

2 Timothy 2:1-7

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of strength in grace, enduring hardship, and the contrast between earthly and heavenly glory in the Christian life.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1, 2 Timothy 2:3-10

Topics: "Persevering Through Suffering", "Faithful Service"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of enduring hardships and being strong in the grace of Christ Jesus, using examples of soldiers, wrestlers, and husbandmen to illustrate the need to strive lawfully and be faithful in teaching others. He contrasts the worldly glory of Emperor Nero with the humble yet victorious life of the Apostle Paul, emphasizing that true honor and glory come from serving Christ faithfully, even in the face of suffering and persecution.

Transcript

Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that labors must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say; and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

The young sailor at sea is inspired with great confidence, if the Master of the ship has been preserved in a shipwreck. For he will not consider that it is from his inexperience that he is exposed to the storm, but from the nature of things; and this has no little effect upon his mind. In war also the Captain, who sees his General wounded and recovered again, is much encouraged. And thus it produces some consolation to the faithful, that the Apostle should have been exposed to great sufferings, and not rendered weak by the utmost of them.

And had it not been so, he would not have related his sufferings. For when Timothy heard, that he who possessed so great powers, who had conquered the whole world, is a prisoner, and afflicted, yet is not impatient, nor discontented upon the desertion of his friends; he, if ever exposed to the same sufferings himself, would not consider that it proceeded from human weakness, nor from the circumstance of his being a disciple, and inferior to Paul, since his teacher too suffered the like, but that all this happened from

the natural course of things.

For Paul himself did this, and related what had befallen him, that he might strengthen Timothy, and renew his courage. And he shows that it was for this reason he mentioned his trials and afflictions, in that he has added, You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What do you say? You have shaken us with terrors, you have told us that you are in chains, in afflictions, that all have forsaken you, and, as if you had said you had not suffered anything, nor been abandoned by any, you add.

Thou therefore, my son, be strong? -- And justly too. For these things were to your strengthening more than to his. For if I, Paul, endure these things, much more ought thou to bear them. If the master, much more the disciple. And this exhortation he introduces with much affection, calling him son, and not only so, but my son. If you are a son, he means, imitate your father. If you are a son, be strong in consideration of the things which I have said, or rather be strong, not merely from what I have told you, but of God.

Be strong, he says, in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; that is, through the grace of Christ. That is, stand firmly. You know the battle. For elsewhere he says, We wrestle not against flesh and blood. Ephesians 6:12 And this he says not to depress but to excite them. Be sober therefore, he means, and watch, have the grace of the Lord coöperating with you, and aiding you in your contest, contribute your own part with much alacrity and resolution. And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men; to faithful men, not to questioners nor to reasoners, to faithful.

How faithful? Such as betray not the Gospel they should preach. The things which you have heard, not which you have searched out. For faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17 But wherefore, among many witnesses? As if he had said: You have not heard in secret, nor apart, but in the presence of many, with all openness of speech. Nor does he say, Tell, but commit, as a treasure committed is deposited in safety. Again he alarms his disciple, both from things above and things below.

But he says not only commit to faithful men; for of what advantage is it that one is faithful, if he is not able to convey his doctrine to others? When he does not indeed betray the faith; but does not render others faithful? The teacher therefore ought to have two qualities, to be both faithful, and apt to teach; wherefore he says, who shall be able to teach others also.

Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Oh, how great a dignity is this, to be a soldier of Jesus Christ! Observe the kings on earth, how great an honor it is esteemed to serve under them. If therefore the soldier of the king ought to endure hardness, not to endure hardness is not the part of any soldier. So that it behooves you not to complain, if you endure hardness, for that is the part of a soldier; but to complain, if you do not endure hardness.

No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully.

These things are said indeed to Timothy, but through him they are addressed to every teacher and disciple. Let no one therefore of those who hold the office of a Bishop disdain to hear these things, but let him be ashamed not to do them. If any one strive for masteries, he says, he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully. What is meant by lawfully? It is not enough that he enters into the lists, that he is anointed, and even engages, unless he comply with all the laws of the exercise, with respect to diet, to temperance and sobriety, and all the rules of the wrestling school, unless, in short, he go through all that is befitting for a wrestler, he is not crowned. And observe the wisdom of Paul. He mentions wrestlers and soldiers, the

one to prepare him for slaughter and blood, the other with reference to endurance, that he might bear everything with fortitude, and be ever in exercise.

The husbandman that labors must be first partaker of the fruits.

