

Homily 34 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus encourages His disciples to be brave and faithful, trusting in God's providence and protection, and promises to reward them with eternal life and glory in heaven.

Scripture: Matthew 10:27-29, Matthew 10:31-32

Topics: "Faith And Persecution", "Inner Beauty"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of not fearing persecution and death, encouraging believers to trust in God's providence and to boldly confess their faith. He emphasizes the temporary nature of earthly bodies and the eternal beauty of the soul, urging people to focus on inner beauty rather than external appearances. Chrysostom highlights the power of the soul to influence the body's condition and appearance, reminding listeners that true beauty comes from within and is reflected in one's actions and character.

Transcript

Matt. X. 23.

But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into the other; for verily I say unto you, you shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come.

Having spoken of those fearful and horrible things, enough to melt very adamant, which after His cross, and resurrection, and assumption, were to befall them, He directs again His discourse to what was of more tranquil character, allowing those whom He is training to recover breath, and affording them full security. For He did not at all command them, when persecuted, to close with the enemy, but to fly. That is, it being so far but a beginning, and a prelude, He gave His discourse a very condescending turn. For not now of the ensuing persecutions is He speaking, but of those before the cross and the passion. And this He showed by saying, You shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come. That is, lest they should say, What then, if when persecuted we flee, and there again they overtake us, and drive us out?-- to destroy this fear, He says, You shall not have gone round Palestine first, but I will straightway come upon you.

And see how here again He does not away with the terrors, but stands by them in their perils. For He said not, I will snatch you out, and will put an end to the persecutions; but what? You shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come. Yea, for it sufficed for their consolation, simply to see Him.

But do thou observe, I pray you, how He does not on every occasion leave all to grace, but requires something also to be contributed on their part. For if you fear, says He, flee, for this He signified by saying, flee ye, and fear not. Matthew 10:26 And He did not command them to flee at first, but when persecuted to withdraw; neither is it a great distance that He allows them, but so much as to go about the cities of Israel.

Then again, He trains them for another branch of self-command; first, casting out all care for their food: secondly, all fear of their perils; and now, that of calumny. Since from that first anxiety He freed them, by saying, The workman is worthy of his hire, Matthew 10:10 and by signifying that many would receive them; and from their distress about their dangers, by saying, Take no thought how or what you shall speak, and, He that endures unto the end, the same shall be saved.

But since withal it was likely that they should also bring upon themselves an evil report, which to many seems harder to bear than all; see whence He comforts them even in this case, deriving the encouragement from Himself, and from all that had been said touching Himself; to which nothing else was equal. For as He said in that other place, You shall be hated of all men, and added, for my name's sake, so also here.

And in another way He mitigates it, joining a fresh topic to that former. What kind of one then is it?

The disciple, says He, is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household? Fear them not therefore. Matthew 10:24-26

See how He discovers Himself to be the Lord and God and Creator of all things. What then? Is there not any disciple above his Master, or servant above his Lord? So long as he is a disciple, and a servant, he is not, by the nature of that honor. For tell me not here of the rare instances, but take the principle from the majority. And He says not, How much more His servants, but them of His household, to show how very near He felt them to be to Him. And elsewhere too He said, Henceforth I call you not servants; you are my friends. And He said not, If they have insulted the Master of the house, and calumniated Him; but states also the very form of the insult, that they called Him Beelzebub.

Then He gives also another consolation, not inferior to this: for this indeed is the greatest; but because for them who were not yet living strictly, there was need also of another, such as might have special power to refresh them, He states it likewise. And the saying seems indeed in form to be an universal proposition, nevertheless not of all matters, but of those in hand only, is it spoken. For what says He?

There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; nor hid, that shall not be known. Matthew 10:16 Now what He says is like this. It is indeed sufficient for your encouragement, that I also shared with you in the same reproach; I who am your Master and Lord. But if it still grieve you to hear these words, consider this other thing too, that even from this suspicion you will soon be released. For why do ye grieve? At their calling you sorcerers and deceivers? But wait a little, and all men will address you as saviors, and benefactors of the world. Yea, for time discovers all things that are concealed, it will both refute their false accusation, and make manifest your virtue. For when the event shows you saviors, and benefactors, and examples of all virtue, men will not give heed to their words, but to the real state of the case; and they will appear false accusers, and liars, and slanderers, but you brighter than the sun, length of time revealing and proclaiming you, and uttering a voice clearer than a trumpet, and making all men witnesses of your virtue. Let not therefore what is now said humble you, but let the hope of the good things to come raise

you up. For it cannot be, that what relates to you should be hid.

