

Homily 90 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 90 on Matthew emphasizes the truth of the resurrection and the call to discipleship while contrasting the burdens of wealth with the freedom of poverty.

Scripture: Matthew 19:21-28, Acts 3:6

Topics: "Resurrection Of Jesus", "Christian Stewardship"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the resurrection of Jesus, highlighting the attempts of the chief priests to cover up the truth by bribing the soldiers and spreading false stories of the disciples stealing Jesus' body. Chrysostom emphasizes the impossibility of such a theft due to the guards, seals, and the disciples' fear. He contrasts the virtues of poverty and the dangers of covetousness, urging the congregation to embrace simplicity and generosity. Chrysostom encourages the listeners to follow the example of the apostles in forsaking worldly wealth for the sake of eternal life, emphasizing that true blessings come from selflessness and devotion to Christ.

Transcript

Matt. XXVIII. 11-14.

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and declared unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they had assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

For the sake of these soldiers that earthquake took place, in order to dismay them, and that the testimony might come from them, which accordingly was the result. For the report was thus free from suspicion, as proceeding from the guards themselves. For of the signs some were displayed publicly to the world, others privately to those present on the spot; publicly for the world was the darkness, privately the appearance of the angel, the earthquake. When then they came and showed it (for truth shines forth, being proclaimed by its adversaries), they again gave money, that they might say, as it is expressed, that His disciples came and stole Him.

How did they steal Him? O most foolish of all men! For because of the clearness and conspicuousness of the truth, they are not even able to make up a falsehood. For indeed what they said was highly incredible, and the falsehood had not even speciousness. For how, I ask, did the disciples steal Him, men poor and

unlearned, and not venturing so much as to show themselves? What? Was not a seal put upon it? What? Were there not so many watchmen, and soldiers, and Jews stationed round it? What? Did not those men suspect this very thing, and take thought, and break their rest, and continue anxious about it? And wherefore moreover did they steal it? That they might feign the doctrine of the resurrection? And how should it enter their minds to feign such a thing, men who were well content to be hidden and to live? And how could they remove the stone that was made sure? How could they have escaped the observation of so many? Nay, though they had despised death, they would not have attempted without purpose, and fruitlessly to venture in defiance of so many who were on the watch. And that moreover they were timorous, what they had done before showed clearly, at least, when they saw Him seized, all rushed away from Him. If then at that time they did not dare so much as to stand their ground when they saw Him alive, how when He was dead could they but have feared such a number of soldiers? What? Was it to burst open a door? Was it that one should escape notice? A great stone lay upon it, needing many hands to move it.

They were right in saying, So the last error shall be worse than the first, Matthew 27:64 making this declaration against themselves, for that, when after so much mad conduct they ought to have repented, they rather strive to outdo their former acts, feigning absurd fictions, and as, when He was alive, they purchased His blood, so when He was dead and risen again, they again by money were striving to undermine the evidence of His resurrection. But do thou mark, I pray you, how by their own doings they are caught everywhere. For if they had not come to Pilate, nor asked for the guard, they would have been more able to act thus impudently, but as it was, not so. For indeed, as though they were laboring to stop their own mouths, even so did they all things. For if the disciples had not strength to watch with Him, and that, though upbraided by Him, how could they have ventured upon these things? And wherefore did they not steal Him before this, but when you had come? For if they had been minded to do this, they would have done it, when the tomb was not yet guarded on the first night, when it was to be done without danger, and in security. For it was on the Sabbath that they came and begged of Pilate to have the watch, and kept guard, but during the first night none of these was present by the sepulchre.

2. And what mean also the napkins that were stuck on with the myrrh; for Peter saw these lying. For if they had been disposed to steal, they would not have stolen the body naked, not because of dishonoring it only, but in order not to delay and lose time in stripping it, and not to give them that were so disposed opportunity to awake and seize them. Especially when it was myrrh, a drug that adheres so to the body, and cleaves to the clothes, whence it was not easy to take the clothes off the body, but they that did this needed much time, so that from this again, the tale of the theft is improbable.

What? Did they not know the rage of the Jews? And that they would vent their anger on them? And what profit was it at all to them, if He had not risen again?

So these men, being conscious that they had made up all this tale, gave money, and said, Say ye these things, and we will persuade the governor. For they desire that the report should be published, fighting in vain against the truth; and by their endeavors to obscure it, by these even against their will they occasioned it to appear clearly. For indeed even this establishes the resurrection, the fact I mean of their saying, that the disciples stole Him. For this is the language of men confessing, that the body was not there. When therefore they confess the body was not there, but the stealing it is shown to be false and incredible, by their watching by it, and by the seals, and by the timidity of the disciples, the proof of the resurrection even hence appears incontrovertible.

Nevertheless, these shameless and audacious men, although there were so many things to stop their mouths, Say ye, these are their words, and we will persuade, and will secure you. Do you see all depraved? Pilate, for he was persuaded? The soldiers? The Jewish people? But marvel not, if money prevailed over soldiers. For if with His disciple it showed its might to be so great, much more with these.

