

Homily 54 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus asks His disciples about His identity, and Peter's confession of faith is blessed by Jesus, who then gives Peter a special role and warns the disciples not to reveal His true identity until after His crucifixion.

Scripture: Isaiah 35:10, Matthew 16:13-21, Galatians 6:14

Topics: "The Cross", "Divine Salvation"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the significance of Jesus asking His disciples who people say He is, leading them to a deeper understanding of His divinity. Peter, in a moment of revelation, declares Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, earning a blessing from Jesus. Despite Peter's initial misunderstanding of Jesus' impending suffering, Jesus rebukes him and emphasizes the necessity of the cross in our salvation. Chrysostom urges believers not to be ashamed of the cross, as it is the symbol of our salvation and the source of all blessings, encouraging a life of selflessness and compassion to receive the abundant rewards promised by Christ.

Transcript

MATT. XIV. 13. "Now when Jesus had gone forth into the coastsof Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?"

Wherefore has he mentioned the founder of the city? Because there was another besides, Cæsarea Stratonis. But not in that, but in this does He ask them, leading them far away from the Jews, so that being freed from all alarm, they might speak with boldness all that was in their mind.

And wherefore did He not ask them at once their own opinion, but that of the people? In order that when they had told the people's opinion, and then were asked, But whom say ye that I am? by the manner of His inquiry they might be led up to a sublimer notion, and not fall into the same low view as the multitude. Accordingly He asks them not at all in the beginning of His preaching, but when He had done many miracles, and had discoursed with them of many and high doctrines, and had afforded so many clear proofs of His Godhead, and of His unanimity with the Father, then He puts this question to them.

And He said not, Whom say the Scribes and Pharisees that I am? often as these had come unto Him, and discoursed with Him; but, Whom do men say that I am? inquiring after the judgment of the people, as unbiassed. For though it was far meaner than it should be, yet was it free from malice, but the other was teeming with much wickedness.

And signifying how earnestly He desires His Economy to be confessed, He says, The Son of Man; thereby denoting His Godhead, which He does also in many other places. For He says, No man has ascended up to Heaven, but the Son of Man, which is in Heaven. John 3:13 And again, But when you shall see the Son of Man ascend up, where He was before. John 6:62

Then, since they said, Some John the Baptist, some Elias, some Jeremias, or one of the prophets, Matthew 16:14 and set forth their mistaken opinion, He next added, But whom say ye that I am? Matthew 16:15 calling them on by His second inquiry to entertain some higher imagination concerning Him, and indicating that their former judgment falls exceedingly short of His dignity. Wherefore He seeks for another judgment from themselves, and puts a second question, that they might not fall in with the multitude, who, because they saw His miracles greater than human, accounted Him a man indeed, but one that had appeared after a resurrection, as Herod also said. Matthew 14:2 But He, to lead them away from this notion, says, But whom say ye that I am? that is, ye that are with me always, and see me working miracles, and have yourselves done many mighty works by me.

2. What then says the mouth of the apostles, Peter, the ever fervent, the leader of the apostolic choir? When all are asked, he answers. And whereas when He asked the opinion of the people, all replied to the question; when He asked their own, Peter springs forward, and anticipates them, and says, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Matthew 16:16

What then says Christ? Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you. Matthew 16:17

Yet surely unless he had rightly confessed Him, as begotten of the very Father Himself, this were no work of revelation; had he accounted our Lord to be one of the many, his saying was not worthy of a blessing. Since before this also they said, Truly He is Son of God, Matthew 14:33 those, I mean, who were in the vessel after the tempest, which they saw, and were not blessed, although of course they spoke truly. For they confessed not such a Sonship as Peter, but accounted Him to be truly Son as one of the many, and though peculiarly so beyond the many, yet not of the same substance.

And Nathanael too said, Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel; John 1:49 and so far from being blessed, he is even reproved by Him, as having said what was far short of the truth. He replied at least, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig-tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these. John 1:50

Why then is this man blessed? Because he acknowledged Him very Son. Wherefore you see, that while in those former instances He had said no such thing, in this case He also signifies who had revealed it. That is, lest his words might seem to the many (because he was an earnest lover of Christ) to be words of friendship and flattery, and of a disposition to show favor to Him, he brings forward the person who had made them ring in his soul; to inform you that Peter indeed spoke, but the Father suggested, and that you might believe the saying to be no longer a human opinion, but a divine doctrine.

And wherefore does He not Himself declare it, nor say, I am the Christ, but by His question establish this, bringing them in to confess it? Because so to do was both more suitable to Him, yea necessary at that time, and it drew them on the more to the belief of the things that were said.

