

John 19:16-20:2

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on John 19:16-20:2 explores the profound significance of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, emphasizing fulfillment of prophecy and His care for others even in suffering.

Scripture: John 19:19-38

Topics: "The Crucifixion", "Resurrection Power"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus, highlighting the actions of Pilate, the soldiers, and the fulfillment of prophecies. He emphasizes the power of Christ's victory over death and the unintentional fulfillment of prophecy by those who crucified Him. Chrysostom also discusses the significance of Jesus' burial and resurrection, urging moderation in funeral practices and emphasizing the importance of alms-doing and virtue over extravagant burial customs.

Transcript

Then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led Him away. And He, bearing His Cross, went forth into a place called the place of a skull, where they crucified Him.

1. Successes have terrible power to cast down or draw aside those who take not heed. Thus the Jews, who at first enjoyed the influence of God, sought the law of royalty from the Gentiles, and in the wilderness after the manna remembered the onions. In the same way here, refusing the Kingdom of Christ, they invited to themselves that of Cæsar. Wherefore God set a king over them, according to their own decision. When then Pilate heard these things, he delivered Him to be crucified. Utterly without reason. For when he ought to have enquired whether Christ had aimed at sovereign power, he pronounced the sentence through fear alone. Yet that this might not befall him, Christ said beforehand, My kingdom is not of this world; but he having given himself wholly up to present things, would practice no great amount of wisdom. And yet his wife's dream should have been sufficient to terrify him; but by none of these things was he made better, nor did he look to heaven, but delivered Him up. And now they laid the cross upon Him as a malefactor. For even the wood they abominated, and endured not even to touch it. This was also the case in the type; for Isaac bare the wood. But then the matter stopped at the will of his father, for it was the type; while here it proceeded to action, for it was the reality.

And He came to the place of a skull. Some say that Adam died there, and there lies; and that Jesus in this place where death had reigned, there also set up the trophy. For He went forth bearing the Cross as a trophy over the tyranny of death: and as conquerors do, so He bare upon His shoulders the symbol of

victory. What matter if the Jews did these things with a different intent. They crucified Him too with thieves, in this also unintentionally fulfilling prophecy; for what they did for insult contributed to the truth, that you may learn how great is its power, since the Prophet had foretold of old, that He was numbered with the transgressors. Isaiah 53:12 The devil therefore wished to cast a veil over what was done, but was unable; for the three were crucified, but Jesus alone was glorious, that you may learn, that His power effected all. Yet the miracles took place when the three had been nailed to the cross; but no one attributed anything of what was done to either of those others, but to Jesus only; so entirely was the plot of the devil rendered vain, and all returned upon his own head. For even of these two, one was saved. He therefore did not insult the glory of the Cross, but contributed to it not a little. For it was not a less matter than shaking the rocks, to change a thief upon the cross, and to bring him unto Paradise.

John 19:19

And Pilate wrote a title.

At the same time requiting the Jews, and making a defense for Christ. For since they had given Him up as worthless, and attempted to confirm this sentence by making Him share the punishment of the robbers, in order that for the future it might be in no man's power to prefer evil charges against him, or to accuse him as a worthless and wicked person, to close moreover their mouths and the mouths of all who might desire to accuse Him, and to show that they had risen up against their own King, Pilate thus placed, as on a trophy, those letters, which utter a clear voice, and show forth His Victory, and proclaim His Kingdom, though not in its completeness. And this he made manifest not in a single tongue, but in three languages; for since it was likely that there would be a mixed multitude among the Jews on account of the Feast, in order that none might be ignorant of the defense, he publicly recorded the madness of the Jews, in all the languages. For they bore malice against Him even when crucified. Yet what did this harm you? Nothing. For if He was a mortal and weak, and was about to become extinct, why did you fear the letters asserting that He is the King of the Jews? And what do they ask? Say that 'he said.' For now it is an assertion, and a general sentence, but if 'he said' be added, the charge is shown to be one arising from his own rashness and arrogance. Still Pilate was not turned aside, but stood to his first decision. And it is no little thing that is dispensed even from this circumstance, but the whole matter. For since the wood of the cross was buried, because no one was careful to take it up, inasmuch as fear was pressing, and the believers were hurrying to other urgent matters; and since it was in after times to be sought for, and it was likely that the three crosses would lie together, in order that the Lord's might not be unknown, it was made manifest to all, first by its lying in the middle, and then by the title. For those of the thieves had no titles.

