

Homily 76 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 76 on Matthew warns of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and encourages believers to remain steadfast amidst tribulations and false teachings.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:2, Matthew 24:21, Matthew 24:30-31, Galatians 2:2, 1 Thessalonians 4:16

Topics: "End Times", "Eternal Salvation"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the signs of the end times as described in Matthew 24, warning the people to be prepared for the tribulations and deceptions that will come. He emphasizes the importance of staying faithful to Christ amidst the chaos and false teachings, urging believers to trust in God's ultimate judgment and justice. Chrysostom highlights the severity of the impending calamities, pointing to the historical context of Jerusalem's destruction as a foreshadowing of the final judgment. He encourages the listeners to prioritize their eternal salvation over worldly pursuits, reminding them of the fleeting nature of earthly riches and honors.

Transcript

Matt. XXIV. 16-18.

Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains. And let him that is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. Neither let him which is in his field return back to take his clothes.

Having spoken of the ills that were to overtake the city, and of the trials of the apostles, and that they should remain unsubdued, and should overrun the whole world, He mentions again the Jews' calamities, showing that when the one should be glorious, having taught the whole world, the others should be in calamity.

And see how He relates the war, by the things that seem to be small setting forth how intolerable it was to be. For, Then, says He, let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains. Then, When? When these things should be, when the abomination of desolation should stand in the holy place. Whence he seems to me to be speaking of the armies. Flee therefore then, says He, for thenceforth there is no hope of safety for you.

For since it had fallen out, that they often had recovered themselves in grievous wars, as under Sennacherib, under Antiochus again (for when at that time also, armies had come in upon them, and the

temple had been seized beforehand, the Maccabees rallying gave their affairs an opposite turn); in order then that they might not now also suspect this, that there would be any such change, He forbids them all thought of the kind. For it were well, says He, to escape henceforth with one's naked body. Therefore them also that are on the housetop, He suffers not to enter into the house to take their clothes, indicating the evils to be inevitable, and the calamity without end, and that it must needs be that he that was involved therein should surely perish. Therefore He adds also, him that is in the field, saying, neither let this man turn back to take his clothes. For if they that are in doors flee, much more they that are out of doors ought not to take refuge within.

Woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, Matthew 24:19 to the one because of their greater inertness, and because they cannot flee easily, being weighed down by the burden of their pregnancy; to the other, because they are held by the tie of feeling for their children, and cannot save their sucklings. For money it is a light thing to despise, and an easy thing to provide, and clothes; but the bonds of nature how could any one escape? How could the pregnant woman become active? How could she that gives suck be able to overlook that which she had borne?

Then, to show again the greatness of the calamity, He says, Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world until now, neither shall be. Matthew 24:20-21

Do you see that His discourse is addressed to the Jews, and that He is speaking of the ills that should overtake them? For the apostles surely were not to keep the Sabbath day, neither to be there, when Vespasian did those things. For indeed the most part of them were already departed this life. And if any was left, he was dwelling then in other parts of the world.

But wherefore neither in the winter, nor on the Sabbath day? Not in the winter, because of the difficulty arising from the season; not on the Sabbath day, because of the absolute authority exercised by the law. For since they had need of flight, and of the swiftest flight, but neither would the Jews dare to flee on the Sabbath day, because of the law, neither in winter was such a thing easy; therefore, Pray ye, says He; for then shall be tribulation, such as never was, neither shall be.

And let not any man suppose this to have been spoken hyperbolically; but let him study the writings of Josephus, and learn the truth of the sayings. For neither can any one say, that the man being a believer, in order to establish Christ's words, has exaggerated the tragical history. For indeed He was both a Jew, and a determined Jew, and very zealous, and among them that lived after Christ's coming.

What then says this man? That those terrors surpassed all tragedy, and that no such had ever overtaken the nation. For so great was the famine, that the very mothers fought about the devouring of their children, and that there were wars about this; and he says that many when they were dead had their bellies ripped up.

