

# Homily 16 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's Homily emphasizes the significance of suffering in the fulfillment of God's promises and the true nature of joy in the Christian life.*

**Topics:** "Spiritual Endurance", "Gods Providence"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on Acts 7:6-7, highlighting God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises despite the afflictions endured by His people. He emphasizes the importance of enduring trials and tribulations, drawing parallels between the sufferings of the Israelites and the spiritual endurance required in the Christian life. Chrysostom points out how affliction can lead to spiritual growth and a deeper reliance on God's providence, contrasting the fleeting joy of worldly pleasures with the lasting joy found in God. He encourages his listeners to find contentment in simplicity and to rejoice in the Lord, even amidst trials and challenges.

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## Transcript

Acts 7:6-7

And God spoke on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve Me in this place.

See, what a number of years the Promise has been given, and the manner of the Promise, and nowhere sacrifice, nowhere circumcision! He here shows, how God Himself suffered them to be afflicted, not that He had anything to lay to their charge. And they shall bring them into bondage, etc. But nevertheless, they did not these things with impunity. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage I will judge, said God. For, "Seest thou?" So Edd.)--> to show that they are not to go by this, in estimating who are pious (by reason of their saying, He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him,) Matthew 27:43.-- He, the Same that promised, He that gave the land, first permits the evils.

So also now, though He has promised a Kingdom, yet He suffers us to be exercised in temptations. If here the freedom was not to be till after four hundred years, what wonder, with regard to the Kingdom? Yet he performed it, and lapse of time availed not to falsify His word. Moreover, it was no ordinary bondage they underwent. And the matter does not terminate solely in the punishment of those (their oppressors); but they themselves also, He says, shall enjoy a mighty salvation.

Here he reminds them too of the benefit which they enjoyed. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so he begot Isaac. Here he lets himself down to lower matters. And circumcised him on the eighth day: and Isaac (begot) Jacob, and Jacob the twelve patriarchs. Acts 7:8.-- Here he seems to hint now at the type. And the patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt. Acts 7:9 Here again, the type of Christ. Though they had no fault to find with him, and though he came on purpose to bring them their food, they thus ill-treated him.

Still here again the promise, though it is a long while first, receives its fulfillment. And God was with him-- this also is for them -- and delivered him out of all his afflictions. Acts 7:10. He shows that unknowingly they helped to fulfil the prophecy, and that they were themselves the cause, and that the evils recoiled on their own selves. And gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt, Gave him favor, in the eyes of a barbarian, to him, the slave, the captive: his brethren sold him, this (barbarian) honored him.

Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren. Acts 7:11-13. They came down to buy, and had to depend upon him for everything. What then did he? [He made himself known to his brethren:] not to this point only did he carry his friendliness; he also made them known to Pharaoh, and brought them down into the land.

And Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew near, which God had sworn to Abraham the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

Acts 7:13-18. Then again, fresh disappointment (■ νελπιστα■α): first, famine, but they came through that: secondly, the falling into the hands of their enemy: thirdly, the being destroyed by the king. Then (to show) God's fullness of ways and means (ε■μ■χανον), In which time, it says, Moses was born, and was exceeding fair. Acts 7:20 If the former circumstance was wonderful, that Joseph was sold by his brethren, here again is another circumstance more wonderful still, that the king nourished the very person who was to overthrow his dominion, being himself the person that was to perish.

Do you observe all along a figurative enacting, so to say, of the resurrection of the dead? But it is not the same thing for God himself to do a thing, and for a thing to come to pass in connection with man's purpose (προα■ρεσις). For these things indeed were in connection with man's purpose [but the Resurrection by itself, independently.]-- And he was mighty, it says, in word and in deed Acts 7:22: he that was to have died. Then again he shows how ungrateful they were to their benefactor.

For, just as in the former instance, they were saved by the injured Joseph, so here again they were saved by another injured person, I mean, Moses. And when he was full forty years old, etc. For what though they killed him not actually? In intention they did kill, as did the others in the former case. There, they sold out of their own into a strange land: here, they drive from one strange land into another strange land: in the former case, one in the act of bringing them food; in this, one in the act of giving them good counsel; one to whom, under God, the man was indebted for his life!

