

Hebrews 6:7-12

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the importance of receiving God's word with reverence and actively producing good works in faith and love.

Scripture: Psalm 2:11, Proverbs 24:11, Luke 10:37, Romans 1:18, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Galatians 6:10, 2 Timothy 2:25, Hebrews 6:9

Topics: "Faith And Works", "Christian Stewardship"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of heeding the warnings in the Bible with fear and trembling, emphasizing the consequences of bearing thorns and thistles instead of fruits. He urges believers to fear falling into sin, to be diligent in their faith, and to show compassion and kindness to all, not just to fellow believers. Chrysostom encourages the congregation to imitate the Samaritan in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, showing mercy and care to those in need, regardless of their background or beliefs.

Transcript

For the Earth which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it, and brings forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God. But if it bear thorns and briars it is rejected, and near unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.

1. Let us hear the oracles of God with fear, with fear and much trembling. For (it is said) Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto Him with trembling. Psalm 2:11 But if even our joy and our exultation ought to be with trembling, of what punishment are we not worthy, if we listen not with terror to what is said, when the things spoken, as now, are themselves fearful?

For having said that it is impossible for those who have fallen away to be baptized a second time, and to receive remission through the laver, and having pointed out the awfulness of the case, he goes on: for the earth which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it, and brings forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God. But if it bear thorns and thistles, it is rejected, and near unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

Let us then fear, beloved! This threat is not Paul's, these words are not of man: they are of the Holy Ghost, of Christ that speaks in him. Is there then any one that is clear from these thorns? And even if we were clear, not even so ought we to be confident, but to fear and tremble lest at any time thorns should spring

up in us. But when we are thorns and thistles through and through, whence (tell me) are we confident? And are becoming supine? What is it which makes us inert? If he that thinks he stands ought to fear lest he fall; for (he says) Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall 1 Corinthians 10:12; he that falls, how anxious ought he to be that he may rise up again! If Paul fears, lest that by any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway 1 Corinthians 9:27; and he who had been so approved is afraid lest he should become disapproved: what pardon shall we have who are already disapproved, if we have no fear, but fulfill our Christianity as a custom, and for form's sake. Let us then fear, beloved: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. Romans 1:18 Let us fear, for it is revealed not against impiety only, but against all unrighteousness. What is against all unrighteousness? [Against all] both small and great.

2. In this passage he intimates the lovingkindness of God towards man: and the teaching [of the Gospel] he calls rain: and what he said above, when for the time ye ought to be teachers Hebrews 5:12, this he says here also. Indeed in many places the Scripture calls the teaching rain. For (it says) I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it Isaiah 5:6, speaking of the vineyard. The same which in another place it calls a famine of bread, and a thirst of water. Amos 8:11 And again, The river of God is full of waters. Psalm 65:9

For land, he says, which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it. Here he shows that they received and drank in the word, yea and often enjoyed this, and yet even so they were not profited. For if (he means) you had not been tilled, if you had enjoyed no rains, the evil would not have been so great. For (it is said) If I had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin. John 15:22 But if you have often drunk and received [nourishment], wherefore have you brought forth other things instead of fruits? For (it is said) I waited that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth thorns. Isaiah 5:2

You see that everywhere the Scripture calls sins thorns. For David also says, I was turned into mourning when a thorn was fixed in me. Psalm 32:4, so Septuagint For it does not simply come on us, but is fixed in; and even if but a little of it remain in, even if we take it not out entirely, that little of itself in like manner causes pain, as in the case of a thorn. And why do I say, 'that little of itself'? Even after it has been taken out, it leaves therein for a long time the pain of the wound. And much care and treatment is necessary, that we may be perfectly freed from it. For it is not enough merely to take away the sin, it is necessary also to heal the wounded place.

But I fear however lest the things said apply to us more than to others. For, he says, the earth which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it. We are ever drinking, ever hearing, but when the sun is risen Matthew 13:6 we straightway lose our moisture, and therefore bring forth thorns. What then are the thorns? Let us hear Christ saying, that the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. Matthew 13:22

3. For the earth which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it, he says, and brings forth meet herbs. Because nothing is so meet as purity of life, nothing so suitable as the best life, nothing so meet as virtue.

