

Homily 69 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 69 on Matthew emphasizes the importance of accepting God's invitation to His kingdom and living a life of spiritual readiness and righteousness.

Scripture: Matthew 11:12, Matthew 22:1, Matthew 28:19, John 3:30, John 7:37, Acts 1:8, Romans 15:9, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:32

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Kingdom Living"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the parable of the wedding feast, highlighting God's long-suffering towards the Jews, the casting out of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles, and the strictness of life required for the kingdom of Heaven. He emphasizes the importance of spiritual joy, the symbolism of the marriage feast representing God's tender care and yearning towards us, and the need to prioritize spiritual matters over worldly concerns. Chrysostom urges believers to clothe their souls with righteous deeds, emulate the ascetic lifestyle of holy individuals, and strive for a life focused on heavenly pursuits rather than earthly distractions.

Transcript

Matt. XXII. 1-14.

And Jesus answered and spoke again in parables. The kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, which made a marriage for his son; and sent forth his servants to call them which were bidden to the wedding; and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

Do you see both in the former parable and in this the difference between the Son and the servants? Do you see at once the great affinity between both parables, and the great difference also? For this also indicates God's long-suffering, and His great providential care, and the Jews' ingratitude.

But this parable has something also more than the other. For it proclaims beforehand both the casting out of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles; and it indicates together with this also the strictness of the life required, and how great the punishment appointed for the careless.

And well is this placed after the other. For since He had said, It shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof, He declares next to what kind of nation; and not this only, but He also again sets forth His providential care towards the Jews as past utterance. For there He appears before His crucifixion bidding them; but here even after He is slain, He still urges them, striving to win them over. And when they deserved to have suffered the most grievous punishment, then He both presses them to the marriage, and honors them with the highest honor. And see how both there He calls not the Gentiles first, but the Jews, and here again. But as there, when they would not receive Him, but even slew Him when He had come, then He gave away the vineyard; thus here too, when they were not willing to be present at the marriage, then He called others.

What then could be more ungrateful than they, when being bidden to a marriage they rush away? For who would not choose to come to a marriage, and that a King's marriage, and of a King making a marriage for a Son?

And wherefore is it called a marriage? One may say. That you might learn God's tender care, His yearning towards us, the cheerfulness of the state of things, that there is nothing sorrowful there, nor sad, but all things are full of spiritual joy. Therefore also John calls Him a bridegroom, therefore Paul again says, For I have espoused you to one husband; 2 Corinthians 11:2 and, This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Ephesians 5:32

Why then is not the bride said to be espoused to Him, but to the Son? Because she that is espoused to the Son, is espoused to the Father. For it is indifferent in Scripture that the one or the other should be said, because of the identity of the substance.

Hereby He proclaimed the resurrection also. For since in what went before He had spoken of the death, He shows that even after the death, then is the marriage, then the bridegroom.

But not even so do these become better men nor more gentle, than which what can be worse? For this again is a third accusation. The first that they killed the prophets; then the son; afterwards that even when they had slain Him, and were bidden unto the marriage of Him that was slain, by the very one that was slain, they come not, but feign excuses, yokes of oxen, and pieces of ground, and wives. And yet the excuses seem to be reasonable; but hence we learn, though the things which hinder us be necessary, to set the things spiritual at a higher price than all.

And He not suddenly, but a long time before. For, Tell, He says, them that are bidden; and again, Call them that were bidden; which circumstance makes the charge against them heavier. And when were they bidden? By all the prophets; by John again; for unto Christ he would pass all on, saying, He must increase, I must decrease; John 3:30 by the Son Himself again, Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you; and again, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. John 7:37

But not by words only, but also by actions did He bid them, after His ascension by Peter, and those with him. For He that wrought effectually in Peter, it is said, to the apostleship of the circumcision, was mighty also in me towards the Gentiles.

