

# STANDING HERE, LOOKING THERE

SERIES: FLOURISH - HOPE IN A  
STRANGE LAND



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1 Peter 1:3-12  
Second Message  
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*1 Peter 1:3-12*

You may have heard of The Marshmallow Experiment. It's a famous study on delayed gratification first conducted at Stanford University in 1972. It has since become one of the standard demonstrations of what it looks like to have a future mindset.

I love watching the children in the video wrestle with the idea of sacrificing something literally right before them to get something better later. The girl who doesn't even try is hilarious—she starts eating the marshmallow before the adult has left the room.

For those of us who believe in Jesus, our faith has a critical aspect to it that we sometimes forget. Central to what we believe is an orientation toward the future. Theologians describe the church as an “eschatological community.” That's a fancy way to say that followers of Jesus live for something that will happen later.

That doesn't mean we ignore the present. Sometimes Christians have made that mistake and have rightfully been criticized for it. Living for the future leaves you free to engage with the present in a powerful new way.

Today is the second week in our fall series on 1 Peter called “Flourish: Hope in a Strange Land.” One of the major themes in this book is how to live a full life here and now even though this world we live in is not our ultimate home.

As the letter from Peter begins, Peter makes it incredibly clear that one of the most important keys for flourishing in this strange land is to be oriented toward the future. We have unique knowledge about what's to come, and we live in a particular season of God's work. In this first part of the book, Peter begins by giving instructions on standing here, looking there.

We need this perspective now more than ever. The “now” that we are living in is not a normal season. We are in an in-between time. Our whole society is operating in a temporary way. We're all waiting for something to change.

Last week, when Scott Grant introduced 1 Peter, he made the point that if you feel like you don't belong here, that's because we don't. But he also made the point that we do belong in a different place. Or more specifically, we belong to a different time.

Whereas the world is waiting for “when COVID is over” or maybe “after the election” or some other milestone, anyone who has put their faith in Jesus is waiting for something else. We believe that God's work in the world is not done. We believe that Jesus will return to complete the work he began. We believe that this creation will give way to a new creation. That's the time where we actually belong.

Peter begins his letter wanting us to see three ways that future orientation changes our lives. This orientation gives us hope, allows us to rejoice, all because we know the mystery of the gospel. We live now with hope and joy because of the mystery of the gospel. Let's look at the picture he paints for us.

## Hope

The letter opens with praise. Peter draws our attention toward God, but as he does that he tells us something vital to understand about ourselves.

**1 Peter 1:3-5:**

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

The focus here is on God. He is praised for what he has done for us. Peter says that God “caused us to be born again.” There are two unique aspects of how Peter talks about followers of Jesus being born again.

First, it's more about God than us. That makes sense because babies don't do a lot in the process of being born. When you talk about a child being born, you usually say, "She gave birth to a beautiful son." That's giving credit where credit is due. She's the one who did the work. That beautiful baby boy may have experienced birth, but he didn't do the work.

That's why being "born again" is such a great way to describe what happens when you believe in Jesus. This is not our work.

There's a Christian song I love called "Run To You" by Unspoken.<sup>1</sup> They repeat this simple line over and over again: "I can never let you down because I never held you up." If you believe in Jesus, you didn't do anything to be born again. That was God's work.

The second unique aspect of how Peter talks about being born again is that even the birth isn't the point. When Christians use the phrase "born again," they are usually looking in the past, talking about the moment of their salvation. But Peter's focus is on what comes after being born again.

We are born "to an inheritance". That's our salvation. Peter says that our salvation is "ready to be revealed" in the last time. It's in the future. We are born again so that we will be saved. He's not looking back at being born again; he's looking forward at what being born again means for our future.

His main point is that our future is guaranteed. Peter goes out of his way to demonstrate just how secure this inheritance is. He uses three powerful words: imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

Imperishable means that it won't go away. Undefiled means it won't get worse over time. Unfading means it won't fade away or diminish. This inheritance that we have been born into won't disappear, degrade, or diminish. It is for sure.

Our future in Christ is secure. It won't disappear, degrade, or diminish. Hope is real.

Friends, at the heart of what it means to believe in Jesus is to have hope. We have been born again, not for this world but for the world to come. This hope is not a fairy tale. It is not a wish or a dream or a childish desire. This hope is real.

