

Hebrews 11:28-36

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon explores the transformative power of faith as demonstrated in biblical events and its implications for believers today.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:28-36

Topics: "Faith And Miracles", "Overcoming Trials"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the power of faith as exemplified in various biblical stories. Through faith, believers kept the Passover, passed through the Red Sea, and saw the walls of Jericho fall. Rahab, the harlot, was saved by her faith. The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in overcoming challenges, achieving miracles, and obtaining salvation, even in the face of persecution and trials.

Transcript

Through faith, he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the first-born should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea, as by dry land; which the Egyptians assaying to do, were drowned. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about seven days. By faith, the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

1. Paul is wont to establish many things incidently, and is very full of thoughts. For such is the grace of The Spirit. He does not comprehend a few ideas in a multitude of words, but includes great and manifold thought in brevity of expressions. Observe at least how, in the midst of exhortation, and when discoursing about faith, of what a type and mystery he reminds us, whereof we have the reality. Through faith (he says) he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the first-born should touch them.

But what is the sprinkling of blood? A lamb was slain in every household, and the blood was smeared on the door-posts, and this was a means of warding off the Egyptian destruction. If then the blood of a lamb preserved the Jews unhurt in the midst of the Egyptians, and under so great a destruction, much more will the blood of Christ save us, who have had it sprinkled not on the door-posts, but in our souls. For even now also the Destroyer is going about in this depth of night: but let us be armed with that Sacrifice. (He calls the sprinkling anointing.) For God has brought us out from Egypt, from darkness, from idolatry.

Although what was done, was nothing, what was achieved was great. For what was done was blood; but was achieved, was salvation, and the stopping, and preventing of destruction. The angel feared the blood; for he knew of what it was a Type; he shuddered, thinking on the Lord's death; therefore he did not touch the door-posts.

Moses said, Smear, and they smeared, and were confident. And you, having the Blood of the Lamb Himself, are you not confident?

2. By faith, they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land. Again he compares one whole people with another, lest they should say, we cannot be as the saints.

By faith (he says) they passed through the Red Sea, as by dry land, which the Egyptians assaying to do, were drowned. Here he leads them also to a recollection of the sufferings in Egypt.

How, by faith? Because they had hoped to pass through the sea, and therefore they prayed: or rather it was Moses who prayed. Do you see that everywhere Faith goes beyond human reasonings, and weakness and lowliness? Do you see that at the same time they both believed, and feared punishment, both in the blood on the doors, and in the Red Sea?

And he made it clear that it was [really] water, through those that fell into it, and were choked; that it was not a mere appearance: but as in the case of the lions those who were devoured proved the reality of the facts, and in the case of the fiery furnace, those who were burnt; so here also you see that the same things become to the one a cause of salvation and glory, and to the other of destruction.

So great a good is Faith. And when we fall into perplexity, then are we delivered, even though we come to death itself, even though our condition be desperate. For what else was left [for them]? They were unarmed, compassed about by the Egyptians and the sea; and they must either be drowned if they fled, or fall into the hands of the Egyptians. But nevertheless [He] saved them from impossibilities. That which was spread under the one as land, overwhelmed the others as sea. In the former case it forgot its nature: in the latter it even armed itself against them. cf. Wisdom 19:20

3. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about for seven days. For assuredly the sound of trumpets is not able to throw down stones, though one blow for ten thousand years; but Faith can do all things.

Do you see that in all cases it is not by natural sequence, nor yet by any law of nature that it was changed, but all is done contrary to expectation? Accordingly in this case also all is done contrary to expectation. For inasmuch as he had said again and again, that we ought to trust to the future hopes, he introduced all this argument with reason, showing that not now [only], but even from the beginning all the miracles have been accomplished and achieved by means of it.

By faith, the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, having received the spies with peace. It would then be disgraceful, if you should appear more faithless even than a harlot. Yet she [merely] heard what the men related, and immediately believed. Whereupon the end also followed; for when all perished, she alone was preserved. She did not say to herself, I shall be with my many friends. She did not say, Can I possibly be wiser than these judicious men who do not believe -- and shall I believe? She said no such thing, but believed what had taken place, which it was likely that they would suffer.

