

Agony in Gethsemane: The Cup, The Cry, and the Cross (Part 1)

Introduction

The Text

³⁹ And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” ⁴¹ And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” ⁴³ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴ And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵ And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” (Luke 22:39–46)

Reading Luke and Climbing Half Dome

- A. As we edge now closer and closer to the cross—the final hours of Jesus’ life on earth—it’s as if the wonder associated with His person and work is also correspondingly amplified. Every step we take towards calvary offers up an even more breathtaking vista of our Savior’s glory.
 - 1. And as we come now to this scene in the garden of Gethsemane it is no different. What we see of Jesus here and His titanium resolve to save sinners even in the face of His own demise, it means everything.

- B. So, listen, some of you who have been with me in Luke’s gospel for the last 5 years or so, you may be thinking: “Look at this! We have just a couple chapters left. We’ll be done soon after Easter, right?!”
 - 1. Well, let me try to set your expectations aright. These last two chapters, these final scenes in the gospel, this is what it’s all about, this is what everything has been building towards. So, I’m sorry to disappoint, but there’s no way I’m going to speed up now.
 - a. To do so, in my estimation, would be like putting in all the effort to climb up half dome only to turn around and hurry back down the moment you get up. That’s not why you climb! At least it’s not why I climb. I climb so I can see. So I can take it all in. Man, I’ve done it twice, and both times, I’m thinking can’t I just camp out up here? Like Peter on the mount of transfiguration. You remember that? “This is so glorious, let’s just set up tents right now and build a life up here!” That’s what you do it for.

- C. So if you thought I was slow before, I am especially uninterested in speeding up now. I honestly don’t know how long we’ll remain in Luke’s gospel, but as I look ahead to these last couple chapters, I have a feeling this is going to be one of the best years yet! ;)

- D. In that spirit, I'm going to take this text before us now and divide it into three weeks I think. I'm calling the sermons by the title: "Agony in Gethsemane: The Cup, the Cry, and the Cross." And we're just going to take those one at a time.
1. So this morning it's The Cup. And with that, as will become plain as we go along, we're really going to be talking about Jesus' agony here. What is He dealing with? What is He so worked up about?
 - a. So I've got two headings under this first part. I want us to see: (1) That He Is in Agony; and (2) Why He Is in Agony. So let's dive in!

(1) That He Is in Agony

- A. I'll need to go quick here as there's much more I want to cover under heading two, but, nonetheless we need to be sure we see this and take in something of the full weight of it.

The Gospel Writers Describe It

- A. The first thing to notice is that Luke simply tells of our Savior's state there in [v. 44](#): "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly . . ."
1. It's the Greek word *agōnia*, and it's defined as: "apprehensiveness of mind, esp. when faced with impending ills, distress, anguish" (BDAG).
 - a. This word is found only here in the New Testament and rightly so. For I dare say there has never been an agony experienced quite like the one experienced in our text here by our Lord. This is a unique and devastating agony.
- B. The other gospel accounts describe it similarly. Take [Matt. 26:37](#) as an example: There in Gethsemane Matthew tells us " . . . he began to be sorrowful and troubled."
1. "[S]orrowful" [Gk. *lupeō*]. It means to be grieved, to be distressed in mind or spirit, to be in pain. His heart is being torn in two.
 2. "[T]roubled" [Gk. *adēmoneō*]. It means to be very heavy, to be depressed or dejected, to be full of anguish or sorrow. There's a weight around His neck and His soul is hunched over under the burden of it.

Jesus Speaks of It

- A. But, now, here's what we also need to see. If we read on in Matthew's account here, it's not just the gospel writers who are telling us of this agony. Jesus Himself begins to express it, describe it, even break down about it.
1. Look at [Matt. 26:38](#) now: "Then he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.'"