I should therefore be glad to inquire of the Jews. Whence came there thus upon them wrath from God intolerable, and more sore than all that had befallen aforesaid, not in Judaea only, but in any part of the world? Is it not quite clear, that it was for the deed of the cross, and for this rejection? All would say it, and with all and before all the truth of the facts itself.

But mark, I pray you, the exceeding greatness of the ills, when not only compared with the time before, they appear more grievous, but also with all the time to come. For not in all the world, neither in all time

that is past, and that is to come, shall any one be able to say such ills have been. And very naturally; for neither had any man perpetrated, not of those that ever have been, nor of those to come hereafter, a deed so wicked and horrible. Therefore He says, there shall be tribulation such as never was, nor shall be.

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. By these things He shows them to be deserving of a more grievous punishment than had been mentioned, speaking now of the days of the war and of that siege. But what He says is like this. If, says He, the war of the Romans against the city had prevailed further, all the Jews had perished (for by no flesh here, He means no Jewish flesh), both those abroad, and those at home. For not only against those in Judā'a did they war, but also those that were dispersed everywhere they outlawed and banished, because of their hatred against the former.

2. But whom does He here mean by the elect? The believers that were shut up in the midst of them. For that Jews may not say that because of the gospel, and the worship of Christ, these ills took place, He shows, that so far from the believers being the cause, if it had not been for them, all had perished utterly. For if God had permitted the war to be protracted, not so much as a remnant of the Jews had remained, but lest those of them who had become believers should perish together with the unbelieving Jews, He quickly put down the fighting, and gave an end to the war. Therefore He says, But for the elect's sake they shall be shortened. But these things He said to leave an encouragement to those of them who were shut up in the midst of them, and to allow them to take breath, that they might not be in fear, as though they were to perish with them. And if here so great is His care for them, that for their sakes others also are saved, and that for the sake of Christians remnants were left of the Jews, how great will be their honor in the time for their crowns?

By this He also encouraged them not to be distressed at their own dangers, since these others are suffering such things, and for no profit, but for evil upon their own head.

But He not only encouraged them, but also led them off secretly and unsuspectedly from the customs of the Jews. For if there is not to be a change afterwards, and the temple is not to stand, it is quite evident that the law also shall be made to cease.

However, He spoke not this openly, but by their entire destruction He darkly intimated it. But He spoke it not openly, lest He should startle them before the time. Wherefore neither at the beginning did He of Himself fall into discourse touching these things; but having first lamented over the city, He constrained them to show Him the stones, and question Him, in order that as it were in answering them their question, He might declare to them beforehand all the things to come.

But mark thou, I pray you, the dispensation of the Spirit, that John wrote none of these things, lest he should seem to write from the very history of the things done (for indeed he lived a long time after the taking of the city), but they, who died before the taking, and had seen none of these things, they write it, in order that every way the power of the prediction should clearly shine forth.

Then, if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not: for there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the desert, go not forth: behold, He is in the secret chambers, believe it not. For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there shall the eagles be gathered together.

Having finished what concerned Jerusalem, He passes on to His own coming, and tells the signs of it, not for their use only, but for us also, and for all that shall come after us.

Then. When? Here, as I have often said, the word, then, relates not to the connection in order of time with the things before mentioned. At least, when He was minded to express the connection of time, He added, Immediately after the tribulation of those days, Matthew 24:29 but here not so, but, then, not meaning what should follow straightway after these things, but what should be in the time, when these things were to be done, of which He was about to speak. So also when it is said, In those days comes John the Baptist, he is not speaking of the time that should straightway follow, but that many years after, and that in which these things were done, of which He was about to speak. For, in fact, having spoken of the birth of Jesus, and of the coming of the magi, and of the death of Herod, He at once says, In those days comes John the Baptist; although thirty years had intervened. But this is customary in the Scripture, I mean, to use this manner of narration. So then here also, having passed over all the intermediate time from the taking of Jerusalem unto the preludes of the consummation, He speaks of the time just before the consummation. Then, He says therefore, if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not.

Awhile He secures them by the place, mentioning the distinguishing marks of His second coming, and the indications of the deceivers. For not, as when at His former coming He appeared in Bethlehem, and in a small corner of the world, and no one knew Him at the beginning, so does He say it shall be then too; but openly and with all circumstance, and so as not to need one to tell these things. And this is no small sign that He will not come secretly.

