

Gethsemane – The Oil Press

Matthew 26:36-46

The Herald on Friday reported that a 35 year old man was pinned by a pallet containing hundreds of kilograms of olive oil in a workplace accident on Waiheke Island. The man was moving a pallet of olive oil off a truck. The loading mechanism on the truck failed and pinned the pallet against him. Hitting him about waist height it pushed him into a bank. Thanks to bystanders the man was freed from under the pellet, suffering injuries around his abdomen. He was flown to Auckland hospital in a serious condition. No doubt Worksafe NZ have been notified and are investigating. This story could be read as *'the revenge of the olive'* having been pressed so hard in order to squeeze the oil out of itself. The good news is that those around this man saw and heard his cry offering immediate assistance. Obviously, they were not asleep on the job. Incredibly helpful because if they didn't do for him as the man cried out he may have died. Unlike the disciples, Jesus' closest friends who were not able to be so attentive to Jesus being hard pressed, having the stuffing squeezed out of him in his single most agonizing moment to date in their relationship.

Gethsemane (v.36) was a garden located east of Jerusalem, beyond the Kidron Valley, at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

The name Gethsemane means oil press.

The Garden of Gethsemane received its name from the stone presses set up to extract oil from the olives gathered on the Mount of Olives, which was covered with them in Jesus time.

There were two main types of press in Jesus' time.

The first type was where the olives were gathered into rough sacks and stacked one on top of another. A beam was lowered onto the stack and increasing weight was added to the end of the beam to press oil from the olives- so, the more pressure, the more oil!

Another type of olive press was hewn from solid rock with a large stone roller manipulated by two people, crushing the olive to a pulp, which was then either trodden out or subjected to further pressing. The oil was what was most valuable about olives, but it could only be obtained through putting immense pressure on the olives, splitting, and breaking them so that they no longer resembled olives. Olives would be put through the same press or different presses up to three times in the process. So...

Olive Oil is produced under pressure - Jesus' Press

From the Mount of transfiguration, Mt Hermon in the north of Israel

[Matthew 17:1-13] where Jesus met and spoke with Moses and Elijah about his suffering and impending death. He has been on his final pressing journey via Galilee, Judea, Jericho, Bethany to another mount, Mount Zion, the city of Jerusalem, the place where the holy presence and power of God dwelt in the Temple, the city that had persecuted and killed many a prophet its history. A city with a mini mount just outside its gates, called Golgotha, a small hill that looked like a skull, the place of crucifixion, Jesus' destiny where the final squeeze of relentless pressure would be applied. But before that Jesus was to commence his Passion or suffering during a time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, taking with him his disciples so that he would not be alone.

Olive Oil is produced under pressure - The Disciples press

The disciples were feeling the pressure. Jesus had informed them that he must suffer and die. They were emotionally and mentally drawn, fatigued, tired and ready to sleep. They certainly were not in the frame of heart, mind and spirit to stay awake for an all night prayer session. Monks hadn't yet introduced chewing coffee beans to the church for use during their all night prayer vigils. The disciples, after celebrating the last supper and listening to Jesus' last mammoth teaching and prayer session finished off by a hymn, then walked to the Garden of Gethsemane at the mount of olives.

Jesus and the Disciples in the Press together

Together with Jesus leading the disciples, they enter Gethsemane –the oil press. The squeeze was on for both parties. *“Sit here while I go over there to pray. Stay here and keep watch with me.”* (v.36) *To pray* Jesus tells them, as in to offer earnest prayers to God, not light impersonal half hearted prayers. It is a tough moment, which called for selecting his three best disciples. Surely they would understand, and even through the darkness be aware of the importance of this moment as he began to be sorrowful and troubled (v37) full of heaviness, in great distress and anguish to the point of being depressed, which is only natural. Jesus was 33 years old. Who wants to die by crucifixion when you're only 33 and you've personally witnessed it before? Jesus was fast approaching his turning point in life. The squeeze was on. He was fighting the battle of his life due to the pressure. So, what do you do at such a time as this? You call out to your closest friends to help support you through your most difficult time. So Jesus grabbed his three closest friends for his toughest time of prayer yet, not wandering off alone this time, he desperately needed their company saying to

them, *“My soul is overwhelmed to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”* (v38) Why?

Because Jesus was not about to die a serene Martyr's death. He was no mere martyr; he was the lamb of God this Passover who was to once and for all bear the penalty of the sins of humanity. Even as the Son of God, his Father's wrath was about to be loosed on him in place of the entire human race. Which more than adequately explains why Jesus' soul is overwhelmed mentally, emotionally and spiritually to the point of death before he has even begun to endure the physical pain, torture, and suffering of an excruciating death on the cross. That is why he wanted the extra backup and support of his three closest disciples at this single most trying moment ever. This serves as a reminder to us to never abandon others who invite us in to their lives during difficult and trying times unless the Lord specifically tells you to practice tough love and not rescue a person who might otherwise be 'using you', so they get to learn an important lesson. This does not apply for instance to people suffering memory loss or the onset of dementia or Alzheimer's who are in a Gethsemane not of their own making. Supporting them and their family at such a time is crucial. Friends offering practical help, along with prayer support is immensely encouraging, even when the person has forgotten you and is in resident care.