Remember those kids looking at the one marshmallow? Do you remember their faces as they were trying their hardest to avoid eating that one marshmallow? What were they thinking about? It was their inheritance! They had one thought driving everything at that moment: "If I wait, I get two marshmallows." They were focused entirely on what would come to them in the future.

Look at all the words that Peter uses to get his readers focused on the future: hope, inheritance, kept, guarded, ready, to be revealed, the last time. He is desperately trying to get his readers to take their eyes off the circumstances surrounding them. Stop focusing on the one marshmallow in front of you and think about the second marshmallow.

Think about what it means that you have a spiritual inheritance. You have a secured future. You have spiritual resources. You have all that you need to make life work. If it all falls apart, you'll still be okay. No matter what happens, you'll be okay.

We have a living hope. We have a living hope not because of what we did, but because of what God has done and is doing even now for us. When we have that clear in our minds and our hearts, something changes. We don't sit and wait for that future. As Peter continues, he points out how knowing the future can help you in the present.

## Joy

Our future salvation doesn't only mean we will be okay in the present. It means that we can endure things here with a completely different attitude.

### 1 Peter 1:6-9:

**In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**

Peter begins by saying, “In this you rejoice.” There is some debate among commentators over what the “this” refers to. If it refers to the phrase “the last time”, then Peter is saying we will rejoice in the future when Jesus is revealed. But if it refers in a broader sense to most of what came before, then Peter is saying we rejoice now, even in the midst of these trials.

Peter talks about rejoicing even if “you have been grieved by various trials.” When I read that phrase, I thought, “that pretty much sums up 2020.” Grieved by various trials—the pandemic, racial injustice, wildfires, air quality, political division, an upcoming election. It’s hard to believe all that’s happened so far this year.

Peter is describing a kind of attitude that we can have in the midst of these trials. Not an exuberant joy—it’s something much deeper; a settled confidence that takes root deep in our souls and sustains us through whatever trials we are facing.

Peter’s analogy helps us to understand how this could be the case. He compares our faith to gold and refers to the process of “testing” gold with fire. Here we see what Peter means. Gold doesn’t go through fire and ever come out as less than gold. It always comes out better.

Peter talks about the “tested genuineness of faith”, but it’s not the kind of test where you pass or fail. The results are never in question. He doesn’t say that trials test our faith to determine whether our faith is genuine. Peter says that trials demonstrate how genuine our faith truly is. Suffering proves our faith.

Peter also points out a difference between our faith and gold. Even though gold is precious, it doesn’t last forever; however, our faith does. Our faith isn’t bound by time. Our faith lasts into eternity.

What does that mean for the here and now? It means that while we are being put through the fire, we can be confident of two things. First, this will eventually lead to something better than we have right now. Second, that something good will last forever.

It’s the second marshmallow that makes the experiment we watched at the beginning interesting. If you told those children they could immediately eat the first marshmallow or wait until the person came back in the room and then eat it, there would be no incentive. But two marshmallows are better than one.

Because their future was better, they could wait for it with joy. Our future is infinitely better than receiving a second marshmallow; it’s seeing Jesus.

Notice what Peter says. You have not seen him in the past. You do not now see him in the present. The implication is clear: we will see Jesus in the future. Jesus is the second marshmallow, but he’s so much better. He’s worth waiting for and rejoicing so much more because we know what’s coming.

This truth doesn’t mean that we enjoy hardships now. It doesn’t mean that pain hurts any less. We don’t skate above the pain of life and feel great all the time. On the contrary, we deeply feel the hard things in life. We can be honest about how much pain we’re in now precisely because we know how good things will be in the future.

That’s what rejoicing looks like in the present. We suffer, and we cry out, and we feel our pain. But over and above and through and within all of that, there is a deep knowledge of what is to come. This is available to us. Joy is possible.

I’ve seen this type of rejoicing most often in the lives of people who really have been “grieved by various trials.” Not inconveniences or little problems, but great tragedies—mental health crises, the death of loved ones, illness out of nowhere, loneliness. When you walk through those deep pains with Jesus by your side, something gets forged out of that fire. You can be happy when things are going well. But I think this kind of joy only truly comes when you’ve suffered.

If that’s true, if the deepest joy comes about when you walk through the most challenging things, why do we try so hard to make our lives easy? If real, eternal joy comes from a deep awareness of that living hope, why do we spend so much time and effort on making things work now? What are we missing?

