

Homily 66 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of earnestness in approaching God, the fulfillment of prophecy through Jesus' actions, and the significance of self-denial and humility.

Scripture: Proverbs 19:17, Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 11:28, Matthew 20:29, Matthew 20:32, Matthew 25:40, Romans 11:25, 2 Corinthians 9:6, 2 Corinthians 12:15

Topics: "Faith And Perseverance", "Divine Mercy"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the story of two blind men who cried out to Jesus for mercy as He passed by. Despite being rebuked, their enduring faith and earnestness led to their healing. Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of approaching God with earnestness and perseverance, even in the face of hindrances and rebukes, as demonstrated by the blind men. He highlights the compassion and mercy of Jesus, who responds to their plea and touches them, showing that worthiness is manifested through faith and gratitude.

Transcript

Matthew 20:29-30.

And as they departed from Jericho, great multitudes followed Him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the wayside, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, Thou Son of David.

See whence He passed unto Jerusalem, and where He abode before this, with regard to which it seems to me especially worthy of inquiry, wherefore He went not away even long before this from thence unto Galilee, but through Samaria. But this we will leave to them that are fond of learning. For if any one were disposed to search the matter out carefully, he will find that John intimates it well, and has expressed the cause.

But let us keep to the things set before us, and let us listen to these blind men, who were better than many that see. For neither having a guide, nor being able to see Him when come near to them, nevertheless they strove to come unto Him, and began to cry with a loud voice, and when rebuked for speaking, they cried the more. For such is the nature of an enduring soul, by the very things that hinder, it is borne up.

But Christ suffered them to be rebuked, that their earnestness might the more appear, and that you might learn that worthily they enjoy the benefits of their cure. Therefore He does not so much as ask, Do ye believe? as He does with many; for their cry, and their coming unto Him, sufficed to make their faith manifest.

Hence learn, O beloved, that though we be very vile and outcast, but yet approach God with earnestness, even by ourselves we shall be able to effect whatsoever we ask. See, for instance, these men, how, having none of the apostles to plead with them, but rather many to stop their mouths, they were able to pass over the hindrances, and to come unto Jesus Himself. And yet the evangelist bears witness to no confidence of life in them, but earnestness sufficed them instead of all.

These then let us also emulate. Though God defer the gift, though there be many withdrawing us, let us not desist from asking. For in this way most of all shall we win God to us. See at least even here, how not poverty, not blindness, not their being unheard, not their being rebuked by the multitude, not anything else, impeded their exceeding earnestness. Such is the nature of a fervent and toiling soul.

What then says Christ? He called them, and said, What will you that I should do unto you? They say unto Him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. Matthew 20:32-33 Wherefore does He ask them? Lest any one should think that when they wish to receive one thing, He gives them another thing. For indeed it is usual with Him on every occasion, first to make manifest and discover to all the virtue of those He is healing, and then to apply the cure, for one reason, that He might lead on the others likewise to emulation; and for another, that He might show that they were enjoying the gift worthily. This, for instance, He did with respect to the Canaanitish woman also, this too in the case of the centurion, this again as to her that had the issue of blood, or rather that marvellous woman even anticipated the Lord's inquiry; but not so did He pass her by, but even after the cure makes her manifest. Such earnest care had He on every occasion to proclaim the good deeds of them that come to Him, and to show them to be much greater than they are, which He does here also.

Then, when they said what they wished, He had compassion on them, and touched them. For this alone is the cause of their cure, for which also He came into the world. But nevertheless, although it be mercy and grace, it seeks for the worthy.

But that they were worthy is manifest, both from what they cried out, and from the fact that, when they had received, they did not hasten away, as many do, being ungrateful after the benefits. Nay, they were not like this, but were both persevering before the gift, and after the gift grateful, for they followed Him.

And when He drew near unto Jerusalem, and had come to Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, saying, Go into the village over against you, and you shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say anything unto you, you shall say, The Lord has need of them; and straightway he sends them. And this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Zechariah the prophet, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, your King comes to you, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

And yet He had often entered Jerusalem before, but never with so much circumstance. What then is the cause? It was the beginning then of the dispensation; and neither was He very well known, nor the time of His passion near; wherefore He mixed with them with less distinction, and more disguising Himself. For He would not have been held in admiration, had He so appeared, and He would have excited them to greater anger. But when He had both given them sufficient proof of His power, and the cross was at the doors, He

makes Himself then more conspicuous, and does with greater circumstance all the things that were likely to inflame them. For it was indeed possible for this to have been done at the beginning also; but it was not profitable nor expedient it should be so.

