

# Hebrews 9:24-10:9

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's sermon explores the supremacy of Christ's sacrifice and the importance of approaching God with purity and reverence.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 6:7, Luke 22:19, John 17:24, 1 Corinthians 2:11, Hebrews 9:24, Hebrews 9:26 - 10:2

**Topics:** "Christ's Sacrifice", "Holy Communion"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the significance of Christ's sacrifice, emphasizing how He entered Heaven to appear in the presence of God for us, offering Himself once to put away sin. He contrasts the earthly temple with the heavenly reality, highlighting Christ's role as both High Priest and sacrifice. Chrysostom explains the importance of partaking in the Communion with a pure conscience and heart, urging believers to approach the spiritual table reverently and consistently, not just as a ritual but as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice.

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## Transcript

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the High Priest enters into the Holy Place every year with blood of others, for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world. But now, once, in the end of the world has He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

1. The Jews greatly prided themselves on the temple and the tabernacle. Wherefore they said, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord. Jeremiah 7:4 For nowhere else in the earth was such a temple constructed as this, either for costliness, or beauty, or anything else. For God who ordained it, commanded that it should be made with great magnificence, because they also were more attracted and urged on by material things. For it had bricks of gold in the walls; and any one who wishes may learn this in the second [book] of Kings, and in Ezekiel, and how many talents of gold were then expended.

But the second [temple] was a more glorious building, both on account of its beauty, and in all other respects. Nor was it revered for this reason only, but also from its being One. For they were wont to resort there from the uttermost parts of the earth, whether from Babylon or from Ethiopia. And Luke shows this when he says in the Acts: There were dwelling there Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt

and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene. Acts 2:5-10 They then who lived in all parts of the world assembled there, and the fame of the temple was great.

What then does Paul do? What [he did] in regard to the sacrifices, that also he does here. For as there he set against [them] the death of Christ, so here also he sets the whole heaven against the temple.

2. And not by this alone did he point out the difference, but also by adding that The Priest is nearer to God: for he says, to appear in the presence of God. So that he made the matter august, not only by the [consideration of] heaven, but also by [that of Christ's] entering in [there]. For not merely through symbols as here, but He sees God Himself there.

Do you see that condescension through the lowly things have been said throughout? Why do you then any longer wonder that He intercedes there, where He places Himself as a High Priest? Nor yet, that He should offer Himself often, as the High Priest.

For Christ is not entered into the Holy Places made with hands (he says) which are the figures of the True. (These then are true; and those are figures, for the temple too has been so arranged, as the Heaven of Heavens.)

What do you say? He who is everywhere present, and who fills all things, does not He appear unless He enter into Heaven? You see that all these things pertain to the flesh.

To appear, he says, in the presence of God for us. What is for us? He went up (he means) with a sacrifice which had power to propitiate the Father. Wherefore (tell me)? Was He an enemy? The angels were enemies, He was not an enemy. For that the Angels were enemies, hear what he says, He made peace as to things on earth and things in Heaven. Colossians 1:20 So that He also entered into Heaven, now to appear in the presence of God for us. He now appears, but for us.

3. Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the High Priest enters into the Holy place every year with blood of others. Seest Thou how many are the differences? The often for the once; the blood of others, for His own. Great is the distance. He is Himself then both victim and Priest and sacrifice. For if it had not been so, and it had been necessary to offer many sacrifices, He must have been many times crucified. For then, he says, He must often have suffered since the foundation of the world.

In this place he has also veiled over something. But now once more in the end of the world. Why at the end of the world? After the many sins. If therefore, it had taken place at the beginning, then no one would have believed; and He must not die a second time, all would have been useless. But since later, there were many transgressions, with reason He then appeared: which he expresses in another place also, Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. But now once in the end of the world, has He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Romans 5:20

Hebrews 9:27

4. Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this, the Judgment. He next says also why He died once [only]: because He became a ransom by one death. It had been appointed (he says) unto men once to die. This then is [the meaning of] He died once, for all. (What then? Do we no longer die that death? We do indeed die, but we do not continue in it: which is not to die at all. For the tyranny of death, and death indeed, is when he who dies is never more allowed to return to life. But when after dying is living, and that a better life, this is not death, but sleep.) Since then death was to have

possession of all, therefore He died that He might deliver us.

