

# Homily 41 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

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*Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God is divided against itself when people are divided against Him and His teachings.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 12:25, Matthew 12:27-31, Luke 11:20, 1 Corinthians 11:31

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Eternal Salvation"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on Jesus' response to the Pharisees' accusation of casting out demons by Beelzebub, highlighting how Jesus refutes their claims by showing the absurdity of Satan casting out Satan and the consequences of a kingdom divided against itself. Jesus emphasizes the importance of unity and the power of the Holy Spirit in His works, warning against blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as an unpardonable sin. He urges repentance, self-examination, and the pursuit of righteousness through humility, prayer, almsgiving, and contrition to avoid eternal punishment and attain salvation.

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## Transcript

Matthew 12:25-26.

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself, shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

Even before now they had accused Him of this, that by Beelzebub He casts out the devils. But whereas then He did not rebuke them, allowing them both to know His power by His more numerous miracles, and by His teaching to learn His majesty: now, since they continued saying the same, He proceeds also to rebuke them, showing His Godhead by this first, that He made their secrets public; and secondly, by the very act of casting out the devils with ease.

And indeed the accusation too was very shameless. Because, as I have said, envy seeks not what to say, but only that it may say somewhat. Yet for all that, not even so did Christ despise them, but defends Himself with the forbearance proper to Him, teaching us to be meek to our enemies; and though they say such things, as we are neither conscious of, nor have they any the least probability, not to be disturbed, nor troubled, but with all long suffering to render them an account. This then He did most especially on that very occasion, affording the strongest proof, that the things were false that were said by them. For neither was it a demoniac's part to exhibit so much meekness; it was not a demoniac's part to know men's

secrets.

For, in truth, both because of the exceeding impudence of such a suspicion, and because of the fear of the multitude, they dared not publicly make these charges, but were turning them in their mind. But He, to show them that He knew all that likewise, does not set down the accusation, nor does He expose their wickedness; but the refutation He adds, leaving it to the conscience of them that had said it to convict them. For on one thing only was He bent, to do good to them that were sinning, not to expose them.

Yet surely, if He had been minded to extend his speech in length, and to make them ridiculous, and withal to have exacted of them also the most extreme penalty, there was nothing to hinder Him. Nevertheless He put aside all these things, and looked to one object only, not to render them more contentious, but more candid, and so to dispose them better toward amendment.

How then does He plead with them? Not by allegation out of the Scriptures (for they would not so much as attend, but were sure rather to distort their meaning), but by the events of ordinary life. For every kingdom, says He, divided against itself shall not stand; and a city and a house, if it be divided, is soon dissolved.

For the wars from without are not so ruinous as the civil ones. Yea, and this is the case in bodies too; it is the case even in all things; but for this time He takes His illustration from those that are more publicly known.

And yet, what is there more powerful on earth than a kingdom? Nothing, but nevertheless it perishes if in dissension. And if in that case one throw the blame on the great burden of the affairs thereof, as breaking down by its own weight; what would you say of a city? And what of a house? Thus, whether it be a small thing, or a great, if at dissension with itself, it perishes. If then I, having a devil, do by him cast out the devils, there is dissension and fighting among devils, and they take their stand one against another. But if they stand one against another, their strength is wasted and destroyed. For if Satan cast out Satan (and He said not the devils, implying their great unanimity one with another), he is then divided against himself; so He speaks. But if he be divided, he has become weaker, and is ruined; and if he be ruined, how can he cast out another?

Do you see how great the absurdity of the accusation, how great the folly, the inconsistency? Since it is not for the same persons to say first, that He stands, and casts out devils, and then to say, that He stands by that, which it was likely would be the cause of His undoing.

2. This then being the first refutation, the next after it is that which relates to the disciples. For not always in one way only, but also in a second and third, He solves their objections, being minded most abundantly to silence their shamelessness. Which sort of thing He did also with respect to the Sabbath, bringing forward David, the priests, the testimony that says, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, the cause of the Sabbath, for which it was ordained; for the Sabbath, says He, was for man. This then He does in the present case also: where after the first He proceeds to a second refutation, plainer than the former.

