

Homily 15 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 15 on Matthew emphasizes the blessings associated with humility, mourning, meekness, and righteousness as foundational to Christian living.

Scripture: Proverbs 19:17

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of living a virtuous life, showing mercy, and being peacemakers. He emphasizes the need to shine as lights in the world, to help those in need, and to reconcile those in conflict. Chrysostom urges believers to be humble, meek, and pure in heart, to avoid seeking praise for their good deeds, and to seek their reward from God. He encourages showing mercy, even in small acts, and warns against giving in to anger and violence, reminding that God will repay our actions.

Transcript

Matthew 5:1-2.

And Jesus seeing the multitudes went up into the mountain, and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him. And He opened His mouth, and taught them saying, Blessed, etc.

See how unambitious He was, and void of boasting: in that He did not lead people about with Him, but whereas, when healing was required, He had Himself gone about everywhere, visiting both towns and country places; now when the multitude has become very great, He sits in one spot: and that not in the midst of any city or forum, but on a mountain and in a wilderness; instructing us to do nothing for display, and to separate ourselves from the tumults of ordinary life, and this most especially, when we are to study wisdom, and to discourse of things needful to be done.

But when He had gone up into the mount, and was set down, His disciples came unto Him. Do you see their growth in virtue? And how in a moment they became better men? Since the multitude were but gazers on the miracles, but these from that hour desired also to hear some great and high thing. And indeed this it was set Him on His teaching, and made Him begin this discourse.

For it was not men's bodies only that He was healing, but He was also amending their souls; and again from the care of these He would pass to attendance on the other. Thus He at once varied the succor that

He gave, and likewise mingled with the instruction afforded by His words, the manifestation of His glory from His works; and besides, He stopped the shameless mouths of the heretics, signifying by this His care of both parts of our being, that He Himself is the Maker of the whole creation. Therefore also on each nature He bestowed abundant providence, now amending the one, now the other.

And in this way He was then employed. For it is said, that He opened His mouth, and taught them. And wherefore is the clause added, He opened His mouth? To inform you that in His very silence He gave instruction, and not when He spoke only: but at one time by opening His mouth, at another uttering His voice by the works which He did.

But when you hear that He taught them, do not think of Him as discoursing with His disciples only, but rather with all through them.

For since the multitude was such as a multitude ever is, and consisted moreover of such as creep on the ground, He withdraws the choir of His disciples, and makes His discourse unto them: in His conversation with them providing that the rest also, who were yet very far from the level of His sayings, might find His lesson of self-denial no longer grievous unto them. Of which indeed both Luke gave intimation, when he said, that He directed His words unto them: and Matthew too, clearly declaring the same, wrote, His disciples came unto Him, and He taught them. For thus the others also were sure to be more eagerly attentive to Him, than they would have been, had He addressed Himself unto all.

2. Whence then does He begin? And what kind of foundations of His new polity does He lay for us?

Let us hearken with strict attention unto what is said. For though it was spoken unto them, it was written for the sake also of all men afterwards. And accordingly on this account, though He had His disciples in His mind in His public preaching, yet unto them He limits not His sayings, but applies all His words of blessing without restriction. Thus He said not, Blessed are you, if you become poor, but Blessed are the poor. And I may add that even if He had spoken of them, the advice would still be common to all. For so, when He says, Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world, Matthew 28:20 He is discoursing not with them only, but also, through them, with all the world. And in pronouncing them blessed, who are persecuted, and chased, and suffer all intolerable things; not for them only, but also for all who arrive at the same excellency, He weaves His crown.

However, that this may be yet plainer, and to inform you that you have great interest in His sayings, and so indeed has all mankind, if any choose to give heed; hear how He begins these wondrous words.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 5:3

What is meant by the poor in spirit? The humble and contrite in mind. For by spirit He has here designated the soul, and the faculty of choice. That is, since many are humble not willingly, but compelled by stress of circumstances; letting these pass (for this were no matter of praise), He blesses them first, who by choice humble and contract themselves.

But why said he not, the humble, but rather the poor? Because this is more than that. For He means here them who are awestruck, and tremble at the commandments of God. Whom also by His prophet Isaiah God earnestly accepting said, To whom will I look, but to him who is meek and quiet, and trembles at My words? For indeed there are many kinds of humility: one is humble in his own measure, another with all excess of lowliness. It is this last lowliness of mind which that blessed prophet commends, picturing to us

the temper that is not merely subdued, but utterly broken, when he says, The sacrifice for God is a contrite spirit, a contrite and an humble heart God will not despise. And the Three Children also offer this unto God as a great sacrifice, saying, Nevertheless, in a contrite soul, and in a spirit of lowliness, may we be accepted. This Christ also now blesses.

3. For whereas the greatest of evils, and those which make havoc of the whole world, had their entering in from pride:-- for both the devil, not being such before, did thus become a devil; as indeed Paul plainly declared, saying, Lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil: 1 Timothy 3:6 -- and the first man, too, puffed up by the devil with these hopes, was made an example of, and became mortal (for expecting to become a god, he lost even what he had; and God also upbraiding him with this, and mocking his folly, said, Behold, Adam has become as one of us Genesis 3:22; and each one of those that came after did hereby wreck himself in impiety, fancying some equality with God: -- since, I say, this was the stronghold of our evils, and the root and fountain of all wickedness, He, preparing a remedy suitable to the disease, laid this law first as a strong and safe foundation. For this being fixed as a base, the builder in security lays on it all the rest. But if this be taken away, though a man reach to the Heavens in his course of life, it is all easily undermined, and issues in a grievous end. Though fasting, prayer, almsgiving, temperance, any other good thing whatever, be gathered together in you; without humility all fall away and perish.

