

Homily 78 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being prepared for Christ's coming by having oil, which represents mercy and almsgiving, and using our talents and abilities to help our neighbors.

Scripture: Matthew 25:14

Topics: "Christian Stewardship", "Spiritual Preparation"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the parables of the ten virgins and the talents from Matthew 25:1-30, emphasizing the importance of being prepared for the return of Christ and using our God-given abilities to serve others. He highlights the need for both purity and compassion, showing that virginity without mercy is futile. Chrysostom urges believers to be diligent in almsgiving, helping their neighbors, and using their talents for the common good, as these actions are crucial for salvation. He stresses the significance of imitating Christ in speech and actions, showing gentleness, meekness, and humility, and warns against having a tongue that resembles the devil's through curses, insults, and envy.

Transcript

Matt. XXV. 1-30.

Then shall the kingdom of Heaven, He says, be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. But five of them were wise, and the other five foolish, which took not, He says, oil.

Then, while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom comes, go out to meet Him. And the five arose, and being in perplexity, said to the wise, Give us of your oil. But they consented not, saying, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; go to them that sell, and buy.

And while they had gone for this, the bridegroom came, and those went in; but these came afterwards, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But He answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for you know not the day, nor the hour.

Then He spoke again another parable. A man travelling into a far country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods; to one five talents, to another two, to another one, to every man according to his several ability, and took his journey. Then, when the two had brought him the double, he that had

been entrusted with the one talent brought it alone, and being blamed says, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered; and I was afraid, and hid your talent; lo! There you have that is yours. His Lord answered and said, Thou wicked servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered: you ought therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I might have received my own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it to him that has ten talents. For to him that has shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; but from him that has not, shall be taken away even that which he has. And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

These parables are like the former parable of the faithful servant, and of him that was ungrateful and devoured his Lord's goods. For there are four in all, in different ways admonishing us about the same things, I mean about diligence in almsgiving, and about helping our neighbor by all means which we are able to use, since it is not possible to be saved in another way. But there He speaks more generally of all assistance which should be rendered to one's neighbor; but as to the virgins, he speaks particularly of mercifulness in alms, and more strongly than in the former parable. For there He punishes him that beats, and is drunken, and scatters and wastes his lord's goods, but here even him that does not help, nor spends abundantly his goods upon the needy. For they had oil indeed, but not in abundance, wherefore also they are punished.

But wherefore does He set forth this parable in the person of the virgins, and does not merely suppose any person whatever? Great things had He spoken of virginity, saying, There are eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven's sake; and, He that is able to receive, let him receive it. Matthew 19:12 He knew also that the generality of men would have a great opinion of it. For indeed the work is by nature great, and is shown so by this, that neither under the old dispensation was it fulfilled by these ancient and holy men, nor under the new was it brought under the compulsion of the law. For He did not command this, but left it to the choice of his hearers. Wherefore Paul also said Now, concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 7:25 For though I praise him that attains thereto, yet I constrain not him that is not willing, neither do I make the thing an injunction. Since then the thing is both great in itself and has great honor with the multitude, lest any one attaining to this should feel as though he had attained to all, and should be careless about the rest, He puts forth this parable sufficient to persuade them, that virginity, though it should have everything else, if destitute of the good things arising out of almsgiving, is cast out with the harlots, and He sets the inhuman and merciless with them. And most reasonably, for the one was overcome by the love of carnal pleasure, but these of money. But the love of carnal pleasure and of money are not equal, but that of carnal pleasure is far keener and more tyrannical. And the weaker the antagonist, the less excusable are these that are overcome thereby. Therefore also He calls them foolish, for that having undergone the greater labor, they have betrayed all for want of the less. But by lamps here, He means the gift itself of virginity, the purity of holiness; and by oil, humanity, almsgiving, succor to them that are in need.

Then, while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. He shows that the time intervening will not be short, leading His disciples away from the expectation that His kingdom was quite immediately to appear. For this indeed they hoped, therefore He is continually holding them back from this hope. And at the same time He intimates this too, that death is a sleep. For they slept, He says.