For since on seeing the Son, they were angry and slew Him, He bids them again by His servants. And unto what does He bid them? Unto labors, and toils, and sweat? Nay but unto pleasure. For, My oxen, He says, and my fatlings are killed. See how complete His banquet, how great His munificence.

And not even this shamed them, but the more long-suffering He showed, so much the more were they hardened. For not for press of business, but from making light of it, they did not come.

How then do some bring forward marriages, others yokes of oxen? These things surely are of want of leisure.

By no means, for when spiritual things call us, there is no press of business that has the power of necessity.

And to me they seem moreover to make use of these excuses, putting forward these things as cloke for their negligence. And not this only is the grievous thing, that they came not, but also that which is a far more violent and furious act, to have even beaten them that came, and to have used them despitefully, and to have slain them; this is worse than the former. For those others came, demanding produce and fruits, and were slain; but these, bidding them to the marriage of Him that had been slain by them, and these again are murdered.

What is equal to this madness? This Paul also was laying to their charge, when he said, Who both killed the Lord, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us.

Moreover, that they may not say, He is an adversary of God, and therefore we do not come, hear what they say who are bidding them; that it is the father who is making the marriage, and that it is He who is bidding them.

What then did He after these things? Since they were not willing to come, yea and also slew those that came unto them; He burns up their cities, and sent His armies and slew them.

And these things He says, declaring beforehand the things that took place under Vespasian and Titus, and that they provoked the father also, by not believing in Him; it is the father at any rate who was avenging.

And for this reason let me add, not straightway after Christ was slain did the capture take place, but after forty years, that He might show His long suffering, when they had slain Stephen, when they had put James to death, when they had spitefully entreated the apostles.

Do you see the truth of the event, and its quickness? For while John was yet living, and many other of them that were with Christ, these things came to pass, and they that had heard these words were witnesses of the events.

See then care utterable. He had planted a vineyard; He had done all things, and finished; when His servants had been put to death, He sent other servants; when those had been slain, He sent the son; and when He was put to death, He bids them to the marriage. They would not come. After this He sends other servants, and they slew these also.

Then upon this He slays them, as being incurably diseased. For that they were incurably diseased, was proved not by their acts only, but by the fact, that even when harlots and publicans had believed, they did these things. So that, not by their own crimes alone, but also from what others were able to do aright, these men are condemned,

But if any one should say, that not then were they out of the Gentiles called, I mean, when the apostles had been beaten and had suffered ten thousand things, but straightway after the resurrection (for then He said to them, Go and make disciples of all nations. Matthew 28:19) We would say, that both before the crucifixion, and after the crucifixion, they addressed themselves to them first. For both before the crucifixion, He says to them, Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; Matthew 10:6 and after the crucifixion, so far from forbidding, He even commanded them to address themselves to the Jews. For though He said, Make disciples of all nations, yet when on the point of ascending into Heaven, He declared that unto those first they were to address themselves; For, you shall receive power, says He, after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and unto the uttermost part of the earth; Acts 1:8 and Paul again, He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, was mighty in me also toward the Gentiles. Therefore the apostles also went first unto the Jews, and when they had tarried a long time in Jerusalem, and then had been driven away by them, in this way they were scattered abroad unto the Gentiles.

2. And see thou even herein His bounty; As many as you shall find, says He, bid to the marriage. For before this, as I said, they addressed themselves both to Jews and Greeks, tarrying for the most part in Judaea; but since they continued to lay plots against them, hear Paul interpreting this parable, and saying thus, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you, but since you judge yourselves unworthy, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Therefore Christ also says, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

He knew this indeed even before, but that He might leave them no pretext of a shameless sort of contradiction, although He knew it, to them first He both came and sent, both stopping their mouths, and teaching us to fulfill all our parts, though no one should derive any profit.

Since then they were not worthy, go ye, says He, into the highways, and as many as you shall find, bid; both the common sort, and the outcasts. For because He had said in every way, The harlots and publicans shall inherit heaven; and, The first shall be last, and the last first; He shows that justly do these things come to pass; which more than anything stung the Jews, and goaded them far more grievously than their overthrow, to see those from the Gentiles brought into their privileges, and into far greater than theirs.

