

Hebrews 9:15-23

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on Hebrews 9:15-23 emphasizes the significance of Christ's death as the foundation of the New Testament and calls believers to pursue a life of virtue and spiritual elevation.

Scripture: Matthew 26:28, John 8:18, John 13:34, John 14:23, John 15:26, John 17:24, Romans 8:38, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 6:11, Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 9:15

Topics: "Christ Mediator", "Eternal Inheritance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the significance of Christ as the Mediator of the New Testament, emphasizing how His death brought redemption and the promise of an eternal inheritance to believers. He explains the concept of a testament, illustrating how Christ's death secured the New Testament and purified believers. Chrysostom highlights the heavenly nature of believers and the need to rise above earthly concerns to dwell in spiritual heights. He encourages the congregation to pursue virtue and willfully choose the path to heavenly inheritance through Christ.

Transcript

And for this cause He is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first Testament, they which are called might receive the promise of an eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead, otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator lives. Whereupon neither the first [testament] was dedicated without blood.

1. It was probable that many of those who were more weakly would especially distrust the promises of Christ because He had died. Paul accordingly out of a superabundance introduced this illustration, deriving it from common custom. Of what kind is it? He says, indeed, on this very account we ought to be of good courage. On what account? Because testaments are established and obtain their force when those who have made them are not living, but dead. And for this cause, he says, He is the Mediator of the New Testament. A Testament is made towards the last day, [the day] of death.

And a testament is of this character: It makes some heirs, and some disinherited. So in this case also: I will that where I am, Christ says, they also may be. John 17:24 And again of the disinherited, hear Him saying, I pray not for all, but for them that believe in Me through their word. John 17:20 Again, a testament has relation both to the testator, and to the legatees; so that they have some things to receive, and some to do. So also in this case. For after having made promises innumerable, He demands also something

from them, saying, a new commandment I give unto you. John 13:34 Again, a testament ought to have witnesses. Hear Him again saying, I am one that bear witness of Myself, and He that sent Me bears witness of Me. John 8:18 And again, He shall testify of Me John 15:26, speaking of the Comforter. The twelve Apostles too He sent, saying, Bear ye witness before God.

2. And for this cause (he says) He is the Mediator of the New Testament. What is a Mediator? A mediator is not lord of the thing of which he is mediator, but the thing belongs to one person, and the mediator is another: as for instance, the mediator of a marriage is not the bridegroom, but one who aids him who is about to be married. So then also here: The Son became Mediator between the Father and us. The Father willed not to leave us this inheritance, but was angry against us, and was displeased [with us] as being estranged [from Him]; He accordingly became Mediator between us and Him, and prevailed with Him.

And what then? How did He become Mediator? He brought words from [Him] and brought [them to us], conveying over what came from the Father to us, and adding His own death thereto. We had offended: we ought to have died: He died for us and made us worthy of the Testament. By this is the Testament secure, in that henceforward it is not made for the unworthy. At the beginning indeed, He made His dispositions as a father for sons; but after we had become unworthy, there was no longer need of a testament, but of punishment.

Why then (he would say) do you think upon the law? For it placed us in a condition of so great sin, that we could never have been saved, if our Lord had not died for us; the law would not have had power, for it is weak.

3. And he established this no longer from common custom only, but also from what happened under the old [Testament]: which especially influenced them. There was no one who died there: how then could that [Testament] be firm? In the same way (he says). How? For blood was there also, as there is blood here. And if it was not the blood of the Christ, do not be surprised; for it was a type. Whereupon, he says, neither was the first [Testament] dedicated without blood.

What is was dedicated? Was confirmed, was ratified. The word whereupon means for this cause. It was needful that the symbol of the Testament should be also that of death.

Hebrews 9:19-20

For why (tell me) is the book of the testament sprinkled? For (he says) when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament, which God has enjoined unto you. Tell me then why is the book of the testament sprinkled, and also the people, except on account of the precious blood, figured from the first? Why with hyssop? It is close and retentive. And why the water? It shows forth also the cleansing by water. And why the wool? This also [was used], that the blood might be retained. In this place blood and water show forth the same thing, for baptism is His passion.

