

Homily 24 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the urgency of spiritual awakening and living in the light of Christ as we prepare for His return.

Scripture: Mark 4:38, Luke 9:58, Romans 13:11-12, Romans 13:14, 1 Corinthians 7:29, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 4:22, Hebrews 10:37

Topics: "Spiritual Awakening", "Christian Living"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the urgency of waking up from spiritual slumber, emphasizing the nearness of the Resurrection and Judgment Day. He encourages believers to cast off works of darkness and put on the armor of light, symbolizing the virtues and righteousness of Christ. Chrysostom warns against indulging in worldly desires, urging the congregation to live in a manner that glorifies God and to avoid the pitfalls of drunkenness, immorality, and strife. He stresses the importance of imitating Christ in humility, simplicity, and self-control, to be constantly wrapped up in His love and righteousness.

Transcript

Rom. XIII. 11

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

Since he had given them what commands were fitting, he again thrusts them on to the performance of good works, in consideration of what was pressing upon them. For the time of judgment, he means, is at the doors. So too he wrote to the Corinthians also, The remaining time is short. 1 Corinthians 7:29 And to the Hebrews again, For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Hebrews 10:37 But in those cases it was to cheer those in trouble, and to solace the toils of their closely successive temptations, that he said those things: but in the passage before us he does it to rouse those that are asleep, this language being useful to us for both the purposes: and what is that which he says, Now it is high time to awake out of sleep? It is, that near is the Resurrection, near the awful Judgment, and the day that burns as a furnace, near. Henceforward then we must be free from our listlessness; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. You see how he puts the Resurrection now close by them. For as the time advances, he means, the season of our present life is wasting away, and that of the life to come waxes nearer. If then thou be prepared, and hast done all whatsoever He has commanded, the day is salvation to you (3 manuscripts and Cat. σωτηρία σοι); but if the contrary, not so. For the present however, it is not upon alarming grounds that he exhorts them, but upon kindly ones, thus also to untie

them from their fellow-feeling for the things of this present world. Then since it was not unlikely, that in the beginning of their early endeavors they would be most earnest, in that their desire was then at its full vigor, but that as the time went on, the whole of their earnestness would wither down to nothing; he says that they ought however to be doing the reverse, not to get relaxed as time went on, but to be the more full of vigor. For the nearer the King may be at hand, the more ought they to get themselves in readiness; the nearer the prize is, the more wide awake ought they to be for the contest, since even the racers do this, when they are upon the end of the course, and towards the receiving of the prize, then they rouse themselves up the more. This is why he said, Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Ver. 12. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

If then this is upon ending, and the latter is drawing near, let us henceforth do what belongs to the latter, not to the former. For this is what is done in the things of this life. And when we see the night pressing on towards the morning, and hear the swallow twittering, we each of us awake our neighbor, although it be night still. But so soon as it is actually departing, we hasten one another, and say It is day now! And we all set about the works of the day, dressing, and leaving our dreams, and shaking our sleep thoroughly off, that the day may find us ready, and we may not have to begin getting up, and stretching ourselves, when the sunlight is up. What then we do in that case, that let us do here also. Let us put off imaginings, let us get clear of the dreams of this life present, let us lay aside its deep slumber, and be clad in virtue for garments. For it is to point out all this that he says,

Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

Yes, for the day is calling us to battle-array, and to the fight. Yet fear not at hearing of array and arms. For in the case of the visible suit of armor, to put it on is a heavy and abhorred task. But here it is desirable, and worth being prayed for. For it is of Light the arms are! Hence they will set you forth brighter than the sunbeam, and giving out a great glistening, and they place you in security: for they are arms, and glittering do they make you: for arms of light are they! What then, is there no necessity for you to fight? Yea, needful is it to fight, yet not to be distressed and toil. For it is not in fact war, but a solemn dance and feast-day, such is the nature of the arms, such the power of the Commander. And as the bridegroom goes forth with joyous looks from his chamber, so does he too who is defended with these arms. For he is at once soldier and bridegroom. But when he says, the day is at hand, he does not even allow it to be but near, but puts it even now beside us. For he says,

Let us walk becomingly, (A.V. honestly, in this sense) as in the day. For day it already is. And what most people insist upon very much in their exhortations, that he also uses to draw them on, the sense of the becoming. For they had a great regard to the esteem of the multitude. And he does not say, walk ye, but let us walk, so making the exhortation free from anything grating, and the reproof gentle.

