

1 Corinthians 15:29

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the significance of baptism and resurrection, urging believers to live righteously and share their spiritual gifts.

Scripture: Matthew 23:12, 1 Corinthians 15:30, 1 Corinthians 15:32-34, Galatians 3:28

Topics: "Resurrection Of Dead", "Spiritual Wealth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of the resurrection of the dead, highlighting the significance of baptism as a symbol of belief in the resurrection and the assurance of God's power to raise the dead. He addresses the folly of those who deny the resurrection and live corrupt lives, emphasizing the need to awaken to righteousness and avoid sin. Chrysostom challenges the rich to consider their excessive lifestyles and the true value of spiritual wealth over material possessions, urging them to use their resources for the benefit of others and to cultivate humility instead of pride.

Transcript

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for the dead?

He takes in hand again another topic, establishing what he said at one time from what God does , and at another from the very things which they practice. And this also is no small plea for the defense of any cause when a man brings forward the gainsayers themselves as witnessing by their own actions what he affirms. What then is that which he means? Or will you that I should first mention how they who are infected with the Marcionite heresy pervert this expression? And I know indeed that I shall excite much laughter; nevertheless, even on this account most of all I will mention it that you may the more completely avoid this disease: viz., when any Catechumen departs among them, having concealed the living man under the couch of the dead, they approach the corpse and talk with him, and ask him if he wishes to receive baptism; then when he makes no answer, he that is concealed underneath says in his stead that of course he should wish to be baptized; and so they baptize him instead of the departed, like men jesting upon the stage. So great power has the devil over the souls of careless sinners. Then being called to account, they allege this expression, saying that even the Apostle has said, They who are baptized for the dead. Do you see their extreme ridiculousness? Is it meet then to answer these things? I trow not; unless it were necessary to discourse with madmen of what they in their frenzy utter. But that none of the more exceedingly simple folk may be led captive, one must needs submit to answer even these men. As thus, if

this was Paul's meaning wherefore did God threaten him that is not baptized? For it is impossible that any should not be baptized henceforth, this being once devised: and besides, the fault no longer lies with the dead, but with the living. But to whom spoke he, Unless you eat My flesh, and drink My blood, you have no life in yourselves? John 6:53 To the living, or to the dead, tell me? And again, Unless a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God. John 3:5 For if this be permitted, and there be no need of the mind of the receiver nor of his assent while he lives, what hinders both Greeks and Jews thus to become believers, other men after their decease doing these things in their stead?

But not to prolong fruitless toil in cutting asunder their petty spiders' webs, come let us unfold unto you the force of this expression. What then is Paul speaking of?

2. But first I wish to remind you who are initiated of the response, which on that evening they who introduce you to the mysteries bid you make; and then I will also explain the saying of Paul: so this likewise will be clearer to you; we after all the other things adding this which Paul now says. And I desire indeed expressly to utter it, but I dare not on account of the uninitiated; for these add a difficulty to our exposition, compelling us either not to speak clearly or to declare unto them the ineffable mysteries. Nevertheless, as I may be able, I will speak as through a veil.

As thus: after the enunciation of those mystical and fearful words, and the awful rules of the doctrines which have come down from heaven, this also we add at the end when we are about to baptize, bidding them say, I believe in the resurrection of the dead, and upon this faith we are baptized. For after we have confessed this together with the rest, then at last are we let down into the fountain of those sacred streams. This therefore Paul recalling to their minds said, if there be no resurrection, why are you then baptized for the dead? i.e., the dead bodies. For in fact with a view to this are you baptized, the resurrection of your dead body, believing that it no longer remains dead. And thou indeed in the words makest mention of a resurrection of the dead; but the priest, as in a kind of image, signifies to you by very deed the things which you have believed and confessed in words. When without a sign you believe, then he gives you the sign also; when you have done your own part, then also does God fully assure you. How and in what manner? By the water. For the being baptized and immersed and then emerging, is a symbol of the descent into Hades and return thence. Wherefore also Paul calls baptism a burial, saying, Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death. Romans 6:4 By this he makes that also which is to come credible, I mean, the resurrection of our bodies. For the blotting out sins is a much greater thing than the raising up of a body. And this Christ declaring, said, For whether is easier to say, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Take up your bed, and walk? Matthew 9:5 The former is the more difficult, says He, but since you disbelieve it as being hidden, and make the easier instead of the more difficult the demonstration of my power, neither will I refuse to afford you this proof. Then says He to the paralytic, Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house.

