

Matthew 26:26–75 | “The Crucible Before the Cross”  
*Preached on July 21, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown*

You can turn in your Bibles this morning to Matthew 26, and we will be starting in verse 26—so Matthew 26:26 is where you can flip to. *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever heard of a “crucible”? *[pause]*

On the one hand, you can use the term with its basic meaning—it’s a pot that’s used to melt metals at a very high temperature.

But due to this image, the term also has a figurative meaning: a severe test or trial. *[pause]*

So one could say, “His character was formed in the crucible of war.”

It’s this depiction of someone going through something hard, likening one facing a trial or struggle to metal sitting in a pot being exposed to high heat. *[pauseeee]*

We have all been through what *we* have deemed to be “crucibles” in our lives.

And there are times where we feel like it has been crucible—brief break—and then another crucible.

But at other times, it feels like we have been in the crucible for such a long time that we feel like vocalizing, “When am I *not* going to feel the burning heat of trial?” *[pauseeee]*

Well as we look at this large portion of Scripture, we see Jesus going through what could easily be described as a “crucible”. *[pause]*

He has yet to reach the agonies of the cross, but the heat of hardship is felt acutely here, even before He reaches Calvary.

And so what we will discover this morning is the crucible that Jesus faces before the cross. *[pauseeee]*

Let’s begin READING, starting in verse 26. *[READ 26-75]*

*As we consider this portion of Scripture, we see that Jesus faces a lot of things, and one of them is....*

**I. Denial (30-35, 69-75)**

Can you imagine being denied by one of the closest people to you? *[pause]*

Maybe that *has* happened to you, but for it to happen to the Son of God is stunning, and is a much bigger deal because of who He is. *[pauseeee]*

After Jesus tells His disciples that they would all scatter, Peter boldly claims, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” *[pause]*

That statement reflects Peter’s character: confident, self-assured, and emboldened.

We see him walking on the water with Jesus, and often being the first one to speak up among the group.

Yet the issue with Peter was that he was sometimes *overconfident*. *[pause]*

He seemed to be a natural leader, which is good, but he relied too much on himself.

He frequently relied upon his own strength, his own ideas, and his own effort. *[pause]*

But don’t we do the same thing?

We overestimate our abilities and underestimate our need for Christ. *[pause]*

We think, “I would *never* do that like that other person!”

And when you say that, watch out!

For as the verse in Proverbs states, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”<sup>1</sup> *[pauseeee]*

Haven’t you ever found yourself saying, “I can’t believe that I just did that.”?

This is because we are like Peter, saying, “I would never!”

When we should be clinging to Christ saying, “Lord, help me!” *[pauseeeee]*

Later, after Jesus is arrested, it comes time for Peter’s confidence and resolve to be tested. *[pause]*

Peter remained close by, desiring to see what would happen to his Master, but some bystanders kept asserting that he had been seen with Jesus.

And what did Peter do?

He continually said, “I don’t know Him.” *[pause]*

He even went so far as to deny Him with an oath and invoke a curse upon himself. *[pauseeee]*

So what happened to Peter?!

He was so bold, so confident, so brave before, and now he can’t even admit that he knows Jesus. *[pause]*

---

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 16:18.

It was *fear* that led Peter to deny Christ. *[pause]*

The great, bold Peter was also a fearful man. *[pause]*

He boldly walked on the water, but sank in fear when the wind and waves came.<sup>2</sup>

He boldly proclaimed Christ, but again sank in waves of fear when he thought about how some Jews would respond if they found him eating with Gentiles.<sup>3</sup>

And here—when the pressure isn't on, he boldly announces that he would *never* deny Christ, but when it came down to it, his resolve weakened, petrified when identifying with Christ could cost him. *[pause]*

When the time came, Peter's confidence shattered on the rock of fear. *[pauseeee]*

Peter's example shows us that we don't need more self-confidence, we need more God-confidence from beginning, middle, to end. *[pauseeeee]*

So Peter has overconfidence *before* his denials, fear *during* his denials, and regret *after*. *[pause]*

Matthew writes that “he went out and wept bitterly.”

He knew what he did, and realized that he did exactly the opposite of what he said he would do. *[pause]*

But the amazing thing is that Peter was restored afterwards!

Jesus went on to use Peter and he became one of the prime leaders in the early church! *[pauseeee]*

Isn't Peter's example so encouraging to your soul?

