

Homily 68 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 68 on Matthew explores the parable of the vineyard, emphasizing God's care, the rejection of His messengers, and the consequences of sin while calling for repentance and faithfulness.

Topics: "Gods Providence", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the parable of the vineyard, highlighting God's care and provision for His people, their rejection of prophets and ultimately His Son, and the consequences of their actions. He contrasts the wickedness and folly of those who reject God's messengers with the obedience and reverence expected from His people. Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of seeking the kingdom of God above all else, comparing the pleasures of worldly pursuits with the eternal joy found in a life dedicated to God. He describes the disciplined and prayerful life of monks, focusing on their spiritual nourishment and the contrast between their holy pursuits and the distractions of the world.

Transcript

Matt. XXI. 33-44.

Hear another parable. There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and dug a winepress, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to receive the fruits. And the husbandmen took the servants, and beat some, and killed some, and stoned some. Again he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last he sent unto them his son, saying, It may be they will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir, come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the Lord therefore of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those husbandmen? They say unto Him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus says unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The Stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner?

Many things does He intimate by this parable, God's providence, which had been exercised towards them from the first; their murderous disposition from the beginning; that nothing had been omitted of whatever pertained to a heedful care of them; that even when prophets had been slain, He had not turned away from them, but had sent His very Son; that the God both of the New and of the Old Testament was one and the same; that His death should effect great blessings; that they were to endure extreme punishment

for the crucifixion, and their crime; the calling of the Gentiles, the casting out of the Jews.

Therefore He puts it after the former parable, that He may show even hereby the charge to be greater, and highly unpardonable. How, and in what way? That although they met with so much care, they were worse than harlots and publicans, and by so much.

And observe also both His great care, and the excessive idleness of these men. For what pertained to the husbandmen, He Himself did, the hedging it round about, the planting the vineyard, and all the rest, and He left little for them to do; to take care of what was there, and to preserve what was given to them. For nothing was left undone, but all accomplished; and not even so did they gain, and this, when they had enjoyed such great blessings from Him. For when they had come forth out of Egypt, He gave a law, and set up a city, and built a temple, and prepared an altar.

And went into a far country; that is, He bore long with them, not always bringing the punishments close upon their sins; for by His going into a far country, He means His great long-suffering.

And He sent His servants, that is, the prophets, to receive the fruit; that is, their obedience, the proof of it by their works. But they even here showed their wickedness, not only by failing to give the fruit, after having enjoyed so much care, which was the sign of idleness, but also by showing anger towards them that came. For they that had not to give when they owed, should not have been indignant, nor angry, but should have entreated. But they not only were indignant, but even filled their hands with blood, and while deserving punishment, themselves inflicted punishment.

Therefore He sent both a second, and a third company, both that the wickedness of these might be shown, and the love towards man of Him who sent them.

And wherefore sent He not His Son immediately? In order that they might condemn themselves for the things done to the others, and leave off their wrath, and reverence Him when He came. There are also other reasons, but for the present let us go on to what is next. But what means, It may be they will reverence? It is not the language of one ignorant, away with the thought! But of one desiring to show the sin to be great; and without any excuse. Since Himself knowing that they would slay Him, He sent Him. But He says, They will reverence, declaring what ought to have been done, that it was their duty to have revered Him. Since elsewhere also He says, if perchance they will hear; Ezekiel 2:5 not in this case either being ignorant, but lest any of the obstinate should say, that His prediction was the thing that necessitated their disobedience, therefore He frames His expressions in this way, saying, Whether they will, and, It may be. For though they had been obstinate towards His servants, yet ought they to have revered the dignity of the Son.

What then do these? When they ought to have run unto Him, when they ought to have asked pardon for their offenses, they even persist more strongly in their former sins, they proceed to add unto their pollutions, forever throwing into the shade their former offenses by their later; as also He Himself declared when He said, Fill ye up the measure of your fathers. Matthew 23:32 For from the first the prophets used to charge them with these things, saying, Your hands are full of blood; Isaiah 1:15 and, They mingle blood with blood; Hosea 4:2 and, They build up Sion with blood. Micah 3:10

But they did not learn self-restraint, albeit they received this commandment first, You shall not kill; and had been commanded to abstain from countless other things because of this, and by many and various means urged to the keeping of this commandment.