Hebrews 11:32

4. Hebrews 11:32 And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell. After this he no longer puts down the names: but having ended with an harlot, and put them to shame by the quality of the person, he no longer enlarges on the histories, lest he should be thought tedious. However he does not set them aside, but runs over them, [doing] both very judiciously, avoiding satiety, and not spoiling the closeness of arrangement; he was neither altogether silent, nor did he speak so as to annoy; for he effects both points. For when a man is contending vehemently [in argument], if he persist in contending, he wearies out the hearer, annoying him when he is already persuaded, and gaining the reputation of vain ambitiousness. For he ought to accommodate himself to what is expedient.

And what do I more say (he says)? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also and Samuel, and of the prophets.

Some find fault with Paul, because he puts Barak, and Samson, and Jephthah in these places. What do you say? After having introduced the harlot, shall he not introduce these? For do not tell me of the rest of their life, but only whether they did not believe and shine in Faith.

Hebrews 11:33

And the prophets, he says, Hebrews 11:33 who through faith subdued kingdoms. You see that he does not here testify to their life as being illustrious; for this was not the point in question: but the enquiry thus far was about their faith. For tell me whether they did not accomplish all by faith?

By faith, he says, they subdued kingdoms; those with Gideon. Wrought righteousness; who? The same. Plainly he means here, kindness.

I think it is of David that he says they obtained promises. But of what sort were these? Those in which He said that his seed should sit upon his throne. Psalm 132:12

Hebrews 11:34

Stopped the mouths of lions, Hebrews 11:34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword. See how they were in death itself, Daniel encompassed by the lions, the three children abiding in the furnace, the Israelites, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, in various temptations; and yet not even so did they despair. For this is Faith; when things are turning out adversely, then we ought to believe that nothing adverse is done, but all things in due order.

Escaped the edge of the sword. I think that he is again speaking of the three children.

Out of weakness were made strong. Here he alludes to what took place at their return from Babylon. For out of weakness, is out of captivity. When the condition of the Jews had now become desperate, when they were no better than dead bones, who could have expected that they would return from Babylon, and not return only; but also wax valiant and turn to flight armies of aliens? 'But to us,' some one says, 'no such thing has happened.' But these are figures of the things to come.

Hebrews 11:35

Women received their dead raised to life again. Hebrews 11:35 He here speaks of what occurred in regard to the prophets, Elisha, [and] Elijah; for they raised the dead.

5. Hebrews 11:35 And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. But we have not obtained a Resurrection. I am able however, he means, to show that they also were cut off, and did not accept [deliverance], that they might obtain a better resurrection. For why, tell me, when it was open to them to live, did they not choose it? Were they not evidently looking for a better life? And they who had raised up others, themselves chose to die; in order to obtain a better resurrection, not such as the children of those women.

Here I think he alludes both to John and to James. For beheading is called torturing. It was in their power still to behold the sun. It was in their power to abstain from reproving [sinners], and yet they chose to die; even they who had raised others chose to die themselves, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Hebrews 11:36

Hebrews 11:36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonment. He ends with these; with things that come nearer home. For these [ex amples] especially bring consolation, when the distress is from the same cause, since even if you mention something more extreme, yet unless it arise from the same cause, you have effected nothing. Therefore he concluded his discourse with this, mentioning bonds, imprisonments, scourges, stonings, alluding to the case of Stephen, also to that of Zacharias.

Wherefore he added, They were slain with the sword. What do you say? Some escaped the edge of the sword, and some were slain by the sword. Hebrews 11:34 What is this? Which do you praise? Which do you admire? The latter or the former? Nay, he says: the former indeed, is appropriate to you, and the latter, because Faith was strong even unto death itself, and it is a type of things to come. For the wonderful qualities of Faith are two, that it both accomplishes great things, and suffers great things, and counts itself to suffer nothing.

And you can not say (he says) that these were sinners and worthless. For even if you put the whole world against them, I find that they weigh down the beam and are of greater value. What then were they to receive in this life? Here he raises up their thoughts, teaching them not to be riveted to things present, but to mind things greater than all that are in this present life, since the world is not worthy of them. What then do you wish to receive here? For it were an insult to you, should you receive your reward here.

6. Let us not then mind worldly things, nor seek our recompense here, nor be so beggarly. For if the whole world is not worthy of them, why do you seek after a part of it? And with good reason; for they are friends of God.

