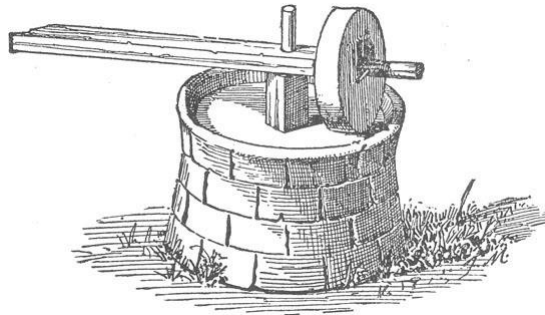


Gethsemane - Matthew 26:36-46

Introduction

26:36. **They may have arrived at Gethsemane by 10 or 11 p.m.** (which was well into the night in that culture). Gethsemane seems to have included an olive grove and probably an olive press (hence **its name, which means “oil press”**); it was on the western slope or base of the Mount of Olives, facing Jerusalem. **Because Passover night had to be spent within the larger boundaries of Jerusalem, which did not include Bethany, they would not return to Bethany that night (21:17).**

Keener, C. S. (1993). The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament (Mt 26:36). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



Olive Press

There were three ways to obtain olive oil. The best quality came from olives crushed gently with mortar and pestle. This is the “beaten olive oil” for Tabernacle lamps. Olives could also be trodden like grapes. The olive press shown here illustrates the third method. The beam pivoted around the central axle, rolling the stone over the olives. The name “Gethsemane” comes from the Aramaic for “olive press.”

[Exod 27:20](#), [Mic 6:15](#), [Matt 26:36](#), [Mark 14:32](#)

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1. Jesus was a Jew who observed the ceremonial laws and traditions of his people. Why did he observe these laws and rituals and we do not? Should we observe the Jewish laws?

It must have been a secluded spot, fenced in and containing some olive trees and perhaps a grotto used in the fall of the year for an olive oil-press. **Was the owner of the grove a follower of Jesus? That would almost seem so, for Jesus went there often with his disciples (John 18:2).** It was therefore a quiet place, a place to teach, pray, rest, and sleep.

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Vol. 9, p. 916). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

1. Jesus often took time to rest and to pray. Why do you think this was so important to him?

A generation after the death and resurrection of Jesus **the Roman legions assaulting Jerusalem (A.D. 70) cut down all the original olive trees, using them as firewood to cook their food and as lumber in the construction of siege engines.** It was here that Jesus had sat a few days earlier, on these same slopes opposite the Temple Mount (24:3ff.), predicting the events that now begin.

Smith, R. H. (1989). Matthew (pp. 308–309). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.



Gethsemane olive tree

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1. Jesus predicted a judgment on Israel that came true. Why did God judge Israel? How do you understand God as judge?

John Calvin:

Mat_26:36. Then Jesus cometh with them. Luke mentions the mountain of Olives only. Mark and Matthew add a more minute description of the place. But Luke expresses what is still more to the purpose, that **Christ came there according to his custom**. Hence we infer, that he did not seek retirement for the purpose of concealing himself, but, as if he had made an assignation with his enemies, **he presented himself to death**. On this account **John says (Joh_18:2) that the place was known to the traitor**, because Jesus was wont to come there frequently. In this passage, therefore, **his obedience is again described to us**, because he could not have appeased the Father but by a voluntary death.

1. Calvin emphasizes that Jesus chose a place Judas knew about so that Judas could find him. What gave Christ such courage to face death (see John 13:3)?

37-38

Eight disciples remain at some distance, perhaps outside the enclosure, and the inner three join him (v. Mat_26:37). **Jesus with stern self-control has so far masked his anguish; now he begins “to be sorrowful [lypeisthai, which connotes deep grief] and troubled” (ademonein, found in the NT only here, in the parallel in Mar_14:33, and in Php_2:26, and connoting deep distress).**

Jesus' next words—“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow” (v. Mat_26:38)—are almost a quotation from the refrain of Psa_42:1 (LXX). The phrase heos thanatou (“to the point of death”) is so common in the LXX (e.g., Isa_38:1) that it should not be thought an allusion to Jon_4:9 (contra Gundry, *Use of OT*, p. 59) but “merely a reflection of the OT-tinged language which Jesus used” (Moo, “Use of OT,” p. 241). **It suggests a sorrow so deep it almost kills** (Taylor, *Mark*, p. 553; Hill, *Matthew*; and many others), not that Jesus is so sorrowful he would rather be dead (contra Bultmann, *TDNT*, 4:323, n. 2). **Having revealed his deepest emotions and thus given his disciples the most compelling of reasons to do what he asks, he tells them to stay and “keep watch with me” while he goes a little farther on to pray alone.**

D.A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*

Jesus in Gethsemane—for the ancient church that was one of the most difficult episodes of the story of Jesus. Celsus, no friend of Christians, observes: “It is obvious that since he was a god and acted intentionally, what was done of deliberate purpose was neither painful nor grievous to him.... **Why then does he utter loud laments and wailings, and pray that he may avoid the fear of death?**” Emperor Julian [who rejected Christianity] argues similarly: “But Jesus asks, so it is said, as only a miserable person can ask who is not able to bear his fate; and he was strengthened by an angel, even though he is God!”¹⁵ For Celsus and Julian, Jesus is not even Socrates, much less God. For the ancient church the issue with this pericope was **how it could be reconciled with the divinity of Jesus.**

The problem is different for modern people. The Gethsemane episode fascinates many, because **here Jesus' humanity is as obvious as anywhere in the Bible**. Not only does Jesus suffer outwardly; he also trembles inwardly when faced with suffering. He wants to avoid his death. He prays to his father, but his wish is not granted.