2. The soldiers parted the garments, but not the coat. See the prophecies in every instance fulfilled by their wickednesses; for this also had been predicted of old; yet there were three crucified, but the matters of the prophecies were fulfilled in Him. For why did they not this in the case of the others, but in His case only? Consider too, I pray you, the exactness of the prophecy. For the Prophet says not only, that they parted, but that they did not part. The rest therefore they divided, the coat they divided not, but committed the matter to a decision by lot. And the, Woven from the top John 19:23 is not put without a purpose; but some say that a figurative assertion is declared by it, that the Crucified was not simply man, but had also the Divinity from above. Others say that the Evangelist describes the very form of the coat. For since in Palestine they put together two strips of cloth and so weave their garments, John, to show that the coat was of this kind, says, Woven from the top; and to me he seems to say this, alluding to the poorness of the garments, and that as in all other things, so in dress also, He followed a simple fashion.

John 19:24

These things the soldiers did.

But He on the Cross, commits His mother to the disciple, teaching us even to our last breath to show every care for our parents. When indeed she unseasonably troubled Him, He said, Woman, what have I to do with you? John 2:4 And, Who is My mother? Matthew 12:48 But here He shows much loving affection, and commits her to the disciple whom He loved. Again John conceals himself, in modesty; for had he desired to boast, he would have also put in the cause for which he was loved, since probably it was some great and wonderful one. But wherefore does He converse on nothing else with John, nor comfort him when desponding? Because it was no time for comforting by words; besides, it was no little thing for him to be honored with such honor, and to receive the reward of steadfastness. But do thou consider, I pray, how even on the cross He did everything without being troubled, speaking with the disciple concerning His mother, fulfilling prophecies, holding forth good hopes to the thief. Yet before He was crucified He appears sweating, agonized, fearing. What then can this mean? Nothing difficult, nothing doubtful. There indeed the weakness of nature had been shown, here was being shown the excess of Power. Besides, by these two things He teaches us, even if before things terrible we be troubled, not on that account to shrink from things terrible, but when we have embarked in the contest to deem all things possible and easy. Let us then not tremble at death. Our soul has by nature the love of life, but it lies with us either to loose the bands of nature, and make this desire weak; or else to tighten them, and make the desire more tyrannous. For as we have the desire of sexual intercourse, but when we practice true wisdom we render the desire weak, so also it falls out in the case of life; and as God has annexed carnal desire to the generation of children, to maintain a succession among us, without however forbidding us from traveling the higher road of continence; so also He has implanted in us the love of life, forbidding us from destroying ourselves, but not hindering our despising the present life. And it behooves us, knowing this, to observe due measure, and neither to go at any time to death of our own accord, even though ten thousand terrible things possess us; nor yet when dragged to it, for the sake of what is pleasing to God, to shrink back from and fear it, but boldly to strip for it, preferring the future to the present life.

But the women stood by the Cross, and the weaker sex then appeared the manlier John 19:25; so entirely henceforth were all things transformed.

John 19:26-7

Behold your son . . . behold your mother.

