

Homily 85 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 85 on Matthew explores the themes of mockery, denial, betrayal, and the call to genuine repentance and charity in light of Christ's suffering.

Scripture: Malachi 2:13, Matthew 25:42, Matthew 26:67, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:61, Hebrews 13:13

Topics: "The Crucifixion", "Gods Judgment"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the events leading to Jesus' crucifixion, highlighting the cruelty and mockery inflicted upon Him by the people, contrasting it with the disciples' truthful and honorable account of the events. He emphasizes the unutterable tenderness of Jesus and the inexcusable wickedness of those who mistreated Him. Chrysostom also delves into the remorse of Judas and the self-condemnation of the chief priests, showcasing how their actions and decisions ultimately led to their guilt and downfall.

Transcript

Matthew 26:67-68.

Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him, and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, you Christ, who is he that smote you?

Wherefore did they these things, when they were to put Him to death? What need of this mockery? That you might learn their intemperate spirit by all things, and that having taken Him like a prey, they thus showed forth their intoxication, and gave full swing to their madness; making this a festival, and assaulting Him with pleasure, and showing forth their murderous disposition.

But admire, I pray you, the self command of the disciples, with what exactness they relate these things. Hereby is clearly shown their disposition to love the truth, because they relate with all truthfulness the things that seem to be opprobrious, disguising nothing, nor being ashamed thereof, but rather accounting it very great glory, as indeed it was, that the Lord of the universe should endure to suffer such things for us. This shows both His unutterable tenderness, and the inexcusable wickedness of those men, who had the heart to do such things to Him that was so mild and meek, and was charming them with such words, as were enough to change a lion into a lamb. For neither did He fail in any things of gentleness, nor they of insolence and cruelty, in what they did, in what they said. All which things the prophet Isaiah foretold, thus proclaiming beforehand, and by one word intimating all this insolence. For like as many were astonished at you, he says, so shall your form be held inglorious of men, and your glory of the sons of men.

For what could be equal to this insolence? On that face which the sea, when it saw it, had revered, from which the sun, when it beheld it on the cross, turned away his rays, they did spit, and struck it with the palms of their hands, and some upon the head; giving full swing in every way to their own madness. For indeed they inflicted the blows that are most insulting of all, buffeting, smiting with the palms of their hands, and to these blows adding the insult of spitting at Him. And words again teeming with much derision did they speak, saying, prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote you? because the multitude called Him a prophet.

But another Luke 22:64 says, that they covered His face with His own garment, and did these things, as though they had got in the midst of them some vile and worthless fellow. And not freemen only, but slaves also were intemperate with this intemperance towards Him at that time.

These things let us read continually, these things let us hear aright, these things let us write in our minds, for these are our honors. In these things do I take a pride, not only in the thousands of dead which He raised, but also in the sufferings which He endured. These things Paul puts forward in every way, the cross, the death, the sufferings, the revilings, the insults, the scoffs. And now he says, let us go forth unto Him bearing His reproach; Hebrews 13:13 and now, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame. Hebrews 12:2

Now Peter sat in the court outside; and a damsel came to him, saying, you also were with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what you say. And when he had gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and says, this man also was there with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath. And after a while came to him they that stood by, and said to Peter, surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you. Then he began to curse and to swear, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, which said, before the cock crow, you shall deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

Oh strange and wonderful acts! When indeed he saw his master seized only, he was so fervent as both to draw his sword, and to cut off the man's ear; but when it was natural for him to be more indignant, and to be inflamed and to burn, hearing such revilings, then he becomes a denier. For who would not have been inflamed to madness by the things that were then done? Yet the disciple, overcome by fears, so far from showing indignation, even denies, and endures not the threat of a miserable and mean girl, and not once only, but a second and third time does he deny Him; and in a short period, and not so much as before judges, for it was without for when he had gone out into the porch, they asked him, and he did not even readily come to a sense of his fall. And this Luke says, Luke 22:61 namely, that Christ looked on him showing that he not only denied Him, but was not even brought to remembrance from within, and this though the cock had crowed; but he needed a further remembrance from his master, and His look was to him instead of a voice; so exceedingly was he full of fear.

