

Homily 28 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon explores the mission of Paul and Barnabas, their encounter with the sorcerer Elymas, and the conversion of the proconsul Sergius Paulus, highlighting the importance of humility, obedience to God, and spiritual growth.

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Missionary Work"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, emphasizing their obedience to the Holy Spirit's guidance as they spread the word of God in various places. Despite facing opposition from sorcerers and false prophets, they remain steadfast in their mission, confronting evil and proclaiming the truth fearlessly. Chrysostom highlights the importance of preaching the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, showing no partiality in sharing the message of salvation. Through Paul's boldness and reliance on the Holy Spirit, the power of God is manifested in miraculous ways, leading many to believe and be astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Transcript

Acts XIII. 4, 5

So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

As soon as they were ordained they went forth, and hasted to Cyprus, that being a place where was no ill-design hatching against them, and where moreover the Word had been sown already. In Antioch there were (teachers) enough, and Phœnice too was near to Palestine; but Cyprus not so. However, you are not to make a question of the why and wherefore, when it is the Spirit that directs their movements: for they were not only ordained by the Spirit, but sent forth by Him likewise.

And when they had come to Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. Do you mark how they make a point of preaching the word to them first, not to make them more contentious? The persons mentioned before spoke to none but to Jews only Acts 11:19, and so here they betook them to the synagogues. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Acts 13:6-8 Again a Jew sorcerer, as was Simon. And observe this man, how, while they preached to the others, he did not take it much amiss, but only when they approached the proconsul. And then in respect of the proconsul the wonder is, that although prepossessed by the man's sorcery, he was nevertheless willing to hear the Apostles. So it was with the Samaritans: and from the competition (συγκροσσεως) the victory appears, the sorcery being worsted.

Everywhere, vainglory and love of power are a (fruitful) source of evils! But Saul, who is also Paul,-- Acts 13:9 here his name is changed at the same time that he is ordained, as it was in Peter's case, -- filled with the Holy Ghost, looked upon him, and said, O full of all guile and all villany, thou child of the devil: Acts 13:10 and observe, this is not abuse, but accusation: for so ought forward, impudent people to be rebuked thou enemy of all righteousness; here he lays bare what was in the thoughts of the man, while under pretext of saving he was ruining the proconsul: will you not cease, he says, to pervert the ways of the Lord? (He says it) both confidently (αξιολπιστως), It is not with us you are warring, nor are you fighting (with us), but the ways of the Lord you are perverting, and with praise (of these, he adds) the right ways.

And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind. Acts 13:11 It was the sign by which he was himself converted, and by this he would fain convert this man. As also that expression, for a season, puts it not as an act of punishing, but as meant for his conversion: had it been for punishment, he would have made him lastingly blind, but now it is not so, but for a season (and this), that he may gain the proconsul. For, as he was prepossessed by the sorcery, it was well to teach him a lesson by this infliction (and the sorcerer also), in the same way as the magicians (in Egypt) were taught by the boils.

Exodus 9:11 And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness: and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. Acts 13:12 But observe, how they do not linger there, as (they might have been tempted to do) now that the proconsul was a believer, nor are enervated by being courted and honored, but immediately keep on with their work, and set out for the country on the opposite coast.

Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. (v. 13, 14.) And here again they entered the synagogues, in the character of Jews, that they might not be treated as enemies, and be driven away: and in this way they carried the whole matter successfully. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, You men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Acts 13:15 From this point, we learn the history of Paul's doings, as in what was said above we have learned not a little about Peter. But let us review what has been said.

(Recapitulation.) And when they had come to Salamis, the metropolis of Cyprus, they preached the word of God. Acts 13:5 They had spent a year in Antioch: it behooved that they should go hither also (to Cyprus) and not sit permanently where they were (the converts in Cyprus): needed greater teachers. See too how they remain no time in Seleucia, knowing that (the people there) might have reaped much benefit from the neighboring city (of Antioch): but they hasten on to the more pressing duties.