Not in rioting and drunkenness. Not that he would forbid drinking, but the doing it immoderately; not the enjoying of wine, but doing it to excess (μετὰ παροινίας). As also the next thing he states likewise with the same measure, in the words,

Not in chambering and wantonness; for here also he does not prohibit the intercourse of the sexes, but committing fornication. Not in strife and envying. It is the deadly kind of passions then that he is for extinguishing, lust, namely, and anger. Wherefore it is not themselves only, but even the sources of them that he removes. For there is nothing that so kindles lust, and inflames wrath, as drunkenness, and sitting long at the wine. Wherefore after first saying, not in rioting and drunkenness, then he proceeded with, not

in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. And even here he does not pause, but after stripping us of these evil garments, hear how he proceeds to ornament us, when he says,

Ver. 14. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.

He no longer speaks of works, but he rouses them to greater things. For when he was speaking of vice, he mentioned the works of it: but when of virtue, he speaks not of works, but of arms, to show that virtue puts him that is possessed of it into complete safety, and complete brightness. And even here he does not pause, but leading his discourse on to what was greater, a thing far more awestrking; he gives us the Lord Himself for a garment, the King Himself: for he that is clad with Him, has absolutely all virtue. But in saying, Put on, he bids us be girt about with Him upon every side. As in another place he says, But if Christ be in you. Romans 8:10 And again, That Christ may dwell in the inner man. Ephesians 3:16-17, al. punct. For He would have our soul to be a dwelling for Himself, and Himself to be laid round about us as a garment, that He may be unto us all things both from within and from without. For He is our fullness; for He is the fullness of Him that fills all in all Ephesians 1:23: and the Way, and the Husband, and the Bridegroom;-- for I have espoused you as a chaste virgin to one husband, 2 Corinthians 11:2: and a root, and drink, and meat, and life -- for he says, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me; Galatians 2:20 and Apostle, and High-Priest, and Teacher, and Father, and Brother, and Joint-heir, and sharer of the tomb and Cross;-- for it says, We were buried together with Him, and planted together in the likeness of His Death Romans 6:4-5: and a Suppliant;-- For we are ambassadors in Christ's stead 2 Corinthians 5:20: and an Advocate to the Father; -- for He also makes, it says, intercession for us: Romans 8:34 and house and inhabitant -- for He says, He that abides in Me and I in Him John 15:5: and a Friend; for, You are My friends John 15:14: and a Foundation, and Cornerstone. And we are His members and His heritage, and building, and branches, and fellow-workers. For what is there that He is not minded to be to us, when He makes us cleave and fit on to Him in every way? And this is a sign of one loving exceedingly. Be persuaded then, and rousing you from sleep, put Him on, and when you have done so, give your flesh up to His bridle. For this is what he intimates in saying,

And make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. For as he does not forbid drinking, but drinking to excess, not marrying, but doing wantonness; so too he does not forbid making provision for the flesh either, but doing so with a view to fulfil the lusts thereof, as, for instance, by going beyond necessities. For that he does bid make provision for it, hear from what he says to Timothy, Use a little wine for your stom- ach's sake, and your frequent infirmities. 1 Timothy 5:23 So here too he is for taking care of it, but for health, and not wantonness. For this would cease to be making provision for it, when you were lighting up the flame, when you were making the furnace powerful. But that you may form a clearer notion what making provision for it to fulfil the lusts thereof is, and may shun such a provision, just call to mind the drunken, the gluttonous, those that pride themselves in dress, those that are effeminate, them that live a soft and relaxed life, and you will see what is meant. For they do everything not that they may be healthy, but that they may be wanton and kindle desire. But do thou, who hast put on Christ, prune away all those things, and seek for one thing only, to have your flesh in health. And to this degree do make provision for it, and not any further, but spend all your industry on the care of spiritual things. For then you will be able to rouse yourself out of this sleep, without being weighed down with these manifold desires. For the present life is a sleep, and the things in it are no way different from dreams. And as they that are asleep often speak and see things other than healthful, so do we also, or rather we see much worse even. For he that does anything disgraceful or says the like in a dream, when he is rid of his sleep, is rid of his disgrace, also, and is not to be punished. But in this case it is not so, but the shame, and also the

punishment, are immortal. Again, they that grow rich in a dream, when it is day are convicted of having been rich to no purpose. But in this case even before the day the conviction often comes upon them, and before they depart to the other life, those dreams have flown away.

