

Colossians 1:26-28

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on Colossians 1:26-28 emphasizes the profound mystery of Christ in believers, the hope of glory, and the importance of teaching and faith in achieving spiritual perfection.

Scripture: Ephesians 3:5

Topics: "Mystery Of Christ", "Christian Wisdom"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the mystery of Christ being revealed to His saints, emphasizing the greatness of this revelation among the Gentiles. He highlights the unique nature of this mystery, hidden in Christ from ages past, and the importance of proclaiming and teaching it with wisdom to present every person perfect in Christ. Chrysostom urges believers not to be deceived by persuasive speech but to be fully assured in understanding the mystery of God and Christ, in whom all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

Transcript

Even the mystery which has been hid from all ages and generations: but now has it been manifested to His saints, to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we proclaim, admonishing every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ.

Having said what we have come to, and showed the lovingkindness of God and the honor, by the greatness of the things given, he introduces yet another consideration that heightens them, namely, that neither before us did any one know Him. As he does also in the Epistle to the Ephesians, saying, neither Angels, nor principalities, nor any other created power, but only the Son of God knew. Ephesians 3:5-10 And he said, not simply hid, but quite hid, and that even if it has but now come to pass, yet it is of old, and from the beginning God willed these things, and they were so planned out; but why, he says not yet. From the ages, from the beginning, as one might say. And with reason he calls that a mystery, which none knew, save God. And where hid? In Christ; as he says in the Epistle to the Ephesians Ephesians 3:9, or as when the Prophet says, From everlasting even to everlasting You are. Psalm 90:2 But now has been manifested, he says, to His saints. So that it is altogether of the dispensation of God. But now has been manifested, he says. He says not, has come to pass, but, has been manifested to His saints. So that it is even now still hid, since it has been manifested to His saints alone.

Let not others therefore deceive you, for they know not. Why to them alone? To whom He was pleased, he says. See how everywhere He stops the mouth of their questions. To whom God was pleased to make known, he says. Yet His will is not without reason. By way of making them accountable for grace, rather than allowing them to have high thoughts, as though it were of their own achieving, he said, To whom he was pleased to make known. What is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles.

He has spoken loftily, and accumulated emphasis, seeking, out of his great earnestness, for amplification upon amplification. For this also is an amplification, the saying indefinitely, The riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles. For it is most of all apparent among the Gentiles, as he also says elsewhere, And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. Romans 15:9 For the great glory of this mystery is apparent among others also, but much more among these.

For, on a sudden, to have brought men more senseless than stones to the dignity of Angels, simply through bare words, and faith alone, without any laboriousness, is indeed glory and riches of mystery: just as if one were to take a dog, quite consumed with hunger and the mange, foul, and loathsome to see, and not so much as able to move, but lying cast out, and make him all at once into a man, and to display him upon the royal throne. They were wont to worship stones and the earth; but they learned that themselves are better both than the heaven and the sun, and that the whole world serves them; they were captives and prisoners of the devil: on a sudden they are placed above his head, and lay commands on him and scourge him: from being captives and slaves to demons, they have become the body of The Master of the Angels and the Archangels; from not knowing even what God is, they have become all at once sharers even in God's throne.

Would you see the countless steps they overleaped? First, they had to learn that stones are not gods; secondly, that they not only are not gods, but inferior even to men; thirdly, to brutes even; fourthly, to plants even; fifthly, they brought together the extremes: that not only stones but not earth even, nor animals, nor plants, nor man, nor heaven; or, to begin again, that not stones, not animals, not plants, not elements, not things above, not things below, not man, not demons, not Angels, not Archangels, not any of those Powers above, ought to be worshipped by the nature of man.

Being drawn up, as it were, from some deep, they had to learn that the Lord of all, He is God, that Him alone is it right to worship; that the virtuous life is a good thing; that this present death is not death, nor this life, life; that the body is raised, that it becomes incorruptible, that it will ascend into heaven, that it obtains even immortality, that it stands with Angels, that it is removed there. But Him who was there below, having cleared at a bound all these steps, He has placed on high upon the throne, having made Him that was lower than the stones, higher in dominion than the Angels, and the Archangels, and the thrones, and the dominions.

Truly What is the riches of the glory of this mystery? Just as if one should show a fool to be all at once made a philosopher; yea rather, whatsoever one should say, it would be as nothing: for even the words of Paul are undefined. What is the riches, he says, of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you? Again, they had to learn that He who is above, and who rules Angels and dominions, and all the other Powers, came down below, and was made Man, and suffered countless things, and rose again, and was received up.

