

# Homily 83 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's Homily 83 on Matthew explores Jesus' agony in Gethsemane, emphasizing the importance of prayer, vigilance, and the dangers of covetousness.*

**Topics:** "Humanity Of Christ", "Submission To God"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the events in Gethsemane where Jesus, in His humanity, expresses deep sorrow and prays earnestly to the Father, demonstrating both His humanity and virtue in submitting to God's will. Despite the disciples' inability to stay awake and their weakness, Jesus teaches the importance of humility, contrition, and reliance on God in times of temptation. He rebukes Peter for his self-confidence and emphasizes the need to follow God's will above all else, even in the face of personal desires and struggles.

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## Transcript

Matt. XXVI. 36-38.

Then comes Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and says unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy: and He says unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me.

Because they clung to Him inseparably, therefore He says, Tarry ye here, while I go away and pray. For it was usual with Him to pray apart from them. And this He did teaching us in our prayers, to prepare silence for ourselves and great retirement.

And He takes with Him the three, and says unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Wherefore does He not take all with Him? That they might not be cast down; but these He takes that had been spectators of His glory. However, even these He dismisses: And He went on a little farther, and prays, saying, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as You will. And He comes unto them, and finds them sleeping, and says unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Not without reason does He inveigh against Peter most, although the others also had slept; but to make him feel by this also, for the cause which I mentioned before. Then because the others also said the same thing (for when Peter had said (these are the words), Though I must die with You, I will not deny You; likewise also, it is added, said all the disciples); Matthew 26:36 He addresses Himself to all, convicting their weakness. For they who are desiring to die with Him, were not then able so much as to sorrow with Him wakefully, but sleep overcame them.

And He prays with earnestness, in order that the thing might not seem to be acting. And sweats flow over him for the same cause again, even that the heretics might not say this, that He acts the agony. Therefore there is a sweat like drops of blood, and an angel appeared strengthening Him, and a thousand sure signs of fear, lest any one should affirm the words to be feigned. For this cause also was this prayer. By saying then, If it be possible, let it pass from me, He showed His humanity; but by saying, Nevertheless not as I will, but as You will, He showed His virtue and self-command, teaching us even when nature pulls us back, to follow God. For since it was not enough for the foolish to show His face only, He uses words also. Again, words sufficed not alone, but deeds likewise were needed; these also He joins with the words, that even they who are in a high degree contentious may believe, that He both became man and died. For if, even when these things are so, this be still disbelieved by some, much more, if these had not been. See by how many things He shows the reality of the incarnation: by what He speaks, by what He suffers. After that He comes and says to Peter, as it is said, What, could you not watch one hour with me? Mark 14:37 All were sleeping, and He rebukes Peter, hinting at him, in what He spoke. And the words, with me, are not employed without reason; it is as though He had said, You could not watch with me one hour, and will you lay down your life for me? And what follows also, intimates this self-same thing. For Watch, says He, and pray not to enter into temptation. See how He is again instructing them not to be self-confident, but contrite in mind, and to be humble, and to refer all to God.

And at one time He addresses Himself to Peter, at another to all in common. And to him He says, Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you; and to all in common, Pray that you enter not into temptation; every way plucking up their self-will, and making them earnest-minded. Then, that He might not seem to make His language altogether condemnatory, He says, The spirit indeed is ready, but the flesh is weak. For even although thou dost desire to despise death, yet you will not be able, until God stretch forth His hand, for the carnal mind draws down.

And again He prayed in the same way, saying, Father, if this cannot pass from me except I drink it, Your will be done, showing here, that He fully harmonizes with God's will, and that we must always follow this, and seek after it.

And He came and found them asleep. For besides that it was late at night, their eyes also were weighed down by their despondency. And the third time He went and spoke the same thing, establishing the fact, that He was become man. For the second and third time is in the Scriptures especially indicative of truth; like as Joseph also said to Pharaoh, Did the dream appear to you the second time? For truth was this done, and that you might be assured that this shall surely be. Genesis 41:32 Therefore He too once, and twice, and three times spoke the same thing, for the sake of proving the incarnation.

And wherefore came He the second time? In order to reprove them, for that they were so drowned in despondency, as not to have any sense even of His presence. He did not however reprove them, but stood apart from them a little, showing their unspeakable weakness, that not even when they had been rebuked, were they able to endure. But He does not awake and rebuke them again, lest He should smite

them that were already smitten, but He went away and prayed, and when He has come back again, He says, Sleep on now, and take your rest. And yet then there was need to be wakeful, but to show that they will not bear so much as the sight of the dangers, but will be put to flight and desert Him from their terror, and that He has no need of their succor, and that He must by all means be delivered up, Sleep on now, He says, and take your rest; behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Matthew 26:45

He shows again that what is done belongs to a divine dispensation.

2. But He does not this only, but also, by saying, into the hands of sinners, He cheers up their minds, showing it was the effect of their wickedness, not of His being liable to any charge.

Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that does betray me. Matthew 26:46 For by all means He taught them, that the matter was not of necessity, nor of weakness, but of some secret dispensation. For, as we see, He foreknew that Judas would come, and so far from flying, He even went to meet him. At any rate, While He yet spoke, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Matthew 26:47 Seemly surely are the instruments of the priests! with swords and staves do they come against Him! And Judas, it is said, with them, one of the twelve. Again he calls him of the twelve, and is not ashamed. Now he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He, hold Him fast. Oh! What depravity had the traitor's soul received. For with what kind of eyes did he then look at his Master? With what mouth did he kiss Him? Oh! accursed purpose; what did he devise? What did he dare? What sort of sign of betrayal did he give? Whomsoever I shall kiss, he says. He was emboldened by his Master's gentleness, which more than all was sufficient to shame him, and to deprive him of all excuse for that he was betraying one so meek.

But wherefore does He say this? Because often when seized by them He had gone out through the midst, without their knowing it. Nevertheless, then also this would have been done, if it had not been His own will that He should be taken. It was at least with a view to teach them this, that He then blinded their eyes, and Himself asked, Whom do you seek? John 18:4 And they knew Him not, though being with lanterns and torches, and having Judas with them. Afterwards, as they had said, Jesus; He says, I am He whom you seek: and here again, Friend, wherefore are you come?

For after having shown His own strength, then at once He yielded Himself. But John says, that even to the very moment He continued to reprove him, saying, Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? Luke 22:48 Are you not ashamed even of the form of the betrayal? Says He. Nevertheless, forasmuch as not even this checked him, He submitted to be kissed, and gave Himself up willingly; and they laid their hands on Him, and seized Him that night on which they ate the passover, to such a degree did they boil with rage, and were mad. However, they would have had no strength, unless He had Himself suffered it. Yet this delivers not Judas from intolerable punishment, but even more exceedingly condemns him, for that though he had received such proof of His power, and lenity, and meekness, and gentleness, he became fiercer than any wild beast.

Knowing then these things, let us flee from covetousness. For that, that it was, which then drove him to madness; that exercises them who are taken thereby in the most extreme cruelty and inhumanity. For, when it makes them to despair of their own salvation, much more does it cause them to overlook that of the rest of mankind. And so tyrannical is the passing, as sometimes to prevail over the keenest lust.

Wherefore indeed I am exceedingly ashamed, that to spare their money, may indeed have bridled their unchastity, but for the fear of Christ they were not willing to live chastely and with gravity.

Wherefore I say, let us flee from it; for I will not cease for ever saying this. For why, O man, do you gather gold? Why do you make your bondage more bitter? Why your watching more grievous? Why your anxiety more painful? Account for your own the metals buried in the mines, those in the kings' courts. For indeed if you had all that heap, you would keep it only, and would not use it. For if now you have not used the things you possess, but abstainest from them as though they belonged to others, much more would this be the case with you, if you had more. For it is the way of the covetous, the more they heap up around them, the more to be sparing of it. But I know, do you say, that these things are mine. The possession then is in supposition only, not in enjoyment. But I should be an object of fear to men, do you say. Nay, but you would by this become a more easy prey both to rich and poor, to robbers, and false accusers, and servants, and in general to all that are minded to plot against you. For if you are desirous to be an object of fear, cut off the occasions by which they are able to lay hold of you and pain you, whoever have set their hearts thereon. Do you not hear the parable that says, that the poor and naked man, not even a hundred men gathered together are ever able to strip? For he has his poverty as his greatest protection, which not even the king shall ever be able to subdue and take.

3. The covetous man indeed all join in vexing. And why do I say men, when moths and worms war against such a man? And why do I speak of moths? Length of time is enough alone, even when no one troubles him, to do the greatest injury to such a man.

What then is the pleasure of wealth? For I see its discomforts, but do thou tell me the pleasure of it. And what are its discomforts? Do you say: anxieties, plots, enmities, hatred, fear; to be ever thirsting and in pain.

For if any one were to embrace a damsel he loves, but were not able to satisfy his desire, he undergoes the utmost torment. Even so also does the rich man. For he has plenty, and is with her, but cannot satisfy all his desire; but the same result takes place as some wise man mentions; The lust of eunuch to deflower a virgin; and, Like an eunuch embracing a virgin and groaning; so are all the rich.

Why should one speak of the other things? How such a one is displeasing to all, to his servants, his laborers, his neighbors, to them that handle public affairs, to them that are injured, to them that are not injured, to his wife most of all, and to his children more than to any. For not as men does he bring them up, but more miserably than menials and purchased slaves.

And countless occasions for anger, and vexation, and insult, and ridicule against himself, does he bring about, being set forth as a common laughing stock to all. So the discomforts are these, and perhaps more than these; before one could never go through them all in discourse, but experience will be able to set them before us.

But tell me the pleasure from hence. I appear to be rich, he says, and am reputed to be rich. And what kind of pleasure to be so reputed? It is a very great name for envy. I say a name, for wealth is a name only void of reality.

Yet he that is rich, says he, indulges and delights himself with this notion. He delights himself in those things about which he ought to grieve. To grieve? Wherefore? asks he. Because this renders him useless for all purposes, and cowardly and unmanly both with regard to banishment and to death, for he holds this

double, longing more for money than for light. Such a one not even Heaven delights, because it bears not gold; nor the sun, forasmuch as it puts not forth golden beams.

