

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 26:36-46 | The Garden of Gethsemane
Sunday March 22, 2026

WELCOME:

- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- My sermon notes are in the foyer—please take them home with you.

REVIEW:

We continue our verse-by-verse exposition of Matthew's Gospel this morning.

We are in the last 24 hours of Jesus' life—this timeframe is called “The Passion.”

Last Sunday, after Jesus instituted the first Lord's Supper, we watched Jesus and the Disciples walk from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives.

As they were walking, Jesus dropped another bomb—saying that all of them would betray Him this very night.

This comes on the heels of the first bomb, which told the Disciples that there was a traitor in the group—referring to Judas Iscariot.

Instead of listening to the Lord, the Disciples, especially Peter, chose to argue with the Lord.

Last Week KEYPOINT 1:

When we fail to listen, we will fail the test.

Peter's epic failure will happen in just a few short hours.

Last Week KEYPOINT 2:

Pride is faith in ourselves.

When we have faith in ourselves, we need to be humbled.
Peter is not a humble man.

Peter convinced himself that he had the wherewithal to never betray or deny the Lord Jesus in his own strength.

Peter will be tested

At this point, we may ask ourselves why life is filled with so many trials.

Last Week KEYPOINT 3:

God aligns His people through tests, trials, and hardships.

We also learned the reason for hard times in life.

Jesus said, “You will have suffering in this world.” (John 16:33)

There is no way around suffering.

Jesus didn't come from Heaven to give us a wonderful life—He came to save sinners.

The wonderful life will come—but it's not today.

We also learned through Peter that we tend to make life harder than it needs to be.

Not only by *not* listening, but also by *not* repenting.

Last Week KEYPOINT 4:

Repentance brings alignment.

When you feel a disconnect between you and God, or that your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, the first thing we are to do is change our ways through repentance.

This disconnect isn't coming from God; it's coming from us.

INTRODUCTION:

Before we begin our examination of this passage, I'd like to give a disclaimer.

As Christians, we believe that God's Word is authoritative.

Our statement of faith says this:

“The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.” (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith).

Yet, although that is very true, because all of Scripture is inspired, some Scripture passages are more important than others.

When we read the Bible, we want to make sure that we're reading it correctly and not flatly.

There is a depth (multiple layers) within the tapestry of truth that runs throughout Genesis-Revelation.

We want to understand what we're reading—because if we read something incorrectly or impose our opinion on the passage, this will lead to an incorrect view of God, which will have negative consequences.

For example, there are many genres in the Bible—law, wisdom, narrative, prophecy, and apocalyptic literature.

We can't read all these books the same way—we must read them differently and correctly, depending on the genre.

I give this disclaimer because today, we come to a narrative that seems to cry out, “Take off your shoes, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

I'm not referring to Moses' meeting with the Lord at the burning bush, but rather the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

I usually don't quote people - I prefer to use cross references

† Charles H. Spurgeon wrote of this passage, “Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord’s life on earth. This is a mystery like that which Moses saw when the bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation, more than for human language.”

† William Barclay said, “Surely this is a passage we must approach upon our knees.”

† D. A. Carson declared, “As his death was unique, so also was his anguish; and our best response to it is hushed worship.”

We are attempting to read and respond to Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane this morning.

It’s important that we acknowledge that although we’ll look at this passage verse by verse, we must first admit that we cannot adequately understand what is going on between God the Son and God the Father.

As we read this passage, it’s like we continue to eavesdrop on the most intense prayer ever uttered by human lips.

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God’s Word.

SCRIPTURE:

† **Matthew 26:36**— Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he told the disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

† **Matthew 26:37**— Taking along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

- † **Matthew 26:38**—He said to them, “I am deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me.”
- † **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.”
- † **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?”
- † **Matthew 26:41**—Stay awake and pray, so that you won’t enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”
- † **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.”
- † **Matthew 26:43**—And he came again and found them sleeping, because they could not keep their eyes open.
- † **Matthew 26:44**—After leaving them, he went away again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.
- † **Matthew 26:45**—Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? See, the time is near. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.
- † **Matthew 26:46**—Get up; let’s go. See, my betrayer is near.”
- † **PRAY:**
Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:11)

EXEGESIS:

Last Sunday, we eavesdropped on a very interesting conversation between Peter and Jesus.

