

Homily 19 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the importance of intention in almsgiving and prayer, advocating for sincerity over public display.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, Matthew 6:9-10, Matthew 6:13-14

Topics: "Forgiveness", "Prayer"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of forgiveness, urging believers to let go of anger and malice towards others. He emphasizes the need to pray with sincerity, humility, and a focus on God's glory, rather than seeking personal gain or revenge. Chrysostom highlights the power of prayer in aligning our will with God's, seeking His kingdom, and acknowledging His authority and majesty. He warns against the dangers of harboring grudges and seeking harm for others, stressing the significance of forgiving others as a reflection of God's mercy towards us. Chrysostom encourages believers to cultivate a spirit of forgiveness, kindness, and love towards their enemies, knowing that such actions lead to peace, blessings, and divine favor.

Transcript

Matt. VI. 1.

Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them.

He roots out in what remains the most tyrannical passion of all, the rage and madness with respect to vainglory, which springs up in them that do right. For at first He had not at all discoursed about it; it being indeed superfluous, before He had persuaded them to do any of the things which they ought, to teach in which way they should practise and pursue them.

But after He had led them on to self-command, then He proceeds to purge away also the alloy which secretly subsists with it. For this disease is by no means of random birth; but when we have duly performed many of the commandments.

It behooved therefore first to implant virtue, and then to remove the passion which mars its fruit.

And see with what He begins, with fasting, and prayer, and almsgiving: for in these good deeds most especially it is wont to make its haunt. The Pharisee, for instance, was hereby puffed up, who says, I fast twice a week, I give tithes of my substance. Luke 18:12 And he was vainglorious too in his very prayer,

making it for display. For since there was no one else present, he pointed himself out to the publican, saying, I am not as the rest of men, nor even as this publican. Luke 18:11

And mark how Christ began, as though He were speaking of some wild beast, hard to catch, and crafty to deceive him who was not very watchful. Thus, take heed, says He, as to your alms. So Paul also speaks to the Philippians; Beware of dogs. And with reason, for the evil beast comes in upon us secretly, and without noise puffs all away, and unobservedly carries out all that is within.

Forasmuch then as He had made much discourse about almsgiving, and brought forward God, Who makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, Matthew 5:45 and by motives from all quarters had urged them on to this, and had persuaded them to exult in the abundance of their giving; He finishes by taking away also all things that encumber this fair olive tree. For which same cause He says, Take heed that you do not your alms before men, for that which was before mentioned, is God's almsgiving.

2. And when He had said, not to do it before men, He added, to be seen of them. And though it seems as if the same thing were said a second time, yet if any one give particular attention, it is not the same thing, but one is different from the other; and it has great security, and unspeakable care and tenderness. For it may be, both that one doing alms before men may not do it to be seen of them, and again that one not doing it before men may do it to be seen of them. Wherefore it is not simply the thing, but the intent, which He both punishes and rewards. And unless such exactness were employed, this would make many more backward about the giving of alms, because it is not on every occasion altogether possible to do it secretly. For this cause, setting you free from this restraint, He defines both the penalty and the reward not by the result of the action, but by the intention of the doer.

That is, that you may not say, What? Am I then the worse, should another see?-- it is not this, says He, that I am seeking, but the mind that is in you, and the tone of what you do. For His will is to bring our soul altogether into frame, and to deliver it from every disease. Now having, as you see, forbidden men's acting for display, and having taught them the penalty thence ensuing, namely, to do it vainly, and for nought, He again rouses their spirits by putting them in mind of the Father, and of Heaven, that not by the loss alone He might sting them, but also shame them by the recollection of Him who gave them being.

For you have no reward, says He, with your Father which is in Heaven. Matthew 6:1

Nor even at this did He stop, but proceeds yet further, by other motives also increasing their disgust. For as above He set forth publicans and heathens, by the quality of the person shaming their imitators, so also in this place the hypocrites.

Therefore when you do your alms, says He, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do. Matthew 6:2

Not that they had trumpets, but He means to display the greatness of their frenzy, by the use of this figure of speech, deriding and making a show of them hereby.

And well has He called them hypocrites for the mask was of mercy, but the spirit of cruelty and inhumanity. For they do it, not because they pity their neighbors, but that they themselves may enjoy credit; and this came of the utmost cruelty; while another was perishing with hunger, to be seeking vainglory, and not putting an end to his suffering.

