

John 6:1-7

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus teaches us to despise worldly dignities and to desire eternal glory, and to be mindful of our dependence on Him.

Scripture: John 6:4-5, John 6:7-8, John 6:12, John 6:15

Topics: "Conflict Resolution", "Miracles Of Jesus"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of not contending with violent individuals but rather yielding to their evil counsel to diminish their hostility. He emphasizes Jesus' strategic movements to avoid conflict and to focus on teaching and miracles. Chrysostom delves into the significance of Jesus' actions, such as going up the mountain with His disciples to prepare for a miracle, demonstrating the need for solitude and wisdom. He also highlights the lesson of giving thanks before meals, the abundance of God's power displayed in the feeding of the multitude, and the disciples' role in the miracle as a means of instruction and preparation for their future ministry.

Transcript

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, into the parts of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed Him, because they saw the miracles which He did on them that were diseased. And Jesus departed into a mountain, and there sat with His disciples. And the Passover of the Jews was near.

1. Beloved, let us not contend with violent men, but learn when the doing so brings no hurt to our virtue to give place to their evil counsels; for so all their hardihood is checked. As darts when they fall upon a firm, hard, and resisting substance, rebound with great violence on those who throw them, but when the violence of the cast has nothing to oppose it, it soon becomes weaker and ceases, so is it with insolent men; when we contend with them they become the fiercer, but when we yield and give ground, we easily abate all their madness. Wherefore the Lord when He knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, went into Galilee, to quench their envy, and to soften by His retirement the wrath which was likely to be engendered by these reports. And when He departed for the second time into Galilee, He comes not to the same places as before; for He went not to Cana, but to the other side of the sea, and great multitudes followed Him, beholding the miracles which He did. What miracles? Why does he not mention them specifically? Because this Evangelist most of all was desirous of employing the greater part of his book on the discourses and sermons [of Christ]. Observe, for instance, how for a whole year, or rather how even now at the feast of the Passover, he has given us no more

information on the head of miracles, than merely that He healed the paralytic and the nobleman's son. Because he was not anxious to enumerate them all, (that would have been impossible,) but of many and great to record a few.

Ver. 2 . A great multitude followed Him beholding the miracles that He did. What is here told marks not a very wise state of mind; for when they had enjoyed such teaching, they still were more attracted by the miracles, which was a sign of the grosser state. For miracles, It says, are not for believers, but for unbelievers. The people described by Matthew acted not thus, but how? They all, he says were astonished at His doctrine, because He taught as one having authority. Matthew 7:28-29

And why does He occupy the mountain now, and sit there with His disciples? Because of the miracle which was about to take place. And that the disciples alone went up with Him, was a charge against the multitude which followed Him not. Yet not for this only did He go up into the mountain, but to teach us ever to rest at intervals from the tumults and confusion of common life. For solitude is a thing meet for the study of wisdom. And often does He go up alone into a mountain, and spend the night there, and pray, to teach us that the man who will come most near to God must be free from all disturbance, and must seek times and places clear of confusion.

John 6:4

And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

How then, says some one, does He not go up unto the feast, but, when all are pressing to Jerusalem, goes Himself into Galilee, and not Himself alone, but takes His disciples with Him, and proceeds thence to Capernaum? Because henceforth He was quietly annulling the Law, taking occasion from the wickedness of the Jews.

John 6:5

And as He lifted up His eyes, He beheld a great company.

This shows that He sat not at any time idly with the disciples, but perhaps carefully conversing with them, and making them attend and turn towards Him, a thing which peculiarly marks His tender care, and the humility and condescension of His demeanor towards them. For they sat with Him, perhaps looking at one another; then having lifted up His eyes, He beheld the multitudes coming unto Him. Now the other Evangelists say, that the disciples came and asked and besought Him that He would not send them away fasting, while St. John says, that the question was put to Philip by Christ. Both occurrences seem to me to be truly reported, but not to have taken place at the same time, the former account being prior to the other, so that the two are entirely different.