Mark how it shows (the truth of) that saying of Gamaliel's, If it be of God, you cannot overthrow it. Acts 5:39 See the plotted-against eventually becoming the authors of salvation to those plotting against them: the people, plotting against itself, and itself plotted against by others; and for all this, saved! A famine, and it did not consume them: nor was this all: but they were saved by means of the very person, whom they had expected to be destroyed (by their means). A royal edict, and it did not consume them: nay then most did their number increase, when he was dead who knew them.

Their own Saviour they wished to kill, but for all that, they had not power to do it. Do you observe, that by the means whereby the devil tried to bring to naught the promise of God, by those very means it was advanced?

And God spoke on this wise, etc. (Recapitulation, v. 6, 7.) This is suitable to be said here also: that God is rich in ways and means to bring us up from hence. For this above all showed the riches of God's resources, that in its very reverses (■ ποστροφ■) the nation increased, while enslaved, while evil-entreated, and sought to be exterminated. And this is the greatness of the Promise. For had it increased in its own land, it had not been so wonderful. And besides, it was not for a short time, either, that they were in the strange land: but for four hundred years.

Hence we learn a (great lesson) of philosophic endurance (φιλοσοφ■αυ):-- they did not treat them as masters use slaves, but as enemies and tyrants -- and he foretold that they should be set in great liberty: for this is the meaning of that expression, They shall serve (Me): and they shall come up hither again (■ ντα■θα ■πανελε■σονται); and with impunity. -- And observe, how, while he seems to concede something to circumcision, he in fact allows it nothing Acts 7:8; since the Promise was before it, and it followed after.-- And the patriarchs, he says, moved with envy.

Acts 7:9 Where it does no harm, he humors (χαρ■ζεται) them: for they prided themselves much on these also.-- And he shows, that the saints were not exempt from tribulation, but that in their very tribulations they obtained help. And that these persons did themselves help to bring about the results, who wished to cut short these same (afflictions): just as these made Joseph the more glorious: just as the king did Moses, by ordering the children to be killed: since had he not ordered, this would not have been: just as also that (Hebrew) drives Moses into exile, that there he may have the Vision, having become worthy.

Thus also him who was sold for a slave, makes He to reign as king there, where he was thought to be a slave. Thus also does Christ in His death give proof of His power: thus also does He there reign as king where they sold Him. And gave him favor and wisdom, etc. Acts 7:10 This was not only by way of honor, but that he should have confidence in his own power. And he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth, etc. On account of famine -- such preparations is he making -- with threescore and fifteen souls, he says, Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

Acts 7:11-16. It shows, that they were not masters even to the extent of a burying-place. But when the time of the promise drew near, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph (v. 17, 18). Observe, that it is not during the four hundred years that He multiplies them, but (only) when the end was about to draw near. And yet already four hundred years were passed, nay more, in Egypt. But this is the wonder of it.

The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil-entreated our fathers, that they should cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. Acts 7:19 Dealt subtly: he hints at their not liking to exterminate them openly: that they should cast out their young children, it says. In which time Moses was born and was exceeding fair. Acts 7:20 This is the wonder, that he who is to be their champion, is born, neither after nor before, these things, but in the very midst of the storm (θυμ■).

And was nourished up in his father's house three months. But when man's help was despaired of, and they cast him forth, then did God's benefit shine forth conspicuous. And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. Acts 7:21 Not a word of Temple, not a word of Sacrifice, while all these Providences are taking place. And he was nourished in a barbarian house. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Acts 7:22 Was trained, both in discipline and in letters. And when he was full forty years old. Acts 7:23 Forty years he was there, and was not found out from his being circumcised. Observe, how, being in safety, they overlook their own interests, both he and Joseph, in order that they may save others: And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

Acts 7:23-25-- See how up to this point he is not yet offensive to them; how they listened to him while he said all this. And his face, we read, was as the face of an angel Acts 6:15.-- For he supposed, etc. And yet it was by deeds that his championship was shown; what intelligence was there need of here? But still for all this they understood not. And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, you are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

Acts 7:26-28 Do you mark with what mildness he addresses them? He who had shown his wrath in the case of the other, shows his gentleness in his own case. But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Will you kill me, as you did the Egyptian yesterday? Mark; the very words which they said to Christ: Who made You ruler and judge over us? So habitual a thing was it for Jews to wrong (their benefactors) when in the act of receiving benefits!