It is not then the giving alms which is required, but the giving as one ought, the giving for such and such an end.

Having then amply derided those men, and having handled them so, that the hearer should be even ashamed of them, He again corrects thoroughly the mind which is so distempered: and having said how we ought not to act, He signifies on the other hand how we ought to act. How then ought we to do our alms?

Let not your left hand know, says He, what your right hand does. Matthew 6:3

Here again His enigmatical meaning is not of the hands, but He has put the thing hyperbolically. As thus: If it can be, says He, for yourself not to know it, let this be the object of your endeavor; that, if it were possible, it may be concealed from the very hands that minister. It is not, as some say, that we should hide it from wrong-headed men, for He has here commanded that it should be concealed from all.

And then the reward too; consider how great it is. For after He had spoken of the punishment from the one, He points out also the honor derived from the other; from either side urging them, and leading them on to high lessons. Yea, for He is persuading them to know that God is everywhere present, and that not by our present life are our interests limited, but a yet more awful tribunal will receive us when we go hence, and the account of all our doings, and honors, and punishments: and that no one will be hid in doing anything either great or small, though he seem to be hid from men. For all this did He darkly signify, when He said,

Your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly.

Setting for him a great and august assemblage of spectators, and what He desires, that very thing bestowing on him in great abundance. For what, says He, do you wish? Is it not to have some to be spectators of what is going on? Behold then, you have some; not angels, nor archangels, but the God of all. And if you desire to have men also as spectators, neither of this desire does He deprive you at the fitting season, but rather in greater abundance affords it unto you. For, if you should now make a display, you will be able to make it to ten only, or twenty, or (we will say) a hundred persons: but if you take pains to lie hidden now, God Himself will then proclaim you in the presence of the whole universe. Wherefore above all, if you will have men see your good deeds, hide them now, that then all may look on them with the more honor, God making them manifest, and extolling them, and proclaiming them before all. Again, whereas now they that behold will rather condemn you as vainglorious; when they see you crowned, so far from condemning, they will even admire you, all of them. When therefore by waiting a little, you may both receive a reward, and reap greater admiration; consider what folly it is to cast yourself out of both these; and while you are seeking your reward from God, and while God is beholding, to summon men for the display of what is going on. Why, if display must be made of our love, to our Father above all should we make it; and this most especially, when our Father has the power both to crown and to punish.

And let me add, even were there no penalty, it were not meet for him who desires glory, to let go this our theatre, and take in exchange that of men. For who is there so wretched, as that when the king was hastening to come and see his achievements, he would let him go, and make up his assembly of spectators of poor men and beggars? For this cause then, He not only commands to make no display, but even to take pains to be concealed: it not being at all the same, not to strive for publicity, and to strive for concealment.

3. And when you pray, says He, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

But you, when you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret.

These too again He calls hypocrites, and very fitly; for while they are feigning to pray to God, they are looking round after men; wearing the garb not of suppliants, but of ridiculous persons. For he, who is to do a suppliant's office, letting go all other, looks to him alone, who has power to grant his request. But if you leave this one, and go about wandering and casting around your eyes everywhere, you will depart with empty hands. For this was your own will. Wherefore He said not, such shall not receive a reward, but, they have it out: that is, they shall indeed receive one, but from those of whom they themselves desire to have it. For God wills not this: He rather for His part was willing to bestow on men the recompence that comes from Himself; but they seeking that which is from men, can be no longer justly entitled to receive from Him, for whom they have done nothing.

But mark, I pray you, the lovingkindness of God, in that He promises to bestow on us a reward, even for those good things which we ask of Him.

Having then discredited them, who order not this duty as they ought, both from the place and from their disposition of mind, and having shown that they are very ridiculous: He introduces the best manner of prayer, and again gives the reward, saying, Enter into your closet.

What then, it may be said, ought we not to pray in church? Indeed we ought by all means, but in such a spirit as this. Because everywhere God seeks the intention of all that is done. Since even if you should enter into your closet, and having shut the door, should do it for display, the doors will do you no good.

It is worth observing in this case also, how exact the definition, which He made when He said, That they may appear unto men. So that even if you shut the doors, this He desires you duly to perform, rather than the shutting of the doors, even to shut the doors of the mind. For as in everything it is good to be freed from vainglory, so most especially in prayer. For if even without this, we wander and are distracted, when shall we attend unto the things which we are saying, should we enter in having this disease also? And if we who pray and beseech attend not, how do we expect God to attend?

