

Homily 27 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus teaches us about the importance of spiritual priorities and not being distracted by worldly matters, and shows us His power and authority through His healing and miracles.

Topics: "Spiritual Healing", "Eternal Transformation"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the healing power of Jesus, showcasing His compassion and authority over sickness and demons. He emphasizes the importance of prioritizing spiritual matters over worldly concerns, as seen in the interactions with those who wanted to follow Jesus but were hindered by personal obligations. Chrysostom highlights the need to focus on the eternal and spiritual well-being, urging believers to draw near to Jesus for healing and transformation, even for those who seem spiritually dead or bound by sin.

Transcript

Matt. VIII. 14.

And when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother laid and sick of a fever: and He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she arose and ministered unto Him.

But Mark adds also, immediately, meaning to declare the time as well; but this evangelist has set down only the miracle, without signifying besides the time. And whereas the others say, that she that lay ill did also entreat Him, this too he has passed over in silence. But this comes not of any dissonance, but the one of brevity, the other of exact narrative. But for what intent did He go into Peter's house? As it seems to me, to take food. This at least is declared when it is said,

She arose and ministered unto Him. Matthew 8:15

For He used to visit His disciples (as Matthew likewise, when He had called him), so honoring them and making them more zealous.

But do thou mark, I pray you, herein also Peter's reverence towards Him. For though he had his wife's mother at home lying ill, and very sick of a fever, he drew Him not into his house, but waited first for the teaching to be finished, then for all the others to be healed; and then when He had come in, besought Him. Thus from the beginning was he instructed to prefer the things of all others to his own.

Therefore neither does he himself bring Him in, but He entered of His own accord (after the centurion had said, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof Matthew 8:8): to show how much favor He bestowed on His disciple. And yet consider of what sort were the houses of these fishermen; but for all that, He disdained not to enter into their mean huts, teaching you by all means to trample under foot human pride.

And sometimes He heals by words only, sometimes He even stretches forth His hand, sometimes He does both these things, to bring into sight His way of healing. For it was not His will always to work miracles in the more surpassing manner: it being needful for Him to be concealed awhile, and especially as concerned His disciples; since they out of their great delight would have proclaimed everything. And this was evident from the fact, that even after coming to the mount, it was needful to charge them that they should tell no man.

Having therefore touched her body, He not only quenched the fever, but also gave her back perfect health. Thus, the disease being an ordinary one, He displayed His power by the manner of healing; a thing which no physician's art could have wrought. For you know that even after the departing of fevers, the patients yet need much time to return to their former health. But then all took place at once.

And not in this case only, but also in that of the sea. For neither there did He quiet the winds only and the storm, but He also stayed at once the swelling of the waves; and this also was a strange thing. For even if the tempest should cease, the waves continue to swell for a long time.

But with Christ it was not so, but all at once was ended: and so it befell this woman also. Wherefore also the evangelist, to declare this, said, She arose and ministered unto Him; Matthew 8:15 which was a sign both of Christ's power, and of the disposition of the woman, which she showed towards Christ.

And another thing together with these we may hence observe, that Christ grants the healing of some to the faith even of others. Since in this case too, others besought Him, as also in the instance of the centurion's servant. And this grant He makes, when there is no unbelief in him that is to be healed, but either through disease he cannot come unto Him, or through ignorance imagines nothing great of Him, or because of His immature age.

2. When the evening had come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils: and He cast out the spirits from them with a word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophet Esaias, that He took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

Do you see the multitude, by this time growing in faith? For not even when the time pressed could they endure to depart, nor did they account it unseasonable to bring their sick to Him at eventide.

But mark, I pray you, how great a multitude of persons healed the evangelists pass quickly over, not mentioning one by one, and giving us an account of them, but in one word traversing an unspeakable sea of miracles. Then lest the greatness of the wonder should drive us again to unbelief, that even so great a people and their various diseases should be delivered and healed by Him in one moment of time, He brings in the prophet also to bear witness to what is going on: indicating the abundance of the proof we have, in every case, out of the Scriptures; such, that from the miracles themselves we have no more; and He says, that Esaias also spoke of these things; He took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses. He said not, He did them away, but He took and bare them; which seems to me to be spoken rather of sins, by the prophet, in harmony with John, where he says, Behold the Lamb of God, that bears the sin of the world.

