

2 Timothy 3:16, 17

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Scripture, preaching the word, and watchfulness and endurance in the face of challenges.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:2-3, 2 Timothy 4:5-6, 2 Timothy 4:8

Topics: "Scripture Inspiration", "Christian Ministry"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of Scripture, stating that all Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, reproof, correction, and righteousness to equip believers for good works. He encourages Timothy to preach the word diligently, in and out of season, with patience and sound doctrine, warning of a time when people will reject sound teaching for their own desires. Chrysostom urges Timothy to endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, and fully fulfill his ministry, as he himself is ready to be poured out as a sacrifice. He concludes by highlighting the rewards awaiting those who love Christ's appearing and endure hardships for His sake.

Transcript

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. [R.V.: Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable, etc.]

Having offered much exhortation and consolation from other sources, he adds that which is more perfect, derived from the Scriptures; and he is reasonably full in offering consolation, because he has a great and sad thing to say. For if Elisha, who was with his master to his last breath, when he saw him departing as it were in death, rent his garments for grief, what think you must this disciple suffer, so loving and so beloved, upon hearing that his master was about to die, and that he could not enjoy his company when he was near his death, which is above all things apt to be distressing? For we are less grateful for the past time, when we have been deprived of the more recent intercourse of those who are departed. For this reason when he had previously offered much consolation, he then discourses concerning his own death: and this in no ordinary way, but in words adapted to comfort him and fill him with joy; so as to have it considered as a sacrifice rather than a death; a migration, as in fact it was, and a removal to a better state. For I am now ready to be offered up 2 Timothy 4:6, he says. For this reason he writes: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. All what Scripture? All that sacred writing, he means, of which I was speaking. This is said

of what he was discoursing of; about which he said, From a child you have known the holy Scriptures. All such, then, is given by inspiration of God; therefore, he means, do not doubt; and it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

For doctrine. For thence we shall know, whether we ought to learn or to be ignorant of anything. And thence we may disprove what is false, thence we may be corrected and brought to a right mind, may be comforted and consoled, and if anything is deficient, we may have it added to us.

That the man of God may be perfect. For this is the exhortation of the Scripture given, that the man of God may be rendered perfect by it; without this therefore he cannot be perfect. You have the Scriptures, he says, in place of me. If you would learn anything, you may learn it from them. And if he thus wrote to Timothy, who was filled with the Spirit, how much more to us!

Thoroughly furnished unto all good works; not merely taking part in them, he means, but thoroughly furnished.

Chap. iv. 1. I charge you therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall judge the quick and the dead.

He either means the wicked and the just, or the departed and those that are still living; for many will be left alive. In the former Epistle he raised his fears, saying, I give you charge in the sight of God, Who quickens all things 1 Timothy 6:13: but here he sets before him what is more dreadful, Who shall judge the quick and the dead, that is, Who shall call them to account at His appearing and His kingdom. When shall He judge? At His appearing with glory, and in His kingdom. Either he says this to show that He will not come in the way that He now has come, or, I call to witness His coming, and His kingdom. He calls Him to witness, showing that he had reminded Him of that appearing. Then teaching him how he ought to preach the word, he adds,

Ver. 2. Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

What means in season, out of season? That is, have not any limited season: let it always be your season, not only in peace and security, and when sitting in the Church. Whether thou be in danger, in prison, in chains, or going to your death, at that very time reprove. Withhold not rebuke, for reproof is then most seasonable, when your rebuke will be most successful, when the reality is proved. Exhort, he says. After the manner of physicians, having shown the wound, he gives the incision, he applies the plaster. For if you omit either of these, the other becomes useless. If you rebuke without convicting, you will seem to be rash, and no one will tolerate it, but after the matter is proved, he will submit to rebuke: before, he will be headstrong. And if you convict and rebuke, but vehemently, and do not apply exhortation, all your labor will be lost. For conviction is intolerable in itself if consolation be not mingled with it. As if incision, though salutary in itself, have not plenty of lenitives to assuage the pain, the patient cannot endure cutting and hacking, so it is in this matter.

With all longsuffering and doctrine. For he that reproves is required to be longsuffering, that he may not believe hastily, and rebuke needs consolation, that it may be received as it ought. And why to longsuffering does he add doctrine? Not as in anger, not as in hatred, not as insulting over him, not as having caught an enemy. Far be these things from you. But how? As loving as sympathizing with him, as

more distressed than himself at his grief, as melted at his sufferings? With all longsuffering and doctrine. No ordinary teaching is implied.

Ver. 3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.

Before they grow stiffnecked, preoccupy them all. For this reason he says, in season, out of season; do everything, so as to have willing disciples.

But after their own lusts, he says, shall they heap to themselves teachers.