Wherefore then does He ask Philip? He knew which of His disciples needed most instruction; for this is he who afterwards said, Show us the Father, and it suffices us John 14:8, and on this account Jesus was beforehand bringing him into a proper state. For had the miracle simply been done, the marvel would not have seemed so great, but now He beforehand constrains him to confess the existing want, that knowing the state of matters he might be the more exactly acquainted with the magnitude of the miracle about to take place. Wherefore He says . . .

John 6:5

Whence shall we have so many loaves, that these may eat?

So in the Old [Testament] He spoke to Moses, for He wrought not the sign until He had asked him, What is that in your hand? Because things coming to pass unexpectedly and all at once, are wont to throw us into forgetfulness of things previous, therefore He first involved him in a confession of present circumstances, that when the astonishment should have come upon him, he might be unable afterwards to drive away the remembrance of what he had confessed, and thus might learn by comparison the greatness of the miracle, which in fact takes place in this instance; for Philip being asked, replied,

John 6:7

Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do.

2. What means, to prove him? Did not He know what would be said by him? We cannot assert that. What then is the meaning of the expression? We may discover it from the Old [Testament]. For there too it is said, And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said to him, Take your beloved son whom you love Genesis 22:1-2; yet it does not appear in that place either, that when He says this He waited to see the end of the trial, whether Abraham would obey or not, (how could He, who knows all things before they come into existence? but the words in both cases are spoken after the manner of men. For as when (the Psalmist) says that He searches the hearts of men, he means not a search of ignorance but of exact knowledge, just so when the Evangelist says that He proved (Philip), he means only that He knew exactly. And perhaps one might say another thing, that as He once made Abraham more approved, so also did He this man, bringing him by this question to an exact knowledge of the miracle. The Evangelist therefore, that you may not stop at the feebleness of the expression, and so form an improper opinion of what was said, adds, He Himself knew what He would do.

Moreover we must observe this, that when there is any wrong suspicion, the writer straightway very carefully corrects it. As then in this place that the hearers might not form any such suspicion, he adds the corrective, saying, For He Himself knew what He would do: so also in that other place, when He says, that the Jews persecuted Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God, had there not been the assertion of Christ Himself confirmed by His works, he would there also have subjoined this correction. For if even in words which Christ speaks the Evangelist is careful that none should have suspicions, much more in cases where others were speaking of Him would he have looked closely, had he perceived that an improper opinion prevailed concerning Him. But he did not so, for he knew that this was His meaning, and immovable decree. Therefore after saying, making Himself equal with God, he used not any such correction; for the matter spoken of was not an erroneous fancy of theirs, but His own assertion ratified by His works. Philip then having been questioned,

Ver. 8, 9 . Andrew, Simon's brother, said, There is a lad here, which has five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

Andrew is higher minded than Philip, yet had not he attained to everything. Yet I do not think that he spoke without an object, but as having heard of the miracles of the Prophets, and how Elisha wrought a sign with the loaves 2 Kings 4:43; on this account he mounted to a certain height, but could not attain to the very top.

Let us learn then, we who give ourselves to luxury, what was the fare of those great and admirable men; and in quality and quantity let us behold and imitate the thriftiness of their table.

What follows also expresses great weakness. For after saying, he has five barley loaves, he adds, but what are they among so many? He supposed that the Worker of the miracle would make less out of less, and more out of more. But this was not the case, for it was alike easy to Him to cause bread to spring forth from more and from less, since He needed no subject-matter. But in order that the creation might not seem foreign to His Wisdom, as afterwards slanderers and those affected with the disease of Marcion said, He used the creation itself as a groundwork for His marvels.

When both the disciples had owned themselves at a loss, then He wrought the miracle; for thus they profited the more, having first confessed the difficulty of the matter, that when it should come to pass, they might understand the power of God. And because a miracle was about to be wrought, which had also been performed by the Prophets, although not in an equal degree, and because He would do it after first giving thanks, lest they should fall into any suspicion of weakness on His part, observe how by the very manner of His working He entirely raises their thoughts of it and shows them the difference (between Himself and others). For when the loaves had not yet appeared, that you may learn, that things that are not are to Him as though they were, (as Paul says, who calls the things that be not as though they were Romans 4:17) He commanded them as though the table were prepared and ready, straightway to sit down, rousing by this the minds of His disciples. And because they had profited by the questioning, they immediately obeyed, and were not confounded, nor said, How is this, why dost Thou bid us sit down, when there is nothing before us? The same men, who at first disbelieved so much as to say, Whence shall we buy bread? began so far to believe even before they saw the miracle, that they readily made the multitudes to sit down.

