

# A STRONG FAITH MAY NOT BE ENOUGH

by Doug Goins

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Think about the duration of your walk of faith, the number of years that you have enjoyed relationship with God through salvation in Jesus. For some of you that is a long time, for others it is not. But has there been a time in that period when you have struggled with doubt? Have you ever found yourself second guessing God's sovereignty over your life, over your circumstances? Do you sometimes fear, in your relationship with the Lord, that your faith may not be strong enough to withstand the difficulty or the struggle or even the disappointment that you're experiencing in your life? Have you ever questioned God's goodness or his fairness or his justice in your life?

This week, as I reflected on my own 35 or so years of relationship with the Lord, I had to admit that I had felt those things more often than I care to remember. I remember my first struggle with faith when I was in my early teens. My younger brother Mike, who is two years younger than I am, was diagnosed with a severely damaged heart, and he needed open heart surgery. In the 1950's open heart surgery was fairly primitive compared to the hi-tech advances we have today in medicine. The procedure was complicated, and there was a long period of recovery; it was touch and go. That was the first time that I remember fighting with God--challenging his goodness and his involvement in our family--because I didn't want to lose my little brother. Mike did survive the operation and is doing well today. I remember later when I was in college, working in a church with a junior high youth group and directing a junior high choir. It was a spectacular failure. I got fired by the church for not being a very good junior high minister. I remember the disappointment and embarrassment that I felt. I said, "Lord, I gave it my best shot; my heart was pure. They didn't appreciate what I was doing." I even asked, "Are you in the middle of all this failure?"

Eight years ago as a pastor in this congregation, I watched my father-in-law waste away from cancer. I watched his struggles to accept his disease. He was a pastor who loved the Lord, yet giving up his life and accepting God's sovereignty were painful for him. What affected me even more profoundly was my wife's struggle. For a year and a half after the death of her dad she grieved, and there was nothing I could do. I couldn't say the right thing. I remember my struggles with the Lord, "How long is this going to go on, Father? How long will she live in the depths of despair?"

Probably my most vivid and painful memories of feelings of doubt and struggle come from seventeen years ago when I was going through my divorce. I was left with a five-year-old boy, and I went through about six months of being overwhelmed by grief, anger, confusion, and guilt. There were times when I accused God of abandoning me. I remember nights in my apartment, after my son was in bed asleep, when I would walk around in the apartment and talk out loud to God. More accurately, I would yell at him and accuse him. I remember one night telling him that I'd had it. I wasn't going to believe in him anymore, and I was abandoning him. Think of the silliness of that--I'm talking out loud to somebody in whom I don't believe anymore. I was going to seminary at the time which makes it even more amazing. I've struggled with doubt and disappointment with God. I've questioned his goodness and fairness.

The prophet Jeremiah wrestled with all the same issues of faith and doubt. Chapters 18-20 of Jeremiah deal with the same theme--God's absolute, unconditional sovereignty over both the life of the nation Judah and the life of the prophet Jeremiah. We're going to look at chapter 19 and 20 this morning. The setting is about ten years after the agonizing prayer of despair that we looked at last week in chapter 15. He prayed that prayer to God in response to the drought that was causing great suffering in Judah, in response to King Jehoiakim's attack on his ministry. He

struggled over the rejection of his own family, the assassination attempts on his life.

In these chapters the king on the throne is probably Zedekiah, who was the third and final ruler of Judah during the ministry of Jeremiah. He ruled over Judah for the last eleven years of the nation before the final Babylonian invasion. In reality, Zedekiah was a puppet king. He was a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. There had been an invasion prior to his rule. King Jehoiakim had been executed as a traitor to Babylon--the people didn't like him anyway--and Zedekiah was put on the throne. Jehoiakim had been a violent, evil man, much like Manasseh had been. And he declared Jeremiah an outlaw. Zedekiah was very ambivalent toward Jeremiah. He was drawn to his message of truth, and yet the counselors around Zedekiah would sway him away from the message of the prophet. So Zedekiah was a weak, ambivalent king, and in that ambivalence, Jeremiah had much more freedom to preach and to travel about without fear of his life. But it's under this leniency that he's going to experience the first physical suffering of his ministry. In this morning's passage he's going to be beaten. He's going to be imprisoned in the stocks for a day and a night. And all this is going to come not at the instigation of the king but at the instigation of the temple priesthood. The religious establishment is going to oppose Jeremiah and punish him physically.