When they came to the metropolis of the island, they were earnest to disabuse (διορθωσαι) the proconsul. But that it is no flattery that (the writer) says, he was with the proconsul, a prudent man Acts 13:7, you may

learn from the facts; for he needed not many discourses, and himself wished to hear them. And he mentions also the names. * * * Observe, how he said nothing to the sorcerer, until he gave him an occasion: but they only preached the word of the Lord. Since (though Elymas) saw the rest attending to them, he looked only to this one object, that the proconsul might not be won over.

Why did not (Paul) perform some other miracle? Because there was none equal to this, the taking the enemy captive. And observe, he first impeaches, and then punishes, him. He shows how justly the man deserved to suffer, by his saying, O full of all deceit Acts 13:10: (full of all,) he says: nothing wanting to the full measure: and he well says, of all deceit, for the man was playing the part of a hypocrite. -- Child of the devil, because he was doing his work: enemy of all righteousness, since this (which they preached) was the whole of righteousness (though at the same time): I suppose in these words he reproves his manner of life.

His words were not prompted by anger, and to show this, the writer premises, filled with the Holy Ghost, that is, with His operation. And now behold the hand of the Lord is upon you. Acts 13:11 It was not vengeance then, but healing: for it is as though he said: It is not I that do it, but the hand of God. Mark how unassuming! No light, as in the case of Paul, shone round about him. Acts 9:3 You shall be blind, he says, not seeing the sun for a season, that he may give him opportunity for repentance: for we nowhere find them wishing to be made conspicuous by the more stern (exercise of their authority), even though it was against enemies that this was put forth: in respect of those of their own body (they used severity), and with good reason, but in dealing with those without, not so; that (the obedience of faith) might not seem to be matter of compulsion and fear.

It is a proof of his blindness, his seeking some to lead him by the hand. Acts 5:1 ff. And the proconsul sees the blindness inflicted, and when he saw what was done, he believed: and both alone believed not merely this, but, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord Acts 13:12: he saw that these things were not mere words, nor trickery. Mark how he loved to receive instruction from his teachers, though he was in a station of so high authority. And (Paul) said not to the sorcerer, Will you not cease to pervert the proconsul?

What may be the reason of John's going back from them? For John, it says, departing from them returned to Jerusalem Acts 13:13: (he does it) because they are undertaking a still longer journey: and yet he was their attendant, and as for the danger, they incurred it (not he).-- Again, when they had come to Perga, they hastily passed by the other cities, for they were in haste to the metropolis, Antioch. And observe how concise the historian is. They sat down in the synagogue, he says, and, on the sabbath day (v. 14, 15): that they might prepare the way beforehand for the Word.

And they do not speak first, but when invited: since as strangers, they called upon them to do so. Had they not waited, there would have been no discourse. Here for the first time we have Paul preaching. And observe his prudence: where the word was already sown, he passes on: but where there was none (to preach), he makes a stay: as he himself writes: Yea, so have I strived to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named. Romans 15:20 Great courage this also. Truly, from the very outset, a wonderful man! crucified, ready for all encounters (παρατεταγμ■νος), he knew how great grace he had obtained, and he brought to it zeal equivalent.

He was not angry with John: for this was not for him: but he kept to the work, he quailed not, he was unappalled, when shut up in the midst of a host. Observe how wisely it is ordered that Paul should not preach at Jerusalem: the very hearing that he has become a believer, this of itself is enough for them; for

him to preach, they never would have endured, such was their hatred of him: so he departs far away, where he was not known. But it is well done, that they entered the synagogue on the sabbath day when all were collected together.

And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, You men and brethren, if you have any word or exhortation for the people, say on. Acts 13:15 Behold how they do this without grudging, but no longer after this. If you did wish this (really), there was more need to exhort.

He first convicted the sorcerer (and showed), what he was; and that he was such, the sign showed: you shall be blind, not seeing the sun this was a sign of the blindness of his soul: for a season Acts 13:11: he says, to bring him to repentance. But, oh that love of rule! Oh, that lust of vainglory! How it does overturn and ruin everything; makes people stand up against their own, against each other's salvation; renders them blind indeed, and dark, insomuch that they have even to seek for some to lead them by the hand!

