

# Homily 44 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's Homily 44 on Matthew emphasizes the importance of virtue and true discipleship over mere familial ties and worldly concerns.*

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Wealth And Faith"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the parable of the sower, emphasizing the importance of cultivating a good heart to receive the word of God. He highlights the different types of soil representing various responses to the Gospel message, urging listeners to avoid being like the wayside, the rocky ground, or the thorny soil, but to strive to be like the good ground that bears fruit. Chrysostom warns against the dangers of luxury, care of the world, and deceitfulness of riches, which can hinder spiritual growth and lead to destruction. He encourages self-examination, moderation, and a focus on doing the will of God to avoid being unprofitable like the thorns that choke the word.

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## Transcript

Matt. XII. 46-49.

While He yet talked to the people, behold, His mother and His brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, Behold, Your mother and Your brethren stand without, desiring to speak with You. But He answered and said to him that told Him, Who is my mother, and my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand towards His disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren.

That which I was lately saying, that when virtue is wanting all things are vain, this is now also pointed out very abundantly. For I indeed was saying, that age and nature, and to dwell in the wilderness, and all such things, are alike unprofitable, where there is not a good mind; but today we learn in addition another thing, that even to have borne Christ in the womb, and to have brought forth that marvellous birth, has no profit, if there be not virtue.

And this is hence especially manifest. For while He yet talked to the people, it is said, one told Him, Your mother and Your brethren seek You. But He says, who is my mother, and who are my brethren?

And this He said, not as being ashamed of His mother, nor denying her that bare Him; for if He had been ashamed of her, He would not have passed through that womb; but as declaring that she has no advantage from this, unless she do all that is required to be done. For in fact that which she had essayed

to do, was of superfluous vanity; in that she wanted to show the people that she has power and authority over her Son, imagining not as yet anything great concerning Him; whence also her unseasonable approach. See at all events both her self-confidence and theirs. Since when they ought to have gone in, and listened with the multitude; or if they were not so minded, to have waited for His bringing His discourse to an end, and then to have come near; they call Him out, and do this before all, evincing a superfluous vanity, and wishing to make it appear, that with much authority they enjoin Him. And this too the evangelist shows that he is blaming, for with this very allusion did he thus express himself, While He yet talked to the people; as if he should say, What? Was there no other opportunity? Why, was it not possible to speak with Him in private?

And what was it they wished to say? For if it were touching the doctrines of the truth, they ought to have propounded these things publicly, and stated them before all, that the rest also might have the benefit: but if about other matters that concerned themselves, they ought not to have been so urgent. For if He suffered not the burial of a father, lest the attendance on Him should be interrupted, much less ought they to have stopped His discourse to the people, for things that were of no importance. Whence it is clear, that nothing but vainglory led them to do this; which John too declares, by saying, Neither did His brethren believe in Him; John 7:5 and some sayings too of theirs he reports, full of great folly; telling us that they were for dragging Him to Jerusalem, for no other purpose, but that they themselves might reap glory from His miracles. For if you do these things, it is said, show Yourself to the world. For there is no man that does anything in secret, and seeks himself to be manifest; when also He Himself rebuked them, attributing it to their carnal mind. That is, because the Jews were reproaching Him, and saying, Is not this the carpenter's son, whose father and mother we know? And His brethren, are not they with us? they, willing to throw off the disparagement caused by His birth, were calling Him to the display of His miracles.

For this cause He quite repels them, being minded to heal their infirmity; since surely, had it been His will to deny His mother, He would have denied her then, when the Jews were reproaching Him. But as it is, we see that He takes so great care of her, as even at the very cross to commit her to the disciple whom He loved most of all, and to give him a great charge concerning her.

But now He does not so, out of care for her, and for His brethren. I mean, because their regard for Him was as towards a mere man, and they were vainglorious, He casts out the disease, not insulting, but correcting them.