But there are some, says he, who do enjoy what they possess, living in luxury, in gluttony, in drunkenness, spending sumptuously. You are telling me of persons worse than the first. For the last above all are the men, who have no enjoyment. For the first at least abstains from other evils, being bound to one love; but the others are worse than these, besides what we have said, bringing in upon themselves a crowd of cruel masters, and doing service every day to the belly, to lust, to drunkenness, to other kinds of intemperance, as to so many cruel tyrants, keeping harlots, preparing expensive feasts, purchasing parasites, flatterers, turning aside after unnatural lusts, involving their body and their soul in a thousand diseases springing therefrom.

For neither is it on what they want they spend their goods, but on ruining the body, and on ruining also the soul therewith; and they do the same, as if any one, when adorning his person, were to think he was spending his money on his own wants.

So that he alone enjoys pleasure and is master of his goods, who uses his wealth for a proper object; but these are slaves and captives, for they aggravate both the passions of the body and the diseases of the soul. What manner of enjoyment is this, where is siege and war, and a storm worse than all the raging of the sea? For if wealth find men fools, it renders them more foolish; if wanton, more wanton.

And what is the use of understanding, you will say, to the poor man? As might be expected you are ignorant; for neither does the blind man know what is the advantage of light. Listen to Solomon, saying, As far as light excels darkness, so does wisdom excel folly. Ecclesiastes 2:13

But how shall we instruct him that is in darkness? For the love of money is darkness, permitting nothing that is to appear as it is, but otherwise. For much as one in darkness, though he should see a golden vessel, though a precious stone, though purple garments, supposes them to be nothing, for he sees not their beauty; so also he that is in covetousness, knows not as he ought the beauty of those things that are worthy of our care. Disperse then I pray you the mist that arises from this passion, and then will you see the nature of things.

But nowhere do these things so plainly appear as in poverty, nowhere are those things so disproved which seem to be, and are not, as in self-denial.

4. But oh! Foolish men; who do even curse the poor, and say that both houses and living are disgraced by poverty, confounding all things. For what is a disgrace to a house? I pray you. It has no couch of ivory, nor silver vessels, but all of earthenware and wood. Nay, this is the greatest glory and distinction to a house. For to be indifferent about worldly things, often occasions all a man's leisure to be spent in the care of his soul.

When therefore you see great care about outward things, then be ashamed at the great unseemliness. For the houses of them that are rich most of all want seemliness. For when you see tables covered with hangings, and couches inlaid with silver, much as in the theatre, much as in the display of the stage, what can be equal to this unseemliness? For what kind of house is most like the stage, and the things on the stage? The rich man's or the poor man's? Is it not quite plain that it is the rich man's? This therefore is full of unseemliness. What kind of house is most like Paul's, or Abraham's? It is quite evident that it is the poor man's. This therefore is most adorned, and to be approved. And that you may learn that this is, above all,

a house's adorning, enter into the house of Zacchaeus, and learn, when Christ was on the point of entering therein, how Zacchaeus adorned it. For he did not run to his neighbors begging curtains, and seats, and chairs made of ivory, neither did he bring forth from his closets Laconian hangings; but he adorned it with an adorning suitable to Christ. What was this? The half of my goods I will give, he says, to the poor; and whomsoever I have robbed, I will restore fourfold. On this wise let us too adorn our houses, that Christ may enter in unto us also. These are the fair curtains, these are wrought in Heaven, they are woven there. Where these are, there is also the King of Heaven. But if you adorn it in another way, you are inviting the devil and his company.

He came also into the house of the publican Matthew. What then did this man also do? He first adorned himself by his readiness, and by his leaving all, and following Christ.

So also Cornelius adorned his house with prayers and alms; wherefore even unto this day it shines above the very palace. For the vile state of a house is not in vessels lying in disorder, nor in an untidy bed, nor in walls covered with smoke, but in the wickedness of them that dwell therein. And Christ shows it, for into such a house, if the inhabitant be virtuous, He is not ashamed to enter; but into that other, though it have a golden roof, He will never enter. So that while this one is more gorgeous than the palace, receiving the Lord of all, that with its golden roof and columns is like filthy drains and sewers, for it contains the vessels of the devil.

But these things we have spoken not of those who are rich for a useful purpose, but of the grasping, and the covetous. For neither is there among these, diligence nor care about the things needful, but about pampering the belly, and drunkenness, and other like unseemliness; but with the others about self-restraint. Therefore nowhere did Christ enter into a gorgeous house, but into that of the publican and chief publican, and fisherman, leaving the kings' palaces, and them that are clothed with soft raiment.

If then thou also desirest to invite Him, deck your house with alms, with prayers, with supplications, with vigils. These are the decorations of Christ the King, but those of mammon, the enemy of Christ. Let no one be ashamed then of a humble house, if it has this furniture; let no rich man pride himself on having a costly house, but let him rather hide his face, and seek after this other, forsaking that, that both here he may receive Christ, and there enjoy the eternal tabernacles, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might world without end. Amen.

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