

Exposition on Psalm 75

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of confession and invocation in our relationship with God, and highlights the significance of humility and repentance in the face of God's judgment.

Topics: "Faithfulness To God", "Repentance And Humility"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of staying faithful to God until the end, emphasizing the need to focus on the ultimate goal of eternal joy rather than temporary worldly pleasures. He warns against pride and urges humility, confession, and invoking God's name for true repentance and reconciliation. St. Augustine highlights the power of God as the ultimate Judge, who humbles the proud and exalts the humble, breaking the horns of sinners while lifting up the horns of the righteous. He encourages believers to choose wisely now, as there will come a time when it will be too late to repent and seek God's mercy.

Transcript

1. ...The Title of this Psalm thus speaks: At the end, corrupt not. What is, corrupt not? That which You have promised, perform. But when? At the end. To this then let the mind's eye be directed, unto the end. Let all the things which have occurred in the way be passed over, in order that we may attain to the end. Let proud men exult because of present felicity, let them swell with honours, glitter in gold, overflow with domestics, be encircled with the services of clients: these things pass away, they pass away like a shadow. When that end shall have come, when all who now hope in the Lord are to rejoice, then to them shall come sorrow without end. When the meek shall have received that which the proud deride, then the vapouring of the proud shall be turned into mourning. Then shall there be that voice which we know in the Book of Wisdom: for they shall say at that time when they see the glory of the Saints, who, when they were in humiliation, endured them; who, when they were exalted, consented not-- at that time then they shall say, These are they whom sometime we have had in derision. Wisdom 5:3 Where they also say, What has pride profited us, and the boasting of riches has bestowed upon us what? All things have passed away like a shadow. Because on things corruptible they relied, their hope shall be corrupted: but our own hope at that time shall be substance. For in order that the promise of God may remain whole and sure and certain towards us, we have said out of a heart of faith, at the end corrupt not. Fear not, therefore, lest any mighty man should corrupt the promises of God. He does not corrupt, because He is truthful; He has no one more mighty by whom His promise may be corrupted: let us be then sure concerning the promises of God; and let us sing now from the place where the Psalm begins.

2. We will confess to You, O Lord, we will confess to You, and will invoke Your name Psalm 74:1. Do not invoke, before thou confess: confess, and invoke. For Him whom you are invoking, unto yourself you call. For what is it to invoke, but unto yourself to call? If He is invoked by you, that is, if He is called to you, unto whom does He draw near? To a proud man He draws not near. High indeed He is, one lifted up attains not unto Him. In order that we may reach all exalted objects, we raise ourselves, and if we are not able to reach them, we look for some appliances or ladders, in order that being exalted we may reach exalted objects: contrariwise God is both high, and by the lowly He is reached. It is written, Nigh is the Lord to them that have bruised the heart. The bruising of the heart is Godliness, humility. He that bruises himself is angry with himself. Let him make himself angry in order that he may make Him merciful; let him make himself judge, in order that he may make Him Advocate. Therefore God does come when invoked. Unto whom does He come? To the proud man He comes not....Take heed therefore what ye do: for if He knows, He is not unobservant. It is better therefore that He be unobservant than known. For what is that same being unobservant, but not knowing? What is, not to know? Not to animadvert. For even as the act of one avenging animadversion is wont to be spoken of. Here one praying that He be unobservant: Turn away Your face from my sins. What then will you do if He shall have turned away His face from you? A grievous thing it is, and to be feared, lest He forsake you. Again, if He turn not away His face, He animadverts. God knows this thing, God can do this thing, namely, both turn away face from one sinning, and not turn away from one confessing....Confess therefore and invoke. For by confessing you purge the Temple, into which He may come, when invoked. Confess and invoke. May He turn away face from your sins, not turn away from you: turn away face from that which you have wrought, not turn away from that which He has Himself wrought. For you, as man, He has Himself wrought, your sins you have yourself wrought....

