

Homily 35 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the necessity of prioritizing faith over familial ties and the importance of compassion towards others.

Topics: "Compassion And Mercy", "Caring For Poor"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of showing compassion and mercy to those in need, emphasizing the need to avoid cruelty, harsh judgment, and indifference towards the poor and needy. He highlights the significance of giving alms, not only with material possessions but also with kind words, to alleviate the suffering of others. Chrysostom urges listeners to reflect on their actions and words, reminding them that God sends the poor to us, and it is our duty to show love and generosity towards them, avoiding insults and mistreatment.

Transcript

Matt. X. 34.

Think not that I have come to send peace on earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword.

Again, He sets forth the things that are more painful, and that with great aggravation: and the objection they were sure to meet Him with, He prevents them by stating. I mean, lest hearing this, they should say, For, this then are You come, to destroy both us, and them that obey us, and to fill the earth with war? He first says Himself, I am not come to send peace on earth.

How then did He enjoin them to pronounce peace on entering into each house? And again, how did the angels say, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace? Luke 2:14 And how came all the prophets too to publish it for good tidings? Because this more than anything is peace, when the diseased is cut off, when the mutinous is removed. For thus it is possible for Heaven to be united to earth. Since the physician too in this way preserves the rest of the body, when he amputates the incurable part; and the general, when he has brought to a separation them that were agreed in mischief. Thus it came to pass also in the case of that famous tower; for their evil peace Genesis 11:7-8 was ended by their good discord, and peace made thereby. Thus Paul also divided them that were conspiring against him. Acts 23:6-7 And in Naboth's case that agreement was at the same time more grievous than any war. 1 Kings xxi For concord is not in every case a good thing, since even robbers agree together.

The war is not then the effect of His purpose, but of their temper. For His will indeed was that all should agree in the word of godliness; but because they fell to dissension, war arises. Yet He spoke not so; but what says He? I am not come to send peace; comforting them. As if He said, For think not that you are to blame for these things; it is I who order them so, because men are so disposed. Be not ye therefore confounded, as though the events happened against expectation. To this end am I come, to send war among men; for this is my will. Be not ye therefore troubled, when the earth is at war, as though it were subject to some hostile device. For when the worse part is rent away, then after that Heaven is knit unto the better.

And these things He says, as strengthening them against the evil suspicion of the multitude.

And He said not war, but what was more grievous than it, a sword. And if there be somewhat painful in these expressions, and of an alarming emphasis, marvel not. For, it being His will to train their ears by the severity of His words, lest in their difficult circumstances they should start aside, He fashioned His discourse accordingly; lest any one should say it was by flattery He persuaded them, and by concealing the hardships; therefore even to those things which merited to be otherwise expressed, He gave by His words the more galling and painful turn. For it is better to see persons' gentleness in things, than in words.

2. Wherefore neither with this was He satisfied, but unfolds also the very nature of the war, signifying it to be far more grievous even than a civil war; and He says, I have come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

For not friends only, says He, nor fellow citizens, but even kinsmen shall stand against one another, and nature shall be divided against herself. For I have come, says He, to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. That is, not merely among those of the same household is the war, but among those that are dearest, and extremely near to each other. And this more than anything signifies His power, that hearing these things, they both accepted Him, and set about persuading all others.

Yet was it not He that did this: of course not: but the wickedness of the other sort: nevertheless He says it is His own doing. For such is the custom of the Scripture. Yea, and elsewhere also He says, God has given them eyes that they should not see: Romans 11:8 and here He speaks in this way, in order that having, as I said before, exercised themselves in these words, they might not be confounded on suffering reproaches and insults.

But if any think these things intolerable, let them be reminded of an ancient history. For in times of old also this came to pass, which thing especially shows the old covenant to be akin to the new, and Him who is here speaking, the same with the giver of those commands. I mean that in the case of the Jews also, when each had slain his neighbor, then He laid aside His anger against them; both when they made the calf, and when they were joined to Baal Peor. Where then are they that say, That God is evil, and this good? For behold He has filled the world with blood, shed by kinsmen. Nevertheless even this we affirm to be a work of great love towards man.

Therefore, you see, implying that it was He who approved those other acts also, He makes mention also of a prophecy, which if not spoken for this end, yet involves the same meaning. And what is this?