2. Then, having rid them of all distress, and fears, and anxiety, and set them above men's reproaches, then, and not till then, He seasonably discourses to them also of boldness in their preaching.

For, What I tell you, says He, in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what you have heard in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. Matthew 10:27

Yet it was not at all darkness, when He was saying these things; neither was He discursing unto them in the ear; but He used a strong figure, thus speaking. That is, because He was conversing with them alone, and in a small corner of Palestine, therefore He said, in darkness, and in the ear; contrasting the boldness of speech, which He was hereafter to confer on them, with the tone of the conversation which was then going on. For not to one, or two, or three cities, but to the whole world you shall preach, says He, traversing land and sea, the inhabited country, and the desert; to princes alike and tribes, to philosophers and orators, saying all with open face, and with all boldness of speech. Therefore, He said, On the house tops, and, In the light, without any shrinking, and with all freedom.

And wherefore said He not only, Preach on the housetops, and Speak in the light, but added also, What I tell you in darkness, and What ye hear in the ear? It was to raise up their spirits. As therefore when He said, He that believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do; John 14:12 even so here too, to signify that He will do it all by them, and more than by Himself, He inserted this. For the beginning indeed, says He, I have given, and the prelude; but the greater part it is my will to effect through you. Now this is the language of one not commanding only, but also declaring beforehand what was to be, and encouraging them with His sayings, and implying that they should prevail over all, and quietly also removing again their distress at the evil report. For as this doctrine, after lying hid for a while, shall overspread all things, so also the evil suspicion of the Jews shall quickly perish.

Then, because He had lifted them up on high, He again gives warning of the perils also, adding wings to their mind, and exalting them high above all. For what says He? Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Matthew 10:28 Do you see how He set them far above all things, persuading them to despise not anxiety only and calumny, dangers and plots, but even that which is esteemed of all things most terrible, death? And not death alone, but by violence too? And He said not, you shall be slain, but with the dignity that became Him, He set this before them, saying, Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell; bringing round the argument, as He ever does, to its opposite. For what? Is your fear, says He, of death? And are you therefore slow to preach? Nay for this very cause I bid you preach, that you fear death: for this shall deliver you from that which is really death. What though they shall slay you? Yet over the better part they shall not prevail, though they strive ten thousand ways. Therefore He said not, Who do not kill the soul, but, who are not able to kill. For wish it as they may, they shall not prevail. Wherefore, if you fear punishment, fear that, the more grievous by far.

Do you see how again He does not promise them deliverance from death, but permits them to die, granting them more than if He had not allowed them to suffer it? Because deliverance from death is not near so great as persuading men to despise death. You see now, He does not push them into dangers, but sets them above dangers, and in a short sentence fixes in their mind the doctrines that relate to the immortality of the soul, and having in two or three words implanted a saving doctrine, He comforts them also by other considerations.

Thus, lest they should think, when killed and butchered, that as men forsaken they suffered this, He introduces again the argument of God's providence, saying on this wise: Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall into a snare without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Matthew 10:29-30 For what is viler than they? says He; nevertheless, not even these shall be taken without God's knowledge. For He means not this, by His operation they fall, for this were unworthy of God; but, nothing that is done is hid from Him. If then He is not ignorant of anything that befalls us, and loves us more truly than a father, and so loves us, as to have numbered our very hairs; we ought not to be afraid. And this He said, not that God numbers our hairs, but that He might indicate His perfect knowledge, and His great providence over them. If therefore He both knows all the things that are done, and is able to save you, and willing; whatever ye may have to suffer, think not that as persons forsaken ye suffer. For neither is it His will to deliver you from the terrors, but to persuade you to despise them, since this is, more than anything, deliverance from the terrors.

3. Fear ye not therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Matthew 10:31 Do you see that the fear had already prevailed over them? Yea, for He knew the secrets of the heart; therefore He added, Fear them not therefore; for even should they prevail, it will be over the inferior part, I mean, the body; which though they should not kill, nature will surely take with her and depart. So that not even this depends on them, but men have it from nature. And if you fear this, much more should you fear what is greater, and dread Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. And He says not openly now, that it is Himself, Who is able to destroy both soul and body, but where He before declared Himself to be judge, He made it manifest.

But now the contrary takes place: Him, namely, who is able to destroy the soul, that is, to punish it, we fear not, but those who slay the body, we shudder at. Yet surely while He together with the soul punishes the body also, they cannot even chasten the body, much less the soul: and though they chasten it ever so severely, yet in that way they rather make it more glorious.