- a. Jesus one-ups Matthew’s earlier description here. “[V]ery sorrowful” [Gk. *perilupos*]. It’s a word related to *lupeō* but much stronger. It means to be greatly grieved, exceedingly sorrowful.
 - b. And then, as if there were any doubt, to accent it to the extreme, to make sure we don’t miss what He’s feeling here, Jesus adds this: “even to death.” “My soul is in so much turmoil within me right now, I feel like I could die.”
- B. You know, sometimes we use this idea flippantly in our own conversations. So when we’re really hungry, we say: “I’m starving.” But we’re not really starving, we’re not really on the brink of death.
- 1. Other times we use this language in earnestness. We are going through something so challenging, so hard, we feel like we could die, we may even want to.
 - a. This gets closer to what Jesus is saying here, to be sure, but, as we’ll soon see, there is something unmistakably unique about the pain He’s experiencing, the anguish, the agony.

We Can All Plainly See It

- A. The last thing we must note is that His agony isn’t just described for us here, whether by gospel writer or Jesus Himself. No, no. We see it clear as day, don’t we?
- 1. So He says: “I feel like I could die.” Well, He looks like it too. His grief, His great distress, it’s not only churning somewhere deep within Him. It’s also throwing His whole being, soul and body into convulsions as it were. This isn’t just mental, emotional, spiritual anguish. It’s erupting out into the physical dimension as well.
- B. So we read of the Son of God here in this olive tree grove stumbling about like a man attempting to walk on quaking earth; staggering like a battered boxer one punch away from the mat; swaying and bent over like a root-tired tree before a violent gale.
- 1. Feeling the sheer dread of it all, He promptly puts the disciples in one place and then drags his weary feet a short distance from that only to there fall on His knees, face to the dirt. That’s the picture.
 - a. We see the pain. We see the death. And, of course, Luke, takes it a step further for us in that vivid description he gives there in the latter part of v. 44: “And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”
 - i. Whether this is meant to be a simile here or it’s describing some literal condition, the import is essentially the same. As one commentator writes: “Jesus’ inner torment [is manifesting] itself in physical trauma” (PNTC). He’s not just talking about feeling like He’s dying. He looks like it as well.
- C. And so the question is: What is happening here?

1. What kind of posture is this for a King—on His knees, face down, so stressed blood is oozing out His pores, trembling with terror? Shouldn't a king be standing strong and proud—chest puffed and face steeled—unmoved by any wind of opposition?
 - a. Is this not the One through Whom the heavens and the earth were made ([John 1:3](#))? So what's He doing in the dirt?
 - b. Is this not the One who gives life and breath to every living thing and upholds it all by the word of His power ([Heb 1:3](#))? So what's He doing pleading here like a beggar?
 - c. Is this not the One who spent His whole ministry healing and restoring others ([Luke 4:40](#))? So what's He doing sweating blood and evidently on the edge of death?
 - i. Why is He in such agony? Well, for this we move to heading two . . .

(2a) Why He Is in Agony – 3 Hints

- A. In our text, I see three hints towards an answer, each one zeroing closer in than that last. Let's look at them now one by one . . .

Hint #1: The Mount

- A. With this I simply want to draw your attention to the location in which all of this is taking place. It's not irrelevant. Luke says it this way for us in [v. 39](#): "[And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives . . .](#)"
- B. Now the Mount of Olives was essentially a ridge running north-south about 2 miles long, just east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley.
 1. It was named, obviously, for the large number of olive trees which grew on it due to its limestone and, therefore, quite fertile soil.
 2. But now this mount, it should be noted, not only has rich soil, it also has rich significance with regard to the unfolding of redemptive history in the biblical tradition. (I can only touch on part of it here, but we may wrap around in a couple of weeks and fill this out even more.)
- C. For now, I simply want to bring out three times this mount makes an appearance in the Old Testament, all of these, again, hint us towards something of what our Savior is experiencing here—why He is in agony.

Appearance #1: 2 Samuel 15:30 - A Story of Rejection

- A. Here we see David, God's anointed king there in Jerusalem, fleeing the city. Why? Because Absalom—a member of his own household, his own flesh and blood, his own son—has turned on him, and made a run on the throne and he's gotten the people of Israel to go along with him.

