

2 Corinthians 2:12-13

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 emphasizes the significance of trials, the power of the Gospel, and the importance of glorifying God in all circumstances.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:13-17

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Christian Forgiveness"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of maintaining a pure heart and mindset, focusing on the power of prayer and the need to avoid seeking harm against enemies. He emphasizes the significance of offering sincere prayers to God, free from bitterness and vengeful thoughts, highlighting the example of Joseph's forgiveness despite being wronged. Chrysostom urges believers to follow the path of mercy and compassion, praying for those who wrong them rather than seeking revenge, as this aligns with God's commandments and fosters a spirit of healing and reconciliation.

Transcript

Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ, and when a door was opened unto me in the Lord, I had no relief for my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother.

These words seem on the one hand to be unworthy of Paul, if because of a brother's absence he threw away so great an opportunity of saving; and on the other, to hang apart from the context. What then? Will ye that we should first prove that they hang upon the context, or, that he has said nothing unworthy of himself? As I think, the second, for so the other point also will be easier and clearer.

How then do these (words) hang upon those before them? Let us recall to mind what those were, and so we shall perceive this. What then were those before? What he said at the beginning. I would not have you, says he, ignorant concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power. 2 Corinthians 1:8 Now having shown the manner of his deliverance, and inserted the intermediate matter, he is of necessity led to teach them again that in yet another way he had been afflicted. How, and in what way? In not finding Titus. vii. 6; 8:6, 16, 22, 23, 12:18 Fearful indeed, and enough to prostrate the soul, is it even to endure trials; but when there is none to comfort and that can help to bear the burden, the tempest becomes greater. Now Titus is he, whom further on he speaks of as having come to him from them, and of whom he runs through many and great praises, and whom he said he had sent. With the view then of showing that in this point also he had been afflicted for their sakes, he said these things.

That the words then in question hang on what went before is from all this plain. And I will attempt to prove also that they are not unworthy of Paul. For He does not say that the absence of Titus impeded the salvation of those who were about to come over, nor yet that he neglected those that believed on this account, but that he had no relief, that is, 'I was afflicted, I was distressed for the absence of my brother;' showing how great a matter a brother's absence is; and therefore he departed thence. But what means, when I came to Troas, for the Gospel? he says not simply 'I arrived,' but 'so as to preach.' But still, though I had both come for that and found very much to do, (for a door was opened unto me in the Lord,) I had, says he, no relief, not that for this he impeded the work. How then says he,

2 Corinthians 2:13. Taking my leave of them, I went from thence?

That is, 'I spent no longer time, being straitened and distressed.' And perhaps the work was even impeded by his absence. And this was no light consolation to them too. For if when a door was opened there, and for this purpose he had come; yet because he found not the brother, he quickly started away; much more, he says, ought ye to make allowance for the compulsion of those affairs which lead us and lead us about everywhere, and suffer us not according as we desire either to journey, or to tarry longer among those with whom we may wish to remain. Whence also he proceeds in this place again to refer his journeyings to God, as he did above to the Spirit, saying,

2 Corinthians 2:14

But thanks be to God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ, and makes manifest through us the savor of His knowledge in every place.

For that he may not seem as though in sorrow to be lamenting these things, he sends up thanks to God. Now what he says is this: 'Every where is trouble, every where straitness. I came into Asia, I was burdened beyond strength. I came to Troas, I found not the brother. I came not to you; this too bred in me no slight, yea rather, exceeding great dejection, both because many among you had sinned, and because on this account I see you not. For, To spare you, he says, I came not as yet unto Corinth. That then he may not seem to be complaining in so speaking, he adds, 'We not only do not grieve in these afflictions, but we even rejoice; and, what is still greater, not for the sake of the rewards to come only, but those too even which are present. For even here we are by these things made glorious and conspicuous. So far then are we from lamenting, that we even call the thing a triumph; and glory in what happens.' For which cause also he said, Now thanks be unto God, Which always causes us to triumph, that is, 'Who makes us renowned unto all. For what seems to be matter of disgrace, being persecuted from every quarter, this appears to us to be matter of very great honor.' Wherefore he said not, Which makes us seen of all, but, Which causes us to triumph: showing that these persecutions set up a series of trophies against the devil in every part of the world. Then having mentioned along with the author, the subject also of the triumph, he thereby also raises up the hearer. 'For not only are we made to triumph by God, but also in Christ;' that is, on account of Christ and the Gospel. 'For seeing it behooves to triumph, all need is that we also who carry the trophy are seen of all, because we bear Him. For this reason we become observed and conspicuous.'

