

Homily 48 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus' departure and return to His own country is a lesson in the importance of compassion, kindness, and honoring Christ, while avoiding lawlessness and immorality.

Scripture: Matthew 13:58

Topics: "Virtuous Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about Jesus finishing His parables and departing to sow the word everywhere, teaching in His own country where He faced disbelief and lack of honor. Despite performing miracles, the people in Nazareth were offended by Jesus due to their familiarity with His family. Herod, hearing of Jesus' fame, reflects on John the Baptist's resurrection and the consequences of his actions. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of virtuous living, condemning revelry, luxury, and mistreatment of the poor, urging for compassion, kindness, and spiritual growth in relationships.

Transcript

Matt. XIII. 53.

And it came to pass, that, when Jesus had finished these parables, He departed thence.

Wherefore said He, these? Because He was to speak others besides. And wherefore, again, does He depart? Desiring to sow the word everywhere.

And when He had come into His own country, He taught them in their synagogue. Matthew 13:54

And what does he now call His country? As it seems to me, Nazareth. For He did not many mighty works there, Matthew 13:58 it is said, but in Capernaum He did miracles: wherefore He said also, 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. Matthew 11:23

But having come there, while He slackens somewhat in His miracles; so as not to inflame them unto more envy, nor to condemn them more grievously, by the aggravation of their unbelief: He yet puts forth a doctrine, having no less of wonder in it than the miracles. For these utterly senseless men, when they ought to have marvelled, and to have been amazed at the power of His words, they on the contrary hold Him cheap, because of him who seemed to be His father; yet we know they had many examples of these things in the former times, and from fathers of no note had seen illustrious children. For so David was the

son of a certain mean husbandman, Jesse; and Amos, the child of a goatherd, and himself a goatherd; Amos 7:14-15 and Moses too, the lawgiver, had a father very inferior to himself. When they therefore, for this especially, ought to adore and be amazed, that being of such parents He spoke such things, it being quite manifest, that so it was not of man's care, but of God's grace: yet they, what things they should admire Him for, for those they despise Him.

He is moreover continually frequenting the synagogues, lest if He were always abiding in the wilderness, they should the more accuse Him as making a schism, and fighting against their polity. Being amazed therefore, and in perplexity, they said, Whence has this man this wisdom, and these powers? either calling the miracles powers, or even the wisdom itself. Is not this the carpenter's son? Matthew 13:55 The greater then the marvel, and the more abundant the ground of amaze. Is not His mother called Mary, and His brethren James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Whence has this man these things? And they were offended in Him. Matthew 13:55-56

Do you see that Nazareth was where He was discoursing? Are not his brethren, it is said, such a one, and such a one? And what of this? Why, by this especially you ought to have been led on to faith. But envy you see is a poor base thing, and often falls foul of itself. For what things were strange and marvellous, and enough to have gained them over, these offended them.

What then says Christ unto them? A prophet, says He, is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house: and He did not, it is said, many mighty works, because of their unbelief. But Luke says, And He did not there many miracles. And yet it was to be expected He should have done them. For if the feeling of wonder towards Him was gaining ground (for indeed even there He was marvelled at), wherefore did He not do them? Because He looked not to the display of Himself, but to their profit. Therefore when this succeeded not, He overlooked what concerned Himself, in order not to aggravate their punishment.

And yet see after how long a time He came to them, and after how great a display of miracles: but not even so did they endure it, but were inflamed again with envy.

Wherefore then did He yet do a few miracles? That they might not say, Physician, heal yourself. Luke 4:23 That they might not say, He is a foe and an enemy to us, and overlooks His own; that they might not say, If miracles had been wrought, we also should have believed. Therefore He both wrought them, and stayed: the one, that He might fulfill His own part; the other, that He might not condemn them the more.

And consider thou the power of His words, herein at least, that possessed as they were by envy, they did yet admire. And as with regard to His works, they do not find fault with what is done, but feign causes which have no existence, slaying, In Beelzebub He casts out the devils; even so here too, they find no fault with the teaching, but take refuge in the meanness of His race.

But mark thou, I pray you, the Master's gentleness, how He reviles them not, but with great mildness says, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country. And neither here did He stop, but added, And in his own house. To me it appears, that with covert reference to His very own brethren, He made this addition.

But in Luke He puts examples also of this, saying, that neither did Elias come unto His own, but to the stranger widow; neither by Eliseus was any other leper healed, but the stranger Naaman; Luke 4:25-27 and Israelites neither received benefit, nor conferred benefit, but the foreigners. And these things He says,

signifying in every instance their evil disposition, and that in His case nothing new is taking place.

2. At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus. For Herod the king, this man's father, he that slew the children, was dead.