4. But yet some there are, who after such and so earnest charges, behave themselves so unseemly in prayer, that even when their person is concealed, they make themselves manifest to all by their voice, crying out disorderly, and rendering themselves objects of ridicule both by gesture and voice. Do you see not that even in a market place, should any one come up doing like this, and begging clamorously, he will drive away him whom he is petitioning; but if quietly, and with the proper gesture, then he rather wins over him that can grant the favor?

Let us not then make our prayer by the gesture of our body, nor by the loudness of our voice, but by the earnestness of our mind: neither with noise and clamor and for display, so as even to disturb those that are near us, but with all modesty, and with contrition in the mind, and with inward tears.

But are you pained in mind, and cannot help crying aloud? Yet surely it is the part of one exceedingly pained to pray and entreat even as I have said. Since Moses too was pained, and prayed in this way and was heard; for this cause also God said to him, Wherefore do you cry unto me. Exodus 14:15 And Hannah

too again, her voice not being heard, accomplished all she wished, forasmuch as her heart cried out. 1 Samuel 1:13 But Abel prayed not only when silent, but even when dying, and his blood sent forth a cry more clear than a trumpet. Genesis 4:10

Do thou also then groan, even as that holy one, I forbid it not. Rend, as the prophet commanded, Joel 2:13 your heart, and not your garments. Out of deeps call upon God, for it is said, Out of the depths have I cried to You, O Lord. From beneath, out of the heart, draw forth a voice, make your prayer a mystery. Do you see not that even in the houses of kings all tumult is put away, and great on all sides is the silence? Do thou also therefore, entering as into a palace -- not that on the earth, but what is far more awful than it, that which is in heaven, -- show forth great seemliness. Yea, for you are joined to the choirs of angels, and art in communion with archangels, and art singing with the seraphim. And all these tribes show forth much goodly order, singing with great awe that mystical strain, and their sacred hymns to God, the King of all. With these then mingle yourself, when you are praying, and emulate their mystical order.

For not unto men are you praying, but to God, who is everywhere present, who hears even before the voice, who knows the secrets of the mind. If you so pray, great is the reward you shall receive.

For your Father, says He, who sees in secret, shall reward you openly.

He said not, shall freely give you, but, shall reward you; yea, for He has made Himself a debtor to you, and even from this has honored you with great honor. For because He Himself is invisible, He would have your prayer be so likewise.

5. Then He speaks even the very words of the prayer.

When ye pray, says He, use no vain repetitions, even as the heathen do.

You see that when He was discoursing of almsgiving, He removed only that mischief which comes of vainglory, and added nothing more; neither did He say whence one should give alms; as from honest labor, and not from rapine nor covetousness: this being abundantly acknowledged among all. And also before that, He had thoroughly cleared up this point, when He blessed them that hunger after righteousness.

But touching prayer, He adds somewhat over and above; not to use vain repetitions. And as there He derides the hypocrites, so here the heathen; shaming the hearer everywhere most of all by the vileness of the persons. For since this, in most cases, is especially biting and stinging, I mean our appearing to be likened to outcast persons; by this topic He dissuades them; calling frivolousness, here, by the name of vain repetition: as when we ask of God things unsuitable, kingdoms, and glory, and to get the better of enemies, and abundance of wealth, and in general what does not at all concern us.

For He knows, says He, what things you have need of. Matthew 6:8

And herewith He seems to me to command in this place, that neither should we make our prayers long; long, I mean, not in time, but in the number and length of the things mentioned. For perseverance indeed in the same requests is our duty: His word being, continuing instant in prayer. Romans 12:12

And He Himself too, by that example of the widow, who prevailed with the pitiless and cruel ruler, by the continuance of her intercession; Luke 18:1 and by that of the friend, who came late at night time, and roused the sleeper from his bed, Luke 11:5 not for his friendship's, but for his importunity's sake; what did

He, but lay down a law, that all should continually make supplication unto Him? He does not however bid us compose a prayer of ten thousand clauses, and so come to Him and merely repeat it. For this He obscurely signified when He said, They think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

For He knows, says He, what things you have need of. And if He know, one may say, what we have need of, wherefore must we pray? Not to instruct Him, but to prevail with Him; to be made intimate with Him, by continuance in supplication; to be humbled; to be reminded of your sins.

