

# Homily 71 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of loving God and loving one's neighbor, and warns against the dangers of vainglory and seeking human praise.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:1, Matthew 22:37, John 21:16, Acts 2:29, 1 Corinthians 13:4

**Topics:** "Loving God", "True Charity"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves, highlighting how these commandments sum up the entire law and prophets. He emphasizes that true charity does not seek recognition or praise from others but is a mystery that should be done in secret to receive God's approval. Chrysostom warns against the dangers of vainglory, especially in acts of mercy like almsgiving, and encourages seeking God's praise alone to avoid losing eternal blessings. He teaches that true mercy is a sacred act that should be kept hidden, as God sees and rewards what is done in secret.

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## Transcript

Matt. XXII. 34-36.

But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together; and one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Again does the evangelist express the cause, for which they ought to have held their peace, and marks their boldness by this also. How and in what way? Because when those others were put to silence, these again assail Him. For when they ought even for this to hold their peace, they strive to urge further their former endeavors, and put forward the lawyer, not desiring to learn, but making a trial of Him, and ask, What is the first commandment?

For since the first commandment was this, You shall love the Lord your God, thinking that He would afford them some handle, as though He would amend it, for the sake of showing that Himself too was God, they propose the question. What then says Christ? Indicating from what they were led to this; from having no charity, from pining with envy, from being seized by jealousy, He says, You shall love the Lord your God. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:37-39

But wherefore like this? Because this makes the way for that, and by it is again established; For every one that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light; John 3:20 and again, The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. And what in consequence of this? They are corrupt, and become abominable in their ways. And again, The love of money is the root of all evils; which while some coveted after they have erred from the faith; 1 Timothy 6:10 and, He that loves me, will keep my commandment.

But His commandments, and the sum of them, are, You shall love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself. If therefore to love God is to love one's neighbor, For if you love me, He says, O Peter, feed my sheep, John 21:16-17 but to love one's neighbor works a keeping of the commandments, with reason does He say, On these hang all the law and the prophets. Matthew 22:40

So therefore what He did before, this He does here also. I mean, that both there, when asked about the manner of the resurrection, He also taught a resurrection, instructing them beyond what they inquired; and here, being asked the first commandment, He rehearses the second also, which is not much inferior to that (for though second, it is like that), intimating to them, whence the question had arisen, that it was from hatred. For charity envies not. 1 Corinthians 13:4 By this He shows Himself to be submissive both to the law and to the prophets.

But wherefore does Matthew say that he asked, tempting Him, but Mark the contrary? For when Jesus, he says, saw that he answered discreetly, He said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God. Mark 12:34

They are not contradicting each other, but indeed fully agreeing. For he asked indeed, tempting, at the beginning, but being benefitted by the answer, was commended. For not at the beginning did He commend him, but when he had said, That to love his neighbor is more than whole burnt sacrifices, then He says, You are not far from the kingdom; because he overlooked low things, and embraced the first principle of virtue. For indeed all those are for the sake of this, as well the Sabbath as the rest.

And not even so did He make His commendation perfect, but yet deficient. For His saying, You are not far off, indicates that he is yet falling short, that he might seek after what was deficient.

But if, when He said, There is one God, and there is none other but He, He commended him, wonder not, but by this too observe, how He answers according to the opinion of them that come unto Him. For although men say ten thousand things about Christ unworthy of His glory, yet this at any rate they will not dare to say, that He is not God at all. Wherefore then does He praise him that said, that beside the Father, there is no other God?

Not excepting Himself from being God; away with the thought; but since it was not yet time to disclose His Godhead, He suffers him to remain in the former doctrine, and praises him for knowing well the ancient principles, so as to make him fit for the doctrine of the New Testament, which He is bringing in its season.

And besides, the saying, There is one God, and there is none other but He, both in the Old Testament and everywhere, is spoken not to the rejection of the Son, but to make the distinction from idols. So that when praising this man also, who had thus spoken, He praises him in this mind.

Then since He had answered, He asks also in turn, What think ye of Christ, whose Son is He? They say unto Him, The Son of David.

See after how many miracles, after how many signs, after how many questions, after how great a display of His unanimity with the Father, as well in words, as in deeds; after having praised this man that said, that there is one God, He asks the question, that they may not be able to say, that He did miracles indeed, yet was an adversary to the law, and a foe to God.

Therefore, after so many things, He asks these questions, secretly leading them on to confess Him also to be God. And the disciples He asked first what the others say, and then themselves; but these not so; for surely they would have said a deceiver, and a wicked one, as speaking all things without fear. So for this cause He inquires for the opinion of these men themselves.

For since He was now about to go on to His passion, He sees forth the prophecy that plainly proclaims Him to be Lord; and not as having come to do this without occasion, nor as having made this His aim, but from a reasonable cause.