And this saying is commonly reported, it is said, until this day. Do you see again the disciples' love of truth, how they are not ashamed of saying even this, that such a report prevailed against them.

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, and some worshipped, and some when they saw Him doubted.

This seems to me to be the last appearance in Galilee, when He sent them forth to baptize. And if some doubted, herein again admire their truthfulness, how they conceal not even their shortcomings up to the last day. Nevertheless, even these are assured by their sight.

What then says He unto them, when He sees them? All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Again He speaks to them more after the manner of man, for they had not yet received the spirit, which was able to raise them on high. Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; giving the one charge with a view to doctrine, the other concerning commandments. And of the Jews He makes no mention, neither brings forward what had been done, nor upbraids Peter with his denial, nor any one of the others with their flight, but having put into their hands a summary of the doctrine, that expressed by the form of baptism, commands them to pour forth over the whole world.

After that, because he had enjoined on them great things, to raise their courage, He says, Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Matthew 28:20 Do you see His own proper power again? Do you see how those other things also were spoken for condescension? And not with those men only did He promise to be, but also with all that believe after them. For plainly the apostles were not to remain here unto the end of the world; but he speaks to the believers as to one body. For tell me not, says He, of the difficulty of the things: for I am with you, who make all things easy. This He said to the prophets also in the Old Testament continually, as well to Jeremiah objecting his youth, Jeremiah 1:6, 8 as to Moses and Ezekiel shrinking from the office, I am with you, this here also to these men. And mark, I pray you, the excellence of these, for the others, when sent to one nation, often excused themselves, but these said nothing of the sort, though sent to the world. And He reminds them also of the consummation, that He may draw them on more, and that they may look not at the present dangers only, but also at the good things to come that are without end.

For the irksome things, says He, that you will undergo are finished together with the present life, since at least even this world itself shall come to an end, but the good things which you shall enjoy remain immortal, as I have often told you before. Thus having invigorated and roused their minds, by the remembrance of that day, He sent them forth. For that day to them that live in good works is to be desired, even as on the other hand to those in sin, it is terrible as to the condemned.

But let us not fear only, and shudder, but let us change too, while there is opportunity, and let us rise out of our wickedness, for we can, if we be willing. For if before grace many did this, much more after grace.

3. For what grievous things are we enjoined? To cleave mountains asunder? To fly into the air? Or to cross the Tuscan sea? By no means, but a way of life so easy, as not so much as to want any

instruments, but a soul and purpose only. For what instruments had these apostles, who effected such things? Did they not go about with one vestment and unshod? And they got the better of all.

For what is difficult of the injunctions? Have no enemy. Hate no man. Speak ill of no man. Nay, the opposites of these things are the greater hardships. But He said, you reply, Throw away your money. Is this then the grievous thing? In the first place, He did not command, but advised it. Yet even if it were a command, what is it grievous not to carry about burdens and unseasonable cares?

But oh covetousness! All things have become money; for this cause all things are turned upside down. If anyone declares another happy, he mentions this; should he pronounce him wretched, hence is derived the description of wretchedness. And all reckonings are made on this account, how such an one gets rich, how such an one gets poor. Should it be military service, should it be marriage, should it be a trade, should it be what you will that any man takes in hand, he does not apply to what is proposed, until he see these riches are coming in rapidly upon him. After this shall we not meet together and consult how we shall drive away this pest? Shall we not regard with shame the good deeds of our fathers? Of the three thousand, of the five thousand, who had all things common?

What is the profit of this present life, when we do not use it for our future gain? How long do ye not enslave the mammon that has enslaved you? How long are you slaves of money? How long have ye no love for liberty, and do not rend in pieces the bargains of covetousness? But while, if you should have become slaves of men, you do all things, if any one should promise you liberty; yet being captives of covetousness, you do not so much as consider how ye may be delivered from this bitter bondage. And yet the one were nothing terrible, the other is the most bitter tyranny.

Consider how great a price Christ paid for us. He shed His own blood; He gave up Himself. But you, even after all this, are grown supine; and the most grievous thing of all is, that you even take delight in the slavery, you luxuriate in the dishonor, and that, from which you ought to flee, has become an object of desire to you.

But since it is right not only to lament and to blame, but also to correct, let us see from what cause this passion and this evil have become an object of desire to you. Whence then, whence has this come to be an object of desire? Because, you say, it makes me to be in honor and in security. In what kind of security, I pray you? In the confidence, not to suffer hunger, nor cold, not to be harmed, not to be despised. Will you then, if we promise you this security, refrain from being rich? For if it is for this that riches are an object of desire, if it be in your power to have security without these, what need have you of these any more? And how is it possible, you say, for one who is not rich to attain to this? Nay, how is it possible (for I say the opposite thing) if one is rich? For it is necessary to flatter many, both rulers and subjects, and to entreat countless numbers, and to be a base slave, and to be in fear and trembling, and to regard with suspicion the eyes of the envious, and to fear the tongues of false accusers, and the desires of other covetous men. But poverty is not like this, but altogether the contrary. It is a place of refuge and security, a calm harbor, a wrestling ground, and school of exercise to learn self-command, an imitation of the life of angels.

