

Hebrews 11:7-12

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in action, highlighting the examples of Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, and encouraging the listeners to look forward to the city of God.

Scripture: Isaiah 35:10, John 15:14, Romans 1:18, 1 Corinthians 2:9, Hebrews 11:7-8, Hebrews 11:10-11, Hebrews 11:13
Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Eternal Blessings"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the powerful examples of faith in Hebrews, highlighting Noah's obedience in building the ark despite the lack of visible signs, Abraham's obedience in leaving his homeland without knowing the destination, and Sarah's faith in conceiving a child in old age. He emphasizes the importance of faith in receiving God's promises, even if they are not fully realized in this life. Chrysostom urges the congregation to reflect on their own sins and shortcomings, to repent, and to strive for the eternal blessings promised by God.

Transcript

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by Faith.

1. By faith (he says) Noah being warned of God. As the Son of God, speaking of His own coming, said, In the days of Noah they married and were given in marriage Luke 17:26-27, therefore the Apostle also recalled to their mind an appropriate image. For the example of Enoch, was an example only of Faith; that of Noah, on the other hand, of unbelief also. And this is a complete consolation and exhortation, when not only believers are found approved, but also unbelievers suffer the opposite.

For what does he say? By faith being warned of God. What is being warned of God? It is, It having been foretold to him. But why is the expression divine communication Luke 2:26 used? For in another place also it is said, and it was communicated to him by the Spirit, and again, and what says the divine communication? Romans 11:4 Do you see the equal dignity of the Spirit? For as God reveals, so also does the Holy Spirit. But why did he speak thus? The prophecy is called a divine communication.

Of things not seen as yet, he says, that is of the rain.

Moved with fear, prepared an ark. Reason indeed suggested nothing of this sort; For they were marrying and being given in marriage; the air was clear, there were no signs [of change]: but nevertheless he feared: By faith (he says) Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.

How is it, By the which he condemned the world? He showed them to be worthy of punishment, since they were not brought to their senses even by the preparation.

And he became (he says) heir of the righteousness which is by Faith: that is, by his believing God he was shown to be righteous. For this is the [part] of a soul sincerely disposed towards Him and judging nothing more reliable than His words, just as Unbelief is the very contrary. Faith, it is manifest, works righteousness. For as we have been warned of God respecting Hell, so was he also: and yet at that time he was laughed at; he was reviled and ridiculed; but he regarded none of these things.

Hebrews 11:8-9

2. By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. [By faith]: for (tell me) whom did he see to emulate? He had for father a Gentile, and an idolater; he had heard no prophets; he knew not whither he was going. For as they of the Hebrews who believed, looked to these [patriarchs] as having enjoyed blessings innumerable, he shows that none of them obtained anything as yet; all are unrewarded; no one as yet received his reward. He escaped from his country and his home, and went out not knowing whither he went.

And what marvel, if he himself [were so], when his seed also dwelt in this same way? For seeing the promise disproved (since He had said, To you will I give this land, and to your seed Genesis 12:7; 13:15), he saw his son dwelling there; and again his grandson saw himself dwelling in a land not his own; yet was he nowise troubled. For the affairs of Abraham happened as we might have expected, since the promise was to be accomplished afterwards in his family (although it is said even to himself, To you, and to your seed, not, to you through your seed, but to you and to your seed): still neither he, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, enjoyed the promise. For one of them served for hire, and the other was driven out: and he himself even was failing through fear: and while he took some things indeed in war, others, unless he had had the aid of God, would have been destroyed. On this account [the Apostle] says, with the heirs of the same promise; not himself alone, he means; but the heirs also.

Hebrews 11:13

3. These all died in faith, he says, not having obtained the promises. At this place it is worth while to make two enquiries; how, after saying that [God] translated Enoch, and he was not found, so that he did not see death, does he say, These all died in Faith. And again, after saying, they not having obtained the promises, he declares that Noah had received a reward, to the saving of his house, and that Enoch had been translated, and that Abel yet speaks, and that Abraham had gained a hold on the land, and yet he says, These all died in Faith, not having obtained the promises. What then is [meant]?

It is necessary to solve the first [difficulty], and then the second. These all (he says) died in faith. The word all is used here not because all had died, but because with that one exception all these had died, whom we know to be dead.

