

Hebrews 9:1-14

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon explains the significance of the tabernacle in the Old Testament and how it foreshadows the coming of Christ, who offers a greater sacrifice to purify the soul and conscience.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:2, Luke 6:25, 1 Corinthians 15:32, Hebrews 9:6-13

Topics: "New Covenant", "Christ's Sacrifice"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the significance of the Old Covenant's ordinances and the transition to the New Covenant through Christ as the High Priest of good things. He emphasizes the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over the blood of animals, highlighting the purification of the soul through Christ's Blood. Chrysostom warns against the dangers of dead works and the defilement they bring, urging believers to serve the Living God with a pure conscience. He addresses the seriousness of sin, particularly the sin of covetousness, and the need for repentance and mourning to attain true joy and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Transcript

Then verily the first [covenant] had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly Sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the Candlestick, and the Table, and the Show-bread, which is called the Sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer and the Ark of the Covenant overlaid round about with gold: wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant: and over it the Cherubim of glory, shadowing the Mercy-seat: of which we cannot now speak particularly.

1. He has shown from the Priest, from the Priesthood, from the Covenant, that that [dispensation] was to have an end. From this point he shows it from the fashion of the tabernacle itself. How? This, he says, [was] the Holy and the Holy of Holies. The holy place then is a symbol of the former period (for there all things are done by means of sacrifices); but the Holy of Holies of this that is now present.

And by the Holy of Holies he means Heaven; and by the veil, Heaven, and the Flesh enters into that within the veil: that is to say, through the veil of His flesh. Supra, 6:19; Hebrews 10:20

And it were well to speak of this passage, taking it up from the beginning. What then does he say? Then verily the first had also (the first what? The Covenant). Ordinances of Divine service. What are ordinances? symbols or rights. Then; as (he means) it has not now. He shows that it had already given place, for (he says) it had at that time; so that now, although it stood, it is not.

And the worldly Sanctuary. He calls it worldly, inasmuch as it was permitted to all to tread it, and in the same house the place was manifest where the priests stood, where the Jews, the Proselytes, the Grecians, the Nazarites. Since, therefore even Gentiles were permitted to tread it, he calls it worldly. For surely the Jews were not the world.

For (he says) there was a tabernacle made; the first, which is called holy, wherein was the Candlestick, and the Table, and the Show-bread. These things are symbols of the world.

And after the second veil (There was then not one veil [only], but there was a veil without also) the tabernacle, which is called holy of holies. Observe how everywhere he calls it a tabernacle in regard of [God's] encamping there.

Which had (he says) a golden Censer, and the ark of the Covenant overlaid round about with gold: wherein was the golden pot that held the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant. All these things were venerable and conspicuous memorials of the Jewish obstinacy; and the tables of the covenant (for they broke them) And the manna (for they murmured; and therefore handing on the memory thereof to posterity, He commanded it to be laid up in a golden pot). And Aaron's rod that budded. And over it, the Cherubim of glory. What is the Cherubim of glory? He either means the glorious, or those which are under God. Shadowing the mercy-seat.

But in another point of view also he extols these things in his discourse, in order to show that those which come after them are greater. Of which (he says) we cannot now speak particularly. In these words he hints that these were not merely what was seen, but were a sort of enigmas. Of which (he says) we cannot now speak particularly, perhaps because they needed a long discourse.

Hebrews 9:6

2. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle accomplishing the service [of God]. That is, these things indeed were [there], but the Jews did not enjoy them: they saw them not. So that they were no more theirs than [ours] for whom they prophesied.

Hebrews 9:7

Hebrews 9:7 But into the second the High Priest went alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people. You see that the types were already laid down beforehand? For, lest they should say, how is there [but] one sacrifice? he shows that this was so from the beginning, since at least the more holy and the awful [sacrifice] was [but] one. And how did the High Priest offer once for all? Thus were they wont [to do] from the beginning, for then also (he says) the High Priest offered once for all.

And well said he, not without blood. (Not indeed without blood, yet not this blood, for the business was not so great.) He signifies that there shall be a sacrifice, not consumed by fire, but rather distinguished by blood. For inasmuch as he called the Cross a sacrifice, though it had neither fire, nor logs, nor was offered many times, but had been offered in blood once for all; he shows that the ancient sacrifice also was of this kind, was offered once for all in blood.