Hebrews 9:21-22

4. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission. Why the almost? Why did he qualify it? Because those [ordinances] were not a perfect purification, nor a perfect remission,

but half-complete and in a very small degree. But in this case He says, This is the blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you, for the remission of sins. Matthew 26:28

Where then is the book? He purified their minds. They themselves then were the books of the New Testament. But where are the vessels of the ministry? They are themselves. And where is the tabernacle? Again, they are; for I will dwell in them, He says, and walk in them. 2 Corinthians 6:16

5. But they were not sprinkled with scarlet wool, nor yet with hyssop. Why was this? Because the cleansing was not bodily but spiritual, and the blood was spiritual. How? It flowed not from the body of irrational animals, but from the Body prepared by the Spirit. With this blood not Moses but Christ sprinkled us, through the word which was spoken; This is the blood of the New Testament, for the remission of sins. This word, instead of hyssop, having been dipped in the blood, sprinkles all. And there indeed the body was cleansed outwardly, for the purifying was bodily; but here, since the purifying is spiritual, it enters into the soul, and cleanses it, not being simply sprinkled over, but gushing forth in our souls. The initiated understand what is said. And in their case indeed one sprinkled just the surface; but he who was sprinkled washed it off again; for surely he did not go about continually stained with blood. But in the case of the soul it is not so, but the blood is mixed with its very substance, making it vigorous and pure, and leading it to the very unapproachable beauty.

6. Henceforward then he shows that His death is the cause not only of confirmation, but also of purification. For inasmuch as death was thought to be an odious thing, and especially that of the cross, he says that it purified, even a precious purification, and in regard to greater things. Therefore the sacrifices preceded, because of this blood. Therefore the lambs; everything was for this cause.

Hebrews 9:23

It was therefore necessary that the Patterns (he says) of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

And how are they patterns of things in the heavens? And what does he mean now by the things in the heavens? Is it Heaven? Or is it the Angels? None of these, but what is ours. It follows then that our things are in Heaven, and heavenly things are ours, even though they be accomplished on earth; since although angels are on earth, yet they are called Heavenly. And the Cherubim appeared on earth, but yet are heavenly. And why do I say appeared? Nay rather they dwell on earth, as indeed in Paradise: but this is nothing; for they are heavenly. And, Our conversation is in Heaven Philippians 3:20, and yet we live here.

But these are the heavenly things, that is, the philosophy which exists among us; those who have been called thereto.

With better sacrifices than these. What is better is better than something [else] that is good. Therefore the patterns also of things in the heavens have become good; for not even the patterns were evil: else the things whereof they are patterns would also have been evil.

7. If then we are heavenly, and have obtained such a sacrifice, let us fear. Let us no longer continue on the earth; for even now it is possible for him that wishes it, not to be on the earth. For to be and not to be on the earth is the effect of moral disposition and choice. For instance; God is said to be in Heaven. Wherefore? Not because He is confined by space, far from it, nor as having left the earth destitute of His presence, but by His relation to and intimacy with the Angels. If then we also are near to God, we are in

Heaven. For what care I about Heaven when I see the Lord of Heaven, when I myself have become a Heaven? For, He says, We will come, I and the Father, and will make our abode with him. John 14:23

Let us then make our soul a Heaven. The heaven is naturally bright; for not even in a storm does it become black, for it does not itself change its appearance, but the clouds run together and cover it. Heaven has the Sun; we also have the Sun of Righteousness. I said it is possible to become a Heaven; and I see that it is possible to become even better than Heaven. How? When we have the Lord of the Sun. Heaven is throughout pure and without spot; it changes not either in a storm or in the night. Neither let us then be so influenced either by tribulations or by the wiles of the devil Ephesians 6:11, but let us continue spotless and pure. Heaven is high and far from the earth. Let us also effect this [as regards ourselves]; let us withdraw ourselves from the earth, and exalt ourselves to that height, and remove ourselves far from the earth. Heaven is higher than the rains and the storms, and is reached by none of them. This we also can do, if we will.

