

Hebrews 11:20-27

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon highlights the importance of faith in the lives of the righteous men of old, and how it led them to trust in God's promises and power.

Scripture: Daniel 5:17, Acts 14:15, Hebrews 11:23-24, Hebrews 11:27

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Godly Endurance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of faith in the lives of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Daniel, highlighting their unwavering trust in God's promises and their willingness to endure hardships for the sake of God's plan. He emphasizes how these biblical figures, despite facing challenges and temptations, chose to prioritize their faith in God over worldly pleasures and honors. Chrysostom encourages the congregation to emulate their examples by always keeping God in their thoughts, trusting in His invisible presence, and seeking His will above all else.

Transcript

By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith, Jacob when he was a dying blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped leaning on the top of his staff. By faith, Joseph when he died made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones.

1. Many prophets and righteous men (it is said) have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which you hear and have not heard them. Matthew 13:17 Did then those righteous men know all the things to come? Yea, most certainly. For if because of the weakness of those who were not able to receive Him, the Son was not revealed, -- He was with good reason revealed to those conspicuous in virtue. This Paul also says, that they knew the things to come, that is the resurrection of Christ.

Or he does not mean this: but that By faith, concerning things to come [means] not [concerning] the world to come, but concerning things to come in this world. For how [except by faith] could a man sojourning in a strange land, give such blessings?

But on the other hand he obtained the blessing, and yet did not receive it. You see that what I said with regard to Abraham, may be said also of Jacob, that they did not enjoy the blessing, but the blessings went to his posterity, while he himself obtained the things to come. For we find that his brother rather enjoyed

the blessing. For [Jacob] spent all his time in servitude and working as a hireling, and [amid] dangers, and plots, and deceits, and fears; and when he was asked by Pharaoh, he says, Few and evil have my days been Genesis 47:9; while the other lived in independence and great security, and afterwards was an object of terror to [Jacob]. Where then did the blessings come to their accomplishment, save in the [world] to come?

Do you see that from the beginning the wicked have enjoyed things here, but the righteous the contrary? Not however all. For behold, Abraham was a righteous man, and he enjoyed things here as well, though with affliction and trials. For indeed wealth was all he had, seeing all else relating to him was full of affliction. For it is impossible that the righteous man should not be afflicted, though he be rich: for when he is willing to be overreached, to be wronged, to suffer all other things, he must be afflicted. So that although he enjoy wealth, [yet is it] not without grief. Why? You ask. Because he is in affliction and distress. But if at that time the righteous were in affliction, much more now.

By Faith, he says, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come (and yet Esau was the elder; but he puts Jacob first for his excellence). Do you see how great was his Faith? Whence did he promise to his sons so great blessings? Entirely from his having faith in God.

2. By Faith, Jacob when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph. Here we ought to set down the blessings entire, in order that both his faith and his prophesying may be made manifest. And worshipped leaning, he says, upon the top of his staff. Here, he means, he not only spoke, but was even so confident about the future things, as to show it also by his act. For inasmuch as another King was about to arise from Ephraim, therefore it is said, And he bowed himself upon the top of his staff. That is, even though he was now an old man, he bowed himself to Joseph, showing the obeisance of the whole people which was to be [directed] to him. And this indeed had already taken place, when his brethren bowed down to him: but it was afterwards to come to pass through the ten tribes. Do you see how he foretold the things which were to be afterwards? Do you see how great faith they had? How they believed concerning the things to come?

For some of the things here, the things present, are examples of patience only, and of enduring ill-treatment, and of receiving nothing good; for instance, what is mentioned in the case of Abraham, in the case of Abel. But others are [examples] of Faith, as in the case of Noah, that there is a God, that there is a recompense. (For Faith in this place is manifold, both of there being a recompense, and of awaiting it, not under the same conditions, and of wrestling before the prizes.) And the things also which concern Joseph are of Faith only. Joseph heard that [God] had made a promise to Abraham, that He had engaged His word to you and to your seed will I give this land; and though in a strange land, and not yet seeing the engagement fulfilled, but never faltered even so, but so believed as even to speak of the Exodus, and to give commandment concerning his bones. He then not only believed himself, but led on the rest also to Faith: that having the Exodus always in mind (for he would not have given commandment concerning his bones, unless he had been fully assured [of this]), they might look for their return [to Canaan].