6. After this manner, therefore, pray ye, says He: Our Father, which art in heaven.

See how He straightway stirred up the hearer, and reminded him of all God's bounty in the beginning. For he who calls God Father, by him both remission of sins, and taking away of punishment, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, and adoption, and inheritance, and brotherhood with the Only-Begotten, and the supply of the Spirit, are acknowledged in this single title. For one cannot call God Father, without having attained to all those blessings. Doubly, therefore, does He awaken their spirit, both by the dignity of Him who is called on, and by the greatness of the benefits which they have enjoyed. But when He says, in Heaven, He speaks not this as shutting up God there, but as withdrawing him who is praying from earth, and fixing him in the high places, and in the dwellings above.

He teaches, moreover, to make our prayer common, in behalf of our brethren also. For He says not, my Father, which art in Heaven, but, our Father, offering up his supplications for the body in common, and nowhere looking to his own, but everywhere to his neighbor's good. And by this He at once takes away hatred, and quells pride, and casts out envy, and brings in the mother of all good things, even charity, and exterminates the inequality of human things, and shows how far the equality reaches between the king and the poor man, if at least in those things which are greatest and most indispensable, we are all of us fellows. For what harm comes of our kindred below, when in that which is on high we are all of us knit together, and no one has anything more than another; neither the rich more than the poor, nor the master than the servant, neither the ruler than the subject, nor the king than the common soldier, nor the philosopher than the barbarian, nor the skillful than the unlearned? For to all has He given one nobility, having vouchsafed to be called the Father of all alike.

7. When therefore He has reminded us of this nobility, and of the gift from above, and of our equality with our brethren, and of charity; and when He has removed us from earth, and fixed us in Heaven; let us see what He commands us to ask after this. Not but, in the first place, even that saying alone is sufficient to implant instruction in all virtue. For he who has called God Father, and a common Father, would be justly bound to show forth such a conversation, as not to appear unworthy of this nobility, and to exhibit a diligence proportionate to the gift. Yet is He not satisfied with this, but adds, also another clause, thus saying,

Hallowed be Your name.

Worthy of him who calls God Father, is the prayer to ask nothing before the glory of His Father, but to account all things secondary to the work of praising Him. For hallowed is glorified. For His own glory He has complete, and ever continuing the same, but He commands him who prays to seek that He may be glorified also by our life. Which very thing He had said before likewise, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 5:16 Yea, and the seraphim too, giving glory, said on this wise, Holy, holy, holy. So that hallowed means this, viz. glorified. That is, vouchsafe, says he, that we may live so purely, that through us all may glorify You. Which thing

again appertains unto perfect self-control, to present to all a life so irreprehensible, that every one of the beholders may offer to the Lord the praise due to Him for this.

Your kingdom come. Matthew 6:10

And this again is the language of a right-minded child, not to be riveted to things that are seen, neither to account things present some great matter; but to hasten unto our Father, and to long for the things to come. And this springs out of a good conscience, and a soul set free from things that are on earth. This, for instance, Paul himself was longing after every day: wherefore he also said, that even we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan, waiting for an adoption, the redemption of our body. For he who has this fondness, can neither be puffed up by the good things of this life, nor abashed by its sorrows; but as though dwelling in the very heavens, is freed from each sort of irregularity.

Your will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.

Behold a most excellent train of thought! In that He bade us indeed long for the things to come, and hasten towards that sojourn; and, till that may be, even while we abide here, so long to be earnest in showing forth the same conversation as those above. For you must long, says He, for heaven, and the things in heaven; however, even before heaven, He has bidden us make the earth a heaven and do and say all things, even while we are continuing in it, as having our conversation there; insomuch that these too should be objects of our prayer to the Lord. For there is nothing to hinder our reaching the perfection of the powers above, because we inhabit the earth; but it is possible even while abiding here, to do all, as though already placed on high. What He says therefore is this: As there all things are done without hindrance, and the angels are not partly obedient and partly disobedient, but in all things yield and obey (for He says, 'Mighty in strength, performing His word'); so vouchsafe that we men may not do Your will by halves, but perform all things as You will.

