

# Homily 87 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of self-control and meekness in the face of insults and suffering, and encourages listeners to consider the fear of God and the good that may have been done to them by the person who insulted them.*

**Topics:** "Christ's Humility", "Suffering And Forgiveness"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the intense suffering and insults Jesus endured before His crucifixion, highlighting the cruelty and mockery inflicted upon Him by soldiers and bystanders. He emphasizes the profound humility and meekness displayed by Jesus in the face of such extreme humiliation, teaching us to endure insults and injuries with patience and self-control. Chrysostom urges listeners to reflect on Christ's silent endurance of abuse and to emulate His example by responding to mistreatment with grace and forgiveness, rather than anger or retaliation.

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## Transcript

Matt. XXVII. 27-29.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers; and they stripped Him, and put on Him a purple robe; and when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews.

As though on some signal the devil then was entering in triumph into all. For, be it that Jews pining with envy and jealousy were mad against Him, as to the soldiers, whence was it, and from what sort of cause? Is it not clear that it was the devil who was then entering in fury into the hearts of all? For indeed they made a pleasure of their insults against Him, being a savage and ruthless set. I mean that, when they ought to have been awestruck, when they ought to have wept, which even the people did, this they did not, but, on the contrary, were spiteful, and insolent; perhaps themselves also seeking to please the Jews, or it may be doing all in conformity to their own evil nature.

And the insults were different, and varied. For that Divine Head at one time they buffeted, at another they insulted with the crown of thorns, at another they smote with the reed, men unholy and accursed!

What plea shall we have after this for being moved by injuries, after Christ suffered these things? For what was done was the utmost limit of insolence. For not one member, but the whole entire body throughout was made an object of insolence; the head through the crown, and the reed, and the buffeting; the face, being spit upon; the cheeks, being smitten with the palms of the hands; the whole body by the stripes, by being wrapped in the robe, and by the pretended worship; the hand by the reed, which they gave him to hold instead of a sceptre; the mouth again by the offering of the vinegar. What could be more grievous than these things? What more insulting?

For the things that were done go beyond all language. For as though they were afraid lest they should seem to fall short at all in the crime, having killed the prophets with their own hands, but this man with the sentence of a judge, so they do in every deed; and make it the work of their own hands, and condemn and sentence both among themselves and before Pilate, saying, His blood be on us and on our children, Matthew 27:25 and insult Him, and do despite unto Him themselves, binding Him, leading Him away, and render themselves authors of the spiteful acts done by the soldiers, and nail Him to the cross, and revile Him, and spit at Him, and deride Him. For Pilate contributed nothing in this matter, but they themselves did every thing, becoming accusers, and judges, and executioners, and all.

And these things are read among us, when all meet together. For that the heathens may not say, that you display to people and nations the things that are glorious and illustrious, such as the signs and the miracles, but that you hide these which are matters of reproach; the grace of the Spirit has brought it to pass, that in the full festival, when men in multitude and women are present, and all, as one may say, at the great eve of the passover, then all these things should be read; when the whole world is present, then are all these acts proclaimed with a clear voice. And these being read, and made known to all, Christ is believed to be God and, besides all the rest, is worshipped, even because of this, that He vouchsafed to stoop so much for us as actually to suffer these things, and to teach us all virtue.

These things then let us read continually; for indeed great is the gain, great the advantage to be thence obtained. For when you see Him, both by gestures and by deeds, mocked and worshipped with so much derision, and beaten and suffering the utmost insults, though thou be very stone, you will become softer than any wax, and will cast out of your soul all haughtiness.

Hear therefore also what follows. For after they had mocked Him, they led Him to crucify Him, it is said, and when they had stripped Him, they took His garments, and sat down and watched Him, when He should die. And they divide His garments among them, which sort of thing is done in the case of very vile and abject criminals, and such as have no one belonging to them, and are in utter desolation.