It was this very thing that took place in the instance of the Pharisee. For even after he had arrived at the very summit, he went down Luke 18:14 with the loss of all, because he had not the mother of virtues: for as pride is the fountain of all wickedness, so is humility the principle of all self-command. Wherefore also He begins with this, pulling up boasting by the very root out of the soul of His hearers.

And what, one may ask, is this to His disciples, who were on every account humble? For in truth they had nothing to be proud of, being fishermen, poor, ignoble, and illiterate. Even though these things concerned not His disciples, yet surely they concerned such as were then present, and such as were hereafter to receive the disciples, lest they should on this account despise them. But it were truer to say that they did also concern His disciples. For even if not then, yet by and by they were sure to require this help, after their signs and wonders, and their honor from the world, and their confidence towards God. For neither wealth, nor power, nor royalty itself, had so much power to exalt men, as the things which they possessed in all fullness. And besides, it was natural that even before the signs they might be lifted up, at that very time when they saw the multitude, and all that audience surrounding their Master; they might feel some human weakness. Wherefore He at once represses their pride.

And He does not introduce what He says by way of advice or of commandments, but by way of blessing, so making His word less burthensome, and opening to all the course of His discipline. For He said not, This or that person, but they who do so, are all of them blessed. So that though you be a slave, a beggar, in poverty, a stranger, unlearned, there is nothing to hinder you from being blessed, if you emulate this virtue.

4. Now having begun, as you see, where most need was, He proceeds to another commandment, one which seems to be opposed to the judgment of the whole world. For whereas all think that they who rejoice are enviable, those in dejection, poverty, and mourning, wretched, He calls these blessed rather than those; saying thus,

Blessed are they that mourn. Matthew 5:4

Yet surely all men call them miserable. For therefore He wrought the miracles beforehand, that in such enactments as these He might be entitled to credit.

And here too again he designated not simply all that mourn, but all that do so for sins: since surely that other kind of mourning is forbidden, and that earnestly, which relates to anything of this life. This Paul also clearly declared, when he said, The sorrow of the world works death, but godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of.

These then He too Himself calls blessed, whose sorrow is of that kind; yet not simply them that sorrow did He designate, but them that sorrow intensely. Therefore He did not say, they that sorrow, but they that mourn. For this commandment again is fitted to teach us entire self-control. For if those who grieve for children, or wife, or any other relation gone from them, have no fondness for gain or pleasure during that period of their sorrow; if they aim not at glory, are not provoked by insults, nor led captive by envy, nor beset by any other passion, their grief alone wholly possessing them; much more will they who mourn for their own sins, as they ought to mourn, show forth a self-denial greater than this.

Next, what is the reward for these? For they shall be comforted, says He.

Where shall they be comforted! Tell me. Both here and there. For since the thing enjoined was exceeding burthensome and galling, He promised to give that, which most of all made it light. Wherefore, if you will be comforted, mourn: and think not this a dark saying. For when God does comfort, though sorrows come upon you by thousands like snow-flakes, you will be above them all. Since in truth, as the returns which God gives are always far greater than our labors; so He has wrought in this case, declaring them that mourn to be blessed, not after the value of what they do, but after His own love towards man. For they that mourn, mourn for misdoings, and to such it is enough to enjoy forgiveness, and obtain wherewith to answer for themselves. But forasmuch as He is full of love towards man, He does not limit His recompense either to the removal of our punishments, or to the deliverance from our sins, but He makes them even blessed, and imparts to them abundant consolation.

But He bids us mourn, not only for our own, but also for other men's misdoings. And of this temper were the souls of the saints: such was that of Moses, of Paul, of David; yea, all these many times mourned for evils not their own.

5. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Tell me, what kind of earth? Some say a figurative earth, but it is not this, for nowhere in Scripture do we find any mention of an earth that is merely figurative. But what can the saying mean? He holds out a sensible prize; even as Paul also does, in that when he had said, Honor your father and your mother, Ephesians 6:2 he added, For so shall you live long upon the earth. And He Himself unto the thief again, Today shall you be with me in Paradise. Luke 23:43

Thus He does not incite us by means of the future blessings only, but of the present also, for the sake of the grosser sort of His hearers, and such as before the future seek those others.

Thus, for example, further on also He said, Agree with your adversary. Matthew 5:25 Then He appoints the reward of such self-command, and says, Lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer. Matthew 5:25 Do you see whereby He alarmed us? By the things of sense, by what happens before our eyes. And again, Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council. Matthew 5:22

And Paul too sets forth sensible rewards at great length, and uses things present in his exhortations; as when he is discoursing about virginity. For having said nothing about the heavens there, for the time he urges it by things present, saying, Because of the present distress, and, But I spare you, and, I would have you without carefulness.

Thus accordingly Christ also with the things spiritual has mingled the sensible. For whereas the meek man is thought to lose all his own, He promises the contrary, saying, Nay, but this is he who possesses his goods in safety, namely, he who is not rash, nor boastful: while that sort of man shall often lose his patrimony, and his very life.

