

Homily 89 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus' resurrection is proven through the sealing of His tomb and the testimony of the women who witnessed His appearance.

Scripture: Exodus 16:29, Isaiah 3:16, Matthew 25:34, Matthew 27:62, Matthew 28:6, Matthew 28:9, John 14:1, 1 Timothy 2:9

Topics: "Jesus Resurrection", "Christian Humility"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the events following Jesus' crucifixion, focusing on the chief priests and Pharisees' attempt to prevent His resurrection by sealing the tomb. Despite their efforts, the truth of Jesus' resurrection is confirmed, even against their will, as the disciples faithfully report the enemies' words. Chrysostom highlights the disciples' love for truth and the enemies' savageness, emphasizing the undeniable proof of Jesus' resurrection. He also addresses the importance of humility and warns against the dangers of materialism, urging women to prioritize spiritual riches over worldly adornments.

Transcript

Matt. XXVII. 62-64.

Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come and steal Him away, and say to the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error should be worse than the first.

Everywhere deceit recoils upon itself, and against its will supports the truth. And observe. It was necessary for it to be believed that He died, and that He rose again, and that He was buried, and all these things are brought to pass by His enemies. See, at any rate, these words bearing witness to every one of these facts. We remember, these are the words, that that deceiver said, when He was yet alive, (He was therefore now dead), After three days I rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be sealed, (He was therefore buried), lest His disciples come and steal Him away. So that if the sepulchre be sealed, there will be no unfair dealing. For there could not be. So then the proof of His resurrection has become incontrovertible by what you have put forward. For because it was sealed, there was no unfair dealing. But if there was no unfair dealing, and the sepulchre was found empty, it is manifest that He is risen, plainly and incontrovertibly. Do you see, how even against their will they contend for the proof of the truth?

But mark thou, I pray you, the disciples' love of truth, how they conceal from us none of the things that are said by His enemies, though they use opprobrious language. Behold, at any rate, they even call Him a deceiver, and these men are not silent about that.

But these things show also their savageness (that not even at His death did they let go their anger), and these men's simple and truthful disposition.

But it were worth while to inquire concerning that point also, where He said, After three days I rise again? For one would not find this thus distinctly stated, but rather the example of Jonah. So that they understood His saying, and of their own will dealt unfairly.

What then says Pilate? You have a watch; make it as sure as you can. And they made it sure, sealing the sepulchre, and setting the watch. He suffers not the soldiers alone to seal, for as having learned the things concerning Christ, he was no longer willing to co-operate with them. But in order to be rid of them, he endures this also, and says, Do ye seal it as you will, that you may not have it in your power to blame others. For if the soldiers only had sealed, they might have said (although the saying would have been improbable and false, yet nevertheless as in the rest they cast aside shame, so in this too they might have been able to say), that the soldiers, having given up the body to be stolen, gave His disciples opportunity to feign the history concerning His resurrection, but now having themselves made it sure, they are not able to say so much as this.

Do you see how they labor for the truth against their will? For they themselves came to Pilate, themselves asked, themselves sealed, setting the watch, so as to be accusers, and refuters one of another. And indeed when should they have stolen Him? On the Sabbath? And how? For it was not lawful so much as to go out. Exodus 16:29 And even if they transgressed the law, how should they have dared, who were so timid, to come forth? And how could they also have been able to persuade the multitude? By saying what? By doing what? And from what sort of zeal could they have stood in behalf of the dead? Expecting what recompense? What requital? Seeing Him yet alive and merely seized, they had fled; and after His death were they likely to speak boldly in His behalf, unless He had risen again? And how should these things be reasonable? For that they were neither willing nor able to feign a resurrection, that did not take place, is plain from hence. He discoursed to them much of a resurrection, and continually said, as indeed these very men have stated, After three days I rise again. If therefore He rose not again, it is quite clear that these men (having been deceived and made enemies to an entire nation for His sake, and come to be without home and without city) would have abhorred Him, and would not have been willing to invest Him with such glory; as having been deceived, and having fallen into the utmost dangers on His account. For that they would not even have been able, unless the resurrection had been true, to feign it, this does not so much as need reasoning.