And the [statement] not having obtained the promises, is true: for surely the promise to Noah was not to be this [which is here spoken of]. But further, of what kind of promises is he speaking? For Isaac and Jacob received the promises of the land; but as to Noah and Abel and Enoch, what kind of promises did they receive? Either then he is speaking concerning these three; or if concerning those others also, the promise was not this, that Abel should be admired, nor that Enoch should be translated, nor that Noah should be preserved; but these things came to them for their virtue's sake, and were a sort of foretaste of things to come. For God from the beginning, knowing that the human race needs much condescension, bestows on us not only the things in the world to come, but also those here; as for instance, Christ said even to the disciples, Whosoever has left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life. Matthew 19:29 And again, Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33 Do you see that these things are given by Him in the way of addition, that we might not faint? For as the athletes have the benefit of careful attention, even when engaged in the combat, but do not then enjoy entire ease, living under rules, yet afterwards they enjoy it entire: so God also does not grant us here to partake of entire ease. For even here He does give [some].

4. But having seen them afar off, he says, and embraced them. Here he hints at something mystical: that they received beforehand all the things which have been spoken concerning things to come; concerning the resurrection, concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, concerning the other things, which Christ proclaimed when He came, for these are the promises of which he speaks. Either then he means this, or, that they did not indeed receive them, but died in confidence respecting them, and they were [thus] confident through Faith only.

Having seen them afar off: four generations before; for after so many [generations], they went up out of Egypt.

And embraced them, says he, and were glad. They were so persuaded of them as even to embrace [or salute] them, from the metaphor of persons on ship-board seeing from afar the longed-for cities: which, before they enter them, they take and occupy by words of greeting.

Hebrews 11:10

For they looked (he says) for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Do you see that they received them in this sense, in their already accepting them and being confident respecting them. If then to be confident is to receive, it is in your power also to receive. For these, although they enjoyed not those [blessings], yet still saw them by their longing desire. Why now do these things happen? That we might be put to shame, in that they indeed, when things on earth were promised them, regarded them not, but sought the future city: whereas God again and again speaks to us of the city which is above, and yet we seek that which is here. He said to them, I will give you the things of the present [world]. But when He saw, or rather, when they showed themselves worthy of greater things, then He no longer suffers them to receive these, but those greater ones; wishing to show us that they are worthy of greater things, being unwilling to be bound to these. As if one should promise playthings to an intelligent child, not that he might receive them, but by way of exhibiting his philosophy, when he asks for things more important. For this is to show, that they held off from the land with so great earnestness, that they did not even accept what was given. Wherefore their posterity receive it on this account, for themselves were worthy of the land.

What is, the city which has foundations? For are not these [which are visible] foundations? In comparison of the other, they are not.

Whose Builder and Maker is God. O! What an encomium on that city!

Hebrews 11:11

5. By faith also Sarah herself, he says. Here he began [speaking] in a way to put them to shame, in case, that is, they should show themselves more faint-hearted than a woman. But possibly some one might say, How by faith, when she laughed? Nay, while her laughter indeed was from unbelief, her fear [was] from Faith, for to say, I laughed not Genesis 18:15, arose from Faith. From this then it appears that when unbelief had been cleared out, Faith came in its place.

By faith also Sarah received strength to conceive seed even when she was past age. What is, to conceive seed? She who was become dead, who was barren, received power for the retaining of seed, for conception. For her imperfection was two-fold; first from her time of life for she was really old; secondly from nature, for she was barren.

Hebrews 11:12

Wherefore even from one they all sprang, as the stars of the sky, and as the sand which is by the sea-shore. Wherefore (he says) even from one they all sprang. Here he not only says that she bare [a child], but that she also became mother of so many as not even fruitful wombs [are mothers of]. As the stars, He says. How then is it that He often numbers them, although He said, As the stars of the heaven shall not be numbered, so neither shall your seed? Genesis 15:5 He either means the excess, or else [speaks of] those who are continually being born. For is it possible, tell me, to number their forefathers of one family as, such an one son of such an one, and such an one son of such an one? But here such are the promises of God, so skillfully arranged are His undertakings.