They parted the garments, by which such great miracles were done. But they wrought none now, Christ restraining His unspeakable power. And this was no small addition of insult. For as to one base and abject, as I said, and the vilest of all men; so do they dare to do all things. To the thieves at any rate they did nothing of the kind, but to Christ they dare it all. And they crucified Him in the midst of them, that He might share in their reputation.

And they gave Him gall to drink, and this to insult Him, but He would not. But another says, that having tasted it, He said, It is finished. John 19:30 And what means, It is finished? The prophecy was fulfilled concerning Him. For they gave me, it is said, gall for my meat, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. But neither does that evangelist indicate that He drank, for merely to taste differs not from not drinking, but has one and the same signification.

But nevertheless not even here does their contumely stop, but after having stripped and crucified Him, and offered Him vinegar, they proceeded still further, and beholding Him impaled upon the cross, they revile Him, both they themselves and the passers by; and this was more grievous than all, that on the charge of being an impostor and deceiver He suffered these things, and as a boaster, and vainly pretending what He said. Therefore they both crucified Him publicly, that they might make a show of it in the sight of all; and therefore also they did it by the hands of the soldiers, that these things being perpetrated even by a public tribunal, the insult might be the greater.

2. And yet who would not have been moved by the multitude that was following Him, and lamenting Him? Nay, not these wild beasts. Wherefore also He to the multitude vouchsafes an answer, but to these men not so. For after having done what they would, they endeavor also to injure His honor, fearing His resurrection. Therefore they say these things publicly, and crucified thieves with Him, and wishing to prove Him a deceiver, they say, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days come down from the cross. Matthew 27:40 For since on telling Pilate to remove the accusation (this was the writing, The king of the Jews), they prevailed not, but he persevered in saying, What I have written, I have written, John 19:22 they then endeavor by their derision of Him to show that He is not a king.

Wherefore they said those things, and also these. If He is the king of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross. He saved others, Himself He cannot save, Matthew 27:42 aiming hereby to bring discredit even on His former miracles. And again, If He be Son of God, and He will have Him, let Him save Him.

O execrable; most execrable! What, were not the prophets prophets, nor the righteous men righteous, because God rescued them not out of their dangers. Nay surely they were, though suffering these things. What then could be equal to your folly? For if the coming of the dangers upon them did not injure their honor with you, how much more in the case of this man, was it wrong for you to be offended, when both by what He did, by what He said, He was ever correcting beforehand this suspicion of yours.

Yet nevertheless, even when these things were said and done, they prevailed nothing, not even at the very time. At any rate, he, who was depraved in such great wickedness, and who had spent his whole life in murders and house-breakings, when these things were being said, then confessed Him, and made mention of a kingdom, and the people bewailed Him. And yet the things that were done seemed to testify the contrary in the eyes of those who knew not the mysterious dispensations, that He was weak and of no power, nevertheless truth prevailed even by the contrary things.

Hearing then these things, let us arm ourselves against all rage, against all anger. Should thou perceive your heart swelling, seal your breast setting upon it the cross. Call to mind some one of the things that then took place, and you will cast out as dust all rage by the recollection of the things that were done. Consider the words, the actions; consider that He is Lord, and thou servant. He is suffering for you, thou for yourself; He in behalf of them who had been benefited by Him and had crucified Him, thou in behalf of yourself; He in behalf of them who had used Him despitely, thou oftentimes at the hands of them who have been injured. He in the sight of the whole city, or rather of the whole people of the Jews, both strangers, and those of the country, before whom He spoke those merciful words, but thou in the presence of few; and what was more insulting to Him, that even His disciples forsook Him. For those, who before paid Him attention, had deserted Him, but His enemies and foes, having got Him in the midst of themselves on the cross, insulted, reviled, mocked, derided, scoffed at Him, Jews and soldiers from below, from above thieves on either side: for indeed the thieves insulted, and upbraided Him both of them. How then says Luke that one rebuked? Luke 23:40 Both things were done, for at first both upbraided Him,

but afterwards one did so no more. For that you might not think the thing had been done by any agreement, or that the thief was not a thief, by his insolence he shows you, that up on the cross he was a thief and an enemy, and at once was changed.

