

Homily 75 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 75 on Matthew emphasizes the importance of vigilance, the dangers of deception, and the promise of salvation amidst tribulations.

Topics: "Eschatology", "Perseverance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on Jesus' prophecy about the destruction of the temple, warning His disciples about the signs of His coming and the end of the world. He emphasizes the importance of not being deceived by false Christs and prophets, and the inevitability of wars, famines, and betrayals. Chrysostom highlights the endurance needed to withstand the trials and persecutions that will come, assuring that those who endure to the end will be saved. He reflects on the various forms of sin and the different levels of punishment based on knowledge, circumstances, and actions, urging believers to focus on virtue and flee from vice to attain the promised blessings.

Transcript

Matthew 24:1-2.

And Jesus went out from the temple, and departed. And His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple. And He answered and said to them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

For inasmuch as He said, Your house is left desolate, and had previously forewarned them of many grievous things; therefore the disciples having heard these things, as though marvelling at it, came unto Him, showing the beauty of the temple, and wondering, if so much beauty was to be destroyed, and materials so costly, and variety of workmanship past utterance; He no longer thenceforth talks to them of desolation merely, but foretells an entire destruction. See ye not all these things, says He, and do ye marvel, and are you amazed? There shall not remain one stone upon another. How then did it remain? One may say. But what is this? For neither so has the prediction fallen to the ground. For He said these things either indicating its entire desolation, or at that spot where He was. For there are parts of it destroyed unto the foundations.

And together with its we would say another thing also, that from what has been done, even the most contentious ought to believe concerning the remains, that they are utterly to be destroyed.

And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world? Matthew 24:3

Therefore did they come unto Him privately, as it was of such matters they meant to inquire. For they were in travail to know the day of His coming, because of their eager desire to behold that glory, which is the cause of countless blessings. And these two things do they ask him, when shall these things be? That is, the overthrow of the temple; and, what is the sign of your coming? But Luke says, Luke 21:6-7 the question was one concerning Jerusalem, as though they were supposing that then is His coming. And Mark says, that neither did all of them ask concerning the end of Jerusalem, but Peter and John, as having greater freedom of speech.

What then says He? Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many. And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. Matthew 24:4-6

For since they felt as being told of vengeance falling on others when hearing of that which was to be brought upon Jerusalem and as though they were to be out of the turmoils, and were dreaming of good things only, and looked for these to befall them quite immediately; for this cause He again foretells to them grievous things, making them earnest, and commanding them on two grounds to watch, so as neither to be seduced by the deceit of them that would beguile them, nor to be overpowered by the violence of ills that should overtake them.

For the war, says He, shall be twofold that of the deceivers, and that of the enemies, but the former far more grievous, as coming upon them in the confusion and turmoils, and when men were terrified and troubled. For indeed great was the storm then, when the Roman power was beginning to flourish, and cities were taken, and camps and weapons were set in motion, and many were readily believed.

But of wars in Jerusalem is He speaking; for it is not surely of those without, and everywhere in the world; for what did they care for these? And besides, He would thus say nothing new, if He were speaking of the calamities of the world at large, which are happening always. For before this, were wars, and tumults, and fightings; but He speaks of the Jewish wars coming upon them at no great distance, for henceforth the Roman arms were a matter of anxiety. Since then these things also were sufficient to confound them, He foretells them all.

Then to show that He Himself also will assail the Jews with them, and war on them, He speaks not of battles only, but also of plagues sent from God, famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, showing that the wars also He Himself permitted to come upon them, and that these things do not happen for no purpose according to what has been before the accustomed course of things among men, but proceed from the wrath on high.

Therefore He says, they shall come not by themselves or at once, but with signs. For that the Jews may not say, that they who then believed were the authors of these evils, therefore has He told them also of the cause of their coming upon them. For verily I say unto you, He said before, all these things shall come upon this generation, having made mention of the stain of blood on them.

Then lest on hearing of the showers of evils, they should suppose the gospel to be broken through, He added, See, be not troubled, for all things must come to pass, i.e. which I foretold, and the approach of the temptations will set aside none of the things which I have said; but there shall indeed be tumults and

confusion, but nothing shall shake my predictions.

