language when things are at their worst? My brother, my sister, your failure, no matter how dramatic, no matter how public, is not final.

Isn't that good news for us? That your failure is not final? There is grace for you, child of God.

Peter denied Jesus publicly, repeatedly, at the moment when it mattered the most. Peter denied Jesus. And Jesus did not discard him.

He restored him. And so if failure is part of your story, and I would think it's strange if it's not some part of your story, repent and receive God's forgiveness.

[29:46] Enjoy his grace. And then keep following Jesus. Kids, maybe you have done something wrong and you have thought to yourself, I don't even want to talk to mom or dad about this.

And you're afraid and you're nervous and you're anxious and you don't know what the consequences will be. I wonder if Peter felt that way.

And yet Jesus does not push him away. He invites him to come closer. He forgives him. And that means even when you mess up your mom and dad who love Jesus, they love you.

And your failure is not going to make them love you less. Give them an opportunity to move towards you in love and to show you that they are committed to following Jesus with forgiveness and grace and perhaps some consequences as well.

Maybe you have been trying to figure out your life and maybe you've exhausted yourself doing more and trying harder and being better. I'm so glad that the message of John 21 is not fix yourself up and then come to Jesus.

[31:08] I'm so glad that that is not the message that we get out of John 21. The message is Jesus comes to you like he came to those seven disciples.

He comes right where you are in your failure, in your fear, in your uncertainty. And he doesn't say prove yourself. He says, do you love me?

Will you turn from your sin and trust in me? I wonder if you will begin to follow Jesus today.

Verse 24. John concludes his gospel with these words. This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things and who has written these things and we know that his testimony is true.

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

[32:27] Now maybe that sounds like hyperbole or an exaggeration to you. I think I'm inclined to read it that way as well at first.

But pause with me for a moment and let's just consider our assumption. Let's remember how John began this gospel.

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God. And then 13 verses later, John says that word, the one who was with God became flesh and dwelt among us.

Who is he talking about? Jesus. Well now this starts to make sense, doesn't it? John is calling our attention.

Don't forget what I wrote at the very beginning. This one Jesus who suffered and died and has now risen from the dead. He is the word.

[33:39] He is the son. He is incarnate God. The word made flesh. Is it true without hyperbole or exaggeration that we could not possibly write all of the things that the son of God, the word of God, the creator, the sustainer, the author, and the finisher of our faith.

John's right. Without hyperbole or exaggeration, we could not write all of the things that the son has done. Maybe this is John's way of saying you can't exhaust Jesus.

You can't outgrow him. You won't ever reach the end of him. I need that reminder that the God that we serve, the savior that we follow, is inexhaustible, and that he is sovereign over my life.

At the beginning, we said, when life gets confusing and you don't know what's next, we go back to what we know. Old habits, old ways of life, old ways of thinking.

We don't go back to these things because they are right. We go back to them because they are familiar. Here's the good news of John 21.

[35:15] Even when you go back, Jesus comes to you. He meets you there. He restores you there. And he says to you there, follow me. What would it look like for us?

What would it look like for you? What if the most natural thing that you fall back into when life is confusing, when you don't know what's next, what if the most natural thing that you fall back into is not the old habits, not the old ways of thinking, but the gospel of Jesus and the promises of God that in Jesus are always yes and amen.

What if we fall back into who God is and what he has done for us? What if when life is uncertain, you don't drift and instead you persevere in faith?

What if when you fail, you don't hide, but like Peter, you run or you swim or whatever he had to do to get a hundred yards from the boat to Jesus as quickly as possible.

What if you run or swim or whatever it takes to run to Jesus? What if you don't know what's next and you don't go back and instead you say, I will follow him wherever he leads for his glory.

[36:43] Because from Jesus, we receive grace upon grace. Persevere in faith. Persevere in faith, brothers and sisters, because Jesus still says, follow me.

Let's pray.