But mark how here He says nothing of war (for He is interpreting the doctrine concerning His advent), but of them that attempt to deceive. For some in the days of the apostles deceived the multitude, for they shall come, says He, and shall deceive many; Matthew 24:11 and others shall do so before His second coming, who shall also be more grievous than the former. For they shall show, He says, signs and wonders, so as to deceive if possible the very elect: Matthew 24:24 here He is speaking of Antichrist, and indicates that some also shall minister to him. Of him Paul too speaks on this wise. Having called him man of sin, and son of perdition, He added, Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders; and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10

And see how He secures them; Go not forth into the deserts, enter not into the secret chambers. He did not say, Go, and do not believe; but, Go not forth, neither depart there. For great then will be the deceiving, because that even deceiving miracles are wrought.

3. Having told them how Antichrist comes, as, for instance, that it will be in a place; He says how Himself also comes. How then does He Himself come? As the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there also will the eagles be gathered together. Matthew 24:27-28

How then shines the lightning? It needs not one to talk of it, it needs not a herald, but even to them that sit in houses, and to them in chambers it shows itself in an instant of time throughout the whole world. So shall that coming be, showing itself at once everywhere by reason of the shining forth of His glory. But He mentions also another sign, where the carcass is, there also shall the eagles be; meaning the multitude of the angels, of the martyrs, of all the saints.

Then He tells of fearful prodigies. What are these prodigies? Immediately after the tribulation of those days, says He, the sun shall be darkened. Matthew 24:29 Of the tribulation of what days does He speak? Of those of Antichrist and of the false prophets? For there shall be great tribulation, there being so many deceivers. But it is not protracted to a length of time. For if the Jewish war was shortened for the elect's sake, much more shall this temptation be limited for these same's sake. Therefore, He said not, after the tribulation, but immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, for almost at the same time all things come to pass. For the false prophets and false Christs shall come and cause confusion, and immediately He Himself will be here. Because no small turmoil is then to prevail over the world.

But how does He come? The very creation being then transfigured, for the sun shall be darkened, not destroyed, but overcome by the light of His presence; and the stars shall fall, for what shall be the need of them thenceforth, there being no night? And the powers of Heaven shall be shaken, and in all likelihood, seeing so great a change come to pass. For if when the stars were made, they trembled and marvelled (for when the stars were made, all angels, it is said, praised Me with a loud voice); much more seeing all things in course of change, and their fellow servants giving account, and the whole world standing by that awful judgment-seat, and those who have lived from Adam unto His coming, having an account demanded of them of all that they did, how shall they but tremble, and be shaken?

Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven; Matthew 24:30 that is, the cross being brighter than the sun, since this last will be darkened, and hide himself, and that will appear when it would not appear, unless it were far brighter than the beams of the sun. But wherefore does the sign appear? In order that the shamelessness of the Jews may be more abundantly silenced. For having the cross as the greatest plea, Christ thus comes to that judgment-seat, showing not His wounds only, but also the death of reproach. Then shall the tribes mourn, for there shall be no need of an accusation, when they see the cross; and they shall mourn, that by His death they are nothing benefited; because they crucified Him whom they ought to have adored.

Do you see how fearfully He has pictured His coming? How He has stirred up the spirits of His disciples? For this reason, let me add, He puts the mournful things first, and then the good things, that in this way also He may comfort and refresh them. And of His passion He suggests to them the remembrance, and of His resurrection, and with a display of glory, He mentions His cross, so that they may not be ashamed nor grieve, whereas indeed He comes then setting it forth for His sign. And another says, They shall look on Him whom they pierced. Therefore it is that they shall mourn, when they see that this is He.