If Peter could be restored and used greatly by God afterwards, then can't you be restored and used by God, no matter what you've done in the past? *[pause]*

If you genuinely repent and genuinely trust Him, then failure isn't final.

Scripture says, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful.”<sup>4</sup> *[pauseeeeeee]*

I want you to think about this—Jesus was denied by Peter, one of his closest followers. *[pause]*

Think of the natural pain that would come from knowing that...

It would hurt deeply, cutting to the heart. *[pause]*

---

<sup>2</sup> A reference to Matthew 14:28–31.

<sup>3</sup> A reference to Galatians 2:11–14.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 2:13.

Sometimes we forget that Jesus as a human would feel the pain of these things in many of the same ways that we would. *[pause]*

Think of one of your closest friends denying that they knew you 3 times in front of people because they don't want to be identified with you. *[pause]*

The emotional pain would be excruciating.

You would feel abandoned by someone who said they loved you.

You would feel utter sadness that they would do that to you.

And yet even through these denials, Jesus went forward to the cross! *[pauseee]*

He could have given up on us right then and there.

He could have thought, "If even Peter denies me, why would I go through with all that is to come? Are these people even worth it?"

Yet He set His face to go and die for us. *[pauseeee]*

*Jesus faced denial from one of His closest disciples, but He also faced...*

## **II. Desertion (36-46, 51-56)**

There's a story about a time "during WWII [when] six Navy pilots left their aircraft carrier on a mission. *[pause]*

After searching the seas for enemy submarines, they tried to return to their ship shortly after dark, but the captain had ordered a blackout of all lights on the ship. *[pause]*

Over and over, the frantic pilots radioed, asking for just one light so they could see to land, but the pilots were told that the blackout could not be lifted. *[pause]*

After several appeals and denials of their request, the ship's operator turned the switch to break radio contact—and the pilots were forced to ditch in the ocean."<sup>5</sup> *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever been deserted at a time when you needed someone the most?

Well Jesus was deserted by His disciples when they were needed the most. *[pauseeee]*

In the portion about Jesus in Gethsemane, we see this so very clearly...

There was Jesus, so very sorrowful and troubled by what was to come.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Today in the Word*, MBI, October, 1991, p. 12. Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/a/abandoned.htm>.

And He even shares with Peter, James, and John that his soul was “sorrowful, even to death.”  
[pause]

He asks them, in light of His great sorrow, to stay and watch with him, which entails staying awake.

Yet even though Jesus is going through one of the hardest emotional times of His life, His disciples are found sleeping. [pauseeee]

Jesus was troubled by what He was about to go through, and needed others to be with Him and pray, yet they are snoring away. [pauseee]

He once again asks them to “watch and pray”, but when He returns the second time, they are sleeping yet again! [pause]

Can you imagine the pain and hurt to see this happen *again*, even after giving them a second chance to support Him? [pause]

For us, we would be thinking, “Don’t they care?! I’m going through such a hard, troubling, sorrowful time here, and all they can think about is themselves!

All they care about is sleeping when I need them the most!” [pauseee]

That’s what *we* would be thinking, yet Jesus goes a third time to pray, and then returns to find them still asleep yet a third time. [pause]

Three times He goes to pray, and three times they are asleep when they were asked to watch with Him. [pauseeeee]

Jesus was deserted when He needed His disciples' presence, support, and encouragement.  
[pause]

I mean, just imagine hearing from someone that they were “sorrowful, even unto death” and then right after just falling asleep when they asked you to stay awake with them.

Yet that’s what Jesus’ disciples did in His crucible in the garden. [pauseeee]

*Three times.*

It’s not like it was once, and they realized their mistake, but three times He returns to find them asleep. [pauseeee]

The three times He returns to find them asleep parallels the three denials of Peter...

Like Peter was given three chances and failed, so the disciples in Gethsemane were given three chances and failed to be a support to Christ. [pauseeee]

Jesus gives us so many chances, doesn’t He?

His grace is a grace of second, third, fourth, and many, many more chances. *[pause]*

We fail Him time and time again, yet He never fails us.

Aren't you thankful for a Lord like that? *[pause]*

After one failure, He doesn't give up on us and say, "I'm done with you."

