

1 Thessalonians 4:13

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4:13 emphasizes the hope of resurrection for believers and the comfort it brings in times of grief.

Scripture: Psalm 39:5, 1 Corinthians 8:2, 1 Corinthians 15:18, 1 Corinthians 15:52, 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:1

Topics: "Resurrection Hope", "Eternal Life"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of understanding the doctrine of the Resurrection to banish grief and sorrow, emphasizing that even those who have fallen asleep in Jesus will be brought by God. He addresses the disbelief in the Resurrection, highlighting the comfort and honor in glory that believers will experience. Chrysostom encourages faith in the Resurrection by pointing out the miraculous transformations in nature and the human body, urging believers to trust in God's power and wisdom beyond human understanding.

Transcript

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep; that you sorrow not, even as the rest, which have no hope.

There are many things which from ignorance alone cause us sorrow, so that if we come to understand them well, we banish our grief. This therefore Paul also showing, says, I would not have you ignorant, that you sorrow not, even as the rest, which have no hope. Is it on this account you would not have them ignorant? But wherefore do you not speak of the punishment that is laid up? Ignorant, says he, of the doctrine of the Resurrection. But why? This is manifest from the other, and is admitted. But meanwhile, together with that, there will also be this not inconsiderable gain. For since they did not disbelieve the Resurrection, but nevertheless bewailed, on this account he speaks. And he discourses indeed with those who disbelieve the Resurrection in one way, but with these in another. For it is manifest that they knew, who were enquiring about the times and seasons. 1 Thessalonians 5:1

Ver. 14. For if we believe, he says, that Jesus died and rose again, and lived, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.

Where are they who deny the Flesh? For if He did not assume Flesh, neither did He die. If He did not die, neither did He rise again. How then does he exhort us from these things to faith? Was he not then

according to them a trifler and a deceiver? For if to die proceeds from sin, and Christ did not sin, how does he now encourage us? And now, concerning whom does he say, O men, for whom do you mourn? For whom do you sorrow? For sinners, or simply for those who die? And why does he say, Even as the rest, which have no hope? For whom do the rest mourn? So that to them all these things are vapid. The firstborn from the dead Colossians 1:18, he says, the first-fruits. Therefore there must also be others left. And see how here he introduces nothing from reasonings, because they were docile. For in writing to the Corinthians, he started many things also from reasonings, and then he added, You fool, that which you sow is not quickened. 1 Corinthians 15:36 For this is more authoritative, but it is when he converses with the believer. But with him who is without, what authority would this have? Even so, he says, them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. Again, fallen asleep: he nowhere says, the dead. But with respect to Christ, his words are, He died, because there followed mention of the Resurrection, but here them that are fallen asleep. How through Jesus? Either that they fell asleep through Jesus, or that through Jesus will He bring them. The phrase that fell asleep through Jesus means the faithful. Here the heretics say, that he is speaking of the baptized. What place then is there for even so? For Jesus did not fall asleep through Baptism. But on what account does he say, them that are fallen asleep? So that he is discoursing not of a general Resurrection, but of a partial one. Them that are fallen asleep through Jesus, he says, and thus he speaks in many places.

Ver. 15. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in nowise precede them that are fallen asleep.

Speaking concerning the faithful, and them which are fallen asleep in Christ 1 Corinthians 15:18; and again, the dead shall rise in Christ. Since his discourse is not concerning the Resurrection only, but both concerning the Resurrection and concerning the honor in glory; all then shall partake of a Resurrection, he says, but not all shall be in glory, only those in Christ. Since therefore he wishes to comfort them, he comforts them not with this only, but also with the abundant honor, and with its speedy arrival, since they knew that. For in proof that he wishes to comfort them with the honor, as he goes on, he says, And we shall be ever with the Lord: and we shall be caught up in the clouds.

But how do the faithful fall asleep in Jesus? It means having Christ within themselves. But the expression, He shall bring with Him, shows that they are brought from many places. This. Something strange he was about to tell them. On this account he also adds what makes it worthy of credit; From the word of the Lord, he says, that is, we speak not of ourselves, but having learned from Christ, That we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in nowise precede them that are fallen asleep. Which also he says in his Epistle to the Corinthians; In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. 1 Corinthians 15:52 Here he gives a credibility to the Resurrection by the manner also [in which it will occur].

