

Homily 21 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon highlights the importance of faith, humility, and the power of the apostles in spreading the gospel and performing miracles.

Scripture: Mark 14:21, Acts 9:26-35, 1 Corinthians 11:26, 1 Timothy 2:1, Hebrews 13:16

Topics: "Conversion Stories", "Faith And Miracles"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the conversion of Saul, highlighting the fear and disbelief of the disciples towards him, the role of Barnabas in bringing Saul to the Apostles, and the transformation of Saul from a persecutor to a disciple. Chrysostom delves into the significance of Paul's journey and interactions, emphasizing the need for humility, forbearance, and the power of witnessing for Christ boldly. He reflects on the miraculous healings performed by Peter in Lydda and Joppa, showcasing the power of faith and the impact of these miracles on the communities. Chrysostom also discusses the importance of almsgiving, prayers for the departed, and the commemoration of martyrs during the celebration of the Eucharist.

Transcript

Acts IX. 26, 27

And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way.

One may well be much at a loss here to understand how it is that, whereas in the Epistle to the Galatians Paul says, I went not to Jerusalem, but into Arabia and to Damascus, and, After three years I went up to Jerusalem, and to see Peter , (■ στωρ■σαι Cat.) here the writer says the contrary. (There, Paul says,) And none of the Apostles saw I; but here, it is said (Barnabas), brought him to the Apostles. -- Well, then, either (Paul) means, I went not up with intent to refer or attach myself to them (■ ναθ■σθαί)-- for what says he?

I referred not myself, neither went I to Jerusalem to those who were Apostles before me: or else, that the laying await for him in Damascus was after his return from Arabia; or else, again, that the visit to Jerusalem was after he came from Arabia. Certainly of his own accord he went not to the Apostles, but assayed to join himself unto the disciples-- as being a teacher, not a disciple-- I went not, he says, for this purpose, that I should go to those who were Apostles before me: certainly, I learned nothing from them.

Or, he does not speak of this visit, but passes it by, so that the order is, I went into Arabia, then I came to Damascus, then to Jerusalem, then to Syria: or else, again, that he went up to Jerusalem, then was sent to Damascus, then to Arabia, then again to Damascus, then to Cæsarea. Also, the visit after fourteen years, probably, was when he brought up the [alms to the] brethren together with Barnabas: or else he means a different occasion. Acts 11:30 For the Historian for conciseness, often omits incidents, and condenses the times.

Observe how unambitious the writer is, and how he does not even relate related in Acts 22:17-21 that vision, but passes it by. He assayed, it says, to join himself to the disciples. And they were afraid of him. By this again is shown the ardor of Paul's character: not (only) from the mouth of Ananias, and of those who wondered at him there, but also of those in Jerusalem: they believed not that he was a disciple: for truly that was beyond all human expectation. He was no longer a wild beast, but a man mild and gentle!

And observe how he does not go to the Apostles, such is his forbearance, but to the disciples, as being a disciple. He was not thought worthy of credit. But Barnabas -- Son of Consolation is his appellation, whence also he makes himself easy of access to the man: for he was a kind man Acts 11:24, exceedingly, and this is proved both by the present instance, and in the affair of John (Mark) -- having taken him, brought him to the Apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord in the way.

Acts 15:39 It is likely that at Damascus also he had heard all about him: whence he was not afraid but the others were, for he was a man whose glance inspired fear. How, it says, he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken unto him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of the Lord. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem, and speaking boldly in the name of Jesus Acts 9:28: these things were demonstrative of the former, and by his acts he made good what was spoken of him.

And he spoke, and disputed with the Hellenists. Acts 9:29 So then the disciples were afraid of him, and the Apostles did not trust him; by this therefore he relieves them of their fear. With the Hellenists: he means those who used the Greek tongue: and this he did, very wisely; for those others, those profound Hebrews had no mind even to see him. But they, it says, went about to slay him: a token, this, of his energy, and triumphant victory, and of their exceeding annoyance at what had happened.

Thereupon, fearing lest the issue should be the same as in the case of Stephen, they sent him to Cæsarea. For it says, When the brethren were aware of this, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus Acts 9:30, at the same time to preach, and likely to be more in safety, as being in his own country. But observe, I pray you, how far it is from being the case that everything is done by (miraculous) grace; how, on the contrary, God does in many things leave them to manage for themselves by their own wisdom and in a human way; so to cut off the excuse of idle people: for if it was so in the case of Paul, much more in theirs.