He doesn't cast us aside in frustration, but He reaches out in mercy-packed grace and love-wrapped forgiveness. *[pauseeee]*

Think about how many times that *you* have failed Him. *[pause]*

He has called you to do many things in His Word, yet He often finds us asleep at the wheel, so to say. *[pause]*

He calls us to watch and we can't stay awake.

He calls us to make disciples, He calls us to pray, He calls us to serve in love, and many more things, yet we are found sleeping spiritually. *[pause]*

Our spirit is often willing, but, man oh man, our flesh is weak. *[pause]*

Oh, how we need Jesus!

Oh, how we need to depend on the Lord for strength and help!

We must "watch and pray that [we] may not enter into temptation." *[pauseeee]*

Not only was Jesus somewhat deserted by His disciples in the garden when He needed them, but He was literally deserted by them later on when He was arrested. *[pauseeee]*

Here comes this great crowd to arrest Jesus, and once they arrest Him, it says in verse 56, "Then all the disciples left him and fled." *[pause]*

Jesus predicted that this would happen.

Remember how He said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night." *[pauseeee]*

They ably remained with Him when things were relatively easy, but when things got intense, they fled. *[pause]*

They were too nervous that they would be arrested for being with Him, so they sought out self-preservation, instead of being willing to suffer with Christ. *[pause]*

These are the same disciples who had just proclaimed, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" but when Jesus is actually arrested, they're gone like the wind. *[pauseeee]*

Once again, when Jesus needed them the most, He was left to suffer alone. *[pauseeee]*

For the disciples, they stuck around when they felt like things were in their control, like being able to use a sword...

...But when things felt out of their control, they could only flee. *[pause]*

They could stand by the strength of their sword, but they couldn't stand by faith. *[pauseeee]*

This is like us many times when it comes to following God...

When we are in situations where we feel in control, and where we feel like we can use our natural strength, intelligence, or abilities—then we are faithful.

But when God pushes out of our comfort zone, where we *have* to exercise faith in Him, we are gone, or at the very least hopeless and discouraged. *[pauseeee]*

When the bank account is in a decent place, we are calm and collected, but when the money is tight, we are a tangled mess of worry and fear. *[pause]*

When we feel like we can minister to others easily because it comes easily to us, we step toward it, but when we feel incompetent and incapable, we shy away from stepping up. *[pause]*

We are more like the disciples than we'd like to admit sometimes. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus was deserted by His disciples at the times that He needed them the most. *[pause]*

That would have been hard to go through. *[pause]*

Some of you may have been abandoned by your family or by some close friends, but to think that the Son of God was abandoned by His followers is astounding.

And yet it's a marvel that He would want to still use them and that they would be restored back to relationship! *[pause]*

In fact, after Jesus says that all of the disciples would fall away, he says, "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." *[pause]*

Jesus was showing His disciples that after their failure, there would be wonderful restoration!

They would be gathered once again around the risen Christ, even though they would all scatter at His arrest. *[pauseeee]*

*Denial and desertion by His true followers—that right there would be enough to go through, but Jesus also experienced disloyalty from a false disciple...*

### III. Disloyalty (47-56)

In Saratoga, NY, there's a very strange monument. *[pause]*

It's a monument of a boot, but it never names the person that it memorializes. *[pause]*

There's a reason for this lack of name though—it's a monument recognizing the actions of Benedict Arnold in the battle of Saratoga. *[pause]*

Benedict Arnold is the one who would go on to become a traitor for secretly helping the British. *[pauseee]*

The presence of the boot monument just goes to show that Benedict Arnold had a life that was contradictory. *[pause]*

On the one hand, he accomplished and did so much for the American side, but then on the other hand, he betrayed America by going over to the British side. *[pause]*

This contradictory life is the hallmark of all betrayers.

They seem to start out so good, and look so supportive, but in the end, they become treacherous and their actions show the opposite of what everyone thought. *[pause]*

That's like the life of Judas.

He seemed like a faithful follower of Jesus, so much so that not one of the other disciples suspected him of being a traitor.

Yet in the end, his true colors were shown as he betrayed Jesus. *[pauseeee]*

His treachery is underscored by his betraying kiss.

To choose his sign to be a kiss just heightens his betrayal.

He even acts like everything is fine when he says, "Greetings, Rabbi!" *[pause]*

No wonder Jesus replies with, "Friend, do what you came to do."

Jesus was reiterating that Judas should have been acting like a friend, instead of an enemy. *[pauseeee]*

Just think of it—the Son of God betrayed with a kiss. *[pause]*

Judas leads a crowd to arrest Jesus, while Judas should have still been following Jesus.