The narrative begins at the end of chapter 19 and continues through chapter 20. It is a roller coaster ride of boldness and cowardice, of great confidence in the Lord and crippling fear that God won't come through on his promises. There's peace, but there's also bitterness. There's even a song of praise and worship that's contrasted with the doubt that gnaws away at Jeremiah. The narrative portion of the passage is written in the third person. It was probably written by his scribe Baruch to show Jeremiah's struggles with physical suffering. Also, the section that we're going to examine records a first-person account of another one of Jeremiah's private struggles with God, one of his confessions. His conflict is one of faith: Can he trust the sovereignty of God in the face of affliction, of physical and emotional suffering? We're going to see his faith in its strength and its weakness. We're going to find out that his struggle is really ours.

In the section of chapter 19 just prior to this, Jeremiah has called a number of priests and elders of the nation to go with him outside the city gate to the Valley of Hinnom to a place called Topheth. It had been the place of child sacrifice under king Manasseh. He delivers a powerful sermon against the nation, speaking of God's coming judgment as he's been doing for twenty-five years. Dramatically, he holds up a clay pot and says in effect, "The nation is like a hardened clay pot that's resisted God's truth." Then Jeremiah throws the pot and smashes it and says, "God will destroy this nation as this pot has been destroyed." We'll pick up the story with verses 19:14-20:2:

**Then Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the Lord had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the court of the Lord's house, and said to all the people: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words." Now Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. Then Pashhur beat Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the Lord.**

They return from the Valley of Hinnom, this select group of priests and elders. He strides purposefully into the temple court which was the place where he had stood twenty years before when he preached the Temple Gate sermon. Two weeks ago you heard that powerful statement of God's coming judgment but also of the hope of forgiveness and renewal and restoration. Jeremiah says to the people that their necks are just as hardened as the clay pot that he has broken out in the Valley. He had been preaching this same message for twenty-five years. And he tells the people that the coming judgment is their own fault. They have nobody else to blame but themselves, and God is going to punish them.

The temple priest, Pashhur, responds immediately; it was his job. He was second in authority only to the high priest. As the chief officer or overseer, he was responsible for maintaining order. As a matter of fact, part of his job is described in chapter 29, verse 26. It says that the chief officer is "*to have charge in the house of the Lord over every madman who prophesies, to put him in the stocks and collar.*" Pashhur was doing his job because

Jeremiah was a disruptive influence. He has Jeremiah immediately arrested and flogged publicly. Apparently truth did not prevail in the marketplace. He was probably beaten with the forty lashes prescribed in the law of Deuteronomy. Then he was placed in the stocks and the collar which immobilized his neck, both of his hands, and his feet. They weren't stocks as we see in Puritan New England, where you sit comfortably and put your hands and feet out. This was an instrument of torture, an instrument to twist the body in a painfully awkward position--total limitation physically. The muscles would begin to tense up and ache. And he spends the rest of the day there. The temple gate, the Benjamin Gate, is a public gate of entry into the temple precinct itself. So for the rest of the day, in addition to the physical suffering, he was subjected to the scorn and ridicule of the citizens of Jerusalem as they came and went from the temple. He's made a public symbol of how dangerous, how costly it is to oppose institutional religion.

Another irony is what Pashhur did here. He had a job description given to him by the religious authorities--overseer of the temple. That was a man-made position. In the call of Jeremiah in chapter 1, twenty-five years earlier, God had said to him, "*I will make you an overseer* [identical word to Pashhur's title] *of the nations,*" as it were. God says he will give him spiritual oversight to communicate his word to all the nations around Judah. So Jeremiah is being persecuted by this human overseer, this religious bureaucrat. God had called Jeremiah sovereignly, and Pashhur was completely unaware of what Jeremiah had been called to. Verse 3 tells us that the next morning Pashhur released Jeremiah. So after the public humiliation of the day in the stocks, he also has to spend an entire night there in the cold, wracked with the pain of being in that awkward position, burning from the lashes on his back without medical care.

