

Homily 1 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon explains the blessings of the saints, the mystery of God's will, and the purpose of the dispensation of the fullness of the times, which is to sum up all things in Christ.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-4, Ephesians 1:7, Ephesians 1:9-10

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Salvation Through Christ"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the profound love and grace of God towards believers, emphasizing the blessings bestowed upon them through Christ Jesus. He highlights the predestination of believers to be holy and blameless before God, chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Chrysostom delves into the richness of God's grace, the forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood, and the revelation of the mystery of God's will. He explains how Christ unites heavenly and earthly realms under one Head, summing up all things in Himself to bring about a dispensation of the fullness of times for the salvation of humanity.

Transcript

Chapter I. Verses 1-2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Observe, he applies the word through to the Father. But what then? Shall we say that He is inferior? Surely not.

To the saints, says he, which are at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus.

Observe that he calls saints, men with wives, and children, and domestics. For that these are they whom he calls by this name is plain from the end of the Epistle, as, when he says, Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands. Ephesians 5:22 And again, Children, obey your parents: Ephesians 6:1 and, Servants, be obedient to your masters. Ephesians 6:5 Think how great is the indolence that possesses us now, how rare is any thing like virtue now and how great the abundance of virtuous men must have been then, when even secular men could be called saints and faithful. Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is his word; and he calls God, Father, since this name is a sure token of that gift of grace. And how so? Hear what he says elsewhere; Because you are sons, God sent

forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Galatians 4:6

And from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because for us men Christ was born, and appeared in the flesh.

Ver. 3. Blessed be the God, he says, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Observe; The God of Him that was Incarnate. And though you will not, The Father of God the Word.

Ver. 3. Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

He is here alluding to the blessings of the Jews ; for that was blessing also, but it was not spiritual blessing. For how did it run? The Lord bless you, He will bless the fruit of your body; Deuteronomy 7:13 and He will bless your going out and your coming in. Deuteronomy 28:4 But here it is not thus, but how? With every spiritual blessing. And what do you lack yet? You are made immortal, you are made free, you are made a son, you are made righteous, you are made a brother, you are made a fellow-heir, you reign with Christ, you are glorified with Christ; all things are freely given you. How, says he, shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? Romans 8:32 Your First-fruits is adored by Angels, by the Cherubim, by the Seraphim! What do you lack yet? With every spiritual blessing. There is nothing carnal here. Accordingly He excluded all those former blessings, when He said, In the world you have tribulation, John 16:33 to lead us on to these. For as they who possessed carnal things were unable to hear of spiritual things, so they who aim at spiritual things cannot attain to them unless they first stand aloof from carnal things.

What again is spiritual blessing in the heavenly places? It is not upon earth, he means, as was the case with the Jews. You shall eat the good of the land. Isaiah 1:19 Unto a land flowing with milk and honey. Exodus 3:8 The Lord shall bless your land. Deuteronomy 7:13 Here we have nothing of this sort, but what have we? If a man love Me, he will keep My word, and I and My Father will come unto him, and make our abode with him. John 14:23 Every one therefore which hears these words of Mine, and does them, shall be likened unto a wise man which built his house upon the rock, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon the rock. Matthew 7:24-25 And what is that rock but those heavenly things which are above the reach of every change? Every one therefore who, says Christ, shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in Heaven: But whosoever shall deny Me, him will I also deny. Matthew 10:32-33 Again, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8 And again, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 5:3 And again, Blessed are you which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for great is your reward in Heaven. Matthew 5:11-12 Observe, how every where He speaks of Heaven, no where of earth, or of the things on the earth. And again, Our citizenship is in Heaven, from whence also we wait for a Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:20 And again, Not setting your mind on the things that are on the earth, but on the things which are above. Colossians 3:3

In Christ.

That is to say, this blessing was not by the hand of Moses, but by Christ Jesus: so that we surpass them not only in the quality of the blessings, but in the Mediator also. As moreover he says in the Epistle to the Hebrews; And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken; but Christ as a Son over His house, whose house are we. Hebrews

3:5-6

Ver. 4. Even as, he proceeds, He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love.