But not without a purpose does the evangelist signify the time, but to make you observe also the haughtiness of the tyrant, and his thoughtlessness, in that not at the beginning did he inform himself about Christ, but after a very long time. For such are they that are in places of power, and are encompassed with much pomp, they learn these things late, because they do not make much account of them.

But mark thou, I pray you, how great a thing virtue is, that he was afraid of him even when dead, and out of his fear he speaks wisely even concerning a resurrection.

For he said, it is mentioned, unto his servants, This is John, whom I slew, he is risen from the dead, and therefore the mighty powers do work in him. Matthew 13:2 Do you see the intensity of his fear? For neither then did he dare to publish it abroad, but he still speaks but to his own servants.

But yet even this opinion savored of the soldier, and was absurd. For many besides had risen from the dead, and no one had wrought anything of the kind. And his words seem to me to be the language both of vanity, and of fear. For such is the nature of unreasonable souls, they admit often a mixture of opposite passions.

But Luke affirms that the multitudes said, This is Elias, or Jeremias, or one of the old prophets, but he, as uttering forsooth something wiser than the rest, made this assertion.

But it is probable that before this, in answer to them that said He was John (for many had said this too), he had denied it, and said, I slew him, priding himself and glorying in it. For this both Mark and Luke report that he said, John I beheaded. But when the rumor prevailed, then he too says the same as the people.

Then the evangelist relates to us also the history. And what might his reason be for not introducing it as a subject by itself? Because all their labor entirely was to tell what related to Christ, and they made themselves no secondary work besides this, except it were again to contribute to the same end. Therefore neither now would they have mentioned the history were it not on Christ's account, and because Herod said, John is risen again.

But Mark says, that Herod exceedingly honored the man, and this, when reproved. Mark 6:20 So great a thing is virtue.

Then his narrative proceeds thus: For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison, for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. For John said to him, It is not lawful for you to have her. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the people, because they counted him as a prophet. Matthew 13:3-5

And wherefore does he not address his discourse at all to her, but to the man? Because it depended more on him.

But see how inoffensive he makes his accusation, as relating a history rather than bringing a charge.

4. But when Herod's birth-day was kept, says he, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Matthew 13:6 O diabolical revel! O satanic spectacle! O lawless dancing! And more

lawless reward for the dancing. For a murder more impious than all murders was perpetrated, and he that was worthy to be crowned and publicly honored, was slain in the midst, and the trophy of the devils was set on the table.

And the means too of the victory were worthy of the deeds done. For,

The daughter of Herodias, it is said, danced in the midst, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he swore with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. Matthew 13:6-8

Her reproach is twofold; first, that she danced, then that she pleased him, and so pleased him, as to obtain even murder for her reward.

Do you see how savage he was? How senseless? How foolish? In putting himself under the obligation of an oath, while to her he gives full power over her request. But when he saw the evil actually ensuing, he was sorry, it is said; and yet in the first instance he had put him in bonds. Wherefore then is he sorry? Such is the nature of virtue, even among the wicked admiration and praises are its due. But alas for her madness! When she too ought to admire, yea, to bow down to him, for trying to redress her wrong, she on the contrary even helps to arrange the plot, and lays a snare, and asks a diabolical favor.

But he was afraid for the oath's sake, it is said, and them that sat at meat with him. And how did you not fear that which is more grievous? Surely if you were afraid to have witnesses of your perjury, much more ought thou to fear having so many witnesses of a murder so lawless.

But as I think many are ignorant of the grievance itself, whence the murder had its origin, I must declare this too, that you may learn the wisdom of the lawgiver. What then was the ancient law, which Herod indeed trampled on, but John vindicated? The wife of him that died childless was to be given to his brother. Deuteronomy 25:5 For since death was an incurable ill, and all was contrived for life's sake; He makes a law that the living brother should marry her, and should call the child that is born by the name of the dead, so that his house should not utterly perish. For if the dead were not so much as to leave children, which is the greatest mitigation of death, the sorrow would be without remedy. Therefore you see, the lawgiver devised this refreshment for those who were by nature deprived of children, and commanded the issue to be reckoned as belonging to the other.

But when there was a child, this marriage was no longer permitted. And wherefore? one may say, for it was lawful for another, much more for the brother. By no means. For He will have men's consanguinity extended, and the sources multiplied of our interest in each other.

Why then, in the case also of death without offspring, did not another marry her? Because it would not so be accounted the child of the departed; but now his brother begetting it, the fiction became probable. And besides, any other man had no constraining call to build up the house of the dead, but this had incurred the claim by relationship.

Forasmuch then as Herod had married his brother's wife, when she had a child, therefore John blames him, and blames him with moderation, showing together with his boldness, his consideration also.