Then, it says, the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace (they), being edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and abounded in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Acts 9:31 He is about to relate that Peter goes down (from Jerusalem), therefore that you may not impute this to fear, he first says this. For while there was persecution, he was in Jerusalem, but when the affairs of the Church are everywhere in security, then it is that he leaves Jerusalem.

See how fervent and energetic he is! For he did not think, because there was peace, therefore there was no need of his presence. Paul departed, and there was peace: there is no war nor disturbance. Them,

they respected most, as having often stood by them, and as being held in admiration by the multitude: but him, they despised, and were more savage against him. See, how great a war, and immediately, peace! See what that war effected. It dispersed the peace-makers. In Samaria, Simon was put to shame: in Judea, the affair of Sapphira took place.

Not that, because there was peace, therefore matters became relaxed, but such was the peace as also to need exhortation. And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. Acts 9:32 Like the commander of an army, he went about, inspecting the ranks, what part was compact, what in good order, what needed his presence. See how on all occasions he goes about, foremost. When an Apostle was to be chosen, he was the foremost: when the Jews were to be told, that these were not drunken, when the lame man was to be healed, when harangues to be made, he is before the rest: when the rulers were to be spoken to, he was the man; when Ananias, he ch. 1:15; 2:15; 3:4-12; 4:8; 5:3-15: when healings were wrought by the shadow, still it was he.

And look: where there was danger, he was the man, and where good management (was needed); but where all is calm, there they act all in common, and he demands no greater honor (than the others). When need was to work miracles, he starts forward, and here again he is the man to labor and toil. And there he found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said to him, Æneas, Jesus Christ makes you whole: arise, and make your bed.

And he arose immediately. (v. 33, 34.) And why did he not wait for the man's faith, and ask if he wished to be healed? In the first place, the miracle served for exhortation to many: hear then how great the gain. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. Acts 9:35 For the man was notable. Arise, and make your bed: he does well to give a proof of the miracle: for they not only released men of their diseases, but in giving the health they gave the strength also.

Moreover, at that time they had given no proofs of their power, so that the man could not reasonably have been required to show his faith, as neither in the case of the lame man did they demand it. Acts 3:6 As therefore Christ in the beginning of His miracles did not demand faith, so neither did these. For in Jerusalem indeed, as was but reasonable, the faith of the parties was first shown; they brought out their sick into the streets, but as Peter passed by, his shadow at least might fall upon some of them Acts 5:15; for many miracles had been wrought there; but here this is the first that occurs.

For of the miracles, some were wrought for the purpose of drawing others (to faith); some for the comfort of them that believed. Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was near to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

Acts 9:36-38. Why did they wait till she was dead? Why was not Peter solicited (■ σκ■λη) before this? So right-minded (φιλοσοφο■ντες) were they, they did not think it proper to trouble (σκ■λλειν) the Disciples about such matters, and to take them away from the preaching: as indeed this is why it mentions that the place was near, seeing they asked this as a thing beside his mark, and not now in the regular course. Not to delay to come unto them: for she was a disciple. And Peter arose, and went with them.

And when he had come, they led him into the upper chamber. Acts 9:39 They do not beseech, but leave it to him to give her life (σωτηρ■αν.) See Seest thou," etc.--The meaning seems to be, "Peter went to see

the dead body, expecting no miracle, but only as one who could bear such sights, and would teach others to do so: but see what a mighty additional boon came of it!"--> what a cheering inducement to alms is here! And all the widows, it says, stood round him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

Peter went into the apartment, as one who took it calmly, but see what an accession came of it! It is not without a meaning that the Writer has informed us of the woman's name, but to show that the name she bore (φερ■νυμος ■v) matched her character; as active and wakeful was she as an antelope. For in many instances there is a Providence in the giving of names, as we have often told you. She was full, it says, of good works: not only of alms, but of good works, first, and then of this good work in particular.

Which, it says, Dorcas made while she was with them. Great humility! Not as we do; but they were all together in common, and in company with them she made these things and worked. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Acts 9:40 Why does he put them all out? That he may not be confused nor disturbed by their weeping. And having knelt down, he prayed.