Hebrews 9:28

So Christ was once offered. By whom offered? Evidently by Himself. Here he says that He is not Priest only, but Victim also, and what is sacrificed. On this account are [the words] was offered. Was once offered (he says) to bear the sins of many. Why of many, and not of all? Because not all believed. For He died indeed for all, that is His part: for that death was a counterbalance against the destruction of all men. But He did not bear the sins of all men, because they were not willing.

And what is [the meaning of] He bare the sins? Just as in the Oblation we bear up our sins and say, Whether we have sinned voluntarily or involuntarily, do Thou forgive, that is, we make mention of them first, and then ask for their forgiveness. So also was it done here. Where has Christ done this? Hear Himself saying, And for their sakes I sanctify Myself. John 17:19 Lo! He bore the sins. He took them from men, and bore them to the Father; not that He might determine anything against them [mankind], but that He might forgive them.

Unto them that look for Him shall He appear (he says) the second time without sin unto salvation. What is without sin? It is as much as to say, He sins not. For neither did He die as owing the debt of death, nor yet because of sin. But how shall He appear? To punish, you say. He did not however say this, but what was cheering; shall He appear unto them that look for Him, without sin unto salvation. So that for the time to come they no longer need sacrifices to save themselves, but to do this by deeds.

Hebrews 10:1

5. Hebrews 10:1 For (he says) the Law having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things; i.e. not the very reality. For as in painting, so long as one [only] draws the outlines, it is a sort of shadow but when one has added the bright paints and laid in the colors, then it becomes an image. Something of this kind also was the Law.

For (he says) the Law having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, i.e. of the sacrifice, of the remission: can never by those sacrifices with which they offered continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

Hebrews 10:2-9

For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshipers once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when He comes into the world, He says, Sacrifice and offering You would not, but a body have You prepared Me. In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin You have had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo! I come, in the volume of the book it is written of Me, to do Your will, O God. Above when He said, Sacrifice, and offering, and burnt-offerings, and [offering] for sin You would not, neither had pleasure therein, which are offered by the Law, then He said, Lo! I come to do Your will, O God! He takes away the first that He may establish the second. Hebrews 10:2-9

You see again the superabundance [of his proofs]? This sacrifice (he says) is one; whereas the others were many: therefore they had no strength, because they were many. For, tell me, what need of many, if one had been sufficient? So that their being many, and offered continually, proves that they [the

worshippers] were never made clean. For as a medicine, when it is powerful and productive of health, and able to remove the disease entirely, effects all after one application; as, therefore, if being once applied it accomplishes the whole, it proves its own strength in being no more applied, and this is its business, to be no more applied; whereas if it is applied continually, this is a plain proof of its not having strength. For it is the excellence of a medicine to be applied once, and not often. So is it in this case also. Why forsooth are they continually cured with the same sacrifices? For if they were set free from all their sins, the sacrifices would not have gone on being offered every day. For they had been appointed to be continually offered in behalf of the whole people, both in the evening and in the day. So that there was an arraignment of sins, and not a release from sins; an arraignment of weakness, not an exhibition of strength. For because the first had no strength, another also was offered: and since this effected nothing, again another; so that it was an evidence of sins. The offering indeed then, was an evidence of sins, the continually, an evidence of weakness. But with regard to Christ, it was the contrary: He was once offered. The types therefore contain the figure only, not the power; just as in images, the image has the figure of the man, not the power. So that the reality and the type have [somewhat] in common with one another. For the figure exists equally in both, but not the power. So too also is it in respect of Heaven and of the tabernacle, for the figure was equal: for there was the Holy of Holies, but the power and the other things were not the same.

What is, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself? What is this putting away? It is making contemptible. For sin has no longer any boldness; for it is made of no effect in that when it ought to have demanded punishment, it did not demand it: that is, it suffered violence: when it expected to destroy all men, then it was itself destroyed.