1. And on the day when all of this is coming to a head, we read that David, the true king, crosses over the “brook Kidron” (v. 23) and then 2 Sam. 15:30: “David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went.”
- B. And now, again, here is Jesus, about 1000 years later, the greater David, God’s anointed King par excellence, rejected by His own people, turned on by those who would rather be king themselves than honor and serve Him.
1. Coming out from the Last Supper, John tells us Jesus and His disciples (much like David and his loyal followers), cross the “brook Kidron” (John 18:1) and head up the Mount of Olives.
 - a. This soil still wet with David’s tears as it were, no doubt would freshly remind Jesus of the sort of rejection He Himself was soon to face in full.

Appearance #2: 2 Kings 23:13 - A Story of Idolatry

- A. Fast forward, David would regain the throne, and, soon after, his son Solomon would take his place. And wise though he was, he was also a fool and given over to idolatry.
1. He had a thing for the ladies, and to please his many foreign wives we’re told that he set up pagan places of worship for them. Where, you might ask? On the Mount of Olives.
- B. So terrible was all of this that the mount itself became known as the “mount of corruption” as it’s called in 2 Kings 23:13.
1. Josiah is on a holy rampage of reform in effort to bring people back to YHWH, and we read this: “And the king [Josiah] defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.”
- C. And now, again, here is Jesus, on this very mount, still about 1000 years later, no doubt freshly reminded of the idolatry and iniquity that have characterized His own people through the centuries.
1. And here, then, He comes to face once more the fact that He will not just be rejected by these people, He will bear their sin.

Appearance #3: Ezekiel 11:23 - A Story of Judgment

- A. Fast forward a few hundred years in the history of Israel. God’s people have committed sin after sin after sin and God has finally had enough. So the prophet Ezekiel speaks of God’s glory lifting up and departing from the temple, lingering at the east gate, and eventually leaving altogether.
1. And in Ezek. 11:23, he describes the last stage in that development: “And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.” “What mountain is that?” you ask. The Mount of Olives.

- B. And now, again, here is Jesus, now about 600 years later, on this mount, no doubt freshly reminded that this was the last stop God's glory-presence made before it abandoned Judah altogether.
 - 1. And here, then, He comes to face once more the fact that He will not just be rejected by these people and bear their sin, He will be judged by God in their place. He will experience the abandonment, the forsakenness, the departure of the glory-presence of God on that dreaded cross.
- C. All of this, it seems to me, would certainly weighing on Him in these moments. Here, then, is the first hint towards an answer as to why the agony?

Hint #2: The Place

- A. But now we move on to Hint #2, and we'll see it takes all of this a step further. You see, Jesus isn't experiencing all of this merely in the Mount of Olives in general, He's in a particular place within that Mount.
 - 1. This is what Luke mentions there in [Luke 22:40](#): "And when he came to the place . . ."
 - a. Now, obviously, Luke doesn't spell out for us just where this place is, but, of course, the other gospel writers do. And even if you're new to Christianity and the Bible, you've probably heard of it before: it's the garden of Gethsemane. As Matthew writes: "Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane . . ." ([Matt. 26:36](#)).
- B. And I bring this out here only for one reason. The name of this place is itself also a hint as to why Jesus is in agony. "Gethsemane"—it comes from the Aramaic, meaning "oil press."
 - 1. It likely indicates that there was some sort of a garden area here among the olive groves on the Mount of Olives where olive oil was prepared . . . pressed—where they'd roll these massive stones over the olives to grind them to a pulp.
 - 2. But here now we see this also serves as a fitting metaphor for what is befalling our Savior in this very place. He is being pressed, crushed to a pulp. His heart is being wrung out like a sponge . . . so much so that His internal anguish is coming out through His pores.

Hint #3: The Cup

- A. And now, brothers and sisters, we've arrived at Hint #3 and the place I want to settle in for just a little bit. Here at last we've reached this idea of The Cup.
 - 1. So we read in [Luke 22:41-42](#): " ⁴¹And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴²saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.'"
 - a. There's a cup here. And Jesus doesn't want it. It's causing Him great agony. He'd rather die than drink it. So what is it? What's in this cup?

