

Jesus & the Olive Press — Matthew 26

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Introduction

A sentence in this book, the Bible proclaims the greatest news ever told: *There is revealed a way to be right with God apart from keeping the law.*

Romans 3:21 But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. (CSB)

Romans 3:21 But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. (NLT)

And this olive press (mill) illustrates that way!

May I tell you about this model of an ancient olive mill? Olives were a critical part of life in the Israel of Jesus's day, though they never ate the olives. In fact, if you could go back and hand someone in Jesus's day what we call an olive or a salad olive today, they wouldn't even recognize it. The olives we eat have been highly fermented and cured and have no resemblance in taste or texture to an actual raw olive. That is why you can't buy them in the grocery store. They are completely inedible.

They used olives to make olive oil. And that olive oil was important for religious ceremony, cooking, cleaning, bug repellent, butter, medicine, preparation of corpses, grooming of sheep, fuel for lamps, lotion for the feet, and as a laxative.

Allow me to tell you how they made olive oil. This model next to me is exactly what an olive mill would have looked in Jesus's day. In Jesus's day, this would have been fashioned from limestone. There were different sizes, but this model is typical. It is about five feet in diameter and thirty inches tall. Much of Israel was covered with olive trees in Jesus's day, and it still is. These olive trees grow olives.

All olives are green, but they darken as they ripen. As we said, they are very hard. And if you did bite into one, it would be sickeningly bitter. As the fruit ripened, it would be collected by shaking the branches of the trees and harvesting the olives that fell. The olives would be placed into the olive mill. A person, or sometimes an animal, would push this pole and turn this rock to crush and grind the olives.

This smaller round rock was called a millstone. There were different shaped millstones to process different foods. Grains were processed with a millstone shaped like a large flat disk. But the millstone you see here was typical of what was used to process olives.

The olives were hard and inside the olive was an even harder pit. So it took a very heavy millstone and much work to grind the olives. Once the olives were thoroughly ground, you would have a paste with the texture and consistency of cooked oatmeal, but with a dark greenish-brown color.

Then the olive paste would be put in burlap-like sacks. The sacks would be stacked on top of each other. Then the pressing would begin. A beam would fit into a notch in a wall on one end, rest on top of the stack of sacks, and then a weight would be placed on the other end of the beam.

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This pressing was done in three stages. The first pressing with one weight on the beam. The second with two weights, and the third with three. The oil produced in each stage was different and used for a different purpose. More on that in a moment...

The common word in Jesus's day for olive press is an Aramaic word: *Gethsemane*. You may have heard of *The Garden of Gethsemane*... This Garden of the Olive Press was located at the foot of the Mount of Olives which was a hill covered with olive trees. It was the place where Jesus and his disciples went the night before he was crucified. What is interesting is that in a sense, Jesus was pressed three times that night while he was in the place where olives were pressed three times. The weight of a crisis was heavy on Jesus. He bore a very heavy burden that night. And three times he struggled under the stress of that weight.

Let's look at the historical record of that event. What occurred in Gethsemane that night is real history. It is also a picture of what the Lord has done to make a way for us to be right with the Father.

Garden narrative...

Matthew 26:36 | Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he told the disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." (CSB)

Just east of the temple in Jerusalem, there was a valley (Kidron Valley) and then a mountain.

John 18:1 | ... across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden... (CSB)

That small mountain was called the Mount of Olives and was covered in olive trees. Olive trees live for a very long time and some suggest that some of the olive trees of Jesus's day remain today.

At the foot of the mount, there was an olive press, much like this one. The place was called, "The Garden of Gethsemane," or the Garden of the Olive Press. Jesus and his disciples often visited this private garden, and they did so on the Thursday night before Christ was crucified.

Matthew 26:37–38 | Taking along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. He said to them, "I am deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me." (CSB)

Mark 14:33 | ... Peter, James, and John... (CSB)

Why was he "*sorrowful and troubled*?"

He has come to a long-awaited moment, THE pivotal moment in history. His entire earthly life has been lived for this moment. Jesus was born to die. And now is the time. Jesus knew that in about twelve hours, he will be nailed to the cross where he will suffer for six hours before dying of asphyxiation.

But while the physical pain and the emotional shame and trauma of crucifixion were certainly things to be dreaded, there was something much much worse.

Jesus, though he had never sinned, would bear the weight, the guilt, and the penalty of every sin ever committed and ever will be committed.

2 Corinthians 5:21 | [God] made the one who did not know sin, [Jesus], to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (CSB)

Jesus would hang on the cross, suffer, and die as our substitute.

Why was he *"deeply grieved to the point of death?"*

The Bible does not exaggerate! Jesus saw something that was so awful that it almost killed him. What did Jesus see?

He saw your sin... My sin...

There are two things here that are hard to understand but they are important...

- The perfection (holiness) of God...
- The sinfulness of man...