And besides, since in the Old Testament the prophet used to say continually, The meek shall inherit the earth; He thus weaves into His discourse the words to which they were accustomed, so as not everywhere to speak a strange language.

And this He says, not as limiting the rewards to things present, but as joining with these the other sort of gifts also. For neither in speaking of any spiritual thing does He exclude such as are in the present life; nor again in promising such as are in our life, does He limit his promise to that kind. For He says, Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33 And again: Whosoever has left houses or brethren, shall receive an hundred fold in this world, and in the future shall inherit everlasting life.

6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Matthew 5:6

What sort of righteousness? He means either the whole of virtue, or that particular virtue which is opposed to covetousness. For since He is about to give commandment concerning mercy, to show how we must show mercy, as, for instance, not of rapine or covetousness, He blesses them that lay hold of righteousness.

And see with what exceeding force He puts it. For He said not, Blessed are they which keep fast by righteousness, but, Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: that not merely anyhow, but with all desire we may pursue it. For since this is the most peculiar property of covetousness, and we are not so enamored of meat and drink, as of gaining, and compassing ourselves with more and more, He bade us to transfer this desire to a new object, freedom from covetousness.

Then He appoints the prize, again from things sensible; saying, for they shall be filled. Thus, because it is thought that the rich are commonly made such by covetousness, Nay, says He, it is just contrary: for it is righteousness that does this. Wherefore, so long as you do righteously, fear not poverty, nor tremble at hunger. For the extortioners, they are the very persons who lose all, even as he certainly who is in love with righteousness, possesses himself the goods of all men in safety.

But if they who covet not other men's goods enjoy so great abundance, much more they who give up their own.

Blessed are the merciful. Matthew 5:7

Here He seems to me to speak not of those only who show mercy in giving of money, but those likewise who are merciful in their actions. For the way of showing mercy is manifold, and this commandment is broad. What then is the reward thereof? For they shall obtain mercy.

And it seems indeed to be a sort of equal recompence, but it is a far greater thing than the act of goodness. For whereas they themselves show mercy as men, they obtain mercy from the God of all; and it is not the same thing, man's mercy, and God's; but as wide as is the interval between wickedness and goodness, so far is the one of these removed from the other.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8

Behold again the reward is spiritual. Now He here calls pure, either those who have attained unto all virtue, and are not conscious to themselves of any evil; or those who live in temperance. For there is nothing which we need so much in order to see God, as this last virtue. Wherefore Paul also said, Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 He is here speaking of such sight as it is possible for man to have.

For because there are many who show mercy, and who commit no rapine, nor are covetous, who yet are guilty of fornication and uncleanness; to signify that the former alone suffices not, He has added this, much in the same sense as Paul, writing to the Corinthians, bore witness of the Macedonians, that they were rich not only in almsgiving, but also in all other virtue. For having spoken of the noble spirit they had shown in regard of their goods, he says, They gave also their own selves to the Lord, and to us. 2 Corinthians 8:5

7. Blessed are the peace-makers. Matthew 5:9

Here He not only takes away altogether our own strife and hatred among ourselves, but He requires besides this something more, namely, that we should set at one again others, who are at strife.

And again, the reward which He annexes is spiritual. Of what kind then is it.

For they shall be called the children of God.

Yea, for this became the work of the Only Begotten, to unite the divided, and to reconcile the alienated.

Then, lest you should imagine peace in all cases a blessing, He has added,

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Matthew 5:10

That is, for virtue's sake, for succor given to others, and for godliness: it being ever His wont to call by the name of righteousness the whole practical wisdom of the soul.

Blessed are you, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad. Matthew 5:11-12

As if He said, Though they should call you sorcerers, deceivers, pestilent persons, or whatever else, blessed are you: so He speaks. What could be newer than these injunctions? Wherein the very things which all others avoid, these He declares to be desirable; I mean, being poor, mourning, persecution, evil report. But yet He both affirmed this, and convinced not two, nor ten, nor twenty, nor an hundred, nor a thousand men, but the whole world. And hearing things so grievous and galling, so contrary to the accustomed ways of men, the multitudes were astonished. So great was the power of Him who spoke.

However, lest you should think that the mere fact of being evil spoken of makes men blessed, He has set two limitations; when it is for His sake, and when the things that are said are false: for without these, he

who is evil spoken of, so far from being blessed, is miserable.

Then see the prize again: Because your reward is great in heaven. But you, though you hear not of a kingdom given in each one of the blessings, be not discouraged. For although He give different names to the rewards, yet He brings all into His kingdom. Thus, both when He says, they that mourn shall be comforted; and, they that show mercy shall obtain mercy; and, the pure in heart shall see God; and, the peacemakers shall be called the children of God; nothing else but the Kingdom does He shadow out by all these sayings. For such as enjoy these, shall surely attain unto that. Think not therefore that this reward is for the poor in spirit only, but for those also who hunger after righteousness, for the meek, and for all the rest without exception.

Since on this account He has set His blessing on them all, that you might not look for anything sensible: for that man cannot be blessed, who is crowned with such things as come to an end with this present life, and hurry by quicker than a shadow.

8. But when He had said, your reward is great, he added also another consolation, saying, For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Thus, since that first, the promise of the Kingdom, was yet to come, and all in expectation, He affords them comfort from this world; from their fellowship with those who before them had been ill-treated.

