

Homily 23 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 23 on Ephesians emphasizes the importance of spiritual readiness and standing firm in truth to navigate life's challenges.

Scripture: Job 38:3, Psalm 108:1, Luke 12:35, 1 Corinthians 10:12, 1 Corinthians 16:13, Galatians 6:9, Ephesians 6:13-14, Philippians 4:1, Hebrews 4:10

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Faith Readiness"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of spiritual warfare and being well-equipped with the armor of God. He highlights the significance of standing firm in the faith, symbolized by girding one's loins with truth, to withstand the challenges and temptations of life. Chrysostom draws parallels between the physical and spiritual aspects of standing upright and being girded with truth, emphasizing the need for spiritual vigilance and readiness for the journey towards Heaven. He encourages believers to focus on heavenly treasures, remain steadfast in faith, and be prepared for the ultimate departure to the promised land.

Transcript

Ephesians 6:14

Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth.

Having drawn up this army, and roused their zeal -- for both these things were requisite, both that they should be drawn up in array and subject to each other, and that their spirit should be aroused -- and having inspired them with courage, for this was requisite also, he next proceeds also to arm them. For arms had been of no use, had they not been first posted each in his own place, and had not the spirit of the soldier's soul been roused; for we must first arm him within, and then without.

Now if this is the case with soldiers, much more is it with spiritual soldiers. Or rather in their case, there is no such thing as arming them without, but everything is within. He has roused their ardor, and set it on fire, he has added confidence. He has set them in due array. Observe how he also puts on the armor. Stand therefore, says he. The very first feature in tactics is, to know how to stand well, and many things will depend upon that. Hence he discourses much concerning standing, saying also elsewhere, Watch ye, stand fast. 1 Corinthians 16:13 And again, So stand fast in the Lord. Philippians 4:1 And again, Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. 1 Corinthians 10:12 And again, That ye may be able, having

done all, to stand. Ephesians 6:13 Doubtless then he does not mean merely any way of standing, but a correct way, and as many as have had experience in wars know how great a point it is to know how to stand. For if in the case of boxers and wrestlers, the trainer recommends this before anything else, namely, to stand firm, much more will it be the first thing in warfare, and military matters.

The man who, in a true sense, stands, is upright; he stands not in a lazy attitude, not leaning upon anything. Exact uprightness discovers itself by the way of standing, so that they who are perfectly upright, they stand. But they who do not stand, cannot be upright, but are unstrung and disjointed. The luxurious man does not stand upright, but is bent; so is the lewd man, and the lover of money. He who knows how to stand will from his very standing, as from a sort of foundation, find every part of the conflict easy to him.

Stand therefore, says he, having girded your loins with truth.

He is not speaking of a literal, physical girdle, for all the language in this passage he employs in a spiritual sense. And observe how methodically he proceeds. First he girds up his soldier. What then is the meaning of this? The man that is loose in his life, and is dissolved in his lusts, and that has his thoughts trailing on the ground, him he braces up by means of this girdle, not suffering him to be impeded by the garments entangling his legs, but leaving him to run with his feet well at liberty. Stand therefore, having girded your loins, says he. By the loins here he means this; just what the keel is in ships, the same are the loins with us, the basis or groundwork of the whole body: for they are, as it were, a foundation, and upon them as the schools of the physicians tell you, the whole frame is built. So then in girding up the loins he compacts the foundation of our soul; for he is not of course speaking of these loins of our body, but is discoursing spiritually: and as the loins are the foundation alike of the parts both above and below, so is it also in the case of these spiritual loins. Oftentimes, we know, when persons are fatigued, they put their hands there as if upon a sort of foundation, and in that manner support themselves; and for this reason it is that the girdle is used in war, that it may bind and hold together this foundation, as it were, in our frame; for this reason too it is that when we run we gird ourselves. It is this which guards our strength. Let this then, says he, be done also with respect to the soul, and then in doing anything whatsoever we shall be strong; and it is a thing most especially becoming to soldiers.

True, you may say, but these our natural loins we gird with a leathern band; but we, spiritual soldiers, with what? I answer, with that which is the head and crown of all our thoughts, I mean, with truth. Having girded your loins, says he, with truth. What then is the meaning of with truth? Let us love nothing like falsehood, all our duties let us pursue with truth, let us not lie one to another. Whether it be an opinion, let us seek the truth, or whether it be a line of life, let us seek the true one.

If we fortify ourselves with this, if we gird ourselves with truth, then shall no one overcome us. He who seeks the doctrine of truth, shall never fall down to the earth; for that the things which are not true are of the earth, is evident from this, that all they that are without are enslaved to the passions, following their own reasonings; and therefore if we are sober, we shall need no instruction in the tales of the Greeks. Do you see how weak and frivolous they are? Incapable of entertaining about God one severe thought or anything above human reasoning?

