

## Matthew 26D

- Ask anyone to describe a moment from the Gospel accounts, and I suspect most would choose a scene from Christ's suffering and death on the cross
  - Even those who have never opened a Bible can tell you how Jesus died, at least some of the details
    - In fact, is there any human death in history better known and more remembered than Jesus' death?
    - For example, do you know how Buddha died? Do people retell the deaths of Muhammed, Confucius or countless Indian gurus?
    - But everyone – including Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and most everyone else – can tell you how Jesus died: on a cross
  - The story of Jesus' death is widely known, but the purpose of His death – that is, why He died – is not so well understood
    - And telling *that* story is the mission of the Church, according to the ministry of the Holy Spirit working through us
    - So that's our purpose today as we embark on a study of the final hours of Jesus' life and His sufferings to forgive us our sin
    - We want to understand not only what happened, but why it happened and what it means for us and the world
  - Today we begin with the first of Jesus' sufferings, which takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane
    - But interestingly, Jesus' sufferings don't begin with beatings or scrounging
    - Nor are they delivered by heartless Romans or hate-driven Jewish authorities
  - Jesus' sufferings begin with a rejection by His closest friends, the apostles

**Matt. 26:30** After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

**Matt. 26:31** Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'

[Matt. 26:32](#) “But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

[Matt. 26:33](#) But Peter said to Him, “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.”

[Matt. 26:34](#) Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”

[Matt. 26:35](#) Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.” All the disciples said the same thing too.

- The scene in v.30 picks up after the Last Supper, which we studied last week, and Matthew’s account of the Last Supper is among the shortest in the Gospels
  - So if you want more detail, you need to read John’s Gospel, which devotes five, long chapters to that meal conversation
    - Among the things John adds is a moment when Jesus says He was leaving the disciples soon, referring to His ascension
    - So Peter asks where Jesus was going, but Jesus said they would follow Him later, meaning they would die and enter Heaven
  - Naturally, Peter didn’t understand this comment, so in John 13 Peter declares that he would lay his life down for Jesus
    - Peter’s comment was mostly bravado and pride, and he thought he could impress Jesus or the other disciples by it
    - But Jesus saw through it, so Jesus tells Peter that he would deny Jesus three times that same evening
    - That was the first time Jesus said this to Peter, and now in Matthew 26 we’re studying the second time
  - As Jesus and the disciples leave the upper room and the city of Jerusalem, they return to the Mt. of Olives
    - And as they reach a garden on the west side of the Mount called the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus returns to the conversation
    - In v.31 Jesus says again not only will Peter fall away, but all the disciples will abandon Jesus that very night
  - Can you imagine the stunned look on the faces of those men as they heard Jesus’ prophecy?

- They couldn't have known the violence that was about to unfold, so they certainly couldn't anticipate the fear they would feel
- And fear can make us say and do dumb, crazy things, including even abandoning and denying our Lord
- But for now, they are incredulous at the suggestion, so to support His prediction, Jesus cites Zechariah 13:7

**Zech. 13:7 "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,**

**And against the man, My Associate,"**

**Declares the LORD of hosts.**

**"Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered;**

**And I will turn My hand against the little ones.**

- Then the Shepherd is struck down, Zechariah says, His sheep will be scattered, and Jesus tell us this prophecy was about Him
- And Christ's abandonment was part of the suffering He experienced on the way to the cross
- Christ suffered witnessing His friends leave Him and deny Him in His time of need, just as we would feel the same under those circumstances
  - Obviously, God doesn't depend upon His Creation for emotional support, for we know God is sufficient in Himself
    - But the Man, Jesus, did have emotions and feelings, and He was facing an unbelievably devastating experience
    - So having the support of friends during a moment like this was not meaningless to Jesus
    - And so as Jesus' disciples abandoned Him to His fate, Jesus felt sorrow and disappointment even as He knew it would happen
  - Moreover, Zechariah 13 proves that the disciples' rejection of Jesus was a part of God's plan, and Jesus describes it as if it's nothing in v.32
    - Jesus says that after they disavow Him at His death, Jesus will meet them later in Galilee once He's been raised from the dead
    - Jesus nonchalantly moves from explaining how they abandon Him to looking forward to their next meeting