Wherefore, when some men say, 'See! Even righteous men had care about their sepulchers,' let us reply to them, that it was for his reason: for he knew that the earth is the Lord's and all that therein is. Psalm 24:1 He could not indeed have been ignorant of this, who lived in so great philosophy, who spent his whole life in Egypt. And yet if he had wished, it was possible for him to return, and not to mourn or vex himself. But when he had taken up his father there, why, did he enjoin them to carry up thence his own bones also? Evidently for this reason.

But what? Tell me, are not the bones of Moses himself laid in a strange land? And those of Aaron, of Daniel, of Jeremiah? And as to those of the Apostles we do not know where those of most of them are laid. For of Peter indeed, and Paul, and John, and Thomas, the sepulchers are well known; but those of the rest, being so many, have nowhere become known. Let us not therefore lament at all about this, nor be so little-minded. For wherever we may be buried, the earth is the Lord's and all that therein is. Psalm 24:1 Certainly what must take place, does take place: to mourn however, and lament, and bewail the departed, arises from littleness of mind.

Hebrews 11:23

3. Hebrews 11:23 By faith, Moses when he was born, was hid three months of his parents. Do you see that in this case they hoped for things on the earth after their death? And many things were fulfilled after their death. This is for some who say, 'After death those things were done for them, which they did not obtain while alive; nor did they believe [would be] after their death.'

Moreover Joseph did not say, He gave not the land to me in my life-time, nor to my father, nor to my grandfather, whose excellence too ought to have been revered; and will He vouchsafe to these wretched people what He did not vouchsafe to them? He said nothing of all this, but by Faith he both conquered and went beyond all these things.

He has named Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, all illustrious and admirable men. Again he makes the encouragement greater, by bringing down the matter to ordinary persons. For that the admirable should feel thus, is nothing wonderful, and to appear inferior to them, is not so dreadful: but to show oneself inferior even to people without names, this is the dreadful thing. And he begins with the parents of Moses, obscure persons, who had nothing so great as their son [had]. Therefore also he goes on to increase the strangeness of what he says by enumerating even women that were harlots, and widows. For by Faith (he says) the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. And he mentions the rewards not only of belief but also of unbelief; as in [the case of] Noah.

But at present we must speak of the parents of Moses. Pharaoh gave orders that all the male children should be destroyed, and none had escaped the danger. Whence did these expect to save their child? From faith. What sort of Faith? They saw (he says) that he was a proper child. The very sight drew them on to Faith: thus from the beginning, yea from the very swaddling-clothes, great was the Grace that was poured out on that righteous man, this being not the work of nature. For observe, the child immediately on its birth appears fair and not disagreeable to the sight. Whose [work] was this? Not that of nature, but of the Grace of God, which also stirred up and strengthened that barbarian woman, the Egyptian, and took and drew her on.

And yet in truth Faith had not a sufficient foundation in their case. For what was it to believe from sight? But you (he would say) believe from facts and have many pledges of Faith. For the receiving with joyfulness the spoiling of their goods Hebrews 10:34, and other such [things], were [evidences] of Faith and of Patience. But inasmuch as these [Hebrews] also had believed, and yet afterwards had become faint-hearted, he shows that the Faith of those [saints of old] also was long continued, as, for instance, that of Abraham, although the circumstances seemed to contend against it.

And (he says) they were not afraid of the king's commandment, although that was in operation, but this [their hope respecting their child] was simply a kind of bare expectation. And this indeed was [the act] of

his parents; but Moses himself what did he contribute?

