

John 7:45-8:19

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon explores the authority of Jesus as the light of the world and the misguided judgment of the Pharisees.

Scripture: John 7:47-49, John 7:51, John 8:12-17

Topics: "Hardness Of Heart", "Bold Proclamation"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the profound impact of Christ's teachings on the officers sent to arrest Him, contrasting their openness to His words with the Pharisees' hardened hearts. Despite witnessing miracles and reading Scriptures, the Pharisees remained blind to the truth, while the officers were moved by a single sermon, acknowledging that 'Never man spoke like this Man.' Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of understanding and boldly proclaiming the truth, as seen in the officers' courageous response to the Pharisees. He delves into the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees, highlighting the ignorance and hypocrisy of those who rejected Christ's teachings, ultimately leading to their condemnation.

Transcript

Then came the officers to the Chief Priests and Pharisees; and they said to them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spoke like this Man.

1. There is nothing clearer, nothing simpler than the truth, if we deal not perversely; just as (on the other hand) if we deal perversely, nothing is more difficult. For behold, the Scribes and Pharisees, who seemed forsooth to be wiser than other men, being ever with Christ for the sake of plotting against Him, and beholding His miracles, and reading the Scriptures, were nothing profited, but were even harmed; while the officers, who could not claim one of these privileges, were subdued by one single sermon, and they who had gone forth to bind Him, came back bound themselves by wonder. We must not only marvel at their understanding, that they needed not signs, but were taken by the teaching alone; (for they said not, Never man wrought miracles thus, but, Never man spoke thus;) we must not, I say, merely marvel at their understanding, but also at their boldness, that they spoke thus to those that had sent them, to the Pharisees, to His enemies, to men who were doing all with a view to gratify their enmity. The officers, says the Evangelist, came, and the Pharisees said to them, Why have ye not brought him? To come was a far greater deed than to have remained, for in the latter case they would have been rid of the annoyance of these men, but now they become heralds of the wisdom of Christ, and manifested their boldness in

greater degree. And they say not, We could not become of the multitude, for they gave heed unto Him as unto a prophet; but what? Never man spoke as this Man. Yet they might have alleged that, but they show their right feeling. For theirs was the saying not only of men admiring Him, but blaming their masters, because they had sent them to bind Him whom it behooved rather to hear. Yet they had not heard a sermon either, but a short one; for when the long mind is impartial, there is no need of long arguments. Such a thing is truth. What then say the Pharisees? When they ought to have been pricked at the heart, they, on the contrary, retort a charge on the officers, saying,

John 7:47

Are ye also deceived?

They still speak them fair, and do not express themselves harshly, dreading lest the others should entirely separate themselves, yet nevertheless they give signs of anger, and speak sparingly. For when they ought to have asked what He spoke, and to have marveled at the words, they do not so, (knowing that they might have been captivated,) but reason with them from a very foolish argument;

John 7:48

Wherefore, has none of the rulers believed on Him?

Do you then make this a charge against Christ, tell me, and not against the unbelievers?

John 7:49

But the people, which knows not the Law, are accursed.

Then is the charge against you the heavier, because the people believed, and you believed not. They acted like men that knew the Law; how then are they accursed? It is ye that are accursed, who keep not the Law, not they, who obey the Law. Neither was it right, on the evidence of unbelievers, to slander one in whom they believed not, for this is an unjust mode of acting. For you also believed not God, as Paul says; What if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God of none effect? God forbid. Romans 3:3-4 For the Prophets ever rebuked them, saying, Hear, you rulers of Sodom; and, Your rulers are disobedient Isaiah 1:10, 23; and again, Is it not for you to know judgment? Micah 3:1 And everywhere they attack them vehemently. What then? Shall one blame God for this? Away with the thought. This blame is theirs. And what other proof can a man bring of your not knowing the Law than your not obeying it? For when they had said, Hath any of the rulers believed on him? and, These who know not the Law, Nicodemus in fair consequence upbraids them, saying,

John 7:51

Does our law judge any man before it hear him?

He shows that they neither know the Law, nor do the Law; for if that Law commands to kill no man without first hearing him, and they before hearing were eager for this deed, they were transgressors of the Law. And because they said, None of the rulers has believed on him John 7:50, therefore the Evangelist informs us that Nicodemus was one of them, to show that even rulers believed on Him; for although they showed not yet fitting boldness, still they were becoming attached to Christ. Observe how cautiously he rebukes them; he said not, You desire to kill him, and condemn the man for a deceiver without proof; but

spoke in a milder way, hindering their excessive violence, and their inconsiderate and murderous disposition. Wherefore he turns his discourse to the Law, saying, Except it hear him carefully, and know what he does. So that not a bare hearing, but careful hearing is required. For the meaning of, know what he does, is, what he intends, on what account, for what purpose, whether for the subversion of the order of things and as an enemy. Being therefore perplexed, because they had said, None of the rulers has believed on him, they addressed him, neither vehemently, nor yet with forbearance. For tell me, after he had said, The Law judges no man, how does it follow that they should say,

John 7:52

Are you also of Galilee?

