

2 Corinthians 9:10

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of almsgiving, highlighting its benefits and calling the listeners to virtue and a life of giving.

Scripture: Psalm 103:4, Matthew 5:45, Matthew 6:4, Acts 10:4, 2 Corinthians 9:11-12, Philippians 4:17

Topics: "Generous Giving", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of almsgiving and the spiritual and temporal rewards that come from it. He emphasizes the need to exhibit a virtuous life worthy of God's grace, highlighting the significance of generosity and the impact it has on glorifying God, warming love, and working loftiness of soul in individuals. Chrysostom encourages the congregation to avoid excess and focus on nourishment rather than indulgence, pointing out that almsgiving leads to many good works and blessings from God. He concludes by exalting the unspeakable gift of God and the transformative power of sacrificial giving, urging believers to see the altar in every poor believer and to offer their lives as a living sacrifice.

Transcript

Now He that supplied seed to the sower, both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the fruits of your righteousness.

Herein one may particularly admire the wisdom of Paul, that after having exhorted from spiritual considerations and from temporal, in respect of the recompense also he again does the very same, making the returns he mentions of either kind. This, (for instance,) He has scattered abroad, he has given to the poor, his righteousness abides for ever, belongs to a spiritual return; that again, multiply your seed for sowing, to a temporal recompense. Still, however, he rests not here, but even again passes back to what is spiritual, placing the two continually side by side; for increase the fruits of your righteousness, is spiritual. This he does, and gives variety by it to his discourse, tearing up by the roots those their unmanly and faint-hearted reasonings, and using many arguments to dissipate their fear of poverty, as also the example which he now brings. For if even to those that sow the earth God gives, if to those that feed the body He grants abundance; much more will He to those who till the soil of heaven, to those who take care for the soul; for these things He wills should yet more enjoy His providing care. However, he does not state this in the way of inference nor in the manner I have done, but in the form of a prayer; thus at once making the reference plain, and the rather leading them on to hope, not only from what [commonly] takes place, but also from his own prayer: for, 'May He minister,' says he, 'and multiply your seed for sowing,

and increase the fruits of your righteousness.' Here also again he hints, in an unsuspecting way, at largeness [in giving], for the words, multiply and increase, are by way of indicating this; and at the same time he allows them to seek for nothing more than necessities, saying, bread for food. For this also is particularly worthy of admiration in him, (and it is a point he successfully established even before,) namely, that in things which be necessary, he allows them to seek for nothing more than need requires; but in spiritual things counsels them to get for themselves a large superabundance. Wherefore he said above also, that having a sufficiency ye may abound to every good work: and here, He that ministers bread for food, multiply your seed for sowing; that is to say, the spiritual [seed]. For he asks not almsgiving merely, but with largeness. Wherefore also he continually calls it seed. For like as the grain cast into the ground shows luxuriant crops, so also many are the handfuls almsgiving produces of righteousness, and unspeakable the fruits it shows. Then having prayed for great affluence unto them, he shows again in what they ought to expend it, saying,

2 Corinthians 9:11

That being enriched in every thing to all liberality, which works through us thanksgiving to God.

Not that you may consume it upon things not fitting, but upon such as bring much thanksgiving to God. For God made us to have the disposal of great things, and reserving to Himself that which is less yielded to us that which is greater. For corporeal nourishment is at His sole disposal, but mental He permitted to us; for we have it at our own disposal whether the crops we have to show be luxuriant. For no need is here of rains and of variety of seasons, but of the will only, and they run up to heaven itself. And largeness in giving is what he here calls liberality. Which works through us thanksgiving to God. For neither is that which is done almsgiving merely, but also the ground of much thanksgiving: yea rather, not of thanksgiving only, but of many other things besides. And these as he goes on he mentions, that by showing it to be the cause of many good works, he may make them thereby the forwarder.