For in what were they confident? In the shrewdness of their reasonings? Nay of all men they were the most unlearned. But in the abundance of their possessions? Nay, they had neither staff nor shoes. But in the distinction of their race? Nay, they were mean, and of mean ancestors. But in the greatness of their country? Nay, they were of obscure places. But in their own numbers? Nay, they were not more than eleven, and they were scattered abroad. But in their Master's promises? What kind of promises? For if He were not risen again, neither would those be likely to be trusted by them. And how should they endure a frantic people. For if the chief of them endured not the speech of a woman, keeping the door, and if all the rest too, on seeing Him bound, were scattered abroad, how should they have thought to run to the ends of the earth, and plant a feigned tale of a resurrection? For if he stood not a woman's threat, and they not so

much as the sight of bonds, how were they able to stand against kings, and rulers, and nations, where were swords, and gridirons, and furnaces, and ten thousand deaths day by day, unless they had the benefit of the power and grace of Him who rose again? Such miracles and so many were done, and none of these things did the Jews regard, but crucified Him, who had done them, and were they likely to believe these men at their mere word about a resurrection? These things are not, they are not so, but the might of Him, who rose again, brought them to pass.

2. But mark, I pray you, their craft, how ridiculous it is. We remember, these are their words, that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I rise again. Yet if He were a deceiver, and boastfully uttered falsehood, why are you afraid and run to and fro, and use so much diligence? We are afraid, it is replied, lest perchance the disciples steal Him away, and deceive the multitude. And yet this has been proved to have no probability at all. Malice, however, is a thing contentious and shameless, and attempts what is unreasonable.

And they command it to be made sure for three days, as contending for doctrines, and being minded to prove that before that time also He was a deceiver, and they extend their malice even to His tomb. For this reason then He rose sooner, that they might not say that He spoke falsely, and was stolen. For this, His rising sooner, was open to no charge, but to be later would have been full of suspicion. For indeed if He had not risen then, when they were sitting there, and watching, but when they had withdrawn after the three days, they would have had something to say, and to speak against it, although foolishly. For this reason then He anticipated the time. For it was meet the resurrection should take place, while they were sitting by and watching. Therefore also it was fit it should take place within the three days, since if it had been when they were passed, and the men had withdrawn, the matter would have been regarded with suspicion. Therefore also He allowed them to seal it, as they were minded, and soldiers sat around it.

And they cared not about doing these things, and working on a Sabbath day, but they looked to one object only, their own wicked purpose, as though by that they were to succeed; which was a mark of extreme folly, and of fear now greatly dismaying them. For they who seized Him, when living, are afraid of Him when dead. And yet if He had been a mere man, they had reason to have taken courage. But that they might learn, that when living also He endured of His own will, what He did endure; behold, both a seal, a stone, and a watch, and they were not able to hold Him. But there was one result only, that the burial was published, and the resurrection thereby proved. For indeed soldiers sat by it, and Jews are on the watch.

But in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And behold there was a great earthquake. For an angel of the Lord descended from Heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow.

After the resurrection came the angel. Why then came he, and took away the stone? Because of the women, for they themselves had seen Him then in the sepulchre. Therefore that they might believe that He was risen again, they see the sepulchre void of the body. For this cause he removed the stone, for this cause also an earthquake took place, that they might be thoroughly aroused and awakened. For they had come to pour oil on Him, and these things were done at night, and it is likely that some also had become drowsy. And for what intent and cause does he say, Fear not ye? First he delivers them from the dread, and then tells them of the resurrection. And the ye is of one showing them great honor, and indicating, that extreme punishment awaits them that had dared to do, what the others had dared, except they repented. For to be afraid is not for you, he means, but for them that crucified Him.

Having delivered them then from the fear both by his words, and by his appearance (for his form he showed bright, as bearing such good tidings), he went on to say, I know that you seek Jesus the Crucified. And he is not ashamed to call Him crucified; for this is the chief of the blessings.

He is risen. Matthew 28:6 Whence is it evident? As He said. So that if you refuse to believe me, he would say, remember His words, and neither will you disbelieve me. Then also another proof, Come and see the place where He lay. For this he had lifted up the stone, in order that from this too they might receive the proof. And tell His disciples, that you shall see Him in Galilee. And he prepares them to bear good tidings to others, which thing most of all made them believe. And He said well in Galilee, freeing them from troubles and dangers, so that fear should not hinder their faith.

And they departed from the sepulchre with fear and joy. Why could this be? They had seen a thing amazing, and beyond expectation, a tomb empty, where they had before seen Him laid. Therefore also He had led them to the sight, that they might become witnesses of both things, both of His tomb, and of His resurrection. For they considered that no man could have taken Him, when so many soldiers were sitting by Him, unless He raised up Himself. For this cause also they rejoice and wonder, and receive the reward of so much continuance with Him, that they should first see and gladly declare, not what had been said only, but also what they beheld.