It's a sad, sad story among other saddening stories.

Jesus faced disloyalty and treachery among one of his own disciples! *[pause]*

Out of all the leaders in the world, Jesus should have never faced disloyalty.

Yet He experienced it—and reflect upon the human feelings of sorrow, disappointment, and hurt that can come along with that. *[pause]*



Some of us have been stabbed in the back by a friend, but for it to happen to Jesus is appalling, and to be betrayed by a greeting and a kiss just hammers it home how horrible it was. *[pauseee]*

*Lastly, the fourth thing that Jesus faced was...*

#### **IV. Disparagement (47-68)**

What does it mean to disparage? *[pause]*

The dictionary says that it's "to belittle the importance or value of (someone or something)."

Or "to lower (someone or something) in rank or reputation [or] degrade."<sup>6</sup> *[pause]*

Basically, it's to treat someone badly, as if they are little in your eyes and should be little in the eyes of others. *[pauseee]*

Jesus most definitely faced disparagement here. *[pause]*

Now most often disparagement is done by words, but consider how the actions of those in this story also degraded Jesus. *[pause]*

They came to arrest Jesus with weapons, even though He was no robber or violent person.

He even makes the point, "Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me." *[pauseee]*

We are told later in the trial scene that they spit on Jesus and hit Him.

Once again degraded and treated as low even though He didn't deserve a thread of the cruelty that they did against Him. *[pauseee]*

He not only faced these things by their actions, but He also faced disparagement in their words. *[pause]*

When He's before Caiaphas, the high priest, false witnesses are brought forward, who give false testimony against Him.

A false judgment of blasphemy is proclaimed, and they mock Him. *[pause]*

They tried to belittle Him by savage lies and cruel mockery.

They sought to bring low the King of kings, they sought to deride the Lord of lords. *[pauseee]*

Jesus Christ faced blatant lies and misrepresentations of His teachings.

He went through a sham trial, vicious physical hostility, and evil ridicule. *[pause]*

---

<sup>6</sup> "Disparage." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disparage>.

Isn't that so horrible? *[pauseeee]*

Jesus faced denial, desertion, disloyalty, and disparagement.

Add all of those dreadful things together and it's a mound of unspeakable misery.

And to think that He didn't deserve a single ounce of this pain or hardship, and is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe—it's mind-boggling to consider. *[pauseeee]*

*Yet through it all...*

**Jesus faithfully went through so much for us!**

Jesus went through a crucible even before the cross, didn't He? *[pause]*

And the amazing thing is that He did it faithfully!

He didn't give up, throw in the towel, or say, "It's not worth it, I'm done."

Instead, He says to His Father, "not as I will, but as you will."

And to His sword-wielding disciple, He tells him to put it away, and states that He could easily get out of the situation with twelve legions of angels, but Scripture must be fulfilled. *[pause]*

It was all under control, and Jesus had to simply be faithful to the Father's will—and He was!

The plan and will of God was being accomplished in Jesus. *[pauseeee]*

You see, that reminds us how to accurately view all of these horrible things. *[pause]*

Denial, desertion, disloyalty, and disparagement?

They all sound purposeless, for they are so dreadful to imagine, yet they were all for a purpose!

Jesus was executing the plan of God for the salvation of our souls! *[pause]*

In fact, right before all of these things, what do we see in verses 26–29? The Lord's Supper. *[pause]*

In the Lord's Supper, He uses the bread and the cup to represent His body and His blood, which would be given for us.

And what does He say?

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." *[pauseeee]*

All of His suffering was for a purpose!

So that we could be graciously forgiven because of Him and through Him! *[pause]*

He was denied, deserted, faced disloyalty and disparagement, and went to die, all so that you could be forgiven, and so that I could be forgiven, and so that *many* could be forgiven!  
*[pauseeee]*

You know, it's not always pleasant looking closely at the suffering of another...

...But looking at the suffering of Christ draws the unbelieving soul to faith and the believing soul to ever-deeper love for Him!

For because He was denied and deserted, we never have to worry about being denied or deserted by God.

And He faced disparagement and was brought low by others, so that we could be lifted up through Him. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus faced many crucibles, but the most severe crucible was the cross, all so that we could stand before God forgiven.

And in that we rejoice.