Then in order that not even these should put confidence in their faith alone, He discourses unto them also concerning the judgment to be passed upon wicked actions; to them that have not yet believed, of coming unto Him by faith, and to them that have believed, of care with respect to their life. For the garment is life and practice.

And yet the calling was of grace; wherefore then does He take a strict account? Because although to be called and to be cleansed was of grace, yet, when called and clothed in clean garments, to continue keeping them so, this is of the diligence of them that are called.

The being called was not of merit, but of grace. It was fit therefore to make a return for the grace, and not to show forth such great wickedness after the honor. But I have not enjoyed, one may say, so much advantage as the Jews. Nay, but you have enjoyed far greater benefits. For what things were being prepared for them throughout all their time, these you have received at once, not being worthy. Wherefore Paul also says, And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. Romans 15:9 For what things were due to them, these you have received.

Wherefore also great is the punishment appointed for them that have been remiss. For as they did despite by not coming, so also thou by thus sitting down with a corrupt life. For to come in with filthy garments is this namely, to depart hence having one's life impure; wherefore also he was speechless.

Do you see how, although the fact was so manifest, He does not punish at once, until he himself, who has sinned, has passed the sentence? For by having nothing to reply he condemned himself, and so is taken away to the unutterable torments.

For do not now, on hearing of darkness, suppose he is punished by this, by sending into a place where there is no light only, but where there is also weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 22:13 And this He says, indicating the intolerable pains.

Hear ye, as many as having partaken of the mysteries, and having been present at the marriage, clothe your souls with filthy deeds. Hear whence you were called.

From the highway. Being what? Lame and halt in soul, which is a much more grievous thing than the mutilation of the body. Reverence the love of Him, who called you, and let no one continue to have filthy garments, but let each of you busy himself about the clothing of your soul.

Hear, you women; hear, you men; we need not these garments that are bespangled with gold, that adorn our outward parts, but those others, that adorn the inward. Whilst we have these former, it is difficult to put on those latter. It is not possible at the same time to deck both soul and body. It is not possible at the same time both to serve mammon, and to obey Christ as we ought.

Let us put off us therefore this grievous tyranny. For neither if any one were to adorn your house by hanging it with golden curtains, and were to make you sit there in rags, naked, would you endure it with meekness. But lo, now you do this to yourself, decking the house of your soul, I mean the body, with curtains beyond number, but leaving the soul itself to sit in rags. Do you not know that the king ought to be adorned more than the city? So therefore while for the city hangings are prepared of linen, for the king there is a purple robe and a diadem. Even so do thou wrap the body with a much meaner dress, but the mind do thou clothe in purple, and put a crown on it, and set it on a high and conspicuous chariot. For now you are doing the opposite, decking the city in various ways, but suffering the king, the mind, to be dragged bound after the brute passions.

Do you not remember, that you are bidden to a marriage, and to God's marriage? Do you not consider how the soul that is bidden ought to enter into those chambers, clad, and decked with fringes of gold?

3. Will you that I show you them that are clad thus, them that have on a marriage garment?

Call to mind those holy persons, of whom I discoursed to you of late, them that wear garments of hair, them that dwell in the deserts. These above all are the wearers of the garments of that wedding; this is evident from hence, that how many soever purple robes thou were to give them, they would not choose to receive them; but much as a king, if any one were to take the beggar's rags, and exhort him to put them on, would abhor the clothing, so would those persons also his purple robe. And from no other cause have they this feeling, but because of knowing the beauty of their own raiment. Therefore even that purple robe they spurn like the spider's web. For these things has their sackcloth taught them; for indeed they are far more exalted and more glorious than the very king who reigns.

And if you were able to open the doors of the mind, and to look upon their soul, and all their ornaments within, surely you would fall down upon the earth, not bearing the glory of their beauty, and the splendor of those garments, and the lightning brightness of their conscience.