Which he offers for himself; again, for himself; and for the errors of the people. He said not sins; but errors, that they might not be high-minded. For even if you have not sinned intentionally, yet unintentionally you have erred, and from this no man is pure.

And everywhere [he adds] the for himself, showing that Christ is much greater. For if He be separated from our sins, how did He offer for Himself? Why then did you say these things (one says)? Because this is [a mark] of One that is superior.

Hebrews 9:8

3. Thus far there is no speculation. But from this point he philosophizes and says, Hebrews 9:8 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the Holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing. For this cause (he says) have these things been thus ordained, that we might learn that the Holy of Holies, that is, Heaven, is as yet inaccessible. Let us not then think (he says) that because we do not enter them, they have no existence: inasmuch as neither did we enter the Most Holy [place].

Hebrews 9:9

Which (he says) was established as a figure for the time then present. What does he mean by the time present? That before the coming of Christ: For after the coming of Christ, it is no longer a time present: For how [could it be], having arrived, and being ended?

There is too something else which he indicates, when he says this, which [was] a figure for the time then present, that is, became the Type. In which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. You see now what is [the meaning of] The Law made nothing perfect, Hebrews 7:19, and If that first [covenant] had been faultless. Hebrews 8:7 How? As pertaining to the conscience. For the sacrifices did not put away the defilement from the soul, but still were concerned with the body: after the law of a carnal commandment. Hebrews 7:16 For certainly they could not put away adultery, nor murder, nor sacrilege. Do you see? You have eaten this, You have not eaten that, which are matters of indifference. [Which stood] only in meats and drinks, and various washings. You have drunk this, he says: and yet nothing has been ordained concerning drink, but he said this, treating them as trifles.

Hebrews 9:10

And [in] various washings, and carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation. For this is the righteousness of the flesh. Here he depreciates the sacrifices, showing that they had no efficacy, and that they existed till the time of reformation, that is, they waited for the time that reforms all things.

Hebrews 9:11

4. But Christ having come an High Priest of good things that have come by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands. Here he means the flesh. And well did he say, greater and more perfect, since God The Word and all the power of The Spirit dwells therein; For God gives not the Spirit by measure [unto Him]. John 3:34 And more perfect, as being both unblamable, and setting right greater things.

That is, not of this creation. See how [it was] greater. For it would not have been of the Spirit Matthew 1:20, if man had constructed it. Nor yet is it of this creation; that is, not of these created things, but spiritual, of the Holy Ghost.

Do you see how he calls the body tabernacle and veil and heaven. By a greater and more perfect tabernacle. Through the veil, that is, His flesh. Hebrews 10:20 And again, into that within the veil. Hebrews 6:19 And again, entering into the Holy of Holies, to appear before the face of God. Hebrews 9:24 Why then does he this? According as one thing or a different one is signified. I mean for instance, the Heaven is a veil, for as a veil it walls off the Holy of Holies; the flesh [is a veil] hiding the Godhead; and the tabernacle likewise holding the Godhead. Again, Heaven [is] a tabernacle: for the Priest is there within.

But Christ (he says) having come an High Priest : he did not say, become, but having come, that is, having come for this very purpose, not having been successor to another. He did not come first and then become [High Priest], but came and became at the same time. And he did not say having come an High Priest of things which are sacrificed, but of good things that have come, as if his discourse had not power to put the whole before us.

Hebrews 9:12

Neither by the blood, he says, of goats and calves (All things are changed) but by His own Blood (he says) He entered in once for all into the Holy Place. See thus he called Heaven. Once for all (he says) He entered into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption. And this [expression] having obtained, was [expressive] of things very difficult, and that are beyond expectation, how by one entering in, He obtained everlasting redemption.

Hebrews 9:13-14

5. Next [comes] that which is calculated to persuade.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the Blood of Christ, who through the Holy Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God.

For (he says) if the blood of bulls is able to purify the flesh, much rather shall the Blood of Christ wipe away the defilement of the soul. For that you may not suppose when you hear [the word] sanctifies, that it is some great thing, he marks out and shows the difference between each of these purifyings, and how the one of them is high and the other low. And says it is [so] with good reason, since that is the blood of bulls, and this the Blood of Christ.

Nor was he content with the name, but he sets forth also the manner of the offering. Who (he says) through the Holy Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, that is, the victim was without blemish, pure from sins. For this is [the meaning of] through the Holy Spirit, not through fire, nor through any other things.