B. You know, it's a little detail that we might pass right on by, but truly this idea of a cup here is loaded with rich biblical significance.

1. Sometimes the Old Testament speaks of a cup in a positive sense.

a. Perhaps the most famous example is from [Ps. 23](#): "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows" (v. 5). Here it's abundance enjoyed at the hands of a good and gracious God.

b. Similarly we read in [Ps. 16:5](#): "The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup . . ." It's a good thing. He's a good God. Satisfying. We drink down blessing.

2. But other times, indeed the great majority of times, the Old Testament speaks of a cup in a negative sense—a cup which also comes from God, though it is not one of abundance and blessing, but one of wrath and cursing.

C. And it's, quite obviously, to this cup which Jesus refers here. But all I want to do, to help you get this, to help you feel this, is just read you some of these texts, with minimal commentary.

1. The way I'm seeing it, with each text I read it's like I'm pouring a little bit more into this cup that Jesus is here going to have to drink.

a. I think when you really see this, by the time we're done, you will have no more confusion as to why Jesus is in agony on the Mount of Olives here in [Luke 22](#), why He's pleading and bleeding in Gethsemane: "Take this cup from Me!"

b. And hopefully you'll also have fresh appreciation for what it cost Him to save you.

D. Even still, this is just a sampling of texts here, but let me read . . .

1. [Ps. 11:4-6](#): " ⁴The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD'S throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man. ⁵ The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. ⁶ Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup."

a. This is a cup the Lord hands to the wicked. It's full of fire and sulfur and scorching wind.

2. [Ps. 75:7-8](#): " ⁷ [I]t is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another. ⁸ For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs."

a. The cup is given in judgment. Again, it's not for the righteous here, but for the wicked. And God will make them drink it down to the dregs.

3. [Isa. 51:17-20](#), here the prophet speaks of God's judgment of the Jews in the exile like this: " ¹⁷ Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand

of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering. ¹⁸ There is none to guide her among all the sons she has borne; there is none to take her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up. ¹⁹ These two things have happened to you— who will console you?— devastation and destruction, famine and sword; who will comfort you? ²⁰ Your sons have fainted; they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the LORD, the rebuke of your God.”

- a. This is the “cup of his wrath,” the “cup of staggering,” and it leads to “devastation and destruction.” To drink from it is to be “rebuke[d]” by God.
4. Jer. 25:15-16, 28-29, again referring to God’s judgment of Judah in the exile and beyond that on all the nations for their sin, the prophet writes: “ ¹⁵ Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: ‘Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. ¹⁶ They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them. . . . ²⁸ And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: You must drink! ²⁹ For behold, I begin to work disaster at the city that is called by my name, and shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the LORD of hosts.””
 - a. There’s a sword in this cup. And it’s coming, not just for the Jews, but for the world!
 5. Last one, and this one’s rated R so just be prepared, Ezek. 23:28-35, the prophet is picturing Israel and Judah as sisters and he says this: “ ²⁸ For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will deliver you into the hands of those whom you hate, into the hands of those from whom you turned in disgust, ²⁹ and they shall deal with you in hatred and take away all the fruit of your labor and leave you naked and bare, and the nakedness of your whoring shall be uncovered. Your lewdness and your whoring ³⁰ have brought this upon you, because you played the whore with the nations and defiled yourself with their idols. ³¹ You have gone the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand. ³² Thus says the Lord GOD: “You shall drink your sister’s cup that is deep and large; you shall be laughed at and held in derision, for it contains much; ³³ you will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow. A cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria; ³⁴ you shall drink it and drain it out, and gnaw its shards, and tear your breasts; for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. ³⁵ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, you yourself must bear the consequences of your lewdness and whoring.”
 - a. It’s a “cup of horror and desolation.” He’s talking about their idolatry, spiritual adultery, and how they’d forgotten Him and cast Him behind their backs and this cup that’s going to rip them up from the inside out is consequence for that.
- E. And this is the cup being placed by the Father into the hand of the Son in our text.
1. Why is Jesus in agony here? Because this is what He’s being asked to drink. He will be treated as the wicked, as the sinner, as the idolater, as the spiritual whore.
- F. This is why He’s sweating blood. Listen, He’s not ultimately here concerned about the physical torment of the cross.