Observe the intentness of his prayer And he gave her his hand. Acts 9:41 So did Christ to the daughter of Jairus: And (says the Evangelist) having taken her by the hand. Mark severally, first the life, then the strength brought into her, the one by the word, the other by his hand -- And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive: to some for comfort, because they received back their sister, and because they saw the miracle, and for kindly support (προστασ■αv) to others.

And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. Acts 9:42-43 Mark the unassuming conduct, mark the moderation of Peter, how he does not make his abode with this lady, or some other person of distinction, but with a tanner: by all his acts leading men to humility, neither suffering the mean to be ashamed, nor the great to be elated! Many days; for they needed his instruction, who had believed through the miracles.-- Let us look then again at what has been said.

Assayed, it says, to join himself to the disciples. Recapitulation, Acts 9:26 He did not come up to them unabashed, but with a subdued manner. Disciples they were all called at that time by reason of their great virtue, for there was the likeness of the disciples plainly to be seen. But they were all afraid of him. See how they feared the dangers, how the alarm was yet at its height in them. But Barnabas, etc. Acts 9:27-- it seems to me that Barnabas was of old a friend of his -- and related, etc.: observe how Paul says nothing of all this himself: nor would he have brought it forward to the others, had he not been compelled to do so.

And he was with them, coming in and going out at Jerusalem, and speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus. (v. 28, 29.) This gave them all confidence. But they went about to slay him: which when the brethren knew etc. Acts 9:30 Do you observe how both there (at Damascus), and here, the rest take care for him, and provide for him the means of departure, and that we nowhere find him thus far receiving (direct supernatural) aid from God? So the energy of his character is betokened.

To Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus: so that, I suppose, he did not continue his journey by land, but sailed the rest of it. And this (departure) is Providentially ordered, that he might preach there also: and so likewise were the plots against him ordered by God's Providence, and his coming to Jerusalem, that the story about him might no longer be disbelieved. For there he was speaking boldly, it says, in the name of

the Lord Jesus; and he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; and again, he was with them coming in and going out.-- So the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace -- i.e. it increased: and peace with itself, that peace which is peace indeed: for the war from without would have done them no harm -- they being edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and abounded in the consolation of the Holy Ghost.

And the spirit consoled them both by the miracles and by the works, and independently of these in the person of each individual. And it came to pass, etc. And Peter said to him, Eneas, etc. Acts 9:32-34 But before discourse, before exhortations, he says to the lame man himself, Jesus Christ makes you whole. This word he believed in any wise, and was made whole. Observe how unassuming he is: for he said not, In the Name, but rather as a sign he narrates the miracle itself, and speaks as its Evangelist.

And having seen him, it says, all that dwelt in Lydda, and Saron, turned unto the Lord. -- Now there was at Joppa, etc. (v. 35, 36.) Observe everywhere the signs taking place. But let us so believe them, as if we were now beholding them. It is not simply said, that Tabitha died, but that she died, having been in a state of weakness. And (yet) they did not call Peter until she died; then they sent and told him not to delay to come unto them. Observe, they send and call him by others.

And he comes: he did not think it a piece of disrespect, to be summoned by two men: for, it says, they sent two men unto him.-- Affliction, my beloved, is a great thing, and rivets our souls together. Not a word of wailing there, nor of mourning. See how thoroughly matters are cleansed! Having washed her, it says, they laid her in an upper chamber: that is, they did all (that was right) for the dead body. Then Peter having come, knelt down, and prayed; and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise.

Acts 9:40 They did not perform all their miracles with the same ease. But this was profitable for them: for truly God took thought not only for the salvation of others, but for their own. He that healed so many by his very shadow, how is it that he now has to do so much first? There are cases also in which the faith of the applicants coöperated. This is the first dead person that he raises. Observe how he, as it were, awakes her out of sleep: first she opened her eyes: then upon seeing (Peter) she sat up: then from his hand she received strength.

And it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Acts 9:42 Mark the gain, mark the fruit, that it was not for display. Indeed, this is why he puts them all out, imitating his Master in this also.