For we could tell also of men of old, great and to be admired; but since visible examples lead on more those of grosser souls, therefore do I send you even to the tabernacles of those holy persons. For they have nothing sorrowful, but as if in heaven they had pitched their tents, even so are they encamped far off the wearisome things of this present life, in campaign against the devils; and as in choirs, so do they war against him. Therefore I say, they have fixed their tents, and have fled from cities, and markets, and houses. For he that wars cannot sit in a house, but he must make his habitation of a temporary kind, as on the point of removing straightway, and so dwell. Such are all those persons, contrary to us. For we indeed live not as in a camp, but as in a city at peace.

For who in a camp ever lays foundation, and builds himself a house, which he is soon after to leave? There is not one; but should any one attempt it, he is put to death as a traitor. Who in a camp buys acres of land, and makes for himself trades? There is not one, and very reasonably. For you have come here, they would say, to fight, not to traffic; why then do you trouble yourself about the place, which in a little time you will leave? When we are gone away to our country, do these things.

The same do I now say to you also. When we have removed to the city that is above, do these things: or rather you will have no need of labors there; after that the king will do all things for you. But here it is enough to dig a ditch round only, and to fix a palisade, but of building houses there is no need.

Hear what was the life of the Scythians, that lived in their wagons, such, as they say, are the habits of the shepherd tribes. So ought Christians to live; to go about the world, warring against the devil, rescuing the captives held in subjection by him, and to be in freedom from all worldly things.

Why do you prepare a house, O man, that you may bind yourself more? Why do you bury a treasure, and invite the enemy against yourself? Why do you compass yourself with walls, and prepare a prison for yourself?

But if these things seem to you to be hard, let us go away unto the tents of those men, that by their deeds we may learn the easiness thereof. For they having set up huts, if they must depart from these, depart like as soldiers, having left their camp in peace. For so likewise are they encamped, or rather even much more beautifully.

For indeed it is more pleasant to behold a desert containing huts of monks in close succession, than soldiers stretching the canvas in a camp, and fixing spears, and suspending from the point of the spears saffron garments, and a multitude of men having heads of brass, and the bosses of the shields glistening much, and men armed all throughout with steel, and royal courts hastily made, and ground levelled far, and men dining and piping. For neither is this spectacle so delightful as that of which I now speak.

For if we were to go away into the wilderness, and look at the tents of Christ's soldiers, we shall see not canvas stretched, neither points of spears, nor golden garments making a royal pavilion; but like as if any one upon an earth much larger than this earth, yea infinite, had stretched out many heavens, strange and awful would be the sight he showed; even so may one see here.

For in nothing are their lodging-places in a condition inferior to the heavens; for the angels lodge with them, and the Lord of the angels. For if they came to Abraham, a man having a wife, and bringing up children, because they saw him hospitable; when they find much more abundant virtue, and a man delivered from the body, and in the flesh disregarding the flesh, much more do they tarry there, and celebrate the choral feast that becomes them. For there is moreover a table among them pure from all covetousness, and full of self-denial.

No streams of blood are among them, nor cutting up of flesh, nor heaviness of head, nor dainty cooking, neither are there unpleasing smells of meat among them, nor disagreeable smoke, neither runnings and tumults, and disturbances, and wearisome clamors; but bread and water, the latter from a pure fountain, the former from honest labor. But if any time they should be minded to feast more sumptuously, their sumptuousness consists of fruits, and greater is the pleasure there than at royal tables. There is no fear there, or trembling; no ruler accuses, no wife provokes, no child casts into sadness, no disorderly mirth dissipates, no multitude of flatterers puffs up; but the table is an angel's table free from all such turmoil.

And for a couch they have grass only beneath them, like as Christ did when making a dinner in the wilderness. And many of them do this, not being even under shelter, but for a roof they have heaven, and the moon instead of the light of a candle, not wanting oil, nor one to attend to it; on them alone does it shine worthily from on high.