3. Therefore after then they had departed with fear and joy, Behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. But they held Him by the feet, and with exceeding joy and gladness ran unto Him, and received by the touch also, an infallible proof, and full assurance of the resurrection. And they worshipped Him. What then says He? Be not afraid. Again, He Himself casts out their fear, making way for faith, But go, tell my brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Mark how He Himself sends good tidings to His disciples by these women, bringing to honor, as I have often said, that sex, which was most dishonored, and to good hopes; and healing that which was diseased.

Perchance some one of you would wish to be like them, to hold the feet of Jesus; ye can even now, and not His feet and His hands only, but even lay hold on that sacred head, receiving the awful mysteries with a pure conscience. But not here only, but also in that day you shall see Him, coming with that unspeakable glory, and the multitude of the angels, if you are disposed to be humane; and you shall hear not these words only, All hail! but also those others, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world. Matthew 25:34

Be therefore humane, that you may hear these things; and you women, that wear gold, who have looked on the running of these women, at last, though late, lay aside the disease of the desire for golden ornaments. So that if you are emulous of these women, change the ornaments which you wear, and clothe yourselves instead with almsgiving. What is the use, I pray you, of these precious stones, and of the garments spangled with gold? My soul, you say, is glad, and is pleased with these things. I asked you the profit, but you tell me the hurt. For nothing is worse than being taken up with these things, and delighting in them, and being riveted to them. For more bitter is this grievous slavery, when any one finds delight even in being a slave. For in what spiritual matter will she ever be diligent as she ought; when will she laugh to scorn, as she should, the things of this world, who thinks it a worthy matter for joy, that she has been chained in gold? For he that continues in prison, and is pleased, will never desire to be set free; as indeed neither will this woman; but as having become a kind of captive to this wicked desire, she will not endure so much as to hear spiritual language with becoming desire and diligence, much less to engage in such work.

What then is the profit of these ornaments and this luxury? I pray you. I am pleased with them, you say. Again you have told of the hurt and the ruin. But I enjoy also, you say, much honor from the beholders. And what is this? This is the occasion of another destruction, when you are lifted up to haughtiness, to arrogance. Come now, since you have not told me of the profit, bear with me while I tell you of the mischiefs. What then are the mischiefs resulting therefrom? Anxiety, which is greater than the pleasure. Wherefore many of the beholders, these I mean of the grosser sort, derive more pleasure from it than she who wears the gold. For you indeed deck yourself with anxiety, but they, without this, feast their eyes.

Moreover, there are other things again, the debasing of the soul, the being looked upon with envy on all sides. For the neighboring women stung by it, arm themselves against their own husbands, and stir up against you grievous wars. Together with these things, the fact that all one's leisure and anxiety are spent on this object, that one does not apply one's self earnestly to spiritual achievements; that one is filled with haughtiness, arrogance, and vainglory; that one is riveted to the earth, and loses one's wings, and instead of an eagle, becomes a dog or a swine. For having given up looking up into Heaven, and flying there, you bend down to the earth like the swine, being curious about mines and caverns, and having an unmanly and base soul. But do you, when you appear, turn towards you the eyes of them at the market-place? Well then; for this very reason, you should not wear gold, that you may not become a common gazing stock, and open the mouths of many accusers. For none of those whose eyes are toward you admires you, but they jeer at you, as fond of dress, as boastful, as a carnal woman. And should you enter into a church, you go forth, without getting anything but countless leers, and revilings, and curses, not from the beholders only, but also from the prophet. For straightway Isaiah, that has the fullest voice of all, as soon as he has seen you, will cry out, These things says the Lord against the princely daughters of Sion; because they walked with a lofty neck, and with winkings of the eyes, and in their walking, trailing their garments, and mincing at the same time with their feet; the Lord shall take off their bravery, and instead of a sweet smell there shall be dust, and instead of a stomacher, you shall gird yourself with a cord. 1 Timothy 2:9

These things for your gorgeous array. For not to them only are these words addressed, but to every woman that does like them. And Paul again with him stands as an accuser, telling Timothy to charge the women, not to adorn themselves with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. So that everywhere the wearing of gold is hurtful, but especially when you are entering into a church, when you pass through the poor. For if you were exceedingly anxious to bring an accusation against yourself, you could not put on any other array than this visage of cruelty and inhumanity.