But do thou observe, I pray you, how many miracles are done, and how many prophecies are fulfilled. He said, You shall find an ass; He foretold that no man should hinder them, but that all, when they heard, should hold their peace.

But this is no small condemnation of the Jews, if them that were never known to Him, neither had appeared before Him, He persuades to give up their own property, and to say nothing against it, and that by His disciples, while these, being present with Him at the working of His miracles, were not persuaded.

2. And do not account what was done to be a small thing. For who persuaded them, when their own property was taken from them, and that, when they were perhaps poor men and husbandmen, not to forbid it? Why say I not to forbid it? Not to ask, or even if they asked, to hold their peace, and give it up. For indeed both things were alike marvellous, as well, if they said nothing, when their beasts were dragged away, or if having spoken, and heard, The Lord has need of them, they yielded and withstood not, and this when they see not Him, but His disciples.

By these things He teaches them, that it was in His power to have entirely hindered the Jews also, even against their will, when they were proceeding to attack Him, and to have made them speechless, but He would not.

And another thing again together with these does He teach the disciples, to give whatever He should ask; and, though he should require them to yield up their very life, to give even this, and not to gainsay. For if even strangers gave up to Him, much more ought they to strip themselves of all things.

And besides what we have said, He was fulfilling also another prophecy, one which was twofold, one part in words, and another in deeds. And that in deeds was, by the sitting on the ass; and that by words, the prediction of Zacharias; because he had said, that the King should sit on an ass. And He, having sat and having fulfilled it, gave to the prophecy another beginning again, by what He was doing typifying beforehand the things to come.

How and in what manner? He proclaimed beforehand the calling of the unclean Gentiles, and that He should rest upon them, and that they should yield to Him and follow Him, and prophecy succeeded to prophecy.

But to me He seems not for this object only to sit on the ass, but also as affording us a standard of self-denial. For not only did He fulfill prophecies, nor did He only plant the doctrines of the truth, but by these very things He was correcting our practice for us, everywhere setting us rules of necessary use, and by all means amending our life.

For this cause, I say, even when He was to be born He sought not a splendid house, nor a mother rich and distinguished, but a poor woman, and one that had a carpenter as her betrothed husband; and is born in a shed, and laid in a manger: and choosing His disciples, He chose not orators and wise men, not rich men and nobly born, but poor men, and of poor families, and in every way undistinguished; and providing His table, at one time He sets before Himself barley loaves, and at another at the very moment commands the disciples to buy at the market. And making His couch, He makes it of grass, and putting on raiment, He

clothes Himself in what is cheap, and in no respect different from the common sort; and a house He did not so much as possess. And if He had to go from place to place, He did this travelling on foot, and so travelling, as even to grow weary. And sitting, He requires no throne nor pillow, but sits on the ground, sometimes in the mountain, and sometimes by the well, and not merely by the well, but also alone, and talks with a Samaritan woman.

Again, setting measures of sorrow, when He had need to mourn, He weeps moderately, everywhere setting us rules, as I have said, and limits how far one ought to proceed, and not any further. So for this intent now also, since it happens that some are weak and have need of beasts to carry them, in this too He fixes a measure, showing that one ought not to yoke horses or mules to be borne by them, but to use an ass, and not to proceed further, and everywhere to be limited by the want.

But let us look also at the prophecy, that by words, that by acts. What then is the prophecy? Behold, your King comes to you, meek, and riding on an ass, and a young colt; Zechariah 9:9 not driving chariots, like the rest of the kings, not demanding tributes, not thrusting men off, and leading about guards, but displaying His great meekness even hereby.

Ask then the Jew, what King came to Jerusalem borne on an ass? Nay, he could not mention, but this alone.

But He did these things, as I said, signifying beforehand the things to come. For here the church is signified by the colt, and the new people, which was once unclean, but which, after Jesus sat on them, became clean. And see the image preserved throughout. I mean that the disciples loose the asses. For by the apostles, both they and we were called; by the apostles were we brought near. But because our acceptance provoked them also to emulation, therefore the ass appears following the colt. For after Christ has sat on the Gentiles, then shall they also come moving us to emulation. And Paul declaring this, said, That blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved. Romans 11:25-26 For that it was a prophecy is evident from what is said. For neither would the prophet have cared to express with such great exactness the age of the ass, unless this had been so.

But not these things only are signified by what is said, but also that the apostles should bring them with ease. For as here, no man gainsaid them so as to keep the asses, so neither with regard to the Gentiles was any one able to prevent them, of those who were before masters of them.

