

Homily 3 on Second Thessalonians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the seriousness of eternal punishment, the glory of God in believers, and the need for steadfast faith amidst false teachings.

Scripture: Matthew 24:24, Matthew 25:6, 1 Thessalonians 3:4, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Hebrews 12:4

Topics: "Eternal Punishment", "False Teachings"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the eternal punishment awaiting those who do not know God and do not believe in the Gospel, emphasizing the severity of hell and the importance of not being deceived by false teachings. He warns against being shaken in faith by false prophecies claiming the imminent return of the Lord, highlighting the need for constant remembrance of God's teachings. Chrysostom also discusses the Antichrist, the man of sin, who will exalt himself against God, and urges the congregation to be vigilant and not easily deceived.

Transcript

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10

Who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His might, when He shall come to be glorified in His Saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed.

There are many men, who form good hopes not by abstaining from their sins, but by thinking that hell is not so terrible as it is said to be, but milder than what is threatened, and temporary, not eternal; and about this they philosophize much. But I could show from many reasons, and conclude from the very expressions concerning hell, that it is not only not milder, but much more terrible than is threatened. But I do not now intend to discourse concerning these things. For the fear even from bare words is sufficient, though we do not fully unfold their meaning. But that it is not temporary, hear Paul now saying, concerning those who know not God, and who do not believe in the Gospel, that they shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction. How then is that temporary which is everlasting? From the face of the Lord, he says. What is this? He here wishes to say how easily it might be. For since they were then much puffed up, there is no need, he says, of much trouble; it is enough that God comes and is seen, and all are involved in punishment and vengeance. His coming only to some indeed will be Light, but to others vengeance.

And from the glory of His might, he says, when He shall come to be glorified in His Saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed.

Is God glorified? Yea, he says, in all the Saints. How? For when they that puff so greatly see those who were scourged by them, who were despised, who were derided, even those now near to Him, it is His glory, or rather it is their glory, both theirs and His; His indeed, because He did not forsake them; theirs, because they were thought worthy of so great honor. For as it is His riches, that there are faithful men, so also it is His glory that there are those who are to enjoy His blessings. It is the glory of Him that is good, to have those to whom He may impart His beneficence. And to be marveled at, he says, in all them that believed, that is, through them that believed. See here again, in is used for through. For through them He is shown to be admirable, when He brings to so much splendor those who were pitiable and wretched, and who had suffered unnumbered ills, and had believed. His power is shown then; because although they seem to be deserted here, yet nevertheless they there enjoy great glory; then especially is shown all the glory and the power of God. How?

Because our testimony unto you was believed in that day.

Ver. 11. To which end also we pray always for you.

That is, when those are brought into public view, who have suffered unnumbered ills, deigned to make them apostatize from the faith, and yet have not yielded, but have believed, God is glorified. Then is shown the glory of these men also. Judge none blessed, it says, before his death. Sirach 11:28 On this account he says, in that day will be shown those who believed. To which end also we pray, he says, always for you, that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire of goodness and every work of faith, with power.

That He may count you, he says, worthy of calling; for they were not called. Therefore he has added, and fulfill every desire of goodness. Since he also who was clothed in filthy garments, was called, but did not abide in his calling, but for this reason was the more rejected. Of the calling, namely that to the bride-chamber. Since the five virgins also were called. Arise it says, the bridegroom comes. From Matthew 25:6 And they prepared themselves, but did not enter in. But he speaks of that other calling. Showing therefore what calling he is speaking of, he has added, And fulfill every desire of goodness and every work of faith, with power. This is the calling, he says, that we seek. See how gently he takes them down. For that they may not be rendered vain by the excess of commendation, as if they had done great deeds, and may not become slothful, he shows that something still is wanting to them, so long as they are in this life. Which also he said in his Epistle to the Hebrews. You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. Hebrews 12:4 Unto all wellpleasing, he says, that is, His gratification, persuasion, full assurance. That is, that the persuasion of God may be fulfilled, that nothing may be wanting to you, that you may be so, as He wills. And every work of faith, he says, with power. What is this? The patient endurance of persecutions, that we may not faint, he says.