Do you see how the Father reveals the Son, how the Son the Father? For neither knows any man the Father, says He, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him. It cannot therefore be that

one should learn the Son of any other than of the Father; neither that one should learn the Father of any other than of the Son. So that even hereby, their sameness of honor and of substance is manifest.

3. What then says Christ? You are Simon, the son of Jonas; you shall be called Cephas. Thus since you have proclaimed my Father, I too name him that begot you; all but saying, As you are son of Jonas, even so am I of my Father. Else it were superfluous to say, You are Son of Jonas; but since he had said, Son of God, to point out that He is so Son of God, as the other son of Jonas, of the same substance with Him that begot Him, therefore He added this, And I say unto you, You are Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church; Matthew 16:18 that is, on the faith of his confession. Hereby He signifies that many were now on the point of believing, and raises his spirit, and makes him a shepherd. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And if not against it, much more not against me. So be not troubled because you are shortly to hear that I shall be betrayed and crucified.

Then He mentions also another honor. And I also will give you the keys of the heavens. But what is this, And I also will give you? As the Father has given you to know me, so will I also give you.

And He said not, I will entreat the Father (although the manifestation of His authority was great, and the largeness of the gift unspeakable), but, I will give you. What dost Thou give? Tell me. The keys of the heavens, that whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in Heaven. How then is it not His to give to sit on His right hand, and on His left, Matthew 20:23 when He says, I will give you?

Do you see how He, His own self, leads Peter on to high thoughts of Him, and reveals Himself, and implies that He is Son of God by these two promises? For those things which are peculiar to God alone, (both to absolve sins, and to make the church in capable of overthrow in such assailing waves, and to exhibit a man that is a fisher more solid than any rock, while all the world is at war with him), these He promises Himself to give; as the Father, speaking to Jeremiah, said, He would make him as a brazen pillar, and as a wall; Jeremiah 1:18 but him to one nation only, this man in every part of the world.

I would fain inquire then of those who desire to lessen the dignity of the Son, which manner of gifts were greater, those which the Father gave to Peter, or those which the Son gave him? For the Father gave to Peter the revelation of the Son; but the Son gave him to sow that of the Father and that of Himself in every part of the world; and to a mortal man He entrusted the authority over all things in Heaven, giving him the keys; who extended the church to every part of the world, and declared it to be stronger than heaven. For heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away. Matthew 24:35 How then is He less, who has given such gifts, has effected such things?

And these things I say, not dividing the works of Father and Son (for all things are made by Him, and without Him was nothing made which was made): but bridling the shameless tongue of them that dare so to speak.

But see, throughout all, His authority: I say unto you, You are Peter; I will build the Church; I will give you the keys of Heaven.

4. And then, when He had so said, He charged them that they should tell no man that He was the Christ. Matthew 16:20

And why did He charge them? That when the things which offend are taken out of the way, and the cross is accomplished, and the rest of His sufferings fulfilled, and when there is nothing any more to interrupt and disturb the faith of the people in Him, the right opinion concerning Him may be engraven pure and immovable in the mind of the hearers. For, in truth, His power had not yet clearly shone forth. Accordingly it was His will then to be preached by them, when both the plain truth of the facts, and the power of His deeds were pleading in support of the assertions of the apostles. For it was by no means the same thing to see Him in Palestine, now working miracles, and now insulted and persecuted (and especially when the very cross was presently to follow the miracles that were happening); and to behold him everywhere in the world, adored and believed, and no more suffering anything, such as He had suffered.

Therefore He bids them tell no man. For that which has been once rooted and then plucked up, would hardly, if planted, again be retained among the many; but that which, once fixed, has remained immovable, and has suffered injury from no quarter, easily mounts up, and advances to a greater growth.

And if they who had enjoyed the benefit of many miracles, and had had part in so many unutterable mysteries, were offended by the mere hearing of it; or rather not these only, but even the leader of them all, Peter; consider what it was likely the common sort should feel, being first told that He is the Son of God, then seeing Him even crucified and spit upon, and that without knowledge of the secret of those mysteries, or participation in the gift of the Holy Ghost. For if to His disciples He said, I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now; John 16:12 much more would the rest of the people have utterly failed, had the chiefest of these mysteries been revealed to them before the proper time. Accordingly He forbids them to tell.