All these things were of the mystery; and he sets them down together with lofty praise, saying, Which is Christ in you? But if He be in you, why seek ye Angels? Of this mystery. For there are other mysteries

besides. But this is really a mystery, which no one knew, which is marvelous, which is beside the common expectation, which was hid. Which is Christ in you, he says, the hope of glory, whom we proclaim, bringing Him from above. Whom we, not Angels: teaching and admonishing: not imperiously nor using constraint, for this too is of God's lovingkindness to men, not to bring them to Him after the manner of a tyrant. Seeing it was a great thing he had said, teaching, he added, admonishing, which is rather like a father than an instructor. Whom, says he, we proclaim, admonishing every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom. So that all wisdom is needed. That is, saying all things in wisdom. For the ability to learn such things exists not in every one. That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. What do you say, every man? Yea; this is what we are earnestly desirous of doing, he says. For what, if this do not come to pass? The blessed Paul endeavored. Perfect. This then is perfection, the other is imperfect: so that if one have not even the whole of wisdom, he is imperfect. Perfect in Christ Jesus, not in the Law, nor in Angels, for that is not perfection. In Christ, that is, in the knowledge of Christ. For he that knows what Christ has done, will have higher thoughts than to be satisfied with Angels.

In Christ Jesus; Ver. 29. Whereunto I labor also, striving. And he said not, I am desirous merely, nor in any indifferent way, but I labor, striving, with great earnestness, with much watching. If I, for your good, thus watch, much more ought ye. Then again, showing that it is of God, he says, according to His working which works in me mightily. He shows that this is the work of God. He, now, that makes me strong for this, evidently wills it. Wherefore also when beginning he says, Through the will of God. Colossians 1:1 So that it is not only out of modesty he so expresses himself, but insisting on the truth of the Word as well. And striving. In saying this, he shows that many are fighting against him. Then great is his tender affection.

Chap. ii. v. 1. For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea.

Then lest this should seem owing to their peculiar weakness, he joined others also with them, and as yet condemned them not. But why does he say, And as many as have not seen my face in the flesh? He shows here after a divine manner, that they saw him constantly in the Spirit. And he bears witness to their great love.

Ver. 2, 3. That their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God the Father, and of Christ: in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.

Now henceforward he is hastening and in pangs to enter upon the doctrine, neither accusing them, nor clearing them of accusation. I strive, he says. To what end? That they may be knit together. What he means is something like this; that they may stand firm in the faith. He does not however so express himself; but extenuates the matter of accusation. That is, that they may be united with love, not with necessity nor with force. For as I have said, he always avoids offending, by leaving it to themselves; and therefore striving, because I wish it to be with love, and willingly. For I do not wish it to be with the lips merely, nor merely that they shall be brought together, but that their hearts may be comforted.

Being knit together in love unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding. That is, that they may doubt about nothing, that they may be fully assured in all things. But I meant full assurance which is by faith, for there is a full assurance which comes by arguments, but that is worthy of no consideration. I know, he says, that you believe, but I would have you fully assured: not unto riches only, but unto all riches; that your full assurance may be intense, as well as in all things. And observe the wisdom of this blessed one. He said not, You do ill that you are not fully assured, nor accused them; but, you know not

how desirous I am that you may be fully assured, and not merely so, but with understanding. For seeing he spoke of faith; suppose not, he says, that I meant barely and unprofitably, but with understanding and love. That they may know the mystery of God the Father and of Christ. So that this is the mystery of God, the being brought unto Him by the Son. And of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. But if they are in Him, then wisely also no doubt He came at this time. Wherefore then do some foolish persons object to Him, See how He discourses with the simpler sort. In whom are all the treasures. He himself knows all things. Hid, for think not in truth that you already have all; they are hidden also even from Angels, not, from you only; so that you ought to ask all things from Him. He himself gives wisdom and knowledge. Now by saying, treasures, he shows their largeness, by All, that He is ignorant of nothing, by hid, that He alone knows.

Ver. 4. This I say, that no one may delude you with persuasiveness of speech.

Do you see that he says, I have therefore said this, that you may not seek it from men. Delude you, he says, with persuasiveness of speech. For what if any does speak, and speak persuasively?

Ver. 5. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit.