6. But if the things which He promised as additional, are so admirable, so beyond expectation, so magnificent, what will those be, to which these are an addition, to which these are somewhat over and above? What then can be more blessed than they who attain them? What more wretched than those who miss them? For if a man when driven out from his native country, is pitied by all; and when he has lost an inheritance is considered by all as an object of compassion, with what tears ought he to be bewailed, who fails of Heaven, and of the good things there stored up? Or rather, he is not even to be wept for: for one is wept for, when he suffers something of which he is not himself the cause; but when of his own choice he has entangled himself in evil, he is not worthy of tears, but of wailings; or rather then of mourning; since even our Lord Jesus Christ mourned and wept for Jerusalem, impious as it was. Truly we are worthy of weepings innumerable, of wailings innumerable. If the whole world should receive a voice, both stones, and wood, and trees, and wild beasts, and birds, and fishes, and in a word, the whole world, if receiving a voice it should bewail us who have failed of those good things, it would not bewail and lament enough. For what language, what intellect, can represent that blessedness and virtue, that pleasure, that glory, that happiness, that splendor? What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered into the heart of man 1 Corinthians 2:9, (he did not say, that they simply surpass [what we imagine]; but none has ever conceived) the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. For of what kind are those good things likely to be, of which God is the Preparer and Establisher? For if immediately after He had made us, when we had not yet done anything, He freely bestowed so great [favours], Paradise, familiar intercourse with Himself, promised us immortality, a life happy and freed from cares; what will He not

bestow on those who have labored and struggled so greatly, and endured on His behalf? For us He spared not His Only Begotten, for us when we were enemies He gave up His own Son to death; of what will He not count us worthy, having become His friends? What will He not impart to us, having reconciled us to Himself?

7. He both is abundantly and infinitely rich; and He desires and earnestly endeavors to obtain our friendship; we do not thus earnestly endeavor. What am I saying, 'do not earnestly endeavor'? We do not wish to obtain the good things as He wishes it. And what He has done shows that He wishes it more [than we]. For while, for our own sake, we with difficulty think lightly of a little gold: He, for our sake, gave even the Son who was His own. Let us make use of the love of God as we ought; let us reap the fruits of His friendship. For you are My friends (he says) if you do what I say to you. John 15:14 How wonderful! His enemies, who were at an infinite distance from Him, whom in all respects He excels by an incomparable superiority, these He has made His friends and calls them friends. What then should not one choose to suffer for the sake of this friendship? For the friendship of men we often incur danger, but for that of God, we do not even give up money. Our [condition] does indeed call for mourning, for mourning and tears and wailings, and loud lamentation and beating of the breast. We have fallen from our hope, we are humbled from our high estate, we have shown ourselves unworthy of the honor of God; even after His benefits we have become unfeeling, and ungrateful. The devil has stripped us of all our good things. We who were counted worthy to be sons; we His brethren and fellow-heirs have come to differ nothing from His enemies that insult Him.

Henceforward, what consolation shall there be for us? He called us to Heaven, and we have thrust ourselves down to hell. Swearing and lying and stealing and adultery, are poured out upon the earth. Hosea 4:2 Some mingle blood upon blood; and others do deeds worse than blood-shedding. Many of those that are wronged, many of those that are defrauded prefer ten thousand deaths to the suffering such things: and except they had feared God, would even have killed themselves, being so murderously disposed against themselves. Are not these things then worse than blood-shedding?

8. Woe is me, my soul! For the godly man is perished from the earth, and there is none upright among men Micah 7:1-2, Septuagint; let us also now cry out, first about our own selves: but aid me in my lamentation.

Perhaps some are even disgusted and laugh. For this very cause ought we to make our lamentations the more intense, because we are so mad and beside ourselves, that we do not know that we are mad, but laugh at things for which we ought to groan. O man! There is wrath revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men Romans 1:18; God will come manifestly: a fire will burn before Him, and round about Him will be a mighty tempest. Psalm 50:3 A fire will burn before Him, and consume His enemies on every side. Psalm 97:3 The day of the Lord is as a burning oven. Malachi 4:1 And no man lays up these things in his mind, but these tremendous and fearful doctrines are more despised than fables, and are trodden under foot. He that hears -- there is no one: while they who laugh and make sport are -- all. What resource will there be for us? Whence shall we find safety? We are undone, we are utterly consumed, we have become the laughingstock of our enemies, and a mockery for the heathen and the Demons. Now is the devil greatly elated; he glories and is glad. The angels to whom we had been entrusted are all ashamed and in sadness: there is no man to convert [you]: all means have been used by us in vain, and we seem to you as idle talkers. It is seasonable even now to call on the heaven, because there is no man that hears; to take to witness the elements: Hear, O heaven! And give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken. Isaiah 1:2

Give a hand, stretch it forth, O you who have not yet been overwhelmed, to them who are undone through their drunkenness: ye that are whole to them that are sick, you that are sober-minded to them that are mad, that are giddily whirling round.

