

Homily 45 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus speaks in parables to the Pharisees because they have stopped their ears and closed their eyes to the truth, and He wants to provoke them to repentance.

Topics: "Kingdom Of Heaven", "Christian Stewardship"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the parable of the sower, emphasizing the importance of understanding the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. He highlights the disciples' eagerness to learn and contrasts it with the willful blindness of those who reject the teachings of Jesus. Chrysostom explains that God's gifts are given freely, but require our active participation and response. He urges the congregation to show generosity and compassion towards others, reflecting on the immense blessings received from God and the simple acts of kindness expected in return.

Transcript

Matthew 13:10-11.

And the disciples came and said to Him, Why do You speak unto them in parables? He answered and said to them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given.

We have good cause to admire the disciples, how, longing as they do to learn, they know when they ought to ask. For they do it not before all: and this Matthew shows by saying, And they came. And, as to this assertion not being conjecture, Mark has expressed it more distinctly, by saying, that they came to Him privately. Mark 4:10 This then His brethren and His mother should also have done, and not have called Him out, and made a display.

But mark their kindly affection also, how they have much regard for the others, and seek their good first, and then their own. For why, it is said, do You speak unto them in parables? They did not say, why do you speak unto us in parables? Yea, and on other occasions also their kindness towards men appears in many ways; as when they say, Send the multitude away; Luke 9:12 and, Do you know that they were offended? Matthew 15:12

What then says Christ? Because it is given unto you, so He speaks, to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given. But this He said, not bringing in necessity, or any allotment made

causelessly and at random, but implying them to be the authors of all their own evils, and wishing to represent that the thing is a gift, and a grace bestowed from above.

It by no means follows, however, because it is a gift, that therefore free will is taken away; and this is evident from what comes after. To this purpose, in order that neither the one sort may despair, nor the other grow careless, upon being told that it is given, He signifies the beginning to be with ourselves.

For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away, even that which he seems to have.

And although the saying be full of much obscurity, yet it indicates unspeakable justice. For what He says is like this: When any one has forwardness and zeal, there shall be given unto him all things on God's part also: but if he be void of these, and contribute not his own share, neither are God's gifts bestowed. For even what he seems to have, so He says, shall be taken away from him; God not so much taking it away, as counting him unworthy of His gifts. This we also do; when we see any one listening carelessly, and when with much entreaty we cannot persuade him to attend, it remains for us to be silent. For if we are still to go on, his carelessness is aggravated. But him that is striving to learn, we lead on, and pour in much.

And well said He, Even that which he seems to have. For he has not really even this.

Then He also made what He had said more distinct, pointing out the meaning of, To him that has, shall be given, but from him that has not, even that which he seems to have, shall be taken away.

Therefore, says He, speak I to them in parables; because they seeing see not. Matthew 13:13

It were meet then, one may say, to have opened their eyes, if they see not. Nay, if the blindness were natural, it were meet to open them; but because it was a voluntary and self-chosen blindness, therefore He said not simply, They see not, but, seeing, they see not; so that the blindness is of their own wickedness. For they saw even devils cast out, and said, By Beelzebub, prince of the devils, He casts out the devils. Matthew 12:14 They heard Him guiding them unto God, and evincing His great unanimity with Him, and they say, This man is not of God. John 9:16 Since then the judgment they pronounced was contrary both to their sight and hearing, therefore, says He, the very hearing do I take away from them. For they derive thence no advantage, but rather greater condemnation. For they not only disbelieved, but found fault also, and accused, and laid snares. However, He says not this, for it is not His will to give disgust in accusing them. Therefore neither at the beginning did He so discourse to them, but with much plainness; but because they perverted themselves, thenceforth He speaks in parables.

2. After this, lest any one should suppose His words to be a mere accusation, and lest men should say, Being our enemy He is bringing these charges and calumnies against us; He introduces the prophet also, pronouncing the same judgment as Himself.

For in them is fulfilled, says He, the prophecy of Esaias, which says, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive.

Do you see the prophet likewise, accusing them with this same accuracy? For neither did He say, You see not, but You shall see and not perceive; nor again, You shall not hear, but You shall hear and not understand. So that they first inflicted the loss on themselves, by stopping their ears, by closing their eyes, by making their heart fat. For they not only failed to hear, but also heard heavily, and they did this, He says,

Lest at any time they should be converted, and I should heal them; describing their aggravated wickedness, and their determined defection from Him. And this He says to draw them unto Him, and to provoke them, and to signify that if they would convert He would heal them: much as if one should say, He would not look at me, and I thank him; for if he had vouchsafed me this, I should straightway have given in: and this he says, to signify how he would have been reconciled. Even so then here too it is said, Lest at any time they should convert, and I should heal them; implying that both their conversion was possible, and that upon their repentance they might be saved, and that not for His own glory, but for their salvation, He was doing all things.

For if it had not been His will that they should hear and be saved, He ought to have been silent, not to have spoken in parables; but now by this very thing He stirs them up, even by speaking under a veil. For God wills not the death of the sinner, but that he should turn unto Him and live.

For in proof that our sin belongs not to nature, nor to necessity and compulsion, hear what He says to the apostles, But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear; Matthew 13:16 not meaning this kind of sight nor hearing, but that of the mind. For indeed these too were Jews, and brought up in the same circumstances; but nevertheless they took no hurt from the prophecy, because they had the root of His blessings well settled in them, their principle of choice, I mean, and their judgment.