Nothing can be more expressive than these words. For by saying they shall heap to themselves, he shows the indiscriminate multitude of the teachers, as also by their being elected by their disciples. They shall heap to themselves teachers, he says, having itching ears. Seeking for such as speak to gratify and delight their hearers.

Ver. 4. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables.

This he foretells, not as willing to throw him into despair, but to prepare him to bear it firmly, when it shall happen. As Christ also did in saying, They will deliver you up, and they will scourge you, and bring you before the synagogues, for My name's sake. Matthew 10:17 And this blessed man elsewhere says, For I know this, that after my departures shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 511 xx. 29 But this he said that they might watch, and duly use the present opportunity.

Ver. 5. But watch thou in all things, endure affliction.

It was for this therefore, that he foretold these things; as Christ also toward the end predicted that there should be false Christs and false prophets; so he too, when he was about to depart, spoke of these things. But watch thou in all things, endure affliction; that is, labor, preoccupy their minds before this pestilence assails them; secure the safety of the sheep before the wolves enter in, everywhere endure hardship.

Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry. Thus it was the work of an evangelist that he should endure hardship, both in himself, and from those without; make full proof of that is, fulfill your ministry. And behold another necessity for his enduring affliction,

Ver. 6. For I am now ready to be poured out, and the time of my departure is at hand.

He has not said of my sacrifice; but, what is much more, of my being poured out. For the whole of the sacrifice was not offered to God, but the whole of the drink-offering was.

Ver. 7. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.

Often, when I have taken the Apostle into my hands, and have considered this passage, I have been at a loss to understand why Paul here speaks so loftily: I have fought the good fight. But now by the grace of God I seem to have found it out. For what purpose then does he speak thus? He is desirous to console the despondency of his disciple, and therefore bids him be of good cheer, since he was going to his crown, having finished all his work, and obtained a glorious end. You ought to rejoice, he says, not to grieve. And why? Because, I have fought the good fight. As a father whose son was sitting by him, bewailing his orphan state, might console him, saying, Weep not, my son; we have lived a good life, we have arrived at old age, and now we leave you. Our life has been irreproachable, we depart with glory, and you may be held in admiration for our actions. Our king is much indebted to us. As if he had said, We have raised

trophies, we have conquered enemies, and this not boastfully. God forbid; but to raise up his dejected son, and to encourage him by his praises to bear firmly what had happened, to entertain good hopes, and not to think it a matter grievous to be borne. For sad, sad indeed is separation; and hear Paul himself, saying, We being bereaved of you for a short time, in presence, not in heart. 1 Thessalonians 2:17 If he then felt so much at being separated from his disciples, what do you think were the feelings of Timothy? If on parting from him while living he wept, so that Paul says, Being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy. 2 Timothy 1:4, how much more at his death? These things then he wrote to console him. Indeed the whole Epistle is full of consolation, and is a sort of Testament. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. A good fight, he says, therefore do thou engage in it. But is that a good fight, where there are imprisonment, chains, and death? Yea, he says for it is fought in the cause of Christ, and great crowns are won in it. The good fight! There is no worthier than this contest. This crown is without end. This is not of olive leaves. It has not a human umpire. It has not men for spectators. The theater is crowded with Angels. There men labor many days, and suffer hardships, and for one hour they receive the crown, and immediately all the pleasure passes away. But here far otherwise, it continues for ever in brightness, glory, and honor. Henceforth we ought to rejoice. For I am entering on my rest, I am leaving the race. You have heard that it is better to depart and to be with Christ.

I have finished the course. For it behooves us both to contend and to run; to contend, by enduring afflictions firmly, and to run, not vainly, but to some good end. It is truly a good fight, not only delighting, but benefiting the spectator: and the race does not end in nothing. It is not a mere display of strength and of rivalry. It draws all up to heaven. This race is brighter than the sun's, yea, this which Paul ran upon earth, than that which he runs in heaven. And how had he finished his course? He traversed the whole world, beginning from Galilee and Arabia, and advancing to the extremities of the earth, so that, as he says, From Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ. Romans 15:19 He passed over the earth like a bird, or rather more swiftly than a bird: for a bird only flies over it, but he, having the wing of the Spirit, made his way through numberless impediments, dangers, deaths, and calamities, so that he was even fleeter than a bird. Had he been a mere bird, he might have alighted and been taken, but being upborne by the Spirit he soared above all snares, as a bird with a wing of fire.

I have kept the faith, he says. There were many things that would have robbed him of it, not only human friendships, but menaces, and death, and countless other perils: but he stood firm against all. How? By being sober and watchful. This might have sufficed for the consolation of his disciples, but he further adds the rewards. And what are these?

Ver. 8. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.

Here again he calls virtue in general righteousness. You should not grieve that I shall depart, to be invested with that crown which will by Christ be placed upon my head. But if I continued here, truly your might rather grieve, and fear lest I should fail and perish.