And forasmuch as He had made mention of the cross, He added, They shall see the Son of Man coming, no longer on the cross, but in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory. Matthew 24:30

For think not, He means, because you hear of the cross, that it is again anything mournful, for He shall come with power and great glory. But He brings it, that their sin may be self-condemned, as if any one who had been struck by a stone, were to show the stone itself, or his garments stained with blood. And He comes in a cloud as He was taken up, and the tribes seeing these things mourn. Not however that the terrors shall with them proceed no further than mournings; but the mourning shall be, that they may bring forth their sentence from within, and condemn themselves.

And then again, He will send His angels with a great trumpet, and they shall gather the elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other. Matthew 24:31

But when you have heard of this, consider the punishment of them that remain. For neither shall they suffer that former penalty only, but this too. And as above He said, that they should say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord, Matthew 22:39 so here, that they shall mourn. For since He had spoken unto them of grievous wars, that they might learn, that together with the fearful things here, the torments there also await them, He brings them in mourning and separated from the elect, and consigned to hell; by this again rousing the disciples, and indicating from how many evils they should be delivered, and how many good things they shall enjoy.

4. And why now does He call them by angels, if He comes thus openly? To honor them in this way also. But Paul says, that they shall be caught up in clouds. And He said this also, when He was speaking concerning a resurrection. For 1 Thessalonians 4:16 the Lord Himself, it is said, shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel. So that when risen again, the angels shall gather them together, when gathered together the clouds shall catch them up; and all these things are done in a moment, in an instant. For it is not that He abiding above calls them, but He Himself comes with the sound of a trumpet. And what mean the trumpets and the sound? They are for arousing, for gladness, to set forth the amazing nature of the things then doing, for grief to them that are left.

Woe is me for that fearful day! For though we ought to rejoice when we hear these things, we feel pain, and are dejected, and our countenance is sad. Or is it I only that feel thus, and do ye rejoice at hearing of these things? For upon me at least there comes a kind of shudder when these things are said, and I lament bitterly, and groan from the very depth of my heart. For I have no part in these things, but in those that are spoken afterwards, that are said to the virgins, unto him that buried the talents he had received, unto the wicked servant. For this cause I weep, to think from what glory we are to be cast out, from what hope of blessings, and this perpetually, and forever, to spare ourselves a little labor. For if indeed this were a great toil, and a grievous law, we ought even so to do all things; nevertheless many of the remiss would seem to have at least some pretext, a poor pretext indeed, yet would they seem to have some, that the toil was great, and the time endless, and the burden intolerable; but now we can put forward no such objection; which circumstance most of all will gnaw us no less than hell at that time, when for want of a slight endeavor, and a little toil, we shall have lost Heaven, and the unspeakable blessings. For both the time is short, and the labor small, and yet we faint and are supine. Thou strivest on earth, and the crown is in Heaven; you are punished of men, and art honored of God; the race is for two days, and the reward for endless ages; the struggle is a corruptible body, and the rewards in an incorruptible.

And apart from these things, we should consider another point also, that even if we do not choose to suffer any of the things that are painful for Christ's sake, we must in other ways most assuredly endure them. For neither, though you should not have died for Christ, will you be immortal; neither though you should not have cast away your riches for Christ, will you go away hence with them. These things He requires of you, which although He should not require them, you will have to give up, because you are mortal; He wills you to do these by your choice, which you must do by necessity. So much only He requires to be added, that it be done for His sake; since that these things befall men and pass away, comes to pass of natural necessity. Do you see how easy the conflict? What it is altogether necessary for you to suffer, that choose to suffer for my sake; let this only be added, and I have sufficient obedience. The gold which you intend to lend to another, this lend to me, both at more profit, and in greater security. Your body, wherewith you are going to warfare for another, make it to war for me, for indeed I surpass your toils with recompenses in the most abundant excess. Yet thou in all other matters preferrest him that gives you more as well in loans, as in marketing and in warfare; but Christ alone, when giving more, and infinitely more than all, thou dost not

receive. And what is this so great hostility? What is this so great enmity? Where will there be any excuse or defense left for you, when the reasons for which you prefer man to man avail not to induce you to prefer God to man?