For think not, says He, that for something inconsistent in your sayings and enactments ye suffer these things: or, as being teachers of evil doctrines, you are to be persecuted by them; the plots and dangers proceed not of any wickedness in your sayings, but of the malice of those who hear you. Wherefore neither are they any blame to you who suffer wrong, but to them who do the wrong. And to the truth of these things all preceding time bears witness. For against the prophets they did not even bring any charge of transgressing the law, and of sentiments of impiety, that they stoned some, chased away others, encompassed others with innumerable afflictions. Wherefore let not this trouble you, for of the very same mind they do all that is done now. Do you see how He raised up their spirits, by placing them near to the company of Moses and Elias?

Thus also Paul writing to the Thessalonians, says, For you became followers of the Churches of God, which are in Judea; for you also have suffered the same things of your own fellow-countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have driven us out; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15 Which same point here also Christ has established.

And whereas in the other beatitudes, He said, Blessed are the poor, and the merciful; here He has not put it generally, but addresses His speech unto themselves, saying, Blessed are you, when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and say every evil word: signifying that this is a special privilege of theirs; and that beyond all others, teachers have this for their own.

At the same time He here also covertly signifies His own dignity, and His equality in honor with Him who begot Him. For as they on the Father's account, says He, so shall you also for me suffer these things. But when He says, the prophets which were before you, He implies that they were also by this time become prophets.

Next, declaring that this above all profits them, and makes them glorious, He did not say, they will calumniate and persecute you, but I will prevent it. For not in their escaping evil report, but in their noble endurance thereof, and in refuting them by their actions, He will have their safety stand: this being a much greater thing than the other; even as to be struck and not hurt, is much greater than escaping the blow.

9. Now in this place He says, Your reward is great in heaven. But Luke reports Him to have spoken this, both earnestly, and with more entire consolation; for He not only, as you know, pronounces them blessed, who are evil spoken of for God's sake, but declares them likewise wretched, who are well spoken of by all men. For, Woe unto you, says He, when all men shall speak well of you. And yet the apostles were well spoken of, but not by all men. Wherefore He said not, Woe unto you, when men shall speak well of you, but, when all men shall do so: for it is not even possible that those who live in the practice of virtue should be well spoken of by all men.

And again He says, When they shall cast out your name as evil, rejoice ye, and leap for joy. Luke 6:22-23 For not only of the dangers they underwent, but of the calumny also, He appoints the recompence to be great. Wherefore He said not, When they shall persecute, and kill you, but, When they shall revile you, and say all manner of evil. For most assuredly, men's evil reports have a sharper bite than their very deeds. For whereas, in our dangers, there are many things that lighten the toil, as to be cheered by all, to have many to applaud, to crown, to proclaim our praise; here in our reproach even this consolation is destroyed. Because we seem not to have achieved anything great; and this galls the combatant more than all his dangers: at least many have gone on even to hang themselves, not bearing evil report. And why do you marvel at the others? Since that traitor, that shameless and accursed one, he who had ceased to blush for anything whatever, was wrought upon by this chiefly to hurry to the halter. And Job again, all adamant as he was, and firmer than a rock; when he had been robbed of all his possessions, and was suffering those incurable ills, and had become on a sudden childless, and when he saw his body pouring out worms like a fountain, and his wife attacking him, he repelled it all with ease; but when he saw his friends reproaching and trampling upon him, and entertaining an evil opinion of him, and saying that he suffered those things for some sins, and was paying the penalty of wickedness: then was there trouble, then commotion, even in that great and noble-hearted man.

And David also, letting pass all that he had suffered, sought of God a retribution for the calumny alone. For, Let him curse, says he, for the Lord has bidden him: that the Lord may see my humiliation, and requite me for this cursing of his on this day. 2 Samuel 16:11-12

And Paul too proclaims the triumph not of those only who incur danger, or are deprived of their goods, but of these also, thus saying, Call to remembrance the former days, in which after you were illuminated ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly while you were made a gazing stock by reproaches, and afflictions. On this account then Christ has appointed the reward also to be great.

After this, lest any one should say, Here you give no redress, nor stoppest men's mouths; and do you assign a reward there? He has put before us the prophets, to show that neither in their case did God give redress. And if, where the rewards were at hand, He cheered them with things to come; much more now, when this hope has become clearer, and self-denial is increased.

And observe too, after how many commandments He has put this, for surely He did it not without reason, but to show that it is not possible for one unprovided, and unarmed with all those other virtues, to go forth unto these conflicts. Therefore, you see, in each instance, by the former precept making way for the

following one, He has woven a sort of golden chain for us. Thus, first, he that is humble, will surely also mourn for his own sins: he that so mourns, will be both meek, and righteous, and merciful; he that is merciful, and righteous, and contrite will of course be also pure in heart: and such a one will be a peacemaker too: and he that has attained unto all these, will be moreover arrayed against dangers, and will not be troubled when evil is spoken of him, and he is enduring grievous trials innumerable.