He has appeared by the sacrifice of Himself (he says), that is, He has appeared, unto God, and drawn near [unto Him]. For do not [think] because the High Priest was wont to do this oftentimes in the year.... So that henceforward this is done in vain, although it is done; for what need is there of medicines where there are no wounds? On this account He ordained offerings continually, because of their want of power, and that a remembrance of sins might be made.

6. What then? Do not we offer every day? We offer indeed, but making a remembrance of His death, and this [remembrance] is one and not many. How is it one, and not many? Inasmuch as that [Sacrifice] was once for all offered, [and] carried into the Holy of Holies. This is a figure of that [sacrifice] and this remembrance of that. For we always offer the same, not one sheep now and tomorrow another, but always the same thing: so that the sacrifice is one. And yet by this reasoning, since the offering is made in many places, are there many Christs? But Christ is one everywhere, being complete here and complete there also, one Body. As then while offered in many places, He is one body and not many bodies; so also [He is] one sacrifice. He is our High Priest, who offered the sacrifice that cleanses us. That we offer now also, which was then offered, which cannot be exhausted. This is done in remembrance of what was then done. For (says He) do this in remembrance of Me. Luke 22:19 It is not another sacrifice, as the High Priest, but we offer always the same, or rather we perform a remembrance of a Sacrifice.

7. But since I have mentioned this sacrifice, I wish to say a little in reference to you who have been initiated; little in quantity, but possessing great force and profit, for it is not our own, but the words of Divine Spirit . What then is it? Many partake of this sacrifice once in the whole year, others twice; others many times. Our word then is to all; not to those only who are here, but to those also who are settled in the desert. For they partake once in the year, and often indeed at intervals of two years.

What then? Which shall we approve? Those [who receive] once [in the year]? Those who [receive] many times? Those who [receive] few times? Neither those [who receive] once, nor those [who receive] often, nor those [who receive] seldom, but those [who come] with a pure conscience, from a pure heart, with an irreproachable life. Let such draw near continually; but those who are not such, not even once. Why, you will ask? Because they receive to themselves judgment, yea and condemnation, and punishment, and vengeance. And do not wonder. For as food, nourishing by nature, if received by a person without appetite, ruins and corrupts all [the system], and becomes an occasion of disease, so surely is it also with respect to the awful mysteries. Do you feast at a spiritual table, a royal table, and again pollute your mouth with mire? Do you anoint yourself with sweet ointment, and again fill yourself with ill savors?

Tell me, I beseech you, when after a year you partake of the Communion, do you think that the Forty Days are sufficient for you for the purifying of the sins of all that time? And again, when a week has passed, do you give yourself up to the former things? Tell me now, if when you have been well for forty days after a long illness, you should again give yourself up to the food which caused the sickness, have you not lost your former labor too? For if natural things are changed, much more those which depend on choice. As for instance, by nature we see, and naturally we have healthy eyes; but oftentimes from a bad habit [of body] our power of vision is injured. If then natural things are changed, much more those of choice. Thou assignest forty days for the health of the soul, or perhaps not even forty, and do you expect to propitiate God? Tell me, are you in sport?

These things I say, not as forbidding you the one and annual coming, but as wishing you to draw near continually.

8. These things have been given to the holy. This the Deacon also proclaims when he calls on the holy; even by this call searching the faults of all. For as in a flock, where many sheep indeed are in good health, but many are full of the scab, it is needful that these should be separated from the healthy; so also in the Church: since some sheep are healthy, and some diseased, by this voice he separates the one from the other, the priest [I mean] going round on all sides by this most awful cry, and calling and drawing on the holy. For it is not possible that a man should know the things of his neighbor, (for what man, he says, knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? 1 Corinthians 2:11): he utters this voice after the whole sacrifice has been completed, that no person should come to the spiritual fountain carelessly and in a chance way. For in the case of the flock also (for nothing prevents us from again using the same example), the sickly ones we shut up within, and keep them in the dark, and give them different food, not permitting them to partake either of pure air, or of simple grass, or of the fountain without [the fold]. In this case then also this voice is instead of fetters.