But do thou, I pray, examine not the words only, which contain a moderate reproof, but also the unbecoming conduct of His brethren, and the boldness wherewith they had been bold and who was the person reproving it, no mere man, but the only-begotten Son of God; and with what purpose He reproveth; that it was not with intent to drive them to perplexity, but to deliver them from the most tyrannical passion and to lead them on little by little to the right idea concerning Himself, and to convince her that He was not her Son only, but also her Lord: so will you perceive that the reproof is in the highest degree both becoming Him and profitable to her, and withal having in it much gentleness. For He said not, Go your way, tell my mother, you are not my mother, but He addresses Himself to the person that told Him; saying, Who is my mother? together with the things that have been mentioned providing for another object also. What then is that? That neither they nor others confiding in their kindred, should neglect virtue. For if she is nothing profited by being His mother, were it not for that quality in her, hardly will any one else be saved by his kindred. For there is one only nobleness, to do the will of God. This kind of noble birth is better than the other, and more real.

2. Knowing therefore these things, let us neither pride ourselves on children that are of good report, unless we have their virtue; nor upon noble fathers, unless we be like them in disposition. For it is possible, both that he who begot a man should not be his father, and that he who did not beget him should be. Therefore in another place also, when some woman had said, Blessed is the womb that bare You, and the paps which You have sucked; He said not, The womb bare me not, neither did I suck the paps, but this, Yea rather, blessed are they that do the will of my Father. Do you see how on every occasion He denies not the affinity by nature, but adds that by virtue? And His forerunner too, in saying, O generation of vipers, think not to say, We have Abraham to our father, Matthew 3:7, 9 means not this, that they were not naturally of Abraham, but that it profits them nothing to be of Abraham, unless they had the affinity by character; which Christ also declared, when He said, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham; John 8:39 not depriving them of their kindred according to the flesh, but teaching them to seek after that affinity which is greater than it, and more real.

This then He establishes here also, but in a manner less invidious, and more measured, as became Him speaking to His mother. For He said not at all, She is not my mother, nor are those my brethren, because they do not my will; neither did He declare and pronounce judgment against them; but He yet left in it their own power to choose, speaking with the gentleness that becomes Him.

For he that does, says He, the will of my Father, this is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Wherefore if they desire to be such, let them come this way. And when the woman again cried out, saying, Blessed is the womb that bare You, He said not, She is not my mother, but, If she wishes to be blessed, let her do the will of my Father. For such a one is both brother, and sister, and mother.

Oh honor! Oh virtue! Unto what a height does she lead up him that follows after her! How many women have blessed that holy Virgin, and her womb, and prayed that they might become such mothers, and give up all! What then is there to hinder? For behold, He has marked out a spacious road for us; and it is granted not to women only, but to men also, to be of this rank, or rather of one yet far higher. For this makes one His mother much more, than those pangs did. So that if that were a subject for blessing, much more this, inasmuch as it is also more real. Do not therefore merely desire, but also in the way that leads you to your desire walk thou with much diligence.

3. Having then said these words, He came out of the house. Do you see, how He both rebuked them, and did what they desired? Which He did also at the marriage. John 2:1-11 For there too He at once reprov'd her asking unseasonably, and nevertheless did not gainsay her; by the former correcting her weakness, by the latter showing His kindly feeling toward His mother. So likewise on this occasion too, He both healed the disease of vainglory, and rendered the due honor to His mother, even though her request was unseasonable. For, in the same day, it is said, went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.

Why, if you desire, says He, to see and hear, behold I come forth and discourse. Thus having wrought many miracles, He affords again the benefit of His doctrine. And He sits by the sea, fishing and getting into His net them that are on the land.

But He sat by the sea, not without a purpose; and this very thing the evangelist has darkly expressed. For to indicate that the cause of His doing this was a desire to order His auditory with exactness, and to leave no one behind His back, but to have all face to face,

And great multitudes, says He, were gathered together unto Him, so that He went into a ship and sat, and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

And having sat down there, He speaks by parables.

And He spoke, it says, many things unto them in parables. Matthew 13:3

And yet on the mount, we know, He did no such thing, neither did He weave His discourse with so many parables, for then there were multitudes only, and a simple people; but here are also Scribes and Pharisees.