Do you see how He signifies the conflicts to be easy? Because in truth, death did exceedingly agitate their souls, inspiring terror for a time, for that it had not as yet been made easy to overcome, neither had they that were to despise it partaken of the grace of the Spirit.

Having, you see, cast out the fear and distress that was agitating their soul; by what follows He also encourages them again, casting out fear by fear; and not by fear only, but also by the hope of great prizes; and He threatens with much authority, in both ways urging them to speak boldly for the truth; and says further,

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven. Matthew 10:32-33

Thus not from the good things only, but also from the opposites, does He urge them; and He concludes with the dismal part.

And mark His exact care; He said not me, but in me, implying that not by a power of his own, but by the help of grace from above, the confessor makes his confession. But of him that denies, He said not, in me, but me; for he having become destitute of the gift, his denial ensues.

Why then is he blamed, one may say, if being forsaken, he denies? Because the being forsaken is the fault of the forsaken person himself.

But why is He not satisfied with the faith in the mind, but requires also the confession with the mouth? To train us up to boldness in speech, and a more abundant love and determination, and to raise us on high. Wherefore also He addresses Himself to all. Nor does He at all apply this to the disciples only in person, for not them, but their disciples too, He is now rendering noble hearted. Because he that has learned this lesson will not only teach with boldness, but will likewise suffer all things easily, and with ready mind. This at any rate brought over many to the apostles, even their belief in this word. Because both in the punishment the infliction is heavier, and in the good things the recompense greater. I mean, whereas he that does right has the advantage in time, and the delay of the penalty is counted for gain by the sinner: He has introduced an equivalent, or rather a much greater advantage, the increase of the recompenses. Have you the advantage, says He, by having first confessed me here? I also will have the advantage of you, by giving you greater things, and unspeakably greater; for I will confess you there. Do you see that both the good things and the evil things are there to be dispensed? Why then hasten and hurry yourself? And why seek your rewards here, thou who art saved by hope? Wherefore, whether you have done anything good, and not received its recompense here, be not troubled (for with increase, in the time to come, the reward thereof awaits you): or whether you have done any evil, and not paid the penalty, be not easy; for there will vengeance receive you, if you turn not and amend.

But if you believe it not, from the things here form your conjecture about things to come also. Why, if in the season of the conflicts they that confess are so glorious, imagine what they will be in the season of the crowns. If the enemies here applaud, how shall that tenderest of all fathers fail to admire and proclaim you? Yea, then shall we have both our gifts for the good, and our punishments for the evil. So that such as deny shall suffer harm, both here and there; here living with an evil conscience, though they were never to die, they shall be surely dead; and there, undergoing the last penalty: but the other sort will profit both here and there, both here making a gain of their death, and in this way becoming more glorious than the living, and there enjoying those unspeakable blessings.

God then is in no wise prompt to punish only, but also to confer benefits; and for this last more than for the first. But why has He put the reward once only, the punishment twice? He knows that this would be more apt to correct us. For this cause when He had said, Fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell, He says again, Him will I also deny. So does Paul also, continually making mention of hell.

Thus we see that He, having by all ways trained on His scholar (both by opening Heaven to him, and by setting before him that fearful judgment-seat, and by pointing to the amphitheatre of angels, and how in the midst of them the crowns shall be proclaimed, which thing would thenceforth prepare the way for the word of godliness to be very easily received); in what follows, lest they grow timid and the word be hindered, He bids them be prepared even for slaughter itself; to make them aware that such as continue in their error, will have to suffer (among other things) for plotting against them.

4. Let us therefore despise death, although the time be not come that requires it of us; for indeed it will translate us to a far better life. But the body decays. Why, on this account most especially we ought to rejoice, because death decays, and mortality perishes, not the substance of the body. For neither, should you see a statue being cast, would you call the process destruction, but an improved formation. Just so do thou reason also concerning the body, and do not bewail. Then it were right to bewail, had it remained in its chastisement.

But, says one, this ought to take place without the decay of our bodies; they should continue entire. And what would this have advantaged either the living or the departed? How long are you lovers of the body? How long are you riveted to the earth and gaping after shadows? Why, what good would this have done? Or rather, what harm would it not have done? For did our bodies not decay, in the first place the greatest of all evils, pride, would have continued with many. For if even while this is going on, and worms gushing out, many have earnestly sought to be gods; what would not have been the result did the body continue?