Peter concludes this section with one more observation to help us to change our perspective.

## **Mystery**

The last section expresses an idea that isn’t found often in the New Testament. Jesus says something similar once, but other than that, this idea isn’t spoken about.

## 1 Peter 1:10-12:

**Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.**

Peter concludes this section with a sidenote about the salvation he's been talking about in the previous two sections. He wants his readers to understand the unique time of history in which they live.

To do that, he references two different groups: the prophets of old and the angels of today. He points out that neither of them experiences the mystery of salvation like we do today. The prophets wanted to know more about what they prophesied about, but it was kept hidden from them. The angels want to understand more about salvation, but they can't because it isn't for them.

Think about the history of the world from a biblical perspective. Creation. The flood. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The exodus from Egypt. The early nation of Israel. Judges and kings. The building of the temple in Jerusalem. Division and exile and then returning to the land. Finally, Jesus being born and preaching and then killed and came back to life. And now us.

God did all of that so that you could have the gospel. All of history unfolding as it did was to get the world to Jesus so that he could die and be raised back to life. We get to see the whole picture. It's for us!

There's a repeated phrase in the musical *Hamilton*. They sing "How lucky we are to be alive right now."<sup>2</sup> They are living through the American Revolution. Who knows whether they appreciated that they were experiencing history in the making, but we can look back at them and know that they were.

The full lyrics say, "Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now! // History is happening in Manhattan and we just happen to be // In the greatest city in the world."<sup>3</sup>

That may be true for them. But how much more true is it for us? Look around! God is at work in the Silicon Valley, and we just happen to be here, right now, in 2020—this year of history making—and we get to see what God is doing now. The mystery is ours.

We know the mystery of the gospel, and Peter makes it clear what that mystery is: the resurrection of Jesus. That's what all of this is based on. Jesus rose from the dead. The worst thing happened, but it led to the best thing. Not only did that happen once, but it will happen again. If you believe in Jesus, you are headed for the best thing. So even if the worst thing happens now, you will be okay.

We need to have our eyes opened and see with wonder the work of God right now. Everyone complains about the present. The older generation wants things back the way they used to be. The younger generation wants everything to change. But look around! What is happening right now is God's plan for the here and now. And we get to live in the age of the gospel. We know Jesus and we see him at work.

One of the problems is that it's sometimes hard even for us to see it. We have so much information coming at us that the work of God gets drowned out. But if you open your eyes and look for it, you'll see it. If you support missionaries, read their letters. They tell stories of God's work in the world. Stop and listen to people who are suffering and ask them how God is working in their life. Listen to people from our Recovery ministry share about how Jesus has changed and is changing their lives.

You don't read about the work of God on CNN or Fox News or MSNBC. You don't see it browsing social media. The work of the gospel is in the lives of God's people. Look for it. Talk to others and hear their stories. Appreciate how lucky you are to be alive right now. We are living in the age of the gospel. The mystery is for us.

## Conclusion

Think about those children waiting for that second marshmallow. Think about how hard they were trying, the determination on their faces.

That's not us.

Everything in this passage speaks of God's work, not ours. God gives us birth. God keeps the inheritance stored away for us. God guards our inheritance through our faith and God proves our faith.

Everything we have is ours because God gives it to us.

That's Christian delayed gratification. That's living in light of the future Christ guarantees us. We live in hope because our inheritance is sure. Nothing we do or anyone else does can take it away from us.

We rejoice in our suffering because we are connected to Jesus. We don't see him, but we will. That hope combined with the experience of seeing him in small ways now gives us the ability to rejoice in our sufferings.

Finally, we live with the mystery. If we believed in luck, we'd say "how lucky we are to be alive right now." But we don't believe in luck. God created us here and now. We're not here by some chance of luck. We're here because God put us here. The grand mystery of the gospel is revealed to us!

This is the perspective we have which enables us live in the present while we wait for the future. This is how we stand here and look there.

## Endnotes

1. Unspoken, *Run to You*, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L03OoamozHU>
2. Lin-Manuel Miranda, *That Would Be Enough*, Hamilton (Los Angeles: Warner Chappell Music, 2015), <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/32212226/That+Would+Be+Enough>
3. Ibid.