2. When they ought to have shown that they had not sent to summon Him without judgment, or that it was not fitting to allow Him speech, they take the reply rather in a rough and angry manner.

Search, and look: for out of Galilee has arisen no prophet.

Why, what had the man said? That Christ was a prophet? No; he said, that He ought not to be slain unjudged; but they replied insolently, and as to one who knew nothing of the Scriptures; as though one had said, Go, learn, for this is the meaning of, Search, and look. What then did Christ? Since they were continually dwelling upon Galilee and The Prophet, to free all men from this erroneous suspicion, and to show that He was not one of the prophets, but the Master of the world, He said,

John 8:12

I am the light of the world.

Not of Galilee, not of Palestine, nor of Judæa. What then say the Jews?

John 8:13

You bear record of yourself, your record is not true.

Alas! For their folly, He continually referred them to the Scriptures, and now they say, You bear record of yourself. What was the record He bare? I am the light of the world. A great thing to say, great of a truth, but it did not greatly amaze them, because He did not now make Himself equal to the Father, nor assert that He was His Son, nor that He was God, but for a while calls Himself a light. They indeed desired to disprove this also, and yet this was a much greater thing than to say,

He that follows Me, shall not walk in darkness.

Using the words light and darkness in a spiritual sense, and meaning thereby abides not in error. In this place He draws on Nicodemus, and brings him in as having spoken very boldly, and praises the servants who had also done so. For to cry aloud, is the act of one desirous to cause that they also should hear. At the same time He hints at these who were secretly contriving treacheries, being both in darkness and error, but that they should not prevail over the light. And He reminds Nicodemus of the words which He had uttered before, Every one that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. John 3:20 For since they had asserted that none of the rulers had believed on Him, therefore He says, that he that does evil comes not to the light, to show that their not having come proceeds not from the weakness of the light, but from their own perverse will.

They answered and said to Him, Do you bear witness to yourself?

What then says He?

John 8:14

Though I bear record of Myself, My record is true; for I know whence I come, and whither I go; but you cannot tell whence I come.

What He had before said, these men bring forward as if it had been specially asserted. What then does Christ? To refute this, and to show that He used those expressions as suitable to them and to their suspicions, who supposed Him to be a mere man, He says, Though I bear record of Myself, My record is true, for I know whence I come. What is this? I am of God, am God, the Son of God, and God Himself is a faithful witness unto Himself, but you know Him not; ye willingly err, knowing ye pretend not to know, but say all that you say according to mere human imagination, choosing to understand nothing beyond what is seen.

John 8:15

You judge after the flesh.

As to live after the flesh is to live badly, so to judge after the flesh is to judge unjustly. But I judge no man.

John 8:16

And yet if I judge, My judgment is true.

What He says, is of this kind; You judge unjustly. And if, says some one, we judge unjustly, why dost Thou not rebuke us? Why dost Thou not punish us? Why dost Thou not condemn us? Because, He says, I came not for this. This is the meaning of, I judge no man; yet if I judge, My judgment is true. For had I been willing to judge, you would have been among the condemned. And this I say, not judging you. Yet neither do I tell you that I say it, not judging you, as though I were not confident that had I judged you, I should have convicted you; since if I had judged you, I must justly have condemned you. But now the time of judgment is not yet. He alluded also to the judgment to come, saying,

I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me.

Here He hinted, that not He alone condemns them, but the Father also. Then He concealed this, by leading them to His own testimony.

John 8:17

It is written in your Law, that the testimony of two men is true.

3. What would the heretics say here? (They would say,) How is he better than man, if we take what he has said simply? For this rule is laid down in the case of men, because no man by himself is trustworthy. But in the case of God, how can one endure such a mode of speaking? How then is the word 'two' used? Is it because they are two, or because being men they are therefore two? If it is because they are two, why did he not betake himself to John, and say, I bear witness of myself, and John bears witness of me? Wherefore not to the angels? Wherefore not to the prophets? For he might have found ten thousand other

testimonies. But he desires to show not this only that there are Two, but also that they are of the same Substance.

John 8:19

Then said they unto Him, Who is your father? Jesus answered, You neither know Me, nor My Father.