Do you see that, unto you it is given, was not of necessity? For neither would they have been blessed, unless the well-doing had been their own. For tell me not this, that it was spoken obscurely; for they might have come and asked Him, as the disciples did: but they would not, being careless and supine. Why say I, they would not? Nay, they were doing the very opposite, not only disbelieving, not only not hearkening, but even waging war, and disposed to be very bitter against all He said: which He brings in the prophet laying to their charge, in the words, They heard heavily.

But not such were these; wherefore He also blessed them. And in another way too He assures them again, saying,

For verily I say unto you, many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them; Matthew 13:17 my coming, He means; my very miracles, my voice, my teaching. For here He prefers them not to these depraved only, but even to such as have done virtuously; yea, and He affirms them to be more blessed even than they. Why can this be? Because not only do these see what the Jews saw not, but even what those of old desired to see. For they indeed beheld by faith only: but these by sight too, and much more distinctly.

Do you see how again He connects the old dispensation with the new, signifying that those of old not only knew the things to come but also greatly desired them? But had they pertained to some strange and opposing God, they would never have desired them.

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower, Matthew 13:18 says He; and He speaks what we before mentioned, of carelessness and attention, of cowardice and fortitude, of wealth and voluntary poverty; pointing out the hurt from the one, and the benefit from the other.

Then of virtue also He brings forward different forms. For being full of love to man, He marked out not one only way, nor did He say, unless one bring forth an hundred, he is an outcast; but he that brings forth sixty is saved also, and not he only, but also the producer of thirty. And this He said, making out salvation to be

easy.

3. And thou then, are you unable to practise virginity? Be chaste in marriage. Are you unable to strip yourself of your possessions? Give of your substance. Can you not bear that burden? Share your goods with Christ. Are you unwilling to yield Him up all? Give Him but the half, but the third part. He is your brother, and joint-heir, make Him joint-heir with you here too. Whatsoever you give Him, you will give to yourself. Do you not hear what says the prophet? Them that pertain to your seed you shall not overlook. But if we must not overlook our kinsmen, much less our Lord, having towards you, together with His authority as Lord, the claim also of kindred, and many more besides. Yea, for He too has made you a sharer in His goods, having received nothing of you, but having begun with this unspeakable benefit. What then can it be but extreme senselessness, not even by this gift to be made kind towards men, not even to give a return for a free gift, and less things for greater? Thus whereas He has made you heir of Heaven, do you not impart to Him even of the things on earth? He, when you had done no good work, but were even an enemy, reconciled you: and do you not requite Him, being even a friend and benefactor?

Yet surely, even antecedently to the kingdom, and to all the rest, even for the very fact of His giving, we ought to feel bound to Him. For so servants too, when bidding their masters to a meal, account themselves not to be giving but receiving; but here the contrary has taken place: not the servant the Lord, but the Lord has first bidden the servant unto His own table; and do you not bid Him, no not even after this? He first has introduced you under His own roof; do you not take Him in, so much as in the second place? He clad you, being naked; and do you not even after this receive Him being a stranger? He first gave you to drink out of His own cup, and do you not impart to Him so much as cold water? He has made you drink of the Holy Spirit, and do you not even soothe His bodily thirst? He has made you drink of the Spirit, when you were deserving of punishment; and do you neglect Him even when thirsty, and this when it is out of His own, that you are to do all these things? Do you not then esteem it a great thing, to hold the cup out of which Christ is to drink, and to put it to His lips? Do you see not that for the priest alone is it lawful to give the cup of His blood? But I am by no means strict about this, says He; but though yourself should give, I receive; though thou be a layman, I refuse it not. And I do not require such as I have given: for not blood do I seek, but cold water. Consider to whom you are giving drink, and tremble. Consider, you have become a priest of Christ, giving with your own hand, not flesh but bread, not blood, but a cup of cold water. He clothed you with a garment of salvation, and clothed you by Himself; do thou at least by your servant clothe Him. He made you glorious in Heaven, do thou deliver Him from shivering, and nakedness, and shame. He made you a fellow-citizen of angels, do thou impart to Him at least of the covering of your roof, give house-room to Him at least as to your own servant. I refuse not this lodging and that, having opened to you the whole Heaven. I have delivered you from a most grievous prison; this I do not require again, nor do I say, deliver me; but if you would look upon me only, when I am bound, this suffices me for refreshment. When thou were dead, I raised you; I require not this again of you, but I say, visit me only when sick.

Now when His gifts are so great, and His demands exceeding easy, and we do not supply even these; what deep of hell must we not deserve? Justly shall we depart into the fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels, being more insensible than any rock. For how great insensibility is it, tell me, for us, who have received, and are to receive so much, to be slaves of money, from which we shall a little while hence be separated even against our will? And others indeed have given up even their life, and shed their blood; and do you not even give up your superfluities for Heaven's sake, for the sake of so great crowns?

And of what favor can you be worthy? Of what justification? Who in your sowing of the earth, gladly pourest forth all, and in lending to men at usury sparest nothing; but in feeding your Lord through His poor art cruel and inhuman?

Having then considered all these things, and calculated what we have received, what we are to receive, what is required of us, let us show forth all our diligence on the things spiritual. Let us become at length mild and humane, that we may not draw down on ourselves the intolerable punishment. For what is there that has not power to condemn us? Our having enjoyed so many and such great benefits; our having no great thing required of us; our having such things required, as we shall leave here even against our will; our exhibiting so much liberality in our worldly matters. Why each one of these, even by itself, were enough to condemn us; but when they all meet together, what hope will there be of salvation?

In order then that we may escape all this condemnation, let us show forth some bounty towards those who are in need. For thus shall we enjoy all the good things, both here, and there; unto which may we all attain, 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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