But do thou mark, I pray you, what kind of parable He speaks first, and how Matthew puts them in their order. Which then does He speak first? That which it was most necessary to speak first, that which makes the hearer more attentive. For because He was to discourse unto them in dark sayings, He thoroughly rouses His hearers' mind first by His parable. Therefore also another evangelist says that He reproved them, because they do not understand; saying, How knew ye not the parable? But not for this cause only does He speak in parables, but that He may also make His discourse more vivid, and fix the memory of it in them more perfectly, and bring the things before their sight. In like manner do the prophets also.

4. What then is the parable? Behold, says He, a sower went forth to sow. Whence went He forth, who is present everywhere, who fills all things? Or how went He forth? Not in place, but in condition and dispensation to usward, coming nearer to us by His clothing Himself with flesh. For because we could not enter, our sins fencing us out from the entrance, He comes forth unto us. And wherefore came He forth? To destroy the ground teeming with thorns? To take vengeance upon the husbandmen? By no means; but to till and tend it, and to sow the word of godliness. For by seed here He means His doctrine, and by land, the souls of men, and by the sower, Himself.

What then comes of this seed? Three parts perish, and one is saved.

And when He sowed, some seeds fell, He says, by the way side; and the fowls came and devoured them up.

He said not, that He cast them, but that they fell.

And some upon the rock, where they had not much earth; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among the thorns, and the thorns sprang up, and choked them. But others fell on the good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who has ears to hear let him hear.

A fourth part is saved; and not this all alike, but even here great is the difference.

Now these things He said, manifesting that He discoursed to all without grudging. For as the sower makes no distinction in the land submitted to him, but simply and indifferently casts his seed; so He Himself too makes no distinction of rich and poor, of wise and unwise, of slothful or diligent, of brave or cowardly; but He discourses unto all, fulfilling His part, although foreknowing the results; that it may be in His power to say, What ought I to have done, that I have not done? Isaiah 5:4 And the prophets speak of the people as of a vine; For my beloved, it is said, had a vineyard; Isaiah 5:1 and, He brought a vine out of Egypt; but He, as of seed. What could this be to show? That obedience now will be quick and easier, and will

presently yield its fruit.

But when you hear, The sower went forth to sow, think it not a needless repetition. For the sower frequently goes forth for some other act also, either to plough, or to cut out the evil herbs, or to pluck up thorns, or to attend to some such matter; but He went forth to sow.

Whence then, tell me, was the greater part of the seed lost? Not through the sower, but through the ground that received it; that is, the soul that did not hearken.

And wherefore does He not say, Some the careless received, and lost it; some the rich, and choked it, and some the superficial, and betrayed it? It is not His will to rebuke them severely, lest He should cast them into despair, but He leaves the reproof to the conscience of His hearers.

And this was not the case with the seed only, but also with the net; for that too produced many that were unprofitable.

5. But this parable He speaks, as anointing His disciples, and to teach them, that even though the lost be more than such as receive the word yet they are not to despond. For this was the ease even with their Lord, and He who fully foreknew that these things should be, did not desist from sowing.

And how can it be reasonable, says one, to sow among the thorns, on the rock, on the wayside? With regard to the seeds and the earth it cannot be reasonable; but in the case of men's souls and their instructions, it has its praise, and that abundantly. For the husbandman indeed would reasonably be blamed for doing this; it being impossible for the rock to become earth, or the wayside not to be a wayside, or the thorns, thorns; but in the things that have reason it is not so. There is such a thing as the rock changing, and becoming rich land; and the wayside being no longer trampled on, nor lying open to all that pass by, but that it may be a fertile field; and the thorns may be destroyed, and the seed enjoy full security. For had it been impossible, this Sower would not have sown. And if the change did not take place in all, this is no fault of the Sower, but of them who are unwilling to be changed: He having done His part: and if they betrayed what they received of Him, He is blameless, the exhibitor of such love to man.

But do thou mark this, I pray you; that the way of destruction is not one only, but there are differing ones, and wide apart from one another. For they that are like the wayside are the coarse-minded, and indifferent, and careless; but those on the rock such as fail from weakness only.

