

Homily 37 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the significance of John the Baptist as a steadfast prophet and the people's need for repentance in light of Jesus' ministry.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23, 1 Corinthians 15:33, Ephesians 5:11, Philippians 4:8, James 4:4, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Moral Purity", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the dangers of indulging in worldly pleasures, specifically focusing on the negative impact of attending theaters and spectacles that promote immorality and impurity. He emphasizes the importance of guarding one's heart and mind against corrupt influences, urging the congregation to avoid places and activities that lead to sin and moral decay. Chrysostom highlights the contrast between the purity of family life, the joy of children, and the blessings of marriage, encouraging believers to find true delight in wholesome relationships and virtuous living. He warns against the harmful effects of participating in sinful entertainment, which not only corrupts the individual but also contributes to the moral decline of society. Chrysostom calls for a rejection of worldly pleasures and a pursuit of spiritual growth and righteousness, reminding the listeners of the eternal consequences of their choices.

Transcript

Matthew 11:7-9.

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment; behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

For the matter indeed of John's disciples had been ordered well, and they had gone away assured by the miracles which had just been performed; but there was need after that of remedy as regarded the people. For although they could not suspect anything of the kind of their own master, the common people might from the inquiry of John's disciples form many strange suspicions, not knowing the mind with which he sent his disciples. And it was natural for them to reason with themselves, and say, He that bore such abundant witness, has he now changed his persuasion, and does he doubt whether this or another be He that should come? Can it be, that in dissension with Jesus he says this? That the prison has made him more timid? That his former words were spoken vainly, and at random? It being then natural for them to suspect many such things, see how He corrects their weakness, and removes these their suspicions. For

as they departed, He began to say to the multitudes. Why, as they departed? That He might not seem to be flattering the man.

And in correcting the people, He does not publish their suspicion, but adds only the solution of the thoughts that were mentally disturbing them: signifying that He knew the secrets of all men. For He says not, as unto the Jews, Wherefore think ye evil? Matthew 9:4 Because if they had it in their minds, not of wickedness did they so reason, but of ignorance on the points that had been spoken of. Wherefore neither does He discourse unto them in the way of rebuke, but merely sets right their understanding, and defends John, and signifies that he is not fallen away from his former opinion, neither is he changed, not being at all a man easily swayed and fickle, but steadfast and sure, and far from being such as to betray the things committed unto him.

And in establishing this, He employs not at first his own sentence, but their former testimony, pointing out how they bare record of his firmness, not by their words only, but also by their deeds.

Wherefore He says, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? as though He had said, Wherefore did ye leave your cities, and your houses, and come together all of you into the wilderness? To see a pitiful and flexible kind of person? Nay, this were out of all reason, this is not what is indicated by that earnestness, and the concourse of all men unto the wilderness. So much people and so many cities would not have poured themselves out with so great zeal towards the wilderness and the river Jordan at that time, had ye not expected to see some great and marvellous one, one firmer than any rock. Yea, it was not a reed surely, that ye went out to see shaken by the wind: for the flexible and such as are lightly brought round, and now say one thing, now another, and stand firm in nothing, are most like that.

And see how He omits all wickedness, and mentions this, which then especially haunted them; and removes the suspicion of lightness.

But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. Matthew 11:8

Now His meaning is like this: He was not of himself a waverer; and this ye yourselves showed by your earnestness. Much less could any one say this, that he was indeed firm, but having made himself a slave to luxury, he afterwards became languid. For among men, some are such as they are of themselves, others become so; for instance, one man is passionate by nature, and another from having fallen into a long illness gets this infirmity. Again, some men are flexible and fickle by nature, while others become so by being slaves to luxury, and by living effeminately. But John, says He, neither was such a character by nature, for neither was it a reed that you went out to see; nor by giving himself to luxury did he lose the advantage he possessed. For that he did not make himself a slave to luxury, his garb shows, and the wilderness, and the prison. Since, had he been minded to wear soft raiment, he would not have lived in the wilderness, nor in the prison, but in the king's courts: it being in his power, merely by keeping silence, to have enjoyed honor without limit. For since Herod so revered him, even when he had rebuked him, and was in chains, much more would he have courted him, had he held his peace. You see, he had indeed given proof of his firmness and fortitude; and how could he justly incur suspicions of that kind?

