

Homily 31 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the power of faith in Christ to heal and resurrect, encouraging believers to view death as a temporary sleep and to live in hope of eternal life.

Scripture: Isaiah 35:10, Matthew 8:11, Matthew 9:18, Matthew 26:39, Luke 8:49-50, John 11:6-12

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Eternal Life"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the story of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the issue of blood, emphasizing the importance of faith, trust, and patience in times of desperation and loss. He highlights how Jesus' compassion and power over death bring hope and comfort to those who believe. Chrysostom addresses the cultural practices of mourning and challenges believers to shift their perspective on death, viewing it as a temporary rest leading to eternal life and glory in Heaven. He encourages the congregation to find solace in the resurrection and immortality promised by God, urging them to embrace suffering with faith and endurance, knowing that death is not the end but a passage to a better existence.

Transcript

Matt. IX. 18.

While He spoke these things unto them, behold, there came in a ruler, and worshipped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay Your hand upon her, and she shall live.

The deed overtook the words; so that the mouths of the Pharisees were the more stopped. For both he that came was a ruler of the synagogue, and his affliction terrible. For the young damsel was both his only child, and twelve years old, the very flower of her age; on which account especially He raised her up again, and that immediately.

And if Luke say that men came, saying, Trouble not the Master, for she is dead; Luke 8:49 we will say this, that the expression, she is even now dead, was that of one conjecturing from the time of his journeying, or exaggerating his affliction. For it is an usual thing with persons in need to heighten their own evils by their report, and to say something more than is really true, the more to attract those whom they are beseeching.

But see his dullness: how he requires of Christ two things, both His actual presence, and the laying on of His hand: and this by the way is a sign that he had left her still breathing. This Naaman also, that Syrian, required of the prophet. For I thought, says he, he will surely come out, and will lay on his hand. For in

truth they who are more or less dull of temper, require sight and sensible things.

And whereas Mark Mark 5:37 says, He took the three disciples, and so does Luke; Luke 8:51 our evangelist merely says, the disciples. Wherefore then did He not take with Him Matthew, though he had but just come unto Him? To bring him to a more earnest longing, and because he was yet rather in an imperfect state. For to this intent does He honor those, that these may grow such as those are. But for him it sufficed for the present, to see what befell the woman with the issue of blood, and to be honored by His table, and by His partaking of his salt.

And when He had risen up many followed Him, as for a great miracle, both on account of the person who had come, and because the more part being of a grosser disposition were seeking not so much the care of the soul, as the healing of the body; and they flowed together, some urged by their own afflictions, some hastening to behold how other men's were cured: however, there were as yet but few in the habit of coming principally for the sake of His words and doctrine. Nevertheless, He did not suffer them to enter into the house, but His disciples only; and not even all of these, everywhere instructing us to repel the applause of the multitude.

2. And, behold, it is said, a woman that had an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment. For she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole.

Wherefore did she not approach Him boldly? She was ashamed on account of her affliction, accounting herself to be unclean. For if the menstruous woman was judged not to be clean, much more would she have the same thought, who was afflicted with such a disease; since in fact that complaint was under the law accounted a great uncleanness. Leviticus 15:25 Therefore she lies hidden, and conceals herself. For neither had she as yet the proper and correct opinion concerning Him: else she would not have thought to be concealed. And this is the first woman that came unto Him in public, having heard of course that He heals women also, and that He is on His way to the little daughter that was dead.

And she dared not invite Him to her house, although she was wealthy; nay, neither did she approach publicly, but secretly with faith she touched His garments. For she did not doubt, nor say in herself, Shall I indeed be delivered from the disease? Shall I indeed fail of deliverance? But confident of her health, she so approached Him. For she said, we read, in herself, If I may only touch His garment, I shall be whole. Yea, for she saw out of what manner of house He had come, that of the publicans, and who they were that followed Him, sinners and publicans; and all these things made her to be of good hope.

What then does Christ? He suffers her not to be hid, but brings her into the midst, and makes her manifest for many purposes.

It is true indeed that some of the senseless ones say, He does this for love of glory. For why, say they, did He not allow her to be hidden? What do you say, unholy, yea, all unholy one? He that enjoins silence, He that passes by miracles innumerable, is He in love with glory?