For that which is sown upon the stony places, says He, the same is he that hears the word, and anon with joy receives it. Yet has he not root in himself, but endures for a while; but when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended! When any one, so He says, hears the word of truth and understands it not, then comes the wicked one, and catches that which was sown out of his heart. This is he that is sown by the wayside.

Now it is not the same thing for the doctrine to wither away, when no man is evil entreating, or disturbing its foundations, as when temptations press upon one. But they that are likened to the thorns, are much more inexcusable than these.

6. In order then that none of these things may befall us, let us by zeal and continual remembrance cover up the things that are told us. For though the devil do catch them away, yet it rests with us, whether they be caught away; though the plants wither, yet it is not from the heat this takes place (for He did not say, because of the heat it withered, but, because it had no root); although His sayings are choked, it is not

because of the thorns, but of them who suffer them to spring up. For there is a way, if you will, to check this evil growth, and to make the right use of our wealth. Therefore He said not, the world, but the care of the world; nor riches, but the deceitfulness of riches.

Let us not then blame the things, but the corrupt mind. For it is possible to be rich and not to be deceived; and to be in this world, and not to be choked with its cares. For indeed riches have two contrary disadvantages; one, care, wearing us out, and bringing a darkness over us; the other, luxury, making us effeminate.

And well has He said, The deceitfulness of riches. For all that pertains to riches is deceit; they are names only, not attached to things. For so pleasure and glory, and splendid array, and all these things, are a sort of vain show, not a reality.

Having therefore spoken of the ways of destruction, afterwards He mentions the good ground, not suffering them to despair, but giving a hope of repentance, and indicating that it is possible to change from the things before mentioned into this.

And yet if both the land be good, and the Sower one, and the seed the same, wherefore did one bear a hundred, one sixty, one thirty? Here again the difference is from the nature of the ground, for even where the ground is good, great even therein is the difference. Do you see, that not the husbandman is to be blamed, nor the seed, but the land that receives it? Not for its nature, but for its disposition. And herein too, great is His mercy to man, that He does not require one measure of virtue, but while He receives the first, and casts not out the second, He gives also a place to the third.

And these things He says, lest they that followed Him should suppose that hearing is sufficient for salvation. And wherefore, one may say, did He not put the other vices also, such as lust, vainglory? In speaking of the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, He set down all. Yea, both vainglory and all the rest belong to this world, and to the deceitfulness of riches; such as pleasure, and gluttony, and envy, and vainglory, and all the like.

But He added also the way and the rock, signifying that it is not enough to be freed from riches only, but we must cultivate also the other parts of virtue. For what if you are free indeed from riches, yet are soft and unmanly? And what if you are not indeed unmanly, but art remiss and careless about the hearing of the word? Nay, no one part is sufficient for our salvation, but there is required first a careful hearing, and a continual recollection; then fortitude, then contempt of riches, and deliverance from all worldly things.

In fact, His reason for putting this before the other, is because the one is first required (for How shall they believe except they hear? Romans 10:14 just as we too, except we mind what is said, shall not be able so much as to learn what we ought to do): after that, fortitude, and the contempt of things present.

7. Hearing therefore these things, let us fortify ourselves on all sides, regarding His instructions, and striking our roots deep, and cleansing ourselves from all worldly things. But if we do the one, neglecting the other, we shall be nothing bettered; for though we perish not in one way, yet shall we in some other. For what signifies our not being ruined by riches, if we are by indolence: or not by indolence, if we are by softness. For so the husbandman, whether this way or that way he lose his crop, equally bewails himself. Let us not then soothe ourselves upon our not perishing in all these ways, but let it be our grief, in whichever way we are perishing.

And let us burn up the thorns, for they choke the word. And this is known to those rich men, who not for these matters alone, but for others also prove unprofitable. For having become slaves and captives of their pleasures, they are useless even for civil affairs, and if for them, much more for those of Heaven. Yea, and in two ways hereby our thoughts are corrupted; both by the luxury, and by the anxiety too. For either of these by itself were enough to overwhelm the bark; but when even both concur, imagine how high the billow swells.