2. 2 Corinthians 2:14. And which makes manifest through us the savor of His knowledge in every place.

He said above, Which always causes us to triumph. Here he says in every place, showing that every place and every time is full of the Apostles' labors. And he uses yet another metaphor, that of the sweet savor. For 'like as those who bear ointment, so are we,' says he, 'manifest to all'; calling the knowledge a very precious ointment. Moreover, he said not, 'the knowledge;' but the savor of the knowledge; for such is the

nature of the present knowledge, not very clear nor uncovered. Whence also he said in the former Epistle, For now we see in a mirror darkly. 1 Corinthians 13:12 And here he calls that which is such a savor. Now he that perceives the savor knows that there is ointment lying somewhere; but of what nature it is he knows not yet, unless he happens before to have seen it. 'So also we. That God is, we know, but what in substance we know not yet. We are then, as it were, a Royal censer, breathing wherever we go of the heavenly ointment and the spiritual sweet savor.' Now he said this, at once both to set forth the power of the Preaching, in that by the very designs formed against them, they shine more than those who prosecute them and who cause the whole world to know both their trophies and their sweet savor: and to exhort them in regard to their afflictions and trials to bear all nobly, seeing that even before the Recompense they reap this glory inexpressible.

2 Corinthians 2:15

For we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God, in them that are saved and in them that perish.

Whether, says he, one be saved or be lost, the Gospel continues to have its proper virtue: and as the light, although it blinds the weakly, is still light, though causing blindness; and as honey, though it be bitter to those who are diseased, is in its nature sweet; so also is the Gospel of sweet savor, even though some should be lost who believe it not. For not It, but their own perverseness, works the perdition. And by this most of all is its sweet savor manifested, by which the corrupt and vicious perish; so that not only by the salvation of the good, but also by the perdition of the wicked is its excellence declared. Since both the sun, for this reason most especially that he is exceeding bright, does wound the eyes of the weak: and the Saviour is for the fall and rising again of many, Luke 2:34 but still He continues to be a Saviour, though ten thousand fall; and His coming brought a sorer punishment upon them that believe not, but still it continues to be full of healing. Whence also he says, We are unto God a sweet savor; that is, 'even though some be lost we continue to be that which we are.' Moreover he said not simply a sweet savor, but unto God. And when we are a sweet savor unto God, and He decrees these things, who shall henceforth gainsay?

The expression also, sweet savor of Christ, appears to me to admit of a double interpretation: for he means either that in dying they offered themselves a sacrifice: or that they were a sweet savor of the death of Christ, as if one should say, this incense is a sweet savor of this victim. The expression then, sweet savor, either signifies this, or, as I first said, that they are daily sacrificed for Christ's sake.

3. Do you see to what a height he has advanced the trials, terming them a triumph and a sweet savor and a sacrifice offered unto God. Then, whereas he said, we are a sweet savor, even in them that perish, lest you should think that these too are acceptable, he added,

2 Corinthians 2:16

To the one a savor from death unto death, to the other a savor from life unto life.