But He does not sit on the bare colt, but on the apostles' garments. For after they had taken the colt, they then gave up all, even as Paul also said, I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls. 2 Corinthians 12:15

But mark how tractable the colt, how being unbroken, and having never known the rein, he was not restive, but went on orderly; which thing itself was a prophecy of the future, signifying the submissiveness of the Gentiles, and their sudden conversion to good order. For all things did that word work, which said, Loose him, and bring him to me: so that the unmanageable became orderly, and the unclean thenceforth clean.

3. But see the baseness of the Jews. He had wrought so many miracles, and never were they thus amazed at Him; but when they saw a multitude running together, then they marvel. For all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? But the multitudes said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. And

when they thought they were saying something great, even then were their thoughts earthly, and low, and dragging on the ground.

But these things He did, not as displaying any pomp, but at once, as I have said, both fulfilling a prophecy, and teaching self-denial, and at the same time also comforting His disciples, who were grieving for His death, and showing them that He suffers all these things willingly. And mark thou, I pray you, the accuracy of the prophet, how he foretold all things. And some things David, some things Zechariah, had proclaimed beforehand. Let us also do likewise, and let us sing hymns, and give up our garments to them that bear Him. For what should we deserve, when some clothe the ass on which He was set, and others strew the garments even under her feet; but we, seeing him naked, and not being even commanded to strip ourselves, but to spend of what is laid by, not even so are liberal? And when they indeed attend upon Him before and behind, but we, when He comes unto us, send Him away, and thrust Him off and insult Him.

How sore a punishment do these things deserve, how great vengeance! Your Lord comes unto you in need, and you are not willing so much as to listen to His entreaty, but you blame and rebuke Him, and this, when you have heard such words as these. But if in giving one loaf, and a little money, you are so mean, and haughty, and backward; if you had to empty out all, what would you become?

Do you see not those that show their magnificence in the theatre, how much they give away to the harlots? But you give not so much as the half, nay often not the smallest part. But the devil is exhorting to give to whom it may chance, procuring us hell, and you give; but Christ to the needy, promising a kingdom, and thou, far from giving, dost rather insult them, and you choose rather to obey the devil, that you might be punished, than to submit to Christ, and be saved.

And what could be worse than this frenzy? One procures hell, the other a kingdom, and you leave the latter, and run unto the former. And this ye send away, when He comes unto you, that when he is far off, you call unto you. And what you do is the same as if a king bearing a royal robe, and offering a diadem, did not win your choice, but a robber brandishing a sword at you, and threatening death, were to win it.

Considering these things then, beloved, let us discern the truth at length though late, and let us grow sober. For I am now ashamed of speaking of almsgiving, because that having often spoken on this subject, I have effected nothing worth the exhortation. For some increase indeed has there been, but not so much as I wished. For I see you sowing, but not with a liberal hand. Wherefore I fear too lest ye also reap sparingly. 2 Corinthians 9:6

For in proof that we do sow sparingly, let us inquire, if it seem good, which are more numerous in the city, poor or rich; and which they, who are neither poor nor rich, but have a middle place. As, for instance, a tenth part is of rich, and a tenth of the poor that have nothing at all, and the rest of the middle sort.

Let us distribute then among the poor the whole multitude of the city, and you will see the disgrace how great it is. For the very rich indeed are but few, but those that come next to them are many; again, the poor are much fewer than these. Nevertheless, although there are so many that are able to feed the hungry, many go to sleep in their hunger, not because those that have are not able with ease to succor them, but because of their great barbarity and inhumanity. For if both the wealthy, and those next to them, were to distribute among themselves those who are in need of bread and raiment, scarcely would one poor person fall to the share of fifty men or even a hundred. Yet nevertheless, though in such great abundance of persons to assist them, they are wailing every day. And that you may learn the inhumanity of the others, when the church is possessed of a revenue of one of the lowest among the wealthy, and not of the very

rich, consider how many widows it succors every day, how many virgins; for indeed the list of them has already reached unto the number of three thousand. Together with these, she succors them that dwell in the prison, the sick in the caravansera, the healthy, those that are absent from their home, those that are maimed in their bodies, those that wait upon the altar; and with respect to food and raiment, them that casually come every day; and her substance is in no respect diminished. So that if ten men only were thus willing to spend, there would be no poor.

4. And what, it will be said, are our children to inherit? The principal remains, and the income again has become more abundant, the goods being stored up for them in Heaven.

But are you not willing to do this? At least do it by the half, at least by the third part, at least by the fourth part, at least by the tenth. For owing to God's favor, it were possible for our city to nourish the poor of ten cities.

And if you will, let us make some calculation in proof of this; or rather there is no need so much as of reckoning; for of itself the easiness of the thing is discernible. See at least, upon public occasions, how much one house has often not been backward to spend, and has not had so much as a little feeling of the expense, which service if each of the rich were willing to perform for the poor, in a brief moment of time he would have seized on Heaven.