Ver. 8. Which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but to all that love His appearing.

Here also he raises his mind. If to all, much more to Timothy. But he did not say, and to you, but to all; meaning, if to all, much more to him.

Moral. But how, it may be asked, is one to love the appearing (τὸ ἐφάναι) of Christ? By rejoicing at His coming; and he who rejoices at His coming, will perform works worthy of His joy; he will throw away his

substance if need be, and even his life, so that he may obtain future blessings, that he may be thought worthy to behold that second coming in a fitting state, in confidence, in brightness and glory. This is to love His appearing. He who loves His appearing will do everything to ensure, before His general coming, a particular coming to himself. And how, you will say, is this possible? Hear from Christ, who says, If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father and I will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. John 14:23 And think how great a privilege it is that He who will appear to all generally, should promise to come to us in particular: for He says, We will come and make Our abode with him. If any man love His appearing, he will do everything to invite Him to himself, and to hold Him, that the light may shine upon him. Let there be nothing unworthy of His coming, and He will soon take up His abode with us.

And it is called His Epiphany, because He will appear above, and shine forth from on high. Let us therefore seek those things that are above, and we shall soon draw down those beams upon us. None of those who grovel below, and bury themselves in this lower earth, will be able to view the light of that Sun. None of those who defile themselves with worldly things will be able to behold that Sun of righteousness. He shines on none of those who are so occupied. Recover yourself a little, recover yourself from that depth, from the waves of a worldly life, if you would see the Sun, and enjoy His appearing. Then you will see Him with great confidence. Be even now a philosopher. Let not a spirit of perverseness possess you, lest He smite you severely, and bring you low. Let not your heart be hardened; nor darkened, lest you be shipwrecked there. Let there be no self-deceit. For the rocks beneath the sea cause the most fatal shipwrecks. Nourish no wild beasts, I mean evil passions, worse than wild beasts. Confide not in things ever flowing, that you may be able to stand firmly. None can stand upon water, but upon a rock all find a secure footing. Worldly things are as water, as a torrent, that passes away. The waters, he says, have come in unto my soul. Psalm 69:1 Spiritual things are as a rock. For he says, You have set my feet upon a rock. Psalm 40:2 Worldly things are as mire and clay; let us extricate ourselves from them. For so we shall be able to attain to the appearing of Christ. Whatever may befall us, let us endure. It is a sufficient consolation in all circumstances that we suffer for Christ. This divine incantation let us repeat, and it will charm away the pain of every wound.

And how can we suffer for Christ, you ask? If one accuse you falsely in any case, not on account of Christ, yet if you bear it patiently, if you give thanks, if you pray for him, all this you do for Christ. But if you curse him, if you utter discontent, if you attempt to revenge it, though you should not be able, it is not for Christ's sake; you suffer loss, and art deprived of your reward on account of your intention. For it rests with us either to profit, or to be injured, by afflictions. It depends not upon the nature of the affliction, but upon the disposition of our own minds. As, for instance, great were the sufferings of Job, yet he suffered with thankfulness; and he was justified, not because he suffered, but because in suffering he endured it thankfully. Another under the same sufferings, yet not the same, for none ever suffered like Job -- but under lighter sufferings, exclaims, is impatient, curses the whole world, and complains against God. He is condemned and sentenced, not because he suffered, but because he blasphemed; and he blasphemed, not from any necessity arising from his afflictions, since if necessity arising from events were the cause, Job too must have blasphemed; but since he, who suffered more severely, did no such thing, it did not come to pass from this cause, but from the man's weakness of purpose. We want therefore strength of soul, and nothing will then appear grievous, but if our soul is weak, we find a grievance in everything.

According to our dispositions, all things become tolerable or intolerable. Let us strengthen our resolution, and we shall bear all things easily. The tree whose roots are fixed deep in the earth is not shaken by the utmost violence of the storm, but if it be set lightly in the surface of the ground, a slight gust of wind will

tear it up from the roots. So it is with us; if our flesh be nailed down by the fear of God, nothing will be able to shake us; but if we merely intend well, a little shock will subvert and destroy us. Wherefore, I exhort, let us bear all with much cheerfulness, imitating the Prophet, who says, My soul cleaves to You; observe, he says not, draws near, but cleaves to You; and again, My soul thirsts for You. Psalm 62:3 He said not merely longs, that he might by such words express the vehemence of his desire; and again, Fix my flesh in Your fear. Psalm 118:120, Septuagint For he wishes us so to cleave and be united to Him, that we may never be separated from Him. If thus we hold by God, if thus we rivet our thoughts upon Him, if we thirst with the love of Him, all that we desire will be ours, and we shall obtain the good things to come, in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, power, and honor, now and forever. Amen.

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