

Homily 25 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the authority of Jesus, the importance of faith and gratitude, and the relationship between humility and wisdom in the Christian life.

Topics: "Divine Authority", "Spiritual Healing"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the astonishment of the people at Jesus' teachings and authority, highlighting the power of His words and the love instilled in His followers. He emphasizes Jesus' authority in both His teachings and miracles, showcasing His divine power and the admiration He received from those with uncorrupted judgment. Chrysostom delves into the significance of Jesus' healing of the leper, illustrating the Lord's mastery over the law and His ability to cleanse both body and soul. He urges gratitude and thanksgiving as a response to God's blessings, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and appreciating His care and salvation.

Transcript

Matt. VII. 28.

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine.

Yet was it rather natural for them to grieve at the unpleasantness of His sayings, and to shudder at the loftiness of His injunctions; but now so great was the power of the Teacher, that many of them were even caught thereby, and thrown into very great admiration, and persuaded by reason of the sweetness of His sayings, not even when He ceased to speak, to depart from Him at all afterwards. For neither did the hearers depart, He having come down from the mountain, but even then the whole auditory followed Him; so great a love for His sayings had He instilled into them.

But they were astonished most of all at His authority. For not with reference to another, like the prophet and Moses, did He say what He said; but everywhere indicating Himself to be the person that had the power of deciding. For so, when setting forth His laws, He still kept adding, But I say unto you. And in reminding them of that day, He declared Himself to be the judge, both by the punishments, and by the honors.

And yet it was likely that this too would disturb them. For if, when they saw Him by His works showing forth His authority, the scribes were for stoning and persecuting Him; while there were words only to prove this,

how was it other than likely for them to be offended? And especially when at first setting out these things were said, and before He had given proof of His own power? But however, they felt nothing of this; for when the heart and mind is candid, it is easily persuaded by the words of the truth. And this is just why one sort, even when the miracles were proclaiming His power, were offended; while the other on hearing mere words were persuaded and followed Him. This, I would add, the evangelist too is intimating, when he says, great multitudes followed Him, Matthew 8:1 not any of the rulers, nor of the scribes, but as many as were free from vice, and had their judgment uncorrupted. And throughout the whole gospel you see that such clave unto Him. For both while He spoke, they used to listen in silence, not making any intrusion, nor breaking in upon the connection of His sayings, nor tempting Him, and desiring to find a handle like the Pharisees; and after His exhortation they followed Him again, marvelling.

But do thou mark, I pray you, the Lord's consideration, how He varies the mode of profiting His hearers, after miracles entering on words, and again from the instruction by His words passing to miracles. Thus, both before they went up into the mountain, He healed many, preparing the way for His sayings; and after finishing that long discourse to the people, He comes again to miracles, confirming what had been said by what was done. And so, because He was teaching as one having authority, lest His so teaching should be thought boasting and arrogant, He does the very same in His works also, as having authority to heal; that they might no more be perplexed at seeing Him teach in this way, when He was working His miracles also in the same.

2. For when He had come down from the mountain, there came a leper, saying, Lord, if You will, You can make me clean. Great was the understanding and the faith of him who so drew near. For he did not interrupt the teaching, nor break through the auditory, but awaited the proper time, and approaches Him when He has come down. And not at random, but with much earnestness, and at His knees, he beseeches Him, as another evangelist says, and with the genuine faith and right opinion about him. For neither did he say, If You request it of God, nor, If Thou pray, but, If You will, You can make me clean. Nor did he say, Lord, cleanse me, but leaves all to Him, and makes His recovery depend on Him, and testifies that all the authority is His.

What then, says one, if the leper's opinion was mistaken? It were meet to do away with it, and to reprove, and set it right. Did He then so do? By no means; but quite on the contrary, He establishes and confirms what had been said. For this cause, you see, neither did He say, Be thou cleansed, but, I will, be thou clean; that the doctrine might no longer be a thing of the other's surmising, but of His own approval.