Then since He had said to the Jews, You shall not see me, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord; and the disciples supposed that together with the destruction would be the end also; to set right this secret thought of theirs, He said, But the end is not yet. For that they did suspect even as I said, you may learn from their question. For, what did they ask? When shall these things be? i.e. when shall Jerusalem be destroyed? And what is the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?

But He answered nothing directly to this question, but first speaks of those other things that are urgent, and which it was needful for them to learn first. For neither concerning Jerusalem straightway, nor of His own second coming, did He speak, but touching the ills that were to meet them at the doors. Wherefore also He makes them earnest in their exertions, by saying, Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ.

Afterwards, when He has roused them to listen about these things (for, take heed, says He, that no man deceive you); and having made them energetic, and prepared them to be watchful, and has spoken first of the false Christs, then He speaks of the ills of Jerusalem, assuring them ever by the things already past, foolish and contentious though they were, of those which were yet to come.

2. But by wars and rumors of wars, He means, what I before said, the troubles coming upon them. After this, because, as I have already said, they supposed after that war the end would come, see how He warns them, saying, But the end is not yet. For nation, He says, shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. Matthew 24:7 Of the preludes to the ills of the Jews does He speak. All these are the beginning of sorrows, that is, of those that befall them. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you.

In good season did He introduce their ills, having a consolation from the common miseries; and not in this way only, but also by His adding, that it is for my name's sake. For you shall be hated, He says, of all men for my name's sake. Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and many false Christs and false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold; but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

This is the greater evil, when the war is intestine too, for there were many false brethren. Do you see the war to be threefold? From the deceivers, from the enemies, from the false brethren. See Paul too lamenting over the same things, and saying, Without were fightings, within were fears; 2 Corinthians 7:5 and, perils among false brethren, 2 Corinthians 11:26 and again, For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:13

After this again, what is more grievous than all, they shall not have so much as the consolation from love. Then indicating, that these things will in no degree harm the noble and the firm, He says, Fear not, neither be troubled. For if you show forth the patience that becomes you, the dangers will not prevail over you. And it is a plain proof of this, that the word shall surely be preached everywhere in the world, so much shall you be above the things that alarm you. For, that they may not say, how then shall we live? He said more, You shall both live and preach everywhere. Therefore He added moreover, And this gospel shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come, of the downfall of Jerusalem.

For in proof that He meant this, and that before the taking of Jerusalem the gospel was preached, hear what Paul says, Their sound went into all the earth; Romans 10:18 and again, The gospel which was preached to every creature which is under Heaven. Colossians 1:23 And do you see him running from Jerusalem unto Spain? And if one took so large a portion, consider what the rest also wrought. For writing to others also, Paul again says concerning the gospel, that it is bringing forth fruit, and growing up in every creature which is under Heaven.

But what means, For a witness to all nations? Forasmuch as though it was everywhere preached, yet it was not everywhere believed. It was for a witness, He says, to them that were disbelieving, that is, for conviction, for accusation, for a testimony; for they that believed will bear witness against them that believed not, and will condemn them. And for this cause, after the gospel is preached in every part of the world, Jerusalem is destroyed, that they may not have so much as a shadow of an excuse for their perverseness. For they that saw His power shine throughout every place, and in an instant take the world captive, what excuse could they then have for continuing in the same perverseness? For in proof that it was everywhere preached at that time, hear what Paul says, of the gospel which was preached to every creature which is under Heaven. Colossians 1:23

Which also is a very great sign of Christ's power, that in twenty or at most thirty years the word had reached the ends of the world. After this therefore, says He, shall come the end of Jerusalem. For that He intimates this was manifested by what follows.

For He brought in also a prophecy, to confirm their desolation, saying, But when you shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, let him that reads understand. He referred them to Daniel. And by abomination He means the statue of him who then took the city, which he who desolated the city and the temple placed within the temple, wherefore Christ calls it, of desolation. Moreover, in order that they might learn that these things will be while some of them are alive, therefore He said, When ye see the abomination of desolation.