2. When therefore as well by the place, as by his garments, and by their concourse unto Him, He had delineated his character, He proceeds to bring in the prophet. For having said, Why went ye out? To see a prophet? Yea I say unto you, and more than a prophet; He goes on, For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before Your face, which shall prepare Your way before You. Matthew 11:10

Having before set down the testimony of the Jews, He then applies that of the prophets; or rather, He puts in the first place the sentence of the Jews, which must have been a very strong demonstration, the witness being borne by his enemies; secondly, the man's life; thirdly, His own judgment; fourthly, the prophet; by all means stopping their mouths.

Then lest they should say, But what if at that time indeed he were such an one, but now is changed? He added also what follows; his garments, his prison, and together with these the prophecy.

Then having said, that he is greater than a prophet, He signifies also in what he is greater. And in what is he greater? In being near Him that had come. For, I send, says He, my messenger before Your face; that is, near You. For as with kings, they who ride near the chariot, these are more illustrious than the rest, just so John also appears in his course near the advent itself. See how He signified John's excellency by this also; and not even here does He stop, but adds afterwards His own suffrage as well, saying, Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist. Matthew 11:11

Now what He said is like this: woman has not borne a greater than this man. And His very sentence is indeed sufficient; but if you are minded to learn from facts also, consider his table, his manner of life, the height of his soul. For he so lived as though he were in heaven: and having got above the necessities of nature, he travelled as it were a new way, spending all his time in hymns and prayers, and holding intercourse with none among men, but with God alone continually. For he did not so much as see any of his fellow-servants, neither was he seen by any one of them; he fed not on milk, he enjoyed not the comfort of bed, or roof, or market, or any other of the things of men; and yet he was at once mild and earnest. Hear, for example, how considerately he reasons with his own disciples, courageously with the people of the Jews, how openly with the king. For this cause He said also, There has not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist.

3. But lest the exceeding greatness of His praises should produce a sort of extravagant feeling, the Jews honoring John above Christ; mark how He corrects this also. For as the things which edified His own disciples did harm to the multitudes, they supposing Him an easy kind of person; so again the remedies employed for the multitudes might have proved more mischievous, they deriving from Christ's words a more reverential opinion of John than of Himself.

Wherefore this also, in an unsuspected way, He corrects by saying, He that is less, in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. Less in age, and according to the opinion of the multitude, since they even called Him a gluttonous man and a winebibber; Matthew 11:19 and, Is not this the carpenter's son? Matthew 13:55 and on every occasion they used to make light of Him.

What then? it may be said, is it by comparison that He is greater than John? Far from it. For neither when John says, He is mightier than I, Matthew 3:11 does he say it as comparing them; nor Paul, when remembering Moses he writes, For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, Hebrews 3:3 does he so write by way of comparison; and He Himself too, in saying, Behold, a greater than Solomon is here, Matthew 12:42 speaks not as making a comparison.

Or if we should even grant that this was said by Him in the way of comparison, this was done in condescension, because of the weakness of the hearers. For the men really had their gaze very much fixed upon John; and then he was rendered the more illustrious both by his imprisonment, and by his plainness of speech to the king; and it was a great point for the present, that even so much should be

received among the multitude. And so too, the Old Testament uses in the same way to correct the souls of the erring, by putting together in a way of comparison things that cannot be compared; as when it says, Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord: and again, There is no god like our God.

Now some affirm, that Christ said this of the apostles, others again, of angels. Thus, when any have turned aside from the truth, they are wont to wander many ways. For what sort of connection has it, to speak either of angels or of apostles? And besides, if He were speaking of the apostles, what hindered his bringing them forward by name? Whereas, when He is speaking of Himself, He naturally conceals His person, because of the still prevailing suspicion, and that He may not seem to say anything great of Himself; yea, and we often find Him doing so.

But what is, In the kingdom of heaven? Among spiritual beings, and all them that are in heaven.

And moreover His saying, There has not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John, suited one contrasting John with Himself, and thus tacitly excepting Himself. For though He too were born of a woman, yet not as John, for He was not a mere man, neither was He born in like manner as a man, but by a strange and wondrous kind of birth.

4. And from the days of John the Baptist, says He, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

And what sort of connection may this have with what was said before? Much, assuredly, and in full accordance therewith. Yea, by this topic also He proceeds to urge and press them into the faith of Himself; and at the same time likewise, He is speaking in agreement with what had been before said by John. For if all things are fulfilled even down to John, I am He that should come.

