

Homily 80 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus defends a woman's anointing of him, highlighting the importance of her act and the dangers of covetousness.

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Covetousness And Greed"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the story of the woman who anointed Jesus with precious ointment, highlighting her deep reverence and faith, contrasting her actions with the disciples' misunderstanding and Judas' betrayal for money. Chrysostom emphasizes the woman's act of pouring ointment on Jesus as an honor and preparation for His burial, showing her contrite soul and fervent faith. He warns against the dangers of covetousness, using Judas as an example, and encourages self-restraint and contentment, illustrating how true wealth comes from a rich soul rather than material possessions.

Transcript

Matthew 26:6-7.

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto Him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on His head, as He sat at meat.

This woman seems indeed to be one and the same with all the evangelists, yet she is not so; but though with the three she does seem to me to be one and the same, yet not so with John, but another person, one much to be admired, the sister of Lazarus.

But not without purpose did the evangelist mention the leprosy of Simon, but in order that He might show whence the woman took confidence, and came unto Him. For inasmuch as the leprosy seemed a most unclean disease, and to be abhorred, and yet she saw Jesus had both healed the man (for else He would not have chosen to have tarried with a leper), and had gone into his house; she grew confident, that He would also easily wipe off the uncleanness of her soul. And not for nought does He name the city also, Bethany, but that you might learn, that of His own will He comes to His passion. For He who before this was fleeing through the midst of them; then, at the time when their envy was most kindled, comes near within about fifteen furlongs; so completely was His former withdrawing Himself a part of a dispensation.

The woman therefore having seen Him, and having taken confidence from thence came unto Him. For if she that had the issue of blood, although conscious to herself of nothing like this, yet because of that

natural seeming uncleanness, approached Him trembling and in fear; much more was it likely this woman should be slow, and shrink back because of her evil conscience. Wherefore also it is after many women, the Samaritan, the Canaanite, her that had the issue of blood, and other besides, that she comes unto Him, being conscious to herself of much impurity; and then not publicly but in a house. And whereas all the others were coming unto Him for the healing of the body alone, she came unto Him by way of honor only, and for the amendment of the soul. For neither was she at all afflicted in body, so that for this most especially one might marvel at her.

And not as to a mere man did she come unto Him; for then she would not have wiped His feet with her hair, but as to one greater than man can be. Therefore that which is the most honorable member of the whole body, this she laid at Christ's feet, even her own head.

But when His disciples saw it, they had indignation, such are the words, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. But when Jesus understood it, He said, Why trouble ye the woman? For she has wrought a good work upon me? For you have the poor always with you, but me you have not always. For in that she has poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman has done, be told for a memorial of her.

And whence had they this thought? They used to hear their Master saying, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, and blaming the Jews, because they omitted the weightier matters, judgment, and mercy, and faith, and discoursing much on the mount concerning almsgiving, and from these things they inferred with themselves, and reasoned, that if He accepts not whole burnt offerings, neither the ancient worship, much more will He not accept the anointing of oil.

But though they thus thought, He knowing her intention suffers her. For indeed great was her reverence, and unspeakable her zeal; wherefore of this exceeding condescension, He permitted the oil to be poured even on His head.

For if He refused not to become man, and to be borne in the womb, and to be fed at the breast, why do you marvel, if He does not utterly reject this? For like as the Father suffered a savor of meat, and smoke, even so did He the harlot, accepting, as I have already said, her intention. For Jacob too anointed a pillar to God, and oil was offered in the sacrifices, and the priests were anointed with ointment.

But the disciples not knowing her purpose found fault unseasonably, and by the things they laid to her charge, they show the woman's munificence. For saying, that it might have been sold for three hundred pence, they showed how much this woman had spent on the ointment, and how great generosity she had manifested. Wherefore He also rebuked them, saying, Why trouble ye the woman? And He adds a reason, as it was His will again to put them in mind of His passion, For she did it, He said, for my burial. And another reason. For you have the poor always with you, but me you have not always; and, Whosoever the gospel shall be preached, that shall be told also which this woman has done.

Do you see how again He declares beforehand the going forth unto the Gentiles, in this way also consoling them for His death, if after the cross His power was so to shine forth, that the gospel should be spread abroad in every part of the earth.

Who then is so wretched as to set his face against so much truth? For lo! What He said has come to pass, and to whatever part of the earth you may go, you will see her celebrated.