He had first spoken from his own example as a teacher. He now speaks from those that are more common, as wrestlers and soldiers, and in their case he sets before him the rewards. First, that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier; secondly, that he may be crowned; now he proposes a third example that more particularly suits himself. For the instance of the soldier and the wrestler corresponds to those who are under rule, but that of the husbandman to the Teacher. (Strive) not as a soldier or a wrestler only, but as a husbandman too. The husbandman takes care not of himself alone, but of the fruits of the earth. That is, no little reward of his labors is enjoyed by the husbandman.

Here he both shows, that to God nothing is wanting, and that there is a reward for Teaching, which he shows by a common instance. As the husbandman, he says, does not labor without profit, but enjoys before others the fruits of his own toils, so is it fit that the teacher should do: either he means this, or he is speaking of the honor to be paid to teachers, but this is less consistent. For why does he not say the husbandman simply, but him that labors? Not only that works, but that is worn with toil? And here with reference to the delay of reward, that no one may be impatient, he says, you reap the fruit already, or there is a reward in the labor itself. When therefore he has set before him the examples of soldiers, of wrestlers, and husbandmen, and all figuratively, No one, he says, is crowned except he strive lawfully. And having observed that the husbandman who labors must first be partaker of the fruits, he adds,

Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

It is on this account that he has spoken these things in proverb and parable. Then again to show his affectionate disposition, he ceases not to pray for him, as fearing for his own son, and he says,

Ver. 8, 9. Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, according to my Gospel. Wherein I suffer trouble as an evil-doer, even unto bonds.

On what account is this mentioned? It is directed chiefly against the heretics, at the same time to encourage Timothy, by showing the advantage of sufferings, since Christ, our Master, Himself overcame death by suffering. Remember this, he says, and you will have sufficient comfort. Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead. For upon that point many had already begun to subvert the dispensation, being ashamed at the immensity of God's love to mankind. For of such a nature are the benefits which God has conferred upon us, that men were ashamed to ascribe them to God, and could not believe He had so far condescended. According to my Gospel. Thus he everywhere speaks in his Epistles, saying according to my Gospel, either because they were bound to believe him, or because there were some who preached another Gospel. Galatians 1:6

Wherein I suffer trouble, he says, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds. Again he introduces consolation and encouragement from himself, and he prepares his hearer's mind with these two things; first, that he should know him to endure hardness; and, secondly, that he did not so but for a useful purpose, for in this case he will gain, in the other will even suffer harm. For what advantage is it, that you can show that a Teacher has exposed himself to hardship, but not for any useful purpose? But if it is for any benefit, if for the profit of those who are taught, then it is worthy of admiration.

But the word of God is not bound. That is, if we were soldiers of this world, and waged an earthly warfare, the chains that confine our hands would avail. But now God has made us such that nothing can subdue us. For our hands are bound, but not our tongue, since nothing can bind the tongue but cowardice and unbelief alone; and where these are not, though you fasten chains upon us, the preaching of the Gospel is not bound. If indeed you bind a husbandman, you prevent his sowing, for he sows with his hand: but if you bind a Teacher, you hinder not the word, for it is sown with his tongue, not with his hand. Our word therefore is not subjected to bonds. For though we are bound, that is free, and runs its course. How? Because though bound, behold, we preach. This is for the encouragement of those that are free. For if we that are bound preach, much more does it behoove you that are loose to do so. You have heard that I suffer these things, as an evil-doer. Be not dejected. For it is a great wonder, that being bound I do the work of those that are free, that being bound I overcome all, that being bound I prevail over those that bound me. For it is the word of God, not ours. Human chains cannot bind the word of God. These things I suffer on account of the elect.

Ver. 10. Therefore I endure all things, he says, for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Behold another incentive. I endure these things, he says, not for myself, but for the salvation of others. It was in my power to have lived free from danger; to have suffered none of these things, if I had consulted my own interest. On what account then do I suffer these things? For the good of others, that others may obtain eternal life. What then do you promise yourself? He has not said, simply on account of these particular persons; but for the elect's sake. If God has chosen them, it becomes us to suffer everything for their sakes. That they also may obtain salvation. By saying, they also, he means, as well as we. For God has chosen us also; and as God suffered for our sakes, so should we suffer for their sakes. Thus it is a matter of retribution, not of favor. On the part of God it was grace, for He having received no previous benefit, has done us good: but on our parts it is retribution, we having previously received benefits from God, suffer for these, for whom we suffer, in order that they may obtain salvation. What do you say? What salvation? Are you who wast not the author of salvation to yourself, but wast destroying yourself, are you the author of salvation to others? Surely not, and therefore he adds, salvation that is in Christ Jesus; that which is truly salvation, with eternal glory. Present things are afflictive, but they are but on earth. Present things are ignominious, but they are temporary. They are full of bitterness and pain; but they last only today and tomorrow.