For all the prophets, says He, and the law prophesied until John. Matthew 11:13

For the prophets would not have ceased, unless I had come. Expect therefore nothing further, neither wait for any one else. For that I am He is manifest both from the prophets ceasing, and from those that every day take by force the faith that is in me. For so manifest is it and certain, that many even take it by force. Why, who has so taken it? Tell me. All who approach it with earnestness of mind.

Then He states also another infallible sign, saying, If you will receive it, he is Elias, which was for to come. For I will send you, it is said, Elias the Tishbite, who shall turn the heart of the father to the children. This man then is Elias, if you attend exactly, says He. For I will send, says He, my messenger before Your face.

And well has He said, If you will receive it, to show the absence of force. For I do not constrain, says He. And this He said, as requiring a candid mind, and showing that John is Elias, and Elias John. For both of them received one ministry, and both of them became forerunners. Wherefore neither did He simply say, This is Elias, but, If you are willing to receive it, this is he, that is, if with a candid mind ye give heed to what is going on. And He did not stop even at this, but to the words, This is Elias, which was for to come, He added, to show that understanding is needed, He that has ears to hear, let him hear. Matthew 11:15

Now He used so many dark sayings, to stir them up to inquiry. And if not even so were they awakened, much more, had all been plain and clear. For this surely no man could say, that they dared not ask Him, and that He was difficult of approach. For they that were asking him questions, and tempting Him about common matters, and whose mouths were stopped a thousand times, yet they did not withdraw from Him; how should they but have inquired of Him, and besought Him touching the indispensable things, had they

indeed been desirous to learn? For if concerning the matters of the law they asked, Which is the first commandment, and all such questions, although there was of course no need of His telling them that; how should they but ask the meaning of what He Himself said, for which also He was bound to give account in His answers? And especially when it was He Himself that was encouraging and drawing them on to do this. For by saying, The violent take it by force, He stirs them up to earnestness of mind; and by saying, He that has ears to hear, let him hear, He does just the same thing.

5. But whereunto shall I liken this generation? says He, It is like children sitting in the market place, and saying, We have piped unto you, and you have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and you have not lamented. This again seems to be unconnected with what came before, but it is the most natural consequence thereof. Yea, He still keeps to the same point, the showing that John is acting in harmony with Himself, although the results were opposite; as indeed with respect to his inquiry also. And He implies that there was nothing that ought to have been done for their salvation, and was omitted; which thing the prophet says of the vineyard; What ought I to have done to this vineyard, and have not done it? For whereunto, says He, shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the market, and saying, We have piped unto you, and you have not danced, we have mourned unto you, and you have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He has a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.

Now what He says is like this: We have come each of us an opposite way, I and John; and we have done just as if it were some hunters with a wild beast that was hard to catch, and which might by two ways fall into the toils; as if each of the two were to cut it off his several way, and drive it, taking his stand opposite to the other; so that it must needs fall into one of the two snares. Mark, for instance, the whole race of man, how it is astonished at the wonder of men's fasting, and at this hard and self-denying life. For this reason it had been so ordered, that John should be thus brought up from his earliest youth, so that hereby (among other things) his sayings might obtain credit.

But wherefore, it may be asked, did not He Himself choose that way? In the first place He did also Himself proceed by it, when He fasted the forty days, and went about teaching, and not having where to lay His head. Nevertheless He did also in another mode accomplish this same object, and provide for the advantage thence accruing. For to be testified of by him that came this way was the same thing, or even a much greater thing than to have come this way Himself.

And besides, John indeed exhibited no more than his life and conversation; for John, it is said, did no sign, John 10:41 but He Himself had the testimony also from signs and from miracles. Leaving therefore John to be illustrious by his fasting, He Himself came the opposite way, both coming unto publicans' tables, and eating and drinking.