Considering then all these things, control yourself. For what do you suffer like what your Lord suffered? Were you publicly insulted? But not like these things. Are you mocked? Yet not your whole body, not being thus scourged, and stripped. And even if you were buffeted, yet not like this.

3. And add to this, I pray you, by whom, and wherefore, and when, and who it was; and (the most grievous matter) that these things being done, no one found fault, no one blamed what was done, but on the contrary all rather approved, and joined in mocking Him and in jeering at Him; and as a boaster, impostor, and deceiver, and not able to prove in His works the things that He said, so did they revile Him. But He held His peace to all, preparing for us the most powerful incentives to long suffering.

But we, though hearing such things, are not patient so much as to servants, but we rush and kick worse than wild asses, with respect to injuries against ourselves, being savage and inhuman; but of those against God not making much account. And with respect to friends too we have the same disposition; should any one vex us, we bear it not; should he insult us, we are savage more than wild beasts, we who are reading these things every day. A disciple betrayed Him, the rest forsook Him and fled, they that had been benefited by Him spat at Him, the servants of the high priest smote Him with the palm of the hand, the soldiers buffeted Him; they that passed by jeered Him and reviled Him, the thieves accused Him; and to no man did He utter a word, but by silence overcame all; instructing you by His actions, that the more meekly you shall endure, the more will you prevail over them that do you evil, and will be an object of admiration before all. For who will not admire him that endures with forbearance the insults he receives from them that are using him despitefully? For even as, though any man suffer justly, yet enduring the evil meekly, he is considered by the more part to suffer unjustly; so though one suffer unjustly, yet if he be violent, he will get the suspicion of suffering justly, and will be an object of ridicule, as being dragged captive by his anger, and losing his own nobility. For such a one, we must not call so much as a freeman, though he be lord over ten thousand servants.

But did some person exceedingly provoke you? And what of that? For then should self-control be shown, since when there is no one to vex, we see even the wild beasts gentle; for neither are they always savage, but when any one rouses them. And we therefore, if we are only then quiet, when there is no one provoking us, what advantage have we over them. For they are both oftentimes justly indignant, and have much excuse, for by being stirred and goaded are they roused, and besides these things they are devoid of reason, and have savageness in their nature.

But whence, I pray you, can you find a plea for being savage and fierce? What hardship have you suffered? Have you been robbed? For this self-same reason should you endure it, so as to gain more amply. But were you deprived of character? And what is this? Your condition is in no way worsened by this, if you practise self-command. But if you suffer no grievance, whence are you angry with him that has done you no harm, but has even benefited you? For they who honor, make them that are not watchful the more vain; but they who insult and despise render those that take heed to themselves more steadfast. For the careless are more injured by being honored than by being insulted. And the one set of persons, if we be sober, become to us authors of self-control, but the others excite our pride, they fill us with boastfulness, vainglory, folly, they make our soul the feebler.

And to this fathers bear witness, who do not flatter their own children so much as they chide them, fearing lest from the praise they should receive any harm, and their teachers use the same remedy to them. So that if we are to avoid any one, it should be those that flatter us rather than those that insult us; for this bait brings greater mischief than insult to them, who do not take heed, and it is more difficult to control this feeling than that. And the reward too is far more abundant from thence, and the admiration greater. For indeed it is more worthy of admiration to see a man insulted, and not moved, than beaten and smitten, and not falling.

And how is it possible not to be moved? One may say. Hath any one insulted you? Place the sign upon your breast, call to mind all the things that were then done; and all is quenched. Consider not the insults only, but if also any good has been ever done unto you, by him that has insulted you, and straightway you will become meek, or rather consider before all things the fear of God, and soon you will be mild and gentle.