3. But why when He was about to restore the paralytic did He not pray, nor when He was raising the dead, or bridling the sea, while He does so here over the loaves? It was to show that when we begin our meals, we ought to give thanks unto God. Moreover, He does it especially in a lesser matter, that you may learn that He does it not as having any need; for were this the case, much more would He have done so in greater things; but when He did them by His own authority, it is clear that it was through condescension that He acted as He did in the case of the lesser. Besides, a great multitude was present, and it was necessary that they should be persuaded that He had come according to the will of God. Wherefore, when He does miracles in the absence of witnesses, He exhibits nothing of the kind; but when He does them in the presence of many, in order to persuade them that He is no enemy of God, no adversary of Him who has begotten Him, He removes the suspicion by thanksgiving.

And He gave to them that were set down, and they were filled.

Do you see how great is the interval between the servants and the Master? They having grace by measure, wrought their miracles accordingly, but God, who acts with free power, did all most abundantly.

Ver. 12 . And He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments which remain; -- and they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets.

This was not a superfluous show, but in order that the matter might not be deemed a mere illusion; and for this reason He creates from matter already subsisting. But why gave He not the bread to the multitudes to bear, but (only) to His disciples? Because He was most desirous to instruct these who were to be the teachers of the world. The multitude would not as yet reap any great fruit from the miracles, (at least they

straightway forgot this one and asked for another,) while these would gain no common profit. And what took place was moreover no ordinary condemnation of Judas, who bore a basket. And that these things were done for their instruction is plain from what is said afterwards, when He reminded them, saying, Do ye not yet understand -- how many baskets ye took up? Matthew 16:9 And for the same reason it was that the baskets of fragments were equal in number to the disciples; afterwards, when they were instructed, they took not up so many, but only seven baskets. Matthew 15:37 And I marvel not only at the quantity of loaves created, but besides the quantity, at the exactness of the surplus, that He caused the superabundance to be neither more nor less than just so much as He willed, foreseeing how much they would consume; a thing which marked unspeakable power. The fragments then confirmed the matter, showing both these points; that what had taken place was no illusion, and that these were from the loaves by which the people had been fed. As to the fishes, they at this time were produced from those already subsisting, but at a later period, after the Resurrection, they were not made from subsisting matter. Wherefore? That you may understand that even now He employed matter, not from necessity, nor as needing any base (to work upon), but to stop the mouths of heretics.

And the multitudes said, that this is of a truth The Prophet.

Oh, excess of gluttony! He had done ten thousand things more admirable than this, but nowhere did they make this confession, save when they had been filled. Yet hence it is evident that they expected some remarkable prophet; for those others had said (to John), Are you that Prophet? while these say, This is that Prophet.

Ver. 15 . When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain.

Wonderful! How great is the tyranny of gluttony, how great the fickleness of men's minds! No longer do they vindicate the Law, no longer do they care for the violation of the Sabbath, no longer are they zealous for God; all such considerations are thrown aside, when their bellies have been filled; He was a prophet in their eyes, and they were about to choose Him for a king. But Christ flees. Wherefore? To teach us to despise worldly dignities, and to show us that He needed nothing on earth. For He who chose all things mean, both mother and house and city and nurture and attire would not afterwards be made illustrious by things on earth. The things which (He had) from heaven were glorious and great, angels, a star, His Father loudly speaking, the Spirit testifying, and Prophets proclaiming Him from afar; those on earth were all mean, that thus His power might the more appear. He came also to teach us to despise the things of the world, and not be amazed or astonished by the splendors of this life, but to laugh them all to scorn, and to desire those which are to come. For he who admires things which are here, will not admire those in the heavens. Wherefore also He says to Pilate, My Kingdom is not of this world John 18:36, that He may not afterwards appear to have employed mere human terror or dominion for the purpose of persuasion. Why then says the Prophet, Behold, your King comes unto you, meek, and sitting upon an ass? Zechariah 9:9 He spoke of that Kingdom which is in the heavens, but not of this on earth; and on this account Christ says, I receive not honor from men. John 5:41