For if I, says He, by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? Matthew 12:27

See here too His gentleness. For He said not, my disciples, nor, the apostles, but your sons; to the end that if indeed they were minded to return to the same nobleness with them, they might derive hence a powerful spring that way; but if they were uncandid, and continued in the same course, they might not thenceforth be able to allege any plea, though ever so shameless.

But what He says is like this, By whom do the apostles cast them out? For in fact they were doing so already, because they had received authority from Him, and these men brought no charge against them; their quarrel not being with the acts, but with the person only. As then it was His will to show that their sayings arose only from their envy against Him, He brings forward the apostles; thus: If I so cast them out, much more those, who have received their authority from me. Nevertheless, no such thing have ye said to them. How then bring ye these charges against me, the author of their doings, while acquitting them of the accusations? This, however, will not free you from your punishment, rather it will condemn you the more. Therefore also He added, They shall be your judges. For when persons from among you, and having been practised in these things, both believe me and obey, it is most clear that they will also condemn those who are against me both in deed and word.

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come unto you.

What means the Kingdom? My coming. See how again He conciliates and soothes them, and draws them to the knowledge of Himself, and signifies that they are warring with their own good, and contentious against their own salvation. For whereas ye ought to rejoice, says He, and leap for joy, that One has come bestowing those great and unutterable blessings, hymned of old by the prophets, and that the time of your prosperity is at hand; ye do the contrary; so far from receiving the blessings, you do even speak ill of them, and frame accusations that have no real being.

Now Matthew indeed says, If I by the Spirit of God cast out; but Luke, If I by the finger of God cast out the devils: Luke 11:20 implying that to cast out devils is a work of the greatest power, and not of any ordinary grace. And He means indeed that from these things they should infer and say, If this be so, then the Son of God has come. This, however, He says not, but in a reserved way, and so as not to be galling to them, He darkly intimates it by saying, Then the kingdom of God has come unto you.

Do you see exceeding wisdom? By the very things which they were blaming, He showed His presence shining forth.

Then, to conciliate them, He said not simply, The Kingdom has come, but, unto you, as though He had said, To you the good things have come; wherefore then feel displeased at your proper blessings? Why war against your own salvation? This is that time, which the prophets long ago foretold: this, the sign of that advent which was celebrated by them, even these things being wrought by divine power. For the fact indeed, that they are wrought, yourselves know; but that they are wrought by divine power, the deeds themselves cry out. Yea, and it is impossible that Satan should be stronger now; rather he must of absolute necessity be weak. But it cannot be, that he who is weak should, as though he were strong, cast out the strong devil.

Now thus speaking He signified the power of charity, and the weakness of separation and contentiousness. Wherefore He was Himself also continually charging His disciples, on every occasion, concerning charity, and teaching them that the devil, to subvert it, leaves nothing undone.

3. Having then uttered His second refutation, He adds also a third, thus saying:

How can one enter into the strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man, and then spoil his goods?

For that Satan cannot possibly cast out Satan is evident from what has been said; but that neither in any other way is it possible to cast him out, except one first get the better of him, this too is acknowledged by all.

What then is established hereby? The former statement, with more abundant evidence. Why, I am so far, says He, from using the devil as an ally, that I make war upon him, and bind him; and an infallible proof thereof is the plundering of his goods. See how the contrary is proved, of what they were attempting to establish. For whereas they wished to show, that not by His own power does He cast out devils, He shows that not only the devils, but even their very chief leader is held by Him bound with all authority; and that over him, before them, did He prevail by His own power. And this is evident from the things that are done. For if he be the prince, and they subjects, how, except he were worsted, and made to bow down, could they have been spoiled?