Hebrews 11:24-26

4. Next again an example appropriate to them, or rather greater than that. For, says he, Hebrews 11:24-26 by faith Moses when he had come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. As though he had said to them, 'No one of you has left a palace, yea a splendid palace, nor such treasures; nor, when he might have been a king's son, has he despised this, as Moses did.' And that he did not simply leave [these things], he expressed by saying, he refused, that is, he hated, he turned away. For when Heaven was set before him, it was superfluous to admire an Egyptian Palace.

And see how admirably Paul has put it. He did not say, 'Esteeming heaven, and the things in heaven,' 'greater riches than the treasures of Egypt,' but what? The reproach of Christ. For the being reproached for the sake of Christ he accounted better than being thus at ease; and this itself by itself was reward.

Choosing rather (he says) to suffer affliction with the people of God. For you indeed suffer on your own account, but he chose [to suffer] for others; and voluntarily threw himself into so many dangers, when it was in his power both to live religiously, and to enjoy good things.

Than (he says) to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. He called unwillingness to suffer affliction with the rest sin: this, he says, [Moses] accounted to be sin. If then he accounted it sin not to be ready to suffer affliction with the rest, it follows that the suffering affliction must be a great good since he threw himself into it from the royal palace.

But this he did, seeing some great things before him. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. What is, the reproach of Christ? It is being reproached in such ways as you are, the reproach which Christ endured; Or that he endured for Christ's sake: for that rock was Christ 1 Corinthians 10:4; the being reproached as you are.

But what is the reproach of Christ? That [because] we repudiate the [ways] of our fathers we are reproached; that we are evil-entreated when we have run to God. It was likely that he also was reproached, when it was said to him, Will you kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday? Exodus 2:14 This is the reproach of Christ, to be ill-treated to the end, and to the last breath: as He Himself was reproached and heard, If Thou be the Son of God Matthew 27:40, from those for whom He was crucified, from those who were of the same race. This is the reproach of Christ when a man is reproached by those of his own family, or by those whom he is benefiting. For [Moses] also suffered these things from the man who had been benefited [by him].

In these words he encouraged them, by showing that even Christ suffered these things, and Moses also, two illustrious persons. So that this is rather the reproach of Christ than of Moses inasmuch as He suffered these things from His own. John 1:11 But neither did the one send forth lightnings, nor the Other feel any [anger], but He was reviled and endured all things, while they wagged their heads. Matthew 27:39 Since therefore it was probable that they [the readers] also would hear such things, and would long for the Recompense, he says that even Christ and Moses had suffered the like. So then ease is [the portion] of sin; but to be reproached, of Christ. For what then do you wish? The reproach of Christ, or ease?

Hebrews 11:27

5. Hebrews 11:27 By faith he forsook Egypt not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is Invisible. What do you say? That he did not fear? And yet the Scripture says, that when he heard, he was afraid Exodus 2:14, and for this cause provided for safety by flight, and stole away, and secretly withdrew himself; and afterwards he was exceedingly afraid. Observe the expressions with care: he said, not fearing the wrath of the king, with reference to his even presenting himself again. For it would have been [the part] of one who was afraid, not to undertake again his championship, nor to have any hand in the matter. That he did however again undertake it, was [the part] of one who committed all to God: for he did not say, 'He is seeking me, and is busy [in the search], and I cannot bear again to engage in this matter.'

So that even flight was [an act of] faith. Why then did he not remain (you say)? That he might not cast himself into a foreseen danger. For this finally would have been tempting [God]: to leap into the midst of dangers, and say, 'Let us see whether God will save me.' And this the devil said to Christ, Cast Yourself down. Matthew 4:6 Do you see that it is a diabolical thing, to throw ourselves into danger without cause and for no purpose, and to try whether God will save us? For he [Moses] could no longer be their champion when they who were receiving benefits were so ungrateful. It would therefore have been a foolish and senseless thing to remain there. But all these things were done, because, he endured as seeing Him who is Invisible.

