

Homily 74 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 74 on Matthew addresses the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, their rejection of prophets, and the urgent call for repentance and self-reflection.

Scripture: Matthew 6:24, Matthew 23:33-34, Matthew 23:37, Luke 11:47

Topics: "Hypocrisy Exposed", "Repentance Urged"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches a powerful sermon on the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who build tombs for the prophets while rejecting their message, exposing their pretense of condemning their fathers while continuing their wicked ways. Jesus warns them of the consequences of their actions, calling them serpents and a generation of vipers, and foretells the judgment that will come upon them for their sins. He urges them to repent and turn to God, using strong language to emphasize the severity of their situation and the need for genuine transformation.

Transcript

Woe unto you, because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish their sepulchers, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

Not because they build, nor because they blame the others, does He say, woe, but because, while both thus, and by what they say, they are pretending to condemn their fathers, they do worse. For in proof that the condemnation was a pretense, Luke says, you do allow because ye build; for, Woe unto you, says He, for you build the sepulchers of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness, and you allow the deeds of your fathers, for they indeed killed them, and you build their sepulchers. Luke 11:47-48 For here He reproves their purpose, wherewith they built, that it was not for the honoring of them that were slain, but as making a show of the murders, and afraid, lest, when the tombs had perished by time, the proof and memory of such daring should fade away, setting up these glorious buildings, as a kind of trophy, and priding themselves in the daring deeds of those men, and displaying them.

For the things that you now dare to do, show that you do these things also in this spirit. For, though ye speak the contrary, says He, as condemning them, as, for instance, We should not, if we had been in their days, have been partakers with them; yet the disposition is evident wherewith ye say these things. Wherefore also unfolding it, though darkly, still He has expressed it. For when He had said, you say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the

prophets; He added, Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that you are the children of them that slew the prophets. And what blame is it to be a murderer's son, if one partake not in the mind of one's father? None. Whence it is evident, that for this same thing He brings it forward against them, hinting at their affinity in wickedness.

And this is manifest too by what comes after; He adds at least, You serpents, you generation of vipers. Matthew 23:33 For as those beasts are like their parents, in the destructiveness of their venom, so also are you like your fathers in murderousness.

Then, because He was searching their temper of mind, which is to the more part obscure, He does, from those things also which they were about to perpetrate, which would be manifest to all, establish His words. For, because He had said, Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves that you are the children of them which killed the prophets, making it evident, that of their affinity in wickedness He is speaking, and that it was a pretense to say, We should not have been partakers with them, He added, Fill ye up therefore the measure of your fathers, Matthew 23:32 not commanding, but declaring beforehand, what was to be, that is, His own murder.

Therefore, having brought in their refutation, and having shown that they were pretenses which they said in their own defense, as, for instance, We would not have been partakers with them, (for they who refrain not from the Lord, how should they have refrained from the servants), He makes after this His language more condemnatory, calling them serpents, and generation of vipers, and saying, How shall you escape the damnation of hell, at once perpetrating such things, and denying them, and dissembling your purpose?

Then rebuking them more exceedingly from another cause also, He says, I will send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes, and some of them shall you kill and crucify, and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues. For that they should not say, Though we crucified the Lord, yet from the servants we should have refrained, if we had been then; Behold, He says, I send servants also to you, prophets likewise themselves, and neither will you spare them. But these things He says, showing that it was nothing strange, that He should be murdered by those sons, being both murderous and deceitful, and having much guile, and surpassing their fathers in their outrages.

And besides what has been said, He shows them to be also exceedingly vainglorious. For when they say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them, they spoke out of vainglory, and were practising virtue in words only, but in their works doing the contrary.

You serpents, you generation of vipers, that is, wicked sons of wicked men, and more wicked than those who begot them. For He shows that they are committing greater crimes, both by their committing them after those others, and by their doing much more grievous things than they, and this, while positively affirming that they never would have fallen into the same. For they add that which is both the end and the crown of their evil deeds. For the others slew them that came to the vineyard, but these, both the son, and them that were bidding them to the wedding.

But these things He says, to separate them off from the affinity to Abraham, and to show that they had no advantage from thence, unless they followed his works; wherefore also He adds, How can you flee from the damnation of hell, when following them that have committed such acts?

And here He recalls to their remembrance John's accusation, for he too called them by this name, and reminded them of the judgment to come. Then, because they are nothing alarmed by judgment and hell,

by reason of their not believing them, and because the thing is future, He awes them by the things present, and says, Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets and scribes: and some of them shall you kill and crucify, and scourge; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachias, whom you slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, that all these things shall come upon this generation. Matthew 23:34-36

2. See by how many things He has warned them. He said, You condemn your fathers, in that you say, We would not have been partakers with them; and this is no little thing to shame them. He said, While ye condemn them, you do worse things, even ye yourselves; and this is sufficient to cover them with disgrace. He said, These things shall not be without punishment; and hence he implants in them fear beyond words. He has reminded them at least of hell. Then because that was to come, He brought home to them the terrors as even present. For all these things shall come, He says, upon this generation.