3. But that there is a strengthening of the sense in repetition, by many passages of the Scriptures we are taught. Thence is that which the Lord says, Verily, Verily. John 1:51 Thence in certain Psalms is, So be it, So be it. To signify the thing, one So be it would have been sufficient: to signify confirmation, there has been added another So be it....Countless passages of such sort there are throughout all the Scriptures. With these it is sufficient that we have commended to your notice a way of speaking which you may observe in all like cases: now to the substance attend: We will confess to You, he says, and we will invoke. I have said why before invocation confession does precede: because he whom you invoke, you invite. But he wills not to come when invoked, if you shall have been lifted up: lifted up if you shall have been, you will not be able to confess. And you deny not any things to God that He knows not. Therefore your confession does not teach Him, but it purges you.

4. ...Hear ye now the words of Christ. For these seemed not as it were to be His words, We will confess to You, O God, we will confess to You, and will invoke Your name. Now begins the discourse in the person of the Head. But whether Head speaks or whether members speak, Christ speaks: He speaks in the person of the Head, He speaks in the person of the Body. But what has been said? There shall be two in one flesh. Genesis 2:24 This is a great Sacrament: I, he says, speak in Christ and in the Church. Ephesians 5:32 And He Himself in the Gospel, Therefore no longer two, but one flesh. Matthew 19:6 For in order that you may know these in a manner to be two persons, and again one by the bond of marriage, as one He speaks in Isaiah, and says, As upon a Bridegroom he has bound upon me a mitre, and as a Bride he has clothed me with an ornament. Isaiah 61:10 A Bridegroom He has called Himself in the Head, a Bride in the Body. He is speaking therefore as One, let us hear Him, and in Him let us also speak. Let us be the members of Him, in order that this voice may possibly be ours also. I will tell forth, he says, all Your marvellous things. Christ is preaching Himself, He is preaching Himself even in His members now

existing, in order that He may guide unto Him others, and they may draw near that were not, and may be united with those members of Him, through which members of Him the Gospel has been preached; and there may be made one Body under one Head, in one Spirit, in one Life.

5. And he says what? When I shall have received, he says, the time, I will judge justices Psalm 74:2. When shall He judge justices? When He shall have received the time. Not yet is the precise time. Thanks to His mercy: He first preaches justices, and then He judges justices. For if He willed to judge before He willed to preach, who would be found that should be delivered: who would meet Him that should be absolved? Now therefore is the time of preaching: I will tell, he says, all Your marvellous works. Hear Him telling, hear Him preaching: for if you shall have despised Him, when I shall have received the time, He says, I will judge justices. I forgive, He says, now sins to one confessing, I will not spare hereafter one despising....He has received a time as Son of Man; He does govern times as Son of God. Hear how as Son of Man He has received the time of judging. He says in the Gospel, He has given to Him power to execute judgment, because Son of Man He is. John 5:27 According to His nature as Son of God, He has never received power of judging, because He never lacked the power of judging: according to His nature as Son of Man He has received a time, as of being born, and of suffering, as of dying, and of rising again, and of ascending, so of coming and of judging. In Him His Body also says these words, for not without them He will judge. For He says in the Gospel, You shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:28 Therefore whole Christ says, that is, Head and Body in the Saints, when I shall have received the time, I will judge justices.