But the apostles not so: rather in what way? The whole people being in amazement, they said, Why give heed to us, as though by our own power or authority we had made him to walk? But the Lord, though He spoke oftentimes many things modestly, and beneath His own glory, what says He here, to establish the doctrine of them that were amazed at Him for His authority? I will, be thou clean. Although in the many and great signs which He wrought, He nowhere appears to have uttered this word. Here however, to confirm the surmise both of all the people and of the leper touching His authority, He purposely added, I will.

And it was not that He said this, but did it not; but the work also followed immediately. Whereas, if he had not spoken well, but the saying had been a blasphemy, the work ought to have been interrupted. But now nature herself gave way at His command, and that speedily, as was meet, even more speedily than the evangelist has said. For the word, immediately, falls far short of the quickness that there was in the work.

But He did not merely say, I will, be thou clean, but He also put forth His hand, and touched him; a thing especially worthy of inquiry. For wherefore, when cleansing him by will and word, did He add also the touch of His hand? It seems to me, for no other end, but that He might signify by this also, that He is not subject to the law, but is set over it; and that to the clean, henceforth, nothing is unclean. Titus 1:15 For this cause, we see, Elisha did not so much as see Naaman, but though he perceived that he was offended at his not coming out and touching him, observing the strictness of the law, he abides at home, and sends him to Jordan to wash. Whereas the Lord, to signify that He heals not as a servant, but as absolute master, does also touch. For His hand became not unclean from the leprosy, but the leprous body was rendered clean by His holy hand.

Because, as we know, He came not to heal bodies only, but also to lead the soul unto self-command. As therefore He from that time forward no more forbade to eat with unwashed hands, introducing that excellent law, which relates to the indifference of meats; just so in this case also, to instruct us for the future, that the soul must be our care -- that leaving the outward purifications, we must wipe that clean, and dread the leprosy thereof alone, which is sin (for to be a leper is no hindrance to virtue):-- He Himself first touches the leper, and no man finds fault. For the tribunal was not corrupt, neither were the spectators under the power of envy. Therefore, so far from blaming, they were on the contrary astonished at the miracle, and yielded thereto: and both for what He said, and for what He did, they adored his uncontrollable power.

3. Having therefore healed his body, He bids him,

Tell no man, but show himself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. Matthew 8:4

Now some say, that for this intent He bade him tell no man, that they might practise no craft about the discerning of his cure; a very foolish suspicion on their part. For He did not so cleanse as to leave the cleansing questionable, but He bids him tell no man, teaching us to avoid boasting and vainglory. And yet He well knew that the other would not obey, but would proclaim his benefactor: nevertheless He does His own part.

How then elsewhere does He bid them tell of it? one may ask. Not as jostling with or opposing Himself, but as teaching men to be grateful. For neither in that place did He give command to proclaim Himself, but to give glory to God; by this leper training us to be clear of pride and vainglory, by the other to be thankful and grateful; and instructing on every occasion to offer to the Lord the praise of all things that befall us. That is, because men for the most part remember God in sickness, but grow slacker after recovery; He bids them continually both in sickness and in health to give heed to the Lord, in these words, give glory to God.

But wherefore did He command him also to show himself to the priest, and to offer a gift? To fulfill the law here again. Leviticus 14:1-32 For neither did He in every instance set it aside, nor in every instance keep it, but sometimes He did the one, sometimes the other; by the one making way for the high rule of life that was to come, by the other checking for a while the insolent speech of the Jews, and condescending to their infirmity. And why marvel, if just at the beginning He Himself did this, when even the very apostles, after they were commanded to depart unto the Gentiles, after the doors were opened for their teaching throughout the world, and the law shut up, and the commandments made new, and all the ancient things had ceased, are found sometimes observing the law, sometimes neglecting it?