And how is this difficult, says one, when it is possible to kings also and rulers? For they too forgive adulterers and homicides. You are jesting, O man, who sayest these things. For to forgive sins with God only is possible. But rulers and kings, whether it is adulterers whom they forgive or homicides, release them indeed from the present punishment; but their sin they do not purge out. Though they should advance to offices them that have been forgiven, though they should invest them with the purple itself, though they should set the diadem upon their heads, yet so they would only make them kings, but could not free them from their sin. It being God alone who does this; which accordingly in the Laver of Regeneration He will bring to pass. For His grace touches the very soul, and thence plucks up the sin by the root. Here is the reason why he that has been forgiven by the king may be seen with his soul yet

impure, but the soul of the baptized no longer so, but purer than the very sun-beams, and such as it was originally formed, nay rather much better than that. For it is blessed with a Spirit, on every side enkindling it and making its holiness intense. And as when you are recasting iron or gold you make it pure and new once more, just so the Holy Ghost also, recasting the soul in baptism as in a furnace and consuming its sins, causes it to glisten with more purity than all purest gold.

Further, the credibility of the resurrection of our bodies he signifies to you again from what follows: viz., that since sin brought in death, now that the root is dried up, one must not after that doubt of the destruction of the fruit. Therefore having first mentioned the forgiveness of sins, you next confess also the resurrection of the dead; the one guides you as by hand on to the other.

Yet again, because the term Resurrection is not sufficient to indicate the whole: for many after rising have again departed, as those in the Old Testament, as Lazarus, as they at the time of the crucifixion: one is bid to say, and the life everlasting, that none may any longer have a notion of death after that resurrection.

These words therefore Paul recalling to their minds, says, What shall they do which are baptized for the dead? For if there be no resurrection, says he, these words are but scenery. If there be no resurrection, how persuade we them to believe things which we do not bestow? Just as if a person bidding another to deliver a document to the effect that he had received so much, should never give the sum named therein, yet after the subscription should demand of him the specified monies. What then will remain for the subscriber to do, now that he has made himself responsible, without having received what he admitted he had received? This then he here says of those who are baptized also. What shall they do which are baptized, says he, having subscribed to the resurrection of dead bodies, and not receiving it, but suffering fraud? And what need was there at all of this confession, if the fact did not follow?

1 Corinthians 15:30-31

3. Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour?

I protest by that glorying in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

See again whence he endeavors to establish the doctrine, from his own suffrage: or rather not from his only, but from that also of the other apostles. And this too is no small thing; that the teachers whom you produce were full of vehement conviction and signified the same not by words only, but also by very deeds. Therefore, you see, he does not say simply, we are persuaded, for this alone was not sufficient to persuade them, but he also furnishes the proof by facts; as if he should say, in words to confess these things haply seems to you no marvel; but if we should also produce unto you the voice which deeds send forth, what can you have to say against that? Hear ye then, how by our perils also day by day we confess these things? And he said not I, but we, taking along with him all the apostles together, and thereby at once speaking modestly and adding credibility to his discourse.

For what can you have to say? That we are deceiving you when we preach these things, and that our doctrines come of vain-glory? Nay, our perils suffer you not to pass such a sentence. For who would choose to be in continual jeopardy to no purpose and with no effect? Wherefore also he said, Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour? For if one should even choose it through vain-glory, such his choice will be but for once and again, not all his life long, like ours. For we have assigned our whole life to this purpose.