For having asked them first, since they answered not the truth concerning Him (for they said He was a mere man), to overthrow their mistaken opinion, He thus introduces David proclaiming His Godhead. For they indeed supposed that He was a mere man, wherefore also they said, the Son of David; but He to correct this brings in the prophet witnessing to His being Lord, and the genuineness of His Sonship, and His equality in honor with His Father.

And not even at this does He stop, but in order to move them to fear, He adds what follows also, saying, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool; that at least in this way He might gain them over.

And that they may not say, that it was in flattery he so called Him, and that this was a human judgment, see what He says, How then does David in spirit call Him Lord? See how submissively He introduces the sentence and judgment concerning Himself. First, He had said, What do you think? Whose Son is He? so by a question to bring them to an answer. Then since they said, the Son of David, He said not, And yet David says these things, but again in this order of a question, How then does David in spirit call Him Lord? in order that the sayings might not give offense to them. Wherefore neither did He say, What think ye of me, but of Christ. For this reason the apostles also reasoned submissively, saying, Let us speak freely of the Patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried. Acts 2:29

And He Himself too in like manner for this cause introduces the doctrine in the way of question and inference, saying, How then does David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on my right hand, until I make Your foes Your footstool; Matthew 22:44 and again, If David then call Him Lord, how is He then his Son, Matthew 22:45 not taking away the fact that He is his Son, away with the thought; for He would not then have reproved Peter for this, but to correct their secret thoughts. So that when He says, How is He his Son? He means this, not so as you say. For they said, that He is Son only, and not also Lord. And this after the testimony, and then submissively, If David then call Him Lord, how is He his Son?

But, nevertheless, even when they had heard these things, they answered nothing, for neither did they wish to learn any of the things that were needful. Wherefore He Himself adds and says, that He is his Lord. Or rather not even this very thing does He say without support, but having taken the prophet with Him, because of His being exceedingly distrusted by them, and evil reported of among them. To which fact we ought to have special regard, and if anything be said by Him that is lowly and submissive, not to be offended, for the cause is this, with many other things also, that He talks with them in condescension.

Wherefore now also He delivers His doctrine in the manner of question and answer; but He darkly intimates even in this way His dignity. For it was not as much to be called Lord of the Jews, as of David.

But mark thou also, I pray you, how seasonable it is. For when He had said, There is one Lord, then He spoke of Himself that He is Lord, and showed it by prophecy, no more by His works only. And He shows the Father Himself taking vengeance upon them in His behalf, for He says, Until I make Your enemies Your footstool, and great unanimity even hereby on the part of Him that begot Him towards Himself, and honor. And upon His reasonings with them He does set this end high and great, and sufficient to close fast their mouths.

For they were silent from thenceforth, not willingly, but from their having nothing to say; and they received so deadly a blow, as no longer to dare to attempt the same things any more. For, no one, it is said, dared from that day forth ask Him any more questions. Matthew 22:46

And this was no little advantage to the multitude. Therefore also unto them does He henceforth direct His word, having removed the wolves, and having repulsed their plots.

For those men gained nothing, taken captive by vainglory, and having fallen upon this terrible passion. For terrible is this passion and many-headed, for some set their heart upon power for the sake of this, some on wealth, some on strength. But proceeding in order it goes on unto almsgiving also, and fasting, and prayers, and teaching, and many are the heads of this monster.

But to be vainglorious indeed about those other things is nothing wonderful; but to be so about fasting and prayer, this is strange and lamentable.

But that we may not again blame only, come and let us tell the means, by which we shall avoid this. Against whom shall we prepare to contend first, against those that are vainglorious of money, or those of dress, or those of places of power, or those of sciences, or those of art, or those of their person, or those of beauty, or those of ornaments, or those of cruelty, or those of humanity and almsgiving, or those of wickedness, or those of death, or those after death? For indeed, as I have said, this passion has many links, and goes on beyond our life. For such a one, it is said, is dead, and that he may be held in admiration, has charged that such and such things be done; and therefore such a one is poor, such a one rich.

For the grievous thing is this, that even of opposite things is it made up.

Against whom then shall we stand, and let ourselves in array first? For one and the same discourse suffices not against all. Will ye then that it be against them that are vainglorious about almsgiving?

To me at least it seems well; for exceedingly do I love this thing, and am pained at seeing it marred, and vainglory plotting against it, like a pandering nurse against some royal damsel. For she feeds her in deed, but for disgrace and mischief, prostituting her and commanding her to despise her father; but to deck herself to please unholy and often despicable men; and invests her with such a dress, as strangers wish, disgraceful, and dishonorable, not such as the father.

Come now, then, let us take our aim against these; and let there be an almsgiving made in abundance for display to the multitude. Surely then, first vainglory leads her out of her Father's chamber. And whereas her Father requires not to appear so much as to the left hand, Matthew 6:3 she displays her to the slaves, and to the vulgar, that have not even known her.

Do you see a harlot, and pander, casting her into the love of foolish men, that according as they require, so she may order herself? Do you desire to see how it renders such a soul not a harlot only, but insane also?