1. Would that be horrible, of course, but plenty of criminals had to undergo that. And, indeed, many martyrs would face violent deaths themselves, with greater courage it would seem than Jesus Himself, were that all this cup entailed—just physical pain.
 2. No, what we see clearly, beyond a shadow of a doubt here, is that that which is causing the Son this dreadful agony here in these moments is not what Jerusalem or Rome would do to Him with a few lashes or nails, but what His Father would do to Him when the sins of all the world are placed on His back and He would have to suffer under the holy, righteous, infinite wrath of God due them.
 - a. So one commentator writes: “Why was Jesus in such perturbation as he faced death? Others, including many who owe their inspiration to the Master, have faced death quite calmly. It cannot be death as such that caused this tremendous depth of feeling. Rather it was the kind of death that Jesus would die, that death in which he was forsaken by God (Mark 14:34), in which God made him to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21)” (TNTC).
- G. And yet still, Jesus, there in Gethsemane, contemplating this, pleading and bleeding over this, rises up from His knees and face, with fresh resolve to drink it down.
1. So we read in John’s account, when Judas comes with the crowd and things, and Peter tries to fend them off with a sword, Jesus responds, [John 18:11](#): “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”
 2. And then, later in John’s gospel, I wonder if you ever noticed how John describes Jesus’ final act on the cross. What does He do? He takes a drink, [John 19:28-30](#): “²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”
 - a. On the cross Jesus drank down to the dregs the sour wine of God’s wrath from the cup of His Father’s fury . . . for the sake of you and I.

(2b) Why He Is in Agony - 1 Fundamental Reason

Constrained by Love

- A. And that last piece really leads us to the final thing I want to say. You see we’ve been after the answer to the question why? Why the agony, why the distress?
1. And, in a sense, I suppose we’ve answered it. He’s going to face the wrath of God against sin. The cumulative fury of a holy God gathering up for millennia on either side of the cross, is going to explode on Him in a single moment there at Calvary. That’s enough to make the Son of God heave with horror. No doubt.

2. But we still really haven't come to the fundamental reason, have we? You see, as the late Ray Dillard wrote: "Jesus was the one human being . . . on whom that cup had absolutely no claim whatsoever . . . He had kept God's law in its entirety, perfectly. There was no sin in Him."
- B. So then, you see, again we are left with the question: Why? Why drink the cup if it has no claim on you? Why go through the agony of it all if, technically, you don't have to?
1. Answer: In a word, love. At the end of the day that was the only constraint. Love. He didn't have to do it. But He wanted to.
- C. The Father and the Son conspire in those moments in Gethsemane to go through with their plan prepared from all eternity to redeem fallen sinners.
1. The Father didn't take the cup of wrath from the hand of His Son, though Jesus begged Him to do so, so that He could take that same cup from the hands of you and I.
 2. And Jesus willingly drank down the cup of His Father's curse in our place so that He could turn and offer the cup of His Father's blessing to us instead.
 - a. That's what He was referring to just hours before in the upper room around the table of the last supper. "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).
 - i. What is that? We get all weirded out. Cup of your blood? What are you saying? This is what He's talking about. "This cup will be a cup of cursing for Me, but in that it will become (as Paul calls it in 1 Cor. 10:16) 'a cup of blessing' for you."

Lift Your Glass

- A. So, listen, I've got one application point for you, and it comes from Ps. 116:12-13. There the Psalmist says this: "¹² What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? ¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD."
- B. Come to Jesus, take up the cup He offers, the cup of salvation, drink in His grace, call upon His name. God is your Father now. You are forgiven and free, welcomed at the table. Give thanks for all He has done!