But mark thou, I pray you, how the whole theatre was devilish. For first, it was made up of drunkenness and luxury, whence nothing healthful could come. Secondly, the spectators in it were depraved, and he that gave the banquet the worst transgressor of all. Thirdly, there was the irrational pleasure. Fourthly, the

damsel, because of whom the marriage was illegal, who ought even to have hid herself, as though her mother were dishonored by her, comes making a show, and throwing into the shade all harlots, virgin as she was.

And the time again contributes no little to the reproof of this enormity. For when he ought to be thanking God, that on that day He had brought him to light, then he ventures upon those lawless acts. When one in chains ought to have been freed by him, then he adds slaughter to bonds.

Hearken, you virgins, or rather ye wives also, as many as consent to such unseemliness at other person's weddings, leaping, and bounding, and disgracing our common nature. Hearken, you men too, as many as follow after those banquets, full of expense and drunkenness, and fear ye the gulf of the evil one. For indeed so mightily did he seize upon that wretched person just then, that he swore even to give the half of his kingdom: this being Mark's statement, He swore unto her, Whatsoever you shall ask of me, I will give it you, unto the half of my kingdom. Mark 6:23

Such was the value he set upon his royal power; so was he once for all made captive by his passion, as to give up his kingdom for a dance. vilifying, reviling, insulting. But not so the saints; they on the contrary mourn for such as sin, rather than curse them.

8. This then let us also do, and let us weep for Herodias, and for them that imitate her. For many such revels now also take place, and though John be not slain, yet the members of Christ are, and in a far more grievous way. For it is not a head in a charger that the dancers of our time ask, but the souls of them that sit at the feast. For in making them slaves, and leading them to unlawful loves, and besetting them with harlots, they do not take off the head, but slay the soul, making them adulterers, and effeminate, and whoremongers.

For you will not surely tell me, that when full of wine, and drunken, and looking at a woman who is dancing and uttering base words, thou dost not feel anything towards her, neither art hurried on to profligacy, overcome by your lust. Nay, that awful thing befalls you, that you makest the members of Christ members of an harlot. 1 Corinthians 6:15

For though the daughter of Herodias be not present, yet the devil, who then danced in her person, in theirs also holds his choirs now, and departs with the souls of those guests taken captive.

But if you are able to keep clear of drunkenness, yet are you partakers of another most grievous sin; such revels being also full of much rapine. For look not, I pray you, on the meats that are set before them, nor on the cakes; but consider whence they are gathered, and you will see that it is of vexation, and covetousness, and violence, and rapine.

Nay, ours are not from such sources, one may say. God forbid they should be: for neither do I desire it. Nevertheless, although they be clear of these, not even so are our costly feasts freed from blame. Hear, at all events, how even apart from these things the prophet finds fault with them, thus speaking, Woe to them that drink wine racked off, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments. Do you see how He censures luxury too? For it is not covetousness which He here lays to their charge, but prodigality only.

And you eat to excess, Christ not even for need; thou various cakes, He not so much as dry bread; you drink Thasian wine, but on Him you have not bestowed so much as a cup of cold water in His thirst. You are on a soft and embroidered bed, but He is perishing with the cold.

Wherefore, though the banquets be clear from covetousness, yet even so are they accursed, because, while for your part you do all in excess, to Him you give not even His need; and that, living in luxury upon things that belong to Him. Why, if you were guardian to a child, and having taken possession of his goods, were to neglect him in extremities, you would have ten thousand accusers, and would suffer the punishment appointed by the laws; and now having taken possession of the goods of Christ, and thus consuming them for no purpose, do you not think you will have to give account?

9. And these things I say not of those who introduce harlots to their tables (for to them I have nothing to say, even as neither have I to the dogs), nor of those who cheat some, and pamper others (for neither with them have I anything to do, even as I have not with the swine and with the wolves); but of those who enjoy indeed their own property, but do not impart thereof to others; of those who spend their patrimony at random. For neither are these clear from reprehension. For how, tell me, will you escape reproving and blame, while your parasite is pampered, and the dog that stands by you, but Christ's worth appears to you even not equal to theirs? When the one receives so much for laughter's sake, but the other for the Kingdom of Heaven not so much as the smallest fraction thereof. And while the parasite, on saying something witty, goes away filled; this Man, who has taught us, what if we had not learned we should have been no better than the dogs -- is He counted unworthy of even the same treatment with such an one?

Do you shudder at being told it? Shudder then at the realities. Cast out the parasites, and make Christ to sit down to meat with you. If He partake of your salt, and of your table, He will be mild in judging you: He knows how to respect a man's table. Yea, if robbers know this, much more the Lord. Think, for instance, of that harlot, how at a table He justified her, and upbraids Simon, saying, You gave me no kiss. Luke 7:54 I say, if He feed you, not doing these things, much more will He reward you, doing them. Look not at the poor man, that he comes to you filthy and squalid, but consider that Christ by him is setting foot in your house, and cease from your fierceness, and your relentless words, with which you are even aspersing such as come to you, calling them impostors, idle, and other names more grievous than these.

