

Homily 70 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 70 on Matthew explores the challenges posed to Jesus by the Pharisees and Sadducees, emphasizing the importance of understanding Scripture and the nature of the resurrection.

Scripture: Matthew 8:22, Matthew 22:16, Matthew 22:29, Matthew 22:32-33, Luke 20:36, Romans 13:7, 1 Corinthians 7:31, Galatians 5:24

Topics: "Hypocrisy Exposed", "Resurrection Truth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the Pharisees' attempt to entangle Jesus in His words, highlighting their wicked intentions and hidden craftiness. Despite their flattery and deceitful questions, Jesus exposes their hypocrisy and reveals the secrets of their hearts with wisdom and severity. He silences their wickedness and teaches about rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, demonstrating His divine knowledge and authority. Jesus also addresses the Sadducees' question about the resurrection, revealing their ignorance of the Scriptures and the power of God, and affirming the reality of the resurrection and the eternal life with God.

Transcript

Matt. XXII. 15.

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle Him in His talk.

Then. When? When most of all they ought to have been moved to compunction, when they should have been amazed at His love to man, when they should have feared the things to come, when from the past they ought to have believed touching the future also. For indeed the things that had been said cried aloud in actual fulfillment. I mean, that publicans and harlots believed, and prophets and righteous men were slain, and from these things they ought not to have gainsaid touching their own destruction, but even to believe and to be sobered.

But nevertheless not even so do their wicked acts cease, but travail and proceed further. And forasmuch as they could not lay hands on Him (for they feared the multitude), they took another way with the intention of bringing Him into danger, and making Him guilty of crimes against the state.

For they sent out unto Him their disciples with the Herodians saying, Master, we know that you are true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither do you care for any man; for you regard not the person of

men. Tell us therefore, What do you think? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not? Matthew 22:16-17

For they were now tributaries, their state having passed under the rule of the Romans. Forasmuch then as they saw that Theudas and Judas Acts 5:36-37 with their companies for this cause were put to death, as having prepared for a revolt, they were minded to bring Him too by these words into such a suspicion. Therefore they sent both their own disciples, and Herod's soldiers, digging, as they thought, a precipice on either side, and in every direction setting the snare, so that, whatever He should say, they might lay hold of it; and if He should answer in favor of the Herodians, themselves might find fault with Him, but if in their favor, the others should accuse Him. And yet He had given the didrachmas, but they knew not that.

And in either way indeed they expected to lay hold of Him; but they desired rather that He should say something against the Herodians. Wherefore they send their disciples also to urge Him thereto by their presence, that they might deliver Him to the governor as an usurper. For this Luke also intimates and shows, by saying, that they asked also in the presence of the multitude, so that the testimony should be the stronger.

But the result was altogether opposite; for in a larger body of spectators they afforded the demonstration of their folly.

And see their flattery, and their hidden craft. We know, their words are, that You are true. How said ye then, He is a deceiver, and deceives the people, and has a devil, and is not of God? how a little while before did ye devise to slay Him?

But they are at everything, whatsoever their craft against Him may suggest. For since, when a little before they had said in self will, By what authority do You do these things? Matthew 21:23 they did not meet with an answer to the question, they look to puff Him up by their flattery, and to persuade Him to say something against the established laws, and opposed to the prevailing government.

Wherefore also they testify the truth unto Him, confessing what was really so, nevertheless, not with an upright mind, nor willingly; and add thereto, saying, You care not for any man. See how plainly they are desiring to urge Him to these sayings, that would make Him both offend Herod, and incur the suspicion of being an usurper, as standing up against the laws, so that they might punish Him, as a mover of sedition, and an usurper. For in saying, You care not for any man, and, You regard not the person of man, they were hinting at Herod and Cæsar.

Tell us therefore, what thinkest Thou? Now ye honor Him, and esteem Him a Teacher, having despised and insulted Him oftentimes, when He was discoursing of the things that concern your salvation. Whence also they have become confederates.

And see their craftiness. They say not, Tell us what is good, what is expedient, what is lawful? But, What thinkest Thou? So much did they look to this one object, to betray Him, and to set Him at enmity with the rulers. And Mark declaring this, and more plainly discovering their self-will, and their murderous disposition, affirms them to have said, Shall we give Cæsar tribute, or shall we not give? Mark 12:15 So that they were breathing anger, and travailing with a plot against Him, yet they feigned respect.

What then says He? Why do you tempt me, you hypocrites? Do you see how He talks with them with more than usual severity? For since their wickedness was now complete and manifest, He cuts the deeper, first confounding and silencing them, by publishing their secret thoughts, and making it manifest to all with

what kind of intent they are coming unto Him.