For where tears are -- or rather, where miracles are, there tears ought not to be; not where such a mystery is celebrating. Hear, I beseech you: although somewhat of the like kind does not take place now, yet in the case of our dead likewise, a great mystery is celebrating. Say, if as we sit together, the Emperor were to send and invite some one of us to the palace, would it be right, I ask, to weep and mourn? Angels are present, commissioned from heaven and come from thence, sent from the King Himself to call their fellow servant, and say, do you weep?

Do you not know what a mystery it is that is taking place, how awful, how dread, and worthy indeed of hymns and lauds? Would you learn, that you may know, that this is no time for tears? For it is a very great mystery of the Wisdom of God. As if leaving her dwelling, the soul goes forth, speeding on her way to her own Lord, and do you mourn? Why then, you should do this on the birth of a child: for this in fact is also a birth, and a better than that. For here she goes forth to a very different light, is loosed as from a prison-house, comes off as from a contest.

Yes, say you, it is all very well to say this, in the case of those of whose salvation we are assured. Then, what ails you, O man, that even in the case of such, thou dost not take it in this way? Say, what can you have to condemn in the little child? Why do you mourn for it? What in the newly baptized? For he too is brought into the same condition: why do you mourn for him? For as the sun arises clear and bright, so the soul, leaving the body with a pure conscience, shines joyously.

Not such the spectacle of Emperor as he comes in state to take possession of the city (■ πιβα■νοντα π■λεως), not such the hush of awe, as when the soul having quitted the body is departing in company with Angels. Think what the soul must then be! In what amazement, what wonder, what delight! Why do you mourn? Answer me.-- But it is only in the case of sinners you do this? Would that it were so, and I would not forbid your mournings, would that this were the object! This lamentation were Apostolic, this were after the pattern of the Lord; for even Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

I would that your mournings were discriminated by this rule. But when you speak the words of one wouldest have him still in the contest, etc. 'But I know not where he is gone.' How knowest thou not, answer me? For whether he lived rightly or otherwise, it is plain where he will go. 'Why, this is the very reason why I do bewail--because he departed a sinner.' This is mere pretence. If this were the reason of thy lamenting him that is gone, thou oughtest while he was alive to have amended him, and formed his manners," etc.}-> that would call back (the dead), and speakest of your long intimacy and his beneficence, it is but for this you mourn (not because he was a sinner), thou dost but pretend to say it.

Mourn, bewail the sinner, and I too will give a loose to tears; I, more than thou, the greater the punishment to which he is liable as such: I too will lament, with such an object. But not thou alone must lament him that is such; the whole city must do the same, and all that meet you on the way, as men bewail them that are led to be put to death. For this is a death indeed, an evil death, the death of sinners. But (with you) all is clean reversed. Such lamentation marks a lofty mind, and conveys much instruction; the other marks a littleness of soul.

If we all lamented with this sort of lamentation, we should amend the persons themselves while yet living. For as, if it rested with you to apply medicines which would prevent that bodily death, you would use them, just so now, if this death were the death you lament, you would prevent its taking place, both in yourself and in him. Whereas now our behavior is a perfect riddle; that having it in our power to hinder its coming, we let it take place, and mourn over it when it has come.

Worthy indeed of lamentations are they (when we consider), what time as they shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ, what words they shall then hear, what they shall suffer! To no purpose have these men lived: nay, not to no purpose, but to evil purpose! Of them too it may be fitly said, It were good for them had they never been born. Mark 14:21 For what profit is it, I ask, to have spent so much time to the hurt of his own person? Had it been spent only to no purpose, were not that, I ask you, punishment enough!

If one who has been an hired servant twenty years were to find that he has had all his labor in vain, would he not weep and lament, and think himself the most miserable of men? Why, here is a man who has lost all the labor of a whole life: not one day has he lived for himself, but to luxury, to debauchery, to covetousness, to sin, to the devil. Then, say, shall we not bewail this man? Shall we not try to snatch him from his perils? For it is, yes, it is possible, if we will, to mitigate his punishment, if we make continual prayers for him, if for him we give alms.

However unworthy he may be, God will yield to our importunity. For if Paul showed mercy on one (who had no claims on his mercy), and for the sake of others spared one (whom he would not have spared), much more is it right for us to do this. By means of his substance, by means of your own, by what means you will, aid him: pour in oil, nay rather, water. Has he no almsdeeds of his own to exhibit? Let him have at least those of his kindred. Has he none done by himself? At least let him have those which are done for him, that his wife may with confidence beg him off in that day, having paid down the ransom for him.