But what, it may be said, does this saying, Show yourself to the priest, contribute to the keeping of the law? No little. Because it was an ancient law, that the leper when cleansed should not entrust to himself the judgment of his cleansing, but should show himself to the priest, and present the demonstration thereof to his eyes, and by that sentence be numbered among the clean. For if the priest said not The leper is cleansed, he remained still with the unclean without the camp. Wherefore he says, Show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded. He said not, which I command, but for a time remits him to the law, by every means stopping their mouths. Thus, lest they should say, He had seized upon the priests' honor; though He performed the work Himself, yet the approving it He entrusted to them, and made them sit as judges of His own miracles. Why, I am so far, He says, from striving either with Moses or with the priests, that I guide the objects of my favor to submit themselves unto them.

But what is, for a testimony unto them? For reproof, for demonstration, for accusation, if they be unthankful. For since they said, as a deceiver and impostor we persecute Him, as an adversary of God, and a transgressor of the law; You shall bear me witness, says He, at that time, that I am not a transgressor of the law. Nay, for having healed you, I remit you to the law, and to the approval of the priests; which was the act of one honoring the law, and admiring Moses, and not setting himself in opposition to the ancient doctrines.

And if they were not in fact to be the better, hereby most of all one may perceive His respect for the law, that although He foreknew they would reap no benefit, He fulfilled all His part. For this very thing He did indeed foreknow, and foretold it: not saying, for their correction, neither, for their instruction, but, for a testimony unto them, that is, for accusation, and for reproof, and for a witness that all has been done on my part; and though I foreknew they would continue incorrigible, not even so did I omit what ought to be done; only they continued keeping up to the end their own wickedness.

This, we may observe, He says elsewhere also; This gospel shall be preached in all the world for a testimony to all the nations, and then shall the end come; Matthew 24:14 to the nations, to them that obey not, to them that believe not. Thus, lest any one should say, And wherefore preach to all, if all are not to believe?-- it is that I may be found to have done all my own part, and that no man may hereafter be able to find fault, as though he had not heard. For the very preaching shall bear witness against them, and they will not be able hereafter to say, We heard not; for the word of godliness has gone out unto the ends of the world.

4. Therefore bearing these things in mind, let us also fulfill all our duties to our neighbor, and to God let us give thanks continually. For it is too monstrous, enjoying as we do His bounty in deed every day, not so much as in word to acknowledge the favor; and this, though the acknowledgment again yield all its profit to us. Since He needs not, be sure, anything of ours: but we stand in need of all things from Him. Thus thanksgiving itself adds nothing to Him, but causes us to be nearer to Him. For if men's bounties, when we call them to memory, do the more warm us with their proper love-charm; much more when we are continually bringing to mind the noble acts of our Lord towards us, shall we be more diligent in regard of His commandments.

For this cause Paul also said, Be thankful. Colossians 3:15 For the best preservative of any benefit is the remembrance of the benefit, and a continual thanksgiving.

For this cause even the awful mysteries, so full of that great salvation, which are celebrated at every communion, are called a sacrifice of thanksgiving, because they are the commemoration of many benefits,

and they signify the very sum of God's care for us, and by all means they work upon us to be thankful. For if His being born of a virgin was a great miracle, and the evangelist said in amaze, now all this was done; His being also slain, what place shall we find for that? Tell me. I mean, if to be born is called all this; to be crucified, and to pour forth His blood, and to give Himself to us for a spiritual feast and banquet -- what can that be called? Let us therefore give Him thanks continually, and let this precede both our words and our works.

But let us be thankful not for our own blessings alone, but also for those of others; for in this way we shall be able both to destroy our envy, and to rivet our charity, and make it more genuine. Since it will not even be possible for you to go on envying them, in behalf of whom you give thanks to the Lord.

Wherefore, as you know, the priest also enjoins to give thanks for the world, for the former things, for the things that are now, for what has been done to us before, for what shall befall us hereafter, when that sacrifice is set forth.

For this is the thing both to free us from earth, and to remove us into heaven, and to make us angels instead of men. Because they too form a choir, and give thanks to God for His good things bestowed on us, saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men. And what is this to us, that are not upon earth, nor are men? Nay, it is very much to us, for we have been taught so to love our fellow servants, as even to account their blessings ours.