John 1:29

How then does the evangelist here apply it to diseases? Either as rehearsing the passage in the historical sense, or to show that most of our diseases arise from sins of the soul. For if the sum of all, death itself, has its root and foundation from sin, much more the majority of our diseases also: since our very capability of suffering did itself originate there.

3. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave commandment to depart unto the other side. Matthew 8:18

Do you see again His freedom from ostentation? In that as the others say, He charged the devils not to say it was He, so this writer says, He repels the multitudes from Him. Now in so doing, He was at once both training us to be moderate, and at the same time allaying the envy of the Jews, and teaching us to do nothing for display. For He was not, we know, a healer to bodies only, but a curer also of the soul, and a teacher of self-restraint; by both disclosing Himself, both by putting away their diseases, and by doing nought for display. Because they indeed were cleaving unto Him, loving Him, and marvelling at Him, and desiring to look upon Him. For who would depart from one who was doing such miracles? Who would not long, were it only to see the face, and the mouth that was uttering such words?

For not by any means in working wonders only was He wonderful, but even when merely showing Himself, He was full of great grace; and to declare this the prophet said, Fair in beauty beyond the children of men. And if Esaias says, He has no form nor comeliness, he affirms it either in comparison of the glory of His Godhead, which surpasses all utterance and description; or as declaring what took place at His passion, and the dishonor which He underwent at the season of the cross, and the mean estate which throughout His life He exemplified in all respects.

Further: He did not first give commandment to depart unto the other side, nor until He had healed them. For surely they could not have borne it. As therefore on the mountain they not only continued with Him while exhorting them, but also when it was silence followed Him; so here too, not in His miracles only did they wait on Him, but also when He had ceased again, from His very countenance receiving no small benefit. For if Moses had his face made glorious, and Stephen like that of an angel; consider thou our common Lord, what manner of person it was likely He would appear at such a time.

Many now perchance have fallen into a passionate desire of seeing that form; but if we are willing we shall behold one far better than that. For if we can pass through our present life with Christian boldness, we shall receive Him in the clouds, meeting Him in an immortal and incorruptible body.

But observe how He does not simply drive them away, lest He should hurt them. For He did not say, withdraw, but gave commandment to depart to the other side, giving them to expect that He would surely come there.

4. And the multitudes for their part evinced this great love, and were following with much affection; but some one person, a slave of wealth, and possessed with much arrogance, approaches Him, and says,

Master, I will follow You wherever You go. Matthew 8:19

Do you see how great his arrogance? For as not deigning to be numbered with the multitude, and indicating that he is above the common sort, so he comes near. Because such is the Jewish character; full of unseasonable confidence. So too another afterwards, when all men were keeping silence, of his own

accord springs up, and says, Which is the first commandment?

Yet nevertheless the Lord rebuked not his unseasonable confidence, teaching us to bear even with such as these. Therefore He does not openly convict them who are devising mischief, but replies to their secret thought, leaving it to themselves only to know that they are convicted, and doubly doing them good, first by showing that He knows what is in their conscience, next by granting unto them concealment after this manifestation, and allowing them to recover themselves again, if they will: which thing He does in the case of this man also.

For he, seeing the many signs, and many drawn after Him, thought to make a gain out of such miracles; wherefore also he was forward to follow Him. And whence is this manifest? From the answer which Christ makes, meeting not the question, as it stands verbally, but the temper shown in its meaning. For, What? says He, do you look to gather wealth by following me? Do you see not then that I have not even a lodging, not even so much as the birds have?

For the foxes, says He, have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. Matthew 8:20

Now these were not the words of one turning Himself away, but of one who while putting to the proof his evil disposition, yet permitted him (if he were willing with such a prospect) to follow Him. And to convince you of his wickedness, when he had heard these things, and had been proved, he did not say, I am ready to follow You.

5. And in many other places also Christ is clearly doing this; He does not openly convict, but by His answer He manifests the purpose of them that are coming unto Him. Thus to him again that said, Good Master, and had thought by such flattery to gain His favor, according to his purpose He made answer, saying, Why do you call me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.