A man's foes shall be they of his own household. Matthew 10:36

For indeed among the Jews also something of the kind took place. That is, there were prophets, and false prophets, and the people was divided, and families were in dissension; and some believed the one, and some the other. Wherefore the prophet admonishes, saying, Trust ye not in friends, have not hope in guides; yea, even of her that lies in your bosom beware, in respect of communicating anything to her: and, A man's enemies are the men that are in his own house. Micah 7:5-6

And this He said, preparing him that should receive the word to be above all. For to die is not evil, but to die an evil death. On this account He said moreover, I have come to cast fire upon the earth. Luke 12:49 And this He said, to declare the vehemence and warmth of the love which He required. For, because He loved us very much, so He will likewise be loved of us. And these sayings would strengthen the persons present also, and lift them higher. For if those others, says He, are to despise kinsmen, and children, and parents, imagine what manner of men ye their teachers ought to be. Since neither will the hardships stop with you, but will also pass on to the rest. For since I have come bringing great blessings, I demand also great obedience, and purpose of heart.

3. He that loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loves son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that takes not his cross and follows after me, is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:37-38

Do you see a teacher's dignity? Do you see, how He signifies himself a true Son of Him that begot Him, commanding us to let go all things beneath, and to take in preference the love of Him?

And why speak I, says He, of friends and kinsmen? Even if it be your own life which you prefer to my love, your place is far from my disciples. What then? Are not these things contrary to the Old Testament? Far from it, rather they are very much in harmony therewith. For there too He commands not only to hate the worshippers of idols, but even to stone them; and in Deuteronomy again, admiring these, He says, Who said to his father, and to his mother, I have not seen you; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, and his own sons he disowned: he kept Your oracles. Deuteronomy 33:9 And if Paul gives many directions touching parents, commanding us to obey them in all things, marvel not; for in those things only does he mean us to obey, as many as do not hinder godliness. For indeed it is a sacred duty to render them all other honors: but when they demand more than is due, one ought not to obey. For this reason Luke says, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple; Luke 14:26 not commanding simply to hate them, since this were even quite contrary to the law; but when one desires to be loved more than I am, hate him in this respect. For this ruins both the beloved himself, and the lover. And these things He said, both to render the children more determined, and to make the fathers more gentle, that would hinder them. For when they saw He had such strength and power as to sever their children from them, they, as attempting things impossible, would even desist. Wherefore also He leaves the fathers, and addresses His discourse to the children, instructing the former not to make the attempt, as attempting things impracticable.

Then lest they should be indignant, or count it hard, see which way He makes His argument tend: in that having said, Who hates not father and mother, He adds, and his own life. For why do you speak to me of parents, says He, and brothers, and sisters, and wife? Nothing is nearer than the life to any man: yet if you hate not this also, you must bear in all things the opposite of his lot who loves me.

And not even simply to hate it was His command, but so as to expose it to war, and to battles, and to slaughters, and blood. For he that bears not his cross, and comes after me, cannot be my disciple. Thus He said not merely that we must stand against death, but also against a violent death; and not violent only, but ignominious too.

And He discourses nothing as yet of His own passion, that when they had been for a time instructed in these things, they might more easily receive His word concerning it. Is there not, therefore, cause for amazement, how on their hearing these things, their soul did not wing its way from the body, the hardships being everywhere at hand, and the good things in expectation? How then did it not flee away? Great was both the power of the speaker, and the love of the hearers. Wherefore though hearing things far more intolerable and galling than those great men, Moses and Jeremiah, they continued to obey, and to say nothing against it.

He that finds his life, says He, shall lose it: and he that loses his life for my sake, shall find it. Matthew 10:39 Do you see how great the damage to such as love it unduly? How great the gain to them that hate it? I mean, because the injunctions were disagreeable, when He was bidding them set themselves against parents, and children, and nature, and kindred, and the world, and their very soul, He sets forth the profit also, being very great. Thus, These things, says He, so far from harming, will very greatly profit; and their opposites will injure; urging them, as He ever does, by the very things which they desire. For why are you willing to despise your life? Because you love it? Then for that very reason despise it, and so you will advantage it in the highest degree, and do the part of one that loves it.

And mark an instance of unspeakable consideration. For not in respect of our parents only does He practise this reasoning, nor of our children, but with regard to our life, which is nearer than all; that the other point may thenceforth become unquestionable, and they may learn that they will in this way profit those of their kindred likewise, as much as may be; since so it is in the case even of our life, which is more essential to us than all.

4. Now these things were enough to recommend men to receive them, their appointed healers. Yea, who would choose but receive with all readiness them that were so noble, such true heroes, and as lions running about the earth, and despising all that pertained to themselves, so that others might be saved? Yet nevertheless He proffers also another reward, indicating that He is caring here for the entertainers more than for the guests.