3. Whence one may most marvel at Christ's power, and their courage, for that they preached in such times, in which most especially the Jewish state was warred against, in which most especially men regarded them as movers of sedition, when Cæsar commanded all of them to be driven away. Acts 18:2 And the result was the same as if any one (when the sea was stirred up on every side, and darkness was filling all the air, and successive shipwrecks taking place, and when all their fellow-sailors were at strife above, and monsters were rising up from beneath, and with the waves devouring the mariners, and thunderbolts falling, and their being pirates, and those in the vessel plotting one against another), were to command men inexperienced in sailing, and who had not so much as seen the sea to sit at the rudder, and to guide and fight the vessel, and when an immense fleet was coming against them with a great array, making use of a single bark, with her crew in this disturbed state, to sink and subdue the fleet. For indeed by the heathens they were hated as Jews, and by the Jews were stoned, as waging war against their laws; and nowhere could they stand.

Thus were all things, precipices, and reefs, and rocks, the things in the cities, the things in the fields, the things in the houses, and every single person was at war with them; generals and rulers, and private persons, and all nations, and all people, and a turmoil which cannot be set forth by words. For the Jewish race was exceedingly detestable to the government of the Romans, as having occasioned them endless trouble; and not even from this did the preaching of the word take hurt; but the city was stormed and set on fire, and involved its inhabitants in countless evils; but the apostles that came from thence, introducing

new laws, prevailed even over the Romans.

O strange and wonderful facts! Countless myriads of Jews did the Romans then subdue, and they did not prevail over twelve men fighting against them naked and unarmed. What language can set forth this miracle? For they that teach need to have these two things, to be worthy of credit, and to be beloved by them whom they are instructing; and together with these, and besides them, that their sayings should be easy of reception, and the time should be free from trouble and tumults.

But then were all the contraries to these. For while they did not seem worthy of credit, they were withdrawing from such as did seem worthy of it, those who had been deceived by them. So far from being loved, they were even hated, and were taking men away from what they loved, both habits, and hereditary customs, and laws.

Again, their injunctions had great difficulty; but the things, from which they were withdrawing men, much pleasure. And many were the perils, many the deaths, both themselves and they that obeyed them underwent, and together with all this, the time also occasioned them much difficulty, teeming with wars, tumults, disturbance, so that, even if there had been none of the things we have mentioned, it would have quite thrown all things into confusion.

We have good occasion to say, Who shall tell the mighty works of the Lord, and make all His praises to be heard. For if his own people amid signs hearkened not to Moses, because of the clay only, and the bricks; who persuaded these that every day were beaten and slain, and were suffering incurable evils, to leave a quiet life, and to prefer thereto this which was teeming with blood and death, and that when they who preached it were strangers to them, and very hostile in every way? For I say not unto nations and cities and people, but into a small house let one bring in him that is hated of all that are in the house, and by him endeavor to bring them away from those whom they love, from father, and wife, and child, will he not surely be seen torn in pieces, before he has opened his mouth? And if there be added moreover a tumult and strife of husband and wife in the house, will they not stone him to death before he steps on the threshold? And if he also be one whom they may readily despise, and who enjoins galling things, and commands them who are living in luxury to practise self restraint, and together with this the conflict be against those who are far more in numbers and who excel him, is it not quite manifest that he will be utterly destroyed? Yet nevertheless, this, which is impossible to be done in one house, this has Christ accomplished in all the world, through precipices and furnaces, and ravines, and rocks, and land and sea at war with Him, bringing in the healers of the world.

And if you are minded to learn these things more distinctly, I mean, the famines, the pestilences, the earthquakes, the other calamities, peruse the history about these things composed by Josephus, and you will know all accurately. Therefore Himself too said, Be not troubled, for all must be; and, He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved; and, The gospel shall surely be preached in all the world. For when weakened and faint at the fear of what had been said, He braces them up by saying, Though ten thousand things be done, the gospel must be preached in every part of the world, and then shall the end come.