And these things He did, repulsing their wickedness, so that they might not suffer hurt in attempting the same things again. And yet their words were full of much respect, for they both called Him Master, and bore witness to His truth, and that He was no respecter of persons; but being God, He was deceived by none of these things. Wherefore they also ought to have conjectured, that the rebuke was not the result of conjecture, but a sign of His knowing their secret thoughts.

2. He stopped not, however, at the rebuke, although it was enough merely to have convicted them of their purpose, and to have put them to shame for their wickedness; but He stops not at this, but in another way closes their mouths; for, Show me, says He, the tribute money. And when they had shown it, as He ever does, by their tongue He brings out the decision, and causes them to decide, that it is lawful; which was a clear and plain victory. So that, when He asks, not from ignorance does He ask, but because it is His will to cause them to be bound by their own answers. For when, on being asked, Whose is the image? they said, Cæsar's; He says, Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. For this is not to give but to render, and this He shows both by the image, and by the superscription.

Then that they might not say, You are subjecting us to men, He added, And unto God the things that are God's. For it is possible both to fulfill to men their claims and to give unto God the things that are due to God from us. Wherefore Paul also says, Render unto all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear. Romans 13:7

But you, when you hear, Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, know that He is speaking only of those things, which are no detriment to godliness; since if it be any such thing as this, such a thing is no longer Cæsar's tribute, but the devil's.

When they heard these things, their mouths were stopped, and they marvelled at His wisdom. Ought they not then to have believed, ought they not to have been amazed. For indeed, He gave them proof of His Godhead, by revealing the secrets of their hearts, and with gentleness did He silence them.

What then? Did they believe? By no means, but they left Him, and went their way; and after them, came to Him the Sadducees.

O folly! When the others had been put to silence, these made the attack, when they ought to have been the more backward. But such is the nature of rashness, shameless, and importunate, and attempting things impossible. Therefore the evangelist also, amazed at their folly, signified this very thing, by saying, On that day came to Him. On that day. On what day? In which He had convicted their craftiness, and put them to shame. But who are these? A sect of the Jews different from the Pharisees, and much worse than they, who said, that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit. Acts 23:8 For these were some of a grosser sort, and eager after the things of the body. For there were many sects even among the Jews. Wherefore Paul also says, I am a Pharisee, of the strictest sect among us.

And they say nothing indeed directly about a resurrection; but they feign a story, and make up a case, which, as I suppose, never so much as had an existence; thinking to drive Him to perplexity, and desiring to overthrow both things, both the existence of a resurrection, and of such a resurrection.

And again, these too attack Him with a show of moderation, saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, not having children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with

us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased; and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven?

See Him answering these like a teacher. For though out of craft they came unto Him, yet was their question rather one of ignorance. Therefore neither does He say unto them, You hypocrites.

Moreover, in order that He might not blame, saying, Wherefore had seven one wife? they add the authority of Moses; although, as I have said before, it was a fiction, in my judgment at least. For the third would not have taken her, when he saw the two bridegrooms dead; or if the third, yet not the fourth or the fifth; and if even these, much more the sixth or the seventh would not have come unto the woman, but have shrunk from her. For such is the nature of the Jews. For if now many have this feeling, much more then had they; when at least, even without this, they often avoided marrying in this way, and that when the law was constraining them. Thus, at any rate, Ruth, that Moabitish woman, was thrust off to him that was further off from her kindred; and Tamar too was thus compelled to obtain, by stealth, seed from her husband's kinsman.

And wherefore did they not feign two or three, but seven? In order the more abundantly to bring derision, as they thought, upon the resurrection. Wherefore they further say, they all had her, as driving Him into some difficulty.

What then says Christ? He replies unto both, as taking His stand not against the words, but the purpose, and on every occasion revealing the secrets of their hearts; and at one time exposing them, at another time leaving the refutation of them that question Him to their conscience. See, at any rate here, how He proves both points, as well that there will be a resurrection, as that it will not be such a resurrection as they suspect.

For what says He? You do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. Matthew 22:29 For since, as if they knew them, they put forward Moses and the law, He shows that this question is that of men very ignorant of the Scriptures. For hence also arose their tempting Him, from their being ignorant of the Scriptures, and from their not knowing the power of God as they ought.