Verses 7-18 of chapter 20 record the thoughts of Jeremiah while he was in the stocks that night. He faces difficult circumstances in a lot of the same ways that we do. Let's examine what he went through during that night of agony, cold and lonely in the stocks. We'll see that he's overwhelmed by fear. In the opening stanzas, verses 7-10, he sees God not as his protector or defender, but as his antagonist and enemy. That's the accusation that he's going to make against God. Verses 7-10:

**O Lord, thou hast deceived me,  
and I was deceived;  
Thou art stronger than I,  
and thou hast prevailed.  
I have become a laughingstock all the day;  
every one mocks me.**

**For whenever I speak, I cry out,  
I shout,  
"Violence and destruction!"  
For the word of the Lord has become  
for me a reproach and derision all day long.**

**If I say, "I will not mention him,  
or speak any more in his name,"  
There is in my heart as it were a burning fire  
shut up in my bones,  
and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.**

**For I hear many whispering [hissing, literally].  
Terror is on every side!  
"Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"  
say all my familiar friends, watching for my fall.  
"Perhaps he will be deceived,  
then we can overcome him,  
and take our revenge on him."**

Jeremiah tells God that he feels deceived and taken advantage of. The word deceived is translated from the word

meaning sexual seduction. This is a blasphemous thing to charge against God. God was so powerful, he was overwhelmed. He could not resist the sovereign God. If we put ourselves in his position--the suffering he endured and the place he ended up in the middle of the night--his perspective is somewhat understandable. We can refer to his original call in the first chapter of Jeremiah to see what God really said to him twenty-five or thirty years earlier. Jeremiah writes in chapter 1, verses 4-10:

**Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,  
"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."**

[And he protests at this point]

**Then I said,  
"Ah, Lord God!  
Behold, I do not know how to speak,  
for I am only a youth."**

**But the Lord said to me,  
"Do not say, 'I am a youth';  
for to all to whom I send you, you shall go,  
and whatever I command you, you shall speak.**

**Be not afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you,  
says the Lord."**

[that rings in his memory as he sits in the stocks alone in terrible pain that night.]

**Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me,  
"Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.  
See, I have set you this day over nations  
and over kingdoms [an overseer],  
to pluck up and to break down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant."**

Can you understand Jeremiah's struggle that night in the stocks? God had promised to be a deliverer, but he was hurting tremendously. God had promised to protect him, but he'd been the subject of ridicule for the entire day prior. Maybe he took these promises superficially. Maybe he made certain assumptions about physical protection--that it would be literal protection--that he should not have made. Perhaps he pictured himself in more heroic terms when he responded to this call. He implies, "Lord, where is the protection from the pain and suffering I'm enduring right now." There's no protection right now, and he charges God with being a liar, a deceiver, and a seducer. It says in the second half of verse 7 in chapter 20 that he's been personally ridiculed and rejected. For twenty-five years the people have made fun of him, but especially in the last twenty-four-hour period when they stood around him in the stocks. They are probably charging him that his prophecies are not very trustworthy: "You've been saying judgment is coming. Where is it? Yeah, there was the Babylonian invasion a few years ago. They took Jehoiakim off and executed him, but he deserved it. We didn't like him anyway. Life is not all that bad in Judah. Where do you get off prophesying all this fire and brimstone, death and destruction? We don't see it anywhere."

In verse 8 Jeremiah feels an unbearable tension within himself towards the message that God has given him. It's in direct contrast to what he said in chapter 15, as we saw last week. In chapter 15 as he's in prayer with the Lord, he says, "*Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.*" That joy and delight are not there anymore. Now it's derision. Now it's a reproach. He says in effect, "This message, you can sum it up in two words, violence and destruction. I've been saying that for twenty-five years, and I'm sick and tired of it. I hate it as much as all the people do that have to listen to it." His words are emotionally charged; the word of God has become repugnant to him. He's tired of standing up for the truth. And he tries to quit preaching as we see in verse 9: "I tried to stop preaching. I wanted to quit," he says as it were, "but I can't." He's compelled to speak. He says the word of God is like a burning in his bones, and whenever he's faced with injustice, the loveless hypocrisy of the priesthood that surrounded him, the moral perversity of the land,

scandalous conduct, he cannot keep quiet.