Do you see how He has taught us also to be modest, by making it clear that virtue is not of our endeavors only, but also of the grace from above? And again, He has enjoined each one of us, who pray, to take upon himself the care of the whole world. For He did not at all say, Your will be done in me, or in us, but everywhere on the earth; so that error may be destroyed, and truth implanted, and all wickedness cast out, and virtue return, and no difference in this respect be henceforth between heaven and earth. For if this come to pass, says He, there will be no difference between things below and above, separated as they are in nature; the earth exhibiting to us another set of angels.

8. Give us this day our daily bread. Matthew 6:11

What is daily bread? That for one day.

For because He had said thus, Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven, but was discoursing to men encompassed with flesh, and subject to the necessities of nature, and incapable of the same impassibility with the angels:-- while He enjoins the commands to be practised by us also, even as they perform them; He condescends likewise, in what follows, to the infirmity of our nature. Thus, perfection of conduct, says He, I require as great, not however freedom from passions; no, for the tyranny of nature permits it not: for it requires necessary food. But mark, I pray you, how even in things that are bodily, that which is spiritual abounds. For it is neither for riches, nor for delicate living, nor for costly raiment, nor for any other such thing, but for bread only, that He has commanded us to make our prayer. And for daily bread, so as not to take thought for the morrow. Matthew 6:34 Because of this He added, daily bread, that is, bread for one

day.

And not even with this expression is He satisfied, but adds another too afterwards, saying, Give us this day; so that we may not, beyond this, wear ourselves out with the care of the following day. For that day, the interval before which you know not whether you shall see, wherefore do you submit to its cares?

This, as He proceeded, he enjoined also more fully, saying, Take no thought for the morrow. He would have us be on every hand unencumbered and winged for flight, yielding just so much to nature as the compulsion of necessity requires of us.

9. Then forasmuch as it comes to pass that we sin even after the washing of regeneration, He, showing His love to man to be great even in this case, commands us for the remission of our sins to come unto God who loves man, and thus to say,

Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.

Do you see surpassing mercy? After taking away so great evils, and after the unspeakable greatness of His gift, if men sin again, He counts them such as may be forgiven. For that this prayer belongs to believers, is taught us both by the laws of the church, and by the beginning of the prayer. For the uninitiated could not call God Father. If then the prayer belongs to believers, and they pray, entreating that sins may be forgiven them, it is clear that not even after the laver is the profit of repentance taken away. Since, had He not meant to signify this, He would not have made a law that we should so pray. Now He who both brings sins to remembrance, and bids us ask forgiveness, and teaches how we may obtain remission and so makes the way easy; it is perfectly clear that He introduced this rule of supplication, as knowing, and signifying, that it is possible even after the font to wash ourselves from our offenses; by reminding us of our sins, persuading us to be modest; by the command to forgive others, setting us free from all revengeful passion; while by promising in return for this to pardon us also, He holds out good hopes, and instructs us to have high views concerning the unspeakable mercy of God toward man.

But what we should most observe is this, that whereas in each of the clauses He had made mention of the whole of virtue, and in this way had included also the forgetfulness of injuries (for so, that His name be hallowed, is the exactness of a perfect conversation; and that His will be done, declares the same thing again: and to be able to call God Father, is the profession of a blameless life; in all which things had been comprehended also the duty of remitting our anger against them that have transgressed): still He was not satisfied with these, but meaning to signify how earnest He is in the matter, He sets it down also in particular, and after the prayer, He makes mention of no other commandment than this, saying thus:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you. Matthew 6:14

So that the beginning is of us, and we ourselves have control over the judgment that is to be passed upon us. For in order that no one, even of the senseless, might have any complaint to make, either great or small, when brought to judgment; on you, who art to give account, He causes the sentence to depend; and in whatever way you have judged for yourself, in the same, says He, do I also judge you. And if you forgive your fellow servant, you shall obtain the same favor from me; though indeed the one be not equal to the other. For you forgive in your need, but God, having need of none: thou, your fellow slave; God, His slave: thou liable to unnumbered charges; God, being without sin. But yet even thus does He show forth His lovingkindness towards man.

Since He might indeed, even without this, forgive you all your offenses; but He wills you hereby also to receive a benefit; affording you on all sides innumerable occasions of gentleness and love to man, casting out what is brutish in you, and quenching wrath, and in all ways cementing you to him who is your own member.