If only the disciples had realised just how important it was. Such a moment in Jesus' life had been foreseen. The suffering servant of Isaiah 53:3 was a man of suffering, and familiar with pain, the Hebrew being used of both physical and mental pain. Surely they would get it when Jesus moves a little farther from the three. Where he fell to the ground (v.39) which was an act of throwing himself to the ground, prostrating himself, face in the dirt crying to Daddy, *“My Father if it is possible”*, in other words if you are able, as the all powerful, mighty, and strong God then do something here. You have all the power, which could be exercised so that I do not have to go through all that has been prophesied and spoken about me.

“If it is possible may this cup be taken from me”.

This cup metaphorically speaking is one's lot or experience, whether joyous or adverse, favourable or unfavourable, which God presents one to drink. In Jesus' case the cup was a symbol of deep sorrow and suffering because here it refers to his Father's face being turned away from him when he who had no sin was

made sin, as in a sin offering, for us...illustrated by Jesus final words cried out from the cross 3pm later that day. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v.46) What's the worst thing that has happened to you at 3pm. Young people come home from school or someone doesn't make your afternoon tea or coffee precisely as you'd like it? "Yet not as I will, but as you will." He prays the first of three times returning to the fab three who have fallen asleep after one hour. Jesus is highly disappointed at their vain attempt to remain awake. So he prayed for them *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."* (v.41)

To fall into temptation is to be attacked by temptation which here was the temptation to be unfaithful in face of the threatening circumstances confronting them. When our Spirit is under God's control, it strives against human weakness. This type of willing steadfast Spirit is illustrated by David in Psalm 51:10-12.

And off Jesus goes a second time to pray (v.42)

"My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." Pressed until there was no more left to give he goes to awaken the disciples having been strengthened by the Spirit of God, tried and tested, with a renewed vigour "Arise, wake up you guys and let's get going! (v.46)

The olive press and the believer

Following Jesus example, earnest prayer will have the effect of bringing you to your knees, even down to the ground to humble yourself before God, to know his will and purpose for your life, your circumstances. If we will accept God's will for us then we have the power of God within and upon us to be able to arise in faith and face any situation, any set of circumstances, no matter what they are, just like Jesus at Gethsemane who has been betrayed and his suffering at the hands of others is about to begin. So,

What is going to come out when you are squeezed and put under pressure?

While dwelling on this question I want you to know that wrestling with the issues is not unbelief. Jesus revealed this in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed the same thing 3 times over.

Remember, 'the press' is only so that we might *Rise* again in obedience to God's will, full of faith in his ultimate power, that gets us back up on our own two feet ready to face and live through what's coming. Sounds easy put like this. But let's be real here.

When we suffer, we can doubt: God's love for us; God's power to answer us; and even pretend that we're ok when we're not. It's only when faith and circumstances are difficult that we have the opportunity to become faithful –literally full of faith just like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to the point of being able to declare to others- Rouse yourselves, Arise and let's Go do this thing!

Therefore, do not give up on God's love and God's power. Don't fall into the trap of thinking and saying "I don't want to suffer in any way let alone die for my faith" when it was Jesus who lead the way for us to willingly declare "Yet not what I want, but, what you want!"

Our faith is most persuasive when it is tested under intense pressure just as an olive in the press to extract its oil. Beginning with Jesus' example to you in the Garden of Gethsemane have a think about those people whose faith made the greatest impression on you. Ask yourself, was it their trust in good times or in hard times? When faith in a loving God was easy, or, was it when their faith was deeply challenged?

The harder it is to trust in God, the more we need to trust in God. Trials and tribulations, pressure and suffering, are a part of the human condition of which Christians are not immune and do not escape. However, like David we can ask God to create a willing spirit within to sustain us along with the joy of knowing that God is with us through times of pressure and suffering, that is only permitted, as it was in Jesus' case, because the final outcome will be good, even great. (James 1:2-3; Romans 8:28)

Let's Pray: Bring your own particular need to God now as we pray Christ's prayer in Gethsemane remembering God is with you in this and cares for you:

Abba Father, Everything is possible for you [thank God for his power and the unquenchable hope we have in prayer];
Take this cup from me [very simply and with a childlike faith ask God to take your problem and sort it out]
Yet not as I will, but as your will." [Lift your hands to in a position of surrender and express your costly trust and faithfulness to God]