Do you know why he couldn't stop telling the truth? Because the word of God was not an external body of information; it had been internalized, and it controlled him. He was captivated by God's truth, the Torah. In verse 10 he hears voices all around him, whisperings on every side. He's totally insecure at this point. It's as if he were paranoid, even delusional. He probably has memories of people hissing at him the day prior. The nickname they give him in verse 10, "*terror on every side*," is a phrase that he used in his prophetic preaching four different times previously. He says that the judgment coming from Babylon will be like terror on every side. Every place you look, there the enemy will be. You will not be able to escape it. It became a byword with him, and as a result, the people began to use it to make fun of him: "There goes Jeremiah, old 'terror on every side.' You can't get away from it. Do you see any terror? I don't see any terror? The man's a fool for preaching this." So he's alone in the middle of the night, and it's as if the voices are still there, hissing at him, whispering, "Terror on every side." Even his best friends, it says, his "*familiar friends*," are accusing him of the same things. He can't trust anyone anymore. It's like the man who told his psychiatrist, "Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean they're not following me." That's Jeremiah.

This confession in verse 7 opens with an accusation against God, that God is a seducer and that he overpowered him. Now in the last three lines of verse 10, the people say in effect, "He'll be deceived; we can overcome him." Everybody around him is hoping for his downfall. Do you ever get overwhelmed by that kind of doubt and fear? Do you ever admit it to yourself if you do feel this way? Do you ever view God as not being faithful to his word in your life? Our challenges to God's faithfulness, like Jeremiah's, call God a liar. I've heard people say numerous times in pastoral counseling in recent years, when I've tried to help them with the word of God, "Well, I know what it says, but it doesn't work for me." Or else they say, "I know you have faith to believe that, but I don't." Or else they say, "I don't see that in the word at all. It's a matter of how you interpret it." Each of those responses to truth is merely a way of saying that God is a deceiver, a seducer, a liar. It's a way of saying, "I don't believe that he's going to do what he says he will do." Again, we're no different than Jeremiah in our accusations against God.

In verse 11 the first word is very significant; it is the word "but." That's an important conjunction because it signals that a contrast is coming. There's going to be a shift in focus, and the shift is going to be from Jeremiah's feelings, from the circumstances that overwhelm him, to the objective reality of what God actually has said. The word of God is going to come to his rescue, faith is going to counterattack. And it's going to begin to strengthen him with spiritual reality. He begins to count as truth what God has already made known to him. Look at verses 11-14:

**But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior;  
therefore my persecutors will stumble,  
they will not overcome me.  
They will be greatly shamed,  
for they will not succeed.  
Their eternal dishonor will never  
be forgotten.**

**O Lord of hosts, who triest the righteous,  
who seest the heart and the mind,  
let me see thy vengeance upon them,  
for to thee have I committed my cause.  
Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord!  
For he has delivered the life of the needy  
from the hand of evildoers.**

He starts with what he knows to be true about God, the unchangeable one. Then he realizes that God is not his enemy but his defender. By faith he chooses to see things not the way they look and feel to him physically and emotionally, but the way that God says they're going to be. And it reassures him of what will happen in the future. Faith believes what will happen before it happens. Jeremiah is still in the stocks, hurting tremendously, but singing

a song of deliverance by faith. This reminded me of Acts 16 when Paul and Silas end up in the Philippian jail. They make the same choice by faith to sing a hymn in the middle of the night to a God of deliverance, even when there is no deliverance humanly possible.