And about midnight there was a cry made. Either He was continuing the parable, or again He shows that the resurrection will be at night. But the cry Paul also indicates, saying, With a shout, with a voice of an

archangel, with the last trump, He shall come down from Heaven. And what mean the trumpets, and what says the cry? The bridegroom comes. When therefore they had trimmed their lamps, the foolish say unto the wise, Give us of your oil. Again He calls them foolish, showing that nothing can be more foolish than they who are wealthy here, and depart naked there, where most of all we have need of humanity, where we want much oil. But not in this respect only were they foolish, but also because they looked to receive it there, and sought it out of season; and yet nothing could be more humane than those virgins, who for this especially were approved. Neither do they seek for it all, for, Give us, they say, of your oil; and the urgency of their need is indicated; for our lamps, they say, are going out. But even so they failed, and neither the humanity of those whom they asked, nor the easiness of their request, nor their necessity and want, made them obtain.

But what now do we learn from hence? That no man can protect us there, if we are betrayed by our works, not because he will not, but because he cannot. For these too take refuge in the impossibility. This the blessed Abraham also indicated, saying, Between us and you there is a great gulf, Luke 16:26 so that not even when willing is it permitted them to pass it.

But go to them that sell, and buy. And who are they that sell? The poor. And where are these? Here, and then should they have sought them, not at that time.

2. Do you see what great profit arises to us from the poor? Should you take them away, you would take away the great hope of our salvation. Wherefore here must we get together the oil, that it may be useful to us there, when the time calls us. For that is not the time of collecting it, but this. Spend not then your goods for nought in luxury and vainglory. For you will have need of much oil there.

Having heard these things, those virgins went their way; but they profited nothing. And this He says, either pursuing the parable, and working it up; or also by these things showing, that though we should become humane after our departure, we shall gain nothing from thence towards our escape. Therefore neither did their forwardness avail these virgins, because they went to them that sell not here, but there; nor the rich man, when he became so charitable, as even to be anxious about his relations. For he that was passing by him that was laid at the gate, is eager to rescue from perils and from hell them whom he did not so much as see, and entreats that some be sent to tell them these things. But nevertheless, he derived no benefit from thence, as neither did these virgins. For when they having heard these things went their way, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with Him, but the others were shut out. After their many labors, after their innumerable toils, and that intolerable fight, and those trophies which they had set up over the madness of natural appetite, disgraced, and with their lamps gone out, they withdrew, bending down their faces to the earth. For nothing is more sullied than virginity not having mercy; so that even the multitude are wont to call the unmerciful dark. Where then was the profit of virginity, when they saw not the bridegroom? And not even when they had knocked did they obtain, but they heard that fearful saying, Depart, I know you not. Matthew 25:12 And when He has said this, nothing else but hell is left, and that intolerable punishment; or rather, this word is more grievous even than hell. This word He speaks to them also that work iniquity.

Watch therefore, for you know not the day nor the hour. Matthew 25:13 Do you see how continually He adds this, showing how awful our ignorance concerning our departure hence? Where now are they, who throughout all their life are remiss, but when they are blamed by us, are saying, At the time of my death, I shall leave money to the poor. Let them listen to these words, and be amended. For indeed at that time many have failed of this, having been snatched away at once, and not permitted so much as to give

charge to their relations touching what they wished to be done.

This parable was spoken with respect to mercy in alms; but the one that comes after this, to them that neither in money, nor in word, nor in protection, nor in any other things whatever, are willing to assist their neighbors, but withhold all.

And wherefore can it be that this parable brings forward a king, but that a bridegroom? That you might learn how close Christ is joined unto the virgins that strip themselves of their possessions; for this indeed is virginity. Wherefore Paul also makes this as a definition of the thing. The unmarried woman cares for the things of the Lord; 1 Corinthians 7:34-35 such are his words: and, For that which is comely, and that you may attend upon the Lord without distraction. These things we advise, he says.

