

# Homily 63 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

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*The love of money is the root of all evils, and it is impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven, but with God all things are possible.*

**Scripture:** Mark 10:17

**Topics:** "Wealth And Faith", "Eternal Life"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man, highlighting the struggle of wealth and the importance of seeking eternal life. Jesus challenges the young man to sell his possessions, emphasizing the difficulty for the rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Chrysostom explains the dangers of the love of money, the root of all evils, and encourages a shift in focus towards heavenly treasures. He urges listeners to consider the true value of wealth in light of eternity and to follow the example of Christ and His faithful servants.

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## Transcript

Matt. XIX. 16.

And, behold, one came and said to Him, Good Master, by doing what, shall I inherit eternal life?

Some indeed accuse this young man, as one dissembling and ill-minded, and coming with a temptation to Jesus, but I, though I would not say he was not fond of money, and under subjection to his wealth, since Christ in fact convicted him of being such a character, yet a dissembler I would by no means call him, both because it is not safe to venture on things uncertain, and especially in blame, and because Mark has taken away this suspicion; for he says, that having come running unto Him, and kneeling to Him, he besought Him, and that Jesus beheld him, and loved him. Mark 10:17-21

But great is the tyranny of wealth, and it is manifest hence; I mean, that though we be virtuous as to the rest, this ruins all besides. With reason has Paul also affirmed it to be the root of all evils in general. For the love of money is the root of all evils, he says.

Wherefore then does Christ thus reply to him, saying, There is none good? askest thou me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good." It is probable, but not certain, that Chrysostom accepted the other form of the text. Comp. note on Homily XXVII. 5., p. 186.--R.]--> Because He came unto Him as a mere man, and one of the common sort, and a Jewish teacher; for this cause then as a man He

discourses with him. And indeed in many instances He replies to the secret thoughts of them that come unto Him; as when He says, We worship we know what; John 4:22 and, If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. John 5:31 When therefore He says, There is none good; not as putting Himself out from being good does He say this, far from it; for he said not, Why do you call me good? I am not good; but, there is none good, that is, none among men.

And when He says this self-same thing, He says it not as depriving even men of goodness, but in contradistinction to the goodness of God. Wherefore also He added, But one, that is, God; and He said not, but my Father, that you might learn that He had not revealed Himself to the young man. So also further back He called men evil, saying, If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children. Matthew 7:11 For indeed there too He called them evil, not as condemning the whole race as evil (for by ye, He means not ye men), but comparing the goodness that is in men with the goodness of God, He thus named it; therefore also He added, How much more shall your Father give good things to them that ask Him? And what was there to urge Him, or what the profit that He should answer in this way? He leads him on little by little, and teaches him to be far from all flattery, drawing him off from the things upon each, and fastening him upon God, and persuading him to seek after the things to come, and to know that which is really good, and the root and fountain of all things, and to refer the honors to Him.

Since also when He says, Call no one master upon earth, it is in contradistinction to Himself He says this, and that they might learn what is the chief sovereignty over all things that are. For neither was it a small forwardness the young man had shown up to this time in having fallen into such a desire; and when of the rest some were tempting, some were coming to Him for the cure of diseases, either their own or others, he for eternal life was both coming to Him, and discoursing with Him. For fertile was the land and rich, but the multitude of the thorns choked the seed. Mark at any rate how he is prepared thus far for obedience to the commandments. For By doing what, he says, shall I inherit eternal life? So ready was he for the performance of the things that should be told him. But if he had come unto Him, tempting Him, the evangelist would have declared this also to us, as He does also with regard to the others, as in the case of the lawyer. And though himself had been silent, Christ could not have suffered him to lie concealed, but would have convicted him plainly, or at least would have intimated it, so that he should not seem to have deceived Him, and to be hidden, and thereby have suffered hurt.

If he had come unto Him tempting, he would not have departed sorrowing for what he heard. This was not at any rate ever the feeling of any of the Pharisees, but they grew fierce when their mouths were stopped. But not so this man; but he goes away cast down, which is no little sign that not with an evil will he had come unto Him, but with one too feeble, and that he did indeed desire life, but was held in subjection by another and most grievous feeling.

Therefore when Christ said, If you will enter into life, keep the commandments, he says, Which? Not tempting, far from it, but supposing there were some others besides those of the law that should procure him life, which was like one who was very desirous. Then since Jesus mentioned those out of the law, he says, All these things have I kept from my youth up. And neither at this did he stop, but again asks, What lack I yet? which itself again was a sign of his very earnest desire.

What then says Christ? Since He was going to enjoin something great, He sets forth the recompenses, and says, If you will be perfect, go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven: and come, and follow me. wouldest," etc.]}-->

2. Do you see how many prizes, how many crowns, He appoints for this race? If he had been tempting, He would not have told him these things. But now He both says it, and in order to draw him on, He also shows him the reward to be great, and leaves it all to his own will, by all means throwing into the shade that which seemed to be grievous in His advice. Wherefore even before mentioning the conflicts and the toil, He shows him the prize, saying If you will be perfect, and then says, Sell that you have, and give to the poor, and straightway again the rewards, You shall have treasure in Heaven; and come, and follow me. For indeed to follow Him is a great recompense. And you shall have treasure in Heaven.