And again, mark the atrocious baseness: (μαρ■αν al. μοχθηρ■αν, Sav. marg.) As you did the Egyptian yesterday! Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begot two sons. Acts 7:29 But neither did flight extinguish the plan of Providence, as neither did death (i.e. the death of Christ).

And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. Acts 7:30 Do you mark that it is not hindered by lapse of time? For when he was an exile, when a stranger, when he had now passed much time in a foreign land, so as to have two sons, when he no longer expected to return, then does the Angel appear to him. The Son of God he calls an Angel, as also he calls Him man. (Appears) in the desert, not in a temple. See how many miracles are taking place, and no word of Temple, no word of Sacrifice. And here also not simply in the desert, but in the bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him. Acts 7:31 Lo! He was deemed worthy of the Voice also. I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. (v. 32, 33.) Lo! how He shows that He is none other than the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob -- He, the Angel of

the Great Counsel. (Isaiah 9:6. LXX. Wonderful, Counsellor, E.V.) Here he shows what great loving-kindness God herein exhibits. Then Moses trembled, and dared not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy ground. Not a word of Temple, and the place is holy through the appearance and operation of Christ. Far more wonderful this than the place which is in the Holy of Holies: for there God is nowhere said to have appeared in this manner, nor Moses to have thus trembled. And then the greatness of His tender care. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you into Egypt. Acts 7:34 See, how he shows, that both by kindnesses, and by chastisements, and by miracles, God was drawing them to Him: but they were still the same. That God is everywhere present, they learned.

Hearing these things, let us in our afflictions flee to Him. And their groaning, says He, I have heard: not simply, because of their calamities. But if any should ask, Why then did He suffer them to be evil entreated there? Why, in the first place, to every just man his sufferings are the causes of his rewards. And in the next place, as to why He afflicted them: it was to show His power, that He can (do all), and not only so, but that He may also train them. Observe in fact; when they were in the desert, then they waxed fat, they grew thick, they spread out in breadth, they kicked Deuteronomy 32:15: and ever and always ease was an evil.

Therefore also from the beginning He said to Adam: In the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread. Genesis 3:19 Also (it was) in order that having come out of much suffering into rest, they might give thanks to God. For affliction is a great good. For hear the Prophet saying, It is good for me, that You have humbled me. Psalm 119:71 But if to great and wonderful men affliction be a great (good), much more to us. And, if you will, let us examine into the nature of affliction as it is in itself.

Let there be some person rejoicing exceedingly, and gay, and giving a loose to jollity: what more unseemly, what more senseless than this? Let there be one sorrowing and dejected: what more truly philosophic than this? For, It is better, we read, to go into the house of mourning, than into the house of laughter. Ecclesiastes 7:2 But, likely enough, you do not like the saying, and want to evade it. Let us however see, what sort of man Adam was in Paradise, and what he was afterwards: what sort of man Cain was before, and what he was afterwards.

The soul does not stand fast in its proper place, but, like as by a running tide, (■ ε■ματος, Edd. πνε■ματος, wind) is raised and buoyed up by pleasure, having no steadfastness; facile in making professions, prompt at promising; the thoughts all in restless commotion: laughter ill-timed, causeless hilarity, idle clatter of unmeaning talk. And why speak of others? Let us take in hand some one of the saints, and let us see what he was while in pleasure, what again, when in distress.

Shall we look at David himself? When he was in pleasure and rejoicing, from his many trophies, from his victory, from his crowns, from his luxurious living, from his confidence, see what sort of things he said and did: But I said in my prosperity, says he, I shall never be moved. Psalm 30:6 But when he has come to be in affliction, hear what he says: And if He say to me, I have no mind for you; lo! Here am I, let Him do that which is pleasing in His sight. 2 Samuel 15:26 What can be more truly philosophic than these words?