And brings forth (says he) herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God. Here he says that God is the cause of all things, giving the heathen a blow, who ascribed the production of fruits to the power of the earth. For (he says) it is not the hands of the husbandman which stir up the earth to bear fruits, but the command from God. Therefore he says, receives blessing from God.

And see how in speaking of the thorns, he said not, bringing forth thorns, nor did he use this word expressive of what is useful; but what? Bearing [literally putting out] thorns, as if one should say, forcing out, throwing out.

Rejected (he says) and near unto cursing. Oh! How great consolation in this word! For he said near unto cursing, not a curse. Now he that has not yet fallen into a curse, but has come to be near [thereto], may also come to be far off [therefrom].

And not by this only did he encourage them, but also by what follows. For he did not say rejected and near unto cursing, which shall be burned, but what? Whose end is to be burned, if he continue [such] (he means) unto the end. So that, if we cut out and burn the thorns, we shall be able to enjoy those good things innumerable and to become approved, and to partake of blessing.

And with good reason did he call sin a thistle, saying that which bears thorns and thistles; for on whatever side you lay hold on it, it wounds and stings, and it is unpleasant even to look at.

4. Having therefore sufficiently rebuked them, and alarmed and wounded them, he in turn heals them, so as not to cast them down too much, and make them supine. For he that strikes one that is dull, makes him more dull. So then he neither flatters them throughout, lest he should make them supine, nor does he wound them throughout, but having inserted a little to wound them, he applies much to heal in what follows.

For what does he say? We speak not these things, as having condemned you, nor as thinking you to be full of thorns, but fearing lest this should come to pass. For it is better to terrify you by words, that you may not suffer by the realities. And this is specially of Paul's wisdom.

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Moreover he did not say, We think, or, we conjecture, or, we expect, or, we hope, but what? Hebrews 6:9 But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. Which word he also used in writing to the Galatians: But I am persuaded of you in the Lord, that you will be none otherwise minded. Galatians 5:10 For in that instance, inasmuch as they were greatly to be condemned, and he could not praise them from things present, he does it from things future (that you will be none otherwise minded, he says): he said not, you are, but ye will be none otherwise minded. But here he encourages them from things present. We are persuaded better things of you, beloved, and things that accompany to salvation, though we thus speak. And since he was not able to say so much from things present, he confirms his consolation from things past; and says,

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For God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and the love, which you have showed toward His name, in that you have ministered unto the saints and do minister. O how did he here restore their spirit, and give them fresh strength, by reminding them of former things, and bringing them to the necessity of not supposing that God had forgotten. (For he cannot but sin who is not fully assured concerning his hope, and says that God is unrighteous. Accordingly he obliged them by all means to look forward to those future things. For one who despairs of present things, and has given up exerting himself, may be restored by [the prospect of] things future.) As he himself also said in writing to the Galatians, You did run well Galatians 5:7: and again, Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain. Galatians 3:4

And as in this place he puts the praise with the reproof, saying, When for the time ye ought to be teachers Hebrews 5:12, so also there, I marvel that you are so soon removed. Galatians 1:6 With the reproof is the praise. For respecting great things we marvel, when they fail. You see that praise is concealed under the accusation and the blame. Nor does he say this concerning himself only, but also concerning all. For he said not, I am persuaded, but we are persuaded better things of you, even good things (he means). He says this either in regard to matters of conduct, or to the recompense. In the next place, having said above, that it is rejected and near unto a curse, and that it shall be for burning, he says, we do not by any means speak this of you. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and love. Hebrews 6:10

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5. Why then did we say these things? But we desire that everyone of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that you be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

We desire, he says, and we do not therefore merely labor for, or even so far as words go, wish this. But what? We desire that you should hold fast to virtue, not as condemning your former conduct (he means), but fearing for the future. And he did not say, 'not as condemning your former conduct, but your present; for you have fainted, you have become too indolent'; but see how gently he indicated it, and did not wound them.