The direct thing to have said here was, even though I be absent in the flesh, yet, nevertheless, I know the deceivers; but instead he has ended with praise, Joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Your order, he means, your good order. And the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. This is still more in the way of encomium. And he said not faith, but steadfastness, as to soldiers standing in good order and firmly. Now that which is steadfast, neither deceit nor trial can shake asunder. Not only, he says, have ye not fallen, but no one has so much as thrown you into disorder. He has set himself over them, that they may fear him as though present; for thus is order preserved. From solidity follows compactedness, for you will then produce solidity, when having brought many things together, you shall cement them compactedly and inseparably; thus a solidity is produced, as in the case of a wall. But this is the peculiar work of love; for those who were by themselves, when it has closely cemented and knit them together, it renders solid. And faith, again, does the same thing; when it allows not reasonings to intrude themselves. For as reasonings divide, and shake loose, so faith causes solidity and compactness.

For seeing God has bestowed upon us benefits surpassing man's reasoning, suitably enough He has brought in faith. It is not possible to be steadfast, when demanding reasons. For behold all our lofty doctrines, how destitute they are of reasonings, and dependent upon faith alone. God is not anywhere, and is everywhere. What has less reason in it than this? Each by itself is full of difficulty. For, indeed, He is not in place; nor is there any place in which He is. He was not made, He made not Himself, He never began to be. What reasoning will receive this, if there be not faith? Does it not seem to be utterly ridiculous, and more endless than a riddle?

Now that He has no beginning, and is uncreate, and uncircumscribed, and infinite, is, as we have said, a manifest difficulty; but let us consider His incorporeality, whether we can search out this by reasoning. God is incorporeal. What is incorporeal? A bare word, and no more, for the apprehension has received nothing, has impressed nothing upon itself; for if it does so impress, it comes to nature, and what constitutes body. So that the mouth speaks indeed, but the understanding knows not what it speaks, save one thing only, that it is not body, this is all it knows. And why do I speak of God? In the case of the soul, which is created, inclosed, circumscribed, what is incorporeality? Say! show! You can not. Is it air? But air is body, even though it be not compact, and it is plain from many proofs that it is a yielding body. Fire is

body, while the energy of the soul is bodiless. Wherefore? Since it penetrates everywhere. If it is not itself body, then that which is incorporeal exists in place, therefore it is circumscribed; and that which is circumscribed has figure; and figures are linear, and lines belong to bodies. Again, that which is without figure, what conception does it admit? It has no figure, no form, no outline. Do you see how the understanding becomes dizzy?

Again, That Nature [viz. God's] is not susceptible of evil. But He is also good of His own will; it is therefore susceptible. But one may not so say, far be it! Again, was He brought into being, willing it, or not willing it? But neither may one say this. Again, circumscribes He the world, or no? If He circumscribes it not, He is Himself circumscribed, but if He circumscribes it, He is infinite in His nature. Again, circumscribes He Himself? If He circumscribes Himself, then He is not without beginning to Himself, but to us; therefore He is not in His nature without beginning. Everywhere one must grant contradictories.

Do you see how great the darkness is; and how everywhere there is need of faith. This it is, that is solid. But, if you will, let us come to things which are less than these. That substance has an operation. And what in His case is operation? Is it a certain motion? Then He is not immutable: for that which is moved, is not immutable: for, from being motionless it becomes in motion. But nevertheless He is in motion, and never stands still. But what kind of motion, tell me; for among us there are seven kinds; down, up, in, out, right, left, circular, or, if not this, increase, decrease, generation, destruction, alteration. But is His motion none of these, but such as the mind is moved with? No, nor this either. Far be it! For in many things the mind is even absurdly moved. Is to will, to operate, or not? If to will is to operate, and He wills all men to be good, and to be saved 1 Timothy 2:4, how comes it not to pass? But to will is one thing, to operate, another. To will then is not sufficient for operation. How then says the Scripture, He has done whatsoever He willed? Psalm 115:3 And again, the leper says unto Christ, If You will, You can make me clean. Matthew 8:2 For if this follows in company with the will, what is to be said? Will ye that I mention yet another thing? How were the things that are, made out of things that are not? How will they be resolved into nothing? What is above the heaven? And again, what above that? And what above that? And beyond that? And so on to infinity. What is below the earth? Sea, and beyond this, what? And beyond that again? Nay; to the right, and to the left, is there not the same difficulty?