Shall purge your conscience (he says) from dead works. And well said he from dead works; if any man touched a dead body, he was polluted; and here, if any man touch a dead work, he is defiled through his conscience. To serve (he says) the Living and true God. Here he declares that it is not [possible] while one has dead works to serve the Living and true God, for they are both dead and false; and with good reason [he says this].

6. Let no man then enter in here with dead works. For if it was not fit that one should enter in who had touched a dead body, much more one that has dead works: for this is the most grievous pollution. And dead works are, all which have not life, which breathe forth an ill odor. For as a dead body is useful to

none of the senses, but is even annoying to those who come near it, so sin also at once strikes the reasoning faculty, and does not allow the understanding itself to be calm, but disturbs and troubles it.

And it is said too that a plague at its very commencement corrupts the living bodies; such also is sin. It differs in nothing from a plague, not [indeed] corrupting the air first, and then the bodies, but darting at once into the soul. Do you see not how persons affected with the plague, are inflamed: how they writhe about, how they are full of an ill scent, how disfigured are their countenances: how wholly unclean they are? Such are they also that sin, though they see it not. For, tell me, is not he who is possessed by the desire of riches or carnal lust, worse than any one that is in a fever? Is he not more unclean than all these, when he does and submits to all shameless things?

7. For what is baser than a man who is in love with money? Whatever things women that are harlots or on the stage refuse not to do neither does he [refuse]. Rather it is likely that they would refuse [to do] a thing, rather than he. He even submits to do things fit for slaves, flattering those whom he ought not; again he is overbearing where he ought not to be, being inconsistent in every respect. He will sit by flattering wicked people, and oftentimes depraved old men, that are of much poorer and meaner condition than himself; and will be insolent and overbearing to others that are good and in all respects virtuous. You see in both respects the baseness, the shamelessness: he is both humble beyond measure, and boastful.

Harlots however stand in front of their house, and the charge against them is that they sell their body for money: yet, one may say, poverty and hunger compel them (although at the most this is no sufficient excuse: for they might gain a livelihood by work). But the covetous man stands, not before his house, but before the midst of the city, making over to the devil not his body but his soul; so that he [the devil] is in his company, and goes in unto him, as verily to a harlot: and having satisfied all his lusts departs; and all the city sees it, not two or three persons only.

And this again is the peculiarity of harlots, that they are his who gives the gold. Even if he be a slave or a gladiator, or any person whatever, yet if he offers their hire, they receive him. But the free, even should they be more noble than all, they do not accept without the money. These men also do the same. They turn away right thoughts when they bring no money; but they associate with the abominable, and actually with those that fight with wild beasts, for the sake of the gold, and associate with them shamelessly and destroy the beauty of the soul. For as those women are naturally of odious appearance and black, and awkward and gross, and formless and ill-shaped, and in all respects disgusting, such do the souls of these men become, not able to conceal their deformity by their outward paintings. For when the ill look is extreme, whatever they may devise, they cannot succeed in their feigning.

For that shamelessness makes harlots, hear the prophet saying, You were shameless towards all; you had a harlot's countenance. Jeremiah 3:3 This may be said to the covetous also: You were shameless towards all, not towards these or those, but towards all. How? Such an one respects neither father, nor son, nor wife, nor friend, nor brother, nor benefactor, nor absolutely any one. And why do I say friend, and brother, and father? He respects not God Himself, but all [we believe] seems to him a fable; and he laughs, intoxicated by his great lust, and not even admitting into his ears any of the things which might profit him.

But O! Their absurdity! And then what things they say! Woe to you, O Mammon, and to him that has you not. At this I am torn to pieces with indignation: for woe to those who say these things, though they say them in jest. For tell me, has not God uttered such a threat as this, saying, You cannot serve two masters?

Matthew 6:24 And do you set at nought the threat? Does not Paul say that it is Idolatry, and does he not call the covetous man an Idolater? Ephesians 5:5

8. And you stand laughing, raising a laugh after the manner of women of the world who are on the stage. This has overthrown, this has cast down everything. Our affairs, both our business and our politeness, are turned into laughing; there is nothing steady, nothing grave. I say not these things to men of the world only; but I know those whom I am hinting at. For the Church has been filled with laughter. Whatever clever thing one may say, immediately there is laughter among those present: and the marvelous thing is that many do not leave off laughing even during the very time of the prayer.