And the first honor He confers is by saying,

He that receives you, receives me, and he that receives me, receives Him that sent me. Matthew 10:40

With this, what may compare? That one should receive the Father and the Son! But He holds out herewith another reward also.

He, says He, that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward. Matthew 10:41

And as before He threatens punishment to such as do not receive them, here He defines also a certain refreshment for the good. And to teach you His greater care for them, He said not simply, He that receives a prophet, or He that receives a righteous man, but subjoined, in the name of a prophet, and, in the name

of a righteous man; that is, if not for any worldly preferment, nor for any other temporal thing, he receive him, but because he is either a prophet or a righteous man, he shall receive a prophet's reward, and a righteous man's reward; such as it were meet for him to have, that has received a prophet, or a righteous man; or, such as that other is himself to receive. Which kind of thing Paul also said: That your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want. 2 Corinthians 8:14

Then, lest any one should allege poverty, He says,

Or whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. Matthew 10:43

Though a cup of cold water be your gift, on which there is nothing laid out, even of this shall a reward be stored up for you. For I do all things for the sake of you the receivers.

Do you see what mighty persuasions He used, and how He opened to them the houses of the whole world? Yea, He signified that men are their debtors: first, by saying, The workman is worthy of his hire; secondly, by sending them forth having nothing; thirdly, by giving them up to wars and fightings in behalf of them that receive them; fourthly, by committing to them miracles also; fifthly, in that He did by their lips introduce peace, the cause of all blessings, into the houses of such as receive them; sixthly, by threatening things more grievous than Sodom to such as receive them not: seventhly, by signifying that as many as welcome them are receiving both Himself and the Father; eighthly, by promising both a prophet's and a righteous man's reward: ninthly, by undertaking that the recompenses shall be great, even for a cup of cold water. Now each one of these things, even by itself, were enough to attract them. For who, tell me, when a leader of armies wounded in innumerable places, and dyed in blood, came in sight, returning after many trophies from war and conflict, would not receive him, throwing open every door in his house?

5. But who now is like this? One may say. Therefore He added, In the name of a disciple, and of a prophet, and of a righteous man; to instruct you that not for the worthiness of the visitor, but for the purpose of him that gives welcome, is His reward appointed. For though here He speak of prophets, and righteous men, and disciples, yet elsewhere He bids men receive the veriest outcasts, and punishes such as fail to do so. For, Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me; Matthew 25:45 and the converse again He affirms with respect to the same persons.

Since though he may be doing no such great work, he is a man, inhabiting the same world with you, beholding the same sun having the same soul, the same Lord, a partaker with you of the same mysteries, called to the same heaven with you; having a strong claim, his poverty, and his want of necessary food. But now they that waken you with flutes and pipes in the winter season, and disturb you without purpose or fruit, depart from you receiving many gifts. And they that carry about swallows, and smut themselves over, and abuse every one, receive a reward for this their conjuration. But if there come to you a poor man wanting bread, there is no end of revilings, and reproaches, and charges of idleness, and upbraidings, and insults, and jeers; and you consider not with yourself, that you too art idle, and yet God gives you His gifts. For tell me not this, that you too art doing somewhat, but point me out this rather, if it be anything really needful that you do, and art busy about. But if you tell one of money-getting, and of traffic, and of the care and increase of your goods, I also would say unto you, Not these, but alms, and prayers, and the protection of the injured, and all such things, are truly works, with respect to which we live in thorough idleness. Yet God never told us, Because you are idle, I light not up the sun for you; because you do

nothing of real consequence, I quench the moon, I paralyze the womb of the earth, I restrain the lakes, the fountains, the rivers, I blot out the atmosphere: I withhold the annual rains: but He gives us all abundantly. And to some that are not merely idle, but even doing evil, He freely gives the benefit of these things.

When therefore you see a poor man, and say, It stops my breath that this fellow, young as he is and healthy, having nothing, would rather be fed in idleness; he is surely some slave and runaway, and has deserted his proper master: I bid you speak these same words to yourself; or rather, permit him freely to speak them to you, and he will say with more justice, It stops my breath that you, being healthy, are idle, and practice none of the things which God has commanded, but having run away from the commandments of your Lord, goes about dwelling in wickedness, as in a strange land, in drunkenness, in gluttony, in theft, in extortion, in subverting other men's houses. And you indeed impute idleness, but I evil works; in your plotting, in your swearing, in your lying, in your spoiling, in your doing innumerable such things.