They celebrated the first Lord's Supper and were walking about a mile from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives.

The mountain is obviously named after its olive groves.

It also has a particular garden called Gethsemane that Jesus was particularly fond of.

This is where we pick up the narrative today.



Matthew 26:36— *Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane,*

The name *Gethsemane* means “olive” or “oil press.”

This garden probably belonged to a Believer who allowed Jesus to use it as a place to get away with His Disciples.

Today, there is a church called the Church of All Nations, built over a fourth-century Byzantine (Turkish) church, which people believe is the site of Gethsemane.

As you read Scripture, gardens are mentioned by name.

The Garden of Gethsemane comes to mind, but so does the Garden of Eden.

Both of these gardens are really important to God's plan of redemption.

The story of salvation (eternal life) begins in Eden when Adam failed his test.

In Gethsemane, God the Father gives mankind a do-over.

Jesus (the second Adam) is now going to do what Adam did not.

What didn't Adam do? Answer: Obey.

Adam tried to usurp God's authority to determine what is good and evil, but God never gave him that right—God alone has that right.

Obedience is the fruit that comes out of the heart of a Believer in trusting God with what He says.

And it's through *perfect* obedience, Jesus reverses the spiral of sin and death.

 **Matthew 26:36**— *and (Jesus) told the disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”*

It is likely that the garden had a gate and was fenced in to keep animals and thieves out.

Jesus asked His Disciples to sit near the gate—possibly so that no one would disturb Him as He prays.

 **Matthew 26:37**—*Taking along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee,*

The sons of Zebedee are James and John—“The sons of thunder.”

The first thing to notice is that Jesus doesn't want to be alone.

He has the eleven Disciples with Him—remember that Jesus dismissed Judas Iscariot before He instituted the Lord's Supper.

But Jesus chooses His inner circle—Peter, James, and John to come further into the Garden with Him.

Why does Jesus do this?

It tells us something about godly relationships.

Jesus poured His life into twelve men—with one man an unbeliever and trader.

However, although Jesus treated everyone fairly, He didn't treat everyone equally.

He spent most of His time with Peter, James, and John—and ultimately Peter.

What's this tell us?

It tells us that if the very Son of God had a community of people around Him, and an inner circle of friends, and ultimately, an even closer friend.

Let me suggest this pattern to you that comes from this passage:

As a Christian, the church is your Twelve—it's your primary community.

The inner circle, represented by Peter James and John, are the people you share life with and trust.

The one, represented by Peter, is your spouse if you're married.

If you are single, widowed, or divorced, there should be someone in the church community whom you enjoy and trust at the deepest level of friendship.

KEYPOINT 1:

We are not designed to do life alone.

One of the primary reasons for loneliness and depression is a lack of community.

God has built community into the very fabric of our DNA.

Not only do we see that in the Trinity, but here in Jesus' humanity.

Because look what happens next...

Matthew 26:37—~~he~~ ^{Jesus} began to be sorrowful and troubled.

It was as if Jesus felt free enough to become more vulnerable with Peter, James, and John rather than with the whole group.

NLT— and he became anguished and distressed.

LSB—began to be grieved and distressed.

The Greek verbs here reveal that Jesus was deeply grieved and without hope.

It's hard to understand how the Lord God Almighty can be "hopeless," yet in His humanity at this moment, He clearly is. —but no sin.

In His grief and hopelessness, He needed to have His closest friends with Him.

He needed to share His emotions with them—and we may be uncomfortable with that, but that's what's happening at this moment.

Although Jesus has over 150 titles in Scripture, His favorite title for Himself is "The Son of Man."

The Son of Man represents His dual natures—both His divinity and His humanity.

Jesus is fully God and fully human.

At this moment, we see Jesus' humanity like never before.

We've seen His humanity in the past...

We know that Jesus was born of a woman and was laid in a manger at his birth (Luke 2:7).

We are told that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.” (Luke 2:52).