6. If then we too always see God with our mind, if we always think in remembrance of Him, all things will appear endurable to us, all things tolerable; we shall bear them all easily, we shall be above them all. For if a person seeing one whom he loves, or rather, remembering him is roused in spirit, and elevated in thought, and bears all things easily, while he delights in the remembrance; one who has in mind Him who has vouchsafed to love us in deed, and remembers Him, when will he either feel anything painful, or dread anything fearful or dangerous? When will he be of cowardly spirit? Never.

For all things appear to us difficult, because we do not have the remembrance of God as we ought; because we do not carry Him about always in our thoughts. For surely He might justly say to us, You have forgotten Me, I also will forget you. And so the evil becomes twofold, both that we forget Him and He us. For these two things are involved in each other, yet are two. For great is the effect of God's remembrance, and great also of His being remembered by us. The result of the one is that we choose good things; of the other that we accomplish them, and bring them to their end. Therefore the prophet says, I will remember You from the land of Jordan, and from the little hill of Hermon. Psalm 42:6 The people which were in Babylon say this: being there, I will remember You.

7. Therefore let us also, as being in Babylon, [do the same]. For although we are not sitting among warlike foes, yet we are among enemies. For some [of them] indeed were sitting as captives, but others did not even feel their captivity, as Daniel, as the three children cf. Psalm 137:1; who even while they were in captivity became in that very country more glorious even than the king who had carried them captive. And he who had taken them captive does obeisance to the captives.

Do you see how great virtue is? When they were in actual captivity he waited on them as masters. He therefore was the captive, rather than they. It would not have been so marvelous if when they were in their native country, he had come and done them reverence in their own land, or if they had been rulers there. But the marvelous thing is, that after he had bound them, and taken them captive, and had them in his

own country, he was not ashamed to do them reverence in the sight of all, and to offer an oblation. Daniel 2:46

Do you see that the really splendid things are those which relate to God, whereas human things are a shadow? He knew not, it seems, that he was leading away masters for himself, and that he cast into the furnace those whom he was about to worship. But to them, these things were as a dream.

Let us fear God, beloved, let us fear [Him]: even should we be in captivity, we are more glorious than all men. Let the fear of God be present with us, and nothing will be grievous, even though thou speak of poverty, or of disease, or of captivity, or of slavery, or of any other grievous thing: Nay even these very things will themselves work together for us the other way. These men were captives, and the king worshipped them: Paul was a tent-maker, and they sacrificed to him as a God.

8. Here a question arises: Why, you ask, did the Apostles prevent the sacrifices, and rend their clothes, and divert them from their attempt, and say with earnest lamentation, What are you doing? We also are men of like passions with you Acts 14:15; whereas Daniel did nothing of this kind.

For that he also was humble, and referred [the] glory to God no less than they, is evident from many places. Especially indeed is it evident, from the very fact of his being beloved by God. For if he had appropriated to himself the honor belonging to God, He would not have suffered him to live, much less to be in honor. Secondly, because even with great openness he said, And as to me, O King, this secret has not been revealed to me through any wisdom that is in me. Daniel 2:30 And again; he was in the den for God's sake, and when the prophet brought him food, he says, For God has remembered me. Daniel 14:38 Thus humble and contrite was he.

He was in the den for God's sake, and yet he counted himself unworthy of His remembrance, and of being heard. Yet we though daring [to commit] innumerable pollutions, and being of all men most polluted, if we be not heard at our first prayer, draw back. Truly, great is the distance between them and us, as great as between heaven and earth, or if there be any greater.

What do you say? After so many achievements, after the miracle which had been wrought in the den, do you account yourself so humble? Yea, he says; for whatever things we have done, we are unprofitable servants. Luke 17:10 Thus by anticipation did he fulfill the evangelical precept, and accounted himself nothing. For God has remembered me, he said. His prayer again, of how great lowliness of mind it is full. And again the three children said thus, We have sinned, we have committed iniquity. Daniel 4:6 And everywhere they show their humility.