Yet, for all that, they put not away that evil custom; but what say they, when they saw Him? Come, let us kill Him. With what motive, and for what reason? What of any kind had they to lay to His charge, either small or great? Is it that He honored you, and being God became man for your sakes, and wrought His countless miracles? Or that He pardoned your sins? Or that He called you unto a kingdom?

But see together with their impiety great was their folly, and the reason of His murder was full of much madness. For let us kill Him, it is said, and the inheritance shall be ours.

And where do they take counsel to kill Him? Out of the vineyard.

2. Do you see how He prophesies even the place where He was to be slain. And they cast Him out, and slew Him.

And Luke indeed says, that He declared what these men should suffer; and they said, God forbid; and He added the testimony [of Scripture]. For He beheld them, and said, What is it then that is written? The stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner; and every one that falls upon it shall be broken. Luke 20:17-18 But Matthew, that they themselves delivered the sentence. But this is not a contradiction. For indeed both things were done, both themselves passed the sentence against themselves; and again, when they perceived what they had said, they added, God forbid; and He set up the prophet against them, persuading them that certainly this would be.

Nevertheless, not even so did He plainly reveal the Gentiles, that He might afford them no handle, but signified it darkly by saying, He will give the vineyard to others. For this purpose then did He speak by a parable, that themselves might pass the sentence, which was done in the case of David also, when He passed judgment on the parable of Nathan. But do thou mark, I pray you, even hereby how just is the sentence, when the very persons that are to be punished condemn themselves.

Then that they might learn that not only the nature of justice requires these things, but even from the beginning the grace of the Spirit had foretold them, and God had so decreed, He both added a prophecy, and reproves them in a way to put them to shame, saying, Did ye never read, The stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner? This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes; by all things showing, that they should be cast out for unbelief, and the Gentiles brought in. This He darkly intimated by the Canaanitish woman also; this again by the ass, and by the centurion, and by many other parables; this also now.

Wherefore He added too, This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes, declaring beforehand that the believing Gentiles, and as many of the Jews as should also themselves believe, shall be one, although the difference between them had been so great before.

Then, that they might learn that nothing was opposed to God's will of the things doing, but that the event was even highly acceptable, and beyond expectation, and amazing every one of the beholders (for indeed the miracle was far beyond words), He added and said, It is the Lord's doing. And by the stone He means Himself, and by builders the teachers of the Jews; as Ezekiel also says, They that build the wall, and daub it with untempered mortar. Ezekiel 13:10 But how did they reject Him? By saying, This man is not of God; John 9:16 This man deceives the people; John 7:12 and again, You are a Samaritan, and hast a devil. John 8:48

Then, that they might know that the penalty is not limited to their being cast out, He added the punishments also, saying, Every one that falls on this stone, shall be broken; but upon whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder. He speaks here of two ways of destruction, one from stumbling and being offended; for this is, Whosoever falls on this stone: but another from their capture, and calamity, and utter destruction, which also He clearly foretold, saying, It will grind him to powder. By these words He darkly intimated His own resurrection also.

Now the Prophet Isaiah says, that He blames the vineyard, but here He accuses in particular the rulers of the people. And there indeed He says, What ought I to have done to my vineyard, that I did not; Isaiah 5:4 and elsewhere again, What transgression have your fathers found in me? Jeremiah 2:5 And again, O my people, what have I done unto you? And wherein have I grieved you? Micah 6:3 showing their thankless disposition, and that when in the enjoyment of all things, they requited it by the contraries; but here He expresses it with yet greater force. For He does not plead, Himself, saying, What ought I to have done that I have not done? but brings in themselves to judge, that nothing has been wanting, and to condemn themselves. For when they say, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out the vineyard to other husbandmen, they say nothing else than this, publishing their sentence with much greater force.

With this Stephen also upbraids them, which thing most of all stung them, that having enjoyed always much providential care, they requited their benefactor with the contraries, which very thing itself was a very great sign, that not the punisher, but the punished, were the cause of the vengeance brought upon them.

This here likewise is shown, by the parable, by the prophecy. For neither was He satisfied with a parable only, but added also a twofold prophecy, one David's, the others from Himself.

What then ought they to have done on hearing these things? Ought they not to have adored, to have marvelled at the tender care, that shown before, that afterwards? But if by none of these things they were made better, by the fear of punishment at any rate ought they not to have been rendered more temperate?