You can not say, 'I did not know, I was not aware that danger attends the matter.' Nay surely Paul too especially testified this. But will you say, 'I never read it'? This is not an apology, but even an accusation. Do you come into the Church every day and yet art ignorant of this?

However, that you may not have even this excuse to offer, for this cause, with a loud voice, with an awful cry, like some herald lifting up his hand on high, standing aloft, conspicuous to all, and after that awful silence crying out aloud, he invites some, and some he forbids, not doing this with his hand, but with his tongue more distinctly than with his hand. For that voice, falling on our ears, just like a hand, thrusts away and casts out some, and introduces and presents others.

Tell me then, I beseech [you], in the Olympic games does not the herald stand, calling out with loud and uplifted voice, saying, Does any one accuse this man? Is he a slave? Is he a thief? Is he one of wicked manners? And yet, those contests for prizes are not of the soul nor yet of good morals, but of strength and the body. If then where there is exercise of bodies, much examination is made about character, how much rather here, where the soul is alone the combatant. Our herald then even now stands, not holding each person by the head, and drawing him forward, but holding all together by the head within; he does not set against them other accusers, but themselves against themselves. For he says not, Does any one accuse this man? but what? If any man accuse himself. For when he says, The Holy things for the holy, he means this: If any is not holy, let him not draw near.

He does not simply say, free from sins, but, holy. For it is not merely freedom from sins which makes a man holy, but also the presence of the Spirit, and the wealth of good works. I do not merely wish (he says) that you should be delivered from the mire, but also that you should be bright and beautiful. For if the Babylonian King, when he made choice of the youths from the captives, chose out those who were beautiful in form, and of fair countenance: much more is it needful that we, when we stand by the royal table, should be beautiful in form, [I mean] that of the soul, having adornment of gold, our robe pure, our shoes royal, the face of our soul well-formed, the golden ornament put around it, even the girdle of truth. Let such an one as this draw near, and touch the royal cups.

But if any man clothed in rags, filthy, squalid, wish to enter in to the royal table, consider how much he will suffer, the forty days not being sufficient to wash away the offenses which have been committed in all the time. For if hell is not sufficient, although it be eternal (for therefore also it is eternal), much more this short time. For we have not shown a strong repentance, but a weak.

9. Eunuchs especially ought to stand by the King: by eunuchs, I mean those who are clear in their mind, having no wrinkle nor spot, lofty in mind, having the eye of the soul gentle and quick-sighted, active and sharp, not sleepy nor supine; full of much freedom, and yet far from impudence and overboldness, wakeful, healthful, neither very gloomy and downcast, nor yet dissolute and soft.

This eye we have it in our own power to create, and to make it quicksighted and beautiful. For when we direct it, not to the smoke nor to the dust (for such are all human things), but to the delicate breeze, to the light air, to things heavenly and high, and full of much calmness and purity, and of much delight, we shall speedily restore it, and shall invigorate it, as it luxuriates in such contemplation. Have you seen covetousness and great wealth? Do not thou lift up your eye thereto. The thing is mire, it is smoke, an evil vapor, darkness, and great distress and suffocating cares. Have you seen a man cultivating righteousness, content with his own, and having abundant space for recreation, having anxieties, not fixing his thoughts on things here? Set [your eye] there, and lift [it] up on high; and you will make it far the most beautiful, and more splendid, feasting it not with the flowers of the earth, but with those of virtue, with temperance, moderation, and all the rest. For nothing so troubles the eye as an evil conscience (My eye, it is said, was troubled by reason of anger Psalm 6:7); nothing so darkens it. Set it free from this injury, and you will make it vigorous and strong, ever nourished with good hopes.

And may we all make both it and also the other energies of the soul, such as Christ desires, that being made worthy of the Head who is set over us, we may depart there where He wishes. For He says, I will that where I am, they also may be with Me, that they may behold My glory. John 17:24 Which may we all enjoy in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom to the Father together with the Holy Ghost be glory, might, honor, now and for ever and world without end. Amen.

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