

Homily 30 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes Jesus' call to sinners and the transformative power of obedience and repentance.

Scripture: Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:9-18

Topics: "Calling Of Disciples", "Repentance And Redemption"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about Jesus calling Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him, showcasing the power of Christ to transform lives from the midst of sin. Chrysostom highlights the humility and obedience of Matthew in responding to Jesus' call, leaving behind his old life to become a disciple. He emphasizes Jesus' compassion and willingness to dine with sinners, showing that He came to call sinners to repentance and not the self-righteous. Chrysostom also addresses the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus dining with sinners, explaining that Christ's presence brings joy and that fasting will come when He is no longer physically present.

Transcript

Matt. IX. 9.

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man sitting at the receipt of custom, named Matthew; and He says unto him, Follow me.

For when He had performed the miracle, He did not remain, lest, being in sight, He should kindle their jealousy the more; but He indulges them by retiring, and soothing their passion. This then let us also do, not encountering them that are plotting against us; let us rather soothe their wound, giving way and relaxing their vehemence.

But wherefore did He not call him together with Peter and John and the rest? As in their case He had come at that time, when He knew the men would obey Him; so Matthew also He then called when He was assured he would yield himself. And therefore Paul again He took, as a fisher his prey, after the resurrection. Because He who is acquainted with the hearts, and knows the secrets of each man's mind, knew also when each of these would obey. Therefore not at the beginning did He call him, when he was yet in rather a hardened state, but after His countless miracles, and the great fame concerning Him, when He knew him to have actually become more prepared for obedience.

And we have cause also to admire the self-denial of the evangelist, how he disguises not his own former life, but adds even his name, when the others had concealed him under another appellation.

But why did he say he was sitting at the receipt of custom? To indicate the power of Him that called him, that it was not when he had left off or forsaken this wicked trade, but from the midst of the evils He drew him up; much as He converted the blessed Paul also when frantic and raging, and darting fire; which thing he himself makes a proof of the power of Him that called him, saying to the Galatians, You have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God. Galatians 1:13 And the fishermen too He called when they were in the midst of their business. But that was a craft not indeed in bad report, but of men rather rudely bred, not mingling with others, and endowed with great simplicity; whereas the pursuit now in question was one full of all insolence and boldness, and a mode of gain whereof no fair account could be given, a shameless traffic, a robbery under cloak of law: yet nevertheless He who uttered the call was ashamed of none of these things.

And why talk I of His not being ashamed of a publican? Since even with regard to a harlot woman, so far from being ashamed to call her, He actually permitted her to kiss His feet, and to moisten them with her tears. Luke 7:38 Yea, for to this end He came, not to cure bodies only, but to heal likewise the wickedness of the soul. Which He did also in the case of the paralytic; and having shown clearly that He is able to forgive sins, then, not before, He comes to him whom we are now speaking of; that they might no more be troubled at seeing a publican chosen into the choir of the disciples. For He that has power to undo all our offenses, why marvel if He even make this man an apostle?

But as you have seen the power of Him that called, so consider also the obedience of him that was called: how he neither resisted, nor disputing said, What is this? Is it not indeed a deceitful calling, wherewith He calls me, being such as I am? nay; for this humility again had been out of season: but he obeyed straightway, and did not even request to go home, and to communicate with his relations concerning this matter; as neither indeed did the fishermen; but as they left their net and their ship and their father, so did he his receipt of custom and his gain, and followed, exhibiting a mind prepared for all things; and breaking himself at once away from all worldly things, by his complete obedience he bore witness that He who called him had chosen a good time.

And wherefore can it be, one may say, that he has not told us of the others also, how and in what manner they were called; but only of Peter and James, and John and Philip, and nowhere of the others?

Because these more than others were in so strange and mean ways of life. For there is nothing either worse than the publican's business, or more ordinary than fishing. And that Philip also was among the very ignoble, is manifest from his country. Therefore these especially they proclaim to us, with their ways of life, to show that we ought to believe them in the glorious parts of their histories also. For they who choose not to pass by any of the things which are accounted reproachful, but are exact in publishing these more than the rest, whether they relate to the Teacher or to the disciples; how can they be suspected in the parts which claim reverence? More especially since many signs and miracles are passed over by them, while the events of the cross, accounted to be reproaches, they utter with exact care and loudly; and the disciples' pursuits too, and their faults, and those of their Master's ancestry who were notorious for sins, Matthew 3:6 they discover with a clear voice. Whence it is manifest that they made much account of truth, and wrote nothing for favor, nor for display.