Now by the world does he mean here the people, or the creation itself? Both: for the Scripture is wont to use the word of both. If the whole creation, he would say, with the human beings that belong to it, were put in the balance, they yet would not be of equal value with these; and with reason. For as ten thousand measures of chaff and hay would not be of equal value to ten pearls, so neither they; for better is one that does the will of the Lord, than ten thousand transgressors Sirach 16:3; meaning by ten thousand not [merely] many, but an infinite multitude.

Consider of how great value is the righteous man. Joshua the Son of Nun said, Let the sun stand still at Gibeon, the moon at the valley of Elom Joshua 10:12, and it was so. Let then the whole world come, or rather two or three, or four, or ten, or twenty worlds, and let them say and do this; yet shall they not be able. But the friend of God commanded the creatures of his Friend, or rather he besought his Friend, and

the servants yielded, and he below gave command to those above. Do you see that these things are for service fulfilling their appointed course?

This was greater than the [miracles] of Moses. Why (I ask)? Because it is not a like thing to command the sea and the heavenly [bodies]. For that indeed was also a great thing, yea very great, nevertheless it was not at all equal [to the other].

Why was this? The name of Joshua [Jesus], was a type. For this reason then, and because of the very name, the creation revered him. What then! Was no other person called Jesus? [Yes]; but this man was on this account so called in type; for he used to be called Hoshea. Therefore the name was changed: for it was a prediction and a prophecy. He brought in the people into the promised land, as Jesus [does] into heaven; not the Law; since neither did Moses [bring them in], but remained without. The Law has not power to bring in, but grace. Do you see the types which have been before sketched out from the beginning? He laid his commands on the creation, or rather, on the chief part of the creation, on the very head itself as he stood below; that so when you see Jesus in the form of Man saying the same, you may not be disturbed, nor think it strange. He, even while Moses was living, turned back wars. Thus, even while the Law is living, He directs all things; but not openly.

7. But let us consider how great is the virtue of the saints. If here they work such things, if here they do such things, as the angels do, what then above? How great is the splendor they have?

Perhaps each of you might wish to be such as to be able to command the sun and moon. (At this point what would they say who assert that the heaven is a sphere? For why did he not [merely] say, Let the sun stand still, but added Let the sun stand still at the valley of Elom, that is, he will make the day longer? This was done also in the time of Hezekiah. The sun went back. This again is more wonderful than the other, to go the contrary way, not having yet gone round his course.)

We shall attain to greater things than these if we will. For what has Christ promised us? Not that we shall make the sun stand still, or the moon, nor that the sun shall retrace his steps, but what? I and the Father will come unto him, He says, and We will make our abode with him. John 14:23 What need have I of the sun and the moon, and of these wonders, when the Lord of all Himself comes down and abides with me? I need these not. For what need I any of these things? He Himself shall be to me for Sun and for Light. For, tell me, if you had entered into a palace, which would you choose, to be able to rearrange some of the things which have been fixed there, or so to make the king a familiar friend, as to persuade him to take up his abode with you? Much rather the latter than the former.

8. But what wonder is it, says some one, that what a man commands, Christ should also? But Christ (you say) needs not the Father, but acts of His own authority, you say. Well. Therefore first confess and say, that he needs not the Father, and acts of His own authority: and then I will ask you, whether His prayer is not in the way of condescension and arrangement (for surely Christ was not inferior to Joshua the Son of Nun), and that He might teach us? For as when you hear a teacher lisping, and saying over the alphabet, thou dost not say that he is ignorant; and when he asks, Where is such a letter? You know that he does not ask in ignorance, but because he wishes to lead on the scholar; in like manner Christ also did not make His prayer as needing prayer, but desiring to lead you on, that you may continually apply yourself to prayer, that you may do it without ceasing, soberly, and with great watchfulness.

And by watching, I do not mean, merely the rising at night, but also the being sober in our prayers during the day. For such an one is called watchful. Since it is possible both in praying by night to be asleep, and

in praying by day to be awake, when the soul is stretched out towards God, when it considers with whom it holds converse, to whom its words are addressed, when it has in mind that angels stand by with fear and trembling, while he approaches gaping and scratching himself.