And to instruct you how great a thing it was, their afterwards learning His doctrine complete, when the things that offend had passed by; learn it from this same leader of theirs. For this very Peter, he who after so many miracles proved so weak as even to deny Him, and to be in fear of a mean damsel; after the cross had come forth, and he had received the certain proofs of the resurrection, and there was nothing more to offend and trouble him, retained the teaching of the Spirit so immovable, that more vehemently than a lion he sprang upon the people of the Jews, for all the dangers and innumerable deaths which were threatened.

With reason then did He bid them not tell the many before the crucifixion, since not even to them that were to teach did He venture to commit all before the crucifixion. For I have many things to say unto you, says He, but you cannot bear them now.

And of the things too that He did say, they do not understand many, which He did not make plain before the crucifixion. At least when He was risen from the dead, then and not before they knew some of His sayings.

5. From that time forth began He to show unto them that He must suffer. Matthew 16:21 From that time. What time? When He had fixed the doctrine in them; when He had brought in the beginning of the Gentiles.

But not even so did they understand what He said. For the saying, it is said, was hid from them; Luke 18:34 and they were as in a kind of perplexity, not knowing that He must rise again. Therefore He rather dwells on the difficulties, and enlarges His discourse, that He may open their mind, and they may understand what it can be that He speaks of.

But they understood not, but the saying was hid from them, and they feared to ask this; Luke 9:45 not whether He should die, but how, and in what manner, and what this mystery could be. For they did not even know what was this same rising again, and supposed it much better not to die. Therefore, the rest being troubled and in perplexity, Peter again, in his ardor, alone ventures to discourse of these things; and not even he openly, but when he had taken Him apart; that is, having separated himself from the rest of the disciples; and he says, Be it far from You, Lord, this shall not be unto You. What ever is this? He that obtained a revelation, he that was blessed, has he so soon fallen away, and suffered overthrow, so as to fear His passion? And what marvel, that one who had not on these points received any revelation, should have that feeling? Yea, to inform you that not of himself did he speak those other things either, see in these matters that were not revealed to him how he is confounded and overthrown, and being told ten thousand times, knows not what the saying can mean.

For that He is Son of God he had learned, but what the mystery of the cross and of the resurrection might be, was not yet manifest to him: for the saying, it is said, was hid from them.

Do you see that with just cause He bade them not declare it to the rest? For if it so confounded them, who must needs be made aware of it, what would not all others have felt?

6. He however, to signify that He is far from coming to the passion against His will, both rebuked Peter, and called him Satan.

Let them hear, as many as are ashamed of the suffering of the cross of Christ. For if the chief apostle, even before he had learned all distinctly, was called Satan for feeling this, what excuse can they have, who after so abundant proof deny His economy? I say, when he who had been so blessed, who made such a confession, has such words addressed to him; consider what they will suffer, who after all this deny the mystery of the cross.

And He said not, Satan spoke by you, but, Get behind me, Satan. Matthew 16:23 For indeed it was a desire of the adversary that Christ should not suffer. Therefore with such great severity did He rebuke him, as knowing that both he and the rest are especially afraid of this, and will not easily receive it.

Therefore He also reveals the thoughts of his mind, saying, Thou savorest mindest.]]-->not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

But what means, Thou savorest mindest.]]-->not the things that be of God, but those that be of men? Peter examining the matter by human and earthly reasoning, accounted it disgraceful to Him and an unmeet thing. Touching him therefore sharply, He says, My passion is not an unmeet thing, but you give this sentence with a carnal mind; whereas if you had hearkened to my sayings in a godly manner, disengaging yourself from your carnal understanding, you would know that this of all things most becomes me. For thou indeed supposest that to suffer is unworthy of me; but I say unto you, that for me not to suffer is of the devil's mind; by the contrary statements repressing his alarm.

Thus as John, accounting it unworthy of Christ to be baptized by him, was persuaded of Christ to baptize Him, He saying, Thus it becomes us, Matthew 3:15 and this same Peter too, forbidding Him to wash his feet, by the words, You have no part with me, unless I wash your feet; John 13:8 even so here too He restrained him by the mention of the opposite, and by the severity of the reproof repressed his fear of suffering.

7. Let no man therefore be ashamed of the honored symbols of our salvation, and of the chiefest of all good things, whereby we even live, and whereby we are; but as a crown, so let us bear about the cross of Christ. Yea, for by it all things are wrought, that are wrought among us. Whether one is to be new-born, the cross is there; or to be nourished with that mystical food, or to be ordained, or to do anything else, everywhere our symbol of victory is present. Therefore both on house, and walls, and windows, and upon our forehead, and upon our mind, we inscribe it with much care.