And yet Daniel had occasions innumerable for being puffed up; but he knew that these also came to him on account of his not being puffed up, and he did not destroy his treasure. For among all men, and in the whole world he was celebrated, not only because the king cast himself on his face and offered sacrifice to him, and accounted him to be a God, who was himself honored as God in all parts of the world: for he ruled over the whole [earth]; (and this is evident from Jeremiah. Who puts on the earth, says he, as a garment. See Jeremiah 43:12 and Psalm 104:2 And again, I have given it to Nebuchadnezzar My servant Jeremiah 27:6, and again from what he [the King] says in his letter). And because he was held in admiration not only in the place where he was, but everywhere, and was greater than if the rest of the nations had been present and seen him; when even by letters [the King] confessed his submission and the miracle. But yet again for his wisdom he was also held in admiration, for it is said, Are you wiser than Daniel? Ezekiel 28:3 And after all these things he was thus humble, dying ten thousand times for the

Lord's sake.

Why then, you ask, being so humble did he not repel either the adoration which was paid him by the king, or the offerings?

9. This I will not say, for it is sufficient for me simply to mention the question, and the rest I leave to you, that at least in this way I may stir up your thoughts. (This however I conjure you, to choose all things for the fear of God, having such examples; and because in truth we shall obtain the things here also, if we sincerely lay hold on the things which are to come.) For that he did not do this out of arrogance, is evident from his saying, Your gifts be to yourself. Daniel 5:17

For besides this also again is another question, how while in words he rejected it, in deed he received the honor, and wore the chain [of gold]. Daniel 5:29

Moreover while Herod on hearing the cry It is the voice of a god and not of a man, inasmuch as he gave not God the glory, burst in sunder, and all his bowels gushed out Acts 12:22-23; see 1:18, this man received to himself even the honor belonging to God, not words only.

However it is necessary to say what this is. In that case [at Lystra] the men were falling into greater idolatry, but in this [of Daniel] not so. How? For his being thus accounted of, was an honor to God. Therefore he said in anticipation, And as to me, not through any wisdom that is in me. Daniel 2:30 And besides he does not even appear to have accepted the offerings. For he [the king] said (as it is written) that they should offer sacrifice, but it did not appear that the act followed. But there [at Lystra] they carried it even to sacrificing the bulls, and they called the one Jupiter and the other Mercurius. Acts 14:12

The chain [of gold] then he accepted, that he might make himself known; the offering however why does it not appear that he rejected it? For in the other case too they did not do it, but they attempted it, and the Apostles hindered them; wherefore here also he ought at once to have rejected [the adoration]. And there it was the entire people: here the King. Why he did not divert him [Daniel] expressed by anticipation, [viz.] that [the king] was not making an offering [to him] as to a God, to the overthrow of religious worship, but for the greater wonder. How so? It was on God's account that [Nebuchadnezzar] made the decree; wherefore [Daniel] did not mutilate the honor [offered]. But those others [at Lystra] did not act thus, but supposed them to be indeed gods. On this account they were repelled.

And here, after having done him reverence, he does these things: for he did not reverence him as a God, but as a wise man.

But it is not clear that he made the offering: and even if he did make it, yet not that it was with Daniel's acceptance.

And what [of this], that he called him Belteshazzar, the name of his own god? Thus [it seems] they accounted their gods to be nothing wonderful, when he called even the captive thus; he who commands all men to worship the image, manifold and of various colors, and who adores the dragon.

Moreover the Babylonians were much more foolish than those at Lystra. Wherefore it was not possible at once to lead them on to this. And many [more] things one might say: but thus far these suffice.

If therefore we wish to obtain all good things, let us seek the things of God. For as they who seek the things of this world fail both of them and of the others, so they who prefer the things of God, obtain both.

Let us then not seek these but those, that we may attain also to the good things promised 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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