I protest by that glorying in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily: by glorying here, meaning their advancement. Thus since he had intimated that his perils were many, lest he might seem to say this by way of lamentation, far from grieving, says he, I even glory in suffering this for your sake. And doubly, he says, he takes delight in it, both as being in jeopardy for their sakes and as beholding their proficiency. Then doing what is usual with him, because he had uttered great things, he refers both to Christ.

But how does he die daily? by his readiness and preparation for that event. And wherefore says he these words? Again by these also to establish the doctrine of the resurrection. For who would choose, says he, to undergo so many deaths, if there be no resurrection nor life after this? Yea, if they who believe in the resurrection would scarcely put themselves in jeopardy for it except they were very noble of heart: much more would not the unbeliever (so he speaks) choose to undergo so many deaths and so terrible. Thus, see by degrees how very high he mounts up. He had said, we stand in jeopardy, he added, every hour, then, daily, then, I not only 'stand in jeopardy,' says he, but I even 'die:' he concludes accordingly by pointing out also what kind of deaths they were; thus saying,

1 Corinthians 15:32

If after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?

What is, if after the manner of men? As far as pertains to men I fought with beasts: for what if God snatched me out of those dangers? So that I am he who ought most to be in care about these things; I, who endure so great dangers and have not yet received any return. For if no time of recompense is at hand, but our reward is shut up in this present world, ours is the greater loss. For you have believed without jeopardy, but we are slaughtered every day.

But all these things he said, not because he had no advantage even in the very suffering, but on account of the weakness of the many, and to establish them in the doctrine of the resurrection: not because he himself was running for hire; for it was a sufficient recompense to him to do that which was pleasing to God. So that when he adds, If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable, it is there again for their sakes, that he might by the fear of this misery overthrow their unbelief of the resurrection. And in condescension to their weakness, he thus speaks. Since in truth, the great reward is to please Christ at all times: and apart from the recompense, it is a very great requital to be in jeopardy for His sake.

4. If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

This word, be sure, is spoken in mockery: wherefore neither did he bring it forward of himself, but summoned the prophet of loftiest sound, Isaiah, who discoursing of certain insensible and reprobate persons made use of these words, Who slay oxen and kill sheep to eat flesh and drink wine; who say, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. These things are revealed to the ears of the Lord of Hosts, and this iniquity shall not be forgiven you, till ye die. Isaiah 22:13-14, Septuagint Now if then they were deprived of pardon who spoke thus, much more in the time of Grace.

Then that he might not make his discourse too rough, he dwells not long upon his *reductio ad absurdum*, but again turns his discourse to exhortation, saying,

1 Corinthians 15:33

Be not deceived: evil company does corrupt good manners.

And this he said, both to rebuke them as without understanding, (for here he by a charitable expression, calls good that which is easily deceived,) and also, as far as he could, to make some allowance to them for the past with a view to their return, and to remove from them and transfer to others the greater part of his charges, and so by this way also to allure them to repentance. Which he does likewise in the Epistle to the Galatians, saying, But he that troubles you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. Galatians 5:10

1 Corinthians 15:34

Awake up righteously and sin not.

As if he were speaking to drunkards and madmen. For suddenly to cast every thing out of their hands, was the part of drunkards and madmen, in not seeing any longer what they saw nor believing what they had before confessed. But what is, righteously? with a view to what is profitable and useful. For it is possible to awake up unrighteously, when a man is thoroughly roused up to the injury of his own soul. And well did he add, sin not, implying that hence were the sins of their unbelief. And in many places he covertly signifies this, that a corrupt life is the parent of evil doctrines; as when he says, The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, which some reaching after, have been led astray from the faith. 1 Timothy 6:10 Yea, and many of those who are conscious of wickedness and would fain not pay its penalty are by this fear damaged also in their faith concerning the resurrection: even as they who do very virtuously desire even daily to behold it.