It does appear to be, but is not really so affected. Neither then let us be affected, even if we appear to be so. For as in a storm, most men know not the beauty of [heaven,] but think that it is changed, while philosophers know that it is not affected at all, so with regard to ourselves also in afflictions; most men think that we are changed with them, and that affliction has touched our very heart, but philosophers know that it has not touched us.

8. Let us then become heaven, let us mount up to that height, and so we shall see men differing nothing from ants. I do not speak of the poor only, nor the many, but even if there be a general there, even if the emperor be there, we shall not distinguish the emperor, nor the private person. We shall not know what is gold, or what is silver, or what is silken or purple raiment: we shall see all things as if they were flies, if we be seated in that height. There is no tumult there, no disturbance, nor clamor.

And how is it possible (one says) for him who walks on the earth, to be raised up to that height? I do not tell it you in words, but I show you in fact those who have attained to that height. Who then are they?

I mean such as Paul, who being on earth, spent their lives in heaven. But why do I say in heaven? They were higher than the Heaven, yea than the other heaven, and mounted up to God Himself. For, who (he says) shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Romans 8:35 And again, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. 2 Corinthians 4:18 Do you see that he did not even see the things here? But to show you that he was higher than the heavens, hear him saying himself, For I am persuaded that neither death, or life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ. Romans 8:38-39

Do you see how thought, hurrying past all things, made him higher not than this creation only, not than these heavens, but even [than any other also] if any other there were? Have you seen the elevation of his mind? Have you seen what the tent-maker became, because he had the will, he who had spent his whole life in the market-place?

9. For there is no hindrance, no not any, but that we may rise above all men, if we have the will. For if we are so successful in arts that are beyond the reach of the generality, much more in that which does not require so great labor.

For, tell me, what is more difficult than to walk along a tight rope, as if on level ground, and when walking on high to dress and undress, as if sitting on a couch? Does not the performance seem to us to be so frightful, that we are not even willing to look at it, but are terrified and tremble at the very sight? And tell me, what is more difficult than to hold a pole upon your face, and when you have put up a child upon it, to perform innumerable feats and delight the spectators? And what is more difficult than to play at ball with swords? And tell me what is harder than thoroughly to search out the bottom of the sea? And one might mention innumerable other arts.

But easier than all these, if we have the will, is virtue, and the going up into Heaven. For here it is only necessary to have the will, and all [the rest] follows. For we may not say, I am unable, neither accuse the Creator. For if He made us unable, and then commands, it is an accusation against Himself.

10. How is it then (some one says) that many are not able? How is it then that many are not willing? For, if they be willing, all will be able. Therefore also Paul says, I would that all men were even as I myself 1 Corinthians 7:7, since he knew that all were able to be as himself. For he would not have said this, if it had been impossible. Do you wish to become [such]? Only lay hold on the beginning.

Tell me now, in the case of any arts, when we wish to attain them, are we content with wishing, or do we also engage with the things themselves? As for instance, one wishes to become a pilot; he does not say, I wish, and content himself with that, but he also puts his hand to the work. He wishes to become a merchant; he does not merely say, I wish, but he also puts his hand to the work. Again he wishes to travel abroad, and he does not say, I wish, but he puts his hand to the work. In everything then, wishing alone is not sufficient, but work must also be added; and when you wish to mount up to heaven, do you merely say, I wish?

How then (he says) did you say that willing is sufficient? [I meant] willing joined with deeds, the laying hold on the thing itself, the laboring. For we have God working with us, and acting with us. Only let us make our choice, only let us apply ourselves to the matter as to work, only let us think earnestly about it, only let us lay it to heart, and all follows. But if we sleep on, and as we snore expect to enter into heaven, how shall we be able to obtain the heavenly inheritance?

Let us therefore be willing, I exhort you, let us be willing. Why do we carry on all our traffic with reference to the present life, which tomorrow we shall leave? Let us choose then that Virtue which will suffice us through all eternity: wherein we shall be continually, and shall enjoy the everlasting good things; which may we all attain, 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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