Let us ask the Jews then, Is fasting a good thing, and to be admired? You should then have obeyed John, and received him, and believed his sayings. For so would those sayings have led you towards Jesus. Is fasting, on the other hand, a thing grievous, and burdensome? Then should you have obeyed Jesus, and have believed in Him that came the opposite way. Thus, either way, you would have found yourselves in the kingdom. But, like an intractable wild beast, they were speaking evil of both. The fault is not then theirs who were not believed, but they are to be blamed who did not believe. For no man would ever choose to speak evil of opposite things, any more than he would on the other hand commend them. I mean thus: he that approves the cheerful and free character, will not approve him that is sad and grave; he that commends the man of a sad countenance will not commend the cheerful man. For it is a thing impossible

to give your vote both ways at once. Therefore also He says, We have piped unto you, and you have not danced; that is, I have exhibited the freer kind of life, and you obeyed not: and, We have mourned, and you have not lamented; that is, John followed the rugged and grave life, and you took no heed. And He says not, he this, I that, but the purpose of both being one, although their modes of life were opposite, for this cause He speaks of their doings as common. Yea, for even their coming by opposite ways arose out of a most exact accordance, such as continued looking to one and the same end. What sort of excuse then can you have after all this?

Wherefore He subjoined, And wisdom is justified of her children; that is, though ye be not persuaded, yet with me after this ye cannot find fault. As the prophet says touching the Father, That You might be justified in Your sayings. For God, though He should effect nothing more by His care over us, fulfills all His part, so as to leave to them that will be shameless not so much as a shadow of excuse for uncandid doubt.

And if the similitudes be mean, and of an ill sound, marvel not, for He was discoursing with a view to the weakness of His hearers. Since Ezekiel too mentions many similitudes like them, and unworthy of God's majesty. But this too especially becomes His tender care.

And mark them, how in another respect also they are carried about into contradictory opinions. For whereas they had said of John, he has a devil, Matthew 11:18 they stopped not at this, but said the very same again concerning Him, taking as He did the opposite course; thus were they forever carried about into conflicting opinions.

But Luke herewith sets down also another and a heavier charge against them, saying, For the publicans justified God, having received the baptism of John.

6. Then He proceeds to upbraid the cities now that wisdom has been justified; now that He has shown all to be fully performed. That is, having failed to persuade them, He now does but lament over them; which is more than terrifying. For He had exhibited both His teaching by His words, and His wonder-working power by His signs. But forasmuch as they abode in their own unbelief, He now does but upbraid.

For then, it is said, began Jesus to upbraid the cities, wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not; saying, Woe unto you, Chorazin! Woe unto you, Bethsaida! Matthew 11:20-21

Then, to show you that they are not such by nature, He states also the name of the city out of which proceeded five apostles. For both Philip, and those two pairs of the chief apostles, were from thence. John 1:44

For if, says He, the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell, for if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.

And He adds not Sodom with the others for nought, but to aggravate the charge against them. Yea, for it is a very great proof of wickedness, when not only of them that now are, but even of all those that ever were wicked, none are found so bad as they.

Thus elsewhere also He makes a comparison, condemning them by the Ninevites, and by the Queen of the south; there, however, it was by them that did right, here, even by them that sinned; a thing far more grievous. With this law of condemnation, Ezekiel too was acquainted: wherefore also he said to Jerusalem, You have justified your sisters in all your sins. Thus everywhere is He wont to linger in the Old Testament, as in a favored place. And not even at this does He stay His speech, but makes their fears yet more intense, by saying, that they should suffer things more grievous than Sodomites and Tyrians, so as by every means to gather them in, both by bewailing, and by alarming them.

7. To these same things let us also listen: since not for the unbelievers only, but for us also, has He appointed a punishment more grievous than that of the Sodomites, if we will not receive the strangers that come in unto us; I mean, when He commanded to shake off the very dust: and very fitly. For as to the Sodomites, although they committed a great transgression, yet it was before the law and grace; but we, after so much care shown towards us, of what indulgence should we be worthy, showing so much inhospitality, and shutting our doors against them that are in need, and before our doors our ears? Or rather not against the poor only, but against the apostles themselves? For therefore we do it to the poor, because we do it to the very apostles. For whereas Paul is read, and you attend not; whereas John preaches, and you hear not: when will you receive a poor man, who will not receive an apostle?

In order then that both our houses may be continually open to the one, and our ears to the others, let us purge away the filth from the ears of our soul. For as filth and mud close up the ears of our flesh, so do the harlot's songs, and worldly news, and debts, and the business of usury and loans, close up the ear of the mind, worse than any filth; nay rather, they do not close it up only, but also make it unclean. And they are putting dung in your ears, who tell you of these things. And that which the barbarian threatened, saying, You shall eat your own dung, and what follows; Isaiah 36:12 this do these men also make you undergo, not in word, but in deeds; or rather, somewhat even much worse. For truly those songs are more loathsome even than all this; and what is yet worse, so far from feeling annoyance when you hear them, you rather laugh, when you ought to abominate them and fly.