2. What then are these many good works? Hear him saying:

2 Corinthians 9:12-14

For the ministration of this service, not only fills up the measure of the wants of the saints, but abounds also through many thanksgivings unto God; seeing that through the proving of you by this ministration, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession unto the Gospel, and for the liberality of your contribution unto them and unto all; while they also with supplication on your behalf, long after you by reason of the exceeding grace of God in you.

What he says is this; 'in the first place ye not only supply the wants of the saints, but you are abundant even;' that is, 'ye furnish them with even more than they need: next, through them ye send up thanksgiving to God, for they glorify Him for the obedience of your confession.' For that he may not represent them as giving thanks on this account solely, (I mean, because they received somewhat,) see how high-minded he makes them, exactly as he himself says to the Philippians, Not that I desire a gift. Philippians 4:17 'To them too I bear record of the same thing. For they rejoice indeed that you supply their wants and alleviate their poverty; but far more, in that you are so subjected to the Gospel; whereof this is an evidence, your contributing so largely.' For this the Gospel enjoins.

And for the liberality of your contribution unto them and unto all. 'And on this account,' he says, 'they glorify God that you are so liberal, not unto them only, but also unto all.' And this again is made a praise unto

them that they gave thanks even for that which is bestowed upon others. 'For,' says he, 'they do honor , not to their own concerns only, but also to those of others, and this although they are in the extremest poverty; which is an evidence of their great virtue. For nothing is so full of envy as the whole race of such as are in poverty. But they are pure from this passion; being so far from feeling pained because of the things ye impart to others, that they even rejoice over it no less than over the things themselves receive.'

While they themselves also with supplication. 'For in respect of these things,' says he, 'they give thanks to God, but in respect of your love and your coming together, they beseech Him that they may be counted worthy to see you. For they long after this, not for the money's sake, but that they may be witnesses of the grace that has been bestowed upon you.' Do you see Paul's wisdom, how after having exalted them, he ascribed the whole to God by calling the thing grace? For seeing he had spoken great things of them, in that he called them ministers and exalted them unto a great height, (since they offered service while he himself did but administer ,) and termed them 'proved ,' he shows that God was the Author of all these things. And he himself again, along with them, sends up thanksgiving, saying,

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.

And here he calls gift, even those so many good things which are wrought by almsgiving, both to them that receive and them that give; or else, those unspeakable good things which through His advent He gave unto the whole world with great munificence, which one may suspect to be the most probable. For that he may at once both sober, and make them more liberal, he puts them in mind of the benefits they had received from God. For this avails very greatly in inciting unto all virtue; and therefore he concluded his discourse with it. But if His Gift be unspeakable, what can match their frenzy who raise curious questions as to His Essence? But not only is His Gift unspeakable, but that peace also passes all understanding, Philipians 4:7 whereby He reconciled the things which are above with those which are below.

3. Seeing then that we are in the enjoyment of so great grace, let us strive to exhibit a virtue of life worthy of it, and to make much account of almsgiving. And this we shall do, if we shun excess and drunkenness and gluttony. For God gave meat and drink not for excess, but for nourishment. For it is not the wine that produces drunkenness, for if that were the case, every body would needs be drunken. 'But,' says one, 'it would be better, if even to drink it largely did not injure.' These are drunkards' words. For if to drink it largely does injure, and yet not even so you desist from your excess in it; if this is so disgraceful and injurious, and yet you cease not even so from your depraved longing; if it were possible both to drink largely and be nothing harmed, where would you have stayed in your excess? Would you not have longed that the rivers even might become wine? Would you not have destroyed and ruined everything? If there is a mean in food which when we overpass we are injured, and yet even so you can not bear the curb, but snapping it as under seize on what every body else has, to minister to the wicked tyranny of this gluttony; what would you not have done, if this natural mean were abolished? Would you not have spent your whole time upon it? Would it then have been well to strengthen a lust so unreasonable, and not prevent the harm arising from excess? And to how many other harms would not this have given birth?