For what can you have to say? That you have wrongfully endured some ill of your neighbor? (For these only are trespasses, since if it be done with justice, the act is not a trespass.) But you too are drawing near to receive forgiveness for such things, and for much greater. And even before the forgiveness, you have received no small gift, in being taught to have a human soul, and in being trained to all gentleness. And herewith a great reward shall also be laid up for you elsewhere, even to be called to account for none of your offenses.

What sort of punishment then do we not deserve, when after having received the privilege, we betray our salvation? And how shall we claim to be heard in the rest of our matters, if we will not, in those which depend on us, spare our own selves?

10. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from the evil one: for Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Here He teaches us plainly our own vileness, and quells our pride, instructing us to deprecate all conflicts, instead of rushing upon them. For so both our victory will be more glorious, and the devil's overthrow more to be derided. I mean, that as when we are dragged forth, we must stand nobly; so when we are not summoned, we should be quiet, and wait for the time of conflict; that we may show both freedom from vainglory, and nobleness of spirit.

And He here calls the devil the wicked one, commanding us to wage against him a war that knows no truce, and implying that he is not such by nature. For wickedness is not of those things that are from nature, but of them that are added by our own choice. And he is so called pre-eminently, by reason of the excess of his wickedness, and because he, in no respect injured by us, wages against us implacable war. Wherefore neither said He, deliver us from the wicked ones, but, from the wicked one; instructing us in no case to entertain displeasure against our neighbors, for whatever wrongs we may suffer at their hands, but to transfer our enmity from these to him, as being himself the cause of all our wrongs.

Having then made us anxious as before conflict, by putting us in mind of the enemy, and having cut away from us all our remissness; He again encourages and raises our spirits, by bringing to our remembrance the King under whom we are arrayed, and signifying Him to be more powerful than all. For Yours, says He, is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.

Does it not then follow, that if His be the kingdom, we should fear no one, since there can be none to withstand, and divide the empire with him. For when He says, Yours is the kingdom, He sets before us even him, who is warring against us, brought into subjection, though he seem to oppose, God for a while permitting it. For in truth he too is among God's servants, though of the degraded class, and those guilty of offense; and he would not dare set upon any of his fellow servants, had he not first received license from above. And why say I, his fellow servants? Not even against swine did he venture any outrage, until He Himself allowed him; Luke 8:32 nor against flocks, nor herds, until he had received permission from above. Job 1:12

And the power, says He. Therefore, manifold as your weakness may be, you may of right be confident, having such a one to reign over you, who is able fully to accomplish all, and that with ease, even by you.

And the glory, forever. Amen. Thus He not only frees you from the dangers that are approaching you, but can make you also glorious and illustrious. For as His power is great, so also is His glory unspeakable, and they are all boundless, and no end of them. Do you see how He has by every means anointed His Champion, and has framed Him to be full of confidence?

11. Then, as I said before, meaning to signify, that of all things He most loathes and hates bearing malice, and most of all accepts the virtue which is opposite to that vice; He has after the prayer also again put us in mind of this same point of goodness; both by the punishment set, and by the reward appointed, urging the hearer to obey this command.

For if you forgive men, says He, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not, neither will He forgive you.

With this view He has again mentioned heaven also, and their Father; to abash the hearer by this topic likewise; that he of all people, being of such a Father, should be made a wild beast of; and summoned as he is to heaven, should cherish an earthly and ordinary sort of mind. Since not by grace only, you see, ought we to become His children, but also by our works. And nothing makes us so like God, as being ready to forgive the wicked and wrong-doers; even as indeed He had taught before, when He spoke of His making the sun to shine on the evil and on the good. Matthew 5:45

For this same cause again in every one of the clauses He commands us to make our prayers common, saying, Our Father, and Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven, and Give us the bread, and forgive us our debts, and lead us not into temptation, and deliver us; everywhere commanding us to use this plural word, that we may not retain so much as a vestige of anger against our neighbor.

How great punishment then must they deserve, who after all this, so far from themselves forgiving, do even entreat God for vengeance on their enemies, and diametrically as it were transgress this law; and this while He is doing and contriving all, to hinder our being at variance one with another? For since love is the root of all that is good, He removing from all sides whatever mars it, brings us together, and cements us to each other. For there is not, there is not one, be he father, or mother, or friend, or what you will, who so loved us as the God who created us. And this, above all things, both His daily benefits and His precepts make manifest. But if you tell me of the pains, and of the sorrows, and of the evils of life; consider in how many things you offend Him every day, and you will no longer marvel, though more than these evils should come upon you, but if you should enjoy any good, then you will marvel, and be amazed. But as it is, we look upon the calamities that come upon us, but the offenses, whereby we offend daily, we consider not: therefore we are perplexed. Since if we did but reckon up with strictness our sins of one day only, in that case we should know well how great evils we must be liable to.