But Mark says, that when he had once denied, then first the cock crew, but when thrice, then for the second time; for he declares more particularly the weakness of the disciple, and that he was utterly dead with fear; having learned these things of his master 1 Peter 5:13 himself, for he was a follower of Peter. In which respect one would most marvel at him, that so far from hiding his teacher's faults, he declared it more distinctly than the rest, on this very account, that he was his disciple.

2. How then is what is said true, when Matthew affirms that Christ said, Verily I say unto you, that before the cock crow you shall deny me thrice; Matthew 26:34 and Mark declares after the third denial, that The

cock crew the second time? Mark 14:72 Nay, most certainly is it both true and in harmony. For because at each crowing the cock is wont to crow both a third and a fourth time, Mark, to show that not even the sound checked him, and brought him to recollection says this. So that both things are true. For before the cock had finished the one crowing, he had denied a third time. And not even when reminded of his sin by Christ did he dare to weep openly, lest he should be betrayed by his tears, but he went out, and wept bitterly.

And when it was day, they led away Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate. For because they were desirous to put Him to death, but were not able themselves because of the feast, they lead Him to the governor.

But mark, I pray you, how the act was forced on, so as to take place at the feast. For so was it typified from the first.

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that He was condemned, repented, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver.

This was a charge both against him, and against these men; against him, not because he repented, but because he did so, late, and slowly, and became self-condemned (for that he delivered Him up, he himself confessed); and against them, for that having the power to reverse it, they repented not.

But mark, when it is that he feels remorse. When his sin was completed, and had received an accomplishment. For the devil is like this; he suffers not those that are not watchful to see the evil before this, lest he whom he has taken, should repent. At least, when Jesus was saying so many things, he was not influenced, but when his offense was completed, then repentance came upon him; and not then profitably. For to condemn it, and to throw down the pieces of silver, and not to regard the Jewish people, were all acceptable things; but to hang himself, this again was unpardonable, and a work of an evil spirit. For the devil led him out of his repentance too soon, so that he should reap no fruit from thence; and carries him off, by a most disgraceful death, and one manifest to all, having persuaded him to destroy himself.

But mark, I pray you, the truth shining forth on every side, even by what the adversaries both do and suffer. For indeed even the very end of the traitor stops the mouths of them that had condemned Him, and suffers them not to have so much as any shadow of an excuse, that is surely shameless. For what could they have to say, when the traitor is shown to pass such a sentence on himself.

But let us see also the words, what is said; He brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests, and says, I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood. And they said, what is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

For neither could he bear his conscience scourging him. But mark, I pray you, the Jews too suffering the same things. For these men also, when they ought to have been amended by what they suffered, do not stop, until they have completed their sin. For his sin had been completed, for it was a betrayal; but theirs not yet. But when they too had accomplished theirs, and had nailed Him to the cross then they also are troubled; at one time saying, Write not, this is the king of the Jews John 19:21 (and yet why are you afraid? Why are you troubled at a dead body that is nailed upon the cross?); at another time they guard over Him, saying, Lest His disciples steal Him away, and say that He is risen again; so the last error shall be worse than the first. And yet if they do it, the thing is refuted, if it be not true. But how should they say so, which did not dare so much as to stand their ground, when He was seized; and the chief of them even

thrice denied Him, not bearing a damsel's threat. But, as I said, the chief priests were now troubled; for that they knew the act was a transgression of the law is manifest, from their saying, See thou to that.

Hear, you covetous, consider what befell him; how he at the same time lost the money, and committed the sin, and destroyed his own soul. Such is the tyranny of covetousness. He enjoyed not the money, neither the present life, nor that to come, but lost all at once, and having got a bad character even with those very men, so hanged himself.

