

# 2 Corinthians 4:1-2

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's sermon on 2 Corinthians 4:1-2 highlights the significance of authentic ministry grounded in God's mercy and the rejection of deceitful practices.*

**Scripture:** Joel 2:25, Matthew 7:6, 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

**Topics:** "Ministry Of Mercy", "Gods Power"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the ministry of mercy and renouncing hidden shameful things, emphasizing the importance of not fainting but rejoicing in God's loving-kindness. He highlights the need to preach Christ, not ourselves, and to serve others for Jesus' sake. Chrysostom explains how God's power shines through our mortal bodies, showcasing His greatness and the treasure we hold. He urges believers to marvel at God's power, which persuades the world to follow Christ, and to worship the invincible might of The Crucified for eternal salvation.

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## Transcript

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy we faint not, but we have renounced the hidden things of shame.

Seeing he had uttered great things and had set himself and all the faithful before Moses, aware of the height and greatness of what he had said, observe how he moderates his tone again. For it was necessary on account of the false Apostles to exalt his hearers also, and again to calm down that swelling; yet not to do it away, since this would be a trifler's part. Wherefore he manages this in another manner, by showing that not of their own merits was it, but all of the loving-kindness of God. Wherefore also he says, Therefore seeing we have this ministry. For nothing more did we contribute, except that we became ministers, and made ourselves subservient to the things given by God. Wherefore he said not 'largess,' nor 'supply,' but 'ministry.' Nor was he contented with this even, but added, as we obtained mercy. For even this itself, he says, the ministering to these things, is of mercy and loving-kindness. Yet it is mercy's to deliver from evils, not to give so many good things besides: but the mercy of God includes this also.

We faint not. And this indeed is to be imputed to His loving-kindness. For the clause, as we obtained mercy, take to be said with reference both to the ministry, and to the words, we faint not. And observe how earnestly he endeavors to lower his own things. 'For,' says he, 'that one who has been counted worthy of such and so great things, and this from mercy only and loving-kindness, should show forth such labors, and undergo dangers, and endure temptations, is no great matter. Therefore we not only do not sink

down, but we even rejoice and speak boldly.' For instance, having said, we faint not, he added,

2 Corinthians 4:2. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.

And what are the hidden things of shame? We do not, he says, profess and promise great things, and in our actions show other things, as they do; wherefore also he said, You look on things after the outward appearance; but such we are as we appear, not having any duplicity, nor saying and doing such things as we ought to hide and veil over with shame and blushes. And to interpret this, he added, not walking in craftiness. For what they considered to be praise, that he proves to be shameful and worthy of scorn. But what is, in craftiness? They had the reputation of taking nothing,, but they took and kept it secret; they had the character of saints and approved Apostles, but they were full of numberless evil things. But, says he, we have renounced these things: (for these are what he also calls the hidden things of shame; being such as we appear to be, and keeping nothing veiled over. And that not in this [our] life only, but also in the Preaching itself. For this is, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.

But by the manifestation of the truth.

Not by the countenance and the outward show, but by the very proof of our actions.

Commending ourselves to every man's conscience.

For not to believers only, but also to unbelievers, we are manifest; lying open unto all that they may test our actions, as they may choose; and by this we commend ourselves, not by acting a part and carrying about a specious mask. We say then, that we take nothing, and we call you for witnesses; we say that we are conscious of no wickedness, and of this again we derive the testimony from you, not as they (sc. false Apostles) who, veiling over their things, deceive many. But we both set forth our life before all men; and we lay bare the Preaching, so that all comprehend it.

2. Then because the unbelievers knew not its power, he added, this is no fault of ours, but of their own insensibility. Wherefore also he says,

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

But if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that are lost; in whom the God of this world has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving.

As he said also before, To some a savor from death unto death, to others a savor from life unto life, 2 Corinthians 2:16 so he says here too. But what is the God of this world? Those that are infected with Marcion's notions, affirm that this is said of the Creator, the just only, and not good; for they say that there is a certain God, just and not good. But the Manichees say that the devil is here intended, desiring from this passage to introduce another creator of the world besides the True One, very senselessly. For the Scripture uses often to employ the term God, not in regard of the dignity of that so designated, but of the weakness of those in subjection to it; as when it calls Mammon lord, and the belly god. But neither is the belly therefore God, nor Mammon Lord, save only of those who bow down themselves to them. But we assert of this passage that it is spoken neither of the devil nor of another creator, but of the God of the Universe, and that it is to be read thus; God has blinded the minds of the unbelievers of this world. For the world to come has no unbelievers; but the present only. But if any one should read it even otherwise, as, for instance, the God of this world; neither does this afford any handle, for this does not show Him to be