Wherefore Paul also, everywhere in his epistles, gives thanks for God's gracious acts to the world.

Let us too therefore continually give thanks, for our own blessings, and for those of others, alike for the small and for the great. For though the gift be small, it is made great by being God's gift, or rather, there is nothing small that comes from Him, not only because it is bestowed by Him, but also in its very nature.

And to pass over all the rest, which exceed the sand in multitude; what is equal to the dispensation that has taken place for our sake? In that what was more precious to Him than all, even His only-begotten Son, Him He gave for us His enemies; and not only gave, but after giving, did even set Him before us as food; Himself doing all things that were for our good, both in giving Him, and in making us thankful for all this. For because man is for the most part unthankful, He does Himself everywhere take in hand and bring about what is for our good. And what He did with respect to the Jews, by places, and times, and feasts, reminding them of His benefits, that He did in this case also, by the manner of the sacrifice bringing us to a perpetual remembrance of His bounty in these things.

No one has so labored that we should be approved, and great, and in all things right-minded, as the God who made us. Wherefore both against our will He befriends us often, and without our knowledge oftener than not. And if you marvel at what I have said, I point to this as having occurred not to any ordinary person, but to the blessed Paul. For even that blessed man, when in much danger and affliction, often besought God that the temptations might depart from him: nevertheless God regarded not his request, but his profit, and to signify this He said, My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9 So that before He has told him the reason, He benefits him against his will, and without his knowing it.

5. Now what great thing does He ask, in requiring us to be thankful in return for such tender care? Let us then obey, and everywhere keep up this. Since neither were the Jews by anything ruined so much, as by being unthankful; those many stripes, one after another, were brought upon them by nothing else than

this; or rather even before those stripes this had ruined and corrupted their soul. For the hope of the unthankful, says one, is like the winter's hoar frost; Wisdom 16:29 it benumbs and deadens the soul, as that does our bodies.

And this springs from pride, and from thinking one's self worthy of something. But the contrite will acknowledge grounds of thanksgiving to God, not for good things only, but also for what seem to be adverse; and how much soever he may suffer, will count none of his sufferings undeserved. Let us then also, the more we advance in virtue, so much the more make ourselves contrite; for indeed this, more than anything else is virtue. Because, as the sharper our sight is, the more thoroughly do we learn how distant we are from the sky; so the more we advance in virtue, so much the more are we instructed in the difference between God and us. And this is no small part of true wisdom, to be able to perceive our own desert. For he best knows himself, who accounts himself to be nothing. Thus we see that both David and Abraham, when they had come up to the highest pitch of virtue, then best fulfilled this; and would call themselves, the one, earth and ashes, Genesis 18:27 the other, a worm; and all the saints too, like these, acknowledge their own wretchedness. So that he surely who is lifted up in boasting, is the very person to be most ignorant of himself. Wherefore also in our common practice we are wont to say of the proud, he knows not himself, he is ignorant of himself. And he that knows not himself, whom will he know? For as he that knows himself will know all things, so he who knows not this, neither will he know the rest.

Such an one was he that says, I will exalt my throne above the Heavens. and did not account himself to be worthy so much as of the title of the apostles, after so many and so great deeds of goodness.

Him therefore let us emulate and follow. And we shall follow him, if we rid ourselves of earth, and of things on earth. For nothing makes a man to be so ignorant of himself, as the being riveted to worldly concerns: nor does anything again so much cause men to be riveted to worldly concerns, as ignorance of one's self: for these things depend upon each other. I mean, that as he that is fond of outward glory, and highly esteems the things present, if he strive for ever, is not permitted to understand himself; so he that overlooks these things will easily know himself; and having come to the knowledge of himself, he will proceed in order to all the other parts of virtue.

In order therefore that we may learn this good knowledge, let us, disengaged from all the perishable things that kindle in us so great flame, and made aware of their vileness, show forth all lowliness of mind, and self-restraint: that we may attain unto blessings, both present and future: by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom be glory, might, and honor, to the Father, together with the Holy and Good Spirit, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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