9. Prayer is a mighty weapon if it be made with suitable mind. And that you may learn its strength, continued entreaty has overcome shamelessness, and injustice, and savage cruelty, and overbearing rashness. For He says, Hear what the unjust judge says. Luke 18:6 Again it has overcome sloth also, and what friendship did not effect, this continued entreaty did: and although he will not give him because he is his friend (He says), yet because of his importunity he will rise and give to him. Luke 11:8 And continued assiduity made her worthy who was unworthy. It is not meet (He says) to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs. Yea! Lord! she says, for even the dogs eat [the crumbs] from their master's table. Matthew 15:26-27 Let us apply ourselves to Prayer. It is a mighty weapon if it be offered with earnestness, if without vainglory, if with a sincere mind. It has turned back wars, it has benefited an entire nation though undeserving. I have heard their groaning (He says) and have come down to deliver them. Acts 7:34 It is itself a saving medicine, and has power to prevent sins, and to heal misdeeds. In this the desolate widow was assiduous. 1 Timothy 5:5

If then we pray with humility, smiting our breast as the publican, if we utter what he did, if we say, Be merciful to me a sinner Luke 18:13, we shall obtain all. For though we be not publicans, yet have we other sins not less than his.

For do not tell me, that you have gone wrong in some small matter [only], since the thing has the same nature. For as a man is equally called a homicide whether he has killed a child or a man, so also is he called overreaching whether he be overreaching in much or in little. Yea and to remember injuries too, is no small matter, but even a great sin. For it is said, the ways of those who remember injuries [tend] to death. Proverbs 12:28, Septuagint And He that is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of hell, and he that calls his brother a fool Matthew 5:22, and senseless, and numberless such things.

But we partake even of the tremendous mysteries unworthily, and we envy, and we revile. And some of us have even oftentimes been drunk. But each one of these things, even itself by itself, is enough to cast us out of the kingdom, and when they even come all together, what comfort shall we have? We need much penitence, beloved, much prayer, much endurance, much perseverance, that we may be enabled to attain the good things which have been promised to us.

10. Let us then say, even we, Be merciful to me a sinner, nay rather, let us not say it only, but let us also be thus minded; and should another call us so, let us not be angry. He heard the words, I am not as this Publican Luke 18:11, and was not provoked thereby, but filled with compunction. He accepted the reproach, and he put away the reproach. The other spoke of the wound, and he sought the medicine. Let us say then, Be merciful to me a sinner Luke 18:13; but even if another should so call us, let us not be indignant.

But if we say ten thousand evil things of ourselves, and are vexed when we hear them from others, then there is no longer humility, nor confession, but ostentation and vainglory. Is it ostentation (you say) to call one's self a sinner? Yes; for we obtain the credit of humility, we are admired, we are commended; whereas if we say the contrary of ourselves, we are despised. So that we do this too for the sake of credit. But what is humility? It is when another reviles us, to bear it, to acknowledge our fault, to endure evil

speaking. And yet even this would not be [a mark] of humility but of candor. But now we call ourselves sinners, unworthy, and ten thousand other such names, but if another apply one of them to us, we are vexed, we become savage. Do you see that this is not confession, nor even candor? You said of yourself that you are such an one: be not indignant if you hear it also said by others, and art reproved.

In this way your sins are made lighter for you, when others reproach you: for they lay a burden on themselves indeed, but you they lead onwards into philosophy. Hear what the blessed David says, when Shimei cursed him, Let him alone (he says) the Lord has bidden him, that He might look on my humiliation (he says): And the Lord will requite me good for his cursing on this day. 2 Samuel 16:11-12

But thou while saying evil things of yourself, even in excess, if you hear not from others the commendations that are due to the most righteous, art enraged. Do you see that you are trifling with things that are no subjects for trifling? For we even repudiate praises in our desire for other praises, that we may obtain yet higher panegyrics, that we may be more admired. So that when we decline to accept commendations, we do it that we may augment them. And all things are done by us for credit, not for truth. Therefore all things are hollow, all impracticable. Wherefore I beseech you now at any rate to withdraw from this mother of evils, vainglory, and to live according to what is approved by God, that so you may attain to the good things to come, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom to the Father be glory, together with His Holy and good Spirit, now and ever and world without end. Amen.

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