And if in Luke the parable of the talents is otherwise put, this is to be said, that the one is really different from the other. For in that, from the one capital different degrees of increase were made, for from one pound one brought five, another ten; wherefore neither did they obtain the same recompense; but here, it is the contrary, and the crown is accordingly equal. For he that received two gave two, and he that had received the five again in like manner; but there since from the same beginning one made the greater, one the less, increase; as might be expected, in the rewards also, they do not enjoy the same.

But see Him everywhere, not requiring it again immediately. For in the case of the vineyard, He let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country; and here He committed to them the talents, and took His journey, that you might learn His long-suffering. And to me He seems to say these things, to intimate the resurrection. But here it is no more a vineyard and husbandmen, but all servants. For not to rulers only, nor to Jews, but to all, does He address His discourse. And they who bring a return unto Him confess frankly, both what is their own, and what their Master's. And the one says, Lord, You gave me five talents; and the other says, two, indicating that from Him they received the source of their gain, and they are very thankful, and reckon all to Him.

What then says the Master? Well done, thou good (for this is goodness to look to one's neighbor) and faithful servant; you were faithful over few things, I will set you over many things: enter thou into the joy of your Lord, Matthew 25:23 meaning by this expression all blessedness.

But not so that other one, but how? I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you sowed not, and gathering where you did not scatter: and I was afraid, and hid your talent: lo, there you have that is yours. Matthew 25:24-25 What then the Master? You ought to have put my money to the exchangers, that is, that ought to have spoken, to have admonished, to have advised. But are they disobedient? Yet this is nought to you.

What could be more gentle than this? For men indeed do not so, but him that has put out the money at usury, even him do they make also responsible to require it again. But He not so; but, You ought, He says, to have put it out, and to have committed the requiring of it again to me. And I should have required it with increase; by increase upon the hearing, meaning the showing forth of the works. You ought to have done that which is easier, and to have left to me what is more difficult. Forasmuch then as he did not this, Take, says He, the talent from him, and give it to him that has ten talents. For unto every one that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has. Matthew 25:28-29 What then is this? He that has a gift of word and teaching to profit thereby, and uses it not, will lose the gift also; but he that gives diligence, will gain to himself the gift in more abundance; even as the other loses what he had received. But not to this is the penalty limited for him that

is slothful, but even intolerable is the punishment, and with the punishment the sentence, which is full of a heavy accusation. For cast, says He, the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Do you see how not only the spoiler, and the covetous, nor only the doer of evil things, but also he that does not good things, is punished with extreme punishment.

Let us hearken then to these words. As we have opportunity, let us help on our salvation, let us get oil for our lamps, let us labor to add to our talent. For if we be backward, and spend our time in sloth here, no one will pity us any more hereafter, though we should wail ten thousand times. He also that had on the filthy garments condemned himself, and profited nothing. He also that had the one talent restored that which was committed to his charge, and yet was condemned. The virgins again entreated, and came unto Him and knocked, and all in vain, and without effect.

Knowing then these things, let us contribute alike wealth, and diligence, and protection, and all things for our neighbor's advantage. For the talents here are each person's ability, whether in the way of protection, or in money, or in teaching, or in whatever thing of the kind. Let no man say, I have but one talent, and can do nothing; for you can even by one approve yourself. For you are not poorer than that widow; you are not more uninstructed than Peter and John, who were both unlearned and ignorant men; Acts 4:13 but nevertheless, since they showed forth a zeal, and did all things for the common good, they attained to Heaven. For nothing is so pleasing to God, as to live for the common advantage.

For this end God gave us speech, and hands, and feet, and strength of body, and mind, and understanding, that we might use all these things, both for our own salvation, and for our neighbor's advantage. For not for hymns only and thanksgivings is our speech serviceable to us, but it is profitable also for instruction and admonition. And if indeed we used it to this end, we should be imitating our Master; but if for the opposite ends, the devil. Since Peter also, when he confessed the Christ, was blessed, as having spoken the words of the Father; but when he refused the cross, and dissuaded it, he was severely reproved, as savoring the things of the devil. But if where the saying was of ignorance, so heavy is the blame, when we of our own will commit many sins, what favor shall we have?

