

Struggling Faith

Key Verse: *“Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.”*
—Mark 14:30

Selected Scripture:
Mark 14:26-31, 66-72

THE WORD FAITH, AS USED

in the New Testament, is translated from the Greek word *pistis*, which means “persuasion” or “conviction.” This Greek word also has the added thought of reliance upon Christ for salvation, and of constancy in such profession. It is this constancy, or loyalty in our reliance upon Christ, that is the focus of today’s lesson.

The Apostle Peter, prior to being begotten of the Holy Spirit, was a man of strong character and courage, but also quite impetuous. Realizing no dread or fear, Peter’s self-confidence led him to do less watching and praying than he should. Jesus saw this weakness in Peter and forewarned him of its consequences: “The Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:31,32) In self-assurance, Peter answered Jesus saying, “Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.”—vs. 33

In our Key Verse and Selected Scripture, we see Peter’s reliance upon his own strength tested mightily. Jesus had spoken these words to Peter shortly after eating his last meal with the disciples. They walked to Gethsemane,

located at the Mount of Olives, where Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a place where he could pray, leaving them alone for a short while. “Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. Simon, he said to Peter, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”—Mark 14:37,38, *New International Version*

Three times Jesus went to pray, and each time his three closest disciples could not stay awake. Upon returning the third time, Jesus declared, “the hour is come,” and immediately Judas came with a “great multitude . . . , from the chief priest and the scribes and the elders.” Courageous, impetuous Peter again rushed into action, drawing his sword and cutting off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest. (vss. 39-47) Jesus, however, surrendered himself, knowing it was time for the completion of his earthly mission. Peter and the other disciples were very confused. To see their Master apparently without power from heaven, delivered over to his enemies, and led from one tribunal to another, had a paralyzing effect upon them, especially Peter. As he followed Jesus, he was recognized as a disciple of the Nazarene. Three times he was identified, and each time he denied knowing Jesus—the third time with cursing, followed by the sound of the cock crowing for the second time, as Jesus had forewarned.—vss. 66-72

In his darkest hour without the Master by his side, Peter’s faith struggled greatly. He was learning the truth of Jesus’ words: “The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.” (Mark 14:38) Such is the danger of not letting our faith rest solely on the strength of our Lord. If we rely on the flesh, we will have a struggling faith. Peter was told he would be sifted by Satan. Later, in his first epistle, he promised that we, too, would have “fiery” trials to prove our faith. (I Pet. 4:12,13) Let us remember the example of Peter, who overcame his weakness, so that our faith may grow stronger in trials, with rejoicing. ■