Such is not the nature of the good things, they are eternal, they are in heaven. That is true glory, this is dishonor.

Moral. For observe, I pray, beloved, that is not glory which is on earth, the true glory is in heaven. But if any one would be glorified, let him be dishonored. If he would obtain rest, let him suffer affliction. If any one would be forever illustrious, would enjoy pleasure, let him despise temporal things. And that dishonor is glory, and glory dishonor, let us now set before us to the best of our power, that we may see what is real glory. It is not possible to be glorified upon earth; if you would be glorified, it must be through dishonor. And let us prove this in the examples of two persons, Nero and Paul. The one had the glory of this world, the other the dishonor. How? The first was a tyrant, had obtained great success, had raised many trophies, had wealth ever flowing in, numerous armies everywhere; he had the greater part of the world and the imperial city subject to his sway, the whole senate crouching to him, and his palace too was advancing with splendid show. When he must be armed, he went forth arrayed in gold and precious stones. When he was to sit still in peace, he sat clothed in robes of purple. He was surrounded by

numerous guards and attendants. He was called Lord of land and sea, Emperor, Augustus, Cæsar, King, and other such high-sounding names as implied flattery and courtship; and nothing was wanting that might tend to glory. Even wise men and potentates and sovereigns trembled at him. For beside all this, he was said to be a cruel and violent man. He even wished to be thought a god, and he despised both all the idols, and the very God Who is over all. He was worshipped as a god. What greater glory than this? Or rather what greater dishonor? For -- I know not how -- my tongue is carried away by the force of truth, and passes sentence before judgment. Meanwhile let us examine the matter according to the opinion of the multitude, and of unbelievers, and the estimation of flattery.

What is greater in the common estimation of glory than to be reputed a god? It is indeed a great disgrace that any human being should be so mad, but for the present let us consider the matter according to the opinion of the multitude. Nothing then was wanting to him, that contributes to human glory, but he was worshipped by all as a god. Now in opposition to him, let us consider Paul. He was a Cilician, and the difference between Rome and Cilicia, all know. He was a tent-maker, a poor man, unskilled in the wisdom of those without, knowing only the Hebrew tongue, a language despised by all, especially by the Italians. For they do not so much despise the barbarian, the Greek, or any other tongue as the Syriac, and this has affinity with the Hebrew. Nor wonder at this, for if they despised the Greek, which is so admirable and beautiful, much more the Hebrew. He was a man that often lived in hunger, often went to bed without food, a man that was naked, and had not clothes to put on; in cold, and nakedness, as he says of himself. 1 Corinthians 11:27 Nor was this all; but he was cast into prison at the command of Nero himself, and confined with robbers, with impostors, with grave-breakers, with murderers, and he was, as he himself says, scourged as a malefactor. Who then is the more illustrious? The name of the one the greater part have never heard of. The other is daily celebrated by Greeks, and Barbarians, and Scythians, and those who inhabit the extremities of the earth.

But let us not yet consider what is the case now, but even at that time who was the more illustrious, who the more glorious, he that was in chains, and dragged bound from prison, or he that was clothed in a purple robe, and walked forth from a palace? The prisoner certainly. For the other, who had armies at his command, and sat arrayed in purple, was not able to do what he would. But the prisoner, that was like a malefactor, and in mean attire, could do everything with more authority. How? The one said, Do not disseminate the word of God. The other said, I cannot forbear; 'the word of God is not bound.' Thus the Cilician, the prisoner, the poor tent-maker, who lived in hunger, despised the Roman, rich as he was, and emperor, and ruling over all, who enriched so many thousands; and with all his armies he availed nothing. Who then was illustrious? Who venerable? He that in chains was a conqueror, or he that in a purple robe was conquered? He that standing below, smote, or he that sitting above, was smitten? He that commanded and was despised, or he who was commanded and made no account of the commands? He who being alone was victorious, or he who with numerous armies was defeated? The king therefore so came off, that his prisoner triumphed over him. Tell me then on whose side you would be? For do not look to what comes afterwards, but to what was then their state. Would you be on the side of Nero, or of Paul? I speak not according to the estimate of faith, for that is manifest; but according to the estimate of glory, and reverence, and preëminence. Any man of right understanding would say, on the side of Paul. For if to conquer is more illustrious than to be conquered, he is more glorious. And this is not yet much, that he conquered, but that being in so mean a state he conquered one in so exalted a condition. For I say, and will not cease to repeat it, though bound with a chain, yet he smote him that was invested with a diadem.