For what does he say? But we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence unto the end. For this is the admirable part of Paul's wisdom, that he does not expressly show that they had given in, that they had become negligent. For when he says, We desire that every one of you-- it is as if one should say, I wish you to be always in earnest; and such as you were before, such to be now also, and for the time to come. For this made his reproof more gentle and easy to be received.

And he did not say, I will, which would have been expressive of the authority of a teacher, but what is expressive of the affection of a father, and what is more than willing, we desire. All but saying, Pardon us, even if we say what is distasteful.

We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of your hope unto the end. Hope (he means) carries us through: it recovers us again. Be not wearied out, do not despair, lest your hope be in vain. For he that works good hopes also good, and never despairs of himself.

That ye may not become dull. Still become; and yet he said above, seeing you have become dull of hearing. Hebrews 5:11 Observe however how he limited the dullness to the hearing. And here he hints the very same thing; instead of 'that you may not continue in it,' he says [this]. But again he leads on to that future time for which they were not yet responsible; saying in effect that you may not become too slothful: since for that which is not yet come we could not be responsible. For he who in regard to the present time is exhorted to be in earnest, as being remiss, will perhaps become even more slothful, but he who is exhorted with reference to the future, not so.

We desire (he says) that every one of you. Great is his affection for them: he cares equally for great and small; moreover he knows all, and overlooks no one, but shows the same tender care for each, and equal value for all: from which cause also he the rather persuaded them to receive what was distasteful in his words.

That ye be not slothful, he says. For as inactivity hurts the body, so also inactivity as to what is good renders the soul more supine and feeble.

6. But followers (he says) of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises. And who they are, he tells afterwards. He said before, Imitate your own former well-doings. Then, lest they should say, What? He leads them back to the Patriarch: bringing before them examples of well-doing indeed from their own history, but of the thought of being forsaken, from the Patriarch; that they might not suppose that they were disregarded and forsaken as worthy of no account, but might know that it is [the portion] of the very noblest men to make the journey of life through trials; and that God has thus dealt with great and admirable men.

Now we ought (he says) to bear all things with patience: for this also is believing: whereas if He say that He gives and thou immediately receive, how have you also believed? Since in that case this is no longer of your faith, but of Me, the Giver. But if I say that I give, and give after an hundred years, and you have not despaired; then have you accounted Me worthy to be believed, then you have the right opinion concerning Me. You see that oftentimes unbelief arises not from want of hope only, but also from faintheartedness, and want of patience, not from condemning him who made the promise.

For God (he says) is not unrighteous to forget your love and the zeal which you have showed toward His Name, in that you have ministered unto the saints, and do minister. He testifies great things of them, not deeds only; but deeds done with alacrity, which he says also in another place, and not only so, but they gave themselves also to the Lord and to us. 2 Corinthians 8:5

Which (he says) you have showed toward His Name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. See how again he soothes them, by adding and do minister. Still even at this time (he says) you are ministering, and he raises them up by showing that they had done [what they did] not to them [the saints], but to God. Which you have showed (he says); and he said not unto the saints, but towards God, for this is toward His Name. It is for His Name's sake (he means) that you have done all. He therefore who has the enjoyment from you of so great zeal and love, will never despise you nor forget you.

7. Hearing these things, let us, I beseech you, minister to the saints. For every believer is a saint in that he is a believer. Though he be a person living in the world, he is a saint. For (he says) the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife by the husband. 1 Corinthians 7:14 See how the faith makes the saintship. If then we see even a secular person in misfortune, let us stretch out a hand [to him]. Let us not be zealous for those only who dwell in the mountains; they are indeed saints both in manner of life and in faith; these others however are saints by their faith, and many of them also in manner of life. Let us not, if we see a monk [cast] into prison, in that case go in; but if it be a secular person, refuse to go in. He also is a saint and a brother.