Such things then let us speak, that of themselves they may be evidently the words of Christ. For not only if I should say, Arise, and walk; Matthew 9:5 neither if I should say, Tabitha, arise, Acts 9:40 then only do I speak Christ's words, but much more if being reviled I bless, if being despitefully used I pray for him that does despite to me. Lately indeed I said, that our tongue is a hand laying hold on the feet of God; but now much more do I say, that our tongue is a tongue imitating the tongue of Christ, if it show forth the strictness that becomes us, if we speak those things which He wills. But what are the things which He wills us to speak? Words full of gentleness and meekness, even as also He Himself used to speak, saying to them that were insulting Him, I have not a devil; and again, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil. John 18:23 If you also speak in this way; if you speak for your neighbor's amendment, you will obtain a tongue like that tongue. And these things God Himself says; For he that brings out the precious from the vile, shall be as my mouth; Jeremiah 15:19 such are His words.

When therefore your tongue is as Christ's tongue, and your mouth has become the mouth of the Father, and you are a temple of the Holy Ghost, then what kind of honor could be equal to this? For not even if your mouth were made of gold, no nor even of precious stones, would it shine like as now, when lit up with the ornament of meekness. For what is more lovely than a mouth that knows not how to insult, but is used to bless and give good words? But if you can not bear to bless him that curses you, hold your peace, and accomplish but this for the time; and proceeding in order, and striving as you ought, you will attain to that

other point also, and will acquire such a mouth, as we have spoken of.

4. And do not account the saying to be rash. For the Lord is loving to man, and the gift comes of His goodness. It is rash to have a mouth like the devil, to have a tongue resembling that of an evil demon, especially for him that partakes of such mysteries, and communicates of the very flesh of the Lord. Reflecting then on these things, become like Him, to the utmost of your power. No longer then will the devil be able so much as to look you in the face, when you have become such a one as this. For indeed he recognizes the image of the King, he knows the weapons of Christ, whereby he was worsted. And what are these? Gentleness and meekness. For when on the mountain Christ overthrew and laid low the devil who was assaulting him, it was not by making it known that He was Christ, but He entrapped him by these sayings, He took him by gentleness, he turned him to flight by meekness. Thou also must do this; should you see a man become a devil, and coming against you, even so do thou likewise overcome. Christ gave you also power to become like Him, so far as your ability extends. Be not afraid at hearing this. The fear is not to be like Him. Speak then after His manner, and you have become in this respect such as He, so far as it is possible for one who is a man to become so.

Wherefore greater is he that thus speaks, than he that prophecies. For this is entirely a gift, but in the other is also your labor and toil. Teach your soul to frame you a mouth like to Christ's mouth. For it can create such things, if it will; it knows the art, if it be not remiss. And how is such a mouth made? One may ask. By what kind of colorings? By what kind of material? By no colorings, indeed, or material; but by virtue only, and meekness, and humility.

Let us see also how a devil's mouth is made; that we may never frame that. How then is it made? By curses, by insults, by envy, by perjury. For when any one speaks his words, he takes his tongue. What kind of excuse then shall we have; or rather, what manner of punishment shall we not undergo; when this our tongue, wherewith we are allowed to taste of the Lord's flesh, when this, I say, we overlook, speaking the devil's words?

Let us not overlook it, but let us use all diligence, in order to train it to imitate its Lord. For if we train it to this, it will place us with great confidence at Christ's judgment seat. Unless any one know how to speak thus, the judge will not so much as hear him. For like as when the judge chances to be a Roman, he will not hear the defense of one who knows not how to speak thus; so likewise Christ, unless thou speak after His fashion, will not hear you, nor give heed.

Let us learn therefore to speak in such wise as our Judge is wont to hear; let it be our endeavor to imitate that tongue. And should you fall into grief, take heed lest the tyranny of despondency pervert your tongue, but that thou speak like Christ. For He too mourned for Lazarus and Judas. Should thou fall into fear, seek again to speak even as He. For He Himself fell into fear for your sake, with regard to His manhood. the other sheep, that He might indicate the unfruitfulness of the one, for no fruit will come from kids; and the great profit from the other, for indeed from sheep great is the profit, as well from the milk, as from the wool, and from the young, of all which things the kid is destitute.

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