Why? Because they are not girded about with truth; because their loins, the receptacle of the seed of life, and the main strength of their reasonings, are ungirt; nothing then can be weaker than these. And the Manicheans again, do you see, how all the things they have the boldness to utter, are from their own reasonings? It was impossible, say they, for God to create the world without matter. Whence is this so

evident? These things they say, groveling, and from the earth, and from what happens among ourselves; because man, they say, cannot create otherwise.

Marcion again, look what he says. God, if He took upon Him flesh, could not remain pure. Whence is this evident? Because, says he, neither can men. But men are able to do this. Valentinus again, with his reasonings all trailing along the ground, speaks the things of the earth; and in like manner Paul of Samosata. And Arius, what does he say? It was impossible for God when He begot, to beget without passion. Whence, Arius, have you the boldness to allege this; merely from the things which take place among ourselves?

Do you see how the reasonings of all these trail along on the ground? All are, as it were, let loose and unconfined, and savoring of the earth? And so much then for doctrines. With regard to life and conduct, again, whoremongers, lovers of money, and of glory, and of everything else, trail on the ground. They have not their loins themselves standing firm, so that when they are weary they may rest upon them; but when they are weary, they do not put their hands upon them and stand upright, but flag.

He, however, who is girt about with the truth, first, never is weary; and secondly, if he should be weary, he will rest himself upon the truth itself. What? Will poverty, tell me, render him weary? No, in nowise; for he will repose on the true riches, and by this poverty will understand what is true poverty. Or again, will slavery make him weary? No, in nowise, for he will know what is the true slavery. Or shall disease? No, nor even that. Let your loins, says Christ, be girded about, and your lamps burning Luke 12:35, with that light which shall never be put out.

This is what the Israelites also, when they were departing out of Egypt Exodus 12:11, were charged to do. For why did they eat the passover with their loins girded? Are you desirous to hear the ground of it? According to the historical fact, or according to its mystical sense, shall I state it? But I will state them both, and do ye retain it in mind, for I am not doing it without an object, merely that I may tell you the solution, but also that my words may become in you reality.

They had, we read, their loins girded, and their staff in their hands, and their shoes on their feet, and thus they ate the Passover. Awful and terrible mysteries, and of vast depth; and if so terrible in the type, how much more in the reality? They come forth out of Egypt, they eat the Passover. Attend. Our Passover has been sacrificed, even Christ, it is said. Wherefore did they have their loins girded? Their guise is that of wayfarers; for their having shoes, and staves in their hands, and their eating standing, declares nothing else than this.

Will ye hear the history first, or the mystery? Better the history first. What then is the design of the history? The Jews were continually forgetting God's benefits to them. Accordingly then, God tied the sense of these, His benefits, not only to the time, but also to the very habit of them that were to eat. For this is why they were to eat girded and sandalled, that when they were asked the reason, they might say, we were ready for our journey, we were just about to go forth out of Egypt to the land of promise and we were ready for our exodus.

This then is the historical type. But the reality is this; we too eat a Passover, even Christ; for, says he, our Passover has been sacrificed, even Christ. 1 Corinthians 5:7 What then? We too ought to eat it, both sandalled and girded. And why? That we too may be ready for our Exodus, for our departure hence.

Moral. Let not any one of them that eat this Passover look towards Egypt, but towards Heaven, towards Jerusalem that is above. Galatians 4:26 On this account you eat with your loins girded, on this account you eat with shoes on your feet, that you may know, that from the moment you first begin to eat the Passover, you ought to set out, and to be upon your journey. And this implies two things, both that we must depart out of Egypt, and that, while we stay, we must stay henceforth as in a strange country; for our citizenship, says he, is in Heaven Philippians 3:20; and that all our life long we should ever be prepared, so that when we are called we may not put it off, but say, My heart is fixed. Psalm 108:1 Yes, but this Paul indeed could say, who knew nothing against himself; but I, who require a long time for repentance, I cannot say it. Yet that to be girded is the part of a waking soul, hearken to what God says to that righteous man, Gird up now your loins like a man, for I will demand of you, and declare thou unto Me. Job 38:3 This He says also to all the prophets, and this He says again to Moses, to be girded. And He Himself also appears to Ezekiel Ezekiel 9:11, Septuagint girded. Nay more, and the Angels, too, appear to us girded Revelation 15:6, as being soldiers. From our being girded about, it comes that we also stand bravely as from our standing our being girded comes.