Hear these things, as many as are poor; or rather also, as many as desire to be rich. It is not poverty that is the thing to be feared, but the not being willing to be poor. Account poverty to be nothing to fear, and it will not be to you a matter for fear. For neither is this fear in the nature of the thing, but in the judgment of feeble-minded men. Or rather, I am even ashamed that I have occasion to say so much concerning poverty, to show that it is nothing to be feared. For if you practise self-command, it is even a fountain to

you of countless blessings. And if any one were to offer you sovereignty, and political power, and wealth, and luxury, and then having set against them poverty, were to give you your choice to take which thou would, you would straightway seize upon poverty, if indeed you knew the beauty thereof.

4. And I know that many laugh, when these things are said; but we are not troubled but we require you to stay, and soon ye will give judgment with us. For to me poverty seems like some comely, fair, and well-favored damsel, but covetousness like some monster shaped woman, some Scylla or Hydra, or some other like prodigies feigned by fabulous writers.

For bring not forward, I pray you, them that accuse poverty, but them that have shone thereby. Nurtured in this, Elias was caught up in that blessed assumption. With this Eliseus shone; with this John; with this all the apostles; but with the other, Ahab, Jezebel, Gehazi, Judas, Nero, Caiaphas, were condemned.

But if it please you, let us not look to those only that have been glorious in poverty, but let us observe the beauty itself of this damsel. For indeed her eye is clear and piercing, having nothing turbid in it, like the eye of covetousness, which is at one time full of anger, at another sated with pleasure, at another troubled by incontinence. But the eye of poverty is not like this, but mild, calm, looking kindly on all, meek, gentle, hating no man, shunning no man. For where there are riches, there is matter for enmity, and for countless wars. The mouth again of the other is full of insults, of a certain haughtiness, of much boasting, cursing, deceit; but the mouth and the tongue of this are sound, filled with continual thanksgiving, blessing, words of gentleness, of affection, of courtesy, of praise, of commendation. And if you would see also the proportion of her members, she is of a goodly height, and far loftier than wealth. And if many flee from her, marvel not at it, for indeed so do fools from the rest of virtue.

But the poor man, you will say, is insulted by him that is rich. Again you are declaring to me the praise of poverty. For who, I pray you, is blessed, the insulter, or the insulted? It is manifest that it is the insulted person. But then, the one, covetousness, urges to insult the other; poverty persuades to endure. But the poor man suffers hunger, you will say. Paul also suffered hunger, and was in famine. But he has no rest. Neither had the Son of Man where to lay His head. Matthew 8:20

Do you see how far the praises of poverty have proceeded, and where it places you, to what men it leads you on, and how it makes you a follower of the Lord? If it were good to have gold, Christ, who have the unutterable blessings, would have given this to His disciples. But now so far from giving it them, He forbid them to have it. Wherefore Peter also, so far from being ashamed of poverty, even glories in it, saying, Silver and gold have I none; but what I have give I you. Acts 3:6 And who of you would not have desired to utter this saying? Nay, we all would extremely, perhaps some one may say. Then throw away your silver, throw away your gold. And if I throw it away, you will say, shall I receive the power of Peter? Why, what made Peter blessed, tell me? Was it indeed to have lifted up the lame man? By no means, but the not having these riches, this procured him Heaven. For of those that wrought these miracles, many fell into hell, but they, who did those good things, attained a kingdom. And this you may learn even of Peter himself. For there were two things that he said, Silver and gold have I none; and, In the name of Jesus Christ rise up and walk.

Which sort of thing then made Him glorious and blessed, the raising up the lame man, or the casting away his money? And this you may learn from the Master of the conflicts Himself. What then does He Himself say to the rich man seeking eternal life? He said not, raise up the lame, but, Sell your goods, and give to the poor, and come and follow me, and you shall have treasure in Heaven. Matthew 19:21 And Peter

again said not, Behold, in Your name we cast out devils; although he was casting them out, but, Behold, we have forsaken all and followed You what shall we have? Matthew 19:27 And Christ again, in answering this apostle, said not, If any man raise up the lame, but, Whosoever has forsaken houses or lands, shall receive an hundredfold in this world, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Let us also then emulate this man, that we may not be confounded, but may with confidence stand at the judgment seat of Christ; that we may win Him to be with us, even as He was with His disciples. For He will be with us, like as He was with them, if we are willing to follow them, and to be imitators of their life and conversation. For in consequence of these things God crowns, and commends men, not requiring of you to raise the dead, or to cure the lame. For not these things make one to be like Peter, but the casting away one's goods, for this was the apostles' achievement.

But do you not find it possible to cast them away? In the first place, I say, it is possible; but I compel you not, if you are not willing, nor constrain you to it; but this I entreat, to spend at least a part on the needy, and to seek for yourself nothing more than is necessary. For thus shall we both live our life here without trouble, and in security, and enjoy eternal life; unto which God grant we all may attain, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, now and always, and world without end. Amen.

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