For this sweet savor some so receive that they are saved, others so that they perish. So that should any one be lost, the fault is from himself: for both ointment is said to suffocate swine, and light (as I before observed,) to blind the weak. And such is the nature of good things; they not only correct what is akin to them, but also destroy the opposite: and in this way is their power most displayed. For so both fire, not only when it gives light and when it purifies gold, but even when it consumes thorns, does very greatly display its proper power, and so show itself to be fire: and Christ too herein also does discover His own majesty when He shall consume Antichrist with the breath of His mouth, and bring him to nought with the

manifestation of His coming. 2 Thessalonians 2:8

And who is sufficient for these things?

Seeing he had uttered great things, that 'we are a sacrifice of Christ and a sweet savor, and are every where made to triumph,' he again uses moderation, referring all to God. Whence also he says, and who is sufficient for these things? 'for all,' says he, 'is Christ's, nothing our own.' Do you see how opposite his language to the false Apostles'? For they indeed glory, as contributing somewhat from themselves unto the message: he, on the contrary, says, he therefore glories, because he says that nothing is his own. For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world. And that which they considered it a glory to acquire, I mean the wisdom from without, he makes it his to take away. Whence also he here says, And who is sufficient for these things? But if none are sufficient, that which is done is of grace.

2 Corinthians 2:17

For we are not as the rest, which corrupt the word of God.

'For even if we use great sounding words, yet we declared nothing to be our own that we achieved, but all Christ's. For we will not imitate the false apostles; the men who say that most is of themselves.' For this is to corrupt, when one adulterates the wine; when one sells for money what he ought to give freely. For he seems to me to be here both taunting them in respect to money, and again hinting at the very thing I have said, as that they mingle their own things with God's; which is the charge Isaiah brings when he said, Your vintners mingle wine with water: Isaiah 1:22, Septuagint for even if this was said of wine, yet one would not err in expounding it of doctrine too. 'But we,' says he, 'do not so: but such as we have been entrusted with, such do we offer you, pouring out the word undiluted.' Whence he added, But as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

'We do not,' says he 'beguile you and so preach, as conferring a gift on you, or as bringing in and mingling somewhat from ourselves, but as of God; that is, we do not say that we confer any thing of our own, but that God has given all.' For of God means this; To glory in nothing as if we had it of our own, but to refer every thing to Him. Speak we in Christ.

Not by our own wisdom, but instructed by the power that comes from Him. Those who glory speak not in this way, but as bringing in something from themselves. Whence he elsewhere also turns them into ridicule , saying, For what have you that thou did not receive? But if you received it, why do you glory as if you had not received it. 1 Corinthians 4:7 This is the highest virtue, to refer every thing to God, to consider nothing to be our own, to do nothing out of regard to men's opinion, but to what God wills. For He it is that requires the account. Now however this order is reversed: and of Him that shall sit upon the tribunal and require the account, we have no exceeding fear, yet tremble at those who stand and are judged with us.

4. Whence then is this disease? Whence has it broken out in our souls? From not meditating continually on the things of that world, but being riveted to present things. Hence we both easily fall into wicked doings, and even if we do any good thing we do it for display, so that thence also loss comes to us. For instance, one has looked on a person often with unbridled eyes, unseen of her or of those who walk with her , yet of the Eye that never sleeps was not unseen. For even before the commission of the sin, It saw the unbridled soul, and that madness within, and the thoughts that were whirled about in storm and surge; for no need has He of witnesses and proofs Who knows all things. Look not then to your fellow-servants:

for though man praise, it avails not if God accept not; and though man condemn, it harms not if God do not condemn. Oh! provoke not so your Judge; of your fellow-servants making great account, yet when Himself is angry, not in fear and trembling at Him. Let us then despise the praise that comes of men. How long shall we be low-minded and grovelling? How long, when God lifts us to heaven, take we pains to be trailed along the ground? The brethren of Joseph, had they had the fear of God before their eyes, as men ought to have, would not have taken their brother in a lonely place and killed him. Genesis 37 Cain again, had he feared that sentence as he should have feared, would not have said, Come, and let us go into the field: Genesis 4:8, Septuagint for to what end, O miserable and wretched! Do you take him apart from him that begot him, and lead him out into a lonely place? For does not God see the daring deed even in the field? Have you not been taught by what befell your father that He knows all things, and is present at all things that are done? And why, when he denied, said not God this unto him: 'Hidest thou from Me Who am present every where, and know the things that are secret?' Because as yet he knew not aright to comprehend these high truths. But what says he? The voice of your brother's blood cries unto Me. Not as though blood had a voice; but like as we say when things are plain and clear, the matter speaks for itself.