But if they be not abominable, go down unto the stage, imitate that which you praise, or rather, do thou merely take a walk with him that is exciting that laugh. Nay, you could not bear it. Why then bestow on him so great honor? Yea, while the laws that are enacted by the Gentiles would have them to be dishonored, you receive them with your whole city, like ambassadors and generals, and dost convoke all men, to receive dung in their ears. And your servant, if he say anything filthy in your hearing, will receive stripes in abundance; and be it a son, a wife, whoever it may, that does as I have said, you call the act an affront; but if worthless fellows, that deserve the scourge, should invite you to hear the filthy words, not only are you not indignant, thou dost even rejoice and applaud. And what could be equal to this folly?

But dost you yourself never utter these base words? Why what is the profit? Or rather, this very fact, whence is it manifest? For if you did not utter these things, neither would you at all laugh at hearing them, nor would you run with such zeal to the voice that makes you ashamed.

For tell me, are you pleased at hearing men blaspheme? Do you not rather shudder, and stop your ears? Surely I think you do. Why so? Because you blaspheme not yourself. Just so do thou act with respect to filthy talking also; and if you would show us clearly, that you have no pleasure in filthy speaking, endure not so much as to hear them. For when will you be able to become good, bred up as you are with such sounds in your ears? When will you venture to undergo such labors as chastity requires, now that you are falling gradually away through this laughter, these songs, and filthy words? Yea, it is a great thing for a

soul that keeps itself pure from all this, to be able to become grave and chaste; how much more for one that is nourished up in such hearings? Do you not know, that we are of the two more inclined to evil? While then we make it even an art, and a business, when shall we escape that furnace?

8. Heardest thou not what Paul says, Rejoice in the Lord? Philippians 4:4 He said not, in the devil. When then will you be able to hear Paul? When, to gain a sense of your wrong actions? drunken as you are, ever and incessantly, with the spectacle I was speaking of. For your having come here is nothing wonderful nor great; or rather it is wonderful. For here you come any how, and so as just to satisfy a scruple, but there with diligence and speed, and great readiness. And it is evident from what you bring home, on returning thence.

For even all the mire that is there poured out for you, by the speeches, by the songs, by the laughter, you collect and take every man to his home, or rather not to his home only, but every man even into his own mind.

And from things not worthy of abhorrence you turn away; while others which are to be abhorred, so far from hating, thou dost even court. Many, for instance, on coming back from tombs, are used to wash themselves, but on returning from theatres they have never groaned, nor poured forth any fountains of tears; yet surely the dead man is no unclean thing, whereas sin induces such a blot, that not even with ten thousand fountains could one purge it away, but with tears only, and with confessions. But no one has any sense of this blot. Thus because we fear not what we ought, therefore we shrink from what we ought not.

And what again is the applause? What the tumult, and the satanical cries, and the devilish gestures? For first one, being a young man, wears his hair long behind, and changing his nature into that of a woman, is striving both in aspect, and in gesture, and in garments, and generally in all ways, to pass into the likeness of a tender damsel. Then another who is grown old, in the opposite way to this, having his hair shaven, and with his loins girt about, his shame cut off before his hair, stands ready to be smitten with the rod, prepared both to say and do anything. The women again, their heads uncovered, stand without a blush, discoursing with a whole people, so complete is their practice in shamelessness; and thus pour forth all effrontery and impurity into the souls of their hearers. And their one study is, to pluck up all chastity from the foundations, to disgrace our nature, to satiate the desire of the wicked demon. Yea, and there are both foul sayings, and gestures yet fouler; and the dressing of the hair tends that way, and the gait, and apparel, and voice, and flexure of the limbs; and there are turnings of the eyes, and flutes, and pipes, and dramas, and plots; and all things, in short, full of the most extreme impurity. When then will you be sober again, I pray you, now that the devil is pouring out for you so much of the strong wine of whoredom, mingling so many cups of unchastity? For indeed both adulteries and stolen marriages are there, and there are women playing the harlot, men prostituting, youths corrupting themselves: all there is iniquity to the full, all sorcery, all shame. Wherefore they that sit by should not laugh at these things, but weep and groan bitterly.