10. Now then, after giving them due exhortation, He refreshes them again with praises. As thus: the injunctions being high, and far surpassing those in the Old Testament; lest they should be disturbed and confounded, and say, How shall we be able to achieve these things? hear what He says: You are the salt of the earth. Matthew 5:13 Implying, that of absolute necessity He enjoins all this. For not for your own life apart, says He, but for the whole world, shall your account be. For not to two cities, nor to ten or twenty, nor to a single nation am I sending you, as I sent the prophets; but to earth, and sea, and the whole world; and that in evil case. For by saying, You are the salt of the earth, He signified all human nature to have lost its savor, and to be decayed by our sins. For which cause, you see, He requires of them such virtues, as are most necessary and useful for the superintendence of the common sort. For first, the meek, and yielding, and merciful, and righteous, shuts not up his good deeds unto himself only, but also provides that these good fountains should run over for the benefit of others. And he again who is pure in heart, and a peacemaker, and is persecuted for the truth's sake; he again orders his way of life for the common good. Think not then, He says, that you are drawn on to ordinary conflicts, or that for some small matters you are to give account. You are the salt of the earth.

What then? Did they restore the decayed? By no means; for neither is it possible to do any good to that which is already spoilt, by sprinkling it with salt. This therefore they did not. But rather, what things had been before restored, and committed to their charge, and freed from that ill savor, these they then salted, maintaining and preserving them in that freshness, which they had received of the Lord. For that men should be set free from the rottenness of their sins was the good work of Christ; but their not returning to it again any more was the object of these men's diligence and travail.

Do you see how by degrees He indicates their superiority to the very prophets? In that He says they are teachers, not of Palestine, but of the whole world; and not simply teachers, but awful ones too. For this is the marvellous thing, that not by flattering, nor soothing, but by sharply bracing them, as salt, even so they became dear to all men.

Now marvel not, says He, if leaving all others, I discourse to you, and draw you on to so great dangers. For consider over how many cities, tribes, and nations, I am to send you to preside. Wherefore I would have you not only be prudent yourselves, but that you should also make others the same. And such persons have great need to be intelligent, in whom the salvation of the rest is at stake: they ought so much to abound in virtue, as to impart of the profit to others also. For if you do not become such as this, you will not suffice even for your own selves.

Be not then impatient, as though my sayings were too burdensome. For while it is possible for others who have lost their savor to return by your means, you, if you should come to this, will with yourselves destroy others also. So that in proportion as the matters are great, which you have put into your hands, you need so much the greater diligence. Therefore He says,

But if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Matthew 5:13

For other men, though they fall never so often, may possibly obtain indulgence: but the teacher, should this happen to him, is deprived of all excuse, and will suffer the most extreme vengeance. Thus, lest at the words, When they shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you, they should be too timid to go forth: He tells them, unless you are prepared to combat with all this, you have been chosen in vain. For it is not evil report that you should fear, but lest ye should prove partners in dissimulation. For then, You will lose your savor, and be trodden under foot: but if you continue sharply to brace them up, and then are evil spoken of, rejoice; for this is the very use of salt, to sting the corrupt, and make them smart. And so their censure follows of course, in no way harming you, but rather testifying your firmness. But if through fear of it you give up the earnestness that becomes you, you will have to suffer much more grievously, being both evil spoken of, and despised by all. For this is the meaning of trodden under foot.

11. After this He leads on to another, a higher image.

You are the light of the world. Matthew 5:14

Of the world again; not of one nation, nor of twenty states, but of the whole inhabited earth. And a light to the mind, far better than this sunbeam: like as they were also a spiritual salt. And before they are salt, and now light; to teach you how great is the gain of these strict precepts, and the profit of that grave discipline: how it binds, and permits not to become dissolute; and causes clear sight, leading men on to virtue.

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid, neither do men light a candle, and put it under the bushel.

Again, by these words He trains them to strictness of life, teaching them to be earnest in their endeavors, as set before the eyes of all men, and contending in the midst of the amphitheatre of the world. For, look not to this, He says, that we are now sitting here, that we are in a small portion of one corner. For you shall be as conspicuous to all as a city set on the ridge of a hill, as a candle in a house on the candlestick, giving light.

Where now are they who persevere in disbelieving the power of Christ? Let them hear these things, and let them adore His might, amazed at the power of the prophecy. For consider how great things he promised to them, who were not known even in their own country: that earth and sea should know them, and that they should by their fame reach to the limits of the inhabited world; or rather, not by their fame, but by the working of the good they wrought. For it was not fame that bearing them everywhere made them conspicuous, but also the actual demonstration by their works. Since, as though they had wings, more vehemently than the sunbeam did they overrun the whole earth, sowing the light of godliness.

But here He seems to me to be also training them to boldness of speech. For to say, A city set on a hill cannot be hid, is to speak as declaring His own powers. For as that city can by no means be hidden, so it was impossible that what they preached should sink into silence and obscurity. Thus, since He had spoken of persecutions and calumnies, of plots and wars, for fear they might think that these would have power to stop their mouths; to encourage them, He says, that so far from being hid, it should over-shine the whole world; and that on this very account they should be illustrious and renowned.

By this then He declares His own power. In what follows, He requires that boldness of speech which was due on their part; thus saying,

Neither do men light a candle and put it under the bushel, but on the candlestick, and it gives light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.

For I, says He, it is true, have kindled the light, but its continuing to burn, let that come of your diligence: not for your own sakes alone, but also for their sake, who are to profit by these rays, and to be guided unto the truth. Since the calumnies surely shall not be able to obscure your brightness, if you be still living a strict life, and as becomes those who are to convert the whole world. Show forth therefore a life worthy of His grace; that even as it is everywhere preached, so this light may everywhere accompany the same.