But they did not become so, but what do they after these things? When they had heard it, it is said, they perceived that He spoke of them. And when they sought to lay hands on Him, they were afraid because of the multitudes, for they took Him for a prophet. For they felt afterwards that they themselves were intimated. Sometimes indeed, when being seized, He withdraws through the midst of them, and is not seen; and sometimes while appearing to them He lays a check upon their laboring eagerness; at which indeed men marveled, and said, Is not this Jesus? Lo, He speaks boldly, and they say nothing unto Him. But in this instance, forasmuch as they were held in restraint by the fear of the multitude, He is satisfied with this, and does not work miracles, as before, withdrawing through the midst, and not appearing. For it was not His desire to do all things in a superhuman way, in order that the Dispensation might be believed.

But they, neither by the multitude, nor by what had been said, were brought to a sound mind; they regarded not the prophet's testimony, nor their own sentence, nor the disposition of the people; so entirely had the love of power and the lust of vainglory blinded them, together with the pursuit of things temporal.

3. For nothing so urges men headlong and drives them down precipices, nothing so makes them fail of the things to come, as their being riveted to these decaying things. Nothing so surely makes them enjoy both the one and the other, as their esteeming the things to come above all. For, Seek ye, says Christ, the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. And indeed, even if this were not joined, not even in that case ought we to aim at them. But now in obtaining the others, we may obtain these two; and

not even so are some persuaded, but are like senseless stones, and pursue shadows of pleasure. For what is pleasant of the things in this present life? What is delightful? For with greater freedom do I desire to discourse with you today; but suffer it, that you may learn that this life which seems to you to be a galling and wearisome life, I mean that of the monks and of them that are crucified, is far sweeter, and more to be desired than that which seems to be easy, and more delicate.

And of this you are witnesses, who often have asked for death, in the reverses and despondencies that have overtaken you, and have accounted happy them that are in mountains, them that are in caves, them that have not married, them that live the unworldly life; ye that are engaged in crafts, you that are in military services, you that live without object or rules, and pass your days at the theatres and orchestras. For of these, although numberless fountains of pleasures and mirth seem to spring up, yet are countless darts still more bitter brought forth.

For if any one be seized with a passion for one of the damsels that dance there, beyond ten thousand marches, beyond ten thousand journeys from home, will he undergo a torture more grievous, being in a more miserable state than any besieged city.

However, not to inquire into those things for the present, having left them to the conscience of those that have been taken captive, come let us discourse of the life of the common sort of men, and we shall find the difference between either of these kinds of life as great as between a harbor, and a sea continually beaten about with winds.

And observe from their retreats at once the first signs of their tranquillity. For they have fled from market places, and cities, and the tumults amidst men, and have chosen the life in mountains, that which has nothing in common with the things present, that which undergoes none of the ills of man, no worldly sorrows, no grief, no care so great, no dangers, no plots, no envy, no jealousy, no lawless lusts, nor any other thing of this kind.

Here already they meditate upon the things of the kingdom, holding converse with groves, and mountains, and springs, and with great quietness, and solitude, and before all these, with God. And from all turmoil is their cell pure, and from every passion and disease is their soul free, refined and light, and far purer than the finest air.

And their work is what was Adam's also at the beginning and before his sin, when he was clothed with the glory, and conversed freely with God, and dwelt in that place that was full of great blessedness. For in what respect are they in a worse state than he, when before his disobedience he was set to till the garden? Had he no worldly care? But neither have these. Did he talk to God with a pure conscience? This also do these; or rather they have a greater confidence than he, inasmuch as they enjoy even greater grace by the supply of the Spirit.

Now ye ought indeed by the sight to take in these things; but forasmuch as you are not willing, but pass your time in turmoils and in markets, by word at least let us teach you, taking one part of their way of living (for it is not possible to go over their whole life). These that are the lights of the world, as soon as the sun is up, or rather even long before its rise, rise up from their bed, healthy, and wakeful, and sober (for neither does any sorrow and care, nor headache, and toil, and multitude of business, nor any other such thing trouble them, but as angels live they in Heaven); having risen then straightway from their bed cheerful and glad, and having made one choir, with their conscience bright, with one voice all, like as out of one mouth, they sing hymns unto the God of all, honoring Him and thanking Him for all His benefits, both particular,

and common.