6. But now what? The earth has flowed down Psalm 74:3. If the earth has flowed down, whence has it flowed down except by sins? Therefore also they are called delinquencies. To delinquish is as it were by a kind of liquidity to slip down from the stability of firmness in virtue and righteousness. For it is through desire of lower things that every man sins: as he is strengthened by the love of higher things, so he falls down and as it were melts away by desire of lower things. This flux of things by the sins of man the merciful forgiver observing, being a merciful forgiver of sins, not yet an exactor of punishments, He observes and says: The earth herself indeed has flowed down by them that dwell in her. That which follows is an exposition, not an addition. As though thou were saying, in what manner has the earth flowed down? Have the foundations been withdrawn, and has anything therein been swallowed up in a sort of gulf? What I mean by earth is all they that dwell therein. I have found, he says, the earth sinful. And I have done what? I have strengthened the pillars thereof. What are the pillars which He has strengthened? Pillars He has called the Apostles. So the Apostle Paul concerning his fellow-Apostles says, who seemed to be pillars. Galatians 2:9 And what would those pillars have been, except by Him they had been strengthened? For on occasion of a sort of earthquake even these very pillars rocked: at the Passion of the Lord all the Apostles despaired. Therefore those pillars which rocked at the Passion of the Lord, by the Resurrection were strengthened. The Beginning of the building has cried out through the pillars thereof, and in all those pillars the Architect Himself has cried out. For the Apostle Paul was one pillar of them when he said, Would ye receive a proof of Him that speaks in me-- Christ? 2 Corinthians 13:3 Therefore, I, he says, have strengthened the pillars thereof: I have risen again, I have shown that death is not to be feared, I have shown to them that fear, that not even the body itself does perish in the dying. There terrified them wounds, there strengthened them scars. The Lord Jesus could have risen again without any scar: for what great matter were it for that power, to restore the frame of the body to such perfect soundness, as that no trace at all of past wound should appear? He had power whence He might make it whole even without scar: but He willed to have that whereby He might strengthen the rocking pillars.

7. We have heard now, brethren, that which day by day is not kept secret: let us hear now what He has cried through these pillars....He cries what? I have said to unjust men, Do not unjustly Psalm 74:4....But already they have done, and they are guilty: already there has flowed down the earth, and all they that dwell therein. Pricked to the heart were they that crucified Christ, Acts 2:37 they acknowledged their sin, they learned something of the Apostle, that they might not despair of the pardon of the Preacher. For as Physician He had come, and therefore had not come to the whole. For there is no need, He says, to the whole of a physician, but to them that are sick. I have not come to call righteous men, but sinners to repentance. Matthew 9:12-13 Therefore, I have said to unjust men, Do not unjustly. They heard not. For of old to us it was spoken: we heard not, we fell, were made mortal, were begotten mortal: the earth flowed down. Let them hear the Physician even now in order that they may rise, Him that came to the sick man, Him whom they would not hear when whole in order that they might not fall, let them hear when lying down in order that they may rise....I have said to unjust men, Do not unjustly; and to the delinquent, Do not exalt your horn. There shall be exalted in you the horn of Christ, if your horn be not exalted. Your horn is of iniquity, the horn of Christ is of majesty.

8. Be not therefore lifted up: speak not iniquity against God Psalm 74:5....What says He in another Psalm? These things you have done, having enumerated certain sins. These things you have done, He says, and was silent. What is, I was silent? He is never silent with commandment, but meanwhile He is silent with punishment: He is keeping still from vengeance, He does not pronounce sentence against the condemned. But this man says thus, I have done such and such things, and God has not taken vengeance; behold I am whole, nought of ill has befallen me.

These things you have done, and I was silent: you have suspected iniquity, that I shall be like you. What is, that I shall be like you? Because you are unjust, even Me you have deemed unjust; as though an approver of your misdeeds, and no adversary, no avenger thereof. And what afterwards says He to you? I will convict you, and will set you before your own face? What is this? Because now by sinning behind your back you set yourself, see not yourself, examinest not yourself; I will set you before yourself, and will bring upon you punishment from yourself.

So also here, Speak not iniquity against God. Attend. Many men speak this iniquity; but dare not openly, lest as blasphemers they be abhorred by godly men: in their heart they gnaw upon these things, within they feed upon such impious food; it delights them to speak against God, and if they break not out with tongue, in heart they are not silent. Whence in another Psalm is said, The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. The fool has said, but he has feared men: he would not say it where men might hear; and he said it in that place where He might Himself hear concerning whom he said it.

Therefore here also in this Psalm (dearly beloved attend), whereas that which He said, Do not speak iniquity against God, this He saw many men do in heart, He has also added, for neither from East, nor from West, nor from the deserts of the mountains Psalm 74:6, for God is Judge Psalm 74:7. Of your iniquities God is Judge. If God He is, everywhere He is present. Whither will you take yourself away from the eyes of God, so that in some quarter you may speak that which He may not hear?