Whatsoever may be pleasing to God, says he, so let it be. And again he said to Saul: If the Lord stirs you up against me, may your sacrifice be acceptable. 1 Samuel 26:19 And then too, being in affliction, he spared even his enemies: but afterwards, not friends even, nor those who had done him no injury. Again, Jacob when he was in affliction, said: If the Lord will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on. Genesis

28:20 As also the son of Noah did nothing of the kind erewhile; but when he was no longer afraid for his safety, you hear how wanton he became.

Genesis 9:22 Hezekiah too, when he was in affliction, see what things he did in order to his deliverance; he put on sackcloth, and such like; but when he was in pleasure, he fell through the haughtiness of his heart. 2 Kings 19:20 For, says the Scripture, When you have eaten, and drunk, and art filled, take heed to yourself. Deuteronomy 6:11-12 For perilous, as on a precipice's brink, is the post of affluence. Take heed, says he, to yourself. When the Israelites were afflicted, they became all the more increased in number: but when He left them to themselves, then they all went to ruin.

And why speak of examples from the ancients? In our own times, let us see, if you please, is it not the case, that when the most are in good case, they become puffed up, hostile to everybody, passionate, while the power is with them: but if it be taken away, they are gentle, lowly (and as) human beings, are brought to a consciousness of their own natural condition. Therefore the Scripture says, Pride has holden them unto the end: their iniquity shall go forth as from fatness. Psalm 73:6, Septuagint

Now these things I have spoken, that we should not make enjoyment every way our object. How then does Paul say, Rejoice always? He does not say simply, Rejoice, but he adds, in the Lord. Philippians 4:4 This is the greatest joy, such as the Apostles rejoiced withal; the joy of which prisons, and scourges, and persecutions, and evil report, and all painful things, are the source, and the root, and the occasion; whence also it comes to a happy issue. But that of the world, on the contrary, begins with sweets and ends in bitters.

Neither do I forbid to rejoice in the Lord, nay, I earnestly exhort to this. The Apostles were scourged, and they rejoiced: were bound, and they gave thanks: were stoned, and they preached. This is the joy I also would have: from nothing bodily has it its origin, but from spiritual things. It is not possible for him who joys after the fashion of the world, to rejoice also after a godly sort: for every one who joys after the world's fashion, has his joy in riches, in luxury, in honor, in power, in arrogance: but he who rejoices after the mind of God, has his joy in dishonor for God's sake, in poverty, in want, in fasting, in humbleness of mind.

Do you see, how opposite are the grounds (of joy)? To go without joy here, is to be without grief also: and to be without grief here, is to go without pleasure too. And in truth these are the things which produce real joy, since the others have the name only of joy, but they altogether consist of pain. What misery the arrogant man endures! How is he cut short (διακ■πτεται) in the midst of his arrogance, bespeaking for himself numberless insults, much hatred, great enmity, exceeding spite, and many an evil eye!

Whether it be that he is insulted by greater men, he grieves: or that he cannot make his stand against everybody, he is mortified. Whereas the humble man lives in much enjoyment: expecting honor from none, if he receive honor, he is pleased, but if not, he is not grieved. He takes it contentedly that he is honored; but above all, none dishonors him. Now not to seek honor, and yet to be honored-- great must be the enjoyment of this. But in the other, it is just the reverse: he seeks honor, and is not honored.

And the pleasure that the honor gives is not the same to him who seeks it, as it is to him who seeks it not. The one, however much he receives, thinks he has received nothing: the other, though you give him ever so little, takes it as though he had received all. Then again, he who lives in affluence and luxury has numberless affairs of business, and let his revenues flow in to him ever so easily, and, as it were, from full fountains, yet he fears the evils arising from luxurious living, and the uncertainty of the future: but the other is always in a state of security and enjoyment, having accustomed himself to scantiness of diet.

For he does not so bemoan himself at not partaking of a sumptuous board, as he luxuriates in not fearing the uncertainty of the future. But the evils arising from luxurious living, how many and great they are, none can be ignorant: it is necessary, however, to mention them now. Twofold the war, in the body, and in the soul: twofold the storm: twofold the diseases; not only in this respect, but because they are both incurable, and bring with them great calamities. Not so, frugality: but here is twofold health, twofold the benefits.