4. This table even angels from heaven beholding are delighted and pleased. For if over one sinner that repents they rejoice, over so many just men imitating them, what will they not do? There are not master and slave; all are slaves, all free men. And do not think the saying to be a dark proverb, for they are indeed slaves one of another, and masters one of another.

They have no occasion to be in sadness when evening has overtaken them, as many men feel, revolving the anxious thoughts that spring from the evils of the day. They have no occasion after their supper to be careful about robbers, and to shut the doors, and to put bars against them, neither to dread the other ills, of which many are afraid, extinguishing their candles with strict care, lest a spark anywhere should set the house on fire.

And their conversation again is full of the same calm. For they talk not of these things, whereof we discourse, that are nothing to us; such a one is made governor, such a one has ceased to be governor; such a one is dead, and another has succeeded to the inheritance, and all such like, but always about the things to come do they speak and seek wisdom; and as though dwelling in another world, as though they had migrated unto heaven itself, as living there, even so all their conversation is about the things there, about Abraham's bosom, about the crowns of the saints, about the choiring with Christ; and of things present they have neither any memory nor thought, but like as we should not deign to speak at all of what the ants do in their holes and clefts; so neither do they of what we do; but about the King that is above, about the war in which they are engaged, about the devil's crafts, about the good deeds which the saints have achieved.

Wherein therefore are we different from ants, when compared with them? For like as they care for the things of the body, so also do we; and would it were for these alone: but now it is even for things far worse. For not for necessary things only do we care like them, but also for things superfluous. For those insects pursue a business free from all blame, but we follow after all covetousness, and not even the ways of ants do we imitate, but the ways of wolves, but the ways of leopards, or rather we are even worse than these.

For to them nature has assigned that they should be thus fed, but us God has honored with speech, and a sense of equity, and we have become worse than the wild beasts.

And whereas we are worse than the brutes, those men are equal to the angels, being strangers and pilgrims as to the things here; and all things in them are made different from us, clothing, and food, and house, and shoes, and speech. And if any one were to hear them conversing and us, then he would know full well, how they indeed are citizens of heaven, but we are not worthy so much as of the earth.

So that therefore, when any one invested with rank has come unto them, then is all inflated pride found utterly vain. For the laborer there, and he that has no experience of worldly affairs, sits near him that is a commander of troops, and prides himself on his authority, upon the grass, upon a mean cushion. For there are none to extol him, none to puff him up; but the same result takes place, as if any one were to go to a goldsmith, and a garden of roses, for he receives some brightness from the gold and from the roses; so they too, gaining a little from the splendor of these, are delivered from their former arrogance. And like as if any were to go upon a high place, though he be exceedingly short, he appears high; so these too, coming unto their exalted minds, appear like them, so long as they abide there, but when they are gone down are abased again, on descending from that height.

A king is nothing among them, a governor is nothing; but like as we, when children are playing at these things, laugh; so do they also utterly spurn the inflamed pride of them who strut without. And this is evident from hence, that if any one would give them a kingdom to possess in security, they would never take it; yet they would take it, unless their thoughts were upon what is greater than it, unless they accounted the thing to be but for a season.

What then? Shall we not go over unto blessedness so great? Shall we not come unto these angels; shall we not receive clean garments, and join in the ceremonies of this wedding feast; but shall we continue begging, in no respect in a better condition than the poor in the streets, or rather in a state far worse and more wretched? For much worse than these are they that are rich in evil ways, and it is better to beg than to spoil, for the one has excuse, but the other brings punishment; and the beggar in no degree offends God, but this other both men and God; and undergoes the labors of rapine, but all the enjoyment thereof other men often reap.

Knowing then these things, let us lay aside all covetousness, and covet the things above, with great earnestness taking the kingdom by force. Matthew 11:12 For it cannot be, it cannot be that any one who is remiss should enter therein.

But God grant that we all having become earnest, and watchful may attain thereto, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might, world without end. Amen.

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