Everywhere the devil leads the dance, he has entered into all, is master of all. Christ is dishonored, is thrust aside; the Church is made no account of. Do ye not hear Paul saying, Let filthiness and foolish talking and jesting Ephesians 5:4 be put away from you? He places jesting along with filthiness, and do you laugh? What is foolish talking? That which has nothing profitable. And do you, a solitary, laugh at all and relax your countenance? thou that art crucified? thou that art a mourner? Tell me, do you laugh? Where do you hear of Christ doing this? Nowhere: but that He was sad indeed oftentimes. For even when He looked on Jerusalem, He wept; and when He thought on the Traitor He was troubled; and when He was about to raise Lazarus, He wept; and do you laugh? If he who grieves not over the sins of others deserves to be accused, of what consideration will he be worthy, who is without sorrow for his own sins, yea laughs at them? This is the season of grief and tribulation, of bruising and bringing matter [the body], of conflicts and sweatings, and do you laugh? Do you not see how Sarah was rebuked? Do you not hear Christ saying, Woe to them that laugh, for they shall weep? Luke 6:25 Thou chantest these things every day, for, tell me, what do you say? I have laughed? By no means; but what? I labored in my groaning. Psalm 6:6

But perchance there are some persons so dissolute and silly as even during this very rebuke to laugh, because forsooth we thus discourse about laughter. For indeed such is their derangement, such their madness, that it does not feel the rebuke.

The Priest of God is Standing, offering up the prayer of all: and are you laughing, having no fears? And while he is offering up the prayers in trembling for you, do you despise all? Do you not hear the Scripture saying, Woe, you despisers! cf. Acts 13:41 from Habakkuk 1:5; do you not shudder? Do you not humble yourself? Even when you enter a royal palace, you order yourself in dress, and look, and gait, and all other respects: and here where there is the true Palace, and things like those of heaven, do you laugh? You indeed, I know, see [them] not, but hear thou that there are angels present everywhere, and in the house of God especially they stand by the King, and all is filled by those incorporeal Powers.

This my discourse is addressed to women also, who in the presence of their husbands indeed do not dare readily to do this, and even if they do it, it is not at all times, but during a season of relaxation, but here they do it always. Tell me, O woman, do you cover your head and laugh, sitting in the Church? Did you come in here to make confession of sins, to fall down before God, to entreat and to supplicate for the transgressions you have wretchedly committed, and do you do this with laughter? How then will you be able to propitiate Him?

9. But (one says) what harm is there in laughter? There is no harm in laughter; the harm is when it is beyond measure, and out of season. Laughter has been implanted in us, that when we see our friends after a long time, we may laugh; that when we see any persons downcast and fearful, we may relieve

them by our smile; not that we should burst out violently and be always laughing. Laughter has been implanted in our soul, that the soul may sometimes be refreshed, not that it may be quite relaxed. For carnal desire also is implanted in us, and yet it is not by any means necessary that because it is implanted in us, therefore we should use it, or use it immoderately: but we should hold it in subjection, and not say, Because it is implanted in us, let us use it.

Serve God with tears, that you may be able to wash away your sins. I know that many mock us, saying, Tears directly. Therefore it is a time for tears. I know also that they are disgusted, who say, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. 1 Corinthians 15:32 Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Ecclesiastes 1:2 It is not I that say it, but he who had had the experience of all things says thus: I built for me houses, I planted vineyards, I made me pools of water, [I had] men servants and women servants. Ecclesiastes 2:4-7 And what then after all these things? Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Ecclesiastes 12:8

Let us mourn therefore, beloved, let us mourn in order that we may laugh indeed, that we may rejoice indeed in the time of unmixed joy. For with this joy [here] grief is altogether mingled: and never is it possible to find it pure. But that is simple and undeceiving joy: it has nothing treacherous, nor any admixture. In that joy let us delight ourselves; that let us pursue after. And it is not possible to obtain this in any other way, than by choosing here not what is pleasant, but what is profitable, and being willing to be afflicted a little, and bearing all things with thanksgiving. For thus we shall be able to attain even to the Kingdom of Heaven, of which may we all be counted worthy, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom to the Father be glory, together with the Holy Ghost, now and for ever and world without end. Amen.

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