4. Consider at any rate how many hungry bellies you pass by with this array, how many naked bodies with this satanical display. How much better to feed hungry souls, than to bore through the lobes of your ears, and to hang from them the food of countless poor for no purpose or profit. What? Is to be rich a commendation? What? Is to wear gold a praise? Though it be from honest earnings that these things are put on you, even so what you have done is a very heavy charge against you; but when it is moreover from dishonesty, consider the exceeding greatness of it.

But do you love praises and honor? Strip yourself therefore of this ridiculous clothing, and then all will admire you; then shall you enjoy both honor and pure pleasure; since now at any rate you are overwhelmed with jeers, working for yourself many causes of vexation arising out of these things. For should any of these things be missing, consider how many are the evils that have their birth therefrom, how many maidservants are beaten, how many men put to trouble, how many led to execution, how many cast into prison. And trials arise hence, and actions, and countless curses and accusations against the wife from the husband, against the husband from her friends, against the soul from itself. But it will not be

lost. In the first place, this is not easy to secure, but even if it be kept safe constantly, yet by being kept, it occasions much anxiety and care and discomfort, and no advantage.

For what kind of profit arises from hence to the house? What advantage to the woman herself who wears it? No advantage indeed, but much unseemliness, and accusation from every quarter? How will you be able to kiss Christ's feet, and cling to them, when thus dressed? From this adorning He turns away. For this cause He vouchsafed to be born in the house of the carpenter, or rather not even in that house, but in a shed, and a manger. How then will you be able to behold Him, not having beauty that is desirable in His eyes, not wearing the array that is lovely before Him, but what is hateful. For he that comes unto Him must not deck himself out with such garments, but be clothed with virtue.

Consider what after all these jewels are. Nothing else than earth and ashes. Mix water with them, and they are clay. Consider and be ashamed to make clay your master, forsaking all, and abiding by it, and carrying and bearing it about, even when you enter into a church, when most of all you ought to flee from it. For neither for this cause was the church built, that you should display therein these riches, but spiritual riches. But you, as though you were entering into a pompous procession, thus deck yourself out on every side, imitating the women on the stage, even so do you carry about in profusion that ridiculous mass.

Therefore, I tell you, you come for mischief to many, and when the congregation is dismissed, in their houses, at their tables, one may hear the more part describing these things. For they have left off saying, thus and thus said the prophet and the apostle, and they describe the costliness of your garments, the size of your precious stones, and all the other unseemliness of them that wear these things.

This makes you backward in almsgiving, and your husbands. For one of you would not readily consent to break up one of these ornaments to feed a poor man. For when you would choose even yourself to be in distress rather than to behold these things broken to pieces, how should you feed another at the cost of them?

For most women feel towards these things, as to some living beings, and not less than towards their children. God forbid, you say. Prove me this then, prove it by your works, as now at least I see the contrary. For who ever of those that are completely taken captive, by melting down these things, would rescue a child's soul from death? And why do I say a child's? Who has redeemed his own soul thereby, when perishing? Nay, on the contrary, the more part even set it to sale for these things every day. And should any bodily infirmity take place, they do everything, but if they see their soul depraved, they take no such pains, but are careless both about their children's soul, and their own soul, in order that these things may remain to rust with time.

And while you are wearing jewels worth ten thousand talents, the member of Christ has not the enjoyment so much as of necessary food. And whereas the common Lord of all has imparted to all alike of heaven, and of the things in Heaven, and of the spiritual table, thou dost not impart to Him even of perishing things, on purpose that you may continue perpetually bound with these grievous chains.

Hence the countless evils, hence the fornications of the men, when you prepare them to cast off self-restraint, when you teach them to take delight in these things with which the harlot women deck themselves. For this cause they are so quickly taken captive. For if you had instructed him to look down upon these things, and to take delight in chastity, godly fear and humility, he would not have been so easily taken by the shafts of fornication. For the harlot is able to adorn herself in this way even to a greater degree than this, but with those other ornaments not so. Accustom him then to take delight in these

ornaments, which he cannot see placed on the harlot. And how will you bring him into this habit? If you take off these, and put on those others, so shall both your husband be in safety, and thou in honor, and God will be propitious to you, and all men will admire you, and you will 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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