3. And He, having committed His mother to John, said, Behold your Son. John 19:26 O the honor! With what honor did He honor the disciple! When He Himself was now departing, He committed her to the disciple to take care of. For since it was likely that, being His mother, she would grieve, and require protection, He with reason entrusted her to the beloved. To him He says, Behold your mother. John 19:27 This He said, knitting them together in charity; which the disciple understanding, took her to his own home. But why made He no mention of any other woman, although another stood there? To teach us to pay more than ordinary respect to our mothers. For as when parents oppose us on spiritual matters, we must not even own them, so when they do not hinder us, we ought to pay them all becoming respect, and to prefer them before others, because they begot us, because they bred us up, because they bare for us ten thousand terrible things. And by these words He silences the shamelessness of Marcion; for if He were not born according to the flesh, nor had a mother, wherefore takes He such forethought for her alone?

John 19:28

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished.

That is, that nothing was wanting to the Dispensation. For He was everywhere desirous to show, that this Death was of a new kind, if indeed the whole lay in the power of the Person dying, and death came not on the Body before He willed it; and He willed it after He had fulfilled all things. Therefore also He said, I have power to lay down My life; and I have power to take it again. John 10:18 Knowing therefore that all things were fulfilled, He says,

John 19:28

I thirst.

Here again fulfilling a prophecy. But consider, I pray, the accursed nature of the bystanders. Though we have ten thousand enemies, and have suffered intolerable things at their hands, yet when we see them perishing, we relent; but they did not even so make peace with Him, nor were tamed by what they saw, but rather became more savage, and increased their irony; and having brought to Him vinegar on a sponge, as men bring it to the condemned, thus they gave Him to drink; since it is on this account that the hyssop is added.

John 19:30

Having therefore received it, He says, It is finished.

Do you see how He does all things calmly, and with power? And what follows shows this. For when all had been completed,

He bowed His head, (this had not been nailed,) and gave up the ghost.

That is, died. Yet to expire does not come after the bowing the head; but here, on the contrary, it does. For He did not, when He had expired, bow His head, as happens with us, but when He had bent His head, then He expired. By all which things the Evangelist has shown, that He was Lord of all.

But the Jews, on the other hand, who swallowed the camel and strained at the gnat, having wrought so atrocious a deed, are very precise concerning the day.

John 19:31

Because it was the Preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross -- they besought Pilate that their legs might be broken.

Do you see how strong a thing is truth? By means of the very things which are the objects of their zeal, prophecy is fulfilled, for by occasion of those things, this plain prediction, unconnected with them, receives its accomplishment. For the soldiers when they came, broke the legs of the others, but not those of Christ. Yet these to gratify the Jews pierced His side with a spear, and now insulted the dead body. O abominable and accursed purpose! Yet, beloved, be not thou confounded, be not thou desponding; for the things which these men did from a wicked will, fought on the side of the truth. Since there was a prophecy, saying, (from this circumstance, They shall look on Him whom they pierced. Ver. 37; Zechariah 12:10 And not this only, but the deed then dared was a demonstration of the faith, to those who should afterwards

disbelieve; as to Thomas, and those like him. With this too an ineffable mystery was accomplished. For there came forth water and blood. Not without a purpose, or by chance, did those founts come forth, but because by means of these two together the Church consists. And the initiated know it, being by water indeed regenerate, and nourished by the Blood and the Flesh. Hence the Mysteries take their beginning; that when you approach to that awful cup, you may so approach, as drinking from the very side.

John 19:35

And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true.

That is, I heard it not from others, but was myself present and saw it, and the testimony is true. As may be supposed. For he relates an insult done; he relates not anything great and admirable, that you should suspect his narrative; but securing the mouths of heretics, and loudly proclaiming beforehand the Mysteries that should be, and beholding the treasure laid up in them, he is very exact concerning what took place. And that prophecy also is fulfilled,

John 19:36

A bone of Him shall not be broken. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12

