

A Sermon of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel  
(a portion of Homily LXIV in Vol X, NPNF (1st))

What is to us the intent of this parable? For the beginning doth not harmonize with what is said at the end, but intimates altogether the contrary. For in the first part He shows all enjoying the same, and not some cast out, and some brought in; yet He Himself both before the parable and after the parable said the opposite thing. "That the first shall be last, and the last first," that is, before the very first, those not continuing first, but having become last. For in proof that this is His meaning, He added, "Many are called, but few chosen," so as doubly both to sting the one, and to soothe and urge on the other.

But the parable saith not this, but that they shall be equal to them that are approved, and have labored much. "For thou hast made them equal unto us," it is said, "that have borne the burden and heat of the day."

What then is the meaning of the parable? For it is necessary to make this first clear, and then we shall clear up that other point. By a vineyard He meaneth the injunctions of God and His commandments: by the time of laboring, the present life: by laborers, them that in different ways are called to the fulfillment of the injunctions: by early in the morning, and about the third and ninth and eleventh hours, them who at different ages have drawn near to God, and approved themselves.

But the question is this, whether the first having gloriously approved themselves, and having pleased God, and having throughout the whole day shone by their labors, are possessed by the basest feeling of vice, jealousy and envy. For when they had seen them enjoying the same rewards, they say, "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, that have borne the burden and heat of the day." And in these words, when they are to receive no hurt, neither to suffer diminution as to their own hire, they were indignant, and much displeased at the good of others, which was proof of envy and jealousy. And what is yet more, the good man of the house in justifying himself with respect to them, and in making his defense to him that had said these things, convicts him of wickedness and the basest jealousy, saying, "Didst thou not agree with me for a penny?"

Take that thine is, and go thy way; I will give unto the last even as unto thee. Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

What then is it which is to be established by these things? For in other parables also this self-same thing may be seen. For the son who was approved is brought in, as having felt this self-same thing, when he saw his prodigal brother enjoying much honor, even more than himself. For like as these enjoyed more by receiving first, so he in a greater degree was honored by the abundance of the things given him; and to these things he that was approved bears witness.

What then may we say? There is no one who is thus justifying himself, or blaming others in the kingdom of Heaven; away with the thought! For that place is pure from envy and jealousy. For if when they are here the saints give their very lives for sinners, much more when they see them there in the enjoyment of these things, do they rejoice and account these to be blessings of their own. Wherefore then did He so frame His discourse? The saying is a parable, wherefore neither is it right to inquire curiously into all things in

parables word by word, but when we have learnt the object for which it was composed, to reap this, and not to busy one's self about anything further.

Wherefore then was this parable thus composed? What is its object to effect? To render more earnest them that are converted and become better men in extreme old age, and not to allow them to suppose they have a less portion. So it is for this cause He introduces also others displeased at their blessings, not to represent those men as pining or vexed, away with the thought! But to teach us that these have enjoyed such honor, as could even have begotten envy in others. Which we also often do, saying, "Such a one blamed me, because I counted thee worthy of much honor," neither having been blamed, nor wishing to slander that other, but hereby to show the greatness of the gift which this one enjoyed.

But wherefore can it have been that He did not hire all at once? As far as concerned Him, He did hire all; but if all did not hearken at once, the difference was made by the disposition of them that were called. For this cause, some are called early in the morning, some at the third hour, some at the sixth, some at the ninth, some at the eleventh, when they would obey.

This Paul also declared when he said, "When it pleased Him, who separated me from my mother's womb." When did it please Him? When he was ready to obey. For He willed it even from the beginning, but because he would not have yielded, then it pleased Him, when Paul also was ready to obey. Thus also did He call the thief, although He was able to have called him even before, but he would not have obeyed. For if Paul at the beginning would not have obeyed, much more the thief.

And if they say, "No man hath hired us," in the first place as I said we must not be curious about all the points in the parables; but here neither is the good man of the house represented to say this, but they; but he doth not convict them, that he might drive them to perplexity, but might win them over. For that He called all, as far as lay in Him, from the first even the parable shows, saying, that "He went out early in the morning to hire."