We know that Jesus got hungry while fasting in the wilderness for forty days and nights (Luke 4:2)

Jesus also got thirsty and asked the Samaritan woman at the well for a drink of water (John 4:7)

We know that Jesus got tired and fell asleep on a boat in the Sea of Galilee (Luke 8:23)

We also know that Jesus cried over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and at Lazarus death (John 11:35).

However, today, Jesus doesn't only weep—he weeps with tears of blood (Luke 22:44).

The intensity of His prayer was so strong that the capillaries in His forehead burst.

Before the crown of thorns was beaten into Jesus' forehead, streams of blood cascaded down His cheeks.

The medical term for this phenomenon is “diapedesis.” (die-uh-ped-dee-sis)

It describes the discharge of blood through the skin, which is typically triggered by extreme emotional or physical stress.

Jesus confesses how stressed He is.

Matthew 26:38—He said to them, “I am deeply grieved to the point of death.”

Is death a hopeful situation?

In other words, “My heart is heavy to the point of death” or “my heart is ready to break with grief”.

Jesus is experiencing an “agony that threatens life itself.”

Did you know that in rare cases, strong emotions like fear, sorrow, or anger can actually cause death?

These emotions trigger physical reactions in the body, especially in the heart—and the heart can’t handle those intense emotions and literally stops beating.

This is how Jesus is feeling At this moment.

Nowhere else in the Gospels do we see the Lord Jesus Christ more vulnerable.

Jesus admits to His closest friends that His grief is about to kill Him—and that’s why Peter, James, and John are there.

Nobody should go through grief and hopelessness alone—not even the very Son of God.

The question becomes why?

Why is Jesus, as the perfect human, so grieved that He may die?

After all, history records countless stories about war heroes and martyrs who willingly gave their lives with boldness.

Why does it seem that Jesus is anything but courageous at this moment?

Are we seeing some flaw in His character?

The answer doesn’t have to do with His physical death—it has to do with a spiritual reality.

It has to do with Jesus becoming sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21—He (God the Father) made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us...

This means that God the Father made God the Son to be regarded and treated as “sin” even though He Himself never sinned (Heb. 4:15).

Galatians 3:13—Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,

Jesus was not a sinner, therefore He couldn't be punished for any sin of His own.

Instead, the Father treated Him as if He were a ^{criminal} sinner by charging to His judicial account the sins of everyone who would ever believe.

A sin is a cosmic crime against God the Father—just as crimes must be punished to uphold the law here in the VV, how much more must justice be served before a holy God.

“To be made sin” means that all of our sins were charged to Jesus as if He had personally committed them.

Every sinful thought, deed, and action that every Believer has ever committed or will commit will be transferred to God the Son on a Roman cross.

In doing so, the full fury of the Father's holy wrath will be unleashed on Jesus' human body.

The cross is how the Father's justice will be served, God's wrath on sin extinguished (propitiation), and how Believers are forgiven.

Why must it be this way? Because mankind sinned, a man must pay for sin.

But it can't be just any man.

It must be a perfect man because God the Father is perfect—and perfection is the Father's standard for eternal life.

Adam was created perfectly and had the ability to live in perfect obedience, but when he sinned, his sin was passed down to us.

That's why our Savior couldn't come from here—He had to come from outside of here.

Jesus had to come from Heaven and be born of a virgin to bypass human sin.

So why is Jesus overwhelmed with grief and hopelessness at this moment?

Because Jesus confronted an agony that no other human could ever experience.

Jesus knows that not only will His remaining Disciples abandon Him, but God the Father will as well.

The thought of His Father turning His back on Him for the first time in eternity is more than Jesus can bear.

Jesus will be so identified with the sinfulness of sin that everyone, including angels and His Father, will abandon Him.

 **Habakkuk 1:13**—*Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.*

We cannot comprehend the depth of Jesus' agony, because, as the sinless Son of God, He was able to perceive the horror of sin in a way we cannot.

This mystery is too profound for us to comprehend.

† **KEYPOINT 2:**

Jesus doesn't grieve physical death—He grieves the spiritual punishment that must first take place.

† **Matthew 26:38**—*Remain here and stay awake with me."*

Jesus gives Peter, James, and John two commands: 1) Stay put 2) Stay awake.

Jesus did not ask the three disciples to pray with Him—this is not a prayer meeting.