For since his discourse was of money, even of all did He advise him to strip himself, showing that he loses not what he has, but adds to his possessions, He gave him more than He required him to give up; and not only more, but also as much greater as Heaven is greater than earth, and yet more so.

But He called it a treasure, showing the plenteousness of the recompense, its permanency, its security, so far as it was possible by human similitudes to intimate it to the hearer. It is not then enough to despise wealth, but we must also maintain poor men, and above all things follow Christ; that is, do all the things that are ordered by Him, be ready for slaughter and daily death. For if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Matthew 16:24 So that to cast away one's money is a much less thing than this last commandment, to shed even one's very blood; yet not a little does our being freed from wealth contribute towards this.

But when the young man heard it, he went away sorrowful. Matthew 19:22 After this the evangelist, as it were to show that he has not felt anything it was unlikely he should feel, says, For he had great possessions. For they that have little are not equally held in subjection, as they that are overflowed with great affluence, for then the love of it becomes more tyrannical. Which thing I cease not always saying, that the increase of acquisitions kindles the flame more, and renders the getters poorer, inasmuch as it puts them in greater desire, and makes them have more feeling of their want.

See, for example, even here what strength did this passion exhibit. Him that had come to Him with joy and forwardness, when Christ commanded him to cast away his riches, it so overwhelmed and weighed down, as not to allow him so much as to answer touching these things, but silenced and become dejected and sullen to go away.

What then says Christ? How hardly shall the rich enter into the kingdom of Heaven! blaming not riches but them that are held in subjection by them. But if the rich man hardly, much more the covetous man. For if not to give one's own be an hindrance to entering the kingdom, even to take of other men's goods, think how much fire it heaps up.

Why can it have been, however, that He said to His disciples, that hardly shall a rich man enter in, they being poor men, and having no possessions? Instructing them not to be ashamed of their poverty, and, as it were, excusing Himself to them for suffering them to have nothing.

But having said it was hard; as He proceeds, He shows that it is even impossible, and not merely impossible, but even in the highest degree impossible; and this He showed by the comparison concerning the camel and the needle.

It is easier says He, for a camel to enter in by the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 19:24 Whence it is shown, that there is no ordinary reward for them that are rich, and are able to practise self command. Wherefore also He affirmed it to be a work of God, that He

might show that great grace is needed for him who is to achieve this. At least, when the disciples were troubled, He said, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. Matthew 19:26

And wherefore are the disciples troubled, being poor, yea, exceedingly poor? Wherefore then are they confounded? Being in pain about the salvation of the rest, and having a great affection for all, and having already taken upon themselves the tender bowels of teachers. They were at least in such trembling and fear for the whole world from this declaration, as to need much comfort.

Therefore, having first beheld them, He said to them, The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God. For with a mild and meek look, having soothed their shuddering mind, and having put an end to their distress (for this the evangelist signified by saying, He beheld them), then by His words also He relieves them, bringing before them God's power, and so making them feel confidence.

But if you will learn the manner of it likewise, and how what is impossible may become possible, hear. Born either for this end did He say, The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God, that you should give it up, and abstain, as from things impossible; but that having considered the greatness of the good work, you should hasten to it readily, and having besought God to assist you in these noble contests, should attain unto life.

3. How then should this become possible? If you cast away what you have, if you empty yourself of your wealth, if you refrain from the wicked desire. For in proof that He does not refer it to God alone, but that to this end He said it, that you should know the vastness of the good work, hear what follows. For when Peter had said, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed You, and had asked, What shall we have therefore? having appointed the reward for them; He added, And every one who has forsaken houses, or lands, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit eternal life. Thus that which is impossible becomes possible. But how may this very thing be done, one may say, to forsake these? How is it possible for him that is once sunk in such lust of wealth, to recover himself? If he begin to empty himself of his possessions, and cut off what are superfluous. For so shall he both advance further, and shall run on his course more easily afterwards.

Do not then seek all at once, but gently, and little by little, ascend this ladder, that leads you up to Heaven. For like as those in fevers having acrid bile abounding within them, when they cast in thereon meats and drinks, so far from quenching their thirst, do even kindle the flame; so also the covetous, when they cast in their wealth upon this wicked lust more acrid than that bile, do rather inflame it. For nothing so stays it as to refrain for a time from the lust of gain, like as acrid bile is stayed by abstinence and evacuations.

But this itself, by what means will it be done? One may say. If you consider, that while rich, you will never cease thirsting, and pining with the lust of more; but being freed from your possessions, you will be able also to stay this disease. Do not then encompass yourself with more, lest you follow after things unattainable, and be incurable, and be more miserable than all, being thus frantic.