So that if it seem good, let us leave Adam, and inquire what is the difference between the angels and this company of them who on earth sing and say, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.

And their dress is suitable to their manliness. For not indeed, like those with trailing garments, the enervated and mincing, are they dressed, but like those blessed angels, Elijah, Elisha, John, like the apostles; their garments being made for them, for some of goat's hair, for some of camel's hair, and there are some for whom skins suffice alone, and these long worn.

Then, after they have said those songs, they bow their knees, and entreat the God who was the object of their hymns for things, to the very thought of which some do not easily arrive. For they ask nothing of things present, for they have no regard for these, but that they may stand with boldness before the fearful judgment-seat, when the Only-Begotten Son of God has come to judge quick and dead, and that no one may hear the fearful voice that says, I know you not, and that with a pure conscience and many good deeds they may pass through this toilsome life, and sail over the angry sea with a favorable wind. And he leads them in their prayers, who is their Father, and their ruler.

After this, when they have risen up and finished those holy and continual prayers, the sun being risen, they depart each one to their work, gathering thence a large supply for the needy.

4. Where now are they who give themselves to devilish choirs, and harlot's songs, and sit in theatres? For I am indeed ashamed to make mention of them; nevertheless, because of your infirmity it is needful to do even this. For Paul too says, Like as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

Come let us also therefore compare the company that is made up of harlot women, and prostituted youths on the stage, and this same that consists of these blessed ones in regard of pleasure, for which most of all, many of the careless youths are taken in their snares. For we shall find the difference as great as if any one heard angels singing above that all-harmonious melody of theirs, and dogs and swine howling and grunting on the dunghill. For by the mouths of these Christ speaks, by their tongues the devil.

But is the sound of pipes joined to them with unmeaning noise, and unpleasing show, when cheeks are puffed out, and their strings stretched to breaking? But here the grace of the Spirit pours forth a sound, using, instead of flute or lyre or pipes, the lips of the saints.

Or rather, whatever we may say, it is not possible to set forth the pleasure thereof, because of them that are riveted to their clay, and their brick-making? Therefore I would even wish to take one of those who are mad about these matters, and to lead him off there, and to show him the choir of those saints, and I should have no more need for these words. Nevertheless, though we speak unto miry ones, we will try, though by word, still little by little, to draw them out of the slime and the fens. For there the hearer receives straightway the fire of illicit love; for as though the sight of the harlot were not enough to set the mind on fire, they add the mischief also from the voice; but here even should the soul have any such thing, it lays it aside straightway. But not their voice only, nor their countenance, but even their clothes do more than these confound the beholders. And should it be some poor man of the grosser and heedless sort, from the sight he will cry out ten thousand times in bitter despair, and will say to himself, The harlot, and the prostituted boy, children of cooks and cobblers, and often even of slaves live in such delicacy, and I a

freeman, and born of freemen, choosing honest labor, am not able so much as to imagine these things in a dream; and thus he will go his way inflamed with discontent.

But in the case of the monks there is no such result, but rather the contrary altogether. For when he shall see children of rich men and descendants of illustrious ancestors clothed in such garments as not even the lowest of the poor, and rejoicing in this, consider how great a consolation against poverty he will receive as he goes away. And should he be rich, he returns sobered, become a better man. Again in the theatre, when they see the harlot clothed with golden ornaments, while the poor man will lament, and bemoan, seeing his own wife having nothing of the kind, the rich will in consequence of this spectacle contemn and despise the partners of their home. For when the harlot present to the beholders garb and look, and voice and step, all luxurious, they depart set on fire, and enter into their own houses, thenceforth captives.

Hence the insults, and the affronts, hence the enmities, the wars, the daily deaths; hence to them that are taken captive, life is insupportable, and the partner of their home thenceforth displeasing, and their children not as much objects of affection, and all things in their houses turned upside down, and after that they seem to be thrown into disorder by the very sunbeam.

But not from these choirs does any such dissatisfaction arise, but the wife will receive her husband quiet and meek, freed from all unlawful lust, and will find him more gentle to her than before this. Such evil things does that choir bring forth, but this good things, the one making wolves of sheep, this lambs of wolves. But as yet we have perhaps said nothing hitherto touching the pleasure.