If from the East God judges, withdraw into the West, and say what you will against God: if from the West, go into the East, and there speak: if from the deserts of the mountains He judges, go into the midst of the peoples, where you may murmur to yourself. From no place judges He that everywhere is secret, everywhere open; whom it is allowed no one to know as He is, and whom no one is permitted not to know. Take heed what you doest. You are speaking iniquity against God. The Spirit of the Lord has filled the

round world (another Scripture says this), and that which contains all things has knowledge of the voice: wherefore he that speaks unjust things cannot be hid.

Wisdom 1:7-8 Do not therefore think God to be in places: He is with you such an one as you shall have been. What is such an one as you shall have been? Good, if you shall have been good; and evil to you He will seem, if evil you shall have been; but a Helper, if good you shall have been; an Avenger, if evil you shall have been. There you have a Judge in your secret place. Willing to do something of evil, from the public you retire into your house, where no enemy may see; from those places of your house which are open and before the eyes of men, you remove yourself into a chamber; you fear even in your chamber some witness from some other quarter, you retire into your heart, there you meditate.

He is more inward than your heart. Whithersoever therefore you shall have fled, there He is. From yourself whither will you flee? Will you not follow yourself wherever you shall flee? But since there is One more inward even than yourself, there is no place whither you may flee from God angry, but to God reconciled. There is no place at all whither you may flee. Will you flee from Him? Flee to Him....What then shall we do now? Let us come before His face, ■ v ■ ξομολογ■σει, come before in confession: He shall come gentle whom you had made angry.

Neither from the deserts of the mountains, for God is Judge: not from the East, not from the West, not from the deserts of the mountains. Wherefore? For God is Judge. If in any place He were, He would not be God: but because God is Judge, not man, do not expect Him out of places. His place you will be, if you are good, if after having confessed you shall have invoked Him.

9. One He humbles, and another He exalts Psalm 74:7. Whom humbles, whom exalts this Judge? Observe these two men in the temple, and you see whom He humbles and whom He exalts. They went up into the Temple to pray, He says, the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican....Verily I say unto you, that Publican went down justified more than that Pharisee: for every one that exalts himself shall be humbled; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted. Thus has been explained a verse of this Psalm. God the Judge does what? One He humbles, and another He exalts: He humbles the proud, He exalts the humble.

10. For the cup in the hand of the Lord of pure wine is full of mixed Psalm 74:8. Justly so. And He has poured out of this upon this man; nevertheless, the dreg thereof has not been emptied; there shall drink all the sinners of earth. Let us be somewhat recruited; there is here some obscurity....The first question that meets us is this, of pure wine it is full of mixed. How of pure, if of mixed? But when he says, the cup in the hand of the Lord (to men instructed in the Church of Christ I am speaking), you ought not indeed to paint in your heart God as it were circumscribed with a human form, lest, though the temples are shut up, you forge images in your hearts. This cup therefore does signify something. We will find out this. But in the hand of the Lord, is, in the power of the Lord. For the hand of God is spoken of for the power of God. For even in reference to men oftentimes is said, in hand he has it: that is, in his power he has it, when he chooses he does it. Of pure wine it is full of mixed. In continuation he has himself explained: He has inclined, he says, from this unto this man; nevertheless the dreg thereof has not been emptied. Behold how it was full of mixed wine. Let it not therefore terrify you that it is both pure and mixed: pure because of the genuineness thereof, mixed because of the dreg. What then in that place is the wine, and what the dreg? And what is, He has inclined from this unto this man, in such sort that the dreg thereof was not emptied?

11. Call ye to mind from whence he came to this: one He humbles, and another He exalts. That which was figured to us in the Gospel through two men, a Pharisee and a Publican, Luke 18:10 this let us, taking in a wider sense, understand of two peoples, of Jews and of Gentiles: the people of the Jews that Pharisee was, the people of the Gentiles that Publican....As those by being proud have withdrawn, so these by confessing have drawn near. The cup therefore full of pure wine in the hand of the Lord, as far as the Lord gives me to understand, ..the cup of pure wine full of the mixed, seems to me to be the Law, which was given to the Jews, and all that Scripture of the Old Testament, as it is called; there are the weights of all manner of sentences.