For what intent then does He bring her forward? In the first place He puts an end to the woman's fear, lest being pricked by her conscience, as having stolen the gift, she should abide in agony. In the second place, He sets her right, in respect of her thinking to be hid. Thirdly, He exhibits her faith to all, so as to provoke the rest also to emulation; and His staying of the fountains of her blood was no greater sign than He affords in signifying His knowledge of all things. Moreover the ruler of the synagogue, who was on the

point of thorough unbelief, and so of utter ruin, He corrects by the woman. Since both they that came said, Trouble not the Master, for the damsel is dead; and those in the house laughed Him to scorn, when He said, She sleeps; and it was likely that the father too should have experienced some such feeling. Therefore to correct this weakness beforehand, He brings forward the simple woman. For as to that ruler being quite of the grosser sort, hear what He says unto him: Fear not, do thou believe only, and she shall be made whole. Luke 8:50

Thus He waited also on purpose for death to come on, and that then He should arrive; in order that the proof of the resurrection might be distinct. With this view He both walks more leisurely, and discourses more with the woman; that He might give time for the damsel to die, and for those to come, who told of it, and said, Trouble not the Master. This again surely the evangelist obscurely signifies, when he says, While He yet spoke, there came from the house certain which said, Your daughter is dead, trouble not the Master. For His will was that her death should be believed, that her resurrection might not be suspected. And this He does in every instance. So also in the case of Lazarus, He waited a first and a second and a third day. John 11:6, 39

On account then of all these things He brings her forward, and says, Daughter, be of good cheer, even as He had said also to the paralyzed person, Son, be of good cheer. Because in truth the woman was exceedingly alarmed; therefore He says, be of good cheer, and He calls her daughter; for her faith had made her a daughter. After that comes also her praise: Your faith has made you whole.

But Luke tells us also other things more than these concerning the woman. Thus, when she had approached Him, says he, and had received her health, Christ did not immediately call her, but first He says, Which is he that touched me? Then when Peter and they that were with Him said, Master, the multitude throng You, and press You, and sayest Thou, who touched me? Luke 8:45 (which was a very sure sign both that He was encompassed with real flesh, and that He trampled on all vainglory, for they did not follow Him at all afar off, but thronged Him on every side); He for His part continued to say, Somebody has touched me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me; answering after a grosser manner according to the impression of His hearers. But these things He said, that He might also induce her of herself to make confession. For on this account neither did He immediately convict her, in order that having signified that He knows all things clearly, He might induce her of her own accord to publish all, and work upon her to proclaim herself what had been done, and that He might not incur suspicion by saying it.

Do you see the woman superior to the ruler of the synagogue? She detained Him not, she took no hold of Him, but touched Him only with the end of her fingers, and though she came later, she first went away healed. And he indeed was bringing the Physician altogether to his house, but for her a mere touch suffered. For though she was bound by her affliction, yet her faith had given her wings. And mark how He comforts her, saying, Your faith has saved you. Now surely, had He drawn her forward for display, He would not have added this; but He says this, partly teaching the ruler of the synagogue to believe, partly proclaiming the woman's praise, and affording her by these words delight and advantage equal to her bodily health.

For that He did this as minded to glorify her, and to amend others, and not to show Himself glorious, is manifest from hence; that He indeed would have been equally an object of admiration even without this (for the miracles were pouring around Him faster than the snow-flakes, and He both had done and was to do far greater things than these): but the woman, had this not happened, would have gone away hid, deprived of those great praises. For this cause He brought her forward, and proclaimed her praise, and

cast out her fear, (for she came, it is said, trembling); and He caused her to be of good courage, and together with health of body, He gave her also other provisions for her journey, in that He said, Go in peace. Luke 8:48

3. And when He came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, He says unto them, Give place, for the maid is not dead, but sleeps. And they laughed Him to scorn.

Noble tokens, surely, these, of the rulers of synagogues; in the moment of her death pipes and cymbals raising a dirge! What then does Christ? All the rest He cast out, but the parents He brought in; to leave no room for saying that He healed her in any other way. And before her resurrection too, He raises her in His word; saying, The maid is not dead, but sleeps. And in many instances besides He does this. As then on the sea He expels tumult from the mind of the by-standers, at the same time both signifying that it is easy for Him to raise the dead (which same thing He did with respect to Lazarus also, saying, Our friend Lazarus sleeps John 11:11; and also teaching us not to fear death; for that it is not death, but is henceforth become a sleep. Thus, since He Himself was to die, He does in the persons of others prepare His disciples beforehand to be of good courage, and to bear the end meekly. Since in truth, when He had come, death was from that time forward a sleep.

But yet they laughed Him to scorn: He however was not indignant at being disbelieved by those for whom He was a little afterwards to work miracles; neither did He rebuke their laughter, in order that both it and the pipes, and the cymbals, and all the other things, might be a sure proof of her death. For since for the most part, after the miracles are done, men disbelieve, He takes them beforehand by their own answers; which was done in the case both of Lazarus and of Moses. For to Moses first He says, What is that in your hand? Exodus 4:2 in order that when he saw it become a serpent, He should not forget that it was a rod before, but being reminded of his own saying, might be amazed at what was done. And with regard to Lazarus He says, Where have ye laid him? John 11:34, 39 that they who had said, Come and see, and he stinks, for he has been dead four days, might no longer be able to disbelieve His having raised a dead man.