Now we could wish that this great confession ended with verse 13, but it does not. There's another drastic shift in focus in verse 14. It's jarring. And we find ourselves saying, "How could he say this after his great confession of faith in verses 11-13?" But he sinks back into even greater doubt and despondency. Listen to the depths of despair in verses 14-18. He wishes he'd never been born:

**Cursed be the day on which I was born!  
The day when my mother bore me,  
let it not be blessed!  
Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father,  
"A son is born to you,"  
making him very glad.  
Let that man be like the cities  
which the Lord overthrew without pity;  
Let him hear a cry in the morning  
and an alarm at noon,  
because he did not kill me in the womb;  
So my mother would have been my grave,  
and her womb for ever great.  
[These are horrible things to say about your parents and the God of the universe who gives physical, human life.]  
Why did I come forth from the womb  
to see toil and sorrow,  
and I spend my days in shame?**

He's saying as it were, "I can't bear the shame anymore. I wish I'd never seen the light of day." This is the worst cry of agony, bitterness, and misery in all the seven confessionals of Jeremiah. It's an amazingly close parallel to the agony of Job in chapter 3 when he asked God the same kind of questions about why he was born as he is enduring such suffering and misery. It's really a cry of dereliction--abandonment by God. He implies, "I can't live with the sorrow and the shame of my life anymore." I'm convinced that in this instance Jeremiah is controlled by the pain of physical suffering.

When I was studying this a few months ago for our Sunday school class, I bumped into a retired elder from our congregation on a Friday morning here at the church. I was working on Jeremiah 20, and I took it to this dear friend and said, "What do you think about this? What do you think it's rooted in?" This man is struggling with congestive heart failure, and he said that most every night he wakes up at two or three in the morning overcome with terrible, terrible chest pain. He talked about the loneliness that he feels; there is nothing medically that can be done to make him feel better. He said, "I understand perfectly how Jeremiah feels. I understand why you could be driven to this kind of agony, questioning the value of your life as a human being. The pain is like a haze, a blur which prevents you from seeing things clearly anymore." My friend understood how Jeremiah could express himself with so much rage and how he could question God's sovereignty.

A few years ago I watched a young man in our church die of cancer, having been married only two or three years. He was a godly, wise, thoughtful man in his early thirties. I struggled early in that illness with God's sovereignty. But he had incredible strength--faith in God--until the end when the pain just about overwhelmed him. I remember being with him several times, at home and then in the hospital, when the same sort of anger and confrontation with the Lord seemed to come out of the depths of his being. He eventually died at peace, resting in the Lord, but there were periods of awful struggle which matched this one of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's cry ends with verse 18. Note that God doesn't talk back to Jeremiah. Earlier in chapter 15 he did. They had a wonderful, powerful conversation. This is a monologue, not a dialogue. I don't think you could even call it prayer in that sense. He's venting his emotions towards God. I think God doesn't say anything because he realizes that Jeremiah's had thirty years of experiencing his faithfulness. He's had thirty years of absorbing the living word

of God, and God trusts that resource. He's saying in effect, "You don't need any more miracles; you don't need any more bright lights or angelic appearances, voices from heaven."

At some point before dawn Jeremiah turned a corner between his doubt and faith. When we return to verse 3, we're going to see that when Pashhur finally releases him, Jeremiah is going to emerge strong and confident. There's no more doubt, discouragement, or despair in this man at all. I think he must have prayed the prayer of a father in Mark 9. A man comes up to Jesus in Mark's gospel and asks him to come to his home to heal his little boy who is seriously ill. Jesus says to the man, "All things are possible to him who believes." Jesus' action will be in accordance with the man's faith. The father responds to Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief." He admits that both of those elements are at work in him. Jeremiah had the same understanding. Verses 11-13 are a powerful confession of faith, of his belief in what God can do. But it's bracketed by verses 7-10 and verses 14-18. Those are statements of unbelief, of doubt, of faithlessness. God responds to Jeremiah and gives him incredible faith. When he comes out in the light of day, he has regained confidence, boldness, and outspokenness. It's almost as if he had been energized with righteous indignation. Verses 3-6 of our text:

**On the morrow, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "The Lord does not call your name Pashhur, but Terror on every side [we've heard that name before]. For thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon; he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. Moreover, I will give all the wealth of the city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them, and seize them, and carry them to Babylon. And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity; to Babylon you shall go; and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.'"**

This is the climax, the thing that Pashhur was most guilty of. There's a whole list of accusations against this man, but the outstanding one is that he didn't tell the truth. He was one of those false prophets who said, "It's not so bad; there's no judgment coming." In the words of Jeremiah, he said, "Peace," when there wasn't peace. He said, "Don't worry about things; it's all going to be fine." The passage also tells us that he misuses spiritual authority. Jeremiah said in effect, "You'll be stripped of that. Even your own friends will find you terrifying, the friends you have a lot of influence over."