His meaning is somewhat of this sort. Through whom He has blessed us, through Him He has also chosen us. And He, then, it is that shall bestow upon us all those rewards hereafter. He is the very Judge that shall say, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Matthew 25:34 And again, I will that where I am they will also be with Me. John 17:24 And this is a point which he is anxious to prove in almost all his Epistles, that ours is no novel system, but that it had thus been figured from the very first, that it is not the result of any change of purpose, but had been in fact a divine dispensation and fore-ordained. And this is a mark of great solicitude for us.

What is meant by, He chose us in Him? By means of the faith which is in Him, Christ, he means, happily ordered this for us before we were born; nay more, before the foundation of the world. And beautiful is that word foundation, as though he were pointing to the world as cast down from some vast height. Yea, vast indeed and ineffable is the height of God, so far removed not in place but in incommunicableness of nature; so wide the distance between creation and Creator! A word which heretics may be ashamed to hear.

But wherefore has He chosen us? That we should be holy and without a blemish before Him. That you may not then, when you hear that He has chosen us, imagine that faith alone is sufficient, he proceeds to add life and conduct. To this end, says he, has He chosen us, and on this condition, that we should be holy and without blemish. And so formerly he chose the Jews. On what terms? This nation, says he, has He chosen from the rest of the nations. Deuteronomy 14:2 Now if men in their choices choose what is best, much more does God. And indeed the fact of their being chosen is at once a token of the loving kindness of God, and of their moral goodness. For by all means would he have chosen those who were approved. He has Himself rendered us holy, but then we must continue holy. A holy man is he who is a partaker of faith; a blameless man is he who leads an irreproachable life. It is not however simply holiness and irreproachableness that He requires, but that we should appear such before Him. For there are holy and blameless characters, who yet are esteemed as such only by men, those who are like whited sepulchres, and like such as wear sheep's clothing. It is not such, however, He requires, but such as the Prophet speaks of; And according to the cleanness of my hands. Psalm 18:24 What cleanness? That which is so in His eyesight. He requires that holiness on which the eye of God may look.

Having thus spoken of the good works of these, he again recurs to His grace. In love, says he, having predestinated us. Because this comes not of any pains, nor of any good works of ours, but of love; and yet not of love alone, but of our virtue also. For if indeed of love alone, it would follow that all must be saved; whereas again were it the result of our virtue alone, then were His coming needless, and the whole dispensation. But it is the result neither of His love alone, nor yet of our virtue, but of both. He chose us, says the Apostle; and He that chooses, knows what it is that He chooses. In love, he adds, having foreordained us; for virtue would never have saved any one, had there not been love. For tell me, what would Paul have profited, how would he have exhibited what he has exhibited, if God had not both called him from the beginning, and, in that He loved him, drawn him to Himself? But besides, His vouchsafing us so great privileges, was the effect of His love, not of our virtue. Because our being rendered virtuous, and believing, and coming near unto Him, even this again was the work of Him that called us Himself, and yet, notwithstanding, it is ours also. But that on our coming near unto Him, He should vouchsafe us so high

privileges, as to bring us at once from a state of enmity, to the adoption of children, this is indeed the work of a really transcendent love.

Ver. 4, 5. In love, says he, having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself.

Do you observe how that nothing is done without Christ? Nothing without the Father? The one has predestinated, the other has brought us near. And these words he adds by way of heightening the things which have been done, in the same way as he says also elsewhere, And not only so, but we also rejoice in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:11 For great indeed are the blessings bestowed, yet are they made far greater in being bestowed through Christ; because He sent not any servant, though it was to servants He sent, but the Only-begotten Son Himself.

Ver. 5. According to the good pleasure, he continues, of His will.