Sleep of health, we read, is in moderate eating. Sirach 31:20 For everywhere, that which keeps measure is pleasant, that which is beyond measure, ceases to please. For say now: on a little spark put a great pile of fagots, and you will no longer see the fire shining, but much disagreeable smoke. On a very strong and large man lay a burden which exceeds his strength, and you will see him with his burden lying prostrate on the ground. Embark too large a freight in your vessel, and you have ensured a grievous shipwreck.

Just so it is here. For just as in overladen ships, great is the tumult of the sailors, the pilot, the man at the prow, and the passengers, while they cast into the sea the things above deck, and things below; so here too, with their vomitings upwards, and their purgings downwards, they mar their constitutions, and destroy themselves. And what is the most shameful of all, the mouth is made to do the office of the nether parts, and that becomes the more shameful member. But if to the mouth the disgrace be such, think what must it be in the soul!

For indeed there it is all mist, all storm, all darkness, great the uproar of the thoughts, at being so thronged and crushed, the soul itself crying out at the abuse done to it: all (the parts and faculties) complaining of one another, beseeching, entreating, that the filth may be discharged somewhere. And after it is flung out, still the turmoil is not at an end; but then comes fever and diseases. And how comes it, say you, that one may see these luxurious livers, in goodly plight, riding on horseback?

What idle talk is this, say you, to tell us of diseases? It is I that am diseased, I that am racked, I that am disgusting, while I have nothing to eat. Ah me! For one may well lament at such words. But the sufferers with the gout, the men that are carried on litters, the men that are swathed with bandages, from what class of people, I ask you, shall we see these? And indeed, were it not that they would deem it an insult, and think my words opprobrious, I would before now have addressed them even by name.

But there are some of them, who are in good health as well. Because they give themselves not merely to luxurious living, but also to labors. Else show me a man, who does nothing whatever but fatten himself, free from pain as he lies there, without an anxious thought. For though a host of physicians without number came together, they would not be able to rescue him from his diseases. It is not in the nature of things. For I will hold you a medical discourse. Of the matters sent down into the belly, not all becomes nourishment; since even in the food itself, not all is nutritive, but part of it in the process of digestion passes into stool, part is turned into nourishment.

If then in the process of digestion the operation is perfect, this is the result, and each finds its proper place; the wholesome and useful part betakes itself to its appropriate place, while that which is superfluous and useless, withdraws itself, and passes off. But if it be in too great quantity, then even the nutritive part of it becomes hurtful. And, to speak by way of example, in order that my meaning may be clearer to you: in wheat part is fine flour, part meal, part bran: now if the mill be able to grind (what is put in), it separates all these: but if you put in too much, all becomes mixed up together.

Wine again, if it go through its proper process of formation, and under due influence of the seasons, then, whereas at first all is mixed together, anon part settles into lees, part rises into scum, part remains for

enjoyment to those that use it, and this is the good part, and will not readily undergo any change. But what they call nourishment, is neither wine, nor lees, while all are mixed up together.-- The same may be seen in the river, when its waters make a whirling flood.

As at such time we see the fishes floating at top, dead, their eyes first blinded by the muddy slime: so is it with us. For when gormandizing, like a flood of rain, has drenched the inward parts, it puts all in a whirl, and makes that the faculties (λογισμο■), healthy till then and living in a pure element, drift lifeless on the surface. Since then by all these examples we have shown how great the mischief is, let us cease to count these men happy for that, for which we ought to think them wretched, and to bemoan ourselves for that, for which we ought to count ourselves happy, and let us welcome sufficiency with a contented mind.

Or do you not hear even what physicians tell you, that want is the mother of health? But what I say is, that want is mother, not of bodily health, but also of that of the soul. These things Paul also, that physician indeed, cries aloud; when he says, Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. 1 Timothy 6:8 Let us therefore do as he bids us, that so, being in sound health, we may perform the work that we ought to do, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with Whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost together be glory, dominion, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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