For what marvel then is it, He says, if you tempt me, who am as yet unknown to you, when at least ye know not so much as the power of God, of which you have had so much experience, and neither from common sense nor from the Scriptures have become acquainted with it; if indeed even common sense causes us to know this, that to God all things are possible. And in the first place He answers to the question asked. For since this was the cause for their not believing a resurrection, that they think the order of things is like this, He cures the cause, then the symptom also (for thence arose the disease too), and shows the manner of the resurrection. For in the resurrection, says He, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels of God in Heaven. But Luke says, As Sons of God. Luke 20:36

If then they marry not, the question is vain. But not because they do not marry, therefore are they angels, but because they are as angels, therefore they do not marry. By this He removed many other difficulties also, all which things Paul intimated by one word, saying, For the fashion of this world passes away. 1 Corinthians 7:31

And by these words He declared how great a thing the resurrection is; and that moreover there is a resurrection, He proves. And indeed this too was demonstrated at the same time by what He had said,

nevertheless over and above He adds again to His word by what He says now. For neither at their question only did He stop, but at their thought. Thus when they are not dealing with great craft, but are asking in ignorance, He teaches even over and above, but when it is of wickedness only, not even to their question does He answer.

And again by Moses does He stop their mouths, since they too had brought forward Moses; and He says, But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Not of them that are not His meaning is, and that are utterly blotted out, and are to rise no more. For He said not, I was, but, I am; of them that are, and them that live. For like as Adam, although he lived on the day that he ate of the tree, died in the sentence: even so also these, although they had died, lived in the promise of the resurrection.

How then does He say elsewhere, That He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living? Romans 14:9 But this is not contrary to that. For here He speaks of the dead, who are also themselves to live. And moreover too, I am the God of Abraham, is another thing from, That He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. He knew of another death too, concerning which He says, Let the dead bury their dead. Matthew 8:22

And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His doctrine. Matthew 22:33 Yet not even here the Sadducees; but these go away defeated, while the impartial multitude reap the benefit.

Since then the resurrection is like this, come let us do all things, that we may obtain the first honors there. But, if you will, let us show you some even before the resurrection here pursuing and reaping these blessings, again having made our resort to the deserts. For again will I enter upon the same discourse, since I see you listening with more pleasure.

Let us behold then today also the spiritual camps, let us behold their pleasure unalloyed with fear. For not with spears are they encamped like the soldiers, for at this point I lately ended my discourse, neither with shields and breastplates; but bare of all these will you see them, yet achieving such things, as not even with arms do they.

And if you are able to observe, come and stretch forth your hand to me, and let us go unto this war, both of us, and let us see their battle array. For these too fight every day, and slay their adversaries, and conquer all the lusts that are plotting against us; and you will see these cast out on the ground, and not able so much as to struggle, but proving by very deed that saying of the apostle, They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Galatians 5:24

Do you see a multitude of dead lying there, slain by the sword of the Spirit? Therefore in that place is no drunkenness nor gluttony. And their table proves it, and the trophy that is set thereon. For drunkenness and gluttony lie dead, put to the rout by the drinking of water, though this be multiform, and a many-headed monster. For like as in the fabled Scylla and Hydra, so in drunkenness may one see many heads, on one side fornication growing up, on another wrath; on one hand sloth, on another lawless lusts; but all these things are taken away. And yet all those other armies, though they get the better in ten thousand wars, are taken captive by these; and neither arms, nor spears, nor whatever else there may be, is able to stand against these phalanxes; but the very giants, the heroes, those that do countless brave deeds, you will find without bonds bound by sleep and drunkenness, without slaughter or wounds lying like the wounded, or rather in more grievous case. For those at least struggle; but these do not even this, but straightway give up.

Do you see that this host is greater and more to be admired? For the enemies that got the better of the others it destroys by its mere will. For they do so weaken the mother of all their evils, that she cannot even trouble them any more; and the leader being overthrown, and the head removed, the rest of the body also lies still.

And this victory one may see each of them, that abide there, achieving. For it is not as in these wars of ours, where, if any enemy has received a blow from one, he is no more grievous to another, having been once overthrown; but it is necessary for all to smite this monster; and he that has not smitten and overthrown her, is surely troubled by her.

Do you see a glorious victory? For such a trophy as the hosts in all parts of the world having met together have not power to erect, this each one of those men erects; and all things that from the army of drunkenness lie mingled together wounded, delirious words of frenzy, insane thoughts, unpleasing haughtiness. And they imitate their own Lord, at whom the Scripture marvelling says, He shall drink of the brook in the way, therefore shall He lift up the head.