2. Having therefore called him, He also honored him with a very great honor by partaking straightway of his table; for in this way He would both give him good hope for the future, and lead him on to a greater confidence. For not in a long time, but at once, He healed his vice. And not with him only does He sit down to meat, but with many others also; although this very thing was accounted a charge against Him, that He chased not away the sinners. But neither do they conceal this point, what sort of blame is endeavored to be fixed on His proceedings.

Now the publicans come together as to one of the same trade; for he, exulting in the entrance of Christ, had called them all together. The fact is, Christ used to try every kind of treatment; and not when discoursing only, nor when healing, nor when reproving His enemies, but even at His morning meal, He would often correct such as were in a bad way; hereby teaching us, that every season and every work may by possibility afford us profit. And yet surely what was then set before them came of injustice and covetousness; but Christ refused not to partake of it, because the ensuing gain was to be great: yea rather He becomes partaker of the same roof and table with them that have committed such offenses. For such is the quality of a physician; unless he endure the corruption of the sick, he frees them not from their infirmity.

And yet undoubtedly He incurred hence an evil report: first by eating with him, then in Matthew's house, and thirdly, in company with many publicans. See at least how they reproach Him with this. Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. Matthew 11:19

Let them hear, as many as are striving to deck themselves with great honor for fasting, and let them consider that our Lord was called a man gluttonous and a winebibber, and He was not ashamed, but overlooked all these things, that he might accomplish what He had set before him; which indeed was accordingly done. For the publican was actually converted, and thus became a better man.

And to teach you that this great thing was wrought by his partaking of the table with Him, hear what Zacchaeus says, another publican. I mean, when he heard Christ saying, Today, I must abide in your house, the delight gave him wings, and he says, The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And to him Jesus says, This day is salvation come to this house. So possible is it by all ways to give instruction.

But how is it, one may say, that Paul commands, If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator or covetous, with such an one no, not to eat? 1 Corinthians 5:11 In the first place, it is not as yet manifest, whether to teachers also he gives this charge, and not rather to brethren only. Next, these were not yet of the number of the perfect, nor of those who had become brethren. And besides, Paul commands, even with respect to them that had become brethren, then to shrink from them, when they continue as they were, but these had now ceased, and were converted.

3. But none of these things shamed the Pharisees, but they accuse Him to His disciples, saying,

Why eats your Master with publicans and sinners? Matthew 9:11

And when the disciples seem to be doing wrong, they intercede with Him, saying, Behold your disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath-day; Matthew 12:2 but here to them they discredit Him. All which was the part of men dealing craftily, and wishing to separate from the Master the choir of the disciples. What then says Infinite Wisdom?

They that be whole need not a physician, says He, but they that are sick.

See how He turned their reasoning to the opposite conclusion. That is, while they made it a charge against Him that He was in company with these men: He on the contrary says, that His not being with them would be unworthy of Him, and of His love of man; and that to amend such persons is not only blameless, but excellent, and necessary, and deserving of all sorts of praise.

After this, that He might not seem to put them that were bidden to shame, by saying, they that are sick; see how He makes up for it again, by reproofing the others, and saying,

Go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. Matthew 9:13

Now this He said, to upbraid them with their ignorance of the Scriptures. Wherefore also He orders His discourse more sharply, not Himself in anger, far from it; but so as that the publicans might not be in utter perplexity.

And yet of course He might say, Did ye not mark, how I remitted the sins of the sick of the palsy, how I braced up his body? But He says no such thing, but argues with them first from men's common reasonings, and then from the Scriptures. For having said, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick; and having covertly indicated that He Himself was the Physician; after that He said, Go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. Thus does Paul also: when he had first established his reasoning by illustrations from common things, and had said, Who feeds a flock, and eats not of the milk thereof? 1 Corinthians 9:7 then he brings in the Scriptures also, saying, It is written in the law of Moses, You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain; and again, Even so has the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

But to His disciples not so, but He puts them in mind of His signs, saying on this wise, Do ye not yet remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Matthew 16:9 Not so however with these, but He reminds them of our common infirmity, and signifies them at any rate to be of the number of the infirm; who did not so much as know the Scriptures, but making light of the rest of virtue, laid all the stress on their sacrifices; which thing He is also earnestly intimating unto them, when He sets down in brief what had been affirmed by all the prophets, saying, Learn ye what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.

The fact is, He is signifying hereby that not He was transgressing the law, but they; as if He had said, Wherefore accuse me? Because I bring sinners to amendment? Why then ye must accuse the Father also for this. Much as He said also elsewhere, establishing this point: My Father works hitherto, and I work: John 5:17 so here again, Go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. For as this is His will, says Christ, so also mine. Do you see how the one is superfluous, the other necessary? For neither did He say, I will have mercy, and sacrifice, but, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. That is, the one thing He allowed, the other He cast out; and proved that what they blamed, so far from being forbidden, was even ordained by the law, and more so than sacrifice; and He brings in the Old Testament, speaking words and ordaining laws in harmony with Himself.