From everything then it is manifest to us, that the parable is spoken with reference to them who from earliest youth, and those who in old age and more tardily, lay hold on virtue; to the former, that they may not be proud, neither reproach those called at the eleventh hour; to the latter, that they may learn that it is possible even in a short time to recover all.

For since He had been speaking about earnestness, and the casting away of riches, and contempt of all one's possessions, but this needed much vigor of mind and youthful ardor; in order to kindle in them a fire of love, and to give vigor to their will, He shows that it is possible even for men coming later to receive the hire of the whole day.

But He doth not say it thus, lest again He should make them proud, but he shows that the whole is of His love to man, and because of this they shall not fail, but shall themselves enjoy the unspeakable blessings.

And this chiefly is what it is His will to establish by this parable. And if He adds, that, "*So the last shall be first and the first last; for many are called, but few chosen,*" marvel not. For not as inferring it from the parable doth He say this, but His meaning is this, that like as this came to pass, so shall that come to pass. For here indeed the first did not

become last, but all received the same contrary to hope and expectation. But as this result took place contrary to hope and contrary to expectation, and they that came before were equaled by them that followed, so shall that also come to pass which is more than this, and more strange, I mean, that the last should come to be even before the first, and that the first should be after these. So that that is one thing, and this another.

But He seems to me to say these, things, darkly hinting at the Jews, and amongst the believers at those who at first shone forth, but afterwards neglected virtue, and fell back; and those others again that have risen from vice, and have shot beyond many. For we see such changes taking place both with respect to faith and practice.

Wherefore I entreat you let us use much diligence both to stand in the right faith, and to show forth an excellent life. For unless we add also a life suitable to our faith, we shall suffer the extremest punishment.

And this the blessed Paul showed even from times of old, when he said, that *“They did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink:”* and added, that they were not saved; *“for they were overthrown in the Wilderness.”* And Christ declared it even in the evangelists, when He brought in some that had cast out devils and prophesied, and are led away to punishment. And all His parables also, as that of the virgins, that of the net, that of the thorns, that of the tree not bringing forth fruit, demand virtue in our works. For concerning doctrines He discourses seldom, for neither doth the subject need labor, but of life often or rather everywhere, for the war about this is continual, wherefore also so is the labor.

And why do I speak of the whole code. For even a part of it overlooked brings upon one great evils; as, for instance, almsgiving overlooked casts into hell them that have come short in it; and yet this is not the whole of virtue, but a part thereof. But nevertheless both the virgins were punished for not having this, and the rich man was for this cause tormented, and they that have not fed the hungry, are for this condemned with the devil.

Again, not to revile is a very small part of it, nevertheless this too casts out them that have not attained to it. *“For he that saith to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”* Again, even continence itself is a part, but nevertheless, without this no one shall see the Lord. For, *“Follow peace,”* it is said. *“And holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.”* And humility too in like manner is a part of virtue; but nevertheless though any one should fulfill other good works, but have not attained to this, he is unclean with God.

And this is manifest from the Pharisee, who though abounding with numberless good works, by this lost all.

But I have also something more than these things to say again. I mean, that not only one of them overlooked shuts Heaven against us, but though it be done, yet not in due perfection and abundance, it produces the selfsame effect again. *“For except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.”* So that though thou give alms, but not more than they, thou shalt not enter in.

And how much did they bestow in alms? One may ask. For this very thing, I am minded to say now, that they who do not give may be roused to give, and they that give may not

pride themselves, but may make increase of their gifts. What then did they give? A tenth of all their possessions, and again another tenth, and after this a third, so that they almost gave away the third part, for three-tenths put together make up this. And together with these, first fruits, and first born, and other things besides, as, for instance, the offerings for sins, those for purification, those at feasts, those in the jubilee, those by the canceling of debts, and the dismissals of servants. And the lendings that were clear of usury. But if he who gave the third part of his goods, or rather the half (for those being put together with these are the half), if then he who is giving the half, achieves no great thing, he who doth not bestow so much as the tenth, of what shall he be worthy? With reason He said, "There are few that be saved."

Let us not, then, despise the care of our life. For if one portion of it despised brings so great a destruction, when on every hand we are subject to the sentence of condemnation, how shall we escape the punishment? And what manner of penalty shall we not suffer? And what manner of hope of salvation have we, one may ask, if each of the things we have numbered threatens us with hell? I too say this; nevertheless, if we give heed we may be saved, preparing the medicines of almsgiving, and attending to our wounds.