Next He sets before them another sort of gain, besides the salvation of mankind, enough to make them strive earnestly, and to lead them unto all diligence. As thus, You shall not only, says He, amend the world, if you live aright, but you will also give occasion that God shall be glorified; even as if you do the contrary, you will both destroy men, and make God's name to be blasphemed.

And how, it may be asked, shall God be glorified through us, if at least men are to speak evil of us? Nay, not all men, and even they themselves who in envy do this, will in their conscience admire and approve you; even as the outward flatterers of such as live in wickedness do in mind accuse them.

What then? Do you command us to live for display and vain glory? Far from it; I say not this; for I did not say, Give ye diligence to bring forward your own good deeds, neither did I say, Show them; but Let your light shine. That is, Let your virtue be great, and the fire abundant, and the light unspeakable. For when virtue is so great, it cannot lie hidden, though its pursuer shade it over ten thousand fold. Present unto them an irreprehensible life, and let them have no true occasion of evil speaking; and then, though there be thousands of evil-speakers, no man shall be able to cast any shade upon you. And well did He say, your light, for nothing makes a man so illustrious, how manifold soever his will to be concealed, as the manifestation of virtue. For as if he were clad with the very sunbeam, so he shines, yet brighter than it; not spending his rays on earth, but surmounting also Heaven itself.

Hence also He comforts them more abundantly. For, What though the slander pain you, says He; yet shall you have many to honor God on your account. And in both ways your recompence is gathering, as well because God is glorified through you, as because you are defamed for God's sake. Thus, lest we should on purpose seek to be reproached, on hearing that there is a reward for it: first, He has not expressed that sentiment simply, but with two limitations, namely, when what is said is false, and when it is for God's sake:-- and next He signifies how not that only, but also good report, has its great profit, the glory of it passing on to God. And He holds out to them those gracious hopes. For, says He, the calumny of the wicked avails not so much as to put all others in the dark, in respect of seeing your light. For then only when you have lost your savor shall they tread you under foot; but not when you are falsely accused, doing right. Yea, rather then shall there be many admiring, not you only, but for your sake your Father also. And He said not God, but your Father; already sowing beforehand the seeds of that noble birth, which was about to be bestowed upon them. Moreover, indicating His parity in honor, as He said above, Grieve not when you are evil spoken of, for it is enough for you that for my sake you are thus spoken of; so here He mentions the Father: every where manifesting His equality.

12. Since then we know the gain that arises from this earnestness, and the danger of indolence (for if our Lord be blasphemed because of us, that were far worse than our perdition), let us give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God. 1 Corinthians 10:32 And while the life

which we present before them is brighter than the sun, yet if any one will speak evil of us, let us not grieve at being defamed, but only if we be defamed with justice.

For, on the one hand, if we live in wickedness, though there be none to speak ill of us, we shall be the most wretched of all men: on the other hand, if we apply ourselves to virtue, though the whole world speak evil of us, at that very time we shall be more enviable than any. And we shall draw on to follow us all who choose to be saved, for not the calumny of the wicked, but our good life, will draw their attention. For indeed no trumpet is so clear as the proof that is given by our actions: neither is the light itself so transparent as a pure life, though our calumniators be beyond number.

I say, if all the above-mentioned qualities be ours; if we be meek and lowly and merciful; if we be pure, and peacemakers; if hearing reproach, we revile not again, but rather rejoice; then shall we attract all that observe us no less than the miracles do. And all will be kindly disposed towards us, though one be a wild beast, a demon, or what you will.

Or if there should even be some who speak evil of you, be not at all troubled thereat, nor because they revile you in public, regard it; but search into their conscience, and you shall see them applauding and admiring you, and numbering up ten thousand praises.

See, for instance, how Nebuchadnezzar praises the children in the furnace; yet surely he was an adversary and an enemy. But upon seeing them stand nobly, he proclaims their triumph, and crowns them: and that for nought else, but because they disobeyed him, and hearkened unto the law of God. For the devil, when he sees himself effecting nothing, from that time departs, fearing lest he should be the cause of our winning more crowns. And when he is gone, even one who is abominable and depraved will recognize virtue, that mist being withdrawn. Or if men still argue perversely, you shall have from God the greater praise and admiration.

Grieve not now, I pray you, neither despond; since the very apostles were to some a savor of death; 1 Corinthians 2:16 to others, a savor of life. And if there be nothing to lay hold of in yourself, you are rid of all their charges; or rather, you have become the more blessed. Shine out therefore in your life, and take no account of them who speak evil of you. For it cannot, it cannot be, that one careful of virtue, should not have many enemies. However, this is nothing to the virtuous man. For by such means his brightness will increase the more abundantly.

Let us then, bearing these things in mind, look to one object only; how to order our own life with strictness. For thus we shall also guide to the life that is there, such as are now sitting in darkness. For such is the virtue of that light, as not only to shine here, but also to conduct its followers there. For when men see us despising all things present, and preparing ourselves for that which is to come, our actions will persuade them sooner than any discourse. For who is there so senseless, that at sight of one, who within a day or two was living in luxury and wealth, now stripping himself of all, and putting on wings, and arrayed to meet both hunger and poverty, and all hardship, and dangers, and blood, and slaughter, and everything that is counted dreadful; will not from this sight derive a clear demonstration of the things which are to come?

But if we entangle ourselves in things present, and plunge ourselves in them more and more, how will it be possible for them to be persuaded that we are hastening to another sojourn?