Seeing then the cymbals and the multitude, He put them all out, and in the presence of the parents works the miracle; not introducing another soul, but recalling the same that had gone out, and awakening her as it were out of a sleep.

And He holds her by the hand, assuring the beholders; so as by that sight to make a way for the belief of her resurrection. For whereas the father said, Lay your hand upon her; Matthew 9:18 He on His part does somewhat more, for He lays no hand on her, but rather takes hold of her, and raises her, implying that to Him all things are ready. And He not only raises her up, but also commands to give her meat, that the event might not seem to be an illusion. And He does not give it Himself, but commands them; as also with regard to Lazarus He said, Loose him, and let him go, John 11:44 and afterwards makes him partaker of His table. John 12:2 For so is He wont always to establish both points, making out with all completeness the demonstration alike of the death and of the resurrection.

But do thou mark, I pray you, not her resurrection only, but also His commanding to tell no man; and by all learn thou this especially, His freedom from haughtiness and vainglory. And withal learn this other thing also, that He cast them that were beating themselves out of the house, and declared them unworthy of such a sight; and do not thou go out with the minstrels, but remain with Peter, and John, and James.

For if He cast them out then, much more now. For then it was not yet manifest that death was become a sleep, but now this is clearer than the very sun itself. But is it that He has not raised your daughter now? But surely He will raise her, and with more abundant glory. For that damsel, when she had risen, died again; but your child, if she rise again, abides thenceforth in immortal being.

4. Let no man therefore beat himself any more, nor wail, neither disparage Christ's achievement. For indeed He overcame death. Why then do you wail for nought? The thing has become a sleep. Why lament and weep? Why, even if Greeks did this, they should be laughed to scorn; but when the believer behaves himself unseemly in these things, what plea has he? What excuse will there be for them that are guilty of such folly, and this, after so long a time, and so clear proof of the resurrection?

But you, as though laboring to add to the charge against you, dost also bring us in heathen women singing dirges, to kindle your feelings, and to stir up the furnace thoroughly: and you hearken not to Paul, saying, What concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel?

And while the children of heathens, who know nothing of resurrection, do yet find words of consolation, saying, Bear it manfully, for it is not possible to undo what has taken place, nor to amend it by lamentations; art not thou, who hear sayings wiser and better than these, ashamed to behave yourself more unseemly than they? For we say not at all, Bear it manfully, because it is not possible to undo what has taken place, but, bear it manfully, because he will surely rise again; the child sleeps and is not dead; he is at rest and has not perished. For resurrection will be his final lot, and eternal life, and immortality, and an angel's portion. Do you not hear the Psalm that says, Return unto your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you? God calls it bountiful dealing, and do you make lamentation?

And what more could you have done, if you were a foe and an enemy of the dead? Why, if there must be mourning, it is the devil that ought to mourn. He may beat himself, he may wail, at our journeying to greater blessings. This lamentation becomes his wickedness, not you, who art going to be crowned and to rest. Yea, for death is a fair haven. Consider, at any rate, with how many evils our present life is filled; reflect how often you yourself hast cursed our present life. For indeed things go on to worse, and from the very beginning thou were involved in no small condemnation. For, says He, In sorrow you shall bring forth children; and, In the sweat of your face shall you eat your bread; and, In the world you shall have tribulation. John 16:33

But of our state there, no such word at all is spoken, but all the contrary; that grief and sorrow and sighing have fled away. Isaiah 35:10 And that men shall come from the east and from the west, and shall recline in the bosoms of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Matthew 8:11 And that the region there is a spiritual bride-chamber, and bright lamps, and a translation to Heaven.

5. Why then disgrace the departed? Why dispose the rest to fear and tremble at death? Why cause many to accuse God, as though He had done very dreadful things? Or rather, why after this invite poor persons, and entreat priests to pray? In order, says he, that the dead may depart into rest; that he may find the Judge propitious. For these things then are you mourning and wailing? You are therefore fighting and warring with yourself: exciting a storm against yourself on account of his having entered into harbor.

But what can I do? says he: such a thing is nature. The blame is not nature's, neither does it belong to the necessary consequence of the thing; but it is we that are turning all things upside down, are overcome with softness, are giving up our proper nobility, and are making the unbelievers worse. For how shall we reason with another concerning immortality? How shall we persuade the heathen, when we fear death,

and shudder at it more than he? Many, for instance, among the Greeks although they knew nothing of course about immortality, have crowned themselves at the decrease of their children, and appeared in white garments, that they might reap the present glory; but thou not even for the future glory's sake ceaseest your woman's behavior and wailing.