Having then reproofed them, both by common illustrations and by the Scriptures, He adds again,

I am not come to call righteous men, but sinners to repentance.

And this He says unto them in irony; as when He said, Behold, Adam has become as one of us; and again, If I were hungry, I would not tell you. For that no man on earth was righteous, Paul declared, saying, For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23 And by this too the others were comforted, I mean, the guests. Why, I am so far, says He, from loathing sinners, that even for their sakes only am I come. Then, lest He should make them more careless, He staid not at the word sinners, but added, unto repentance. For I am not come that they should continue sinners, but that they should alter, and amend.

4. He then having stopped their mouths every way, as well from the Scriptures as from the natural consequence of things; and they having nothing to say, proved as they were obnoxious to the charges which they had brought against Him, and adversaries of the law and the Old Testament; they leave Him, and again transfer their accusation to the disciples.

And Luke indeed affirms that the Pharisees said it, but this evangelist, that it was the disciples of John; but it is likely that both said it. That is, they being, as might be expected, in utter perplexity, take the other sort with them; as they did afterwards with the Herodians likewise. Since in truth John's disciples were always disposed to be jealous of Him, and reasoned against Him: being then only humbled, when first John abode in the prison. They came at least then, and told Jesus; but afterwards they returned to their former envy.

Now what say they? Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but your disciples fast not? Matthew 9:14

This is the disease, which Christ long before was eradicating, in the words, When you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face; Matthew 6:17 foreknowing the evils that spring therefrom. But yet He does not rebuke even these, nor say, O you vainglorious and over-busy; but He discourses to them with all gentleness, saying, The children of the bride-chamber cannot fast, as long as the bridegroom is with them. Thus, when others were to be spoken for, the publicans I mean, to soothe their wounded soul, He was more severe in His reproof of their revilers; but when they were deriding Himself and His disciples, He makes His reply with all gentleness.

Now their meaning is like this; Granted, say they, You do this as a physician; why do Your disciples also leave fasting, and cleave to such tables? Then, to make the accusation heavier, they put themselves first, and then the Pharisees; wishing by the comparison to aggravate the charge. For indeed both we, it is said, and the Pharisees, fast oft. And in truth they did fast, the one having learned it from John, the other from the law; even as also the Pharisee said, I fast twice in the week. Luke 18:12

What then says Jesus? Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them. Before, He called Himself a physician, but here a bridegroom; by these names revealing His unspeakable mysteries. Yet of course He might have told them, more sharply, These things depend not on you, that you should make such laws. For of what use is fasting, when the mind is full of wickedness; when you blame others, when you condemn them, bearing about beams in your eyes, and do all for display? Nay, before all this ye ought to have cast out vainglory, to be proficients in all the other duties, in charity, meekness, brotherly love. However, nothing of this kind does He say, but with all gentleness, The children of the bridechamber cannot fast, so long as the bridegroom is with them; recalling to their mind John's words, when he said, He that has the bride, is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, which stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. John 3:29

Now His meaning is like this: The present time is of joy and gladness, therefore do not bring in the things which are melancholy. For fasting is a melancholy thing, not in its own nature, but to them that are yet in rather a feeble state; for to those at least that are willing to practise self-command, the observance is exceedingly pleasant and desirable. For as when the body is in health, the spirits are high, so when the soul is well conditioned, the pleasure is greater. But according to their previous impression He says this. So also Isaiah, discoursing of it, calls it an affliction of the soul; and Moses too in like manner.

Not however by this only does He stop their mouths, but by another topic also, saying,

Days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. Matthew 9:15

For hereby He signifies, that what they did was not of gluttony, but pertained to some marvellous dispensation. And at the same time He lays beforehand the foundation of what He was to say touching His passion, in His controversies with others instructing His disciples, and training them now to be versed in the things which are deemed sorrowful. Because for themselves already to have this said to them, would have been grievous and galling, since we know that afterwards, being uttered, it troubled them; but spoken to others, it would become rather less intolerable to them.

It being also natural for them to pride themselves on John's calamity, He from this topic represses likewise such their elation: the doctrine however of His resurrection He adds not yet, it not being yet time. For so much indeed was natural, that one supposed to be a man should die, but that other was beyond nature.

5. Then what He had done before, this He does here again. I mean, that as He, when they were attempting to prove Him blameable for eating with sinners, proved to them on the contrary, that His proceeding was not only no blame, but an absolute praise to Him: so here too, when they wanted to show of Him, that He knows not how to manage His disciples, He signifies that such language was the part of men not knowing how to manage their inferences, but finding fault at random.

