

Homily 84 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus' death is a demonstration of spiritual victory, and a lesson in the importance of enduring defeat in order to achieve true triumph.

Scripture: Matthew 26:52-66, Luke 22:36, John 18:10

Topics: "Jesus Arrested", "Divine Sovereignty"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the events leading to Jesus' arrest, highlighting Peter's impulsive act of cutting off the high priest's servant's ear and Jesus' response to put away the sword, emphasizing the fulfillment of Scriptures and Jesus' willingness to be betrayed. Chrysostom delves into the significance of Jesus allowing His disciples to carry swords, not for defense but to indicate His impending betrayal. He explains how Jesus' actions and words during His arrest demonstrate His power, forbearance, and meekness, ultimately leading to His crucifixion and the fulfillment of prophecies.

Transcript

Matt. XXVI. 51-54.

And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched forth his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.

Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again your sword unto his place, for all they that take the sword, shall perish by the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot pray to the Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?

Who was this one, who cut off the ear? John says that it was Peter. John 18:10 For the act was of his fervor.

But this other point is worth inquiry, wherefore they were bearing swords? For that they bore them is evident not hence only, but from their saying when asked, here are two. But wherefore did Christ even permit them to have swords? For Luke affirms this too, that He said to them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And when they said, Nothing, He said to them, But now, he that has a purse, let him take it, and a scrip, and he that has no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. And when they said, Here are two swords, He said to them, It is enough.

Wherefore then did He suffer them to have them? To assure them that He was to be betrayed. Therefore He says unto them, Let him buy a sword, not that they should arm themselves, far from it; but by this, indicating His being betrayed.

And wherefore does He mention a scrip also? He was teaching them henceforth to be sober, and wakeful, and to use much diligence on their own part. For at the beginning He cherished them (as being inexperienced) with much putting forth of His power but afterwards bringing them forth as young birds out of the nest, He commands them to use their own wings. Then, that they might not suppose that it was for weakness He is letting them alone, in commanding them also to work their part, He reminds them of the former things, saying, When I sent you without purse, lacked ye anything? that by both they might learn His power, both wherein He protected them, and wherein He now leaves them to themselves by degrees.

But whence were the swords there? They had come forth from the supper, and from the table. It was likely also there should be swords because of the lamb, and that the disciples, hearing that certain were coming forth against Him, took them for defense, as meaning to fight in behalf of their Master, which was of their thought only. Wherefore also Peter is rebuked for using it, and with a severe threat. For he was resisting the servant who came, warmly indeed, yet not defending himself, but doing this in behalf of his Master.

Christ however suffered not any harm to ensue. For He healed him, and showed forth a great miracle, enough to indicate at once both His forbearance and His power, and the affection and meekness of His disciple. For then he acted from affection, now with dutifulness. For when he heard, Put up your sword into its sheath, John 18:11 he obeyed straightway, and afterwards nowhere does this.

But another says, that they moreover asked, Shall we smite? Luke 22:49 but that He forbid it, and healed the man, and rebuked His disciple, and threatened, that He might move him to obedience. For all they that take the sword, He said, shall die with the sword.

And he adds a reason, saying, Think ye that I cannot pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Matthew 26:53-54 By these words He quenched their anger, indicating that to the Scriptures also, this seemed good. Wherefore there too He prayed, that they might take meekly what befell Him, when they had learned that this again is done according to God's will.

And by these two things, He comforted them, both by the punishment of them that are plotting against Him, For all they, He says, that take the sword shall perish with the sword; and by His not undergoing these things against His will, For I can pray, He says, to my Father.

And wherefore did He not say, Think ye that I cannot destroy them all? Because He was more likely to be believed in saying what He did say; for not yet had they the right belief concerning Him. And a little while before He had said, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and, Father, let the cup pass from me; Matthew 26:38-39 and He had appeared in an agony and sweating, and strengthened by an angel.