That is to say, because He earnestly willed it. This is, as one might say, His earnest desire. For the word good pleasure every where means the precedent will, for there is also another will. As for example, the first will is that sinners should not perish; the second will is, that, if men become wicked, they shall perish. For surely it is not by necessity that He punishes them, but because He wills it. You may see something of the sort even in the words of Paul, where he says, I would that all men were even as I myself. 1 Corinthians 7:7 And again, I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children. 1 Timothy 5:14 By good pleasure then he means the first will, the earnest will, the will accompanied with earnest desire, as in case of us, for I shall not refuse to employ even a somewhat familiar expression, in order to speak with clearness to the simpler sort; for thus we ourselves, to express the intentness of the will, speak of acting according to our resolve. What he means to say then is this, God earnestly aims at, earnestly desires, our salvation. Wherefore then is it that He so loves us, whence has He such affection? It is of His goodness alone. For grace itself is the fruit of goodness. And for this cause, he says, has He predestinated us to the adoption of children; this being His will, and the object of His earnest wish, that the glory of His grace may be displayed. According to the good pleasure of His will, he proceeds,

Ver. 6. To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

That the glory of His grace may be displayed, he says, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. Now then if for this He has shown grace to us, to the praise of the glory of His grace, and that He may display His grace, let us abide therein. To the praise of His glory. What is this? That who should praise Him? That who should glorify Him? That we, that Angels, that Archangels, yea, or the whole creation? And what were that? Nothing. The Divine nature knows no want. And wherefore then would He have us praise and glorify Him? It is that our love towards Him may be kindled more fervently within us. He desires nothing we can render; not our service, not our praise, nor any thing else, nothing but our salvation; this is His object in every thing He does. And he who praises and marvels at the grace displayed towards himself will thus be more devoted and more earnest.

Which He freely bestowed on us, he says. He does not say, Which He has graciously given us, (■ χαρ■σατο) but, wherein He has shown grace to us. (■ χαρ■τωσεν) That is to say, He has not only released us from our sins, but has also made us meet objects of His love. It is as though one were to take a leper, wasted by distemper, and disease, by age, and poverty, and famine, and were to turn him all at once into a graceful youth, surpassing all mankind in beauty, shedding a bright lustre from his cheeks, and eclipsing the sun-beams with the glances of his eyes; and then were to set him in the very flower of his

age, and after that array him in purple and a diadem and all the attire of royalty. It is thus that God has arrayed and adorned this soul of ours, and clothed it with beauty, and rendered it an object of His delight and love. Such a soul Angels desire to look into, yea, Archangels, and all the holy ones. Such grace has He shed over us, so dear has He rendered us to Himself. The King, says the Psalmist, shall greatly desire your beauty. Psalm 45:11 Think what injurious words we uttered heretofore, and look, what gracious words we utter now. Wealth has no longer charms for us, nor the things that are here below, but only heavenly things, the things that are in the heavens. When a child has outward beauty, and has besides a pervading grace in all its sayings, do we not call it a beautiful child? Such as this are the faithful. Look, what words the initiated utter! What can be more beautiful than that mouth that breathes those wondrous words, and with a pure heart and pure lips, and beaming with cheerful confidence, partakes of such a mystical table? What more beautiful than the words, with which we renounce the service of the Devil, and enlist in the service of Christ? Than both that confession which is before the Baptismal laver, and that which is after it? Let us reflect as many of us as have defiled our Baptism, and weep that we may be able again to repair it.

Ver. 6. In the Beloved, he says, in whom we have our redemption through His Blood.

And how is this? Not only is there this marvel, that He has given His Son, but yet further that He has given Him in such a way, as that the Beloved One Himself should be slain!

Yea, and more transcendent still! He has given the Beloved for them that were hated. See, how high a price he sets upon us. If, when we hated Him and were enemies, He gave the Beloved, what will He not do now, when we are reconciled by Him through grace?

Ver. 7. The forgiveness, says he, of our trespasses.

Again he descends from high to low: first speaking of adoption, and sanctification, and blamelessness, and then of the Passion, and in this not lowering his discourse and bringing it down from greater things to lesser, no rather, he was heightening it, and raising it from the lesser to the greater. For nothing is so great as that the blood of this Son should be shed for us. Greater this than both the adoption, and all the other gifts of grace, that He spared not even the Son. For great indeed is the forgiveness of sins, yet this is the far greater thing, that it should be done by the Lord's blood. For that this is far greater than all, look how here again he exclaims,

Ver. 7, 8. According to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us.

The abovementioned gifts are riches, yet is this far more so. Which, says he, He made to abound toward us. They are both riches and they have abounded, that is to say, were poured forth in ineffable measure. It is not possible to represent in words what blessings we have in fact experienced. For riches indeed they are, abounding riches, and He has given in abundance riches not of man but of God, so that on all hands it is impossible that they should be expressed. And to show us how He gave it to such abundance, he adds,

Ver. 8, 9. In all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of His will.