the God of this world only. For He is called the God of Heaven, Psalm 136:26, etc. yet is He not the God of Heaven only; and we say, 'God of the present day;' yet we say this not as limiting His power to it alone. And moreover He is called the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; Exodus 3:6, etc. and yet He is not the God of them alone. And one may find many other like testimonies in the Scriptures. How then has He blinded them? Not by working unto this end; away with the thought! But by suffering and allowing it. For it is usual with the Scripture so to speak, as when it says, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind. For when they themselves first disbelieved, and rendered themselves unworthy to see the mysteries; He Himself also thereafter permitted it. But what did it behoove Him to do? To draw them by force, and reveal to those who would not see? But so they would have despised the more, and would not have seen either. Wherefore also he added,

That the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ should not dawn upon them.

Not that they might disbelieve in God, but that unbelief might not see what are the things within, as also He enjoined us, commanding not to cast the pearls before the swine. Matthew 7:6 For had He revealed even to those who disbelieve, their disease would have been the rather aggravated. For if one compel a man laboring under ophthalmia to look at the sunbeams, he the rather increases his infirmity. Therefore the physicians even shut them up in darkness, so as not to aggravate their disorder. So then here also we must consider that these persons indeed became unbelievers of themselves, but having become so, they no longer saw the secret things of the Gospel, God thenceforth excluding its beams from them. As also he said to the disciples, Therefore I speak unto them in proverbs, Matthew 13:13 because hearing they hear not. But what I say may also become clearer by an example; suppose a Greek, accounting our religion to be fables. This man then, how will he be more advantaged? By going in and seeing the mysteries, or by remaining without? Therefore he says, That the light should not dawn upon them, still dwelling on the history of Moses. For what happened to the Jews in his case, this happens to all unbelievers in the case of the Gospel. And what is that which is overshadowed, and which is not illuminated unto them? Hear him saying, That the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ who is the Image of God, should not dawn upon them. Namely, that the Cross is the salvation of the world, and His glory; that this Crucified One himself is about to come with much splendor; all the other things, those present, those to come, those seen, those not seen, the unspeakable splendor of the things looked for. Therefore also he said, dawn, that you may not look for the whole here, for that which is [here] given is only, as it were, a little dawning of the Spirit. Therefore, also above as indicating this, he spoke of savor; 2 Corinthians 2:16 and again, earnest, 2 Corinthians 1:25 showing that the greater part remains there. But nevertheless all these things have been hidden from them; but had been hidden because they disbelieved first. Then to show that they are not only ignorant of the Glory of Christ, but of the Father's also, since they know not His, he added, Who is the Image of God? For do not halt at Christ only. For as by Him you see the Father, so if you are ignorant of His Glory, neither will you know the Father's.

2 Corinthians 4:5

3. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

And what is the nature of the connection there? What has this in common with what has been said? He either hints at them as exalting themselves, and persuading the disciples to name themselves after them: as he said in the former Epistle, I am of Paul and I of Apollos; or else another thing of the gravest character. What then is this? Seeing that they waged fierce war against them, and plotted against them on every side; 'Is it,' he says, 'with us ye fight and war? [Nay but] with Him that is preached by us, for we

preach not ourselves. I am a servant, I am [but] a minister even of those who receive the Gospel, transacting every thing for Another, and for His glory doing whatsoever I do. So that in warring against me you throw down what is His. For so far am I from turning to my own personal advantage any part of the Gospel, that I will not refuse to be even your servant for Christ's sake; seeing it seemed good to Him so to honor you, seeing He so loved you and did all things for you.' Wherefore also he says, and ourselves your servants for Christ's sake. Do you see a soul pure from glory? 'For in truth,' says he, 'we not only do not take to ourselves anything of our Master's, but even to you we submit ourselves for His sake.'

#### 2 Corinthians 4:6

Seeing it is God that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in your hearts.

Do you see how again to those who were desirous of seeing that surpassing glory, I mean that of Moses, he shows it flashing with added lustre ? 'As upon the face of Moses, so also has it shined unto your hearts,' he says. And first, he puts them in mind of what was made in the beginning of the Creation, sensible light and darkness sensible, showing that this creation is greater. And where commanded He light to shine out of darkness? In the beginning and in prelude to the Creation; for, says he, Darkness was upon the face of the deep. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. Howbeit then indeed He said, Let it be, and it was: but now He said nothing, but Himself became Light for us. For he said not, 'has also now commanded,' but has Himself shined. Therefore neither do we see sensible objects by the shining of this Light, but God Himself through Christ. Do you see the invariableness in the Trinity? For of the Spirit, he says, But we all with unveiled face reflecting in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as from the Lord the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18 And of the Son; That the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, Who is the Image of God, should not dawn upon them. 2 Corinthians 4:4 And of the Father; He that said Light shall shine out of darkness shined in your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. For as when he had said, Of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, he added, Who is the Image of God, showing that they were deprived of His glory also; So after saying, the knowledge of God, he added, in the face of Christ,' to show that through Him we know the Father, even as through the Spirit also we are brought unto Him.