4. Do you see in what a state things were then, and how manifold was the war? And this is the beginning, when each of the things to be effected most required quiet. In what state then were they? For nothing hinders us from resuming the same things again. The first war was that of the deceivers; For there shall come, He says, false Christs and false prophets: the second, that of the Romans, For you shall hear, He says, of wars: the third, that which brings on the famines: the fourth, the pestilences and the earthquakes:

the fifth, they shall deliver you into afflictions: the sixth, you shall be hated of all men: the seventh, They shall betray one another, and hate one another (an intestine war does He here make known); then, false Christs, and false brethren; then, the love of the most shall wax cold, which is the cause of all the ills.

Do you see numberless kinds of war, new and strange? Yet nevertheless in the midst of these things, and much more (for with the intestine wars was mingled also that of kinsmen), the gospel prevailed over the whole earth. For the gospel, He says, shall be preached in the whole world.

Where then are they who set up the power of a nativity and the cycle of times against the doctrines of the church? For who has ever recorded that another Christ appeared; that such a thing took place? Although they falsely affirm other things, that ten myriads of years passed, yet this they cannot even feign. Of what kind of cycle then would ye speak? For there was never another Sodom, nor another Gomorrha, nor another flood. How long do ye trifle, talking of a cycle and nativity?

How then, it is said, do many of the things they say come to pass? Because you have bereaved yourself of the help God bestows, and betrayed yourself, and placed yourself without His providence; therefore does the evil spirit turn and twist about your matters as he will.

But not so among the saints, or rather not even among us sinners, who utterly despise it. For although our practice is beyond endurance, yet because by God's grace we cling with much exactness to the doctrines of the truth, we are above the malice of the evil spirits.

And altogether, what is a nativity? Nothing else than injustice, and confusion, and that all things are borne along at random; or rather not at random only; but more than this, with folly.

And if there is not any nativity, whence is such a one rich? Whence is such a one poor?

I know not: for in this way I will for a time reason with you, instructing you not to be curious about all things; neither in consequence of this to go on at random and rashly. For neither because you are ignorant of this, ought thou to feign the things that are not. It is better to be ignorant well, than to learn ill. For he that knows not the cause, will come soon to the right one; but he who because he does not know the real cause, feigns one that is untrue, will not be able easily to receive the real; but he needs more both of labors and toil, in order to take away the former. For indeed on a tablet, if it have been wiped smooth, any one may easily write what he will, but when it is written upon, no longer in the same way, for we must first wipe out what has been ill written. And among physicians again, he that applies nothing, is far better than he that applies hurtful things; and he who builds unsoundly, is worse than he who does not so much as build at all; like as the land is far better that bears nothing, than that which bears thorns.

Let us not then be impatient to learn all things, but let us endure to be even ignorant of some things, that when we have found a teacher, we may not afford him double toil. Or rather many oftentimes have remained even incurably diseased, by carelessly entangling themselves in evil opinions. For neither is the toil the same to pluck up first what has taken root amiss, and then to sow, as to plant a clear ground. For in that case, he must overthrow first, and then put in other things; but in this, the hearing is ready.

Whence then is such a one rich? I will say, now; many acquire wealth, by God's gift; and many by His permission. For this is the short and simple account.

What then? It is said, does He make the whoremongers to be rich, and the adulterers, and him that has abused himself with mankind, and him that has made a bad use of his possessions? He does not make

them, but permits them to be rich; and great is the difference, and quite infinite between making and permitting. But wherefore does He suffer it at all? Because it is not yet the time for judgment, that every one may receive according to his merits.

For what more worthless than that rich man, who gives not to Lazarus so much as of his crumbs? Nevertheless, he was more wretched than all, for he came to be possessed not even of a drop of water, and for this very cause most especially, that being rich he was cruel. For if there are two wicked men, who have not had the same portion here, but one in wealth, the other in poverty, they will not be similarly punished there, but the wealthier more grievously.

5. Do you not see at least even this man, suffering more fearfully because he had received his good things? Do thou also therefore, when you see in prosperity one who has become rich by injustice, groan, weep; for indeed this wealth is to him an addition of punishment. For like as they who sin much, and are not minded to repent, treasure up to themselves a treasure of wrath; even so they, who, besides not being punished, are even enjoying prosperity, will undergo the greater punishment.