For even if this was said with reference to the lamb of the Jews, still it was for the sake of the reality that the type preceded, and in Him the prophecy was more fully accomplished. On this account the Evangelist brought forward the Prophet. For since by continually producing himself as witness he would have seemed unworthy of credit, he brings Moses to help him, and says, that neither did this come to pass without a purpose, but was written before of old. And this is the meaning of the words, A bone of Him shall not be broken. Again he confirms the Prophet's words by his own witness. These things, says he, I have told you, that you might learn that great is the connection of the type with the reality. Do you see what pains he takes to make that believed which seemed to be matter of reproach, and bringing shame? For that the soldier should insult even the dead body, was far worse than being crucified. But still, even these things, he says, I have told, and told with much earnestness, 'that you might believe.' John 19:35 Let none then be unbelieving, nor through shame injure our cause. For the things which appear to be most shameful, are the very venerable records of our good things.

John 19:38

After this came Joseph of Arimathæa, being a disciple.

Not one of the twelve, but perhaps one of the seventy. For now deeming that the anger of the Jews was quenched by the Cross, they approached without fear, and took charge of His funeral. Joseph therefore came and asked the favor from Pilate, which he granted; why should he not? Nicodemus also assists him, and furnishes a costly burial. For they were still disposed to think of Him as a mere man. And they brought those spices whose special nature is to preserve the body for a long time, and not to allow it quickly to yield to corruption, which was an act of men imagining nothing great respecting Him; but anyhow, they exhibited very loving affection. But how did no one of the twelve come, neither John, nor Peter, nor any other of the more distinguished disciples? Nor does the writer conceal this point. If any one say that it was from fear of the Jews, these men also were occupied by the same fear; for Joseph too was, it says, A secret (disciple) for fear of the Jews. And not one can say that Joseph acted thus because he greatly despised them, but though himself afraid, still he came. But John who was present, and had seen Him

expire, did nothing of the kind. It seems to me that Joseph was a man of high rank, (as is clear from the funeral,) and known to Pilate, on which account also he obtained the favor; and then he buried Him, not as a criminal, but magnificently, after the Jewish fashion, as some great and admirable one.

4. And because they were straitened by the time, (since the Death took place at the ninth hour, and it is probable, that what with going to Pilate and what with taking down the body, evening would come upon them when it was not lawful to work,) they laid Him in the tomb that was near. And it is providentially ordered, that He should be placed in a new tomb, wherein no one had been placed before, that His Resurrection might not be deemed to be that of some other who lay there with Him; and that the disciples might be able easily to come and be spectators of what came to pass, because the place was near; and that not they alone should be witnesses of His burial, but His enemies also, for the placing seals on the tomb, and the sitting by of the soldiers to watch it, were the actions of men testifying to the burial. For Christ earnestly desired that this should be confessed, no less than the Resurrection. Wherefore also the disciples are very earnest about this, the showing that He died. For the Resurrection all succeeding time would confirm, but the Death, if at that time it had been partially concealed, or not made very manifest, was likely to harm the account of the Resurrection. Nor was it for these reasons only that He was laid near, but also that the story about the stealing might be proved false.

John 20:1

The first day of the week (that is, the Lord's day) comes Mary Magdalene, very early in the morning, and sees the stone taken away from the sepulcher.

For He arose while both stone and seals lay over Him; but because it was necessary that others should be fully satisfied, the tomb was opened after the Resurrection, and thus what had come to pass was confirmed. This then was what moved Mary. For being entirely full of loving affection towards her Master, when the Sabbath was past, she could not bear to rest, but came very early in the morning, desiring to find some consolation from the place. But when she saw the place, and the stone taken away, she neither entered in nor stooped down, but ran to the disciples, in the greatness of her longing; for this was what she earnestly desired, she wished very speedily to learn what had become of the body. This was the meaning of her running, and her words declare it.

John 20:2

They have taken away, she says, my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.

