

Hebrews 10:8-18

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the superiority of the New Covenant's sacrifice over the Old Covenant's sacrifices, and the importance of poverty and humility in the Christian life.

Scripture: Psalm 40:6, Matthew 5:3, Matthew 19:21, Matthew 25:34, Acts 3:6, Hebrews 10:4, Hebrews 10:10

Topics: "Christ's Sacrifice", "Christian Humility"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the inefficacy of sacrifices in purifying sins and the superiority of Christ's sacrifice, which once and for all sanctifies believers. He explains that God never truly desired sacrifices but rather the obedience and surrender of one's will. Chrysostom highlights the importance of poverty as a virtue, contrasting the anxieties of the rich with the freedom and confidence of the voluntarily poor. He encourages believers to embrace poverty, generosity, and humility, as exemplified by Christ and His disciples, to inherit the kingdom of Heaven.

Transcript

Above when He said, Sacrifice and offering, and burnt-offerings, and [offering] for sin, You would not, neither had pleasure [therein], which are offered by the Law, then said He, Lo! I come to do Your will, O God. He takes away the first, that He may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified, by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all. And every Priest stands daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this [man] after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool.

1. In what has gone before he had shown that the sacrifices were unavailing for perfect purification, and were a type, and greatly defective. Since then there was this objection to his argument, If they are types, how is it that, after the truth has come, they have not ceased, nor given place, but are still performed? He here accordingly labors at this very point, showing that they are no longer performed, even as a figure, for God does not accept them. And this again he shows not from the New [Testament], but from the prophets, bringing forward from times of old the strongest testimony, that it [the old system] comes to an end, and ceases, and that they do all in vain, alway resisting the Holy Ghost. Acts 7:51

And he shows over and above that they cease not now [only], but at the very coming of the Messiah, nay rather, even before His coming: and how it was that Christ did not abolish them at the last, but they were abolished first, and then He came; first they were made to cease, and then He appeared. That they might

not say, Even without this sacrifice, and by means of those, we could have been well pleasing unto God, He waited for these sacrifices to be convicted [of weakness], and then He appeared; for (He says) sacrifice and offering You would not. Hereby He took all away; and having spoken generally, He says also particularly, In burnt-offerings and [sacrifice] for sin You had no pleasure. But the offering was everything except the sacrifice. Then said I, Lo! I come. Of whom was this spoken? Of none other than the Christ.

Here he does not blame those who offer, showing that it is not because of their wickednesses that He does not accept them, as He says elsewhere, but because the thing itself has been convicted for the future and shown to have no strength, nor any suitableness to the times. What then has this to do with the sacrifices being offered oftentimes? Not only from their being oftentimes [offered] (he means) is it manifest that they are weak, and that they effected nothing; but also from God's not accepting them, as being unprofitable and useless. And in another place it is said, If You had desired sacrifice I would have given it. Psalm 51:16 Therefore by this also he makes it plain that He does not desire it. Therefore sacrifices are not God's will, but the abolition of sacrifices. Wherefore they sacrifice contrary to His will.

What is To do Your will? To give up Myself, He means: This is the will of God. By which Will we are sanctified. Or he even means something still further, that the sacrifices do not make men clean, but the Will of God. Therefore to offer sacrifice is not the will of God.

2. And why do you wonder that it is not the will of God now, when it was not His will even from the beginning? For who, says He, has required this at your hands? Isaiah 1:12

How then did He Himself enjoin it? In condescension. For as Paul says, I would that all men were even as I myself 1 Corinthians 7:7, in respect of continence, and again says, I will that the younger women marry, bear children 1 Timothy 5:14; and lays down two wills, yet the two are not his own, although he commands; but the one indeed is his own, and therefore he lays it down without reasons; while the other is not his own, though he wishes it, and therefore it is added with a reason. For having previously accused them, because they had waxed wanton against Christ 1 Timothy 5:11, he then says, I will that the younger women marry, bear children. 1 Timothy 5:14 So in this place also it was not His leading will that the sacrifices should be offered. For, as He says, I wish not the death of the sinner, as that he should turn unto [Me] and live Ezekiel 33:11: and in another place He says that He not only wished, but even desired this: and yet these are contrary to each other: for intense wishing is desire. How then dost Thou not wish? How dost Thou in another place desire, which is a sign of vehement wishing? So is it in this case also.