Learn we then, beloved, to despise and not to desire the honor which is from men; for we have been honored with the greatest of honors, compared with which that other is verily insult, ridicule, and mockery. And as the riches of this world compared with the riches of that are poverty, as this life apart from that is deadness, (for let the dead bury their dead Matthew 8:28) so this honor compared with that is shame and ridicule. Let us then not pursue it. If they who confer it are of less account than a shadow or a dream, the

honor itself much more so.

The glory of man is as the flower of the grass 1 Peter 1:24; and what is meaner than the flower of the grass? Were this glory everlasting, in what could it profit the soul? In nothing. Nay, it very greatly injures us by making us slaves, slaves in worse condition than those bought with money, slaves who obey not one master only, but two, three, ten thousand, all giving different commands. How much better is it to be a free man than a slave, to be free from the slavery of men, and subject only to the dominion of God?

In a word, if you will desire glory, desire it, but let it be the glory immortal, for that is exhibited on a more glorious stage, and brings greater profit. For the men here bid you be at charges to please them, but Christ, on the contrary, gives you an hundredfold for what you give Him, and adds moreover eternal life. Which of the two then is better, to be admired on earth, or in heaven? By man, or by God? To your loss, or to your gain? To wear a crown for a single day, or for endless ages?

Give to him that needs, but give not to a dancer, lest you lose your money and destroy his soul. For you are the cause of his (coming to) perdition through unseasonable munificence. Since did those on the stage know that their employment would be unprofitable, they would have long ago ceased to practice it; but when they behold you applauding, crowding after them, spending and wasting your substance upon them, even if they have no desire to follow (their profession), they are kept to it by the desire of gain.

If they knew that no one would praise what they do, they would soon desist from their labors, by reason of their unprofitableness; but when they see that the action is admired by many, the praise of others becomes a bait to them. Let us then desist from this unprofitable expense, let us learn upon whom and when we ought to spend. Let us not, I implore you, provoke God in both ways, gathering whence we ought not, and scattering where we ought not; for what anger does not your conduct deserve, when you pass by the poor and givest to a harlot?

Would not the paying the hire of sin and the bestowing honor where it were meet to punish have been a charge against you, even had you paid out of your just earnings? But when you feed your uncleanness by stripping orphans and wronging widows, consider how great a fire is prepared for those who dare such things. Hear what Paul says, Who not only do these things, but also have pleasure in them that do them. Romans 1:32

Perhaps we have touched you sharply, yet if we touch you not, there are actual punishments awaiting those who sin without amendment. What then avails it to gratify by words those who shall be punished by realities? Do you take pleasure at a dancer, do you praise and admire him? Then are you worse than he; his poverty affords him an excuse though not a reasonable one, but you are stripped even of this defense. If I ask him, Why have you left other arts and come to this accursed and impure one? he will reply, because I can with little labor gain great profits. But if I ask you why you admire one who spends his time in impurity, and lives to the mischief of many, you can not run to the same excuse, but must bow down your face and be ashamed and blush. Now if when called by us to give account, you would have nothing to reply, class="greek">couldst reply nothing. }--> when that terrible and inexorable Judgment comes where we shall render account of thoughts and deeds and everything, how shall we stand? With what eyes shall we behold our Judge? What shall we say? What defense shall we make? What excuse reasonable or unreasonable shall we put forward? Shall we allege the expense? The gratification? The perdition of others whom by means of his art we ruin? We can have nothing to say, but must be punished with a punishment having no end, knowing no limit. That this come not to pass, let us henceforth guard all

points, that having departed with a good hope, we may obtain the everlasting blessings; to which may we all attain through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, now and ever and world without end. Amen.

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