And what excuse after this shall we have, if the fear of God avail not so much with us, as human glory availed with the Greek philosophers? For some of them did really both lay aside wealth, and despised

death, that they might make a show before men; wherefore also their hopes became vain. What plea then shall deliver us, when with so great things set before us, and with so high a rule of self-denial laid open to us, we are not able even to do as they did, but ruin both ourselves and others besides? For neither is the harm so great when a heathen commits transgression, as when a Christian does the same. Of course not; for their character is already lost, but ours, by reason of the grace of God, is even among the ungodly venerable and glorious. Therefore when they would most revile us, and aggravate their evil speech, they add some such taunt as, You Christian: a taunt which they would not utter, did they not secretly entertain a great opinion of our doctrine.

Have you not heard how many, and how great precepts Christ enjoined? Now when will you be able to fulfill one of those commandments, while you leave all, and go about gathering interest, tacking together usuries, setting on foot transactions of business, buying herds of slaves, procuring silver vessels, purchasing houses, fields, goods without end? And I would this were all. But when to these unseasonable pursuits, you add even injustice, removing landmarks, taking away houses by violence, aggravating poverty, increasing hunger, when will you be able to set your foot on these thresholds?

13. But sometimes you show mercy to the poor. I know it as well as you. But even in this again great is the mischief. For you do this either in pride or in vainglory, so as not to profit even by your good deeds. What can be more wretched than this, to be making your shipwreck in the very harbor? To prevent this, when you have done any good action, seek not thanks from me, that you may have God your debtor. For, Lend, says He, unto them from whom you do not expect to receive.

You have your Debtor; why leave Him, and require it of me, a poor and wretched mortal? What? Is that Debtor displeased, when the debt is required of Him? What? Is He poor? Is He unwilling to pay? Do you see not His unspeakable treasures? Do you see not His indescribable munificence? Lay hold then on Him, and make your demand; for He is pleased when one thus demands the debt of Him. Because, if He see another required to pay for what He Himself owes, He will feel as though He were insulted, and repay you no more; nay, He justly finds fault, saying, Why, of what ingratitude have you convicted me? What poverty do you know to be in me, that you hasten by me, and resortest unto others? Have you lent to One, and do you demand the debt of another?

For although man received it, it was God that commanded you to bestow; and His will is to be Himself, and in the original sense, debtor, and surety, affording you ten thousand occasion to demand the debt of Him from every quarter. Do not then let go so great facility and abundance, and seek to receive of me who have nothing. Why, to what end do you display to me your mercy shown to the poor. What! Was it I that said to you, Give? Was it from me that you heard this; that you should demand it back of me? He Himself has said, He that has pity upon the poor lends to God. Proverbs 19:17 You have lent to God: put it to His account.

But He does not repay the whole now. Well, this too He does for your good. For such a debtor is He: not as many, who are anxious simply to repay that which is lent; whereas He manages and does all things, with a view of investing likewise in security that which has been given unto Him. Therefore some, you see, He repays here: some He assigns in the other place.

14. Knowing therefore as we do these things, let us make our mercifulness abundant, let us give proof of much love to man, both by the use of our money, and by our actions. And if we see any one ill-treated and beaten in the market-place, whether we can pay down money, let us do it: or whether by words we may

separate them, let us not be backward. For even a word has its reward, and still more have sighs. And this the blessed Job said; But I wept for every helpless one, and I sighed when I saw a man in distress. Job 30:25 But if there be a reward for tears and sighs; when words also, and an anxious endeavor, and many things besides are added, consider how great the recompence becomes. Yea, for we too were enemies to God, and the Only-begotten reconciled us, casting himself between, and for us receiving stripes, and for us enduring death.

Let us then likewise do our diligence to deliver from countless evils such as are incurring them; and not as we now do, when we see any beating and tearing one another: we are apt to stand by, finding pleasure in the disgrace of others, and forming a devilish amphitheatre around: than which what can be more cruel? You see men reviled, tearing each other to pieces, rending their clothes, smiting each other's faces, and do you endure to stand by quietly?

What! Is it a bear that is fighting? A wild beast? A serpent? It is a man, one who has in every respect fellowship with you: a brother, a member. Ephesians 4:25 Look not on, but separate them. Take no pleasure, but amend the evil. Stir not up others to the shameful sight, but rather drive off and separate those who are assembled. It is for shameless persons, and born slaves, to take pleasure in such calamities; for those that are mere refuse, for asses without reason.

You see a man behaving himself unseemly, and do you not account the unseemliness your own? Do you not interpose, and scatter the devil's troop, and put an end to men's miseries?

That I may receive blows myself, says one; is this also your bidding? You will not have to suffer even this; but if you should, the thing would be to you a sort of martyrdom; for you suffered on God's behalf. And if you are slow to receive blows, consider that your Lord was not slow to endure the cross for you.

Since they for their part are drunken in darkness; wrath being their tyrant and commander; and they need some one who is sound to help them, both the wrong-doer, and he who is injured; the one that he may be delivered from suffering evil, the other that he may cease to do it. Draw near, therefore, and stretch forth the hand, you that are sober to him that is drunken. For there is a drunkenness of wrath too, and that more grievous than the drunkenness of wine.