But these indeed are things unseen. Will ye that I lead the discourse to those which are seen; those which have already happened? Tell me, how did the beast contain Jonah in its belly, without his perishing? Is it not void of reason, and its motions without control? How spared it the righteous man? How was it that the heat did not suffocate him? How was it that it putrefied him not? For if to be in the deep only, is past contriving, to be both in the creature's bowels, and in that heat, is very far more unaccountable. If from within we breathe the air, how did the respiration suffice for two animals? And how did it also vomit him forth unharmed? And how too did he speak? And how too was he self-possessed, and prayed? Are not these things incredible? If we test them by reasonings, they are incredible, if by faith, they are exceeding credible.

Shall I say something more than this? The wheat in the earth's bosom decays, and rises again. Behold marvels, opposite, and each surpassing the other; marvelous is the not becoming corrupted, marvelous, after becoming so, is the rising again. Where are they that make sport of such things, and disbelieve the Resurrection and say, This bone how shall it be cemented to that? And introduce such like silly tales. Tell me, how did Elias ascend in a chariot of fire? Fire is wont to burn, not to carry aloft. How lives he so long a time? In what place is he? Why was this done? Whither was Enoch translated? Lives he on like food with us? And what is it hinders him from being here? Nay, but does he not eat? And wherefore was he

translated? Behold how God schools us little by little. He translated Enoch; no very great thing that. This instructed us for the taking up of Elias. He shut in Noe into the ark Genesis 7:7; nor is this either any very great thing. This instructed us for the shutting up of the prophet within the whale. Thus even the things of old stood in need of forerunners and types. For as in a ladder the first step sends on to the second, and from the first it is not possible to step to the fourth, and this sends one on to that, that that may be the way to the next; and as it is not possible either to get to the second before the first; so also is it here.

And observe the signs of signs, and you will discern this in the ladder which Jacob saw. Above, it is said, the Lord stood fast, and underneath Angels were ascending and descending. Genesis 28:13 It was prophesied that the Father has a Son; it was necessary this should be believed. Whence would you that I show you the signs of this? From above, downward? From beneath, upward? Because He begets without passion, for this reason did she that was barren first bear. Let us rather go higher. It was necessary to be believed, that He begot of Himself. What then? The thing happens obscurely indeed, as in type and shadow, but still it does happen, and as it goes on it becomes somehow clearer. A woman is formed out of man alone, and he remains whole and entire. Again, it was necessary there should be some sure sign of the Conception of a Virgin. So the barren bears, not once only, but a second time and a third, and many times. Of His birth then of a Virgin, the barren is a type, and she sends the mind forward to faith. Again, this was a type of God being able to beget alone. For if man is the chief agent, and birth takes place without him, in a more excellent way, much rather, is One begotten of the Chiefest Agent. There is still another generation, which is a type of the Truth. I mean, ours by the Spirit. Of this again the barren a type, the fact that it is not of blood John 1:13; this pertains to the generation above. The one -- as also the types -- shows that the generation is to be without passion; the other, that it could proceed from one above.

Christ is above, ruling over all things: it was necessary this should be believed. The same takes place in the earth with respect to man. Let Us make man after Our image and likeness Genesis 1:26, for dominion of all the brutes. Thus He instructed us, not by words, but by actions. Paradise showed the separateness of his nature, and that man was the best thing of all. Christ was to rise again; see now how many sure signs there were; Enoch, Elias, Jonas, the fiery furnace, the case of Noah, baptism, the seeds, the plants, our own generation, that of all animals. For since on this everything was at stake, it, more than any other, had abundance of types.

That the Universe is not without a Providence we may conjecture from things among ourselves, for nothing will continue to exist, if not provided for; but even herds, and all other things stand in need of governance. And that the Universe was not made by chance, Hell is a proof, and so was the deluge in Noah's day, the fire, the overwhelming of the Egyptians in the sea, the things which happened in the wilderness.

It was necessary too that many things should prepare the way for Baptism; yea, thousands of things; those, for instance, in the Old Testament, those in the Pool, the cleansing of him that was not sound in health, the deluge itself, and all the things that have been done in water, the baptism of John.

It was necessary to be believed that God gives up His Son; a man did this by anticipation, Abraham the Patriarch. Types then of all these things, if we are so inclined, we shall find by searching in the Scriptures. But let us not be weary, but attune ourselves by these things. Let us hold the faith steadfastly, and show forth strictness of life: that having through all things returned thanks to God, we may be counted worthy of the good things promised to them that love Him, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, etc.

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