

Hebrews 10:32-11:2

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of perseverance in faith, self-reflection, and accountability, and warns against the dangers of judging others and tattling.

Topics: "Christian Perseverance", "Faithfulness Rewarded"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the endurance and compassion of the early Christians in the face of afflictions and persecutions, highlighting their willingness to suffer joyfully for their faith and their focus on heavenly rewards. He encourages the congregation to hold fast to their confidence in God, reminding them of the great recompense of reward for their faithfulness. Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of patience and endurance in the Christian journey, urging believers to continue in their faith and not to lose hope, as the day of judgment is near.

Transcript

But call to remembrance the former days, in which after you were illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, while you were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly while ye became companions of them that were so used. For you had compassion on those who were in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing that you have for yourselves in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

1. The best Physicians after they have made a deep incision, and have increased the pains by the wound, soothing the afflicted part, and giving rest and refreshment to the disturbed soul, proceed not to make a second incision, but rather soothe that which has been made with gentle remedies, and such as are suited to remove the violence of the pain. This Paul also did after he had shaken their souls, and pierced them with the recollection of Hell, and convinced then, that he must certainly perish, who does despite to the grace of God, and after he had shown from the laws of Moses, that they also shall perish, and the more [fearfully], and confirm it by other testimonies, and had said, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God Hebrews 10:31: then, lest the soul desponding through excessive fear, should be swallowed up with grief, he soothes them by commendations and exhortation, and gives them zeal derived from their own conduct. For, he says, call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye had been enlightened, you endured a great fight of afflictions. Powerful is the exhortation from deeds [already done]: for he who begins a work ought to go forward and add to it. As if he had said, when you were brought in [to the Church], when you were in the rank of learners, you displayed so great readiness, so great nobleness; but

now it is no longer so. And he who encourages, does thus especially encourage them from their own example.

And he did not simply say, ye endured a fight but a great [fight]. Moreover he did not say temptations but fight, which is an expression of commendation and of very great praise.

Then he also enumerates them particularly, amplifying his discourse, and multiplying his praise. How? Partly (he says) while you were made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions; for reproach is a great thing, and calculated to pervert the soul, and to darken the judgment. For hear what the prophet says: While they daily say unto me, Where is your God? Psalm 42:10 And again, If the enemy had reproached me, I would have borne it. Psalm 55:12 For since the human race is exceedingly vainglorious, therefore it is easily overcome by this.

And he did not simply say by reproaches, but that even with great intensity, being made a gazing-stock. For when a person is reproached alone, it is indeed painful, but far more so when in presence of all. For tell me how great the evil was when men who had left the meanness of Judaism, and gone over, as it were, to the best course of life, and despised the customs of their fathers, were ill treated by their own people, and had no help.

2. I cannot say (he says) that you suffered these things indeed and were grieved, but you even rejoiced exceedingly. And this he expressed by saying, Whilst ye became companions of them that were so used, and he brings forward the Apostles themselves. Not only (he means) were ye not ashamed of your own sufferings, but you even shared with others who were suffering the same things. This too is the language of one who is encouraging them. He said not, 'Bear my afflictions, share with me,' but respect your own.

You had compassion on them that were in bonds. You see that he is speaking concerning himself and the rest who were in prison. Thus ye did not account bonds to be bonds: but as noble wrestlers so stood ye: for not only ye needed no consolation in your own [distresses], but even became a consolation to others.

And ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods. O! What full assurance of faith! Hebrews 10:22 Then he also sets forth the motive, not only consoling them for their struggles, but also that they might not be shaken from the Faith. When ye saw your property plundered (he means) ye endured; for already ye saw Him who is invisible, as visible: which was the effect of genuine faith, and you showed it forth by your deeds themselves.

Well then, the plundering was perhaps from the force of the plunderers, and no man could prevent it; so that as yet it is not clear, that you endured the plundering for the faith's sake. (Although this too is clear. For it was in your power if you chose, not to be plundered, by not believing.) But ye did what is far greater than this; the enduring such things even with joy; which was altogether apostolic, and worthy of those noble souls, who rejoiced when scourged. For, it says, they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name. Acts 5:41 But he that endures with joy, shows that he has some reward, and that the affair is no loss but a gain.

Moreover the expression ye took shows their willing endurance, because, he means, you chose and accepted.

Knowing (he says) that you have for yourselves in heaven a better and an enduring substance; instead of saying, firm, not perishing like this.

Hebrews 10:35

3. In the next place, having praised them, he says, Hebrews 10:35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of reward. What do you mean? He did not say, 'you have cast it away, and recover it': but, which tended more to strengthen them, you have it, he says. For to recover again that which has been cast away, requires more labor: but not to lose that which is held fast does not. But to the Galatians he says the very opposite: My children of whom I travail in birth again, till Christ be formed in you Galatians 4:19; and with reason; for they were more supine, whence they needed a sharper word; but these were more faint-hearted, so that they rather needed what was more soothing.