Why do you commit your treasure to the earth? Give it into my hand, He says. Does not the earth's Lord seem to you more worthy of trust than the earth? This indeed restores that which you laid in it, though oftentimes not even this, but He gives you also recompense for His keeping of it? For indeed He does exceedingly love us. Therefore if you should wish to lend, He stands ready; or to sow, He receives it; or if you should wish to build, He draws you unto Himself, saying, Build in my regions. Why do you run unto poor, unto beggarly men, who also for little gains occasion you great trouble? Nevertheless, not even on hearing these things, do we make up our minds to it, but where are fightings and wars, and wild struggles, and trials and suits of law, and false accusations, there do we hasten.

5. Does He not justly turn away from us, and punish us, when He is giving up Himself unto us for all things, and we are resisting Him? It is surely plain to all. For whether you are desirous to adorn yourself, Let it, He says, be with my ornaments; or to arm yourself, with my arms, or to clothe yourself, with my raiment; or to feed yourself, at my table; or to journey, on my way; or to inherit, my inheritance; or to enter into a country, the city of which I am builder and maker; or to build a house, among my tabernacles. For I, so far from asking you for a recompense of the things that I give you, to even make myself owe you a recompense for this very thing, if you be willing to use all I have. What can be equal to this munificence, I am Father, I am brother, I am bridegroom, I am dwelling place, I am food, I am raiment, I am root, I am foundation, all whatsoever you will, I am. Be thou in need of nothing, I will be even a servant, for I came to minister, not to be ministered unto; I am friend, and member, and head, and brother, and sister, and mother; I am all; only cling thou closely to me. I was poor for you, and a wanderer for you, on the cross for you, in the tomb for you, above I intercede for you to the Father; on earth I have come for your sake am ambassador from my Father. You are all things to me, brother, and joint heir, and friend, and member. What would you more? Why do you turn away from Him, who loves you? Why do you labor for the world? Why do you draw water into a broken cistern? For it is this to labor for the present life. Why do you comb wool into the fire? Why do you beat the air? 1 Corinthians 9:26 Why do you run in vain? Galatians 2:2

Hath not every art an end? It is surely plain to every one. Do thou also show the end of your worldly eagerness. But you can not; for, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Ecclesiastes 1:2 Let us go to the tombs; show me your father; show me your wife. Where is he that was clad in raiment of gold? He that rode in the chariot? He that had armies, that had the girdle, that had the heralds? He that was slaying these, and casting those into prison? He that put to death whom he would, and set free whom he was minded? I see nothing but bones, and a worm, and a spider's web; all those things are earth, all those a fable, all a dream, and a shadow, and a bare relation, and a picture, or rather not so much as a picture. For the picture we see at least in a likeness, but here not so much as a likeness.

And would that the evils stop with this. For now the honor, and the luxury, and the distinction, end with a shadow, with words; but the consequences of them, are no longer limited to a shadow and to words, but continue, and will pass over with us elsewhere, and will be manifest to all, the rapine, the covetousness, the fornications, the adulteries, the dreadful things beyond number; these not in similitude, neither in ashes, but written above, both words and deeds.

With what eyes then shall we behold Christ? For if any one could not bear to see his father, when conscious to himself that he had sinned against him, upon Him who infinitely exceeds a father in

forbearance how shall we then look? How shall we bear it? For indeed we shall stand at Christ's judgment-seat, and there will be a strict inquiry into all things.

But if any man disbelieve the judgments to come, let him look at the things here, at those in the prisons, those in the mines, those on the dunghills, the possessed, the frantic, them that are struggling with incurable diseases, those that are fighting against continual poverty, them that live in famine, them that are pierced with irremediable woes, those in captivity. For these persons would not suffer these things here, unless vengeance and punishments were to await all the others also that have committed such sins. And if the rest have undergone nothing here, you ought to regard this very fact as a sign that there is surely something to follow after our departure here. For the self-same God of all would not take vengeance on some, and leave others unpunished, who have committed the same or more grievous offenses, unless He designed to bring some punishments upon them there.

By these arguments then and these examples let us also humble ourselves; and let them who are obstinate unbelievers of the judgment believe it henceforth, and become better men; that having lived here in a manner worthy of the kingdom, we may attain unto the good things to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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