Because while they knew they spoke as though they knew not, and as if trying Him, He does not even deem them worthy of an answer. Wherefore henceforth He speaks all more clearly and more boldly; drawing His testimony from signs, and from His teaching of them that followed Him, and by the Cross being near. For, I know, He says, whence I come. This would not greatly affect them, but the adding, and whither I go, would rather terrify them, since He was not to remain in death. But why said He not, I know that I am God, instead of, I know whence I come? He ever mingles lowly words with sublime, and even these He veils. For after saying, I bear witness of Myself, and proving this, He descends to a humbler strain. As though He had said, I know from whom I am sent, and to whom I depart. For so they could have had nothing to say against it, when they heard that He was sent from Him, and would depart to Him. I could not have spoken, He says, any falsehood, I who have come from thence, and depart there, to the true God. But ye know not God, and therefore judge according to the flesh. For if having heard so many sure signs and proofs ye still say, 'your witness is not true,' if you deem Moses worthy of credit, both as to what he speaks concerning others and what he speaks concerning himself, but Christ not so, this is to judge according to the flesh. But I judge no man. He says indeed also that the Father judges no man. John 5:22 How then does He here declare, that, If I judge, My judgment is just, for I am not alone? He again speaks in reply to their thoughts. The judgment which is Mine is the judgment of the Father. The Father, judging, would not judge otherwise than as I do, and I should not judge otherwise than as the Father. Wherefore did He mention the Father? Because they would not have thought that the Son was to be believed unless He received the witness of the Father. Besides, the saying does not even hold good. For in the case of men when two bear witness in a matter pertaining to another, then their witness is true, (this is for two to witness,) but if one should witness for himself, then they are no longer two. Do you see that He said this for nothing else but to show that He was of the same Substance, that He needed no other witness, and was in nothing inferior to the Father? Observe at least His independence ;

John 8:18

I am One that bear witness of Myself; and the Father that sent Me bears witness of Me.

Had He been of inferior substance, He would not have put this. But now that you may not deem that the Father is included, to make up the number (of two), observe that His power has nothing different (from the Father's). A man bears witness when he is trustworthy of himself, not when he himself needs testimony, and that too in a matter pertaining to another; but in a matter of his own, where he needs the witness of another, he is not trustworthy. But in this case it is all contrary. For He though bearing witness in a matter of His own, and saying that witness is borne to Him by another, asserts that He is trustworthy, in every way manifesting His independence. For why, when He had said, I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me, and, The testimony of two men is true, did He not hold His peace, instead of adding, I am One that bear witness of Myself? It was evidently to show His independence. And He places Himself first; I am One that bear witness of Myself. Here He shows His equality of honor, and that they were profited nothing by saying that they knew God the Father, while they knew not Him. And He says that the cause of this (ignorance) was that they were not willing to know Him. Therefore He tells them that it was not possible to

know the Father without knowing Him, that even so He might draw them to the knowledge of Him. For since leaving Him they even sought to get the knowledge of the Father, He says, You cannot know the Father without Me. John 8:19 So that they who blaspheme the Son, blaspheme not the Son only, but Him that begot Him also.

4. This let us avoid, and glorify the Son. Had He not been of the same Nature, He would not have spoken thus. For had He merely taught, but been of different Substance, a man might not have known Him, and yet have known the Father; and again, it would not have been that one who knew Him, would have altogether known the Father; for neither does one who knows a man know an Angel. Yes, replies some one, he that knows the creation, knows God. By no means. Many, or rather I should say, all men know the creation, (for they see it,) but they know not God.

Let us then glorify the Son of God, not with this glory (of words) only, but that also which is by works. For the first without the last is nothing. Behold, says St. Paul, you are called a Jew, and retest in the Law, and makest your boast of God -- thou therefore that teachest another, teachest class="greek">judget. }--> thou not yourself? Thou that makest your boast of the Law, through breaking of the Law do you dishonor God? Romans 2:17-23 Beware lest we also who make boast of the rightness of our faith dishonor God by not manifesting a life agreeable to the faith, causing Him to be blasphemed.

For He would have the Christian to be the teacher of the world, its leaven, its salt, its light. And what is that light? It is a life which shines, and has in it no dark thing. Light is not useful to itself, nor leaven, nor salt, but shows its usefulness towards others, and so we are required to do good, not to ourselves only, but to others. For salt, if it salt not, is not salt. Moreover another thing is evident, that if we be righteous, others shall certainly be so also; but as long as we are not righteous, we shall not be able to assist others.

Let there be nothing foolish or silly among us; such are worldly matters, such are the cares of this life. Wherefore the virgins were called foolish, because they were busy about foolish, worldly matters, gathering things together here, but laying not up treasure where they ought. Fear there is lest this be our case, fear lest we too depart clothed with filthy garments, to that place where all have them bright and shining. For nothing is more filthy, nothing more impure, than sin.

Wherefore the Prophet declaring its nature cried out, My wounds stink, and are corrupt. Psalm 38:5 And if you will fully learn how ill-savored sin is, consider it after it has been done; when you are delivered from the desire, when the fire no longer troubles you, then shall you see what sin is. Consider anger, when you are calm; consider avarice, when thou dost not feel it. There is nothing more shameful, nothing more accursed, than rapine and avarice. This we continually say, desiring not to vex you, but to gain some great and wonderful advantage.

For he who has not acted rightly after hearing once, may perhaps do so after hearing a second time; and he who has passed by the second time, may do right after the third. God grant that we, being delivered from all evil things, may have the sweet savor of Christ; for to Him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost is glory, now and ever and world without end. Amen.

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