And this I say, not as making a law in favor of idleness, far from it; but rather very earnestly wishing all to be employed; for sloth is the teacher of all wickedness: but I beseech you not to be unmerciful, nor cruel. Since Paul also, having made infinite complaints, and said, If any will not work, neither let him eat, stopped not at this, but added, But you, be not weary in well doing. Nay, but these things are contradictory. For if you have commanded them not to eat, how do you exhort us to give? I do so, says He, for I have also commanded to avoid them, and to have no company with them; and again I said, Count them not as enemies, but admonish them; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 not making contradictory laws, but such as are quite in unison with each other. Because, if you are prompt to mercy, both he, the poor man, will soon be rid of his idleness, and you of your cruelty.

But he has many lies and inventions, you reply. Well, hence again is he pitiable, for that he has fallen into such distress, as to be hardened even in such doings. But we, so far from pitying, add even those cruel words, Have you not received once and again? so we talk. What then? Because he was once fed, has he no need to be fed again? Why do you not make these laws for your own belly also, and say to it likewise, You were filled yesterday, and the day before, seek it not now? But while you fill that beyond measure, even to bursting, from him you turn away, when he asks but what is moderate; whereas you ought therefore to pity him, because he is constrained to come to you every day. Yea, if nought else incline you to him, you should pity him because of this; for by the constraint of his poverty he is forced on these things, and does them. And you do not pity him, because, being so spoken to, he feels no shame: the reason being, that his want is too strong for him.

Nay, instead of pitying, you even make a show of him; and whereas God has commanded to give secretly, you stand exposing publicly him that has accosted you, and upbraiding him, for what ought to move your pity. Why, if you are not minded to give, to what end add reproach, and bruise that weary and wretched soul? He came as into a harbor, seeking help at your hands; why stir up waves, and make the storm more grievous? Why do you condemn him of meanness? What? Had he thought to hear such things, would he have come to you? Or if he actually came foreseeing this, good cause therefore both to pity him, and to shudder at your own cruelty, that not even so, when you see an inexorable necessity laid upon him, do you become more gentle, nor judge him to have a sufficient excuse for his importunity in the dread of hunger, but accuse him of impudence: and yet have you often yourself practised greater impudence, yea in respect of grievous matters. For while here the very impudence brings with it ground of pardon, we, often doing things punishable, brazen it out: and when we ought to bear all that in mind, and be humble, we even trample on those miserable men, and when they ask medicines, we add to their wounds. I say, if

you will not give, why do you strike? If you will not be bounteous, why be insolent?

But he submits not to be put off in any other way. Well then, as that wise man commanded, Sirach 4:8 so do. Answer him peaceable words with meekness. For not of his own accord, surely, is he so very importunate. For there is not, there cannot be, any man desiring to be put to shame for its own sake. How much soever any may contend, I cannot yield ever to be convinced that a man who was living in plenty would choose to beg.

6. Let no man then beguile us with arguments. But although Paul says, If any will not work, neither let him eat, 2 Thessalonians 3:10 to them he says it; but to us he says not this, but, on the contrary, Be not weary in well doing. 2 Thessalonians 3:13 Even thus do we at home; when any two are striving with each other, we take each apart, and give them the opposite advice. This did God also, and Moses. For while to God he said, If you will forgive them their sin, forgive it; else blot me out also; them on the contrary he commanded to slay one another, and all that pertained to them. Yet these things are contrary; nevertheless, both looked to one end.

Again, God said to Moses in the hearing of the Jews, Let me alone, that I may consume the people, Exodus 32:10 (for though they were not present when God was saying this, yet they were to hear it afterwards): but privately He gives him directions of the opposite tenor. And this, Moses upon constraint revealed afterwards, thus saying, What? Did I conceive them, that you say to me, Carry them, as a nurse would carry the sucking child in her bosom?

These things are done also in houses, and often a father while he blames the tutor in private for having used his child reproachfully, saying, Be not rough, nor hard, to the youth speaks in the contrary way, Though thou be reproached unjustly, bear it; out of those opposites making up some one wholesome result. Thus also Paul said to such as are in health and beg, If any man will not work, neither let him eat, that he may urge them into employment: but to such as can show mercy, You, for your part, be not weary in well doing: that he may lead them to give alms.