- Clearly, Jesus didn't view their failure to stand by Him to mean the end of their relationship or opportunity to minister together
- Jesus' statement to these men is more important than you might have considered, and it deserves our attention this morning
  - This exchange teaches us something very important about the nature of our relationship with Jesus
  - Jesus' disciples will reject the Messiah during His greatest moment of need, and yet Jesus will not reject them
  - That is a cornerstone of the Gospel, a major point of theology in the Christian faith, and a powerful source of hope for all believers
- And to understand why, we need to go a little further in the text to focus on the example of the chief apostle, Peter
  - Back on the Mt of Olives, Peter speaks up again to declare his undying support and commitment to Jesus
    - Peter says that even if the other disciples fall away, he would never fall away from Jesus
    - The term fall away is the word *skandalizo* in Greek, and it literally means to stumble or separate due to an offense
  - We get the word scandalize from this Greek word, referring to an offense that turns someone into a pariah leading others to abandon them
    - For example, someone offends you with a Facebook post so you respond by "unfriending" that person...that's *skandalizo*
    - So Peter was telling Jesus that there was nothing that could ever offend Peter so much that he would consider abandoning Jesus
  - I'm sure Peter meant what he said in that moment, and I'm also sure he had every intention of keeping his promise, as far as he could know
    - And it's the same for all of us when we make a sincere promise to someone...we fully intend to keep our word as best we can
    - And yet, many times we fall short, and when we break a promise it's usually because we couldn't anticipate the future perfectly
    - We make a promise based on what we know, but then later circumstances change which then cause us to fall away

- In Peter's case, he promised that he could resist any force that might come against him demanding that he reject Jesus
  - But Peter *underestimated* the power of his own fear while watching Jesus being arrested and threatened with crucifixion
  - And Peter *overestimated* his willingness to suffer death with Jesus when that time came
  - Crucifixion is perhaps the most painful way to die ever conceived by man and Peter couldn't bear the thought of experiencing it
- So Peter makes a promise he couldn't keep in the end, and Jesus knew this would happen, and He gives Peter a sign to make it clear
  - Using a colloquialism, Jesus says Peter would deny Jesus three times prior to the rooster crowing, meaning before sunrise
  - It was bad enough for Jesus to suggest Peter had the potential to reject Jesus at all
  - But now Jesus says it will happen more than once and in only a matter of hours!
- So an indignant Peter responds defensively and pridefully by throwing his fellows disciples under the bus
  - He says even if these other guys reject you, I will never reject you
  - Clearly, Peter's not thinking right now...he's just reacting and for that reason Jesus doesn't even bother responding
  - Jesus knew that soon enough Peter would see that Jesus was correct, so there was little point in arguing it in the meantime
- Matthew records Peter's three denials at the end of this chapter, and we'll study them more when we get there
  - But today we need to appreciate the significance of this exchange and why it's such a powerful example of hope for every believer
    - And to begin, you may have heard someone tell you in the past that it's possible for a Christian to become unsaved
    - Some believe that a Christian who professes Christ and is saved can later deny Christ and lose (or reject) their salvation

- Those who support such a notion will use various Scriptures to support their view, and in all cases they misinterpret or misuse the text
  - And if we had the time today, I could walk through every one of those texts to show how they are misunderstood
  - And if you're interested in a deeper examination of the topic of salvation in general, I direct you to our Romans study
- But even without an understanding of biblical soteriology, you can know that our relationship with Jesus doesn't end by looking at Peter
  - In Peter we have a case study to understand, how does our Lord respond to a disciple who repudiates Him publicly?
  - Peter denied Jesus vehemently and repeatedly, but did Jesus accept his "resignation" from the faith? Did Jesus reject Peter?
- Peter's denial of Jesus is exactly the kind of rejection that some say results in a loss of salvation
  - And be assured, Peter does reject Jesus...in fact, at one point, Peter even swears an oath denying that he knew Jesus
  - This matches the claims of some that when we believe in Jesus we're saved, but if we turn away from Jesus we are lost again
- So let's look at how Jesus handles Peter's unfaithfulness beginning with that casual statement Jesus made in v.32
  - Jesus said that after His disciples rejected and abandoned Jesus, He'll meet them in Galilee
    - That doesn't sound like a Lord preparing to break off a relationship with His disciples, does it?
    - And we remember even earlier in the Gospels when Jesus told Peter that he would hold the keys to the Kingdom
    - It seems clear that Jesus wasn't going to hold Peter's denials against Him
  - But we find even more compelling evidence that Jesus was standing by Peter in Luke's record of this moment...