By the which will we are sanctified, he says. How sanctified? by the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once for all.

3. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifice. (To stand therefore is a sign of ministering; accordingly to sit, is a sign of being ministered unto.)

Hebrews 10:14-15

But this [man] after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. Hebrews 10:14-15 For by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us. He had said that those [sacrifices] are not offered; he reasoned from what is written, [and] from what is not written; moreover also he put forward the prophetic word which says, sacrifice and offering You would not. He had said that He had forgiven their sins.

Hebrews 10:16-18

Again this also He proves from the testimony of what is written, for the Holy Ghost (he says) is a witness to us: for after that He had said, Hebrews 10:16-18 This is the covenant, that I will make with them, after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is there is no more offering for sin. So then He forgave their sins, when He gave the Covenant, and He gave the Covenant by sacrifice. If therefore He forgave the sins through the one sacrifice, there is no longer need of a second.

He sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting. Why the delay? that His enemies be put under His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. But perhaps some one might say; Wherefore did He not put them under at once? For the sake of the faithful who should afterwards be brought forth and born. Whence then [does it appear] that they shall be put under? By the saying He sat down. He called to mind again that testimony which says, until I put the enemies under His feet. See Hebrews 1:13 But His enemies are the Jews. Then since he had said, Till His enemies be put under His feet, and they [these enemies] were vehemently urgent, therefore he introduces all his discourse concerning faith after this. But who are the enemies? All unbelievers: the dÃmons. And intimating the greatness of their subjection, he said not are subjected, but are put under His feet.

4. Let us not therefore be of [the number of] His enemies. For not they alone are enemies, the unbelievers and Jews, but those also who are full of unclean living. For the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither can it be. Romans 8:7 What then (you say)? This is not a ground of blame. Nay rather, it is very much a ground of blame. For the wicked man as long as he is wicked, cannot be subject [to God's law]; he can however change and become good.

Let us then cast out carnal minds. But what are carnal? Whatever makes the body flourish and do well, but injures the soul: as for instance, wealth, luxury, glory (all these things are of the flesh), carnal love. Let us not then love gain, but ever follow after poverty: for this is a great good.

But (you say) it makes one humble and of little account. [True:] for we have need of this, for it benefits us much. Poverty (it is said) humbles a man. Proverbs 10:4, Septuagint And again Christ [says], Blessed are the poor in spirit. Matthew 5:3 Do you then grieve because you are upon a path leading to virtue? Do you not know that this gives us great confidence?

But, one says, the wisdom of the poor man is despised. Ecclesiastes 9:16 And again another says, Give me neither riches nor poverty Proverbs 30:8, and, Deliver me from the furnace of poverty. See Isaiah 48:10 And again, if riches and poverty are from the Lord, how can either poverty or riches be an evil? Why then were these things said? They were said under the Old [Covenant], where there was much account made of wealth, where there was great contempt of poverty, where the one was a curse and the other a blessing. But now it is no longer so.

But will you hear the praises of poverty? Christ sought after it, and says, But the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. Matthew 8:20 And again He said to His disciples, Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor two coats. Matthew 10:9-10 And Paul in writing said, As having nothing and yet possessing all things. 2 Corinthians 6:10 And Peter said to him who was lame from his birth, Silver and gold have I none. Acts 3:6 Yea and under the Old [Covenant] itself, where wealth was held in admiration, who were the admired? Was not Elijah, who had nothing save the sheepskin? Was not Elisha? Was not John?

Let no man then be humiliated on account of his poverty: It is not poverty which humiliates, but wealth, which compels us to have need of many, and forces us to be under obligations to many?

And what could be poorer than Jacob (tell me), who said, If the Lord give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on? Genesis 28:20 Were Elijah and John then wanting in boldness? Did not the one reprove Ahab, and the other Herod? The latter said, It is not lawful for you to have your brother Philip's wife. Mark 6:18 And Elias said to Ahab with boldness, It is not I that trouble Israel, but you and your father's house. 1 Kings 18:18 You see that this especially produces boldness; poverty [I mean]? For while the rich man is a slave, being subject to loss, and in the power of every one wishing to do him hurt, he who has nothing, fears not confiscation, nor fine. So, if poverty had made men wanting in boldness Christ would not have sent His disciples with poverty to a work requiring great boldness. For the poor man is very strong, and has nothing wherefrom he may be wronged or evil entreated. But the rich man is assailable on every side: just in the same way as one would easily catch a man who was dragging many long ropes after him, whereas one could not readily lay hold on a naked man. So here also it falls out in the case of the rich man: slaves, gold, lands, affairs innumerable, innumerable cares, difficult circumstances, necessities, make him an easy prey to all.