But O the senseless ones! Who wallowing as in mire, in drunkenness and all other debauchery, when they have got a little sober again, sit down and do nothing but utter such sort of sayings, 'Why does this end in this way?' when they ought to be condemning their own transgressions. For instead of what you now say, 'Why has He set bounds? Why do not all things go on without any order?' say, 'Why do we not cease from

being drunken? Why are we never satiated? Why are we more senseless than creatures without reason?' For these things they ought to ask one another, and to hearken to the voice of the Apostle and learn how many good things he witnesses to the Corinthians proceed from almsgiving, and to seize upon this treasure. For to contemn money makes men approved, as he said; and provides that God be glorified; and warms love; and works in men loftiness of soul; and constitutes them priests, yea of a priesthood that brings great reward. For the merciful man is not arrayed in a vest reaching to the feet, nor does he carry about bells, nor wear a crown; but he is wrapped in the robe of loving-kindness, a holier than the sacred vestment; and is anointed with oil, not composed of material elements, but produced by the Spirit, and he bears a crown of mercies, for it is said, Who crowns you with pity and mercies; Psalm 103:4 and instead of wearing a plate bearing the Name of God, is himself like to God. For how? You, says He, shall be like unto your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 5:45

Would you see His altar also? Bezaleel built it not, nor any other but God Himself; not of stones, but of a material brighter than the heaven, of reasonable souls. But the priest enters into the holy of holies. Into yet more awful places may thou enter when you offer this sacrifice, where none is present but your Father, Which sees in secret, Matthew 6:4 where no other beholds. 'And how,' says one, 'is it possible that none should behold, when the altar stands in public view?'

Because this it is that is admirable, that in those times double doors and veils made the seclusion: but now, though doing your sacrifice in public view, you may do it as in the holy of holies, and in a far more awful manner. For when you do it not for display before men; though the whole world has seen, none has seen, because you have so done it. For He said not simply, Do it not before men, but added, to be seen of them. Matthew 6:1 This altar is composed of the very members of Christ, and the body of the Lord is made your altar.

That then revere; on the flesh of the Lord you sacrifice the victim. This altar is more awful even than this which we now use, not only than that used of old. Nay, clamor not. For this altar is admirable because of the sacrifice that is laid upon it: but that, the merciful man's, not only on this account, but also because it is even composed of the very sacrifice which makes the other to be admired. Again, this is but a stone by nature; but become holy because it receives Christ's Body: but that is holy because it is itself Christ's Body.

So that this beside which thou, the layman, standest, is more awful than that. Whether then does Aaron seem to you anything in comparison of this, or his crown, or his bells, or the holy of holies? For what need is there henceforth to make our comparison refer to Aaron's altar, when even compared with this, it has been shown to be so glorious? But you honor indeed this altar, because it receives Christ's body; but him that is himself the body of Christ you treat with contumely, and when perishing, neglectest.

This altar may thou everywhere see lying, both in lanes and in market places, and may sacrifice upon it every hour; for on this too is sacrifice performed. And as the priest stands invoking the Spirit, so do you too invoke the Spirit, not by speech, but by deeds. For nothing does so sustain and kindle the fire of the Spirit, as this oil largely poured out. But if you would see also what becomes of the things laid upon it, come hither, and I will show you them. What then is the smoke, what the sweet savor of this altar?

Praise and thanksgiving. And how far does it ascend? As far as unto heaven? By no means, but it passes beyond the heaven itself, and the heaven of heaven, and arrives even at the throne of the King. For, Your prayers, says he, and your alms have come up before God. Acts 10:4 And the sweet savor which the

sense perceives pierces not far into the air, but this opened the very vault of heaven. And thou indeed art silent, but your work speaks : and a sacrifice of praise is made, no heifer slain nor hide burnt, but a spiritual soul presenting her proper offering.

For such a sacrifice is more acceptable than any loving-kindness. When then you see a poor believer, think that you behold an altar: when you see such an one a beggar, not only insult him not, but even reverence him, and if you see another insulting him, prevent, repel it. For so shall you yourself be able both to have God propitious to you, and to obtain the promised good things, whereunto may we all attain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom and with Whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory, might, honor, now and forever, and world without end. Amen.

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