Ver. 12. That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

He spoke there of glory, he speaks of it also here. He said, that they are glorified, so that they might even boast. He said, what was much more, that they also glorify God. He said, that they will receive that glory. But here too he means; For the Master being glorified, the servants also are glorified. For those who glorify their Master, are much more glorified themselves, both by that very thing, and apart from it. For tribulation for the sake of Christ is glory, and that thing he everywhere calls glory. And by how much the more we suffer anything dishonorable, so much the more illustrious we become. Then again showing that

this also itself is of God, he says, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, this grace He Himself has given us, that He may be glorified in us, and that He may glorify us in Him. How is He glorified in us? Because we prefer nothing before Him. How are we glorified in Him? Because we have received power from Him, so that we do not at all yield to the evils that are brought upon us. For when temptation happens, at the same time God is glorified, and we too. For they glorify Him, because He has so nerved us; they admire us, because we have rendered ourselves worthy. And all these things are done by the grace of God.

Chap. 2:1, 2. Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him; to the end that you be not quickly shaken from your mind.

When the Resurrection will be, he has not said, but that it will not be now, he has said. And our gathering together unto Him. This also is no little matter. See how the exhortation also is again accompanied with commendation and encouragement, in that He and all the Saints will certainly appear with us. Here he is discoursing concerning the resurrection and our gathering together. For these things will happen at the same time. He raises up their minds. That you be not quickly shaken, he says, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is now present.

Here he seems to me to intimate that certain persons went about having forged an Epistle, as if from Paul, and showing this, said that the Day of the Lord is at hand, that thence they might lead many into error. Therefore that they might not be deceived, Paul gives security by the things he writes, and says, be not troubled, either by spirit or by word: and this is the meaning of what he says: Though any one having the spirit of prophecy should say this, believe it not. For when I was with you I told you these things, so that you ought not to change your persuasion from the things which you were taught. Or thus, by spirit: so he calls the false prophet, speaking what they spoke by an unclean spirit. For these men, willing the more to be believed, not only endeavored to deceive by persuasive words, (for this he shows, saying, or by word,) but they also showed a forged letter, as from Paul, declaring the same thing. Wherefore pointing out this also, he has added, or by letter as from us. Having therefore secured them on every side, he thus sets forth his own doctrine, and says:

Ver. 3, 4. Let no man beguile you in any wise: for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God.

Here he discourses concerning the Antichrist, and reveals great mysteries. What is the falling away? He calls him Apostasy, as being about to destroy many, and make them fall away. So that if it were possible, He says, the very Elect should be offended. From Matthew 24:24 And he calls him the man of sin. For he shall do numberless mischiefs, and shall cause others to do them. But he calls him the son of perdition, because he is also to be destroyed. But who is he? Is it then Satan? By no means; but some man, that admits his fully working in him. For he is a man. And exalts himself against all that is called God or is worshipped. For he will not introduce idolatry, but will be a kind of opponent to God; he will abolish all the gods, and will order men to worship him instead of God, and he will be seated in the temple of God, not that in Jerusalem only, but also in every Church. Setting himself forth, he says; he does not say, saying it, but endeavoring to show it. For he will perform great works, and will show wonderful signs.

Ver. 5. Do you not remember that when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

Do you see that it is necessary continually to say the same things, and to enlarge upon them in the same words? For behold, they heard him saying these things when present, and again they had need to be reminded of them. For as when they had heard concerning afflictions, For verily, he says, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction 1 Thessalonians 3:4; they nevertheless forgot it, and he confirms them again by letters; so also having heard concerning the Coming of Christ, they again needed letters to compose them. He therefore reminds them, showing that he speaks of nothing strange, but what he had always said.

For as in the case of husbandmen, the seeds are indeed cast into the earth once for all, yet do not constantly remain, but require much preparation withal, and if they do not break up the earth, and cover over the seeds sown, they sow for the birds that gather grain; so we also, unless by constant remembrance we cover over what has been sown, have but cast it all into the air. For both the devil carries it away, and our sloth destroys it, and the sun dries it up, and the rain washes it away, and the thorns choke it: so that it is not sufficient after once sowing it to depart, but there is need of much assiduity, driving off the birds, rooting up the thorns, filling up the stony ground with much earth, checking, and fencing off, and taking away everything injurious. But in the case of the earth all depends upon the husbandman, for it is a lifeless subject, and prepared only to be passive. But in the spiritual soil it is quite otherwise. All is not the teachers' part, but half at least, if not more, that of the disciples. It is our part indeed to cast the seed, but yours to do the things spoken for your recollection, by your works to show the fruits, to pull up the thorns by the roots.