4. Together with these things even from your own servants take a lesson concerning these matters; and when you see yourself insulting, but your servant holding his peace, consider that it is possible to practise self-control, and condemn yourself for being violent; and in the very time of offering insults learn not to insult; and thus not even when insulted, will you be vexed. Consider that he who is insolent is beside himself and mad, and you will not feel indignant, when insulted, since the possessed strike us, and we, so far from being provoked, do rather pity them. This do thou also; pity him that is insolent to you, for he is held in subjection by a dreadful monster, rage, by a grievous demon, anger. Set him free as he is wrought upon by a grievous demon, and going quickly to ruin. For so great is this disease as not to need even time for the destruction of him that is seized with it. Wherefore also one said, The sway of his fury shall be his fall; Sirach 1:22 by this most of all showing its tyranny, that in a short time it works great ills, and needs not to continue long with us, so that if in addition to its strength it were apt to last, it would indeed be hard to strive against.

I should like to show what the man is who insults, what he that practises self-control, and to bring nakedly before you the soul of the one and the other. For you should see the one like a sea tost with a tempest, but the other like a harbor free from disturbance. For it is not disturbed by these evil blasts, but puts them to rest easily. For indeed they who are insulting, do everything in order to make it sting. When then they fail of that hope, even they are thenceforth at peace, and go away amended. For it is impossible that a man, who is angry, should not utterly condemn himself, even as on the other hand it is impossible for one who is not angry to be self-condemned. For though it be necessary to retaliate, it is possible to do this without anger (and it were more easy and more wise than with anger) and to have no painful feeling. For if we be willing, the good things will be from ourselves, and we shall be with the grace of God sufficient for our own safety and honor.

For why do you seek the glory that comes from another? Do thou honor yourself, and no one will be able to insult you; but if you dishonor yourself, though all should honor you, you will not be honored. For like as, unless we put ourselves in an evil state, no one else puts us in such a state; even so unless we insult ourselves, no one else can put us to shame.

For let any man be great and worthy of admiration, and let all men call him an adulterer, a thief, a violater of tombs, a murderer, a robber, and let him be neither provoked or indignant, nor be conscious to himself of any of these crimes, what disgrace will he thence undergo? None. What then, you may say, if many have such an opinion of him? Not even so is he disgraced, but they bring shame upon themselves, by

accounting one, who is not such, to be such. For tell me, if any one think the sun to be dark, does he bring an ill name on that heavenly body, or on himself? Surely on himself, getting himself the character of being blind or mad. So also they that account wicked men good, and they that make the opposite error, disgrace themselves.

Wherefore we ought to give the greater diligence, to keep our conscience clear, and to give no handle against ourselves, nor matter for evil suspicion; but if others will be mad, even when this is our disposition, not to care very much, nor to grieve. For he that has got the character of a wicked man, being a good man, is in no degree thereby hurt as regards his being such as he is; but he that has been suspecting another vainly and causelessly, receives the utmost harm; as, on the other hand, the wicked man, if he be supposed to be the contrary, will gain nothing thence, but will both have a heavier judgment, and be led into greater carelessness. For he that is such and is suspected thereof, may perhaps be humbled, and acknowledge his sins; but when he escapes detection, he falls into a state past feeling. For if, while all are accusing them, offenders are hardly stirred up to compunction, when so far from accusing them, some even praise them, at what time will they who are living in vice be able to open their eyes? Do you hear that Paul also blames for this, that the Corinthians (so far from permitting him that had been guilty of fornication, to acknowledge his own sin), applauding and honoring him, did on the contrary urge him on in vice thereby? Wherefore, I pray, let us leave the suspicions of the multitude, their insults and their honors, and let us be diligent about one thing only, that we be conscious to ourselves of no evil thing, nor insult our own selves. For so both here, and in the world to come, we shall enjoy much glory, unto which God grant we all may attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory world without end. Amen.

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