For of the salvation wrought for us, and of our common freedom, and of the goodness of our Lord, this is the sign. For as a sheep was He led to the slaughter. Isaiah 53:7 When therefore you sign yourself, think of the purpose of the cross, and quench anger, and all the other passions. When you sign yourself, fill your forehead with all courage, make your soul free. And ye know assuredly what are the things that give freedom. Wherefore also Paul leading us there, I mean unto the freedom that beseems us, did on this wise lead us unto it, having reminded us of the cross and blood of our Lord. For you are bought, says he, with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Consider, says he, the price that has been paid for you, and you will be a slave to no man; by the price meaning the cross.

Since not merely by the fingers ought one to engrave it, but before this by the purpose of the heart with much faith. And if in this way you have marked it on your face, none of the unclean spirits will be able to stand near you, seeing the blade whereby he received his wound, seeing the sword which gave him his mortal stroke. For if we, on seeing the places in which the criminals are beheaded, shudder; think what the devil must endure, seeing the weapon, whereby Christ put an end to all his power, and cut off the head of the dragon.

Be not ashamed then of so great a blessing, lest Christ be ashamed of you, when He comes with His glory, and the sign appears before Him, shining beyond the very sunbeam. For indeed the cross comes then, uttering a voice by its appearance, and pleading with the whole world for our Lord, and signifying that no part has failed of what pertained to Him.

This sign, both in the days of our forefathers and now, has opened doors that were shut up; this has quenched poisonous drugs; this has taken away the power of hemlock; this has healed bites of venomous beasts. For if it opened the gates of hell, and threw wide the archways of Heaven, and made a new entrance into Paradise, and cut away the nerves of the devil; what marvel, if it prevailed over poisonous drugs, and venomous beasts, and all other such things.

This therefore do thou engrave upon your mind, and embrace the salvation of our souls. For this cross saved and converted the world, drove away error, brought back truth, made earth Heaven, fashioned men into angels. Because of this, the devils are no longer terrible, but contemptible; neither is death, death, but a sleep; because of this, all that wars against us is cast to the ground, and trodden under foot.

If any one therefore say to you, Do you worship the crucified? Say, with your voice all joy, and your countenance gladdened, I do both worship Him, and will never cease to worship. And if he laugh, weep for him, because he is mad. Thank the Lord, that He has bestowed on us such benefits, as one cannot so much as learn without His revelation from above. Why, this is the very reason of his laughing, that the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:14 Since our children too feel this, when they see any of the great and marvellous things; and if you bring a child into the mysteries, he will laugh. Now the heathen are like these children; or rather they are more imperfect even than these; wherefore also they are more wretched, in that not in an immature age, but when full grown, they have the feelings of

babes; wherefore neither are they worthy of indulgence.

But let us with a clear voice, shouting both loud and high, cry out and say (and should all the heathen be present, so much the more confidently), that the cross is our glory, and the sum of all our blessings, and our confidence, and all our crown. I would that also with Paul I were able to say, By which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world; Galatians 6:14 but I cannot, restrained as I am by various passions.

8. Wherefore I admonish both you, and surely before you myself, to be crucified to the world, and to have nothing in common with the earth, but to set your love on your country above, and the glory and the good things that come from it. For indeed we are soldiers of a heavenly King, and are clad with spiritual arms. Why then take we upon ourselves the life of traders, and mountebanks, nay rather of worms? For where the King is, there should also the soldier be. Yea, we have become soldiers, not of them that are far off, but of them that are near. For the earthly king indeed would not endure that all should be in the royal courts, and at his own side, but the King of the Heavens wills all to be near His royal throne.

And how, one may say, is it possible for us, being here, to stand by that throne? Because Paul too being on earth was where the seraphim, where the cherubim are; and nearer to Christ, than these the body guards to the king. For these turn about their faces in many directions, but him nothing beguiled nor distracted, but he kept his whole mind intent upon the king. So that if we would, this is possible to us also.

For were He distant from us in place, you might well doubt, but if He is present everywhere, to him that strives and is in earnest He is near. Wherefore also the prophet said, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; and God Himself again, I am a God near at hand, and not a God afar off. Jeremiah 23:23 Then as our sins separate us from Him, so do our righteousnesses draw us near unto Him. For while you are yet speaking, it is said, I will say, Here I am. What father would ever be thus obedient to his offspring? What mother is there, so ready, and continually standing, if haply her children call her? There is not one, no father, no mother: but God stands continually waiting, if any of his servants should perchance call Him; and never, when we have called as we ought, has He refused to hear. Therefore He says, While you are yet speaking, I do not wait for you to finish, and I straightway hearken.