Since then He had shown forth many tokens of human nature, He did not seem likely to speak so as to be believed, if He had said, Think ye that I cannot destroy them. Therefore He says, What, think ye that I cannot pray to my Father? And again He speaks it humbly, in saying, He will presently give me twelve legions of angels. For if one angel slew one hundred and eighty-five armed thousands, 2 Kings 19:35 what need of twelve legions against a thousand men? But He frames His language with a view to their terror and weakness, for indeed they were dead with fear. Wherefore also He brings against them the

Scriptures, saying, How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled? alarming them by this also. For if this be approved by the Scriptures, do ye oppose and fight against them?

2. And to His disciples He says these things; but to the others, Have you come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily teaching in the temple, and you laid no hold on me.

See how many things He does that might awaken them. He cast them to the ground, He healed the servant's ear, He threatened them with being slain; For they shall perish with the sword, He says, who take the sword. By the healing of the ear, He gave assurance of these things also; from every quarter, both from the things present, and from the things to come, manifesting His power, and showing that it was not a work of their strength to seize Him. Wherefore He also adds, I was daily with you, and sat teaching, and you laid no hold on me; by this also making it manifest, that the seizure was of His permission. He passed over the miracles, and mentions the teaching, that He might not seem to boast.

When I taught, you laid no hold on me; when I held my peace, did ye come against me? I was in the temple, and no one seized me, and now do ye come upon me late and at midnight with swords and staves? What need was there of these weapons against Him, who was with you always? By these things teaching them, that unless He had voluntarily yielded, not even then would they have succeeded. For neither could they (who were not able to hold Him when in their hands, and who, when they had got Him in the midst of them, had not prevailed) even then have succeeded, unless He had been willing.

After this, He solves also the difficulty why He willed it then. For, this was done, He says, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Matthew 26:56 See how even up to the last hour, and in the very act of being betrayed, He did all things for their amendment, healing, prophesying, threatening. For, He says, they shall perish by the sword. To show that He is suffering voluntarily, He says, I was daily with you teaching; to manifest His accordance with the Father, He adds, That the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

But wherefore did they not lay hold on Him in the temple? Because they would not have dared in the temple, on account of the people. Wherefore also He went forth without, both by the place and by the time giving them security, and even to the last hour taking away their excuse. For He who, in order that He might obey the prophets, gave up even Himself, how did He teach things contrary to them?

Then all His disciples, it is said, forsook Him, and fled. For when He was seized, they remained; but when He had said these things to the multitudes, they fled. For thenceforth they saw that escape was no longer possible, when He was giving Himself up to them voluntarily, and saying, that this was done according to the Scriptures.

And when these were fled, they lead Him away to Caiaphas; but Peter followed, and entered in to see what the end should be.

Great was the fervor of the disciple; neither did he fly when he saw them flying, but stood his ground, and went in with Him. And if John did so too, yet he was known to the high priest. John 18:15

And why did they lead Him away there where they were all assembled? That they might do all things with consent of the chief priests. For he was then high priest, and all were waiting for Christ there, to such a degree did they spend the whole night, and give up their sleep for this object. For neither did they then eat the passover, but watched for this other purpose. For John, when he had said that it was early, added,

they entered into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the passover.

What must we say then? That they ate it on another day, and broke the law, on account of their eager desire about this murder. For Christ would not have transgressed as to the time of the passover, but they who were daring all things, and trampling under foot a thousand laws. For since they were exceedingly boiling with rage, and having often attempted to seize Him, had not been able; having then taken Him unexpectedly, they chose even to pass by the passover, for the sake of satiating their murderous lust.

Wherefore also they were all assembled together, and it was a council of pestilent men, and they ask some questions, wishing to invest this plot with the appearance of a court of justice. For neither did their testimonies agree together; so feigned was the court of justice, and all things full of confusion and disorder.

But false witnesses came, and said, This fellow said, I will destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it. And indeed He had said, In three days, but He said not, I will destroy, but, Destroy, and not about that temple but about His own body.