And yet neither was the person that did it distinguished, nor had what was done many witnesses, neither was it in a theatre, but in a house, that it took place, and this a house of some leper, the disciples only being present.

2. Who then proclaimed it, and caused it to be spread abroad? It was the power of Him who is speaking these words. And while of countless kings and generals the noble exploits even of those whose memorials remain have sunk into silence; and having overthrown cities, and encompassed them with walls, and set up trophies, and enslaved many nations, they are not known so much as by hearsay, nor by name, though they have both set up statues, and established laws; yet that a woman who was a harlot poured out oil in the house of some leper, in the presence of ten men, this all men celebrate throughout the world; and so great a time has passed, and yet the memory of that which was done has not faded away, but alike Persians and Indians, Scythians and Thracians, and Sarmatians, and the race of the Moors, and they that dwell in the British Islands, spread abroad that which was done secretly in a house by a woman that had been a harlot.

Great is the loving-kindness of the Lord. He endures an harlot, an harlot kissing his feet, and moistening them with oil, and wiping them with her hair, and He receives her, and reproves them that blame her. For neither was it right that for so much zeal the woman should be driven to despair.

But mark thou this too, how far they were now raised up above the world, and forward in almsgiving. And why was it He did not merely say, She has wrought a good work, but before this, Why trouble ye the woman? That they might learn not at the beginning to require too high principles of the weaker sort. Therefore neither does He examine the act merely itself by itself, but taking into account the person of the woman. And indeed if He had been making a law, He would not have brought in the woman, but that you might learn that for her sake these things were said, that they might not mar her budding faith, but rather cherish it, therefore He says it, teaching us whatever good thing may be done by any man, though it be not quite perfect, to receive it, and encourage it, and advance it, and not to seek all perfection at the beginning. For, that at least He Himself would rather have desired this, is manifest from the fact, that He required a bag to be borne, who had not where to lay His head. But then the time demanded not this, that He should correct the deed, but that He should accept it only. For even as, if any one asked Him, without the woman's having done it, He would not have approved this; so, after she had done it, He looks to one thing only, that she be not driven to perplexity by the reproof of the disciples, but that she should go from His care, having been made more cheerful and better. For indeed after the oil had been poured out, their rebuke had no seasonableness.

Do thou then likewise, if you should see any one provide sacred vessels and offer them, and loving to labor upon any other ornament of the church, about its walls or floor; do not command what has been made to be sold, or overthrown, lest you spoil his zeal. But if, before he had provided them, he were to tell you of it, command it to be given to the poor; forasmuch as He also did this not to spoil the spirit of the woman, and as many things as He says, He speaks for her comfort.

Then because He had said, She has done it for my burial; that He might not seem to perplex the woman, by making mention of such a thing as this, His burial and death, I mean; see how by that which follows He recovers her, saying, What she has done shall be spoken of in the whole world.

And this was at once consolation to His disciples, and comfort and praise to her. For all men, He says, shall celebrate her hereafter; and now too has she announced beforehand my passion, by bringing unto

me what was needed for a funeral, let not therefore any man reprove her. For I am so far from condemning her as having done amiss, or from blaming her as having not acted rightly, that I will not suffer what has been done to lie hidden, but the world shall know that which has been done in a house, and in secret. For in truth the deed came of a reverential mind, and fervent faith, and a contrite soul.

And wherefore did He promise the woman nothing spiritual; but the perpetual memory? From this He is causing her to feel a confidence about the other things also. For if she has wrought a good work, it is quite evident she shall receive a due reward.

Then went one of the twelve, he that was called Judas Iscariot, unto the chief priests, and said to them, What will you give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? Then. When? When these things were spoken, when He had said, it is for my burial, and not even thereby was he moved to compunction, neither when he heard that the Gospel should be preached everywhere did he fear (and yet it was the language of unspeakable power), but when women showed so much honor, and women that had been harlots, then he wrought the devil's works.

But what can be the reason they mention his surname? Because there was also another Judas. And they do not shrink from saying, He was of the twelve; so entirely do they hide none of those things which seem to be matters of reproach. And yet they might have said merely this, that he was one of the disciples, for there were others besides. But now they add, of the twelve, as though they had said, of the first company of those selected as the best, of them with Peter and John. Because for one thing did they care, for truth alone, not for concealing what things were done.