For oil does not so strengthen a body, as benevolence at once strengthens a soul, and makes it invincible to all and impregnable to the devil. For wheresoever he may seize us, his hold then slips, this oil not suffering his grasp to fix on our back.

With this oil therefore let us anoint ourselves continually. For it is the cause of health, and a supply of light, and a source of cheerfulness. "But such a one," thou wilt say, "hath talents of gold so many and so many, and gives away nothing." And what is that to thee? For thus shalt thou appear more worthy of admiration, when in poverty thou art more munificent than he. It was on this ground Paul marveled at the Macedonians, not because they gave, but because even though they were in poverty they gave.

Look not then at these, but at the common Teacher of all, who "had not where to lay His head." And why, you say, doth not this and that person do so? Do not judge another, but deliver thyself from the charge against thee. Since the punishment is greater when thou at the same time blamest others, and thyself doest not, when judging other men, thou art again thyself also subject to the same judgment. For if even them who do right He permits not to judge others, much more will He not permit offenders. Let us not therefore judge others, neither let us look to others who are taking their ease, but unto Jesus, and from thence let us draw our examples.

Why! Have I been thy benefactor? Why! Did I redeem thee, that thou lookest to me? It is another who hath bestowed these things on thee. Why dost thou let go thy Master, and look unto thy fellow-servant? Heardest thou not Him saying, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart?" And again, "He that would be first amongst you, let him be servant of all:" and again, "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." And after these things again, lest taking offense at them who are remiss amongst thy fellow-servants, thou continue in contemptuousness; to draw thee off from that, He saith, "I have made myself an example to you, that as I have done, ye should do also." But hast thou no teacher of virtue amongst those persons that are with thee, neither

such a one as to lead thee on to these things? More abundant then will be the praise, the commendation greater, when not even being supplied with teachers thou hast become one to be marveled at.

For this is possible, nay very easy, if we be willing: and this they show, who first duly performed these things, as for instance, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedeck, Job, and all the men like them. To them it is needful to look every day, and not unto these, whom ye never cease emulating, and passing about their names in your assemblies. For nothing else do I hear you saying everywhere, but such words as these; “Such a one has bought so many acres of land; such a one is rich, he is building.” Why dost thou stare, O man, at what is without? Why dost thou look to others? If thou art minded to look to others, look to them that do their duty, to them that approve themselves, to them that carefully fulfill the law, not to those that have become offenders, and are in dishonor. For if thou look to these, thou wilt gather hence many evil things, falling into remissness, into pride, into condemnation of others; but if thou reckon over them that do right, thou wilt lead thyself on unto humility, unto diligence, unto compunction, unto the blessings that are beyond number.

Hear what the Pharisee suffered, because he let pass them that do right, and looked to him that had offended; hear and fear.

See how David became one to be marveled at, because he looked to his ancestors that were noted for virtue. “For I am a stranger,” saith he, “and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.” For this man, and all that are like him, let pass them that had sinned, and thought of those who had approved themselves.

This do thou also. For thou art not set to judge of the negligences of which others have been guilty, nor to inquire into the sins which others are committing; thou art required to do judgment on thyself, not on others. “For if we judged ourselves,” it is said, “we should not be judged, but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord.” But thou hast reversed the order, of thyself requiring no account of offenses great or small, but being strict and curious about the offenses of others.

Let us no more do this, but leaving off this disorderly way, let us set up a tribunal in ourselves for the sins committed by ourselves, becoming ourselves accusers, and judges, and executioners for our offenses.

But if it be thy will to be busy about the things of other men also, busy thyself about their good works, not their sins, that both by the memory of our negligences and by our emulation for the good works they have done, and by setting before ourselves the judgment-seat from which no prayers can deliver, wounded each day by our conscience as by a kind of goad, we may lead ourselves on to humility, and a greater diligence, and attain unto the good things to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ; with whom be to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, glory, might, honor, now and always, and world without end. Amen.

Thank you for visiting: <http://www.JMJsite.com>. Please share this information and tell others about this website.