He added also unspeakable severity to the vengeance, saying, that they shall suffer more grievous things than all; yet by none of these things did they become better. But if any one say, And why do they suffer more grievously than all? We would say, Because they have first committed more grievous things than all, and by none of the things that have been done to them have they been brought to a sound mind.

Did you not hear Lamech saying, Of Lamech vengeance shall be taken seventy times sevenfold; Genesis 4:24 that is, I am deserving of more punishment than Cain. Why could this be? Yet he did not slay his brother; but because not even by his example was he brought to a better mind. And this is what God says elsewhere, Requiring the sins of fathers upon children for the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. Not as though one were to suffer punishment for the crimes committed by others, but inasmuch as they who, after many sin and have been punished, yet have not grown better, but have committed the same offenses, are justly worthy to suffer their punishments also.

But see how seasonably he also mentioned Abel, indicating that this murder likewise is of envy. What then have ye to say? Do you not know what Cain suffered? Did God hold His peace at his deeds? Did He not exact the severest penalty? Heard ye not what things your fathers suffered, when they slew the prophets; were they not delivered over to punishments, and inflictions of vengeance without number? How then did ye not become better? And why do I speak of the punishments of your fathers, and what they suffered? Thou who yourself condemnest your fathers, how is it you do worse? For moreover even ye yourselves have declared that He will miserably destroy those wicked men. Matthew 21:41 What favor then will you have after this, committing such things after such a sentence?

But who is this Zacharias? Some say, the father of John; some, the prophet; some, a priest with two different names, whom the Scripture also calls, the son of Jehoiada.

But do thou mark this, that the outrage was twofold. For not only did they slay holy men, but also in a holy place. And saying these things, He did not only alarm them, but also comfort His disciples, showing that the righteous men also who were before them suffered these things. But these He alarmed, foretelling that like as they paid their penalty, even so should these too suffer the utmost extremities. Therefore He calls them prophets, and wise men, and scribes, even hereby again taking away every plea of theirs. For you cannot say, He says, You sent from among the Gentiles, and therefore we were offended; but they were led on unto this by being murderous, and thirsting for blood. Wherefore He also said beforehand, For this cause do I send prophets and scribes. This did the prophets also lay to their charge, saying, They mingle

blood with blood, and that they are men of blood. Therefore also did He command the blood to be offered to Him, showing that if in a brute it be thus precious, much more in a man. Which He says to Noah likewise, I will require all blood that is shed. Genesis 9:5 And ten thousand other such things might one find Him enjoining with regard to their not committing murder; wherefore He commanded them not even to eat that which was strangled.

Oh the love of God towards man! That though He foreknew they would profit nothing, He still does His part. For I will send, He says, and this knowing they would be slain. So that even hereby they were convicted of saying vainly, We should not have been partakers with our fathers. For these too slew prophets even in their synagogues, and revered neither the place, nor the dignity of the persons. For not merely ordinary persons did they slay, but prophets and wise men, such that they had nothing to lay to their charge. And by these He means the apostles, and those after them, for, indeed, many prophesied. Then, willing to aggravate their fears, He says, Verily, verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation; that is, I will bring all upon your heads, and will make the vengeance sore. For he that knew many to have sinned, and was not sobered, but himself has committed the same sins again, and not the same only, but also far more grievous, would justly deserve to suffer a far more grievous punishment than they. For like as, if he had been minded, he would have gained greatly, had he grown better by their examples, even so, since he continued without amendment, he is liable to a heavier vengeance, as having had the benefit of more warning by them who had sinned before and been punished, and having reaped no advantage.

3. Then He directs His speech unto the city, in this way too being minded to correct His hearers, and says, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Matthew 23:37 What means the repetition? This is the manner of one pitying her, and bemoaning her, and greatly loving her. For, like as unto a woman beloved, herself indeed ever loved, but who had despised Him that loved her, and therefore on the point of being punished, He pleads, being now about to inflict the punishment. Which He does in the prophets also, using these words, I said, Turn thou unto me, and she returned not. Jeremiah 3:7

Then having called her, He tells also her blood-stained deeds, Thou that killest the prophets, and stone them that are sent unto you, how often would I have gathered your children together, and you would not, in this way also pleading for His own dealings; not even with these things have you turned me aside, nor withdrawn me from my great affection toward you, but it was my desire even so, not once or twice, but often to draw you unto me. For how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens, and you would not. And this He says, to show that they were ever scattering themselves by their sins. And His affection He indicates by the similitude; for indeed the creature is warm in its love towards its brood. And everywhere in the prophets is this same image of the wings, and in the song of Moses and in the Psalms, indicating His great protection and care.