Mark then her mind. For when she lets go heaven and runs after fugitives and menial slaves, pursuing through streets and lanes them that hate her, the ugly and deformed, them that are not willing so much as to look at her, them that, when she burns with love towards them, hate her, what can be more insane than this? For no one do the multitude hate so much, as those that want the glory they have to bestow. Countless accusations at least do they frame against them, and the result is the same, as if any one were to bring down a virgin daughter of the king from the royal throne, and to require her to prostitute herself to gladiators, who abhorred her. These then, as much as you pursue them, so much do they turn away from you; but God, if you seek the glory that comes from Him, so much the more both draws you unto Himself, and commends you, and great is the reward He renders unto you.

But if you are minded in another way also to discern the mischief thereof, when you give for display and ostentation, consider how great the sorrow that then comes upon you, and how continual the desponding, while Christ's voice is heard in your ears, saying, Matthew 6:1 You have lost all your reward. For in every matter indeed vainglory is a bad thing, yet most of all in beneficence, for it is the utmost cruelty, making a show of the calamities of others, and all but upbraiding those in poverty. For if to mention one's own good actions is to upbraid, what do you think it is to publish them even to many others.

How then shall we escape the danger? If we learn how to give alms, if we see after whose good report we are to seek. For tell me, who has the skill of almsgiving? Plainly, it is God, who has made known the thing, who best of all knows it, and practises it without limit. What then? If you are learning to be a wrestler, to whom do you look? Or to whom do you display your doings in the wrestling school, to the seller of herbs, and of fish, or to the trainer? And yet they are many, and he is one. What then, if while he admires you, others deride you, will you not with him deride them?

What, if you are learning to box, will you not look in like manner to him who knows how to teach this? And if you are practising oratory, will you not accept the praise of the teacher of rhetoric, and despise the rest.

How then is it other than absurd, in other arts to look to the teacher only, but here to do the contrary? Although the loss be not equal. For there, if you wrestle according to the opinion of the multitude, and not that of the teacher, the loss is in the wrestling; but here it is in eternal life. You have become like to God in giving alms; be thou then like Him in not making a display. For even He said, when healing, that they should tell no man.

But do you desire to be called merciful among men? And what is the gain? The gain is nothing; but the loss infinite. For these very persons, whom you call to be witnesses, become robbers of your treasures that are in the heavens; or rather not these, but ourselves, who spoil our own possessions, and scatter what we have laid up above.

O new calamity! This strange passion. Where moth corrupts not, nor thief breaks through, vainglory scatters. This is the moth of those treasures there; this the thief of our wealth in heaven; this steals away the riches that cannot be spoiled; this mars and corrupts all. For because the devil saw that that place is impregnable to thieves and to the worm, and the other plots against them, he by vainglory steals away the wealth.

But do you desire glory? Does not then that suffice you which is given by the receiver himself, that from our gracious God, but do you set your heart on that from men also? Take heed, lest you undergo the contrary, lest some condemn you as not showing mercy, but making a display, and seeking honor, as making a show of the calamities of others.

For indeed the showing of mercy is a mystery. Shut therefore the doors, that none may see what it is not pious to display. For our mysteries too are above all things, a showing of God's mercy and loving-kindness. According to His great mercy, He had mercy on us being disobedient.

And the first prayer too is full of mercy, when we entreat for the energumens; and the second again, for others under penance seeking for much mercy; and the third also for ourselves, and this puts forward the innocent children of the people entreating God for mercy. For since we condemn ourselves for sins, for them that have sinned much and deserve to be blamed we ourselves cry; but for ourselves the children; for the imitators of whose simplicity the kingdom of heaven is reserved. For this image shows this, that they who are like those children, lowly and simple, these above all men are able to deliver the guilty by their prayers.

But the mystery itself, of how much mercy, of how much love to man it is full, the initiated know.

Do thou then, when according to your power you are showing mercy to a man, shut the doors, let the object of your mercy see it only; but if it be possible, not even he. But if you set them open, you are profanely exposing your mystery.

Consider that the very person, whose praise you seek, even himself will condemn you; and if he be a friend, will accuse you to himself; but if an enemy, he will deride you unto others also. And you will undergo the opposite of what you desire. For you indeed desire that he should call you the merciful man; but he will not call you this, but the vainglorious, the man-pleaser, and other names far more grievous than these.

But if you should hide it, he will call you all that is opposite to this; the merciful, the kind. For God suffers it not to be hidden; but if you conceal it, the other will make it known, and greater will be the admiration, and more abundant the gain. So that even for this very object of being glorified, to make a display is against us; for with respect to the thing unto which we most hasten and press, as to this most especially is this thing against us. For so far from obtaining the credit of being merciful, we obtain even the contrary, and besides this, great is the loss we undergo.

For every motive then let us abstain from this, and set our love on God's praise alone. For thus shall we both attain to honor here, and enjoy the eternal blessings, 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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