This passage displays Jeremiah's striking confidence and boldness, and it also teaches us parenthetically about what God is going to do with corrupt religious leadership, whether it's the corrupt television evangelists who were profiled last Thursday night on Prime Time, or whether it's chickenhearted, wimpy ministers that don't tell the truth anymore in terms of the cutting edge of the gospel. Just as God dealt with Pashhur, he will deal with the false prophets among us that we hear on the airwaves or the pulpits of the land. In verse 5, he focuses on the thing that meant more than anything else to Pashhur--material things. He's going to be stripped of wealth, gain, prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings. There are three verbs that say these material things are going to be plundered, seized, and carried off. Whenever you see repetition or intensification, a special point is being made. Pashhur cared a lot about his material things. He liked the perks of the ministry. Jeremiah warned as it were, "You won't get away with it." It's incredible to me that this man, who at three in the morning is so overwhelmed with doubt and pain, has gone through this drastic change. In the light of the next morning, he stands strong in faith. The word of God has penetrated the struggle and has triumphed over his feelings.

I think Jeremiah experienced the spiritual reality that was taught by the apostle John in his first letter. First John 4 says, "*For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*" It's true whether it feels like it or not, or whether it looks like it or not. Jeremiah remembered the power of God's word at work in his own life, everything it had accomplished and all the promises that had come true. And God responds to his cry and replaces doubt with confidence, unbelief with the certainty of faith. So the next morning Jeremiah is able to look Pashhur straight in the eye and tell him the truth without an inkling of fear.

The scripture that was read this morning from Paul's second letter to Timothy captures this spiritual truth beautifully. Paul is writing from prison, facing a death sentence. In all probability he was executed very soon after he wrote this letter. He knows that his time is coming. Timothy is a young pastor in Ephesus who struggles with faith, struggles to believe that God uses him in ministry, struggles with ill health, struggles to believe that the leadership in Ephesus really trusts him. So Paul writes to Timothy in a time of crisis in his own life. In 2 Timothy chapter 2, he says, *"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus [not strong in yourself, not strong in your own faith, but strong in the resources of Jesus that are offered to you], and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. [There's the word. You've heard it and know it's true. You've seen it in other people's lives; you've experienced it in your own life.] Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus...Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered [Paul is confident of that. Finally, the ringing climax of this section]...If we are faithless, he [God] remains faithful--for he cannot deny himself."* God must be true to his own character. The good news for us is that God's faithfulness is more powerful than our doubt. He is just as faithful to his promises today as he was with Jeremiah and Timothy in the first century. He can protect us from weak, trembling faith. He can deliver us from the evil of charging him, accusing him of unfairness or even falsehood. He can save us from fear and disappointment.

As we gather around the table of the Lord, we are reminded of the triumph of the cross. Jesus went through his own night of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Remember when he sweat drops of blood because the agony was so great physically. He said in effect, "Lord, if there's any way I can get out of this, please let me. I don't want to go to the cross." But then he said in obedience, in faith, "Not my will, but yours be done." The apostle Peter, in his first letter, tells us how Jesus was able to do that. Peter says, "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly."

Our time around the table this morning can be a time of ministry to each of us. It's a time when we can bring our doubt, both self-doubt and doubt in the Lord, our weak faith, and our struggles to him. And he promises to meet us. We can be spiritually strengthened as we symbolically take the bread that represents the broken body and as we drink the wine that reminds us of his shed blood. The hymn that we sang this morning, "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place," says that our faith rests "not in device," that is not in the strength of my faith, "nor creed," that is not in any theological system, but "we trust the ever-living One." His wounds and his brokenness on the cross remind us of the healing that is available. The hymn says that it's enough that Jesus continues to save. You can experience salvation this morning in the area of doubt and faithlessness. It can be healed. The hymn writer says his heart is leaning on the word of God, the written word of God. We come to a great physician who heals the sick. His precious blood was shed for us. We can experience that salvation this morning as we come to the table of the Lord.

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