And when they said to Him, Behold, Your mother and Your brethren seek You; Matthew 12:47-48 forasmuch as these were under the influence of some human infirmity, not desiring to hear something profitable, but to make a display of their relationship to Him, and therein to be vainglorious; hear what He says: Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?

And again to His brethren themselves, saying unto Him, Show yourself to the world, John 7:4, 6 and wishing thence to feed their vainglory, He said, Your time (so He speaks) is always ready, but my time is not yet come.

And in the opposite cases too He does so; as in that of Nathanael, saying, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. John 1:47 And again, Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see. Matthew 11:4 For neither in this did He reply to the words, but to the intention of him that sent them. And with the people again in like manner, He addresses His discourse unto their conscience, saying, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? Matthew 11:7 That is because they were probably feeling about John, as though he had been a sort of easy and wavering person; to correct this their suspicion, He says, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? or, a man clothed with soft raiment? by both these figures declaring, that he was neither of himself a waverer, nor would be softened by any luxury. Thus then in the present case also He makes His answer to their meaning.

And see how in this also He shows forth great moderation: in that He said not, I have it indeed, but despise it, but I have it not. Do you see what exact care goes along with His condescension? Even as when He eats and drinks, when He seems to be acting in an opposite way to John, this too He does for the sake of the Jews' salvation, or rather for that of the whole world, at once both stopping the mouths of the heretics, and desiring to win also more abundantly those of that day to Himself.

6. But a certain other one, we read, said to Him,

Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Matthew 8:21

Did you mark the difference? How one impudently says, I will follow You wherever You go; but this other, although asking a thing of sacred duty, says, Allow me. Yet He suffered him not, but says, Let the dead bury their dead, but do thou follow me. For in every case He had regard to the intention. And wherefore did He not allow him? One may ask. Because, on the one hand, there were those that would fulfill that duty, and the dead was not going to remain unburied; on the other, it was not fit for this man to be taken away from the weightier matters. But by saying, their own dead, He implies that this is not one of His dead. And that because he that was dead, was, at least as I suppose, of the unbelievers.

Now if you admire the young man, that for a matter so necessary he besought Jesus, and did not go away of his own accord; much rather do thou admire him for staying also when forbidden.

Was it not then, one may say, extreme ingratitude, not to be present at the burial of his father? If indeed he did so out of negligence, it was ingratitude, but if in order not to interrupt a more needful work, his departing would most surely have been of extreme inconsideration. For Jesus forbade him, not as commanding to think lightly of the honor due to our parents, but signifying that nothing ought to be to us more urgent than the things of Heaven, and that we ought with all diligence to cleave to these, and not to put them off for ever so little, though our engagements be exceeding indispensable and pressing. For what can be more needful than to bury a father? What more easy? Since it would not even consume any long time.

But if one ought not to spend even as much time as is required for a father's burial, nor is it safe to be parted even so long from our spiritual concerns; consider what we deserve, who all our time stand off from the things that pertain to Christ, and prefer things very ordinary to such as are needful, and are remiss, when there is nothing to press on us?

And herein too we should admire the instructiveness of His teaching, that He nailed him fast to His word, and with this freed him from those endless evils, such as lamentations, and mournings, and the things that follow thereafter. For after the burial he must of necessity proceed to inquire about the will, then about the distribution of the inheritance, and all the other things that follow thereupon; and thus waves after waves coming in succession upon him, would bear him away very far from the harbor of truth. For this cause He draws him, and fastens him to Himself.

But if you still marvellest, and art perplexed, that he was not permitted to be present at his father's burial; consider that many suffer not the sick, if it be a father that is dead, or a mother, or a child, or any other of their kinsmen, to know it, nor to follow him to the tomb; and we do not for this charge them with cruelty nor inhumanity: and very reasonably. For, on the contrary, it were cruelty to bring out to the funeral solemnity men in such a state.

But if to mourn and be afflicted in mind for them that are of our kindred is evil, much more our being withdrawn from spiritual discourses. For this same cause He said elsewhere also, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of Heaven. And surely it is far better to proclaim the kingdom, and draw back others from death, than to bury the dead body, that is nothing advantaged thereby; and especially, when there are some to fulfill all these duties.