Would ye see also another multitude of dead? Let us see the lusts that arise from luxurious living, those that are cherished by the makers of sauces, by the cooks, the furnishers of feasts, the confectioners. For I am ashamed indeed to speak of all; however, I will tell of the birds from Phasis, the soups that are mixed from various things: the moist, the dry dishes, the laws made about these things. For like as if ordering some city and marshalling hosts, even so these too make laws, and ordain such a thing first, and such a thing second, and some bring in first birds roasted on the embers, filled within with fish; and others make of other material the beginnings of these unlawful feasts; and there is much rivalry about these things, about quality, and about order, and about quantity; and they take a pride in the things, for which they ought to bury themselves for shame; some saying that they have spent the half of the day, some all of it, some that they have added the night too. Behold, O wretched man, the measure of your belly, and be ashamed of your unmeasured earnestness!

But there is nothing like this among those angels; but all these desires also are dead. For their meals are not unto fullness, and unto luxurious living, but unto necessity. No bird hunters are there, no fishermen, but bread and water. But this confusion, and the disturbance, and the turmoils, are all removed from thence, alike from the house and from the body, and great is the haven, but among these great the tempest.

Burst open now in thought the belly of them who feed on such things, and you will see the vast refuse, and the unclean channel, and the whited sepulchre.

But what come after these I am even ashamed to tell, the disagreeable eructations, the vomitings, the discharges downwards and upwards.

But go and see even these desires dead there, and those more violent lusts that spring from these; I mean, those of impurity. For these too you will see all overthrown, with their horses, with their beasts of burden. For the beast of burden, and the weapon, and the horse of a filthy deed, is a filthy word. But you will see such like horse and rider together, and their weapons thrown down; but here quite the contrary, and souls cast down dead. But not at their meal only is the victory of these holy men glorious, but in the other things also, in money, in glory, in envy, in all diseases of the soul.

Surely does not this host seem to you mightier than that, and the meal better? Nay, who will gainsay it? None, not even of those persons themselves, though he be very mad. For this guides us on to Heaven, that drags to hell; this the devil lays out, that Christ; for this luxury gives laws, and intemperance, for that self-denial and sobriety, here Christ is present, there the devil. For where there is drunkenness, the devil is there; where there are filthy words, where there is surfeiting, there the devils hold their choirs. Such a table had that rich man, therefore not even of a drop of water was he master.

But these have not such a table, but they already practise the ways of the angels. They marry not, they are not given in marriage, neither do they sleep excessively, nor live luxuriously, but except a few things they are even bodiless.

Now who is there that so easily overcomes his enemies as he that sets up a trophy while at his dinner? Therefore also the prophet says, You have prepared a table before me, in the presence of them that trouble me. One could not be wrong in repeating this oracle about this table. For nothing so troubles a soul as disorderly concupiscence, and luxury, and drunkenness, and the evils that spring from these; and this they know full well who have had experience thereof.

And if you were to learn also, whence this table is procured, and whence that; then you would see well the difference between each. Whence then is this procured. From countless tears, from widows defrauded, from orphans despoiled; but the other from honest labor. And this table is like to a fair and well-favored woman, needing nothing external, but having her beauty from nature; but that to some ugly and ill-favored harlot, wearing much paint, but not able to disguise her deformity, but the nearer she is, the more convicted. For this too, when it is nearer to him that is at it, then shows its ugliness more. For look not I tell you, at the banqueters, as they come only, but also as they go away, and then you will see its ugliness. For that, as being free, suffers them that come unto it to say nothing shameful; but this nothing seemly, as being a harlot, and dishonored. This seeks the profit of him that is at it, that the hurt. And one permits not to offend God, the other permits not but that we must offend Him.

Let us go away therefore unto those men. Thence we shall learn with how many bonds we are encompassed. Thence shall we learn to set before ourselves a table full of countless blessings, most sweet, without cost, delivered from care, free from envy and jealousy and every disease, and full of good hope, and having its many trophies. No turmoil of soul there, no sorrow, no wrath; all is calm, all is peace.

For tell me not of the silence of them that serve in the houses of the rich, but of the clamor of them that dine; I mean, not that which they make one to another (for this too is worthy of derision), but that within, that in the soul, that brings on them a great captivity, the tumults of the thoughts, the sleet, the darkness, the tempest, by which all things are mingled and confused, and are like to some night battle. But not in the monks' tents are such things as these; but great is the calm, great the quietness. And that table is succeeded by a sleep that is like death, but this by sobriety and wakefulness; that by punishment, this by the kingdom of heaven, and the immortal rewards.

This then let us follow, that we may enjoy also the fruits thereof; unto which God grant we may all attain, 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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