Let no man, I beseech you, prefer the favor of his friend to his salvation; and let violence and rebuke look to one thing only -- his benefit. When one has been seized by a fever, even slaves lay hold of their Masters. For when that is pressing on him, throwing his mind into confusion, and a swarm of slaves are standing by, they recognize not the law of Master and Servant, in the calamity of the Master.

Let us collect ourselves, I exhort you: there are daily wars, submersions [of towns], destructions innumerable all around us, and on every side the wrath of God is enclosing us as in a net. And we, as though we were well-pleasing to Him, are in security. We all make our hands ready for unjust gains, none for helping others: all for plundering, none for protecting: each one is in earnest as to how he shall increase his possessions; no one as to how he shall aid the needy: each one has much anxiety how he may add to his wealth; no one how he may save his own soul. One fear possesses all, lest (you say) we should become poor; no man is in anguish and trembling lest we should fall into hell. These things call for lamentations, these call for accusation, these call for reprobation.

9. But I do not wish to speak of these things, but I am constrained by my grief. Forgive me: I am forced by sorrow to utter many things, even those which I do not wish. I see that our wound is grievous, that our calamity is beyond comfort, that woes have overtaken us greater than the consolation. We are undone. O that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears Jeremiah 9:1, that I might lament. Let us weep, beloved, let us weep, let us groan.

Possibly there may be some here who say, He talks to us of nothing but lamentation, nothing but tears. It was not my wish, believe me, it was not my wish, but rather to go through a course of commendations and praises: but now it is not the season for these. Beloved, it is not lamenting which is grievous, but the doing things which call for lamentations. Sorrow is not the thing to shrink from, but the committing things that call for sorrow. Do not thou be punished, and I will not mourn. Do not die, and I will not weep. If the body indeed lies dead, you call on all to grieve with you, and thinkest those without sympathy who do not mourn: And when the soul is perishing, do you tell us not to mourn?

But I cannot be a father, if I do not weep. I am a father full of affection. Hear how Paul exclaims, My little children, of whom I travail in birth again Galatians 4:19: what mother in child-birth utters cries so bitter as he! Would that it were possible for you to see the very fire that is in my heart, and you would know, that I burn [with grief] more intense than any woman, or gift that suffers untimely widowhood. She does not so mourn over her husband, nor any father over his son, as I do over this multitude that is here with us.

I see no progress. Everything turns to calumnies and accusations. No man makes it his business to please God; but (he says) 'let us speak evil of such an one or such an one.' 'Such an one is unfit to be among the Clergy.' 'Such an one does not lead a respectable life.' When we ought to be grieving for our own evils, we judge others, whereas we ought not to do this, even when we are pure from sins. For who makes you to differ (he says) and what have you which thou did not receive? But if you have received it, why do you glory, as though you had not received it? 1 Corinthians 4:7 And thou, why do you judge your brother Romans 14:10, being yourself full of innumerable evils? When you say, Such an one is a bad man, and a spendthrift, and vicious, think of yourself, and examine strictly your own [condition], and you will repent of what you have said. For there is no, no not any, such powerful stimulus to virtue, as the recollecting of our

sins.

If we turn over these two things in our minds, we shall be enabled to attain the promised blessings, we shall be enabled to cleanse ourselves and wipe away [what is amiss]. Only let us take serious thought sometime; let us be anxious about the matter, beloved. Let us grieve here in reflection, that we may not grieve yonder in punishment, but may enjoy the everlasting blessings, where pain and sorrow and sighing are fled away Isaiah 35:10, that we may attain to the good things which surpass man's understanding, in Christ Jesus our Lord, for to Him is glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

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