Cast not away therefore (he says) your confidence, so that they were in great confidence towards God. Which has (he says) great recompense of reward. And when shall we receive them (some one might say)? Behold! All things on our part have been done. Therefore he anticipated them on their own supposition, saying in effect, If you know that you have in heaven a better substance, seek nothing here.

For you have need of patience, not of any addition [to your labors], that you may continue in the same state, that you may not cast away what has been put into your hands. You need nothing else, but so to stand as you have stood, that when you come to the end, you may receive the promise.

Hebrews 10:36

Hebrews 10:36 For (he says) you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise. You have need of one thing only, to bear with the delay; not that you should fight again. You are at the very crown (he means); you have borne all the combats of bonds, of afflictions; your goods have been spoiled. What then? Henceforward you are standing to be crowned: endure this only, the delay of the crown. O the greatness of the consolation! It is as if one should speak to an athlete who had overthrown all, and had no antagonist, and then was to be crowned, and yet endured not that time, during which the president of the games comes, and places the crown [upon him]; and he impatient, should wish to go out, and escape as though he could not bear the thirst and the heat.

Hebrews 10:37

He then also hinting this, what does he say? Hebrews 10:37 Yet a little while and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. For lest they should say, And when will He come? He comforts them from the Scriptures. For thus also when he says in another place, Now is our salvation nearer Romans 13:11, he comforts them because the remaining time is short. And this he says not of himself but from the Scriptures. But if from that time it was said, Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry, it is plain that now He is nearer. Wherefore also waiting is no small reward.

Hebrews 10:38

Hebrews 10:38 Now the just (he says) shall live by faith, but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. This is a great encouragement when one shows that they have succeeded in the whole matter and are losing it through a little indolence. Hebrews 10:39 But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Hebrews 11:1-2

4. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. O what an expression has he used, in saying, an evidence of things not seen. For [we say] there is evidence, in the case of things that are very plain. Faith then is the seeing things not plain (he means), and brings what are not seen to the same full assurance with what are seen. So then neither is it possible to disbelieve in things which are seen, nor, on the other hand can there be faith unless a man be more fully assured with respect to things invisible, than he is with respect to things that are most clearly seen. For since the objects of hope seem to be unsubstantial, Faith gives them substantiality, or rather, does not give it, but is itself their substance. For instance, the Resurrection has not come, nor does it exist substantially, but hope makes it substantial in our soul. This is [the meaning of] the substance of things.

If therefore it is an evidence of things not seen, why forsooth do you wish to see them, so as to fall away from faith, and from being just? Since the just shall live by faith, whereas ye, if you wish to see these things, are no longer faithful. You have labored (he says), you have struggled: I too allow this, nevertheless, wait; for this is Faith: do not seek the whole here.

5. These things were indeed said to the Hebrews, but they are a general exhortation also to many of those who are here assembled. How and in what way? To the faint-hearted; to the mean-spirited. For when they see the wicked prospering, and themselves faring ill, they are troubled, they bear it impatiently: while they long for the chastisement, and the inflicting vengeance on others; while they wait for the rewards of their own sufferings. For yet a little time, and He that shall come will come.

Let us then say this to the slothful: Doubtless there will be punishment; doubtless He will come, henceforth the events of the Resurrection are even at the doors.

Whence [does] that [appear] (you say)? I do not say, from the prophets; for neither do I now speak to Christians only; but even if a heathen be here, I am perfectly confident, and bring forward my proofs, and will instruct him. How (you say)?

Christ foretold many things. If those former things did not come to pass, then do not believe them; but if they all came to pass, why doubt concerning those that remain? And indeed, it were very unreasonable, nothing having come to pass, to believe the one, or when all has come to pass, to disbelieve the others.

But I will make the matter more plain by an example. Christ said, that Jerusalem should be taken, and should be so taken as no city ever was before, and that it should never be raised up: and in fact this prediction came to pass. He said, that there should be great tribulation Matthew 24:21, and it came to pass. He said that a grain of mustard seed is sown, so should the preaching [of the Gospel] be extended: and every day we see this running over the world. He said, that they who left father or mother, or brethren, or sisters, should have both fathers and mothers; And this we see fulfilled by facts. He said, in the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world John 16:33, that is, no man shall get the better of you. And this we see by the events has come to pass. He said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church Matthew 16:18, even though persecuted, and that no one shall quench the preaching [of the Gospel]: and the experience of events bears witness to this prediction also: and yet when He said these things, it was very hard to believe Him. Why? Because all these were words, and He had not as yet given proof of the things spoken. So that they have now become far more credible. He said that when the Gospel should have been preached among all the nations, then the end shall come Matthew 24:14; lo! now you have arrived at the end: for the greater part of the world has been preached to, therefore the end is now at hand. Let us tremble, beloved.