What then? Are we to shut up the stage? it will be said, and are all things to be turned upside down at your word? Nay, but as it is, all things are turned upside down. For whence are they, tell me, that plot against our marriages? Is it not from this theatre? Whence are they that dig through into chambers? Is it not from that stage? Comes it not of this, when husbands are insupportable to their wives? Of this, when the wives are contemptible to their husbands? Of this, that the more part are adulterers? So that the subverter of all things is he that goes to the theatre; it is he that brings in a grievous tyranny. Nay, you will say, this is appointed by the good order of the laws. Why, to tear away men's wives, and to insult young boys, and to

overthrow houses, is proper to those who have seized on citadels. And what adulterer, will you say, has been made such by these spectacles? Nay, who has not been made an adulterer? And if one might but mention them now by name, I could point out how many husbands those harlots have severed from their wives, how many they have taken captive, drawing some even from the marriage bed itself, not suffering others so much as to live at all in marriage.

What then? I pray you, are we to overthrow all the laws? Nay, but it is overthrowing lawlessness, if we do away with these spectacles. For hence are they that make havoc in our cities; hence, for example, are seditions and tumults. For they that are maintained by the dancers, and who sell their own voice to the belly, whose work it is to shout, and to practise everything that is monstrous, these especially are the men that stir up the populace, that make the tumults in our cities. For youth, when it has joined hands with idleness, and is brought up in so great evils, becomes fiercer than any wild beast. The necromancers too, I pray you, whence are they? Is it not from hence, that in order to excite the people who are idling without object, and make the dancing men have the benefit of much and loud applause, and fortify the harlot women against the chaste, they proceed so far in sorcery, as not even to shrink from disturbing the bones of the dead? Comes it not hence, when men are forced to spend without limit on that wicked choir of the devil? And lasciviousness, whence is that, and its innumerable mischiefs? You see, it is thou who art subverting our life, by drawing men to these things, while I am recruiting it by putting them down.

Let us then pull down the stage, say they. Would that it were possible to pull it down; or rather, if you be willing, as far as regards us, it is pulled down, and dug up. Nevertheless, I enjoin no such thing. Standing as these places are, I bid you make them of no effect; which thing were a greater praise than pulling them down.

9. Imitate at least the barbarians, if no one else; for they verily are altogether clean from seeking such sights. What excuse then can we have after all this, we, the citizens of Heaven, and partners in the choirs of the cherubim, and in fellowship with the angels, making ourselves in this respect worse even than the barbarians, and this, when innumerable other pleasures, better than these, are within our reach?

Why, if you desire that your soul may find delight, go to pleasure grounds, to a river flowing by, and to lakes, take notice of gardens, listen to grasshoppers as they sing, be continually by the coffins of martyrs, where is health of body and benefit of soul, and no hurt, no remorse after the pleasure, as there is here.

You have a wife, you have children; what is equal to this pleasure? You have a house, you have friends, these are the true delights: besides their purity, great is the advantage they bestow. For what, I pray you, is sweeter than children? What sweeter than a wife, to him that will be chaste in mind?

To this purpose, we are told, that the barbarians uttered on some occasion a saying full of wise severity. I mean, that having heard of these wicked spectacles, and the unseasonable delight of them; why the Romans, say they, have devised these pleasures, as though they had not wives and children; implying that nothing is sweeter than children and wife, if you are willing to live honestly.

What then, one may say, if I point to some, who are nothing hurt by their pastime in that place? In the first place, even this is a hurt, to spend one's time without object or fruit, and to become an offense to others. For even if you should not be hurt, you make some other more eager herein. And how can you but be yourself hurt, giving occasion to what goes on? Yea, both the fortune-teller, and the prostitute boy, and the harlot woman, and all those choirs of the devil, cast upon your head the blame of their proceedings. For as surely as, if there were no spectators, there would be none to follow these employments; so, since there

are, they too have their share of the fire due to such deeds. So that even if in chastity thou were quite unhurt (a thing impossible), yet for others' ruin you will render a grievous account; both the spectators', and that of those who assemble them.

And in chastity too you would profit more, did you refrain from going there. For if even now you are chaste, you would have become chaster by avoiding such sights. Let us not then delight in useless argument, nor devise unprofitable apologies: there being but one apology, to flee from the Babylonian furnace, to keep far from the Egyptian harlot, though one must escape her hands naked. Genesis 39:12

For so shall we both enjoy much delight, our conscience not accusing us, and we shall live this present life with chastity, and attain unto the good things to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom be glory and might, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-37-on-matthew/>

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