A. THE PERFECTION OF GOD...

We call this holiness. God, whether you are looking at the person of the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, is perfect. He has never sinned. He has never considered sin. There is no sin or even a shadow of sin in him.

Because God is perfect, perfectly holy, he cannot and will not tolerate sin. The prophet Habakkuk said it like this...

Habakkuk 1:13a | Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and you cannot tolerate wrongdoing... (CSB)

B. THE SINFULNESS OF MAN...

It is difficult for us to appreciate just how sinful we are. The Bible says even the best things about us are sinful. These "best things" are corrupted with selfish and sinful motives.

God says our sin deserves death.

Romans 6:23a | The wages of sin is death... (CSB)

That is really hard to understand. Here is my best short explanation...

God is the source of all life (eternal life). Sin separates us from God. So, since we are separated from the source of life, we are left with death (eternal death).

Another explanation is just to say that our sin has so corrupted us that a part of that corruption is that we cannot comprehend the sinfulness of our sin. I heard a preacher once tell a story about what happened to his first— ever brand-new car. His four-year-old son took a wire coat hanger out to the garage to decorate the car by scratching "art designs" on the hood and the trunk. The preacher was crushed. This "decoration" was going to cost a ton of money to repaint, and it would never be exactly right. He started to explain to his four-year-old just how badly the kid

had damaged the car, but he just couldn't do it. The four-year-old did not have the capacity to understand his misdeed. So, the father just picked up his son, hugged him, and told him not to decorate his dad's car ever again.

We are a lot like that four-year-old in that we just can't fully comprehend the sinfulness of our sin. Yet, our sin is sinful. And when Jesus got a glimpse of our sin, the thought of bearing that sin, for even a moment almost killed him with grief.

Here, though, is what we can know... We are guilty of sin and will stand guilty of sin forever. Nothing we can do can undo that! Our sin forever separates us from God, from life, and from eternal life. Left to our own devices, we have no hope.

Remember at the beginning when I told you: *There is revealed a way to be right with God apart from keeping the law* (Romans 3:21). We need this "way" because none of us have kept the law.

I want to give you some Bible facts/truths as we go through these verses to help us remember.

Bible Fact #1: Jesus hates our sin.

Matthew 26:39 | Going a little farther, he fell facedown and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (CSB)

Luke 22:41 | ... about a stone's throw [away]... (CSB)

Mark 14:35 | He went a little farther, fell to the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. (CSB)

In short, the cup represents the crucifixion.

This seems like an odd prayer for Jesus to pray! Is Jesus having second thoughts? Is Jesus considering not allowing the crucifixion? We must understand what Jesus was facing. We must understand this cup of suffering. This was much more than just the physical discomfort of crucifixion.

- All the sin of the world was distilled in that cup! [Adrian Rogers]
- (The cup contained all of the guilt of all of the sin of all of the world for all of history.)
- And this cup "contained the undiluted wrath of a sin— hating God." [Arthur Pink]
- Jesus was enduring our condemnation. [David Platt]

Let me show you how much agony Jesus suffered in this garden prayer...

Luke 22:43 | Then an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him. (CSB)

Luke 22:44 | Being in anguish, he prayed more fervently, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. (CSB)

This is a rare but real medical condition called *hematidrosis* that can be caused by extreme anguish or physical pain.

Now, I told you that at Gethsemane (olive press), the ground up olive paste was pressed three times. This is Jesus's first "pressing."

What exactly was Jesus asking his Father? Jesus is asking...

- Is there another way that people can be made right with the Father?
- Is there a way for people to be forgiven (saved from their sins) apart from the crucifixion?

The clear answer was: NO!

Matthew 26:40 | Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He asked Peter, "So, couldn't you stay awake with me one hour? (CSB)

Matthew 26:42 | Again, a second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." (CSB)

This is Jesus's second pressing.

Now, you might say: Many people have faced death without so much stress and anguish. Why is Jesus struggling with this?

First, know that Jesus, though he is God, is also fully human. He faced all the same emotions and felt all of the same pain, physical and mental, that we face.

But secondly, know Jesus's agony is not so much about the physical torment of the cross. What is going to happen on the cross is that when the guilt of our sin is placed on Jesus, the Father will forsake and abandon his Son.

Matthew 27:46 | About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (CSB)

This breach of the eternal fellowship of the Father and the Son is what Jesus fears. It had not been long since the Father had said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Matthew 17:5 | While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well— pleased. Listen to him!" (CSB)

And now, on the cross when Jesus bears the guilt of all sin, the Father will turn, abandon, forsake, reject the Son.

Why would Jesus undergo this extreme act of suffering?

Bible Fact #2: Jesus loves me and you.

Philippians 2:6–8 | who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross. (CSB)

Matthew 26:43–44 | And he came again and found them sleeping, because they could not keep their eyes open. After leaving them, he went away again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. (CSB)

The third pressing...

Jesus has reaffirmed his choice to die for our sins!

John 10:15 | Just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. (CSB)

John 10:18 | No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own... (CSB)

Daniel Akin wrote...