6. But what, tell me? Are you anxious about the end? It indeed is itself near, but each man's life and death is nearer. For it is said, the days of our years are seventy years; but if [one be] in strength, fourscore years. Psalm 90:10 The day of judgment is near. Let us fear. A brother does not redeem; shall man redeem? Psalm 49:7 There we shall repent much, but in death no man shall praise Him. Psalm 6:5 Wherefore he says, Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving Psalm 93:2, that is, his coming. For here [in this life] indeed, whatever we do has efficacy; but there, no longer. Tell me, if a man placed us for a little while in a flaming furnace, should we not submit to anything in order to escape, even were it necessary to part with our money, nay to undergo slavery? How many have fallen into grievous diseases, and would gladly give up all, to be delivered from them, if the choice were offered them? If in this world then, a disease of short duration so afflicts us, what shall we do yonder, when repentance will be of no avail?

7. Of how many evils are we now full, without being conscious of them? We bite one another, we devour one another, in wronging, accusing, calumniating, being vexed by the credit of our neighbors. cf.

And see the difficulty. When a man wishes to undermine the reputation of a neighbor, he says, 'Such an one said this of him; O God, forgive me, do not examine me strictly, I must give account of what I have heard.' Why then do you speak of it at all, if you dost not believe it? Why do you speak of it? Why do you make it credible by much reporting? Why do you pass on the story which is not true? Thou dost not believe it, and you entreat God not to call you to strict account? Do not say it then, but keep silence, and free yourself from all fear.

But I know not from whence this disease has fallen upon men. We have become tattlers, nothing remains in our mind. Hear the exhortation of a wise man who says, Have you heard a word? Let it die in you, be bold; it will not burst you. Sirach 19:10 And again, A fool hears a word, and travails, as a women in labor of a child. Sirach 19:11 We are ready to make accusations, prepared for condemning. Even if no other evil thing had been done by us, this were sufficient to ruin us, and to carry us away to Hell, this involves us in ten thousand evils. And that you may know this certainly, hear what the prophet says, Thou sat and spoke against your brother. Psalm 50:20

But it is not I, you say, but the other [who told me]. Nay rather, it is yourself; for if thou had not spoken, another would not have heard: or even if he should hear it, yet you would not have been to blame for the sin. We ought to shade over and conceal the failings of neighbors, but you parade them under a cloak of zeal for goodness. Thou becomest, not an accuser, but a gossip, a trifler, a fool. O what cleverness! Without being aware of it, you bring disgrace upon yourself as well as on him.

And see what great evils which arise from this. You provoke the wrath of God. Do you not hear Paul saying about widows, they not only (these are his words) learn to be idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, wandering about from house to house, and speaking things which they ought not. 1 Timothy 5:13 So that even when you believe the things which are said against your brother, you ought not even in that case to speak of them; much less, when thou dost not believe them.

But thou [forsooth] lookest to your own interest? Thou fearest to be called to account by God? Fear then, lest even for your tattling thou be called to account. For here, you can not say, 'O God, call me not to account for light talking': for the whole matter is light talking. Why did you publish it? Why did you increase the evil? This is sufficient to destroy us. On this account Christ said, Judge not, that you be not judged. Matthew 7:1

But we pay no regard to this, neither are we brought to our senses by what happened to the Pharisee. He said what was true, I am not as this Publican Luke 18:11, he said it too in no man's hearing; yet was he condemned. If he were condemned when he said what was true, and uttered it in no man's hearing, what fearful [punishment] shall not they suffer, who like gossiping women, carry about everywhere lies which they do not even themselves believe? What shall they not endure?

8. Henceforward let us set a door and a bolt before the mouth. Sirach 28:25 For innumerable evils have arisen from tattling; families have been ruined, friendships torn asunder, innumerable other miseries have happened. Busy not yourself, O man, about the affairs of your neighbor.

But you are talkative and hast a weakness. Talk of your own [faults] to God: thus the weakness will be no longer a weakness, but an advantage. Talk of your own [faults] to your friends, those who are thorough friends and righteous men, and in whom you have confidence, that so they may pray for your sins. If you speak of the [sins] of others, you are nowise profited, neither have you gained anything, but hast ruined yourself. If you confess your own [sins] to the Lord, you have great reward: for one says, I said, I will confess against myself mine iniquity to the Lord, and You forgave the impiety of my heart. Psalm 32:5

Do you wish to judge? Judge your own [sins]. No one will accuse you, if you condemn yourself: but he will accuse if you do not condemn; he will accuse you, unless thou convict yourself; will accuse you of insensibility. You have seen such an one angry, irritated, doing something else out of place? Think at once, even thou on your own [faults]: and thus you will not greatly condemn him, and will free yourself from the load of your past transgressions. If we thus regulate our own conduct, if we thus manage our own life, if we condemn ourselves, we shall probably not commit many sins, and we shall do many good things, being fair and moderate; and shall enjoy all the promises to them that love God: to which may all attain, by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, power, honor, now and for ever and world with end. Amen.

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