7. Nothing else then do we learn hereby, but that we must not wantonly lose any, no not the smallest time, though there be ten thousand things to press on us; but to set what is spiritual before all, even the most indispensable matters, and to know both what is life, and what is death. Since many even of them that seem to live are nothing better than dead men, living as they do in wickedness; or rather these are worse than the dead; For he that is dead, it is said, is freed from sin, Romans 6:7 but this man is a slave to sin. For tell me not of this, that he is not eaten of worms, nor lies in a coffin, nor has closed his eyes, nor is bound in graveclothes. Nay, for these things he undergoes more grievously than the dead, no worms devouring him, but the passions of his soul tearing him to pieces more fiercely than wild beasts.

And if his eyes be open, this too again is far worse than having closed them. For those of the dead see no evil thing, but this man is gathering unto himself diseases without number, while his eyes are open. And whereas the other lies in a coffin, unmoved by anything, this one is buried in the tomb of his innumerable distempers.

But you see not his body in a state of decay. And what of that? Since before his body, his soul is corrupted and destroyed, and undergoes greater rottenness. For the other stinks a few days, but this for the whole of his life exhales evil odors, having a mouth more foul than sewers.

And so the one differs from the other, by just so much as this, that the dead indeed undergoes that decay only which comes of nature, but this man together with that, brings in also that rottenness which is from intemperance, devising each day unnumbered causes of corruption.

But is he borne on horseback? And what of that? Why, so is the other on a couch. And what is very hard, while the other is seen by no one in his dissolution and decay, but has his coffin for a veil, this man is going about everywhere with his evil savor, bearing about a dead soul in his body as in a tomb.

And if one could but once see a man's soul who is living in luxury and vice, you would perceive that it is far better to lie bound in a grave than to be riveted by the chains of our sins; and to have a stone laid over you, than that heavy cover of insensibility. Wherefore above all things it behooves the friends of these dead men, seeing that they are past feeling, to come near to Jesus in their behalf, as Mary then did in the case of Lazarus. Though he stinks, though he be dead four days, do not despair, but approach, and remove the stone first. Yea, for then you shall see him lying as in a tomb, and bound in his grave clothes.

And if you will, let it be some one of them that are great and distinguished, whom we bring before you. Nay, fear not, for I will state the example without a name: or rather, though I should mention the name, not even so need there be any fear: for who ever fears a dead man? Seeing that whatever one may do, he continues dead, and the dead cannot injure the living either little or much.

Let us then behold their head bound up. For indeed, when they are for ever drunken, even as the dead by their many wrappers and grave-clothes, so are all their organs of sense closed and bound up. And if you will look at their hands too, you shall see these again bound to their belly, like those of the dead, and fastened about not with grave-clothes, but what is far more grievous, with the bands of covetousness:

obtaining as they do no leave from her to be stretched out for almsgiving, or for any other of such like good deeds; rather she renders them more useless than those of the dead. Would you also see their feet bound together? See them again fastened about with cares, and for this cause never able to run unto the house of God.

Have you seen the dead? Behold also the embalmer. Who then is the embalmer of these? The devil, who carefully fastens them about, and suffers not the man any longer to appear a man, but a dry stock. For where there is no eye, nor hands, nor feet, nor any other such thing, how can such an one appear a man? Even so may we see their soul also swaddled up, and rather an image than a soul.

Forasmuch then as they are in a sort of senseless state, being turned to dead men, let us in their behalf draw near unto Jesus, let us entreat Him to raise them up, let us take away the stone, let us loosen the grave clothes. For if you take away the stone, that is, their insensibility to their own miseries, you will quickly be able to bring them also out of the tomb; and having brought them out, you will more easily rid them of their bonds. Then shall Christ know you, when you are risen, when unbound; then will He call you even unto His own supper. As many therefore of you as are friends of Christ, as many as are disciples, as many as love him that is gone, draw near unto Jesus, and pray. For even though his ill savor abound and be ever so intense, nevertheless not even so should we, his friends, forsake him, but so much the rather draw near; even as the sisters of Lazarus then did; neither should we leave interceding, beseeching, entreating, until we have received him alive.

For if we thus order our own affairs, and those of our neighbors, we shall also attain speedily unto the life to come; unto which may we all attain, by the grace and love to man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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