What then (you say) if he be unclean and polluted? Listen to Christ saying, Judge not that you be not judged. Matthew 7:1 Do thou act for God's sake. Nay, what am I saying? Even if we see a heathen in misfortune, we ought to show kindness to him, and to every man without exception who is in misfortunes, and much more to a believer who is in the world. Listen to Paul, saying, Do good unto all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10

But I know not whence this [notion] has been introduced, or whence this custom has prevailed. For he that only seeks after the solitaries, and is willing to do good to them alone, and with regard to others on the contrary is over-curious in his enquiries, and says, 'unless he be worthy, unless he be righteous, unless he

work miracles, I stretch out no hand'; [such an one] has taken away the greater part of charity, yea and in time he will in turn destroy the very thing itself. And yet that is charity, [which is shown] towards sinners, towards the guilty. For this is charity, not the pitying those who have done well, but those who have done wrong.

8. And that you may understand this, listen to the Parable: A certain man (it is said) went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves Luke 10:30, etc.; and when they had beaten him, they left him by the way-side, having badly bruised him. A certain Levite came, and when he saw him, he passed by; A priest came, and when he saw him, he hastened past; a certain Samaritan came, and bestowed great care upon him. For he bound up his wounds Luke 10:34, dropped oil on them, set him upon his ass, brought him to the inn, said to the host, Take care of him Luke 10:35; and (observe his great liberality), and I, he says, will give you whatsoever you shall expend. Who then is his neighbor? He, it is said, that showed mercy on him. Go then also, He says, and do likewise. Luke 10:37 And see what a parable He spoke. He said not that a Jew did [so and so] to a Samaritan, but that a Samaritan showed all that liberality. Having then heard these things, let us not care only for those that are of the household of faith Galatians 6:10, and neglect others. So then also thou, if you see any one in affliction, be not curious to enquire further. His being in affliction involves a just claim on your aid. For if when you see an ass choking you raise him up, and dost not curiously enquire whose he is, much more about a man one ought not to be over-curious in enquiring whose he is. He is God's, be he heathen or be he Jew; since even if he is an unbeliever, still he needs help. For if indeed it had been committed to you to enquire and to judge, you would have well said thus, but, as it is, his misfortune does not suffer you to search out these things. For if even about men in good health it is not right to be over-curious, nor to be a busybody in other men's matters, much less about those that are in affliction.

9. But on another view what [shall we say]? Did you see him in prosperity, in high esteem, that you should say that he is wicked and worthless? But if you see him in affliction, do not say that he is wicked. For when a man is in high credit, we fairly say these things; but when he is in calamity, and needs help, it is not right to say that he is wicked. For this is cruelty, inhumanity, and arrogance. Tell me what was ever more iniquitous than the Jews. But nevertheless while God punished them, and that justly, yea, very justly, yet He approved of those who had compassion on them, and those who rejoiced over them He punished. Amos 6:6 For they were not grieved, it is said, at the affliction of Joseph.

And again it is said Redeem [Ransom] those who are ready to be slain: spare not. Proverbs 24:11 (He said not, enquire curiously, and learn who he is; and yet, for the most part, they who are led away to execution are wicked,) for this especially is charity. For he that does good to a friend, does it not altogether for God's sake: but he that [does good] to one unknown, this man acts purely for God's sake. Do not spare your money, even if it be necessary to spend all, yet give.

But we, when we see persons in extreme distress, bewailing themselves, suffering things more grievous than ten thousand deaths, and oftentimes unjustly, we [I say] are sparing of our money, and unsparing of our brethren; we are careful of lifeless things, but neglect the living soul. And yet Paul says, in meekness instruct those that oppose themselves, if perhaps God should give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil who are taken captive by him, at His will. 2 Timothy 2:25-26 If perhaps, he says; you see of how great long-suffering the word is full.

Let us also imitate Him, and despair of no one. For the fishermen too, when they have cast many times [suppose it], have not succeeded; but afterwards having cast again, have gained all. So we also expect

that you will all at once show to us ripe fruit. For the husbandman too, after he has sown, waits one day or two days, and is a long while in expectation: and all at once he sees the fruits springing up on every side. This we expect will take place in your case also by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and also to the Holy Ghost be glory, might, honor, now and for ever and world without end. Amen.

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