#### 2 Corinthians 4:7

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves.

For seeing he had spoken many and great things of the unspeakable glory, lest any should say, 'And how enjoying so great a glory remain we in a mortal body?' he says, that this very thing is indeed the chiefest marvel and a very great example of the power of God, that an earthen vessel has been enabled to bear so great a brightness and to keep so high a treasure. And therefore as admiring this, he said, That the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves; again alluding to those who gloried in themselves. For both the greatness of the things given and the weakness of them that receive show His power; in that He not only gave great things, but also to those who are little. For he used the term earthen in allusion to the frailty of our mortal nature, and to declare the weakness of our flesh. For it is nothing better constituted than earthenware; so is it soon damaged, and by death and disease and variations of temperature and ten thousand other things easily dissolved. And he said these things both to take down their inflation, and to show to all that none of the things we hold is human. For then is the power of God chiefly conspicuous, when by vile it works mighty things. Wherefore also in another place He said,

For My power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9 And indeed in the Old [Testament] whole hosts of barbarians were turned to flight by gnats and flies, wherefore also He calls the caterpillar His mighty force ; Joel 2:25 and in the beginning, by only confounding tongues, He put a stop to that great tower in Babylon. And in their wars too, at one time, He routed innumerable hosts by three hundred men; at another He overthrew cities by trumpets; and afterwards by a little and poor stripling, David, He turned to flight the whole army of barbarians. So then here also, sending forth twelve only He overcame the world; twelve, and those, persecuted, warred against.

4. Let us then be amazed at the Power of God, admire, adore it. Let us ask Jews, let us ask Greeks, who persuaded the whole world to desert from their fathers' usages, and to go over to another way of life? The fisherman, or the tentmaker? The publican, or the unlearned and ignorant? And how can these things stand with reason, except it were Divine Power which achieves all by their means? And what too did they say to persuade them? 'Be baptized in the Name of The Crucified.'

Of what kind of man ? One they had not seen nor looked upon. But nevertheless saying and preaching these things, they persuaded them that they who gave them oracles, and whom they had received by tradition from their forefathers, were no Gods: while this Christ, He Who was nailed [to the wood,] drew them all unto Himself. And yet that He was indeed crucified and buried, was manifest in a manner to all; but that He was risen again, none save a few saw. But still of this too they persuaded those who had not beheld; and not that He rose again only, but that He ascended also into Heaven, and comes to judge quick and dead.

Whence then the persuasiveness of these sayings, tell me? From nothing else than the Power of God. For, in the first place, innovation itself was offensive to all; but when too one innovates in such things, the matter becomes more grievous: when one tears up the foundations of ancient custom, when one plucks laws from their seat. And besides all this, neither did the heralds seem worthy of credit, but they were both of a nation hated among all men, and were timorous and ignorant.

Whence then overcame they the world? Whence cast they out you, and those your forefathers who were reputed to be philosophers, along with their very gods? Is it not quite evident that it was from having God with them? For neither are these successes of human, but of some divine and unspeakable, power. 'No,' says one, 'but of witchcraft.' Then certainly ought the power of the demons to have increased and the worship of idols to have extended. How then have they been overthrown and have vanished, and our things the reverse of these?

So that from this even it is manifest that what was done was the decree of God; and not from the Preaching only, but also from the title of life itself. For when was virginity so largely planted every where in the world? When contempt of wealth, and of life, and of all things besides? For such as were wicked and wizards, would have effected nothing like this, but the contrary in all respects: while these introduced among us the life of angels; and not introduced merely, but established it in our own land, in that of the barbarians, in the very extremities of the earth.

Whence it is manifest that it was the power of Christ every where that effected all, which every where shines, and swifter than any lightning illumines the hearts of men. All these things, then, considering, and accepting what has been done as a clear proof of the promise of the things to come, worship with us the invincible might of The Crucified, that you may both escape the intolerable punishments, and obtain the everlasting kingdom; of which may all we partake through the grace and love towards men of our Lord

Jesus Christ; to Whom be glory world without end. Amen.

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