And here His saying seems to me to be a prophecy likewise. For not only, I suppose, are the evil spirits the goods of the devil, but also the men that are doing his works. Therefore to declare that He does not only cast out devils, but also will drive away all error from the world, and will put down his sorceries, and make all his arts useless, He said these things.

And He said not, He will take away, but He will spoil, to express what is done with authority. But He calls him strong, not because he is so by nature, God forbid, but declaring his former tyranny, which arose from our remissness.

4. He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not with me scatters abroad. Matthew 12:30

Behold also a fourth refutation. For what is my desire? Says He. To bring men to God, to teach virtue, to proclaim the kingdom. What, that of the devil, and the evil spirits? The contrary to these. How then should he that gathers not with me, nor is at all with me, be likely to co-operate with me? And why do I say co-operate? Nay, on the contrary, his desire is rather to scatter abroad my goods. He then who is so far from cooperating that he even scatters abroad, how should he have exhibited such unanimity with me, as with me to cast out the devils?

Now it is a natural surmise that He said this not of the devil only, but Himself also of Himself, as being for His part against the devil, and scattering abroad his goods. And how, one may say, is he that is not with me against me? By this very fact, of his not gathering. But if this be true, much more he that is against him. For if he that does not co-operate is an enemy, much more he that wages war.

But all these things He says, to indicate His enmity against the devil, how great and unspeakable it is. For tell me, if you must go to war with any one, he that is not willing to fight on your side, by this very fact is he not against you? And if elsewhere He says, He that is not against you is for you, it is not contrary to this. For here He signified one actually against them, but there He points to one who in part is on their side: For they cast out devils, it is said in Your name.

But to me He seems here to be hinting also at the Jews, setting them on the devil's side. For they too were against Him, and were scattering what He gathered. As to the fact that He was hinting at them also, He declared it by speaking thus,

Therefore I say unto you, that all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.

5. Thus having defended Himself, and refuted their objection, and proved the vanity of their shameless dealings, He proceeds to alarm them. For this too is no small part of advice and correction, not only to plead and persuade, but to threaten also; which He does in many passages, when making laws and giving counsel.

And though the saying seem to have much obscurity, yet if we attend, its solution will prove easy.

First then it were well to listen to the very words: All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto them. And whosoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaks against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

What now is it that He affirms? Many things have ye spoken against me; that I am a deceiver, an adversary of God. These things I forgive you on your repentance, and exact no penalty of you; but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven, no, not to those who repent. And how can this be right? For even this was forgiven upon repentance. Many at least of those who said these words believed afterward, and all was forgiven them. What is it then that He says? That this sin is above all things unpardonable. Why so? Because Himself indeed they knew not, who He might be, but of the Spirit they received ample experience. For the prophets also by the Spirit said whatever they said; and indeed all in the Old Testament had a very high notion of Him.

What He says, then, is this: Be it so: you are offended at me, because of the flesh with which I am encompassed: can you say of the Spirit also, We know it not? And therefore is your blasphemy unpardonable, and both here and hereafter shall you suffer punishment. For many indeed have been punished here only (as he who had committed fornication, as they who partook unworthily of the mysteries, among the Corinthians); but you, both here and hereafter.

Now as to your blasphemies against me, before the cross, I forgive them: and the daring crime too of the cross itself; neither shall you be condemned for your unbelief alone. (For neither had they, that believed before the cross, perfect faith. And on many occasions He even charges them to make Him known to no man before the Passion; and on the cross He said that this sin was forgiven them.) But as to your words touching the Spirit, they will have no excuse. For in proof that He is speaking of what was said of Him before the crucifixion, He added, Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Ghost, there is no more forgiveness. Wherefore? Because this is known to you; and the truths are notorious which you harden yourselves against. For though ye say that you know not me; yet of this surely you are not ignorant, that to cast out devils, and to do cures, is a work of the Holy Ghost. It is not then I only whom you are insulting, but the Holy Ghost also. Wherefore your punishment can be averted by no prayers, neither here nor there.