For some have no knowledge of God; I speak this to move you to shame.

See how again he transfers his accusations to others. For he said not, You have no knowledge, but, some have no knowledge. Because disbelieving the resurrection is the temper of one not fully aware that the power of God is irresistible and sufficient for all things. For if out of the things which are not He made the things that are, much more will He be able to raise again those which have been dissolved.

And because he had touched them to the quick and exceedingly mocked them, accusing them of gluttony, of folly, of madness; mitigating those expressions, he says, I speak to move you to shame, that is, to set upright, to bring back, to make you better, by this shame of yours. For he feared lest if he cut too deep, he should cause them to start away.

5. But let us not consider these things as spoken to them only, but as addressed now also to all who labor under the same disease, and live a corrupt life. Since in truth not they who hold corrupt doctrines only, but they too who are holden of grievous sins, are both drunken and frantic. Wherefore also to them may it be justly said, Awake, and especially to those who are weighed down by the lethargy of avarice; who rob wickedly. For there is a robbery which is good, the robbery of Heaven, which injures not. And although in respect of money it is impossible for one to become rich, unless another first become poor: yet in spiritual things this is not so, but wholly the reverse: it is impossible that any should become rich without making another's store plentiful. For if you help no one, you will not be able to grow wealthy. Thus, whereas in temporal things imparting causes diminution: in spiritual things, on the contrary, imparting works increase, and the not imparting, this produces great poverty and brings on extreme punishment. And this is signified by him who buried the talent. Yea, and he too who has a word of wisdom, by imparting to another increases his own abundance, by making many wise: but he that buries it at home, deprives himself of his abundance by neglecting to win the profit of the many. Again, he that had other gifts, by healing many augmented his own gift: and was neither himself emptied by the imparting, and filled many others with his own spiritual gift. And in all spiritual things this rule abides unshaken. Thus also in the Kingdom, he that

makes many partakers with himself of the Kingdom will hereby the more completely have the fruits of it in return: but he that studies not to have any partaker will himself be cast out of those many blessings. For if the wisdom of this world of sense is not spent, though ten thousand are forcibly seizing it; nor does the artificer by making many artificers lose his own skill; much less does he who seizes the Kingdom make it less, but then will our riches be increased when we call many to us for that purpose.

Let us seize then the things which cannot be spent but increase while we seize them: let us seize the things which admit of none to defraud us of them by false accusation, none to envy us for them. For so, if there were a place which had a fountain of gold gushing forth with continual flood, and flowing the more as more was drawn from it; and there were another place which had a treasure buried in the earth; from which would you desire to be enriched? Would it not be from the first? Plainly. But that this may not be a mere conception in words, consider the saying in reference to the air and the sun. For these are seized by all, and satisfy all. These, however, whether men enjoy or do not enjoy them, abide the same undiminished: but what I spoke of is a much greater thing; for spiritual wisdom abides not the same distributed or not distributed: but it rather increases in the distribution.

But if any endure not what I have said, but still cleave to the poverty of worldly things, snatching at the things which endure diminution: even in respect of those again, let him call to mind the food of manna Exodus 16:20 and tremble at the example of that punishment. For what happened in that instance, this same result may one now also see in the case of covetous men. But what then happened in worms were bred from their covetousness. This also now happens in their case. For the measure of the food is the same for all; we having but one stomach to fill; only you who eat luxuriously have more to get rid of. And as in that case they who in their houses gathered more than the lawful quantity, gathered not manna, but more worms and rottenness; just so both in luxury and in covetousness, the gluttonous and drunken gather not more dainties but more corruption.

6. Nevertheless, so much worse than they are the men of our time, in that they experienced this once for all and received correction; but these every day bringing into their own houses this worm much more grievous than that, neither perceive it nor are satiated. For that these things do resemble those in respect of our useless labor on them: (for in regard of punishment these are much worse:) here is the proof for you to consider.