For answer me, whom shall we affirm to be tormented and pained? Him that longs after costly meats and drinks, and is not able to enjoy them as he will, or him that has not such a desire? It is quite clear one must say, him that desires, but cannot obtain what he desires. For this is so painful, to desire and not to enjoy, to thirst and not to drink, that Christ desiring to describe hell to us, described it in this way, and introduced the rich man thus tormented. For longing for a drop of water, and not enjoying it, this was his punishment. So then he that despises wealth quiets the desire, but he that desires to be rich has inflamed it more, and not yet does he stay; but though he have got ten thousand talents, he desires as much more; though he

obtain these, again he aims at twice as much more, and going on he desires even the mountains, and the earth, and the sea, and all to become gold for him, being mad with a kind of new and fearful madness, and one that can never thus be extinguished.

And that you might learn, that not by addition but by taking away this evil is stayed; if you had ever had an absurd desire to fly and to be borne through the air, how would you extinguish this unreasonable desire? By fashioning wings, and preparing other instruments, or by convincing the mind that it is desiring things impossible, and that one should attempt none of these things? It is quite plain, that by convincing the mind. But that, you may say, is impossible. But this again is more impossible, to find a limit for this desire. For indeed it is more easy for men to fly, than to make this lust cease by an addition of more. For when the objects of desire are possible, one may be soothed by the enjoyment of them, but when they are impossible, one must labor for one thing, to draw ourselves off from the desire, as otherwise at least it is not possible to recover the soul.

Therefore that we may not have superfluous sorrows, let us forsake the love of money that is ever paining, and never endures to hold its peace, and let us remove ourselves to another love, which both makes us happy, and has great facility, and let us long after the treasures above. For neither is the labor here so great, and the gain is unspeakable, and it is not possible for him to fail of them who is but in any wise watchful and sober, and despises the things present; even as on the other hand, as to him that is a slave to these last, and is utterly given up to them, it as altogether of necessity that he fail of those better riches.

4. Considering then all these things, put away the wicked desire of wealth. For neither could you say this, that it gives the things present, though it deprive us of the things to come, albeit even if this were so, this were extreme punishment, and vengeance. But now not even this may be. For besides hell, and before that hell, even here it casts you into a more grievous punishment. For many houses has this lust overthrown, and fierce wars has it stirred up, and compelled men to end their lives by a violent death; and before these dangers it ruins the nobleness of the soul, and is wont often to make him that has it cowardly, and unmanly, and rash, and false, and calumnious, and ravenous, and over-reaching, and all the worst things.

But seeing perhaps the brightness of the silver, and the multitude of the servants, and the beauty of the buildings, the court paid in the market-place, are you bewitched thereby? What remedy then may there be for this evil wound? If you consider how these things affect your soul, how dark, and desolate, and foul they render it, and how ugly; if you reckon with how many evils these things were acquired, with how many labors they are kept, with how many dangers: or rather they are not kept unto the end, but when you have escaped the attempts of all, death coming on you is often wont to remove these things into the hand of your enemies, and goes and takes you with him destitute, drawing after you none of these things, save the wounds and the sores only, which the soul received from these, before its departing. When then you see any one resplendent outwardly with raiment and large attendance, lay open his conscience, and you shall see many a cobweb within, and much dust. Consider Paul, Peter. Consider John, Elias, or rather the Son of God Himself, who has not where to lay His head. Be an imitator of Him, and of His servants, and imagine to yourself the unspeakable riches of these.

But if having obtained a little sight by these, you should be darkened again, as in any shipwreck when a storm has come on, hear the declaration of Christ, which affirms, that it is impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. And against this declaration set the mountains, and the earth, and the sea; and all things, if you will, suppose to be gold; for you shall see nothing equal to the loss arising to you

from thence. And thou indeed makest mention of acres of land, so many and so many, and of houses ten or twenty or even more, and of baths as many, and of slaves a thousand, or twice as many, and of chariots fastened with silver and overlaid with gold; but I say this, that if each one of you that are rich were to leave this poverty (for these things are poverty compared with what I am about to say), and were possessed of a whole world, and each of them had as many men as are now everywhere on land and sea, and each a world both sea and land, and everywhere buildings, and cities, and nations, and from every side instead of water, instead of fountains, gold flowed up for him, I would not say those who are thus rich are worth three farthings, when they are cast out of the kingdom.

For if now aiming at riches that perish, when they miss them, they are tormented, if they should obtain a perception of those unspeakable blessings, what then will suffice for consolation for them? There is nothing. Tell me not then of the abundance of their possessions, but consider how great loss the lovers of this abundance undergo in consequence thereof, for these things losing Heaven, and being in the same state, as if any one after being cast out of the highest honor in kings' courts, having a dung heap, were to pride himself on that. For the storing up of money differs nothing from that, or rather that is even the better. For that is serviceable both for husbandry, and for heating a bath, and for other such uses, but the buried gold for none of these things. And would it were merely useless; but as it is, it kindles moreover many furnaces for him that has it, unless he use it rightly; countless evils at least spring therefrom.

Therefore they that are without used to call the love of money the citadel of evils; but the blessed Paul spoke much better and more vividly, pronouncing it the root of all evils.

Considering then all these things, let us emulate the things worthy of emulation, not gorgeous buildings not costly estates, but the men that have much confidence towards God, those that have riches in Heaven, the owners of those treasures, them that are really rich, them that are poor for Christ's sake, that we may attain unto the good things of eternity by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom be unto the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, glory, might, honor, now and always and world without end. Amen.

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