For so of men, some are punished both here, and there, some here only, some there only, others neither here nor there. Here and there, as these very men (for both here did they pay a penalty, when they suffered those incurable ills at the taking of their city, and there shall they undergo a very grievous one), as the inhabitants of Sodom; as many others. There only, as the rich man who endured the flames, and had not at his command so much as a drop of water. Here, as he that had committed fornication among the Corinthians. Neither here nor there, as the apostles, as the prophets, as the blessed Job; for their sufferings were not surely in the way of punishment, but as contests and wrestlings.

Let us labor, therefore, to be of the same part with these: or if not with these, at least with them that wash away their sins here. For fearful indeed is that other judgment, and inexorable the vengeance, and incurable the punishment.

6. But if you desire not to be punished even here, pass judgment on yourself, exact your own penalty. Listen to Paul, when he says, If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. If you do this, proceeding in order you shall even arrive at a crown.

But how are we to exact our own penalty? One may ask. Lament, groan bitterly, humble, afflict yourself, call to remembrance your sins in their particulars. This thing is no small torture to a man's soul. If any man has been in a state of contrition, he knows that the soul is punished by this more than anything. If any has been living in remembrance of sins, he knows the anguish thence arising. Therefore does God appoint righteousness as a reward for such repentance, saying, Be first to tell your sins, that you may be justified. For it is not, it is not indeed, a small step towards amendment, to lay together all our sins, and to be continually revolving and reckoning them up with their particulars. For he that is doing this will be so heart-broken, as not to think himself worthy so much as to live; and he that thinks thus, will be tenderer than any wax. For tell me not of acts of fornication only, nor of adulteries, nor of these things that are manifest, and acknowledged among all men: but lay together also your secret crafts, and your false accusations, and your evil speakings, and your vain gloryings, and your envy, and all such things. For neither will these bring a trifling punishment. For the reviler too shall fall into hell; and the drunkard has no part in the kingdom; and he that loveth not his neighbor so offends God, as to find no help even in his own martyrdom; and he that neglects his own has denied the faith, and he who overlooks the poor is sent into the fire.

Account not then these things to be little, but put all together, and write them as in a book. For if you write them down, God blots them out; even as on the other hand, if you omit writing them, God both inscribes them, and exacts their penalty. It were then far better for them to be written by us, and blotted out above, than on the contrary, when we have forgotten them, for God to bring them before our eyes in that day.

Therefore that this may not be so, let us reckon up all with strictness, and we shall find ourselves answerable for much. For who is clear from covetousness? Nay, tell me not of the quantity, but since even in a small amount we shall pay the same penalty, consider this and repent. Who is rid of all insolence? Yet this casts into hell. Who has not secretly spoken evil of his neighbor? Yet this deprives one of the Kingdom. Who has not been self-willed? Yet this man is more unclean than all. Who has not looked with unchaste eyes? Yet this is a complete adulterer. Who has not been angry with his brother without a cause? Yet such an one is in danger of the council. Who has not sworn? Yet this thing is of the evil one. Who has not forsworn himself? But this man is something more than of the evil one. Who has not served mammon? But this man is fallen away from the genuine service of Christ.

I have also other things greater than these to mention: but even these are enough, and able, if a man be not made of stone, nor utterly past feeling, to bring him to compunction. For if each one of them casts into hell, what will they not bring to pass when all are met together?

How then can one be saved? It may be asked. By application of the countervailing remedies: alms, prayers, compunction, repentance, humility, a contrite heart, contempt of possessions. For God has marked out for us innumerable ways of salvation, if we be willing to attend. Let us then attend, and let us every way cleanse out our wounds, showing mercy, remitting our anger against them that have displeased

us, giving thanks for all things to God, fasting according to our power, praying sincerely, making unto ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. For so shall we be able to obtain pardon for our offenses, and to win the promised good things; whereof may we all be counted worthy, by the grace and love toward man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might forever and ever. Amen.

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