Such is the power of Christ. The chain surpassed the kingly crown, and this apparel was shown more brilliant than that. Clothed in filthy rags, as the inhabitant of a prison, he turned all eyes upon the chains that hung on him, rather than on the purple robe. He stood on earth bound down and stooping low, and all left the tyrant mounted on a golden chariot to gaze on him. And well they might. For it was customary to see a king with white horses, but it was a strange and unwonted sight to behold a prisoner conversing with a king with as much confidence as a king would converse with a pitiful and wretched slave. The surrounding multitude were all slaves of the king, yet they admired not their lord, but him who was superior to their lord. And he before whom all feared and trembled, was trampled upon by one solitary man. See then how great was the brightness of these very chains!

And what need to mention what followed after these things? The tomb of the one is nowhere to be seen; but the other lies in the royal city itself, in greater splendor than any king, even there where he conquered, where he raised his trophy. If mention is made of the one, it is with reproach, even among his kindred, for he is said to have been profligate. But the memory of the other is everywhere accompanied with a good report, not among us only, but among his enemies. For when truth shines forth, it puts to shame even one's enemies, and if they admire him not for his faith, yet they admire him for his boldness and his manly freedom. The one is proclaimed by all mouths, as one that is crowned, the other is loaded with reproaches and accusations. Which then is the real splendor?

And yet I am but praising the lion for his talons, when I ought to be speaking of his real honors. And what are these? Those in the heavens. How will he come in a shining vesture with the King of Heaven! How will Nero stand then, mournful and dejected! And if what I say seems to you incredible and ridiculous, you are ridiculous for deriding that which is no subject for laughter. For if you disbelieve the future, be convinced from what is past. The season for being crowned is not yet come, and yet how great honor has the combatant gained! What honor then will he not obtain, when the Distributor of the prizes shall come! He was among foreigners, a stranger and a sojourner Hebrews 11:13, and thus is he admired: what good will he not enjoy, when he is among his own? Now our life is hid with Christ in God Colossians 3:3; yet he who is dead works more and is more honored than the living. When that our life shall come, what will he not participate? What will he not attain?

On this account God made him enjoy these honors, not because he wanted them. For if when in the body he despised popular glory, much more will he despise it now that he is delivered from the body. Nor only on this account has He caused him to enjoy honor, but that those who disbelieve the future may be convinced from the present. I say that when the Resurrection shall be, Paul will come with the King of Heaven, and will enjoy infinite blessings. But the unbeliever will not be convinced. Let him believe then from the present. The tent-maker is more illustrious, more honored than the king. No emperor of Rome ever enjoyed so great honor. The emperor is cast out, and lies, no one knows where. The tent-maker occupies the midst of the city, as if he were a king, and living. From these things believe, even with respect to the future. If he enjoys so great honor here, where he was persecuted and banished, what will he not be when he shall come hereafter? If when he was a tent-maker, he was so illustrious, what will he be when he shall come rivaling the beams of the sun? If in so much meanness he overcame such magnificence, to whom, at his coming, will he not be superior? Can we avoid the conclusion? Who is not moved by the fact, that a tent-maker became more honorable than the most honored of kings? If here things happen so beyond the course of nature, much more will it be so hereafter. If you will not believe the future, O man, believe the present. If you will not believe invisible things, believe things that are seen: or rather believe things which are seen, for so you will believe things which are invisible. But if you will not, we may fitly say

with the Apostle, We are pure from your blood Acts 20:26: for we have testified to you of all things, and have left out nothing that we should have said. Blame yourselves therefore, and to yourselves will you impute the punishment of Hell. But let us, my beloved children, be imitators of Paul, not in his faith only, but in his life, that we may attain to heavenly glory, and trample upon that glory that is here. Let not any things present attract us. Let us despise visible things, that we may obtain heavenly things, or rather may through these obtain the others, but let it be our aim preeminently to obtain those, of which God grant that we may be all accounted worthy, through the grace and lovingkindness, etc.

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