For we also are going to depart, and many are the difficulties that intervene. When we have crossed this plain, straightway the devil is upon us, doing everything, contriving every artifice, to the end that those who have been saved out of Egypt, those who have passed the Red Sea, those who are delivered at once from the evil demons, and from unnumbered plagues, may be taken and destroyed by him. But, if we be vigilant, we too have a pillar of fire, the grace of the Spirit. The same both enlightens and overshadows us. We have manna; yea rather not manna, but far more than manna. Spiritual drink we have, not water, that springs forth from the Rock. So have we too our encampment Revelation 20:9, and we dwell in the desert even now; for a desert indeed without virtue, is the earth even now, even more desolate than that wilderness. Why was that desert so terrible? Was it not because it had scorpions in it, and adders? Deuteronomy 8:15 A land, it is said, which none passed through. Jeremiah 2:6. Yet is not that wilderness, no, it is not so barren of fruits, as is this human nature. At this instant, how many scorpions, how many asps are in this wilderness, how many serpents, how many offsprings of vipers Matthew 3:7 are these through whom we at this instant pass! Yet let us not be afraid; for the leader of this our Exodus is not Moses, but Jesus.

How then is it that we shall not suffer the same things? Let us not commit the same acts, and then shall we not suffer the same punishment. They murmured, they were ungrateful; let us therefore not cherish these passions. How was it that they fell all of them? They despised the pleasant land. Psalm 106:24 How 'despised' it? Surely they prized it highly. By becoming indolent and cowardly, and not choosing to undergo any labors to obtain it. Let not us then despise Heaven! This is what is meant by despising. Again, among us also has fruit been brought, fruit from Heaven, not the cluster of grapes borne upon the staff Numbers 13:23, but the earnest of the Spirit 2 Corinthians 1:22, the citizenship which is in Heaven Philippians 3:20, which Paul and the whole company of the Apostles, those marvelous husbandmen, have taught us. It is not Caleb the son of Jephunneh, nor Jesus the son of Nun, that has brought these fruits; but Jesus the Son of the Father of mercies 2 Corinthians 1:3, the Son of the Very God, has brought every virtue, has brought down from Heaven all the fruits that are from thence, the songs of heaven has He brought. For the words which the Cherubim above say, these has He charged us to say also, Holy, Holy, Holy. He has brought to us the virtue of the Angels. The Angels marry not, neither are given in marriage Matthew 22:30; this fair plant has He planted here also. They love not money, nor anything like it; and this too has He sown among us. They never die; and this has He freely given us also, for death is no longer death, but sleep. For hearken to what He says, Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep. John 11:11

Do you see then the fruits of Jerusalem that is above? Galatians 4:26 And what is indeed more stupendous than all is this, that our warfare is not decided, but all these things are given us before the attainment of the promise! For they indeed toiled even after they had entered into the land of promise -- rather, they toiled not, for had they chosen to obey God, they might have taken all the cities, without either arms or array. Jericho, we know, they overturned, more after the fashion of dancers than of warriors. We however have no warfare after we have entered into the land of promise, that is, into Heaven, but only so long as we are in the wilderness, that is, in the present life. For he that is entered into his rest has himself also rested from his works as God did from His. Hebrews 4:10 Let us not then be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. Galatians 6:9 Do you see how that just as He led them, so also He leads us? In their case, touching the manna and the wilderness, it is said, He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack. Exodus 16:18 And we have this charge given us, not to lay up treasure upon the earth. Matthew 6:19 But if we do lay up treasure, it is no longer the earthly worm that corrupts it, as was the case with the manna, but that which dwells eternally with fire. Let us then subdue all things, that we furnish not food to this worm. For he, it is said, who gathered much had nothing over. For this too happens with ourselves also every day. We all of us have but the same capacity of hunger to satisfy. And that which is more than this, is but an addition of cares. For what He intended in after-times to deliver, saying, Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof Matthew 6:34, this had He thus been teaching even from the very beginning, and not even thus did they receive it. But as to us, let us not be insatiable, let us not be discontented, let us not be seeking out for splendid houses; for we are on our pilgrimage, not at home; so that if there be any that knows that the present life is a sort of journey, and expedition, and, as one might say, it is what they call an entrenched camp, he will not be seeking for splendid buildings. For who, tell me, be he ever so rich, would choose to build a splendid house in an encampment? No one; he would be a laughing stock, he would be building for his enemies, and would the more effectually invite them on; and so then, if we be in our senses, neither shall we. The present life is nothing else than a march and an encampment.

Wherefore, I beseech you, let us do all we can, so as to lay up no treasure here; for if the thief should come, we must in a moment arise and depart. Watch, says He, for you know not at what hour the thief comes Matthew 24:42-43, thus naming death. O then, before he comes, let us send away everything before us to our native country; but here let us be well girded, that we may be enabled to overcome our enemies, whom God grant that we may overcome, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom together with the Holy Ghost, be unto the Father glory, strength, honor forever and ever. Amen.

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