Do you see not the seamen, how, when they see any meeting with shipwreck, they spread their sails, and set out with all haste, to rescue those of the same craft out of the waves? Now, if partakers in an art show so much care one for another, how much more ought they who are partakers of the same nature to do all these things! Because in truth here too is a shipwreck, a more grievous one than that; for either a man under provocation blasphemes, and so throws all away: or he forswears himself under the sway of his wrath, and that way falls into hell: or he strikes a blow and commits murder, and thus again suffers the very same shipwreck. Go then, and put a stop to the evil; pull out them that are drowning, though you descend into the very depth of the surge; and having broken up the theatre of the devil, take each one of them apart, and admonish him to quell the flame, and to lull the waves.

But if the burning pile wax greater, and the furnace more grievous, be not terrified; for you have many to help you, and stretch forth the hand, if you furnish but a beginning; and above all you surely have with you the God of peace. And if you will first turn aside the flames, many others also will follow, and of what they do well, you will yourself receive the reward.

Hear what precept Christ gave to the Jews, creeping as they did upon the earth: If you see, says He, your enemy's beast of burden falling down, do not hasten by, but raise it. And you must see that to separate and reconcile men that are fighting is a much lighter thing than to lift up the fallen beast. And if we ought to help in raising our enemies' ass, much more our friends' souls: and most when the fall is more grievous; for not into mire do these fall, but into the fire of hell, not bearing the burden of their wrath. And you, when you see your brother lying under the load, and the devil standing by, and kindling the pile, you run by, cruelly and unmercifully; a kind of thing not safe to do, even where brutes are concerned.

And whereas the Samaritan, seeing a wounded man, unknown, and not at all appertaining to him, both staid, and set him on a beast, and brought him home to the inn, and hired a physician, and gave some money, and promised more: you, seeing one fallen not among thieves, but among a band of demons, and beset by anger; and this not in a wilderness, but in the midst of the forum; not having to lay out money, nor to hire a beast, nor to bring him on a long way, but only to say some words:-- are you slow to do it? And holdest back, and hurriest by cruelly and unmercifully? And how do you think, calling upon God, ever to find Him propitious?

15. But let me speak also to you, who publicly disgrace yourselves: to him who is acting despitefully, and doing wrong. Are you inflicting blows? Tell me; and kicking, and biting? Are you become a wild boar, and a wild ass? And are you not ashamed? Do you not blush at thus being changed into a wild beast, and betraying your own nobleness? For though you be poor, you are free; though you be a working man, you are a Christian.

Nay, for this very reason, that you are poor, you should be quiet. For fightings belong to the rich, not to the poor; to the rich, who have many causes to force them to war. But you, not having the pleasure of wealth, go about gathering to yourself the evils of wealth, enmities, and strifes, and fightings; and takest your brother by the throat, and go about to strangle him, and throwest him down publicly in the sight of all men: and do you not think that you are yourself rather disgraced, imitating the violent passions of the brutes; nay rather, becoming even worse than they? For they have all things in common; they herd one with another, and go about together: but we have nothing in common, but all in confusion: fightings, strifes, revilings, and enmities, and insults. And we neither reverence the heaven, unto which we are called all of us in common; nor the earth, which He has left free to us all in common; nor our very nature; but wrath and the love of money sweeps all away.

Have you not seen him who owed the ten thousand talents, and then, after he was forgiven that debt, took his fellow-servant by the throat for an hundred pence, what great evils he underwent, and how he was delivered over to an endless punishment? Have you not trembled at the example? Have you no fear, lest you too incur the same? For we likewise owe to our Lord many and great debts: nevertheless, He forbears, and suffers long, and neither urges us, as we do our fellow-servants, nor chokes and takes us by the throat; yet surely had he been minded to exact of us but the least part thereof, we had long ago perished.

16. Let us then, beloved, bearing these things in mind, be humbled, and feel thankful to those who are in debt to us. For they become to us, if we command ourselves, an occasion of obtaining most abundant pardon; and giving a little, we shall receive much. Why then exact with violence, it being meet, though the other were minded to pay, for you of your accord to excuse him, that you may receive the whole of God? But now you do all things, and art violent, and contentious, to have none of your debts forgiven you; and while you are thinking to do despite unto your neighbor, you are thrusting the sword into yourself, so

increasing your punishment in hell: whereas if you will show a little self-command here, you make your own accounts easy. For indeed God therefore wills us to take the lead in that kind of bounty, that He may take occasion to repay us with increase.

As many therefore as stand indebted to you, either for money, or for trespasses, let them all go free, and require of God the recompense of such your magnanimity. For so long as they continue indebted to you, you can not have God your debtor. But if you let them go free, you will be able to detain your God, and to require of Him the recompense of so great self-restraint in bountiful measure. For suppose a man had come up and seeing you arresting your debtor, had called upon you to let him go free, and transfer to himself your account with the other: he would not choose to be unfair after such remission, seeing he had passed the whole demand to himself: how then shall God fail to repay us manifold, yea, ten thousand fold, when for His commandment's sake, if any be indebted to us, we urge no complaint against them, great or small, but let them go exempt from all liability? Let us not then think of the temporary pleasure that springs up in us by exacting of our debtors, but of the loss, rather, how great! Which we shall thereby sustain hereafter, grievously injuring ourselves in the things which are eternal. Rising accordingly above all, let us forgive those who must give account to us, both their debts and their offenses; that we may make our own accounts prove indulgent, and that what we could not reach by all virtue besides, this we may obtain by not bearing malice against our neighbors; and thus enjoy the eternal blessings, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might now and always, even forever and ever. Amen.

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