But have you no heirs, nor any to succeed to your goods? And which would you rather, that he should be heir of your possessions, or of Heaven? And which did you desire, that he should succeed to the things that perish, which he must have let go soon after, or to things that remain, and are immoveable? You had him not for heir, but God had him instead of you; he became not joint-heir with his own brethren, but he became joint-heir with Christ.

But to whom, says he, are we to leave our garments, to whom our houses, to whom our slaves and our lands? To him again, and more securely than if he lived; for there is nothing to hinder. For if barbarians burn the goods of the departed together with them, much more were it a righteous thing for you to send away with the dead what things he has: not to be turned to ashes, like those, but to invest him with more glory; and that if he departed a sinner, it may do away his sins; but if righteous, that it may become an increase of reward and recompense.

But do you long to see him? Then live the same life with him, and you will soon obtain that sacred vision.

And herewith consider this also, that though you should not hearken to us, you will certainly yield to time. But no reward then for you; for the consolation comes of the number of the days. Whereas if you are willing now to command yourself, you will gain two very great points: first, you will deliver yourself from the intervening ills, next, you will be crowned with the brighter crown from God. For indeed neither almsgiving nor anything else is nearly so great as bearing affliction meekly.

Bear in mind, that even the Son of God died: and He indeed for you, but thou for yourself. And when He said, If it be possible, let the cup pass from me, Matthew 26:39 and suffered pain, and was in agony, nevertheless He shunned not the end, but underwent it, and that with its whole course of exceeding woe. That is, He did by no means simply endure death, but the most shameful death; and before His death, stripes; and before His stripes, upbraidings, and jeers, and revilings; instructing you to bear all manfully. And though He died, and put off His body, He resumed it again in greater glory, herein also holding out to you good hopes. If these things be not a fable, lament not. If you account these things to be sure, weep not; but if you dost weep, how will you be able to persuade the Greek that you believe?

6. But even so does the event still appear intolerable to you? Well then, for this very cause it is not meet to lament for him, for he is delivered from many such calamities. Grudge not therefore against him, neither envy him: for to ask death for yourself because of his premature end, and to lament for him that he did not live to endure many such things, is rather the part of one grudging and envying.

And think not of this, that he will no more return home: but that yourself also art a little while after to go to him. Regard not this, that he returns here no more, but that neither do these things that are seen remain such as they are, but these too are being transformed. Yea, for heaven, and earth, and sea, and all, are being put together afresh, and then shall you recover your child in greater glory.

And if indeed he departed a sinner, his wickedness is stayed; for certainly, had God known that he was being converted, He would not have snatched him away before his repentance: but if he ended his life righteous, he now possesses all good in safety. Whence it is manifest that your tears are not of kindly

affection, but of unreasoning passion. For if you loved the departed, you should rejoice and be glad that he is delivered from the present waves.

For what is there more, I pray you? What is there fresh and new? Do we not see the same things daily revolving? Day and night, night and day, winter and summer, summer and winter, and nothing more. And these indeed are ever the same; but our evils are fresh, and newer. Would you then have him every day drawing up more of these things, and abiding here, and sickening, and mourning, and in fear and trembling, and enduring some of the ills of life, dreading others lest he some time endure them? Since assuredly you can not say this, that one sailing over this great sea might possibly be free from despondency and cares, and from all other such things.

And withal take this also into account, that you did not bring him forth immortal; and that if he had not died now, he must have endured it soon after. But is it that you had not your fill of him? But you will of a certainty enjoy him there. But do you long to see him here also? And what is there to hinder you? For you are permitted even here, if you be watchful; for the hope of the things to come is clearer than sight.

But you, if he were in some king's court would not ever seek to see him, so long as you heard of his good report: and seeing him departed to the things that are far better, are you faint-hearted about a little time; and that, when you have in his place one to dwell with you?

But have you no husband? Yet have you a consolation, even the Father of the orphans, and Judge of the widows. Hear even Paul pronouncing this widowhood blessed, and saying, Now she that is a widow indeed and desolate, trusts in the Lord. Because such an one will appear more approved, evincing as she does greater patience. Mourn not therefore for that which is your crown, that for which you demand a reward.

Since you have also restored His deposit, if you have exhibited the very thing entrusted to you. Be not in care any more, having laid up the possession in an inviolable treasure-house.

But if you would really learn, both what is our present being, and what our life to come; and that the one is a spider's web and a shadow, but the things there, all of them, immoveable and immortal; you would not after that want other arguments. For whereas now your child is delivered from all change; if he were here, perhaps he might continue good, perhaps not so. Do you see not how many openly cast off their own children? How many are constrained to keep them at home, although worse than the open outcasts?

Let us make account of all these things and practise self-command; for so shall we at once show regard to the deceased, and enjoy much praise from men, and receive from God the great rewards of patience, and attain unto the good things eternal; unto which may we all attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might forever and ever. Amen.

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