9. Let us call Him therefore, as it is His will to be called. But what is this His will? Loose, says He, every band of iniquity, unloose the twisted knots of oppressive covenants, tear in pieces every unjust contract. Break your bread to the hungry, and bring in the poor that are cast out to your house. If you see one naked, cover him, and them that belong to your seed you shall not overlook. Then shall your light break forth in the morning, and your healings shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall cover you. Then you shall call upon me, and I will give ear unto you; while you are yet speaking, I will say, Lo! Here I am.

And who is able to do all this? It may be asked. Nay, who is unable, I pray you? For which is difficult of the things I have mentioned? Which is laborious? Which not easy?

Why, so entirely are they not possible only, but even easy, that many have actually overshot the measure of those sayings, not only tearing in pieces unjust contracts, but even stripping themselves of all their goods; making the poor welcome not to roof and table, but even to the sweat of their body, and laboring in order to maintain them; doing good not to kinsmen only, but even to enemies.

But what is there at all even hard in these sayings? For neither did He say, Pass over the mountain, go across the sea, dig through so many acres of land, abide without food, wrap yourself in sackcloth; but, Impart to the poor, impart of your bread, cancel the contracts unjustly made.

What is more easy than this? Tell me. But even if you account it difficult, look, I pray you, at the rewards also, and it shall be easy to you.

For much as our emperors at the horse races heap together before the combatants crowns, and prizes, and garments, even so Christ also sets His rewards in the midst of His course, holding them out by the prophet's words, as it were by many hands. And the emperors, although they be ten thousand times emperors, yet as being men, and the wealth which they have in a course of spending, and their munificence of exhaustion, are ambitious of making the little appear much; wherefore also they commit each thing severally into the hand of the several attendants, and so bring it forward. But our King contrariwise, having heaped all together (because He is very rich, and does nothing for display), He so brings it forward, and what He so reaches out is indefinitely great, and will need many hands to hold it. And to make you aware of this, examine each particular of it carefully.

Then, says He, shall your light break forth in the morning. Does not this gift appear to you as some one thing? But it is not one; nay, for it has many things in it, both prizes, and crowns, and other rewards. And, if you are minded, let us take it to pieces and show all its wealth, as it shall be possible for us to show it; only do not ye grow weary.

And first, let us learn the meaning of It shall break forth. For He said not at all, shall appear, but shall break forth; declaring to us its quickness and plentifulness, and how exceedingly He desires our salvation, and how the good things themselves travail to come forth, and press on; and that which would check their unspeakable force shall be nought; by all which He indicates their plentifulness, and the infinity of His abundance. But what is the morning. It means, not after being in life's temptations, neither after our evils have come upon us; nay, it is quite beforehand with them. For as in our fruits, we call that early, which has shown itself before its season; so also here again, declaring its rapidity, he has spoken in this way, much as above He said, Whilst you are yet speaking, I will say, Lo! Here I am.

But of what manner of light is He speaking, and what can this light be? Not this, that is sensible; but another far better, which shows us Heaven, the angels, the archangels, the cherubim, the seraphim, the thrones, the dominions, the principalities, the powers, the whole host, the royal palaces, the tabernacles. For should you be counted worthy of this light, you shall both see these, and be delivered from hell, and from the venomous worm, and from the gnashing of teeth, and from the bonds that cannot be broken, and from the anguish and the affliction, from the darkness that has no light, and from being cut asunder, and from the river of fire, and from the curse, and from the abodes of sorrow; and you shall depart, where sorrow and woe are fled away, Isaiah 35:10 where great is the joy, and the peace, and the love, and the pleasure, and the mirth; where is life eternal, and unspeakable glory, and inexpressible beauty; where are eternal tabernacles, and the untold glory of the King, and those good things, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man; 1 Corinthians 2:9 where is the spiritual bridechamber, and the apartments of the heavens, and the virgins that bear the bright lamps, and they who have the marriage garment; where many are the possessions of our Lord, and the storehouses of the King.

Do you see how great the rewards, and how many He has set forth by one expression, and how He brought all together?

So also by unfolding each of the expressions that follow, we shall find our abundance great, and the ocean immense. Shall we then still delay, I beg you; and be backward to show mercy on them that are in need? Nay, I entreat, but though we must throw away all, be cast into the fire, venture against the sword, leap upon daggers, suffer what you will; let us bear all easily, that we may obtain the garment of the kingdom of Heaven, and that untold glory; which may we all attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might, world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-54-on-matthew/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net