Luz, U. (2005). *Matthew 21–28: a commentary*. (H. Koester, Ed.) (p. 394). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

Here something different is reported about Jesus from what one normally reads in legends of martyrs. He begins to grieve and to be fearful. He expresses his anguish forcefully with the biblical words of the psalms of lament in Ps 41:6, 12; 42:5 LXX. Περὶλυπος already has a superlative meaning: “exceedingly sorrowful.”

Luz, U. (2005). *Matthew 21–28: a commentary*. (H. Koester, Ed.) (pp. 395–396). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

1. What is your reaction to such distress in Christ? How do you reconcile this with his being God himself?

2. How might the intensity of Jesus' sorrow point to the historical nature of this narrative?

John Calvin:

Certainly those who imagine that the Son of God was exempt from human passions do not truly and sincerely acknowledge him to be a man.

Matthew 26:38

Matthew does not leave his readers to think that Jesus was troubled in the same way as we all are from time to time. In Gethsemane **he underwent a most unusual sense of being troubled** that we must feel is connected not only with the fact that he would die, **but that he would die the kind of death he faced, a death for sinners**. Jesus was a brave man, and lesser people by far, including many who have owed their inspiration to him, have faced death calmly. It is impossible to hold that it was the fact of death that moved Jesus so deeply. Rather, **it was the kind of death that he would die that brought the anguish**. In due course Matthew will record the cry from the cross that says the Father had forsaken Jesus at the point of death (27:46; Paul says, “him who knew no sin he made sin for us,” 2 Cor. 5:21). **Jesus would be one with sinners in his death, he would experience the death that is due to sinners**, and it seems that it was this that brought about the tremendous disturbance of spirit that Matthew records.

(Pillar New Testament Commentary Collection)

26:39. **The cup (20:22; cf. 27:48) may allude to the Old Testament image of a cup of judgment given to the nations;** (Ps 60:3; 75:8; Is 51:17–23; Jer 25:15–29; 49:12; Lam 4:21; Zech 12:2).

Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament (Mt 26:39)*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

1. Jesus became THE sinner. The place where the sinner is judged. What made this so dreadful? What is the ultimate punishment given to the sinner?

The early church saw in the torments of Jesus the plight of the pious in every age (Ps. 42:5–6, 11) and **drew strength for its own trials from his deep sorrows and struggling, signs of a shared humanity and a common vulnerability** (Heb. 2:10–18; 4:15; 5:7–8; John 12:27).

Smith, R. H. (1989). *Matthew* (p. 309). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

1. Is it right for us to link our sufferings to Christ's sufferings? How might our sufferings be like his (see Colossians 1:24)?

Verse 39b

In one sense all things are possible with God (see on 19:26; Mark 14:36), in another some things are impossible. The two passages (Mar_14:36 and Mat_26:1) complement each other: all things are possible with God, and so, if it be morally consistent with the Father's redeeming purpose that this "cup" (Matthew) or "hour" (Mark) be taken from Jesus, that is what he deeply desires. But more deeply still, Jesus desires to do his Father's will. Though the precise wording of the synoptic accounts varies somewhat, if the prayer was of some duration ("one hour," v. Mat_26:40), and if Jesus after his resurrection told his disciples its contents, or if the disciples were within earshot, some variation in the tradition is not surprising. Jesus' deep commitment to his Father's will cannot be doubted. But **in this crisis, the worst since Mat_4:1, Jesus is tempted to seek an alternative to sin-bearing suffering as the route by which to fulfill his Father's redemptive purposes. As with his self-confessed ignorance in Mat_24:36, Jesus may simply not have known whether any other way was possible.** He prays in agony; and though he is supernaturally strengthened (Luk_22:43), he learns only that the Cross is unavoidable if he is to obey his Father's will.

D.A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*

1. Do you agree some things are impossible for God? HINT: Could God have simply forgiven our sin without the sacrifice of his son?

2. Jesus was tempted and yet did not sin. What does this tell us about our struggles with God's will? How might Christ be of help?

Verse 40

Matthew here places highest value on community, as he portrays **Jesus' desire to be surrounded by friends, by companions, by the new family** (12:46–50).