And marvel not at His calling our luxury, thorns. For thou indeed art not aware of it, being intoxicated with your passion, but they that are in sound health know that it pricks sharper than any thorn, and that luxury wastes the soul worse than care, and causes more grievous pains both to body and soul. For one is not so sorely smitten by anxiety, as by surfeiting. Since when watchings, and throbbings of the temples, and heaviness in the head, and pangs of the bowels, lay hold of such a man, you may imagine how many thorns these surpass in grievousness. And as the thorns, on whichever side they are laid hold of, draw blood from the hands that seize them, just so does luxury plague both feet, and hands, and head, and eyes, and in general all our members; and it is withered also, and unfruitful, like the thorn, and hurts much more than it, and in our vital parts. Yea, it brings on premature old age, and dulls the senses, and darkens our reasoning, and blinds the keen-sighted mind, and makes the body tumid, rendering excessive the deposition of that which is cast away, and gathering together a great accumulation of evils; and it makes the burden too great, and the load overwhelming; whence our falls are many and continual, and our shipwrecks frequent.

For tell me, why pamper your body? What? Are we to slay you in sacrifice, to set you on the table? The birds it is well for you to pamper: or rather, not so well even for them; for when they are fattened, they are unprofitable for wholesome food. So great an evil is luxury, that its mischief is shown even in irrational beings. For even them by luxury we make unprofitable, both to themselves and to us. For their superfluous flesh is indigestible, and the moister kind of corruption is engendered by that kind of fatness. Whereas the creatures that are not so fed, but live, as one may say, in abstinence, and moderate diet, and in labor and hardship, these are most serviceable both to themselves and to others, as well for food, as for everything else. Those, at any rate, who live on them, are in better health; but such as are fed on the others are like them, growing dull and sickly, and rendering their chain more grievous. For nothing is so hostile and hurtful to the body, as luxury; nothing so tears it in pieces, and overloads and corrupts it, as intemperance.

Wherefore above all may this circumstance make one amazed at them for their folly, that not even so much care as others show towards their wine skins, are these willing to evince towards themselves. For those the wine merchants do not allow to receive more than is fit, lest they should burst; but to their own wretched belly these men do not vouchsafe even so much forethought, but when they have stuffed it and distended it, they fill all, up to the ears, up to the nostrils, to the very throat itself, thereby pressing into half its room the spirit, and the power that directs the living being. What? Was your throat given you for this end, that you should fill it up to the very mouth, with wine turned sour, and all other corruption? Not for this, O man, but that you should above all things sing to God, and offer up the holy prayers, and read out the divine laws, and give to your neighbors profitable counsel. But you, as if you had received it for this end, dost not suffer it to have leisure for that ministry, so much as for a short season, but for all your life subjectest it to this evil slavery. And as if any man having had a lyre given him with golden strings, and beautifully constructed, instead of awakening with it the most harmonious music, were to cover it over with much dung and clay; even so do these men. Now the word, dung, I use not of living, but of luxurious living, and of that great wantonness. Because what is more than necessary is not nourishment, but merely

injurious. For in truth the belly alone was made merely for the reception of food; but the month, and the throat, and tongue, for other things also, far more necessary than these: or rather, not even the belly for the reception of food simply, but for the reception of moderate food. And this it makes manifest by crying out loudly against us, when we tease it by this greediness; nor does it clamor against us only, but also avenging that wrong exacts of us the severest penalty. And first it punishes the feet, that bear and conduct us to those wicked revels, then the hands that minister to it, binding them together for having brought unto it such quantities and kinds of provisions; and many have distorted even their very mouth, and eyes, and head. And as a servant receiving an order beyond his power, not seldom out of desperation becomes insolent to the giver of the order: so the belly too, together with these members, often ruins and destroys, from being over-strained, the very brain itself. And this God has well ordered, that from excess so much mischief should arise; that when of your own will thou dost not practise self-restraint, at least against your will, for fear of so great ruin, you may learn to be moderate.

Knowing then these things, let us flee luxury, let us study moderation, that we may both enjoy health of body, and having delivered our soul from all infirmity, may 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 forever and ever. Amen.

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