But ye would not, He says. Behold your house is left desolate, Matthew 23:38 stripped of the succor which comes from me. Surely it was the same, who also was before protecting them, and holding them together, and preserving them; surely it was He who was ever chastening them. And He appoints a punishment, which they had ever dreaded exceedingly; for it declared the entire overthrow of their polity. For I say unto you, You shall not see me henceforth, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord. Matthew 23:39 And this is the language of one that loves earnestly, earnestly drawing them unto Him by the things to come, not merely warning them by the past; for of the future day of His second coming does He here speak.

What then? Did they not see Him from that time? But it is not that hour which He means in saying, Henceforth, but the time up to His crucifixion.

For since they were forever accusing Him of this, that He was a kind of rival God, and a foe to God, He moves them to love Him by this, namely, by showing Himself to be of one accord with His Father; and He indicates Himself to be the same that was in the prophets. Wherefore also He uses the same words as did the prophets.

And by these He intimated both His resurrection, and His second coming, and made it plain even to the utterly unbelieving, that then most surely they should worship Him. And how did He make this plain? By speaking of many things that were first to be, that He should send prophets, that they should kill them; that it should be in the synagogues; that they should suffer the utmost extremities; that their house should be left desolate; that they should undergo things more grievous than any, and such as never were undergone before. For all these things are enough to furnish even to the most senseless and contentious a clear proof of that which should come to pass at His coming.

For I will ask them, Did He send the prophets and wise men? Did they slay them in their synagogue? Was their house left desolate? Did all the vengeance come upon that generation? It is quite plain that it was so, and no man gainsays it. As then all these things came to pass, so shall those also come to pass, and most surely they shall submit then.

But they shall derive thence no advantage in the way of defense, as neither will they who repent of their course of life then.

Wherefore let us, while it is time, practise what is good. For like as they henceforth derived no advantage from their knowledge, even so neither shall we ourselves from our repentance for our wickedness. For neither to the pilot, when the bark is sunk in the sea from his remissness, will there remain anything more; nor to the physician, when the sick man is gone; but each of these must before the end devise, and execute all things, so as to be involved in no danger, nor shame; but after this, all is unprofitable.

Let us also then, while in sickness, send for physicians, and lay out money, and exert unceasing diligence, that having risen up from our affliction, we may depart hence in health.

And as much care as we exert about our servants, when their bodies are sick, so much let us show forth upon ourselves, when our soul is diseased. And indeed we are nearer to ourselves than our servants, and our souls are more necessary than those bodies, but nevertheless it were well if we exert at least an equal diligence. For if we do not this now, when gone, thenceforth we may obtain nothing more in the way of plea.

4. Who is so wretched, one may say, as not to show even as much thought as this? Why this is the marvellous thing, that we are held in so little esteem with our ownelves, that we despise ourselves more than our servants. For when our servants are sick of a fever, we send for physicians, and make a separation in the house, and compel them to obey the laws of that art; and if these are neglected, we are displeased with them, and set persons to watch them, who will not, even should they wish them, suffer them to satiate their desire; and if they who have the care of these persons should say, that medicines must be procured at great cost, we yield; and whatsoever they may enjoin, we obey, and we pay them hire for these injunctions.

But when we are sick (or rather there is no time when we are not sick), we do not so much as call in the physician, we do not lay out money, but as though some ruffian, and enemy, and foes were concerned, so do we disregard our soul. And these things I say, not finding fault with our attention towards our servants, but thinking it meet to take at least as much care of our souls. And how should we do? One may say. Show it to Paul when ill; call in Matthew; let John sit by it. Hear from them, what we ought to do that is thus ill, they will surely tell, and will not conceal. For they are not dead, but live and speak. But does the soul take no heed to them, being weighed down by the fever? Do thou compel it, and awaken its reasoning power. Call in the prophets. There is no need to pay money to these physicians, for neither do they themselves demand hire for themselves, nor for the medicines which they prepare do they drive you to the necessity of expense, except for almsgiving; but in everything else they even add to your possessions; as, for instance, when they require you to be temperate, they deliver you from unseasonable and wrong expenses; when they tell you to abstain from drunkenness, they make you wealthier. Do you see the skill of physicians, who besides health, are supplying you also with riches? Sit down therefore by them, and learn of them the nature of your disease. For instance, do you love wealth, and greedy gain, like as the fevered love water? Listen at any rate to their admonitions. For like as the physician says to you, If you will gratify your desire, you will perish, and undergo this or that; even so also Paul: They that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare of the devil, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. 1 Timothy 6:9

But are you impatient? Hear him saying, Yet a little while, and He that comes will come, and will not tarry. Hebrews 10:37 The Lord is at hand, be careful for nothing; Philippians 4:5-6 and again, The fashion of this world passes away. 1 Corinthians 7:31

For neither does he command only, but also soothes, as a physician should. And like as they devise some other things in the place of cold things, so does this man draw off the desire another way. Do you wish to be rich, says he; let it be in good works. Do you desire to lay up treasure? I forbid it not at all; only let it be in Heaven.