Do you see how she knew not as yet anything clearly concerning the Resurrection, but thought there had been a removal of the body, and tells all simply to the disciples? And the Evangelist has not deprived the woman of such a praise, nor thought it shame that they should have learned these things first from her who had passed the night in watching. Thus everywhere does the truth-loving nature of his disposition shine forth. When then she came and said these things, they hearing them, draw near with great eagerness to the sepulcher, and see the linen clothes lying, which was a sign of the Resurrection. For neither, if any persons had removed the body, would they before doing so have stripped it; nor if any had stolen it, would they have taken the trouble to remove the napkin, and roll it up, and lay it in a place by itself; but how? They would have taken the body as it was. On this account John tells us by anticipation that it was buried with much myrrh, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead; in order that when you hear that the napkins lay apart, you may not endure those who say that He was stolen. For a thief would not have been so foolish as to spend so much trouble on a superfluous matter. For why should

he undo the clothes? And how could he have escaped detection if he had done so? Since he would probably have spent much time in so doing, and be found out by delaying and loitering. But why do the clothes lie apart, while the napkin was wrapped together by itself? That you may learn that it was not the action of men in confusion or haste, the placing some in one place, some in another, and the wrapping them together. From this they believed in the Resurrection. On this account Christ afterwards appeared to them, when they were convinced by what they had seen. Observe too here again the absence of boastfulness in the Evangelist, how he witnesses to the exactness of Peter's search. For he himself having gotten before Peter, and having seen the linen clothes, enquired not farther, but withdrew; but that fervent one passing farther in, looked at everything carefully, and saw somewhat more, and then the other too was summoned to the sight. For he entering after Peter, saw the grave-clothes lying, and separate. Now to separate, and to place one thing by itself, and another, after rolling it up, by itself, was the act of some one doing things carefully, and not in a chance way, as if disturbed.

5. But do thou, when you hear that your Lord arose naked, cease from your madness about funerals; for what is the meaning of that superfluous and unprofitable expense, which brings much loss to the mourners, and no gain to the departed, or (if we must say that it brings anything) rather harm? For the costliness of burial has often caused the breaking open of tombs, and has caused him to be cast out naked and unburied, who had been buried with much care. But alas for vainglory!

How great the tyranny which it exhibits even in sorrow! How great the folly! Many, that this may not happen, having cut in pieces those fine clothes, and filled them with many spices, so that they may be doubly useless to those who would insult the dead, then commit them to the earth. Are not these the acts of madmen? Of men beside themselves? To make a show of their ambition, and then to destroy it? Yea, says some one, it is in order that they may lie safely with the dead that we use all these contrivances.

Well then, if the robbers do not get them, will not the moths get them, and the worms? Or if the moths and worms get them not, will not time and the moisture of putrefaction destroy them? But let us suppose that neither tomb-breakers, nor moths, nor worms, nor time, nor anything else, destroy what lies in the tomb, but that the body itself remains untouched until the Resurrection, and these things are preserved new and fresh and fine; what advantage is there from this to the departed, when the body is raised naked, while these remain here, and profit us nothing for those accounts which must be given?

Wherefore then, says some one, was it done in the case of Christ? First of all, do not compare these with human matters, since the harlot poured even ointment upon His holy feet. But if we must speak on these things, we say, that they were done when the doers knew not the word of the Resurrection; therefore it says, As was the manner of the Jews. For they who honored Christ were not of the twelve, but were those who did not honor Him greatly. The twelve honored Him not in this way, but by death and massacre and dangers for His sake.

That other indeed was honor, but far inferior to this of which I have spoken. Besides, as I began by saying, we are now speaking of men, but at that time these things were done with relation to the Lord. And that you may learn that Christ made no account of these things, He said, You saw Me an hungered, and you fed Me; thirsty, and you gave Me drink; naked, and you clothed Me Matthew 25:35; but nowhere did He say, dead, and you buried Me. And this I say not as taking away the custom of burial, (that be far from me,) but as cutting short its extravagance and unseasonable vanity.