But, as I said, after the act, then some see clearly. See at any rate these men too for a time not willing to have a clear perception of the fact, but saying, See thou to that: which thing of itself is a most heavy charge against them. For this is the language of men bearing witness to their daring and their transgression, but intoxicated by their passion, and not willing to forbear their satanical attempts, but senselessly wrapping themselves up in a veil of feigned ignorance.

For if indeed these things had been said after the crucifixion, and His being slain, of a truth even then the saying would have had no reasonable meaning, nevertheless it would not have condemned them so much; but now having Him yet in your own hands, and having power to release Him, how could ye be able to say these things? For this defense would be a most heavy accusation against you. How? And in what way? Because while throwing the whole blame upon the traitor (for they say, See thou to that), being able to have set themselves free from this murder of Christ, they left the traitor, and even pressed the crime further, adding the cross to the betrayal. For what hindered them, when they said to him, See thou to that, themselves to forbear the criminal act? But now they even do the contrary, adding to it the murder and in every thing, both by what they do, and by what they say, entangling themselves in inevitable ills. For indeed after these things, when Pilate left it to them, they choose the robber to be released rather than Jesus; but Him that had done no wrong, but had even conferred on them so many benefits, they slew.

3. What then did that man? When he saw that he was laboring to no profit, and that they would not consent to receive the pieces of silver, he cast them down in the temple, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, it is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, the field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, and they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him that was valued, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

Do you see them again self-condemned by their conscience? For because they knew that they had been buying the murder, they put them not into the treasury, but bought a field to bury strangers in. And this also became a witness against them, and a proof of their treason. For the name of the place more clearly than a trumpet proclaimed their blood- guiltiness. Neither did they it at random, but having taking counsel, and in every case in like manner, so that no one should be clear of the deed, but all guilty. But these things the prophecy foretold from of old. Do you see not the apostles only, but the prophets also declaring exactly those things which were matters of reproach, and every way proclaiming the passion, and indicating it beforehand?

This was the case with the Jews without their being conscious of it. For if they had cast it into the treasury, the thing would not have been so clearly discovered; but now having bought a piece of ground, they made it all manifest even to subsequent generations.

Hear ye as many as think to do good works out of murders, and take a reward for the lives of men. These almsgiving are Judaical, or rather they are Satanical. For there are, there are now also they, that take by violence countless things belonging to others, and think that an excuse is made for all if they cast in some ten or a hundred gold pieces.

Touching whom also the prophet says, You covered my altar with tears. Malachi 2:13 Christ is not willing to be fed by covetousness, He accepts not this food. Why do you insult your Lord, offering Him unclean things? It is better to leave men to pine with hunger, than to feed them from these sources. That was the conduct of a cruel man, this of one both cruel and insolent. It is better to give nothing, than to give the things of one set of persons to others. For tell me, if you saw any two persons, one naked, one having a garment, and then having stripped the one that had the garment, thou were to clothe the naked, would you not have committed an injustice? It is surely plain to every one. But if when you have given all that you have taken to another, you have committed an injustice, and not shown mercy; when you give not even a small portion of what you rob, and callest the deed alms, what manner of punishment will you not undergo? For if men offering lame brutes were blamed, what favor will you obtain doing things more grievous? For if the chief, making restitution to the owner himself, still does an injustice, and so does an injustice, as by adding fourfold scarcely to do away the charge against himself, and this under the old covenant; Exodus 22:1 he that is not stealing, but taking by violence, and not even giving to him that is robbed, but instead of him to another; nor yet giving fourfold, but not so much as the half; and moreover not living under the old dispensation, but under the new; consider how much fire he is heaping together upon his own head. And if he do not as yet suffer his punishment, for this self-same thing I say bewail him, for he is treasuring up against himself a greater wrath, unless he repent. For what? Think ye, says He, that they alone were sinners upon whom the tower fell down? Nay, I say unto you, but except ye repent, you also shall suffer the same things.