What then does the high priest? Willing to press Him to a defense, that by that he might take Him, he says, Hearest Thou not what these witness against You? But He held His peace.

For the attempts at defense were unprofitable, no man hearing. For this was a show only of a court of justice, but in truth an onset of robbers, assailing Him without cause, as in a cave, or on a road.

Wherefore He held His peace, but the other continued, saying, I adjure You by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of the living God. But He said, You have said. Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall you see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He has spoken blasphemy. And this he did to add force to the accusation, and to aggravate what He said, by the act. For since what had been said moved the hearers to fear, what they did about Stephen, Acts 7:59 stopping their ears, this high priest does here also.

3. And yet what kind of blasphemy was this? For indeed before He had said, when they were gathered together, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on my right hand, Matthew 22:43-46 and interpreted the saying, and they dared say nothing, but held their peace, and from that time forth gainsaid Him no more. Why then did they now call the saying a blasphemy? And wherefore also did Christ thus answer them? To take away all their excuse, because unto the last day He taught that He was Christ, and that He sits at the right hand of the Father, and that He will come again to judge the world, which was the language of one manifesting His full accordance with the Father.

Having rent therefore his clothes, he says, What do you think? Matthew 26:66 He gives not the sentence from himself, but invites it from them, as in a case of confessed sins, and manifest blasphemy. For, inasmuch as they knew that if the thing came to be inquired into, and carefully decided, it would free Him from all blame, they condemn Him among themselves, and anticipate the hearers by saying, You have heard the blasphemy; all but necessitating and forcing them to deliver the sentence. What then say they? He is guilty of death; that having taken Him as condemned, they should thus work upon Pilate thereupon to pass sentence. In which matter those others also being accomplices say, He is guilty of death; themselves accusing, themselves judging, themselves passing sentence, themselves being everything then.

But wherefore did they not bring forward the Sabbaths? Because He had often stopped their mouths; and moreover they wanted to take Him, and condemn Him by the things then said. And the high priest anticipated them, and gave the sentence as from them, and drew them all on by rending his vestments, and having led Him away as now condemned unto Pilate, thus did all.

Before Pilate at any rate they said nothing of this kind, but what? If this Man were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto you; attempting to put Him to death by political accusations. And wherefore did they not slay Him secretly? They were desirous also to bring up an evil report against His fame. For since many had now heard Him, and were admiring Him, and amazed at Him, therefore they endeavored that He should be put to death publicly, and in the presence of all.

But Christ hindered it not, but made full use of their wickedness for the establishment of the truth, so that His death should be manifest. And the result was the contrary to what they wished. For they wished to make a show of it, as in this way disgracing Him, but He even by these very things shone forth the more. And much as they said, Let us put Him to death, lest the Romans come and take away our place and nation; and after they had put Him to death, this came to pass; so also here; their object was to crucify Him publicly, that they might injure His fame, and the contrary result took place.

For in proof that indeed they had power to have put Him to death, even among themselves, hear what Pilate says: Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law. John 18:31 But they would not, that He might seem to have been put to death as a transgressor, as an usurper, as a mover of sedition. Therefore also they crucified thieves with Him; therefore also they said, Write not that this man is King of the Jews; but that He said it.

But all these things are done for the truth, so that they might not have so much as any shadow of a defense that is surely shameless. And at the sepulchre too, in the like manner, the seals and the watches made the truth to be the more conspicuous; and the mockings, and the jeerings, and the revilings, wrought again this self-same effect.

For such is the nature of error: it is destroyed by those things whereby it plots; thus at least it fell out even here, for they that seemed to have conquered, these most of all were put to shame, and defeated, and ruined; but He that seemed to be defeated, this man above all has both shone forth, and conquered mightily.