Wherefore surely it behooves to have before our eyes the sentence of God, and all terrors are extinguished. So too in prayers we can keep awake, if we bear in mind with whom we are conversing, if we reflect that we are offering sacrifice and have in our hands a knife and fire and wood; if in thought we throw wide the gates of heaven, if we transport ourselves there and taking the sword of the Spirit infix it in the throat of the victim: make watchfulness the sacrifice and tears the libation to Him. For such is the blood of this victim. Such the slaughter that crimson that altar. Suffer not then anything of worldly thoughts to occupy your soul then. Bethink you that Abraham also, when offering sacrifice, suffered nor wife nor servant nor any other to be present. Neither then do thou suffer any of the slavish and ignoble passions to be present unto you, but go up alone into the mountain where he went up, where no second person is permitted to go up. And should any such thoughts attempt to go up with you, command them with authority, and say, Sit there, and I and the lad will worship and return to you; Genesis 22:5. Septuagint and leaving the ass and the servants below, and whatever is void of reason and sense, go up, taking with you whatever is reasonable, as he took Isaac. And build your altar so as he, as having nothing human, but having outstepped nature. For he too, had he not outstepped nature, would not have slain his child. And let nothing disturb you then, but be lift up above the very heavens. Groan bitterly, sacrifice confession, for, says he, Declare first your transgressions that you may be justified, Isaiah 43:26, Septuagint, sacrifice contrition of heart. These victims turn not to ashes nor dissolve into smoke nor melt into air; neither need they wood and fire, but only a deep-pricked heart. This is wood, this is fire to burn, yet not consume them. For he that prays with warmth is burnt, yet not consumed; but like gold that is tried by fire becomes brighter.

5. And withal observe heedfully one thing more, in praying to say none of those things that provoke your Master; neither draw near [to pray] against enemies. For if to have enemies be a reproach, consider how great the evil to pray against them. For need is that thou defend yourself and show why you have enemies: but you even accuse revilest.)--> them. And what forgiveness shall you obtain, when you both revile, and at such a time when you need much mercy yourself. For you drew near to supplicate for your own sins: make not mention then of those of others, lest you recall the memory of your own.

For if you say, 'Smite mine enemy,' you have stopped your mouth, you have cut off boldness from your tongue; first, indeed, because you have angered the Judge at once in beginning; next, because thou asks things at variance with the character of your prayer. For if you come near for forgiveness of sins, how do

you discourse of punishment? The contrary surely was there need to do, and to pray for them in order that we may with boldness beseech this for ourselves also. But now you have forestalled the Judge's sentence by your own, demanding that He punish them that sin: for this deprives of all pardon.

But if you pray for them, even if you say nothing in your own sins' behalf, you have achieved all. Consider how many sacrifices there are in the law; a sacrifice of praise, a sacrifice of acknowledgment, a sacrifice of peace, a sacrifice of purifications, and numberless others, and not one of them against enemies, but all in behalf of either one's own sins or one's own successes. For do you come to another God? To him you come that said, Pray for your enemies. Luke 6:27-35; Romans 12:14 How then do you cry against them?

How do you beseech God to break his own law? This is not the guise of a suppliant. None supplicates the destruction of another, but the safety of himself. Why then do you wear the guise of a suppliant, but hast the words of an accuser? Yet when we pray for ourselves, we scratch ourselves and yawn, and fall into ten thousand thoughts; but when against our enemies, we do so wakefully. For since the devil knows that we are thrusting the sword against ourselves, he does not distract nor call us off then, that he may work us the greater harm.