Smith, R. H. (1989). Matthew (p. 309). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

I weep when I remember how often these disciples stand for us. We forget too easily that Jesus became one of us, became flesh. **He made himself vulnerable, depending in his most difficult hour on the support of his friends—and we let him down.** Reigning as Lord of the universe, he does not depend on our support in the same way now; but is it possible that Matthew still intends us to hear the plaintive cry of the Lord of harvest in this narrative? The burden of his heart remains the mission of the world's redemption, yet **he continues to cry out to a sleeping church governed by other agendas.**

Keener, C. S. (1997). Matthew (Vol. 1, Mt 26:31). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

1. Jesus looked to the disciples for support. Is the church in our day a good source of support?

2. Do you think the church is asleep when it comes to aspects of its mission? Are there ways we're especially failing the commands of Christ?

Sleeping at this hour, probably past midnight, was natural, especially after the exciting experiences in the Upper Room (the washing of the disciples' feet, the revelation that one of The Twelve was going to betray his Master, the departure of Judas, the institution of the Lord's Supper) and afterward ("All of you shall become untrue to me," Peter's protest, etc.). Nevertheless, these men should have stayed awake. They could have, had they only prayed for strength to do so. Though Christ's gentle reprimand concerned all three—note the plural—yet it was addressed particularly to Peter, no doubt because in the matter of pledging his loyalty and even boasting about it he had taken the lead.

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Vol. 9, p. 918). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

2. Is it possible to accomplish the church's mission in our own strength?

Verse 41

In the present passage **"spirit" indicates man's invisible entity viewed in its relation to God. As such it is the recipient of God's favor and the means whereby man worships God.** See further on 10:28, including footnote 453 on p. 471. **"Flesh," as here meant, is the human nature considered from the aspect of its frailty and needs, both physical and psychical.** See N.T.C. on Philippians, p. 77, footnote 55. Cf. Isa. 40:6; 1 Cor. 1:29; Gal. 2:16. This use of "flesh" must not be confused with that according to which "flesh" indicates the human nature regarded as the seat of sinful desire (Rom. 7:25; 8:4–9; etc.).

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Vol. 9, p. 919). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

"The spirit is willing, but the body [sarx 'flesh'] is weak." This is not a reference to the Holy Spirit but makes a **"distinction between man's physical weakness and the noble desires of his will"** (Hill, *Matthew*; id., *Greek Words*, p. 242; Bonnard).

D.A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*

1. How are humans different from the animals? How might "noble desires of the will" refer to human spirit?

Verse 42

This prayer in the garden of Gethsemane is the classic disproof of “name it and claim it” praying.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1453). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

1. Have you heard of the prosperity gospel, so called “name it and claim it” theology? If so, how does this verse challenge that belief?

In his prayer he addresses God with the intimate words *πάτερ μου*, “my Father”

(very frequent in Matthew, but cf. esp. v. 29; 11:25, 27; 25:34).

Hagner, D. A. (1998). *Matthew 14–28* (Vol. 33B, p. 783). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

1. When Jesus said “my Father” may he have been saying this for himself? How might prayer be a means of strengthening our faith?

Verse 45

[A]s the story develops we notice that it was especially this one thought, namely, that **he**, a most tender and sensitive soul, **is more and more being driven into isolation**. **Many of the people have already left him (John 6:66)**. His disciples are going to forsake him (Matt. 26:56). **Worst of all, on the cross he will be crying out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (27:46)**. Did he, perhaps, here in Gethsemane see this tidal wave of God’s wrath because of our sin coming? Cf. Isa. 63:3.

It was alone the Savior prayed
In dark Gethsemane;
Alone he drained the bitter cup
And suffered there for me.
Alone, alone, He bore it all alone;
He gave himself to save his own,
He suffered, bled, and died alone, alone.

—Ben H. Price

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Vol. 9, p. 917). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

1. Loneliness is at epidemic proportions in our day. Why is this so? How might this be related to the meaning of Christ's sufferings in Gethsemane?

To be sure, he had been a curse-bearer throughout the days of his humiliation, but now he was becoming overwhelmed with the curse; and this consciousness would not again leave him until he was able to say, "It is finished" (Gal. 3:13).

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Vol. 9, p. 917). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

1. How might have Christ been bearing the curse of our sin before his sufferings and death? What does the above quote mean by "days of his humiliation" (see Philippians 2)?

Matthew 26:45

He lets them see something of what that means with "the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." Ten times in this chapter Matthew uses this verb "betray" (Mark in the equivalent chapter has it 7 times, and Luke 5 times); he will not let his readers overlook the dreadful fact of treachery among the followers of Jesus. **And he characterizes the Jewish leaders, high priests, and other leaders of the people as sinners. Jesus would go to his death in accordance with the will of his Father, but that excuses neither his follower who handed him over, nor the religious leaders who bought his arrest.**

(Pillar New Testament Commentary Collection)

1. Here we face a great paradox, God is in control; yet we are still responsible for our actions. Do you struggle with how these two things can be true? Is it possible to reconcile them both?

2. What might be the danger of over-emphasizing either God's control or human responsibility?