Why not? Because no one else could join Jesus at this moment. Why's that?

Because Jesus is the only one who was qualified to take on the elect's sin.

It's the same reason that darkness covered the Earth when God the Father punished Jesus on the Roman cross.

Nobody could see what was happening.

† **Matthew 26:39**—*Going a little farther, he fell facedown and prayed,*

Although the Disciples are close by, Jesus needed to pray alone.

At this moment, God the Son is expressing His innermost thoughts and struggles to God the Father.

No one knows the Father like the Son, and no one knows the Son like the Father (Matt. 11:27).

There is an intimacy within the Godhead that none of us will ever understand.

Notice the physical position in which Jesus prays.

This is the only time in all of Scripture when we read of Jesus falling on His face and prostrating Himself before His Father. Why?

Because He is facing the most severe temptation of His life—which is to bypass the cross.

Have you ever noticed that the more serious your prayers are, the more humble you become?

It's one thing to sit in a chair with your head bowed; it's another to throw yourself facedown in the dirt.

 **Matthew 26:39**—“My Father,

Jesus doesn't pray to “the” Father—He prays to “my” father.

He uses a first-person personal pronoun.

In other words, Jesus is not praying to Someone He doesn't know—He is praying to the One who knows Him best.

What does Jesus pray for?

 **Matthew 26:39**— if it is possible,

Jesus is obviously speaking from His human nature, because there is no “if” when it comes to His divine nature.

Jesus is humble in His posture, and now He is humble in His tone, “If it's possible.”

† **Matthew 26:39**—*let this cup pass from me.*

Just as the cup was a metaphor of Jesus blood in the new covenant of grace during the Lord's Supper—this cup is also a metaphor

In the Old Testament, the cup symbolizes divine wrath and God's judgment.

† **Psalm 75:7 NLT**—*It is God alone who judges;
he decides who will rise and who will fall.*

† **Psalm 75:8 NLT**—*For the Lord holds a cup in his hand
that is full of foaming wine mixed with spices.
He pours out the wine in judgment,
and all the wicked must drink it,*

The foaming wine denotes strength, while the spices add intensity.

When the wicked drink it, they receive the complete punishment that their sins deserve.

The metaphor emphasizes that divine judgment is not partial or merciful—it is total, thorough, and inescapable.

† **Isaiah 51:17 NLT**—*Wake up, wake up, O Jerusalem!
You have drunk the cup of the Lord's fury.
You have drunk the cup of terror,
tipping out its last drops.*

It's this cup of the Father's wrath on our sin that Jesus must drink.

So, Jesus is praying that His Father will provide a different way to forgive us.

In other words, Jesus is telling His Father that He doesn't want to go through this.

Paraphrase: *I will lay down my life, I will shed my blood, I will endure the wrath of the Jewish Leaders, I will endure the wrath of the Romans, I can handle the wrath of all mankind—but must I endure Your wrath for their sin?*

We are to be certain that no prayer in human history was uttered with greater intensity or greater agony than this prayer.

Then He ends His prayer...

† **Matthew 26:39**—Yet not as I will,

Many of us want to know how to pray according to God's will.

Jesus shows us in this passage—praying for God's will means to put your Heavenly Father above every other person, interest, desire, and ambitions.

Jesus is not imposing His will on the Father, but accepting the will of the Father.

† **KEYPOINT 3:**
There is one thing worse than experiencing the Father's wrath for our sin—and that's failing to do His will. (Disobedience.)

If Jesus is disobedient at this moment, He too will fail the test of obedience—which means that we're no better off than when Adam sinned.

† **Matthew 26:39**—but as you will."

Paraphrase: *If it is Your will that I drink this cup, if there is no other way to redeem your elect, then give Me the cup, and I'll drink it to the last drop.*

What kind of love is this? Who is this Man?

† **Romans 5:8**—But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It's important to remember that the cross is the Father's plan of redemption.

The Father did send the Son to do this, but the Father did not force the Son to go. Jesus is willing to do the Father's will—whether He likes it or not.

KEYPOINT 4:

Obedience is yielding to the Word of God by the Spirit of God in the community of God, regardless of the personal cost.