But, says one, 'I have been wronged and am afflicted.' Why not then pray against the devil, who injures us most of all. This you have also been commanded to say, Deliver us from the evil one. He is your irreconcilable foe, but man, do whatsoever he will, is a friend and brother. With him then let us all be angry; against him let us beseech God, saying, Bruise Satan under our feet; Romans 16:20 for he it is that breeds also the enemies [we have]. But if you pray against enemies, you pray so as he would have you pray, just as if for your enemies, then against him.

Why then letting him go who is your enemy indeed, do you tear your own members, more cruel in this than wild beasts. 'But,' says one, 'he insulted me and robbed me of money;' and which has need to grieve, he that suffered injury, or he that inflicted injury? Plainly he that inflicted injury, since while he gained money he cast himself out of the favor of God, and lost more than he gained: so that he is the injured party. Surely then need is not that one pray against, but for him, that God would be merciful to him.

See how many things the three children suffered, though they had done no harm. They lost country, liberty, were taken captive and made slaves; and when carried away into a foreign and barbarous land, were even on the point of being slain on account of the dream, without cause or object. Daniel 2:13 What then? When they had entered in with Daniel, what prayed they? What said they? Dash down Nebuchadnezzar, pull down his diadem, hurl him from the throne? Nothing of this sort; but they desired mercies of God.

Daniel 2:18. Septuagint And when they were in the furnace, likewise. But not so ye: but when you suffer far less than they, and oftentimes justly, you cease not to vent ten thousand imprecations. And one says, 'Strike down my enemy as You overwhelmed the chariot of Pharaoh;' another, 'Blast his flesh;' another again, 'Requite it on his children.' Recognize ye not these words? Whence then is this your laughter? Do you see how laughable this is, when it is uttered without passion.

And so all sin then discovers how vile it is, when you strip it of the state of mind of the perpetrator. Should thou remind one who has been angered of the words which he said in his passion, he will sink for shame and scorn himself and wish he had suffered a thousand punishments rather than those words to be his. And should you, when the embrace is over, bring the unchaste to the woman he sinned with, he too will turn away from her as disgusting. And so do ye, because you are not under the influence of the passion,

laugh now.

For worthy to be laughed at are they, and the words of drunken old gossips; and springing from a womanish littleness of soul. And yet Joseph, though he had been sold and made a slave, and had tenanted a prison, uttered not even then a bitter word against the authors of his sorrows. But what says he? Indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; Genesis 40:15 and adds not by whom. For he feels more ashamed for the wickedness of his brethren, than they who wrought them.

Such too ought to be our disposition, to grieve for them who wrong us more than they themselves do. For the hurt passes on to them. As then they who kick against nails, yet are proud of it, are fit objects of pity and lamentation on account of this madness; so they who wrong those that do them no evil, inasmuch as they wound their own souls, are fit objects for many moans and lamentations, not for curses. For nothing is more polluted than a soul that curses, or more impure than a tongue that offers such sacrifices.

You are a man; vomit not forth the poison of asps. You are a man; become not a wild beast. For this was your mouth made, not that you should bite but that you should heal the wounds of others. 'Remember the charge I have given you,' says God, 'to pardon and forgive. But you beseech Me also to be a party to the overthrow of my own commandments, and devour your brother, and redden your tongue, as madmen do their teeth on their own members.' How, do you think, the devil is pleased and laughs, when he hears such a prayer?

And how, God is provoked, and turns from and abhors you, when you beseech things like these? Than which, what can be more dangerous? For if none should approach the mysteries that has enemies: how must not he, that not only has, but also prays against them, be excluded even from the outer courts themselves? Thinking then on these things, and considering the Subject of the Sacrifice, that He was sacrificed for enemies; let us not have an enemy: and if we have, let us pray for him; that we too having obtained forgiveness of the sins we have committed, may stand with boldness at the tribunal of Christ; to whom be glory forever. Amen.

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