5. Let no man then henceforth esteem poverty a cause of disgrace. For if virtue be there, all the wealth of the world is neither clay, nor even a mote in comparison of it. This then let us follow after, if we would enter into the kingdom of heaven. For, He says, Sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven. Matthew 19:21 And again, It is hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 19:23 Do you see that even if we have it not, we ought to draw it to us? So great a good is Poverty. For it guides us by the hand, as it were, on the path which leads to Heaven, it is an anointing for the combat, an exercise great and admirable, a tranquil haven.

But (you say) I have need of many [things], and am unwilling to receive a favor from any. Nevertheless, even in this respect the rich man is inferior to you; for thou perhaps ask the favor for your support, but he shamelessly [asks] for ten thousand things for covetousness' sake. So that it is the rich that are in need of many [persons], yea oftentimes those who are unworthy of them. For instance, they often stand in need of those who are in the rank of soldiers, or of slaves: but the poor man has no need even of the Emperor himself, and if he should need him, he is admired because he has brought himself down to this, when he might have been rich.

Let no man then accuse poverty as being the cause of innumerable evils, nor let him contradict Christ, who declared it to be the perfection of virtue, saying, If you will be perfect. Matthew 19:21 For this He both uttered in His words, and showed by His acts, and taught by His disciples. Let us therefore follow after poverty, it is the greatest good to the sober-minded.

Perhaps some of those who hear me, avoid it as a thing of ill omen. I do not doubt it. For this disease is great among most men, and such is the tyranny of wealth, that they cannot even as far as words endure the renunciation of it, but avoid it as of ill omen. Far be this from the Christian's soul: for nothing is richer than he who chooses poverty of his own accord, and with a ready mind.

6. How? I will tell you, and if you please, I will prove that he who chooses poverty of his own accord is richer even than the king himself. For he indeed needs many [things], and is in anxiety, and fears lest the supplies for the army should fail him; but the other has enough of everything, and fears about nothing, and if he fears, it is not about so great matters. Who then, tell me, is the rich man? He who is daily asking, and

earnestly laboring to gather much together, and fears lest at any time he should fall short, or he who gathers nothing together, and is in great abundance and has need of no one? For it is virtue and the fear of God, and not possessions which give confidence. For these even enslave. For it is said, Gifts and presents blind the eyes of the wise, and like a muzzle on the mouth turn away reproofs. Sirach 20:29

Consider how the poor man Peter chastised the rich Ananias. Was not the one rich and the other poor? But behold the one speaking with authority and saying, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much Acts 5:8, and the other saying with submission, Yea, for so much. And who (you say) will grant to me to be as Peter? It is open to you to be as Peter if you will; cast away what you have. Disperse, give to the poor Psalm 112:9, follow Christ, and you shall be such as he. How? He (you say) wrought miracles. Is it this then, tell me, which made Peter an object of admiration, or the boldness which arose from his manner of life? Do you not hear Christ saying, Rejoice not because the devils are subject unto you; If you will be perfect [&c]. Luke 10:20 Hear what Peter says: Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give you. Acts 3:6 If any man have silver and gold, he has not those other gifts.

Why is it then, you say, that many have neither the one nor the other? Because they are not voluntarily poor: since they who are voluntarily poor have all good things. For although they do not raise up the dead nor the lame, yet, what is greater than all; they have confidence towards God. They will hear in that day that blessed voice, Come, you blessed of My Father, (what can be better than this?) inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered and you gave Me meat: I was thirsty and you gave Me drink: I was a stranger and you took Me in: I was naked and you clothed Me: I was sick and in prison and you visited Me. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Matthew 25:34-36 Let us then flee from covetousness, that we may attain to the kingdom [of Heaven]. Let us feed the poor, that we may feed Christ: that we may become fellow-heirs with Him in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom to the Father together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, power, honor, now and for ever and world without end. Amen.

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