In the first garden, the garden of Eden, Adam said to the Father, "Not Your will but mine be done," and all of creation was plunged into sin. In this second garden, the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, the second Adam, says, "Not My will but Yours be done," and the redemption and salvation of all creation begins!

Eden brought death. Gethsemane begins new life.

We've had a lot of conversations about suicide in the last two weeks. Some people are wondering if their life is valuable. Is life worth living? If you are asking those questions, find your answer here...

Late on that Thursday night... In the Garden of the Olive Press... Under the greatest stress and strain in history... Sweating blood... Twelve hours from crucifixion... Crying out to the Father... Jesus decided your life was worth dying for!

Bible Fact #3: Jesus highly values your life.

Jesus said you are worth dying for. So, without question, your life is worth living!

Matthew 26:46 | Get up; let's go. See, my betrayer is near." (CSB)

Back to the olive press...

Just as the olives were pressed three times, Jesus was pressed three times as we have seen. The three pressings of the olives produced three different kinds of olive oil used for three different purposes...

The first pressing produced the best oil. Today we call this Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO). One of the primary uses of this oil was in worship. This first-oil was used as an offering to God when asking for the forgiveness of sins. Sometimes the oil was poured over the altar. Sometimes the oil was poured over other offerings. Sometimes it was baked into bread that was to be offered.

The second pressing... One of the primary uses of this oil was for lamps. Olive oil lamps provided light in the darkness. If the people of Jesus's day lit a building or their homes, they used olive oil lamps.

The third pressing... The primary use of the oil from the third pressing was the making of soap. They would burn soapwort bushes which produced an alkaline ash which was sort of like a powdered lye. They would mix the third-oil, ashes from the soapwort trees, and a little water, let it sit, and they had the first *Dove Soap Bar*.

It was not an accident that Jesus prayed these three prayers in the Garden of the Olive Press. The three oils from the three presses tell us three important truths about Christ and the crucifixion.

Good News from Jesus and the Olive Press

I. Jesus can be our sinless sacrifice for the penalty of sin.

Just as the first oil was used as an offering or sacrifice to God, so Jesus can be our offering and sacrifice before God.

This is gospel, the good news. We are guilty of sin and deserve eternal separation from God and eternal death. There is nothing we can do to overcome our guilt. We have to have a way to be right with God that is not by keeping the rules. (Because we have already failed there.) But Jesus can be our sacrifice and die for us, in our place, as our substitute. And he can be that if we trust him for that.

The Fact of Life: Either you will pay for your sin (eternal death), or Jesus will pay for your sins (crucifixion). *It is up to you.*

Here is a question we often ask people to help them understand where they stand with the Lord: *Suppose you were to die today and stand before God and he were to ask you: Why should I let you into heaven? What would you say?*

II. Jesus can be our light and guide through this dark world.

The oil of the first pressing was used as an offering. The oil of the second pressing was used for light (olive oil lamps). Jesus is our offering. AND Jesus is our light. (I told you it was no coincidence or accident that Jesus prayed this prayer in the Garden of the Olive Press.)

Not only does Jesus provide us with forgiveness, but he also provides us with direction and guidance. It is by God's wisdom that we can navigate the uncertainties of life. It is by God's wisdom that we can find marital peace and family happiness. It is by God's wisdom that we can know love, joy, peace, patience.

And becoming a child of God is not just about trusting his sacrifice, but it is about making him the Lord of life and following his light, guidance, and wisdom.

III. Jesus can be the soap that provides a fresh start.

So, the first oil was an offering, the second for light, the third for soap. And Jesus is our offering, our light... AND OUR SOAP!

Sometimes you just need a bath. You need a shower... Clean clothes... A new start to the day...

Nacogdoches, Jesus wants to be your offering and your light. But, then he wants to be your soap. For those who trust Jesus as their offering and choose to follow him as their light... He will give you a clean, fresh start...

Isaiah 1:18 | ... Though your sins are scarlet, they will be as white as snow.... (CSB)

Psalms 51:2 | [Oh Lord,] completely wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. (CSB)

Zechariah 13:1 | On that day a fountain will be opened ... to wash away sin and impurity. (CSB)

Jesus can give a fresh start: For your marriage... For your family... For your life...

Conclusion

What do we know? Jesus was pressed... Jesus chose to die for us and pay the penalty for our sins... Jesus was resurrected by the Father to offer us forgiveness, a fresh start, and eternal life...

So, there is hope...

I want Easter 2023 to count for you! Some need to trust and surrender... Some have trusted and surrendered, but you need a fresh start... Washed clean... Walking by the light of God's wisdom and God's word...

In Acts 22, Paul shares his testimony of how he came to know the Lord, was forgiven, and given a new life with a fresh start. The Bible says a man by the name of Ananias said to Paul...

Acts 22:16 | Why are you delaying? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name. (CSB)

And that is what I say to you today!