Let us then shake off this evil sleep, for if the day find us sleeping, a deathless death will succeed, and before that day we shall be open to the attacks of all the enemies that are of this world, both men and devils: and if they be minded to undo us, there is nobody to hinder them. For if there were many watching, then the danger would not be so great; since however, one perhaps there is, or two, who have lighted a candle, and would be as it were watching in the depth of night, while men were sleeping; therefore now we have need of much sleeplessness, much guardedness, to prevent our falling into the most irremediable evils.

Does it not now seem to be broad daylight? Do we not think that all men are awake and sober? Yet still (and perhaps you will smile at what I say, still say it I will) we seem all of us like men sleeping and snoring in the depth of night. And if indeed an incorporeal being could be seen, I would show you how most men are snoring, and the devil breaking through walls, and butchering us as we lie, and stealing away the goods within, doing everything fearlessly, as if in profound darkness.

Or rather, even if it be impossible to see this with our eyes, let us sketch it out in words, and consider how many have been weighed down by evil desires, how many held down by the sore evil of wantonness, and have quenched the light of the Spirit. Hence it comes that they see one thing instead of another, hear one thing instead of another, and take no notice of any of the things here told them. Or if I am mistaken in saying so, and you are awake, tell me what has been doing here this day, if you have not been hearing this as a dream.

I am indeed aware that some can tell me (and I do not mean this of all); but do thou who comest under what has been said, who hast come here to no purpose, tell me what Prophet, what Apostle has been discoursing to us today? And on what subjects? And you would not have it in your power to tell me. For you have been talking a great deal here, just as in a dream, without hearing the realities. And this I would have said to the women too, as there is a great deal of sleeping among them.

And would it were sleep! For he that is asleep says nothing either good or bad. But he that is awake as you are puts forth many a word even for mischief on his own head, telling his interest, casting up his creditor accounts, calling to memory some barefaced bargaining, planting the thorns thick in his own soul, and not letting the seed make even ever so little advance. But rouse yourself, and pull these thorns up by the roots, and shake the drunkenness off: for this is the cause of the sleep.

But by drunkenness I mean, not that from wine only, but from worldly thoughts, and with them that from wine also. (See p. 443.) And this advice I am giving not to the rich only, but the poor too, and chiefly those that club together for social parties. For this is not really indulgence or relaxation, but punishment and vengeance. For indulgence lies not in speaking filthy things, but in talking solemnly, in being filled, not being ready to burst. But if you think this is pleasure, show me the pleasure by the evening!

You can not! And hitherto I say nothing of the mischiefs it leads to, but at present have only been speaking to you of the pleasure that withers away so quickly. For the party is no sooner broken up, than all that went for mirth is flown away. But when I come to mention the spewing, and the headaches, and the numberless disorders, and the soul's captivity, what have you to say to all this? Have we any business, because we are poor, to behave ourselves unseemly too? And in saying this I do not forbid your meeting together, or

taking your suppers at a common table, but to prevent your behaving unseemly, and as wishing indulgence to be really indulgence, and not a punishment, nor a vengeance, or drunkenness and revelling.

Let the Gentiles (■ λληνες) see that Christians know best how to indulge, and to indulge in an orderly way. For it says, Rejoice in the Lord with trembling. Psalm 2:11 But how then can one rejoice? Why, by saying hymns, making prayers, introducing psalms in the place of those low songs. Thus will Christ also be at our table, and will fill the whole feast with blessing, when you pray, when you sing spiritual songs, when you invite the poor to partake of what is set before you, when you set much orderliness and temperance over the feast.

So you will make the party a Church, by hymning, in the room of ill-timed shouts and cheers, the Master of all things. And tell me not, that another custom has come to prevail, but correct what is thus amiss. For whether you eat, it says, or whether ye drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 For from banquets of that sort you have evil desires, and impurities, and wives come to be in disrepute, and harlots in honor among you. Hence come the upsetting of families and evils unnumbered, and all things are turned upside down, and you have left the pure fountain, and run to the conduit of mire.

For that an harlot's body is mire, I do not enquire of any one else but of your own self that wallowest in the mire, if you dost not feel ashamed of yourself, if you dost not think yourself unclean after the sin is over. Wherefore I beseech you flee fornication, and the mother of it, drunkenness. Why sow where reaping is impossible, or rather even if you dost reap, the fruit brings you great shame? For even if a child be born, it at once disgraces yourself, and has itself had injustice done it in being born through you illegitimate and base.