For therein the New Testament lies concealed, as though in the dreg of corporal Sacraments. The circumcision of the flesh is a thing of great mystery, and there is understood from thence the circumcision of the heart. The Temple of Jerusalem is a thing of great mystery, and there is understood from it the Body of the Lord. The land of promise is understood to be the Kingdom of Heaven. The sacrifice of victims and of beasts has a great mystery: but in all those kinds of sacrifices is understood that one Sacrifice and only victim of the Cross, the Lord, instead of all which sacrifices we have one; because even those figured these, that is, with those these were figured.

That people received the Law, they received commandments just and good. Exodus 20:1-17 What is so just as, you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not speak false testimony, honour your father and mother, you shall not covet the property of your neighbour, one God you shall adore, and Him alone you shall serve, all these things belong to the wine. But those things carnal have as it were sunk down in order that they might remain with them, and there might be poured forth from thence all the spiritual understanding.

But the cup in the hand of the Lord, that is, in the power of the Lord: of pure wine, that is, of the mere Law: is full of mixed, that is, is together with the dreg of corporal Sacraments. And because the one He humbles, the proud Jew, and the other He exalts, the confessing Gentile; He has inclined from this unto this, that is, from the Jewish people unto the Gentile people. Hath inclined what? The Law. There has distilled from thence a spiritual sense. Nevertheless, the dreg thereof has not been emptied, for all the carnal Sacraments have remained with the Jews.

There shall drink all the sinners of the earth. Who shall drink? All the sinners of the earth. Who are the sinners of the earth? The Jews were indeed sinners, but proud: again, the Gentiles were sinners, but humble. All sinners shall drink, but see, who the dreg, who the wine. For those by drinking the dreg have come to nought: these by drinking the wine have been justified. I would dare to speak of them even as inebriated, and I shall not fear: and O that all you were thus inebriated.

Call to mind, Your cup inebriating, how passing beautiful! But why? Do ye think, my brethren, that all those who by confessing Christ even willed to die, were sober? So drunk they were, that they knew not their friends. All their kindred, who strove to divert them from the hope of Heavenly rewards by earthly allurements, were not acknowledged, were not heard by them drunken. Were they not drunken, whose heart had been changed? Were they not drunken, whose mind had been alienated from this world?

There shall drink, he says, all the sinners of the earth. But who shall drink the wine? Sinners shall drink, but in order that they may not remain sinners; in order that they may be justified, in order that they may not be punished.

12. But I, for all drink, but separately I, that is, Christ with His Body, for ever will rejoice, I will Psalm to the God of Jacob Psalm 74:9: in that promise to be at the end, whereof is said, corrupt not. And all the horns of sinners I will break, and there shall be exalted the horns of the Just Psalm 74:10. This is, the one He humbles, the other He exalts. Sinners would not have their horns to be broken, which without doubt will be broken at the end. You will not have Him then break them, do thou today break them. For you have heard above, do not despise it: I have said to unjust men, Do not unjustly, and to the delinquents, Do not exalt the horn. When you have heard, do not exalt the horn, you have despised and hast exalted the horn: you shall come to the end, where there shall come to pass, All the horns of sinners I will break, and there shall be exalted the horns of the Just. The horns of sinners are the dignities of proud men: the horns of the Just are the gifts of Christ. For by horns exultations are understood. You hate on earth earthly exultation, in order that you may have the heavenly. You love the earthly, He does not admit you to the Heavenly: and unto confusion will belong your horn which is broken, just as unto glory it will belong, if your horn is exalted. Now therefore there is time for making choice, then there will not be. You will not say, I will be let go and will make choice. For there have preceded the words, I have said to the unjust. If I have not said, make ready an excuse, make ready a defence: but if I have said, seize first upon confession, lest you come unto damnation; for then confession will be too late, and there will be no defence.

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