**[Luke 22:28](#) "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials;**

**[Luke 22:29](#) and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you**

[Luke 22:30](#) that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

[Luke 22:31](#) “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;

[Luke 22:32](#) but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

[Luke 22:33](#) But he said to Him, “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!”

[Luke 22:34](#) And He said, “I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.”

- Luke is writing about the same moment that we’re studying in Matthew 26, but notice how Luke begins the conversation
  - Jesus tells His disciples they are the ones who have stood by Him in His trials, and because of that faithfulness, they will have eternal rewards
    - Remember, this is the same setting as Matthew 26 where Jesus just told these men they would all scatter and abandon Him
    - So obviously, that momentary failure was not indicative of their hearts overall
    - They will run in fear during an intense moment of persecution, but that didn’t mean they lacked faith in Jesus
    - The disciples’ experience is an example of how the weakness of our flesh will cause us to live out our faith inconsistently at times
  - And Peter is the poster child for faithlessness because of his three public denials of Christ, so his situation is the one we need to focus on
    - In v.31 we discover that Peter’s denials were not merely personal weakness...they were the work of Satan
    - Jesus says that Satan has demanded permission from God to sift Peter like flour
  - Sifting purifies flour by removing impurities, so Satan was asking for opportunity to search for impurities in Peter’s heart
    - Satan wants to disqualify Peter, because he was the leader among the disciples and had the keys to the Kingdom

- Satan was confident that if he brought threats of persecution against Peter, then Peter's devotion to Christ would crumble
- And if Peter fell, then Satan expects the entire Church will fall with him, since Peter was the rock
- And as we know, Satan was partially right...Peter did fail the test when he denied Jesus not once, but three times in one night
  - But Satan was also wrong in his assumptions about the impact of Peter's faithlessness, because Peter's failure didn't mean the end of the Church
    - Satan's miscalculation was in assuming that the church's existence rests on the faithfulness of Jesus' disciples
    - But it doesn't, and that's why God granted Satan permission to test Peter knowing that Peter would fail that test
  - Jesus wanted His church to learn from Peter's experience so we could understand what happens when our faithfulness falls short
    - Because despite our best intentions, we too depart from Jesus, routinely, both in our actions and in our words
    - We say we love Jesus and will follow and obey Him, but then we spend the rest of our life doing much the opposite
    - We make promises and commitments and appointments and goals and resolutions...and then we break many of them
    - And in times of stress, a Christian can even come to denying they know Christ rather than face the consequences of faith
  - That's the reality of sinful flesh...we are weak and prone to wandering
    - So if believers are to have eternal life without fear of rejection, then that salvation can't depend upon our faithfulness to Jesus
    - Because we simply can't be faithful enough given the weakness of our flesh
- That's the primary error made by those who believe salvation can be lost...it's *not* their assumption that salvation comes and goes...
  - That's wrong too, but their primary error is in assuming that a Christian is *ever* truly faithful to Jesus