And what could be more pleasant than not to be troubled or grieved in mind, neither to despond and groan? Nevertheless, let us carry on our discourse still further, and examine the enjoyment of either kind of song and spectacle; and we shall see the one indeed continuing until evening, so long as the spectator sits in the theatre, but after this paining him more grievously than any sting; but in the other case forever vigorous in the souls of them that have beheld it. For as well the fashion of the men, and the delightfulness of the place, and the sweetness of their manner of life, and the purity, of their rule, and the grace of that most beautiful and spiritual song they have for ever instilled in them. They at least who are in continual enjoyment of those havens, thenceforth flee as from a tempest, from the tumults of the multitude.

But not when singing only, and praying, but also when riveted to their books, they are a pleasing spectacle to the beholders. For after they have ended the choir, one takes Isaiah and discourses with him, another converses with the apostles, and another goes over the labors of other men, and seeks wisdom concerning God, concerning this universe, concerning the things that are seen, concerning the things that are not seen, concerning the objects of sense, and the objects of intellect, concerning the vileness of this present life, and the greatness of that to come.

5. And they are fed on a food most excellent, not setting before themselves cooked flesh of beasts; but oracles of God, beyond honey and the honey comb, a honey marvellous, and far superior to that whereon John fed of old in the wilderness. For this honey no wild bees collect, settling on the flowers, neither do lay it up in hives digesting the dew, but the grace of the Spirit forming it, lays it up in the souls of the saints, in the place of honeycombs, and hives, and pipes, so that he that will may eat thereof continually in security. These bees then they also imitate, and hover around the honeycombs of those holy books, reaping therefrom great pleasure.

And if you desire to learn about their table, be near it, and you shall see them bursting forth with such things, all gentle and sweet, and full of a spiritual fragrance. No foul word can those spiritual mouths bring forth, nothing of foolish jesting, nothing harsh, but all worthy of Heaven. One would not be wrong in comparing the mouths of them that crawl about in the market places, and are mad after worldly things, to ditches of some mire; but the lips of these to fountains flowing with honey, and pouring forth pure streams.

But if any felt displeased that I have called the mouths of the multitude ditches of some mire, let him know that I have said it, sparing them very much. For Scripture has not used this measure, but a comparison far stronger. For adder's poison, it is said, is under their lips, and their throat is an open sepulchre. But theirs are not so, but full of much fragrance.

And their state here is like this, but that hereafter what speech can set before us? What thought shall conceive? The portion of angels, the blessedness unspeakable, the good things untold?

Perchance some are warmed now, and have been moved to a longing after this good rule of life. But what is the profit, when while you are here only, you have this fire; but when you have gone forth, you extinguish the flame, and this desire fades. How then, in order that this may not be? While this desire is warm in you, go your way unto those angels, kindle it more. For the account that we give will not be able to set you on fire, like as the sight of the things. Say not, I will speak with my wife, and I will settle my affairs first. This delay is the beginning of remissness. Hear, how one desired to bid farewell to them at his house, 1 Kings 19:20 and the prophet suffered him not. And why do I say, to bid farewell? The disciple desired to bury his father, Matthew 8:21-22 and Christ allowed not so much as this. And yet what thing seems to you to be so necessary as the funeral of a father? But not even this did He permit.

Why could this have been? Because the devil is at hand fierce, desiring to find some secret approach; and though it be but a little hindrance or delay he takes hold of, he works a great remissness. Therefore one advises, Put not off from day to day. Sirach 5:7 For thus shall you be able to succeed in most things, thus also shall the things in your house be well ordered for you. For seek ye, it is said, the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33 For if we establish in great security them that overlook their own interests, and prefer the care of ours, much more does God, who even without these things has a care for us, and provides for us.

Be not thoughtful then about your interests, but leave them to God. For if you are thoughtful about them, you are thoughtful as a man; but if God provide, He provides as God. Be not so thoughtful about them as to let go the greater things, since then He will not much provide for them. In order therefore that He may fully provide for them, leave them to Him alone. For if you also yourself takest them in hand, having let go the things spiritual, He will not make much provision for them.

In order then that both these things may be well disposed for you, and that you may be freed from all anxiety, cleave to the things spiritual, overlook the things of the world; for in this way you shall have earth also with heaven, and shall attain unto the good things to come, 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-68-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