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?"

After praying the most passionate, exhaustive prayer a man could ever pray, Jesus takes a break and checks on Peter, James, and John.

They had two jobs: 1) Stay put 2) Stay awake.

Tragically, they've only done half their job.

Jesus finds them staying put while sleeping.

As if Jesus isn't grieved enough—His best friends only add to His stress.

This is the second time the Disciples have fallen asleep on the job.

It was also Peter, James, and John who fell asleep when Moses and Elijah appeared during Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17:2).

And now they are sleeping at the moment of the greatest spiritual conflict in the history of the world.

They were oblivious to the Lord's need of them.

Now, in all fairness, they've been up for the past 24 hours or more at this point.

They are indeed physically tired.

They are emotionally tired as well—and sleep is a means of escape.

That's why when we become frustrated, confused, or depressed, we want to sleep.

† **Matthew 26:41**—*Stay awake and pray,*

Jesus gives two more directives: 1) Stay awake 2) Pray.

Now He adds prayer.

The Greek verbs behind *stay awake* and *pray* carry the idea of continuous action.

An action that should prevent fatigue.

† **Matthew 26:41**—*so that you won't enter into temptation.*

What's the temptation for the Disciples? To go back to sleep and escape from reality.

† **Matthew 26:41**—*The spirit is willing,*

Willing means “eager.”

† **Matthew 26:41**—*but the flesh is weak.”*

Flesh is defined as “man the sinner”— and *man the sinner* is more than physically weak.

Scripture tells us that man is corrupt, sinful, and rebellious to his very core.

The flesh also refers to our defenselessness against sin.

† **Romans 7:18**—*For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh.*

And because our flesh is weak, the Lord tells the Disciples (and us) to be spiritually alert.

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.”*

Here we see a change in Jesus’ prayer.

He didn’t pray the same exact prayer.

Reading between the lines here, I get the sense that the Father had already answered His first prayer.

That the Father had said to Him, “No, I’m not taking away this cup.”

In other words, the only way to pass this test of obedience is by drinking the cup of the Father’s wrath on human sin.

Jesus must go through the test—not around it.

Jesus doesn’t argue or try to talk the Father out of it.

He accepts, submits, and obeys perfectly.

This is the hour that will prove His total obedience to His Father.

So after this realization, Jesus needs a break and checks on the Disciples again...

Matthew 26:43—*And he came again and found them sleeping, because they could not keep their eyes open.*

After two heartfelt rebukes from the Lord, these three men were still sleeping.

They neither watched nor prayed.

There is not a hint that the Disciples uttered a single prayer.

They did the one thing they were not supposed to do—just like Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Matthew 26:44—*After leaving them, he went away again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.*

We should find it interesting that Matthew only provides two sentences of a prayer that lasted several hours.

Why? First, it's all we need to know.

Second, there are some prayers that we pray that are only for the Father's ears.

KEYPOINT 5:

Even though Jesus had His answer, He continues to pray.

Matthew does not provide the third prayer—he only says it was the same prayer.

In other words, it was the same type of prayer—a prayer of agreement and obedience.

Paraphrase: *Since I must drink your cup of wrath, I ask for strength to bear it for your glory.*

Just as Jesus had three sessions of prayer in the wilderness, Jesus has three sessions of prayer in the garden.

With each session, Jesus continues to suffer, but each time He responds with obedience.

The Lord does this in our prayer life as well.

We talk about building spiritual muscle, and this is how it's done.

With each prayer session, as we wrestle with God's will, and like a loving trainer, God puts more and more weight on us after we've obeyed.

Matthew 26:45—*Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? See, the time is near. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*

This is one of the most disturbing sentences in Scripture.

How is it even possible that sinful people can lay their hands on a holy God? Let alone arrest him?!

Matthew 26:46—*Get up; let's go. See, my betrayer is near."*

This is not a call to run away.

There was nothing more that Jesus needed to do, and nothing more the Disciples were willing to do.

They were not going around the Father's will—they were going straight through it—but not alone.

Sometimes I think we forget that.

Rather than being fearful or discouraged, Jesus became stronger and more resolved.

Instead of waiting for His enemies to come to Him, He went out to meet them.

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