Let us not then everywhere seek victory, nor everywhere shun defeat. There is an occasion when victory brings hurt, but defeat profit. For, for instance, in the case of them that are angry; he that has been very outrageous seems to have prevailed; but this man above all is the one subdued and hurt by the most grievous passion; but he that has endured nobly, this man has got the better and conquered. And while the one has not had strength to overcome so much as his own disease; the other has removed another man's; this has been subdued by his own, that has got the better even of another's passion; and so far from being burnt up, he quenched the flame of another when raised to a height. But if he had minded to gain what seems to be victory, both he himself would have been overcome; and having inflamed the other, he would have occasioned him to have suffered this more grievously; and, like women, both the one and the other would have been disgracefully and miserably overthrown by their anger. But now he that has exercised self-control is both freed from this disgrace, and has erected a glorious trophy over anger both in himself and in his neighbor, through his honorable defeat.

4. Let us not then everywhere seek victory. For he that has overreached has conquered the person wronged, but with an evil victory, and one that brings destruction to him that has won it; but he that is wronged, and seems to have been conquered, if he have borne it with self-command, this above all is the one that has the crown. For often to be defeated is better, and this is the best mode of victory. For whether one overreaches, or smites, or envies, he that is defeated, and enters not into the conflict, this is he who has the victory.

And why do I speak of overreaching and envy? For he also that is dragged to martyrdom, thus conquers by being bound, and beaten, and maimed, and slain. And what is in wars defeat, namely, for the combatant to fall; this with us is victory. For nowhere do we overcome by doing wrongfully, but everywhere by suffering wrongfully. Thus also does the victory become more glorious, when we sufferers get the better of the doers. Hereby it is shown that the victory is of God. For indeed it has an opposite nature to outward conquest, which fact is again above all an infallible sign of strength. Thus also the rocks in the sea, by being struck, break the waves; thus also all the saints were proclaimed, and crowned, and set up their glorious trophies, winning this tranquil victory. For stir not yourself, He says, neither weary yourself. God has given you this might, to conquer not by conflict, but by endurance alone. Do not oppose yourself also as he does, and you have conquered; conflict not, and you have gained the crown. Why do you disgrace yourself? Allow him not to say that by conflicting you have got the better, but allow him to be amazed and to marvel at your invincible power; and to say to all, that even without entering into conflict you have conquered.

Thus also the blessed Joseph obtained a good report, everywhere by suffering wrong getting the better of them who were doing it. For his brethren and the Egyptian woman were among those that were plotting against him, but over all did this man prevail. For tell me not of the prison, wherein this man dwelt, nor of the kings' courts where she abode, but show me who it is that is conquered, who it is that is defeated, who that is in despondency, who that is in pleasure. For she, so far from being able to prevail over the righteous man, could not master so much as her own passion; but this man prevailed both over her and over that grievous disease. But if you will, hear her very words, and you shall see the trophy. You brought in unto us here an Hebrew servant to mock us. Genesis 39:17 It was not this man that mocked you, O wretched and unhappy woman, but the devil that told you that you could break down the adamant. This your husband brought not in unto you an Hebrew servant to plot against you, but the wicked spirit brought in that unclean lasciviousness; he it was that mocked you.

What then did Joseph? He held his peace, and thus is condemned, even as Christ is also.

For all those things are types of these. And he indeed was in bonds, and she in royal courts. Yet what is this? For he was more glorious than any crowned victor, even while continuing in his bonds, but she was in a more wretched condition than any prisoner, while abiding in royal chambers.

But not hence alone may one see the victory, and the defeat, but by the end itself. For which accomplished his desired object? The prisoner, not the high born lady? For he strove to keep his chastity, but she to destroy it. Which then accomplished what he desired? He who suffered wrong, or she who did the wrong. It is quite plain, that it is he who suffered. Surely then this is the one who has conquered.

Knowing then these things, let us follow after this victory, which is obtained by suffering wrong, let us flee from that which is got by doing wrong. For so shall we both live this present life in all tranquility, and great quietness, and shall attain unto the good things to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord

Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might world without end. Amen.

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