- Th only way you believe you are faithful to Jesus is if you lower your standard of faithfulness low enough to stay above it
- But God's standard for faithfulness is the same as His standard for all behaviors: perfection
- Only perfection meets God's standard for holiness and righteousness and we have all fallen short of the glory of God
- Thinking you can be faithful enough to maintain your relationship with Jesus is the same kind of arrogance and pride that stumbled Peter
  - Peter declared twice that he would never abandon Jesus...only to deny Him three times a few hours later
  - And anyone who thinks that their own convictions hold them to Jesus is equally self-deceived
  - If our faithfulness to Christ was the criteria for maintaining our salvation, we would all be in big trouble
- Because we all routinely act contrary to our profession of faith
  - We all disobey Christ's word by choosing to live in ways contrary to His commands
  - We all give in to worldly thought and behavior, we all live in the flesh at times, forsaking our obligations to the Lord and His body
  - And when pushed hard enough, we all would deny Christ publicly as Peter did
- Now perhaps you're saying, "No, not me Steve, I would never deny Christ," and if that's you, please allow me to direct you back to Peter's example
  - The Rock of the early church, the man who walked with Jesus in person for three years, rejected Jesus mere hours after promising he wouldn't
    - The Lord permitted Satan to intimidate and frighten Peter with threats of persecution, and when he did, Peter folded like a kite
    - In fact, Satan's plan worked so well that Peter denied Christ three times!
    - Do you honestly think you're stronger than Peter? Are we so foolish as to think we would have done better in that situation?

- So if you're feeling secure because you've never publicly denied knowing Jesus, it just means Satan hasn't asked to sift you yet
- And the fact that Jesus said yes to Satan's request should worry anyone who believes we hold onto our salvation by our faithfulness to Jesus
  - Good luck with that, friend, because you can't be faithful enough...you don't have the spiritual strength to be that strong
  - And in the day when Satan makes you the target, you will discover how weak your flesh truly is
- And in that moment you become thankful that your salvation doesn't rest on your faithfulness to Jesus but on Christ's faithfulness to you
  - The Bible says your salvation came by the grace of God, through a faith that is not of our own, it is a gift of God to us
  - You didn't obtain salvation by your own strength and you aren't holding onto it by your own power either, as Paul told us

[1Cor. 1:30](#) But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

[1Cor. 1:31](#) so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

- Pauls says by *His doing* we are in Christ Jesus, which means we didn't even come to Jesus on our own...He came to us bringing us faith
  - At that moment, Jesus became our righteousness, Paul says, but Jesus' work in us didn't stop there
  - Paul says that Christ also becomes our sanctification and ultimately our redemption...Jesus does it all
  - He finishes the spiritual work in us that He began, so that all who are saved ultimately come to glory...and we add nothing
- Peter's example is proof to us that salvation doesn't rest on our faithfulness to Christ, but rather we rest in Christ's faithfulness to us and to His own word
  - In Peter's case, Christ promised he would have the keys to the Kingdom and that Peter was to lead the church
    - And then Christ promised Peter that they would meet again in the Galilee after he abandoned Jesus

- And finally, Jesus promised Peter that He would join Jesus in Heaven after a short time
- All those promises came from the mouth of God, and nothing in the Universe is more powerful than the word of God
  - So that even when we disobey or disregard Jesus or walk away from Him like a rebellious child, the Lord remains faithful
  - And how can a righteous God remain so faithful to a faithless people? Because Jesus died to make forgiveness possible
- Take one more look at that passage in Luke 22...notice Jesus tells Peter in v.32 that He prayed for Peter that his faith wouldn't fail during the test
  - We know Peter did deny Jesus, but Jesus says that He would ensure that Peter's faith wouldn't fail despite those denials
  - Which means that while Peter was denying Christ three times, the Lord was working in Peter's heart to maintain Peter's faith
  - Peter's faith was preserved by the power of God, not by Peter's own strength
- So even as Peter's actions demonstrated faithlessness, Peter could take comfort knowing his spirit remained in covenant with the Living God
  - That's why Jesus added that *when* Peter turned again, he would strengthen His brothers
  - The key words there are when and again
  - Jesus said *when* Peter turned, not *if* he turned, because Jesus was going to make sure that Peter turned back in time
  - And Jesus said *again*, because Peter's first turn would not be his last...in the end, Peter would remain in Christ
- That's why Jesus said Peter would strengthen his brothers...He meant Peter's failure and restoration would become a source of reassurance for our own hope
  - When we fall short in faithfulness, we remember that Peter fell first
    - And if we wonder whether Jesus will take us back, we remember that He restored Peter telling Him I'll meet you in the Galilee
    - So if you think you've done things too terrible to be forgiven, or perhaps you've walked away from the faith, remember Peter