And like as the physician says, that what is cold is hurtful to teeth, to nerves, to bones; so he too, more briefly indeed, as heedful of brevity, yet far more, clearly and more powerfully, says, For the love of money is the root of all evils. 1 Timothy 6:10

Of what then should one make use? He tells this also: of contentedness instead of covetousness. For contentment, he says, with godliness is great gain. 1 Timothy 5:6 But if you are dissatisfied, and desirest more, and art not yet equal to cast away all superfluous things, he tells also him that is thus diseased, how he ought to handle these things too. That they that rejoice in wealth, be as though they rejoiced not; and they that have, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it. 1 Corinthians 7:30-31

Do you see what manner of things he enjoins? Will you call in also another physician besides? To me at least it seems well. For neither are these physicians like those of the body, who often, while vying one with another, overwhelm the sick man. But not so these, for they have regard to the health of the sick, not to their own vainglory. Be not then afraid of the number of them; one Master speaks in all, that is, Christ.

5. See, for instance, another again entering in, and saying severe things concerning this disease, or rather it is the Master by him; For you cannot serve God and mammon. Matthew 6:24 Yea, says he, and how will these things be? How shall we cease from the desire? Hence may we learn this also. And how shall we

know? Hear him saying this too: Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust does corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. Matthew 6:19

Do you see how by the place, by the things that waste there, He draws men off from this desire that is here, and rivets them to Heaven, where all things are impregnable? For if you transfer your wealth there where neither rust nor moth corrupts, nor thieves break through and steal, you will both expel this disease, and establish your soul in the greatest abundance.

And together with what we have said, He brings forward an example also to teach you moderation. And like as the physician, to alarm the sick man says, that such a one died from the use of cold water; so does He also bring in the rich man, Matthew 19:16 laboring indeed, and longing for life and health, but not able to attain thereto, because of having set his heart on covetousness, but going away empty. And besides this man, another is shown to you again by another evangelist, he that was in torment, Luke 16:24-26 and was not master so much as of a drop of water. Then showing that His injunctions are easy, He says, Behold the fowls of the air. Matthew 6:26 But being compassionate, He suffers not even the rich to despair. For the things which are impossible with men, are possible with God, Luke 18:27 says He. For though thou be rich, the physician is able to cure you. For neither was it wealth that He took away, but to be slave of riches, and a lover of greedy gain.

How then is it possible for the rich man to be saved. By possessing his goods in common with them that are in need, being such as Job was, and exterminating out of his soul the desire of more, and in no points going beyond real need.

He shows you together with these this selfsame publican also, that was grievously oppressed by the fever of covetousness, quickly set free from it. For what more sordid than a publican? Nevertheless, the man became indifferent to wealth from obeying the laws of the physician. For indeed He has for His disciples such persons as these, that were sick of the same diseases as we are, and have recovered their health quickly. And He shows us each, in order we may not despair. See at least this publican. Mark again another, a chief of the publicans, who promised four fold indeed for all that he had extorted, and the half of all that he possessed, that he might receive Jesus.

But are you on fire with exceeding desire for riches. Have the possessions of all men instead of your own. For indeed I give you, He says, more than you seek, in opening to you the houses of the wealthy throughout the world. For whosoever has forsaken father or mother, or lands, or house, shall receive an hundredfold. Matthew 19:29 Thus will you not enjoy more abundant possessions only, but you will even remove this grievous thirst altogether, and will endure all things easily, so far from desiring more, not seeking often even necessary things. Thus does Paul suffer hunger, and is held in honor more than when he ate. Forasmuch as a wrestler also, when striving, and winning crowns, would not choose to give up and to be in repose; and a merchant who has entered on sea voyages would not desire to be afterwards in idleness.

And we therefore, if we should taste as we ought of spiritual fruits, shall thenceforth not even account the things present to be anything, being seized by the desire of the things to come as with some most noble intoxication.

Let us taste of them, therefore, that we may both be delivered from the turmoil of the things present, and may attain the good things to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the might, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-74-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