So also, when he was admonishing those of the Gentiles, in his Epistle to the Romans, not to be highminded against the Jews, he brought forward also the wild olive, and he seems to be saying one thing to these, another to those. Romans 11:17

Let us not therefore fall away into cruelty, but let us listen to Paul, saying, Be not weary in well doing; let us listen to the Lord, who says, Give to every man that asks of you, Luke 6:30 and, Be merciful as your Father. Luke 6:36 And though He has spoken of many things, He has nowhere used this expression, but with regard to our deeds of mercy only. For nothing so equals us with God, as doing good.

But nothing is more shameless, says one, than a poor man. Why, I pray you? Because he runs up, and cries out after you? Will you then let me point out, how we are more importunate than they, and very shameless? Remember, I say, now at the season of the fast, how often, when your table was spread at eventide, and you had called your ministering servant; on his moving rather leisurely, you have upset everything, kicking, insulting, reviling, merely about a little delay; although fully assured, that if not immediately, yet a little after you shall enjoy your victuals. Upon which thou dost not call yourself impudent, changed as you are into a wild beast for nothing; but the poor man, alarmed and trembling about his greater interests (for not about delay, but about famine, is all his fear), him do you call audacious, and shameless, and impudent, and all the most opprobrious names? Nay, how is this anything but extreme impudence.

But these things we do not consider: therefore we account such men troublesome: since if we at all searched into our own doings, and compared them with theirs, we should not have thought them intolerable.

Be not then a severe judge. Why, if you were clear of all sins, not even then would the law of God permit you to be strict in searching out other men's sins. And if the Pharisee perished on this account, what defense are we to find? If He suffer not such as have done well to be bitter in searching out other men's doings, much less them that have offended.

7. Let us not then be savage, nor cruel, not without natural feeling, not implacable, not worse than wild beasts. For I know many to have gone even so far in brutishness, as for a little trouble to slight famishing persons, and to say these words: I have no servant now with me; we are far from home; there is no money-changer that I know. Oh cruelty! Did you promise the greater, and do you not fulfill the less? To save your walking a little way, does he perish with hunger? Oh insolence! Oh pride! Why, if it were ten furlongs to be walked, ought thou to be backward? Does it not even come into your mind that so your reward is made greater? For whereas, when you give, you receive reward for the gift only: when you yourself also go, for this again is appointed you a recompense.

Yea, the patriarch himself we admire for this, that in his own person he ran to the herd, and snatched up the calf, Genesis 18:7 and that, when he had three hundred and eighteen servants born in his house. But now some are filled with so much pride, as to do these things by servants, and not to be ashamed. But do you require me to do these things myself? one may say. How then shall I not seem to be vainglorious? Nay, but as it is, you are led by another kind of vainglory to do this, being ashamed to be seen talking with a poor man.

But I am in no respect strict about this; only give, whether by yourself or by another you are minded to do so; and do not accuse, do not smite, do not revile. For medicines, not wounds, does he need who comes unto you; mercy, not a sword. For tell me, if any one who had been smitten with a stone, and had received a wound in his head, were to let go all others, and run unto your knees, drenched in his blood; would you indeed smite him with another stone, and add unto him another wound? I, for my part, think not; but even as it was, you would endeavor to cure it. Why then doest thou the contrary with respect to the poor? Do you not know how much power a word has, both to raise up, and to cast down? For a word, it is said, is better than a gift. Sirach 18:16

Do you not consider that you are thrusting the sword into yourself, and art receiving a more grievous wound, when he, being reviled, silently withdraws, with groans and many tears? Since indeed of God he is sent unto you. Consider then, in insulting him, upon whom you are causing the insult to pass; when God indeed sends him unto you, and commands you to give, but thou, so far from giving, dost even insult him on his coming.

And if you are not aware how exceedingly amiss this is, look at it as among men, and then you will fully know the greatness of the sin. As thus: if a servant of yours had been commanded by you to go to another servant, who had money of yours, to receive it, and were to come back not only with empty hands, but also with despiteful usage; what would you not do to him that had wrought the insult? What penalty would you not exact, as though, after this, it were yourself that had been ill used?

This reckoning do thou make in regard of God also; for truly it is He that sends the poor to us, and of His we give, if indeed we do give. But if, besides not giving, we also send them away insulted, consider how

many bolts, how many thunders, that which we are doing deserves.

Duly considering then all these things, let us both bridle our tongue, and put away inhumanity, and let us stretch forth the hand to give alms, and not with money only, but with words also, let us relieve such as are in need; that we may both escape the punishment for reviling, and may inherit the kingdom which is for blessing and almsgiving, 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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