For this cause many of the signs they pass by, but of the things that appear to be matters of reproach they conceal nothing; but though it be word, though it be deed, though it be what you will of this kind, they proclaim it with confidence.

3. And not these only, but even John himself, who utters the higher doctrines. For he most of all tells us of the affronts and the reproachful things that were done unto Him.

And see how great is the wickedness of Judas, in that he comes unto them of his own accord, in that he does this for money, and for such a sum of money.

But Luke says, that he conferred with the chief captains. For after that the Jews became seditious, the Romans set over them those that should provide for their good order. For their government had now undergone a change according to the prophecy.

To these then he went and said, What will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you. And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him. For indeed he was afraid of the multitude, and desired to seize him alone.

Oh madness! How did covetousness altogether blind him! For he that had often seen Him when He went through the midst, and was not seized, and when He afforded many demonstrations of His Godhead and power, looked to lay hold on Him; and this while He was using like a charm for him so many, both awful and soothing words, to put an end to this evil thought. For not even at the supper did He forbear from this care of him, but unto the last day discoursed to him of these things. But he profited nothing. Yet not for that did the Lord cease to do His part.

Knowing this, then, let us also not intermit to do all things unto them that sin and are remiss, warning, teaching, exhorting, admonishing, advising, though we profit nothing. For Christ indeed foreknew that the traitor was incorrigible, yet nevertheless He ceased not to supply what could be done by Himself, as well admonishing as threatening and bemoaning over him, and nowhere plainly, nor openly, but in a concealed way. And at the very time of the betrayal, He allowed him even to kiss Him, but this benefited him nothing. So great an evil is covetousness, this made him both a traitor, and a sacrilegious robber.

Hearken, all you covetous, you that have the disease of Judas; hearken, and beware of the calamity. For if he that was with Christ, and wrought signs, and had the benefit of so much instruction, because he was not freed from the disease, was sunk into such a gulf; how much more shall you, who do not so much as listen to the Scripture, who are constantly riveted to the things present, become an easy prey to this calamity, unless you have the advantage of constant care. Every day was that man with Him, who had not where to lay His head, and every day was he instructed by deeds, and by words, not to have gold, nor silver, nor two coats; and yet he was not taught self restraint; and how do you expect to escape the disease, if you have not the benefit of earnest attention, and dost not use much diligence? For terrible, terrible is the monster, yet nevertheless, if you be willing, you will easily get the better of him. For the desire is not natural; and this is manifest from them that are free from it. For natural things are common to all; but this desire has its origin from remissness alone; hence it takes its birth, hence it derives its increase, and when it has seized upon those who look greedily after it, it makes them live contrary to nature. For when they regard not their fellow countrymen, their friends, their brethren, in a word all men, and with these even themselves, this is to live against nature. Whence it is evident that the vice and disease of covetousness, wherein Judas, being entangled, became a traitor, is contrary to nature. And how did he become such a one, you may say, having been called by Christ? Because God's call is not compulsory, neither does it force the will of them who are not minded to choose virtue, but admonishes indeed, and advises, and does and manages all things, so as to persuade men to become good; but if some endure not, it does not compel. But if you would learn from what cause he became such as he was, you will find him to have been ruined by covetousness.

And how was he taken by this calamity? One may say. Because he grew remiss. For hence arise such changes, as on the other hand, those for the better from diligence. How many for instance that were violent, are now more gentle than lambs? How many lascivious persons have become afterwards continent? How many, heretofore covetous, yet now have cast away even their own possessions? And the contrary again has been the result of remissness. For Gehazi also lived with a holy man, and he too became depraved from the same disease. For this calamity is the most grievous of all. Hence come robbers of tombs, hence menslayers, hence wars and fightings, and whatsoever evil you may mention, it comes hence. And in every respect is such a one useless, whether it be requisite to lead an army or to guide a people: or rather not in public matters only, but also in private. If he is to marry a wife, he will not take the virtuous woman, but the vilest of all; if he have to buy a house, not that which becomes a free man, but what can bring much rent; if he is to buy slaves, or what else it may be, he will take the worst.

And why do I speak of leading an army, and guiding a people, and managing households; for should he be a king, he is the most wretched of all men, and a pest to the world, and the poorest of all men. For he will feel like one of the common sort, not accounting all men's possessions to be his, but himself to be one of all; and when spoiling all men's goods, thinks himself to have less than any. For measuring the things present by his desire for those whereof he is not yet possessed, he will account the former nothing compared to the latter. Wherefore also one says, There is not a more wicked thing than a covetous man.