And the proof of this, if you will, I will show you, not from the things to come only, but also from the present life. For the blessed David, when he sinned that sin of Bathsheba, and was convicted by the prophet, for this cause most of all was he more severely reprov'd, that even when he had enjoyed such security, he was like this. Hear at least God upbraiding him with this especially. Did not I anoint you for a king, and delivered you from the hand of Saul, and give you all that pertained to your master, and all the house of Israel and Judah, and if it had been little for you, I would have added thus and thus; and wherefore have you done that which was evil in my sight? 2 Samuel 12:7-9 For not for all sins are there the same punishments, but many and diverse, according to the times, according to the persons, according to their rank, according to their understanding, according to other things besides. And that what I say may be more clear, let one sin be set forth, fornication; and mark how many different punishments I find not from myself, but from the divine Scriptures. Did any one commit fornication before the law, he is differently punished; and this Paul shows, For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law. Romans 2:12 Did any one commit fornication after the law? He shall suffer more grievous things. For as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law. Did any one commit fornication being a priest, he receives from his dignity a very great addition to his punishment. So for this cause, whereas the other women were slain for fornication, the daughters of the priests were burnt; the lawgiver showing the more amply, how great punishment await the priest if he commits this sin. For if on the daughter he inflicts a greater punishment, because of her being a priest's daughter, much more on the man himself who bears the priest's office. Was fornication committed with any violence? She is even freed from punishment. Did one play the harlot being rich, and another being poor? Here again also is a difference. And this is evident from what we have said before concerning David. Was any one guilty of fornication after Christ's coming? Should he depart uninitiated, he will suffer a punishment more sore than all those. Was any guilty of fornication after the laver? In this case not even a consolation is left for the sin any more. And this selfsame thing Paul declared when he said, He that despised Moses' law dies without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment suppose you shall he be counted worthy, who has trodden underfoot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and has done despite to the grace of the Spirit? Hath any been guilty of fornication, bearing the priest's office now? This above all is the crown of the evil deeds.

Do you see of one sin how many different forms? One that before the law, another that after the law, another that of him who bears the priest's office; that of the rich woman, and that of the poor woman, of

her that is a catechumen, and of the believing woman, of the daughter of the priest.

And from the knowledge again great is the difference; For he which knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. Luke 12:47 And to sin after examples brings greater vengeance. Therefore He says, But you, when you had seen it, repented not afterwards, Matthew 21:32 though ye had had the advantage of much care. Therefore He upbraids Jerusalem likewise with this saying, How often would I have gathered your children together, and you would not! Luke 13:34

And to sin being in luxury, this is shown by the history of Lazarus. And from the place also the sin becomes more grievous, which He Himself indicated when He said, Between the temple and the altar. Matthew 23:35

And from the equality of the offenses themselves, It is not marvellous if one be taken stealing; and again, You slew your sons and your daughters; this is beyond all your whoredoms, and your abominations.

And from the persons again: If one man sin against another, they shall pray for him; but if he sin against God, who shall entreat for him?

And when any one surpasses in negligence those who are far inferior; wherewith in Ezekiel He does charge them, saying, Not even according to the judgments of the nations have you done. Ezekiel 5:7

And when one is not sobered even by the examples of others, She saw her sister, it is said, and justified her.

And when one has had the advantage of more abundant care; For if, He says, these mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago; but it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for that city. Matthew 11:21-22

Do you see perfect exactness, and that all for the same sins are not paying the same penalty? For moreover when we have had the benefit of long-suffering, and profit nothing, we shall endure worse things. And this Paul shows, where he says, But after your hardness and impenitent heart, you store up for yourself wrath. Romans 2:5

Knowing then these things, let us not be offended, neither let us be confounded at any of the things that happen, nor bring in upon us the storm of thought, but giving place to God's providence, let us give heed to virtue, and flee vice, that we may also attain to the good things to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom be glory unto the Father together with the Holy Spirit, now and always, and world without end. Amen.

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