Oh that they did even this, oh that they did seek were it but some to lead them by the hand! But no, they no longer endure this, they take the whole matter into their own hands. (This vice) will let no man see: like a mist and thick darkness it spreads itself over them, not letting any see through it. What pleas shall we have to offer, we who for one evil affection, overcome another evil affection (supra p. 176), but not for the fear of God! For example, many who are both lewd and covetous, have for their niggardliness put a bridle upon their lust, while other such, on the contrary, have for pleasure's sake, despised riches.

Again, those who are both the one and the other, have by the lust of vainglory overcome both, lavishing their money unsparingly, and practising temperance to no (good) purpose; others again, who are exceedingly vainglorious, have despised that evil affection, submitting to many vile disgraces for the sake of their amours, or for the sake of their money: others again, that they may satiate their anger, have chosen to suffer losses without end, and care for none of them, provided only they may work their own will.

And yet, what passion can do with us, the fear of God is impotent to effect! Why speak I of passion? What shame before men can do with us, the fear of God has not the strength to effect! Many are the things we do right and wrong, from a feeling of shame before men; but God we fear not. How many have been shamed by regard to the opinions of men into flinging away money! How many have mistakenly made it a point of honor to give themselves up to the service of their friends (only), to their hurt!

How many from respect for their friendships have been shamed into numberless wrong acts! Since then both passion and regard for the opinion of men are able to put us upon doing wrong things and right, it is idle to say, we cannot: we can, if we have the mind: and we ought to have the mind. Why can you not overcome the love of glory, when others do overcome it, having the same soul as thou, and the same body; bearing the same form, and living the same life? Think of God, think of the glory that is from above: weigh against that the things present, and you will quickly recoil from this worldly glory.

If at all events thou covet glory, covet that which is glory, indeed. What kind of glory is it, when it begets infamy? What kind of glory, when it compels one to desire the honor of those who are inferior, and stands in need of that? Real honor is the gaining the esteem of those who are greater than one's self. If at all events you are enamoured of glory, be thou rather enamoured of that which comes from God. If enamoured of that glory you despise this world's glory, you shall see how ignoble this is: but so long as you see not that glory, neither will you be able to see this, how foul it is, how ridiculous.

For as those who are under the spell of some wicked, hideously ugly woman, so long as they are in love with her, cannot see her ill-favoredness, because their passion spreads a darkness over their judgment: so is it here also: so long as we are possessed with the passion, we cannot perceive what a thing it is. How then might we be rid of it? Think of those who (for the sake of glory) have spent countless sums, and now are none the better for it: think of the dead, what glory they got, and (now) this glory is nowhere abiding, but all perished and come to naught: bethink you how it is only a name, and has nothing real in it.

For say, what is glory? Give me some definition. The being admired by all, you will say. With justice, or also not with justice? For if it be not with justice, this is not admiration, but crimination (κατηγορία), and flattery, and misrepresentation (διδασκαλία). But if you say, With justice, why that is impossible: for in the populace there are no right judgments; those that minister to their lusts, those are the persons they admire. And if you would (see the proof of this), mark those who give away their substance to the harlots, to the charioteers, to the dancers.

But you will say, we do not mean these, but those who are just and upright, and able to do great and noble good acts. Would that they wished it, and they soon would do good: but as things are, they do nothing of the kind. Who, I ask you, now praises the just and upright man? Nay, it is just the contrary. Could anything be more preposterous than for a just man, when doing any such good act, to seek glory of the many -- as if an artist of consummate skill, employed upon an Emperor's portrait, should wish to have the praises of the ignorant!

Moreover, a man who looks for honor from men, will soon enough desist from the acts which virtue enjoins. If he will needs be gaping for their praises, he will do just what they wish, not what himself wishes. What then would I advise you? You must look only to God, to the praise that is from Him, perform all things which are pleasing to Him, and go after the good things (that are with Him), not be gaping for anything that is of man: for this mars both fasting and prayer and almsgiving, and makes all our good deeds void.

Which that it be not our case, let us flee this passion. To one thing alone let us look, to the praise which is from God, to the being accepted of Him, to the commendation from our common Master; that, having passed through our present life virtuously, we may obtain the promised blessings together with them that love Him, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, might, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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