- You can't possibly do worse than Peter who swore a public oath that he didn't know Jesus even as Jesus looked on
- And yet Jesus never rejected Peter and when Peter finally turned back, Jesus was there waiting to greet him in Galilee
- Later in his life, a mature Peter taught the Church to learn from his own experience when he wrote

**1Pet. 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

**1Pet. 1:4** to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

**1Pet. 1:5** who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

**1Pet. 1:6** In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

**1Pet. 1:7** so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

- Peter describes our salvation as an act of God's mercy, which caused us to be born again into a living hope in the resurrection of Jesus
  - And that hope means we will obtain an eternal inheritance that is reserved for us in Heaven and cannot be taken from us
  - And then Peter says that eternal future is "protected by the power of God" through faith
  - Peter knew perhaps better than anyone that our eternal life is protected by the power of God and that faith is preserved
- Which is why Peter goes on to say that we should rejoice greatly even as we are distressed by various trials
  - Because those trials ultimately become proof of our faith, even when we are faithless in a moment as Peter was
  - As we reflect on Peter's whole experience, we come to realize that his actions did not nullify a faith God placed in the heart

- And therefore, neither will our faithless words or actions threaten a faith God gave us and is protecting for a future day of glory
- And Peter says in that day to come, Christ's faithfulness to us and His preserving of our faith will result in praise and glory for Him
- That's why Paul tells us in Romans that we have no reason to fear anything in this life because nothing can separate us from our eternal future with Jesus

[Rom. 8:33](#) Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;

[Rom. 8:34](#) who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

[Rom. 8:35](#) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

- Paul asks rhetorically how can a Christian be condemned when Jesus is for us, referring to Jesus interceding for us before God
  - Paul is saying that no matter how faithless we are, we have a faithful advocate securing our forgiveness every time
  - Just as Jesus interceded for Peter asking that his faith would not fail, and because of Jesus' intercession Peter was restored
- So Paul asks us what worldly pressure could ever be enough to separate us from Christ?
  - If Satan brought the full force of his persecution against you, I assure you that you would recant your faith
  - If we are subject to famine or peril or the threat of death, most of us would say or do whatever we could to escape that moment
- But Paul asks how can those things stop Jesus from interceding for us? No matter how unfaithful you may be to Christ, He intercedes for you
  - So when we fail Jesus – and we fail Him routinely – He comes through for us before the throne of God faithfully, every time
  - In fact, Jesus' protection over His sheep is so complete and Satan must ask God's permission before Satan can even test us
  - And even if that testing comes, and even if we fail in the face of tribulation or distress or sword, Jesus stands by us

- Even if we renounce Christ as Peter did, Jesus forgives us that offense too, protecting and preserving our faith in the meantime
- So if you believe salvation can be lost, that someone can repudiate Christ and walk away from their salvation, then Peter's story was written just for you
  - Jesus allowed Satan to sift Peter for your sake...so that you could see conclusive evidence of how faithless we are and yet how faithful Jesus is
    - You didn't earn Jesus' mercy in the beginning
    - You didn't impress Jesus by your confession of faith such that Jesus felt compelled to save you on merit
    - The Bible says He saved you as an act of His mercy by His grace
  - And in fact, we were dead in our trespasses and sins even as we were being saved, so clearly Jesus saves faithless people
    - And Peter's account is your reassurance that your hope rests in Jesus not in yourself
    - Paul sums up our relationship to Jesus in one verse in 2 Timothy 2:13...

**2Tim. 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.**

- If Jesus were faithless to us, He would deny Himself, meaning He would deny His own promises, and that's something God cannot do
  - Rejoice in your salvation made sure by the faithfulness of a God who keeps His promises
  - What better way to end this lesson than with the words Peter uses to close his first letter to the church:

**1Pet. 5:10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.**

**1Pet. 5:11 To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.**