For no man, says He, puts a piece of new cloth unto an old garment.

He is again establishing His argument by illustrations from common life. And what He says is like this, The disciples have not yet become strong, but still need much condescension. They have not yet been renewed by the Spirit, and on persons in that state one ought not to lay any burden of injunctions.

And these things He said, setting laws and rules for His own disciples, that when they should have to receive as disciples those of all sorts that should come from the whole world, they might deal with them very gently.

Neither do men put new wine into old bottles.

Do you see His illustrations, how like the Old Testament? The garment? The wine skins? For Jeremiah too calls the people a girdle, and makes mention again of bottles and of wine. Jeremiah 13:10-12 Thus, the discourse being about gluttony and a table, He takes His illustrations from the same.

But Luke the same words, a second and a third time and often; not however in a wearisome kind of way, but sportively, and do thou now turn from her, now flatter and court her.

Do you see not the painters, how much they rub out, how much they insert, when they are making a beautiful portrait? Well then, do not thou prove inferior to these. For if these, in drawing the likeness of a

body, used such great diligence, how much more were it meet for us, in fashioning a soul, to use every contrivance. For if you should fashion well the form of this soul, you will not see the countenance of the body looking unseemly, nor lips stained, nor a mouth like a bear's mouth dyed with blood, nor eyebrows blackened as with the smut of some kitchen vessel, nor cheeks whitened with dust like the walls of the tombs. For all these things are smut, and cinders, and dust, and signals of extreme deformity.

But stay: I have been led on unobserving, I know not how, into these expressions; and while admonishing another to teach with gentleness, I have been myself hurried away into wrath. Let us return therefore again unto the more gentle way of admonition, and let us bear with all the faults of our wives, that we may succeed in doing what we would. Do you see not how we bear with the cries of children, when we would wean them from the breast, how we endure all for this object only, that we may persuade them to despise their former food? Thus let us do in this case also, let us bear with all the rest, that we may accomplish this. For when this has been amended, you will see the other too proceeding in due order, and you will come again unto the ornaments of gold, and in the same way will reason concerning them likewise, and thus little by little bringing your wife unto the right rule, you will be a beautiful painter, a faithful servant, an excellent husbandman.

Together with these things remind her also of the women of old, of Sarah, of Rebecca, both of the fair and of them that were not so, and point out how all equally practised modesty. For even Leah, the wife of the patriarch, not being fair, was not constrained to devise any such thing, but although she were uncomely, and not very much beloved by her husband, she neither devised any such thing, nor marred her countenance, but continued to preserve the lineaments thereof undisfigured, and this though brought up by Gentiles.

But thou that art a believing woman, you that hast Christ for your head, are you bringing in upon us a satanic art? And do you not call to mind the water that dashed over your countenance, the sacrifice that adorns your lips, the blood that has reddened your tongue? For if you would consider all these things, though thou were fond of dress to the ten thousandth degree, you will not venture nor endure to put upon you that dust and those cinders. Learn that you have been joined unto Christ, and refrain from this unseemliness. For neither is He delighted with these colorings, but He seeks after another beauty, of which He is in an exceeding degree a lover, I mean, that in the soul. This the prophet likewise has charged you to cherish, and has said, So shall the King have pleasure in your beauty.

Let us not therefore be curious in making ourselves unseemly. For neither is any one of God's works imperfect, nor does it need to be set right by you. For not even if to an image of the emperor, after it was set up, any one were to seek to add his own work, would the attempt be safe, but he will incur extreme danger. Well then, man works and you add not; but does God work, and do you amend it? And do you not consider the fire of hell? Do you not consider the destitution of your soul? For on this account it is neglected, because all your care is wasted on the flesh.

But why do I speak of the soul? For to the very flesh everything falls out contrary to what you have sought. Consider it. Do you wish to appear beautiful? This shows you uncomely. Do you wish to please your husband? This rather grieves him; and causes not him only, but strangers also, to become your accusers. Would you appear young? This will quickly bring you to old age. Would you wish to array yourself honorably? This makes you to be ashamed. For such an one is ashamed not only before those of her own rank, but even those of her maids who are in her secret, and those of her servants who know; and, above all, before herself.

But why need I say these things? For that which is more grievous than all I have now omitted, namely, that you dost offend God; you undermine modesty, kindlest the flame of jealousy, emulatest the harlot women at their brothel.

All these things then consider, you women, and laugh to scorn the pomp of Satan and the craft of the devil; and letting go this adorning, or rather disfiguring, cultivate that beauty in your own souls which is lovely even to angels and desired of God, and delightful to your husbands; that you may attain both unto present glory, and unto that which is to come. To which God grant that we may all attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might forever and ever. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-30-on-matthew/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net