4. For such a one both sets himself to sale, and goes about, a common enemy of the world, grieving that the earth does not bear gold instead of the grain, and the fountains instead of streams, and the mountains instead of stone; vexed at the fruitfulness of the seasons, troubled at common benefits; shunning every means whence one cannot obtain money; undergoing all things whence one can scrape together so much as two farthings; hating all men, the poor and the rich; the poor, lest they should come and beg of him; the rich, because he has not their possessions. All men he accounts to be possessed of what is his, and as though he had been injured by all, so is he displeased with all. He knows not plenty, he has no experience of satiety, he is more wretched than any, even as, on the other hand, he that is freed from these things, and practises self-restraint, is the most enviable. For the virtuous man, though he be a servant, though a prisoner, is the most happy of all men. For no one shall do him ill, no not though all men should come together out of the world, setting in motion arms and camps, and warring with him. But he that is depraved and vile, and such as we have described, though he be a king, though he have on a thousand diadems, will suffer the utmost extremities, even from a common hand. So feeble is vice, so strong is virtue.

Why then do you mourn, being in a state of poverty. Why do you wail keeping a feast, for indeed it is an occasion of feasting. Why do you weep, for poverty is a festival, if you be wise. Why do you lament, thou little child; for such a one we should call a little child. Did such a person strike you? What is this, he made you more able to endure? But did he take away your money? He has removed the greater part of your burden. But has he cut off your honor? Again you tell me of another kind of freedom. Hear even those without teaching wisdom touching these things, and saying, You have suffered no ill, if you show no regard to it. But has he taken away that great house of yours, which has enclosures about it? But behold the whole earth is before you, the public buildings, whether you would have them for delight, or for use. And what is more pleasing or more beautiful than the firmament of Heaven.

How long are you poor and needy? It is not possible for him to be rich, who is not wealthy in his soul; like as it is not possible for him to be poor, who has not the poverty in his mind. For if the soul is a nobler thing than the body, the less noble parts have not power to affect it after themselves; but the noble part draws over unto herself, and changes those that are not so noble. For so the heart, when it has received any hurt, affects the whole body accordingly; if its temperament be disordered, it mars all, if it be rightly tempered, it profits all. And if any of the remaining parts should have become corrupt, while this remains sound, it easily shakes off what is evil in them also.

And that I may further make what I say more plain, what is the use, I pray you, of verdant branches, when the root is withering? And what is the harm of the leaves being withered above, while this is sound? So also here there is no use of money, while the soul is poor; neither harm from poverty, when the soul is rich. And how can a soul, one may say, be rich, being in want of money? Then above all times might this be; for then also is it wont to be rich.

For if, as we have often shown, this is a sure proof of being rich, to despise wealth, and to want nothing; and of poverty again, to want, and any one would more easily despise money in poverty than in wealth, it is quite evident that to be in poverty rather makes one to be rich. For indeed that the rich man sets his heart on money more than the poor man, is surely plain to every one; like as the drunken man is thirsty, rather than he that has partaken of drink sufficiently. For neither is his desire such as to be quenched by too much; but, on the contrary, it is its nature to be inflamed by this. For fire likewise, when it has received more food, then most of all waxes fierce; and the tyranny of wealth, when you have cast into it more gold,

then most especially is increased.

If then the desiring more be a mark of poverty; and he that is in the possession of riches is like this; he is especially in poverty. Do you see that the soul then most of all is poor, when it is rich; and then is rich, when it is in poverty?

And if you will, let us exercise our reasoning in persons also, and let there be two, the one having ten thousand talents, the other ten, and from both let us take away these things. Who then will grieve the most? He that has lost the ten thousand. But he would not have grieved more, unless he had loved it more; but if he loves more, he desires more; but if he desires more, he is more in poverty. For this do we most desire, of which we are most in want, for desire is from want. For where there is satiety, there cannot be desire. For then are we most thirsty, when we have most need of drink.

And all these things have I said, to show that if we be vigilant, no one shall harm us; and that the harm arises not from poverty but from ourselves. Wherefore I beseech you with all diligence to put away the pest of covetousness, that we may both be wealthy here, and enjoy the good things eternal, unto which God grant we may all attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-80-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