What plea then will there be? What shadow of defense, when not even of the things from which we must assuredly be separated, when taken away from hence, not even of these do we impart to the needy with as much liberality as others to those on the stage, and this when we are to reap so many benefits therefrom? For we ought indeed, even though we were always to be here, not even so to be sparing of this good expenditure; but when after a little time, we are to be removed from hence, and dragged away naked from all, what kind of defense shall we have for not even out of our income giving to the hungry and distressed?

For neither do I constrain you to lessen your possessions, not because I do not wish it, but because I see you very backward. It is not then this I say, but spend of your fruits, and treasure up nothing from these. It is enough for you to have the money of your income pouring in on you as from a fountain; make the poor sharers with you, and become a good steward of the things given you of God.

But I pay tribute, one may say. For this cause then do you despise, because in this case no one demands it of you? And the other, who, should the earth bear, or should it not bear, takes by force, and extorts, you dare not gainsay; but Him that is so mild, and then only demands, when the earth bears, you answer not even to a word? And who will deliver you from those intolerable punishments? There is no one. For if, because in the other case a very sore punishment will ensue to you for not giving, therefore you become diligent about the payment, consider here too is one more sore; not to be bound, neither to be cast into prison, but to depart into the eternal fire.

For all reasons then let us pay these tributes first: for great is the facility, and greater the reward; and more abundant the gain, and worse the punishments to us if we are obstinate. For a punishment comes upon us, which has no end.

But if you tell me of the soldier's fighting for you with the barbarians, there is here too a camp, that of the poor, and a war, which the poor are waging for you. For when they receive, by praying they make God propitious; and making Him propitious, they repulse, instead of barbarians, the assaults of the devils; they

suffer not the evil one to be violent, neither to attack us continually, but they relax his might.

5. Seeing therefore these soldiers every day fighting in your behalf with the devil by their supplications and prayers, demand of yourself this good contribution, their nourishment. For this King being mild has not assigned you any to demand it of you, but desires you should give it willingly; though thou pay little by little, He receives it; though being in difficulty, you should pay after a long time, He does not press him that has not.

Let us not then despise His long-suffering; let us treasure up for ourselves, not wrath, but salvation; not death, but life; not punishment and vengeance, but honors and crowns. There is no need in this case to pay a hire for the conveyance of the things contributed; there is no need in this case to labor in turning them into money. If you give them up, the Lord Himself removes them into Heaven; He Himself makes the traffic the more gainful for you.

There is no need here to find one to carry in what you have contributed; contribute only, and straightway it goes up, not that others may be maintained as soldiers, but that it may remain for you with great profit. For here whatsoever you may have given, it is not possible to recover; but there you will receive them again with much honor, and shall gain greater, and more spiritual gains. Here the gifts are a demand; there a loan, and money at interest, and a debt.

Yea farther, God has given you bonds. For he that shows mercy to a poor man, it is said, lends to the Lord. Proverbs 19:17 He gave you also an earnest, and bail, and this being God! What sort of earnest? The things in the present life, the visible, the spiritual things, the foretaste of the things to come.

Why then do you delay, and why are you backward, having received so many things already, looking for so many things?

For what you have received are these: He Himself made you a body, He Himself put in you a soul, He honored with speech you alone of the things on the earth, He gave you the use of all the things that are seen, He bestowed on you the knowledge of Himself, He gave up His Son for you, He gave you a baptism full of so many good things, He gave you a holy table, He promised a kingdom, and the good things that cannot be told.

Having then received so many good things, having to receive so many, again I say the same thing, are you making petty reckoning about perishing riches, and what excuse will you have?

But are you looking altogether at your children? And dost draw back for the sake of these? Nay, rather teach them also to gain such gains. For if you had money lent out and bearing interest, and you had a grateful debtor, you would ten thousand times rather choose instead of the gold to leave the bond to your child, so that he should have the large income from it, and not be constrained to go about, and seek for others to borrow it.

And now give this bond to your children, and leave God a debtor to them. Thou dost not sell your lands, and give to your children, but leavest them, that the income may remain, and that they may have a greater increase of riches from thence; but this bond, which is more productive than any land or revenue, and bears so many fruits, this are you afraid to leave to them? What great folly must this be, and frenzy. And this when you know, that though you should leave it to them, you yourself also shall again take it away with you.

Of this nature are the things spiritual; they have great munificence. Let us not then be beggarly; neither be inhuman and savage towards ourselves, but let us traffic in that good merchandise; that we may both ourselves take it away with us when we depart, and leave it to our own children, and attain to the good things to come, 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 ever, and world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-66-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