And if you leave it never so much money, both the son of an harlot, and that of a servant-maid, is disreputable at home, disreputable in the city, disreputable in a court of law: disreputable too will you be also, both in your lifetime, and when dead. For if you have departed even, the memorials of your unseemliness abide. Why then bring disgrace upon all these? Why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? Where there are many efforts at abortion? Where there is murder before the birth?

For even the harlot thou dost not let continue a mere harlot, but makest her a murderess also. You see how drunkenness leads to whoredom, whoredom to adultery, adultery to murder; or rather to a something even worse than murder. For I have no name to give it, since it does not take off the thing born, but prevent its being born. Why then do you abuse the gift of God, and fight with His laws, and follow after what is a curse as if a blessing, and make the chamber of procreation a chamber for murder, and arm the woman that was given for childbearing unto slaughter?

For with a view to drawing more money by being agreeable and an object of longing to her lovers, even this she is not backward to do, so heaping upon your head a great pile of fire. For even if the daring deed be hers, yet the causing of it is yours. Hence too come idolatries, since many, with a view to become acceptable, devise incantations, and libations, and love-potions, and countless other plans. Yet still after such great unseemliness, after slaughters, after idolatries, the thing seems to many to belong to things indifferent, aye, and to many that have wives too.

Whence the mingle (φορτυ■ς) of mischief is the greater. For sorceries are applied not to the womb that is prostituted, but to the injured wife, and there are plottings without number, and invocations of devils, and necromancies, and daily wars, and truceless fightings, and home-cherished jealousies. Wherefore also

Paul, after saying, not in chamberings and wantonness, proceeds, not in strife and envying, as knowing the wars that result therefrom; the upsetting of families, the wrongs done to legitimate children, the other ills unnumbered.

That we may then escape from all these, let us put on Christ, and be with Him continually. For this is what putting Him on is; never being without Him, having Him evermore visible in us, through our sanctification, through our moderation. So we say of friends, such an one is wrapped up (■ νεδ■σατο) in such another, meaning their great love, and keeping together incessantly. For he that is wrapped up in anything, seems to be that which he is wrapped in. Let then Christ be seen in every part of us.

And how is He to be seen? If you do His deeds. And what did He do? The Son of Man, He says, has not where to lay His head. Luke 9:58 This do thou also aim after. He needed the use of food, and He fared upon barley loaves. He had occasion to travel, and there were no horses or beast of burden anywhere, but He walked so far as even to be weary. He had need of sleep, and He lay asleep upon the pillow in the fore (πρ■μν■, here πρ■ρας) part of the ship. Mark 4:38 There was occasion for sitting down to meat, and He bade them lie down upon the grass.

And His garments were cheap; and often He stayed alone, with no train after Him. And what He did on the Cross, and what amidst the insults, and all, in a word, that He did, do thou learn by heart (καταμαθ■ν) and imitate. And so will you have put on Christ, if you make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. For the thing has no real pleasure, since these lusts gender again others more keen, and you will never find satisfaction, but will only make you one great torment.

For as one who is in a continual thirst, even if he have ten thousand fountains hard by him, gets no good from this, as he is not able to extinguish the disorder, so is he that lives continually in lusts. But if you keep to what is necessary, you will never come to have this fear, but all those things will go away, as well drunkenness as wantonness. Eat then only so much as to break your hunger, have only so much upon you as to be sheltered, and do not curiously deck your flesh with clothing, lest you ruin it.

For you will make it more delicate, and will do injury to its healthfulness, by unnerving it with so much softness. That you may have it then a meet vehicle for the soul, that the helmsman may be securely seated over the rudder, and the soldier handle his arms with ease, you must make all parts to be fitly framed together. For it is not the having much, but requiring little, that keeps us from being injured. For the one man is afraid even if he is not wronged: this other, even if he be wronged, is in better case than those that have not been wronged, and even for this very thing is in the better spirits.

Let the object of our search be then, not how we can keep any one from using us spitefully, but how even if he wish to do it, he may be without the power. And this there is no other source whence to obtain, save by keeping to necessities, and not coveting anything more. For in this way we shall be able to enjoy ourselves here, and shall attain to the good things to come, by the grace and love toward man, etc.

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