Wherein, I ask, differs the rich man from the poor? Has he not one body to clothe? One belly to feed? In what then has he the advantage? In cares, in spending himself, in disobeying God, in corrupting the flesh, in wasting the soul. Yea, these are the things in which he has the advantage of the poor: since if he had many stomachs to fill, perhaps he might have somewhat to say, as that his need was more and the necessity of expense greater. But even now they may, says one, reply, that they fill many bellies, those of their domestics, those of their hand-maidens. But this is done, not through need nor for humanity's sake, but from mere pride: whence one cannot put up with their excuse.

For why have you many servants? Since as in our apparel we ought to follow our need only, and in our table, so also in our servants. What need is there then? None at all. For, in fact, one master need only employ one servant; or rather two or three masters one servant. But if this be grievous, consider them that have none and enjoy more prompt attendance. For God has made men sufficient to minister unto themselves, or rather unto their neighbor also. And if you believe it not, hear Paul saying, These hands ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. Acts 20:34 After that he, the teacher of the world and worthy of heaven, disdained not to serve innumerable others; do you think it a disgrace, unless

you carry about whole herds of slaves, not knowing that this in truth is what most of all brings shame upon you? For to that end did God grant us both hands and feet, that we might not stand in need of servants. Since not at all for need's sake was the class of slaves introduced, else even along with Adam had a slave been formed; but it is the penalty of sin and the punishment of disobedience. But when Christ came, He put an end also to this. For in Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free. Galatians 3:28 So that it is not necessary to have a slave: or if it be at all necessary, let it be about one only, or at the most two. What mean the swarms of servants? For as the sellers of sheep and the slave-dealers, so do our rich men take their round, in the baths and in the forum.

However, I will not be too exact. We will allow you to keep a second servant. But if you collect many, you do it not for humanity's sake, but in self-indulgence. Since if it be in care for them, I bid you occupy none of them in ministering to yourself, but when you have purchased them and have taught them trades whereby to support themselves, let them go free. But when you scourge, when you put them in chains, it is no more a work of humanity.

And I know that I am giving disgust to my hearers. But what must I do? For this I am set, and I shall not cease to say these things, whether anything comes of them or not. For what means your clearing the way before you in the market place? Are you walking then among wild beasts that you drive away them that meet you? Be not afraid; those who approach you and walk near you don't bite. But do you consider it an insult to walk along side of other men? What madness is this, what prodigious folly, when a horse is following close after you, to think not of his bringing on you any insult; but if it be a man, unless he be driven an hundred miles off, to reckon that he disgraces you. And why have you also servants to carry fasces, employing freemen as slaves, or rather yourself living more dishonorably than any slave? For, in truth, meaner than any servant is he who bears about with him so much pride.

Therefore they shall not so much as have a sight of the real liberty, who have enslaved themselves to this grievous passion. Nay, if you must drive and clear away, let it not be them that come near you, but your own pride which you drive away; not by your servant, but by yourself: not with this scourge, but with that which is spiritual. Since now your servant drives away them that walk by your side, but you are yourself driven from your high place more disgracefully by your own self-will than any servant can drive your neighbor. But if, descending from your horse, you will drive away pride by humility, you shall sit higher and place yourself in greater honor, needing no servant to do this. I mean, that when you have become modest and walkest on the ground, you will be seated on the car of humility which bears you up to the very heavens, that car which has winged steeds : but if falling from it, thou pass into that of arrogance, you will be in no better state than the beggars who are drawn along the ground, nay even much more wretched and pitiable than they: since them the imperfection of their bodies compels thus to be drawn, but you the disease of your own arrogance. For every one that exalts himself, says He, shall be abused. Matthew 23:12 That we then may not be abused but exalted, let us approach towards that exaltation. For thus also shall we find rest for our souls according to the divine oracle, and shall obtain the true and most exalted honor; the which may we all obtain, through the grace and mercy, etc. etc.

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