For because the matter seems to be difficult he says that as it is easy for the living to be taken up, so also for the departed. But in saying we, he does not speak of himself, for he was not about to remain until the Resurrection, but he speaks of the faithful. On this account he has added, We that are left unto the coming of the Lord shall in nowise precede them that are fallen asleep. As if he had said, Think not that there is any difficulty. It is God that does it. They who are then alive shall not anticipate those who are dissolved, who are rotted, who have been dead ten thousand years. But as it is easy to bring those who are entire, so is it also those who are dissolved.

But there are some who disbelieve the matter, because they know not God. For, tell me, which is the more easy, to bring one into being out of nothing, or to raise up again him that was dissolved? But what say

they? A certain one suffered shipwreck and was drowned in the sea, and having fallen many fishes caught him, and each of the fish devoured some member. Then of these very fishes, one was caught in this gulf, and one in that, and this was eaten by one man, and that by another, while having in it the devoured pieces of flesh. And again, those who ate the fishes, that had eaten up the man, died in different places, and were themselves perhaps devoured by wild beasts. And -- when there has been so great a confusion and dispersion -- how shall the man rise again? Who shall gather up the dust? But wherefore do you say this, O man, and weavest strings of trifles, and makest it a matter of perplexity? For tell me, if the man had not fallen into the sea, if the fish had not eaten him, nor the fish again been devoured by numberless men -- but he had been preserved with care in a coffin, and neither worms nor anything else had disturbed him, how shall that which is dissolved rise again? How shall the dust and ashes be again conglutinated? Whence shall there be any more its bloom for the body? But is not this a difficulty?

If indeed they be Greeks who raise these doubts, we shall have numberless things to say to them. What then? For there are among them those who convey souls into plants, and shrubs, and dogs. Tell me, which is more easy, to resume one's own body, or that of another? Others again say that they are consumed by fire, and that there is a resurrection of garments and of shoes, and they are not ridiculed. Others say atoms. With them, however, we have no argument at all; but to the faithful, (if we ought to call them faithful who raise questions,) we will still say what the Apostle has said, that all life springs from corruption, all plants, all seeds. Do you see not the fig tree, what a trunk it has, what stems, how many leaves, and branches, stalks, and roots, occupying so much ground and embosomed therein. This then, such and so great as it is, springs from the grain which was thrown into the ground and itself first corrupted. And if it be not rotted and dissolved, there will be none of these things. Tell me, whence does this happen? And the vine too, which is so fair both to see and to partake of, springs from that which is vile in appearance. And what, tell me, is not the water that descends from above one thing? How is it changed into so many things? For this is more wonderful than the Resurrection. For there indeed the same seed and the same plant is the subject, and there is a great affinity. But here tell me how, having one quality and one nature, it turns into so many things? In the vine it becomes wine, and not only wine, but leaves and sap. For not only is the cluster of grapes, but the rest of the vine nourished by it. Again, in the olive (it becomes) oil, and the other so numerous things. And what is wonderful, here it is moist, there dry, here sweet there sour, here astringent, elsewhere bitter. Tell me how it turns into so many things? Show me the reason! But you cannot.

And in the case of yourself, tell me, for this comes nearer, this seed, that is deposited, how is it fashioned and molded into so many things? How into eyes? How into ears? How into hands? How into heart? Are there not in the body ten thousand differences of figures, of sizes, of qualities, of positions, of powers, of proportions? Nerves and veins and flesh and bones and membranes, and arteries and joints and cartilages, and as many more things beside these, as the sons of the physicians precisely specify, which compose our nature -- and these come from that one seed! Does not this then seem to you much more difficult than those things? How is the moist and soft congealed into the dry and cold, that is, bone? How into the warm and moist, which are united in the blood? How into the cold and soft, the nerve? How into the cold and moist, the artery? Tell me, whence are these things? Are you not quite at a loss about these things? Do you not see every day a resurrection and a death taking place in the periods of our life? Whither is our youth gone? Whence is our age come? How is it that he who is grown old cannot indeed make himself young, but begets another, a very young child, and what he cannot give to himself, that he bestows upon another?