In the second place, it would not be believed to be of earth; for if, its end witnessing this, some yet doubt; what would they not have suspected if they did not see this? Thirdly, the bodies would have been excessively loved; and most men would have become more carnal and gross; and if even now some cleave to men's tombs and coffins, after that themselves have perished, what would they not have done, if they had even their image preserved? Fourthly, they would not have earnestly desired the things to come. Fifthly, they that say the world is eternal, would have been more confirmed, and would have denied God as Creator. Sixthly, they would not have known the excellence of the soul, and how great a thing is the presence of a soul in a body. Seventhly, many of them that lose their relations would have left their cities, and have dwelt in the tombs, and have become frantic, conversing continually with their own dead. For if even now men form to themselves images, since they cannot keep the body (for neither is it possible, but whether they will or no it glides and hurries from them), and are riveted to the planks of wood; what monstrous thing would they not then have devised? To my thinking, the generality would have even built temples for such bodies, and they that are skilled in such sorceries would have persuaded evil spirits to speak through them; since at least even now, they that venture on the arts of necromancy attempt many things more out of the way than these. And how many idolatries would not have arisen from hence? When men even after the dust and ashes, are yet eager in those practices.

God therefore, to take away all our extravagances, and to teach us to stand off from all earthly things, destroys the bodies before our eyes. For even he that is enamored of bodies, and is greatly affected at the sight of a beautiful damsel, if he will not learn by discourse the deformity of that substance, shall know it by the very sight. Yea, many of the like age with her whom he loves, and oftentimes also fairer, being dead, after the first or second day, have emitted an ill savor, and foul matter, and decay with worms. Imagine then what sort of beauty you love, and what sort of elegance has power so to disturb you. But if bodies did not decay, this would not be well known: but as evil spirits run unto men's graves, so also many of our lovers, continually sitting by the tombs, would have received evil spirits in their soul, and would quickly have perished in this grievous madness.

But as it is, together with all other things this also comforts the soul, that the form is not seen: it brings men to forgetfulness of their affliction. Indeed, if this were not so, there would be no tombs at all, but you would see our cities having corpses instead of statues, each man desiring to look upon his own dead. And much confusion would arise hence, and none of the ordinary sort would attend to his soul, nor would give room to the doctrine of immortality to enter in: and many other things too, more shocking than these, would have resulted, which even to speak of were unseemly. Wherefore it decays presently, that you might see unveiled the beauty of the soul. For if she be the procurer of all that beauty and life, much more excellent must she herself be. And if she preserve that which is so deformed and unsightly, much more herself.

5. For it is not the body wherein the beauty lies, but the expression, and the bloom which is shed over its substance by the soul. Now then, I bid you love that which makes the body also to appear such as it is. And why speak I of death? Nay even in life itself, I would have you mark how all is hers that is beautiful. For whether she be pleased, she showers roses over the cheeks; or whether she be pained, she takes

that beauty, and involves it all in a dark robe. And if she be continually in mirth, the body improves in condition; if in grief, she renders the same thinner and weaker than a spider's web; if in wrath, she has made it again abominable and foul; if she show the eye calm, great is the beauty that she bestows; if she express envy, very pale and livid is the hue she sheds over us; if love, abundant the gracefulness she at once confers. Thus in fact many women, not being beautiful in feature, have derived much grace from the soul; others again of brilliant bloom, by having an ungracious soul, have marred their beauty. Consider how a face that is pale grows red, and by the variation of color produces great delight, when there is need of shame and blushing. As, on the other hand, if it be shameless, it makes the countenance more unpleasing than any monster.

For nothing is fairer, nothing sweeter than a beautiful soul. For while as to bodies, the longing is with pain, in the case of souls the pleasure is pure and calm. Why then let go the king, and be wild about the herald? Why leave the philosopher, and gape after his interpreter? Have you seen a beautiful eye? Acquaint yourself with that which is within; and if that be not beautiful, despise this likewise. For surely, did you see an ill-favored woman wearing a beautiful mask, she would make no impression on you: just as on the other hand, neither would you suffer one fair and beautiful to be disguised by the mask, but would take it away, as choosing to see her beauty unveiled.

This then I bid you do in regard of the soul also, and acquaint yourself with it first; for this is clad with the body instead of a mask; wherefore also that abides such as it is; but the other, though it be mishapen, may quickly become beautiful. Though it have an eye that is unsightly, and harsh, and fierce, it may become beautiful, mild, calm, sweet-tempered, gentle.

This beauty therefore let us seek, this countenance let us adorn; that God also may have pleasure in our beauty, and impart to us of His everlasting blessings, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might forever and ever. Amen.

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