And to let pass the other misdoings of which we have been guilty, each one for himself, and to speak of what have been committed this day; although of course I know not in what each of us may have sinned, yet such is the abundance of our misdoings, that not even he who knew all exactly would be able to choose from among these only. Which of us, for instance, has not been careless in his prayers? Which has not been insolent, or vainglorious? Who has not spoken evil of his brother, has not admitted a wicked desire, has not looked with unchaste eyes, has not remembered things with hostile feeling, even till he made his heart swell?

And if while we are in church, and in a short time we have become guilty of so great evils; what shall be when we are gone out from hence? If in the harbor the waves are so high, when we are gone forth into the channel of wickednesses, the forum I mean, and to public business, and our cares at home, shall we indeed be able so much as to know ourselves again?

But yet from our so great and so many sins, God has given us a short and easy way of deliverance, and one that is free from all toil. For what sort of toil is it to forgive him that has grieved us? Nay, it is a toil not to forgive, but to keep up our enmity: even as to be delivered from the anger, both works in us a great refreshment, and is very easy to him that is willing. For there is no sea to be crossed, nor long journey to be travelled, nor summits of mountains to be passed over, nor money to be spent, no need to torment your body; but it suffices to be willing only, and all our sins are done away.

But if so far from forgiving him yourself, you make intercession to God against him, what hope of salvation will you then have, if at the very time when you ought rather to appease God, even then you provoke Him; putting on the garb of a suppliant, but uttering the cries of a wild beast, and darting out against yourself those shafts of the wicked one? Wherefore Paul also, making mention of prayer, required nothing so much as the observance of this commandment; for He says, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting. And if when you have need of mercy, not even then will you let go your anger, but art rather exceedingly mindful of it, and that, although you know you are thrusting the sword into yourself; when will it be possible for you to become merciful, and to spew out the evil venom of this wickedness?

But if you have not yet seen this outrageousness in its full extent, suppose it happening among men, and then you will perceive the excess of the insolence. As thus: should one approach you who are a man, seeking to obtain mercy, and then, in the midst of his lying on the ground, should see an enemy, and leaving off to supplicate you, begin to beat him; would you not make yourself more angry with him? This do thou consider as taking place with regard to God also. For so thou likewise, making supplication unto God, leavest your supplication in the midst, and smitest your enemy with your words, and insultest the laws of God. Him who made a law to dismiss all anger, you are summoning against those that have vexed you, and requiring Him to do things contrary to His own commandments. Is it not enough for you in the way of revenge, that you yourself transgresses the law of God, but do you entreat Him likewise to do so? What? Has He forgotten what He commanded? What? Is He a man who spoke these things? It is God, who knows all things, and whose will is, that His own laws be kept with the utmost exactness, and who, so far from doing these things which you are requiring of Him, does even regard you who sayest these things, merely because you say them, with aversion and hatred, and exacts of you the most extreme penalty. How then do you seek to obtain of Him things, from which He very seriously bids you refrain?

Yet some there are, who have come to such a point of brutishness, as not only to make intercession against their enemies, but even to curse their children, and to taste, if only it might be, of their very flesh; or rather they are even tasting thereof. For tell me not this, that you have not fixed your teeth in the body of him that vexed you; since you have done, at least as far as concerned you, what is much more grievous; in claiming that wrath from above should fall upon him, and that he should be delivered over to undying punishment, and be overthrown with his whole house.

Why, what sort of bites are as ferocious as this? What kind of weapons as bitter? Not so did Christ instruct you; not so did He command you to stain your mouth with blood. Nay, mouths made bloody with human flesh are not so shocking as tongues like these.

How then will you salute your brother? How will you touch the sacrifice? How taste the Lord's blood, when you have so much venom upon your mind? Since when you say, Rend him in pieces, and overthrow his house, and destroy all, when you are imprecating on him ten thousand deaths, you are in nothing different from a murderer, or rather from a wild beast that devours men.