Let us repent then, and give alms pure from covetousness, and in great abundance. Consider that the Jews used to feed eight thousand Levites, and together with the Levites, widows also and orphans, and they bore many other public charges, and together with these things also served as soldiers; but now there are fields, and houses, and hirings of lodgings, and carriages, and muleteers, and mules, and a great array of this kind in the church on account of you, and your hardness of heart. For this store of the church ought to be with you, and your readiness of mind ought to be a revenue to her; but now two wrong things come to pass, both you continue unfruitful, and God's priests do not practise their proper duties.

Was it not possible for the houses and the lands to have remained in the time of the apostles? Wherefore then did they sell them and give away? Because this was a better thing.

4. But now a fear seized our fathers (when you were so mad after worldly things, and because of your gatherings, and not dispersing abroad), lest the companies of the widows and orphans, and of the virgins, should perish of famine; therefore were they constrained to provide these things. For it was not their wish to thrust themselves unto what was so unbecoming; but their desire was that your good will should have been a supply for them, and that they should gather their fruits from thence, and that they themselves should give heed to prayers only.

But now you have constrained them to imitate the houses of them that manage public affairs; whereby all things are turned upside down. For when both you and we are entangled in the same things, who is there to propitiate God? Therefore it is not possible for us to open our mouths, when the state of the church is no better than that of worldly men. Have ye not heard that the apostles would not consent so much as to

distribute the money that was collected without any trouble? But now our bishops have gone beyond agents, and stewards, and hucksters in their care about these things; and when they ought to be careful and thoughtful about your souls, they are vexing themselves every day about these things, for which the innkeepers, and tax-gatherers, and accountants, and stewards are careful.

These things I do not mention for nought in the way of complaint, but in order that there may be some amendment and change, in order that we may be pitied for serving a grievous servitude, in order that you may become a revenue and store for the church.

But if you are not willing, behold the poor before your eyes; as many as it is possible for us to suffice, we will not cease to feed; but those, whom it is not possible, we will leave to you, that you may not hear those words on the awful day, which shall be spoken to the unmerciful and cruel. You saw me an hungered, and fed me not. Matthew 25:42

For together with you this inhumanity makes us laughing-stocks, because leaving our prayers, and our teaching, and the other parts of holiness, we are fighting all our time, some with wine merchants, some with grain-factors, others with them that retail other provisions.

Hence come battles, and strifes, and daily revilings, and reproaches, and jeers, and on each of the priests names are imposed more suitable for houses of secular men; when it would have been fit to take other names in the place of these, and to be named from those things, from which also the apostles ordained, from the feeding of the hungry, from the protection of the injured, from the care of strangers, from succoring them that are despitefully used, from providing for the orphans, from taking part with the widows, from presiding over the virgins; and these offices should be distributed among us instead of the care of the lands and houses.

These are the stores of the church, these the treasures that become her, and that afford in great degree both ease to us and profit to you; or rather to you ease with the profit. For I suppose that by the grace of God they that assemble themselves here amount to the number of one hundred thousand; and if each bestowed one loaf to some one of the poor, all would be in plenty; but if one farthing only, no one would be poor; and we should not undergo so many revilings and jeers, in consequence of our care about the money. For indeed the saying, Sell your goods, and give to the poor, and come and follow me, might be seasonably addressed to the prelates of the church with respect to the property of the church. For in any other way it is not possible to follow Him as we ought, not being freed from all grosser and more worldly care.

But now the priests of God attend at the vintage and harvest, and at the sale and purchase of the produce; and whereas they that served the shadow had an entire immunity from such matters, although entrusted with a more carnal service; we, who are invited to the very inmost shrines of the heavens, and who enter into the true holy of holies, take upon ourselves the cares of tradesmen and retail dealers.

Hence great neglect of the Scriptures, and remissness in prayers, and indifference about all the other duties; for it is not possible to be split into the two things with due zeal. Where I pray and beseech you that many fountains may spring up to us from all quarters, and that your forwardness may be to us the threshing floor and the wine press.

For in this way both the poor will more easily be supported, and God will be glorified, and you will advance unto a greater degree of love to mankind, and will enjoy the good things eternal; unto which God grant we

may all attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory world without end. Amen.

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