That is to say, Making us wise and prudent, in that which is true wisdom, and that which is true prudence. Strange! What friendship! For He tells us His secrets; the mysteries, says he, of His will, as if one should say, He has made known to us the things that are in His heart. For here is indeed the mystery which is full of all wisdom and prudence. For what will you mention equal to this wisdom! Those that were worth

nothing, it has discovered a way of raising them to wealth and abundance. What can equal this wise contrivance? He that was an enemy, he that was hated, he is in a moment lifted up on high. And not this only -- but, yet more, that it should be done at this particular time, this again was the work of wisdom; and that it should be done by means of the Cross. It were matter of long discourse here to point out, how all this was the work of wisdom, and how He had made us wise. And therefore he repeats again the words,

According to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him.

That is to say, this He desired, this He travailed for, as one might say, that He might be able to reveal to us the mystery. What mystery? That He would have man seated up on high. And this has come to pass.

Ver. 10. Unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, even in Him.

Heavenly things, he means to say, had been severed from earthly. They had no longer one Head. So far indeed as the system of the creation went, there was over all One God, but so far as management of one household went, this, amid the wide spread of Gentile error, was not the case, but they had been severed from His obedience.

Unto a dispensation, says he, of the fullness of the times.

The fullness of the times, he calls it. Observe with what nicety he speaks. And whereas he points out the origination, the purpose, the will, the first intention, as proceeding from the Father, and the fulfillment and execution as effected by the agency of the Son, yet no where does he apply to him the term minister.

He chose us, says he, in Him, having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself; and, to the praise of the glory of His grace, in whom we have redemption through His blood, -- which He purposed in Him, unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ; and no where has he called Him minister. If however the word in and the word by implies a mere minister, look what the matter comes to. Just in the very beginning of the Epistle, he used the expression through the will of the Father. The Father, he means, willed, the Son wrought. But neither does it follow, that because the Father willed, the Son is excluded from the willing; nor because the Son wrought, that the Father is deprived of the working. But to the Father and the Son, all things are common. For all Mine are Yours, says He, and Yours are Mine. John 17:10

The fullness of the times, however, was His coming. After, then, He had done everything, by the ministry both of Angels, and of Prophets, and of the Law, and nothing came of it, and it was well near come to this, that man had been made in vain, brought into the world in vain, nay, rather to his ruin; when all were absolutely perishing, more fearfully than in the deluge, He devised this dispensation, that is by grace; that it might not be in vain, might not be to no purpose that man was created. This he calls the fullness of the times, and wisdom. And why so? Because at that time when they were on the very point of perishing, then they were rescued.

That He might sum up he says.

What is the meaning of this word, sum up? It is to knit together. Let us, however, endeavor to get near the exact import. With ourselves then, in common conversation, the word means the summing into a brief compass things spoken at length, the concise account of matters described in detail. And it has this meaning. For Christ has gathered up in Himself the dispensations carried on through a lengthened period,

that is to say, He has cut them short. For by finishing His word and cutting it short in righteousness, Romans 9:28 He both comprehended former dispensations, and added others beside. This is the meaning of summing up.

It has also another signification; and of what nature is this? He has set over all one and the same Head, i.e., Christ according to the flesh, alike over Angels and men. That is to say, He has given to Angels and men one and the same government; to the one the Incarnate, to the other God the Word. Just as one might say of a house which has some part decayed and the other sound, He has rebuilt the house, that is to say, He has made it stronger, and laid a firmer foundation. So also here He has brought all under one and the same Head. For thus will an union be effected, thus will a close bond be effected, if one and all can be brought under one and the same Head, and thus have some constraining bond of union from above. Honored then as we are with so great a blessing, so high a privilege, so great loving-kindness, let us not shame our Benefactor, let us not render in vain so great grace. Let us exemplify the life of Angels, the virtue of Angels, the conversation of Angels, yea, I entreat and conjure you, that all these things turn not to our judgment, nor to our condemnation, but to our enjoyment of those good things, which may God grant we may all attain, in Christ Jesus, our Lord, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, strength, etc. etc.

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