And think, when you are talking so, of the parasites; what kind of works do they accomplish? In what respect do they profit your house? Do they really make your dinner pleasant to you? Pleasant, by their being beaten and saying foul words? Nay, what can be more unpleasing than this, when you smite him that is made after God's likeness, and from your insolence to him gatherest enjoyment for yourself, making your house a theatre, and filling your banquet with stage-players, thou who art well born and free imitating the actors with their heads shaven? For among them too is laughter, and rude blows.

These things then do you call pleasure, I pray you, which are deserving of many tears, of much mourning and lamentation? And when it were fit to urge them to a good life, to give timely advice, do you lead them on to perjuries, and disorderly language, and call the thing a delight? And that which procures hell, do you account a subject of pleasure? Yea, and when they are at a loss for witty sayings, they pay the whole reckoning with oaths and false swearing. Are these things then worthy of laughter, and not of lamentations and tears? Nay, who would say so, that has understanding?

And this I say, not forbidding them to be fed, but not for such a purpose. Nay, let their maintenance have the motive of kindness, not of cruelty; let it be compassion, not insolence. Because he is a poor man, feed him; because Christ is fed, feed him; not for introducing satanical sayings, and disgracing his own life. Look not at him outwardly laughing, but examine his conscience, and then you will see him uttering ten thousand imprecations against himself, and groaning, and wailing. And if he do not show it, this also is due to you.

10. Let the companions of your meals then be men that are poor and free, not perjured persons, nor stage-players. And if you must needs ask of them a requital for their food, enjoin them, should they see anything done that is amiss, to rebuke, to admonish, to help you in your care over your household, in the government of your servants. Have you children? Let these be joint fathers to them, let them divide your charge with you, let them yield you such profits as God loves. Engage them in a spiritual traffic. And if you see one needing protection, bid them succor, command them to minister. By these do thou track the strangers out, by these clothe the naked, by these send to the prison, put an end to the distresses of others.

Let them give you, for their food, this requital, which profits both you and them, and carries with it no condemnation.

Hereby friendship also is more closely riveted. For now, though they seem to be loved, yet for all that they are ashamed, as living without object in your house; but if they accomplish these purposes, both they will be more pleasantly situated, and you will have more satisfaction in maintaining them, as not spending your money without fruit; and they again will dwell with you in boldness and due freedom, and your house, instead of a theatre, will become to you a church, and the devil will be put to flight, and Christ will enter, and the choir of the angels. For where Christ is, there are the angels too, and where Christ and the angels are, there is Heaven, there is a light more cheerful than this of the sun.

And if you would reap yet another consolation through their means, command them, when you are at leisure, to take their books and read the divine law. They will have more pleasure in so ministering to you, than in the other way. For these things add respect both to you and to them, but those bring disgrace upon all together; upon you as an insolent person and a drunkard, upon them as wretched and gluttonous. For if you feed in order to insult them, it is worse than if you had put them to death; but if for their good and profit, it is more useful again than if you had brought them back from their way to execution. And now indeed thou dost disgrace them more than your servants, and your servants enjoy more liberty of speech, and freedom of conscience, than they do; but then you will make them equal to the angels.

Set free therefore both them and your own self, and take away the name of parasite, and call them companions of your meals; cast away the appellation of flatterers, and bestow on them that of friends. With this intent indeed did God make our friendships, not for evil to the beloved and loving, but for their good and profit.

But these friendships are more grievous than any enmity. For by our enemies, if we will, we are even profited; but by these we must needs be harmed, no question of it. Keep not then friends to teach you harm; keep not friends who are enamored rather of your table than of your friendship. For all such persons, if you retrench your good living, retrench their friendship too; but they that associate with you for virtue's sake, remain continually, enduring every change.

And besides, the race of the parasites does often take revenge upon you, and bring upon you an ill fame. Hence at least I know many respectable persons to have got bad characters, and some have been evil reported of for sorceries, some for adulteries and corrupting of youths. For whereas they have no work to do, but spend their own life unprofitably; their ministry is suspected by the multitude as being the same with that of corrupt youths.

Therefore, delivering ourselves both from evil report, and above all from the hell that is to come, and doing the things that are well-pleasing to God, let us put an end to this devilish custom, that both eating and

drinking we may do all things to the glory of God, 1 Corinthians 10:31 and enjoy the glory that comes from Him; unto which may we all attain, 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.

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