Let us cease then from this disease and madness, and that kindliness which He commanded let us show forth towards them that have vexed us: that we may become like our Father which is in heaven. And we shall cease therefrom, if we call to mind our own sins; if we strictly search out all our misdeeds at home, abroad, and in the market, and in church.

12. For if for nothing else, surely for our disrespectfulness here we are worthy to undergo the utmost punishment. For when prophets are chanting, and apostles singing hymns, and God is discoursing, we wander without, and bring in upon us a turmoil of worldly business. And we do not afford to the laws of God so great stillness, even as the spectators in the theatres to the emperor's letters, keeping silence for them. For there, when these letters are being read, deputies at once, and governors, and senate, and people, stand all upright, with quietness hearkening to the words. And if amid that most profound silence any one should suddenly leap up and cry out, he suffers the utmost punishment, as having been insolent to the emperor. But here, when the letters from heaven are being read, great is the confusion on all sides. And yet both He who sent the letters is much greater than this our king, and the assembly more venerable: for not men only, but angels too are in it; and these triumphs, of which the letters bear us the good tidings, are much more awful than those on earth. Wherefore not men only, but angels also and archangels; both the nations of heaven, and all we on the earth, are commanded to give praise. For, Bless the Lord, it is said, all His works. Yea, for His are no small achievements, rather they surpass all speech, and thought, and understanding of man.

And these things the prophets proclaim every day, each of them in a different way publishing this glorious triumph. For one says, You have gone up on high, You have led captivity captive, and hast received gifts among men. And, The Lord strong and mighty in battle. And another says, He shall divide the spoils of the strong. Isaiah 53:12 For indeed to this purpose He came, that He might preach deliverance to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind.

And raising aloud the cry of victory over death, he said, Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Grave, is your sting? And another again, declaring glad tidings of the most profound peace, said, They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. And while one calls on Jerusalem, saying, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion, for lo! Your King comes to you meek, riding upon an ass, and a young colt; Zechariah 9:9 another proclaims His second coming also, saying on this wise, The Lord, whom you seek, will come, and who will abide the day of His coming? Malachi 3:1-2 Leap ye as calves set free from bonds. And another again, amazed at such things, said, This is our God; there shall none other be accounted of in comparison of Him. Baruch 3:35

Yet, nevertheless, while both these and many more sayings than these are being uttered, while we ought to tremble, and not so much as account ourselves to be on the earth; still, as though in the midst of a forum, we make an uproar and disturbance, and spend the whole time of our solemn assembly in discoursing of things which are nothing to us.

When therefore both in little things, and in great, both in hearing, and in doing, both abroad, and at home, in the church, we are so negligent; and together with all this, pray also against our enemies: whence are

we to have any hope of salvation, adding to so great sins yet another grievous enhancement, and equivalent to them all, even this unlawful prayer?

Have we then hereafter any right to marvel, if anything befall us of the things which are unexpected and painful? Whereas we ought to marvel when no such thing befalls us. For the former is in the natural order of things, but the latter were beyond all reason and expectation. For surely it is beyond reason, that they who have become enemies of God, and are provoking Him to anger, should enjoy sunshine and showers, and all the rest; who being men surpass the barbarity of wild beasts, setting themselves one against another, and by the biting of their neighbors staining their own tongues with blood: after the spiritual table, and His so great benefits, and His innumerable injunctions.

Therefore, considering these things, let us cast up that venom; let us put an end to our enmities, and let us make the prayers that become such as we are. Instead of the brutality of devils, let us take upon us the mildness of angels; and in whatsoever things we may have been injured, let us, considering our own case, and the reward appointed us for this commandment, soften our anger; let us assuage the billows, that we may both pass through the present life calmly, and when we have departed there, may find our Lord such as we have been towards our fellow-servants. And if this be a heavy and fearful thing, let us make it light and desirable; and let us open the glorious gates of confidence towards Him; and what we had not strength to effect by abstaining from sin, that let us accomplish by becoming gentle to them who have sinned against us (for this surely is not grievous, nor burdensome); and let us by doing kindnesses to our enemies, lay up beforehand much mercy for ourselves.

For so both during this present life all will love us, and above all others, God will both befriend and crown us, and will count us worthy of all the good things to come; unto which may we all attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might for ever and ever. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-19-on-matthew/>

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