This also we may see in trees and in animals. And yet that which gives to another ought first to bestow upon itself. But this is what human reasoning demands. But when God creates, let all things give way. If these things are so difficult, nay, so excessively difficult, I am reminded of those mad persons, who are curious about the incorporeal Generation of the Son. Things that take place every day, that are within the grasp of our hands, and that have been enquired into ten thousand times, no one has yet been able to discover; tell me, then, how is it they are curious about that secret and ineffable Generation? Is not the mind of such men wearied in treading that void? Has it not been whirled into ten thousand giddinesses? Is it not dumfounded? And yet not even so are they instructed. When they are able to say nothing about grapes and figs, they are curious about God! For tell me, how is that grape-stone resolved into leaves and stems? How before this were they not in it, nor seen in it? But it is not the grape-stone, you say, but all is from the earth. Then how is it that without this the earth bears nothing of itself? But let us not be void of understanding. What takes place is neither from the earth, nor from the grape-stone, but from Him who is Lord both of the earth and of its seeds. For this reason He has caused the same thing to be made both without them, and with them. In the first place, showing His own power, when he said, Let the earth bring forth the herb of grass. From Genesis 1:11 And secondly, besides showing His power, instructing us also to be laborious and industrious.

Why then have these things been said by us? Not idly, but that we may believe also in the Resurrection, and that, when we again wish to apprehend something by our reasonings, but do not find it, we may not be angry and take offense, but discreetly withdrawing and checking our reasoning, we may take refuge in the power and skillfulness of God. Knowing these things therefore, let us put a curb upon our reasonings. Let us not transgress our bounds, nor the measures that have been assigned to our knowledge. For, If any man, he says, thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 1 Corinthians 8:2

I speak not concerning God, he says, but concerning everything. For what? Would you learn about the earth? What do you know? Tell me. How great is its measure? What is its size? What is its manner of position? What is its essence? What is its place? Where does it stand, and upon what? None of these things can you tell? But that it is cold, and dry, and black, this you can tell -- and nothing farther. Again, concerning the sea? But there you will be reduced to the same uncertainty, not knowing where it begins, and where it ends, and upon what it is borne, what supports the bottom of it, and what sort of place there is for it, and whether after it there is a continent, or it ends in water and air. And what do you know of the things that are in it? But what? Let me pass over the elements. Would you have us select the smallest of plants? The unfruitful grass, a thing which we all know, tell me, how it is brought forth? Is not the material of it water, and earth, and dung? What is it that makes it appear so beautiful, and have such an admirable color? Whence does that beauty so fade away? This is not the work of water, or of earth. Do you see that there is everywhere need of faith? How does the earth bring forth, how does it travail? Tell me. But you can tell me none of these things.

Be instructed, O man, in things that are here below, and be not curious nor overmeddling about heaven. And would it were heaven, and not the Lord of heaven! Do you not know the earth from which you were brought forth, in which you were nourished, which thou inhabitest, on which you walk, without which you can not even breathe; and are you curious about things so far removed? Truly man is vanity. Psalm 39:5, and 144:5 And if any one should bid you descend into the deep, and trace out things at the bottom of the sea, you would not tolerate the command. But, when no one compels you, you are willing of yourself to fathom the unsearchable abyss? Do not so, I beseech you. But let us sail upwards, not floating, for we shall soon be weary, and sink; but using the divine Scriptures, as some vessel, let us unfurl the sails of

faith. If we sail in them, then the Word of God will be present with us as our Pilot. But if we float upon human reasonings, it will not be so. For to whom of those who float, is a Pilot present? So that the danger is twofold, in that there is no vessel, and that the Pilot is absent. For if even the boat without a pilot is unsafe, when both are wanting, what hope is there of safety? Let us not then throw ourselves into manifest danger, but let us go upon a safe vessel, having fastened ourselves by the sacred anchor. For thus we shall sail into the tranquil haven, with much merchandise, and at the same time with great safety, and we shall obtain the blessings laid up for them that love Him, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom, to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, honor, now and always and world without end. Amen.

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