The more sins he has to answer for, the greater need has he of alms, not only for this reason, but because the alms has not the same virtue now, but far less: for it is not all one to have done it himself, and to have another do it for him; therefore, the virtue being less, let us by quantity make it the greatest. Let us not busy ourselves about monuments, not about memorials. This is the greatest memorial: set widows to stand around him. Tell them his name: bid them all make for him their prayers, their supplications: this will overcome God: though it have not been done by the man himself, yet because of him another is the author of the almsgiving.

Even this pertains to the mercy of God: widows standing around and weeping know how to rescue, not indeed from the present death, but from that which is to come. Many have profited even by the alms done by others on their behalf: for even if they have not got perfect (deliverance), at least they have found some comfort thence. If it be not so, how are children saved? And yet there, the children themselves contribute nothing, but their parents do all: and often have women had their children given them, though the children themselves contributed nothing. Many are the ways God gives us to be saved, only let us not be negligent.

How then if one be poor? Say you. Again I say, the greatness of the alms is not estimated by the quantity given, but by the purpose. Only give not less than your ability, and you have paid all. How then, say you, if he be desolate and a stranger, and have none to care for him? And why is it that he has none, I ask you? In this very thing you suffer your desert, that you have none to be thus your friend, thus virtuous. This is so ordered on purpose that, though we be not ourselves virtuous, we may study to have virtuous companions and friends -- both wife, and son, and friend -- as reaping some good even through them, a slight gain indeed, but yet a gain.

If you make it your chief object not to marry a rich wife, but to have a devout wife, and a religious daughter, you shall gain this consolation; if you study to have your son not rich but devout, you shall also gain this consolation. If you make these your objects then will yourself be such as they. This also is part of virtue, to choose such friends, and such a wife and children. Not in vain are the oblations made for the departed, not in vain the prayers, not in vain the almsdeeds: all those things has the Spirit ordered, wishing us to be benefited one by the other.

See: he is benefited, you are benefited: because of him, you have despised wealth, being set on to do some generous act: both you are the means of salvation to him, and he to you the occasion of your almsgiving. Doubt not that he shall get some good thereby. It is not for nothing that the Deacon cries, For them that are fallen asleep in Christ, and for them that make the memorials for them. It is not the Deacon that utters this voice, but the Holy Ghost: I speak of the Gift.

What do you say? There is the Sacrifice in hand, and all things laid out duly ordered: Angels are there present, Archangels, the Son of God is there: all stand with such awe, and in the general silence those stand by, crying aloud: and do you think that what is done, is done in vain? Then is not the rest also all in vain, both the oblations made for the Church, and those for the priests, and for the whole body? God

forbid! But all is done with faith. What do you think of the oblation made for the martyrs, of the calling made in that hour, martyrs though they be, yet even for martyrs?

It is a great honor to be named in the presence of the Lord, when that memorial is celebrating, the dread Sacrifice, the unutterable mysteries. For just as, so long as the Emperor is seated, is the time for the petitioner to effect what he wishes to effect, but when he is risen, say what he will, it is all in vain, so at that time, while the celebration of the mysteries is going on, it is for all men the greatest honor to be held worthy of mention. For look: then is declared the dread mystery, that God gave Himself for the world: along with that mystery he seasonably puts Him in mind of them that have sinned.

For as when the celebration of Emperor.' victories is in progress, then, as many as had their part in the victory receive their meed of praise, while at the same time as many as are in bonds are set at liberty in honor of the occasion; but when the occasion is past, he that did not obtain this favor then, no longer gets any: so is it here likewise: this is the time of celebration of a victory. For, says it, so often as you eat this bread, you do show forth the Lord's death. Then let us not approach indifferently, nor imagine that these things are done in any ordinary sort.

But it is in another sense that we make mention of martyrs, and this, for assurance that the Lord is not dead: and this, for a sign that death has received its death's blow, that death itself is dead. Knowing these things, let us devise what consolations we can for the departed, instead of tears, instead of laments, instead of tombs, our alms, our prayers, our oblations, that both they and we may attain unto the promised blessings, by the grace and loving-kindness of His only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, 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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