But, says some one, feeling and grief and sympathy for the departed persuade to this practice. The practice does not proceed from sympathy for the departed, but from vainglory. Since if you desire to sympathize with the dead, I will show you another way of mourning, and will teach you to put on him garments which shall rise again with him, and make him glorious. For these garments are not consumed by worms, nor wasted by time, nor stolen by tomb-breakers. Of what sort then are these?

The clothing of alms-doing; for this is a robe that shall rise again with him, because the seal of alms-doing is with him. With these garments shine they who then hear, Hungering ye fed Me. These make men distinguished, these make them glorious, these place them in safety; but those used now are only something for moths to consume, and a table for worms. And this I say, not forbidding to use funeral observance, but bidding you to do it with moderation, so as to cover the body, and not commit it naked to the earth.

For if living He bids us have no more than enough to cover us, much more when dead; since the dead body has not so much need of garments as when it is living and breathing. For when alive, on account of the cold, and for decency's sake, we need the covering of garments, but when dead we require grave-clothes for none of these reasons, but that the body may not lie naked; and better than grave-clothes we have the earth, fairest of coverings, and more suited for the nature of such bodies as ours. If then where there are so many needs we must not search for anything superfluous, much more where there is no such necessity, is the ostentation unseasonable.

6. But the lookers-on will laugh, says some one. Most certainly if there be any laughter, we need not care much for one so exceedingly foolish; but at present there are many who rather admire and accept our true wisdom. For these are not the things which deserve laughter, but those which we do at present, weeping, and wailing, and burying ourselves with the departed; these things deserve ridicule and punishment. But to show true wisdom, both in these respects and in the modesty of the attire used, prepares crowns and praises for us, and all will applaud us, and will admire the power of Christ, and will say, Amazing!

How great is the power of the Crucified One! He has persuaded those who are perishing and wasting, that death is not death; they therefore do not act as perishing men, but as men who send the dead before them to a distant and better dwelling-place. He has persuaded them that this corruptible and earthy body shall put on a garment more glorious than silk or cloth of gold, the garment of immortality; therefore they are not very anxious about their burial, but deem a virtuous life to be an admirable winding-sheet.

These things they will say, if they see us showing true wisdom; but if they behold us bent down with grief, playing the woman, placing around troops of female mourners, they will laugh, and mock, and find fault in ten thousand ways, pulling to pieces our foolish expense, our vain labor. With these things we hear all finding fault; and very reasonably. For what excuse can we have, when we adorn a body, which is consumed by corruption and worms, and neglect Christ when thirsting, going about naked, and a stranger?

Cease we then from this vain trouble. Let us perform the obsequies of the departed, as is good both for us and them, to the glory of God: let us do much alms for their sake, let us send with them the best provision for the way. For if the memory of admirable men, though dead, has protected the living, (for, I will defend, it says, this city for Mine Own sake, and for My servant David's sake 2 Kings 19:34) much more will alms-doing effect this; for this has raised even the dead, as when the widows stood round showing what things Dorcas had made, while she was with them.

Acts 9:39 When therefore one is about to die, let the friend of that dying person prepare the obsequies, and persuade the departing one to leave somewhat to the needy. With these garments let him send him to the grave, leaving Christ his heir. For if they who write kings among their heirs, leave a safe portion to their relations, when one leaves Christ heir with his children, consider how great good he will draw down upon himself and all his. These are the right sort of funerals, these profit both those who remain and those who depart.

If we be so buried, we shall be glorious at the Resurrection-time. But if caring for the body we neglect the soul, we then shall suffer many terrible things, and incur much ridicule. For neither is it a common unseemliness to depart without being clothed with virtue, nor is the body, though cast out without a tomb, so disgraced, as a soul appearing bare of virtue in that day. This let us put on, this let us wrap around us; it is best to do so during all our lifetime; but if we have in this life been negligent, let us at least in our end be sober, and charge our relations to help us when we depart by alms-doing; that being thus assisted by each other, we may attain to much confidence, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, dominion, and honor, now and ever and world without end. Amen.

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