For wealth truly is a thorn, bearing no fruit, both uncomely to the sight, and unpleasant for use, injuring those that meddle with it, not only not itself bearing fruit, but even hindering that which was shooting forth. Such is wealth. It not only does not bear eternal fruit but it even hinders those who wish to gain it. Thorns are the food of irrational camels; they are devoured and consumed by fire, being useful for nothing. Such also is wealth, useful for nothing, but to kindle the furnace, to light up The Day that burns as an oven, to nourish passions void of reason, revenge and anger. For such is also the camel that feeds on thorns. For it is said by those who are acquainted with such things, that there is no animal so implacable, so sulky and revengeful, as a camel. Such is wealth. It nourishes the unreasonable passions of the soul but it pierces and wounds the rational, as is the case with thorns. This plant is hard and rough, and grows up of itself.

Let us see how it grows up, that we may root it out. It grows in places that are precipitous, stony and dry, where there is no moisture. When therefore anyone is rough and precipitous, that is unmerciful, the thorn grows in him. But when the sons of husbandmen wish to root them up, they do it not with iron. How then? Having set fire to it, they in that way extract all the bad quality of the land. For since it is not enough to cut away the upper part, while the root remains below, nor even to extirpate the root, (for it remains in the earth from its bad quality, and, as when some pestilence has assailed the body, there are still left the remains of it,) the fire from above, drawing up all that moisture of the thorns, like some poison, extracts it by means of the heat from the bowels of the earth. For as the cupping glass placed upon the part draws all the disorder to itself, so also the fire draws off all the base quality that was in the thorns, and makes the land pure.

On what account then do I say these things? Because it behooves you to purge off all affection for riches. With us also there is a fire that draws this bad quality from the soul; I mean that of the Spirit. This if we let work on them, we shall be able not only to dry up the thorns, but also the humor from them, since if they be deeply fixed, all is rendered vain. For mark, has a rich man entered here, or also a rich woman? She does not regard how she shall hear the oracles of God, but how she shall make a show, how she shall sit

with pomp, how with much glory, how she shall surpass all other women in the costliness of her garments, and render herself more dignified both by her dress, and look, and gait. And all her care and concern is, Did such a woman see me? Did she admire me? Is my beauty handsomely set off? So that her garments may not rot, nor be rent; and about this is all her care. In like manner also the rich man enters, meaning to exhibit himself to the poor man, and to strike him with awe by the garments which are about him, and by the number of his slaves, who also stand round, driving off the crowd. But he from his great pride does not condescend even to do this but considers it a work so unworthy of a gentleman, that although excessively puffed up, he cannot bear to do it, but commits it to his slaves. For to do this requires truly servile and impudent manners. Then when he is seated, the cares of his house immediately intrude themselves, distracting him on every side. The pride that possesses his soul overflows. He thinks that he does a favor both to us, and to the people, and perhaps even to God, because he has entered into the house of God. But he who is thus inflamed, how shall he ever be cured?

Tell me then, if any one should go to the shop of a physician, and not ask a favor of the physician, but think that he was doing him a favor, and declining to request a medicine for his wound, should concern himself about his garments; would he go away having received any benefit? I think not indeed. But, with your leave, I will tell you the cause of all these things. They think when they enter in here, that they enter into our presence, they think that what they hear they hear from us. They do not lay to heart, they do not consider, that they are entering into the presence of God, that it is He who addresses them. For when the Reader standing up says, Thus says the Lord, and the Deacon stands and imposes silence on all, he does not say this as doing honor to the Reader, but to Him who speaks to all through him. If they knew that it was God who through His prophet speaks these things, they would cast away all their pride. For if when rulers are addressing them, they do not allow their minds to wander, much less would they, when God is speaking. We are ministers, beloved. We speak not our own things, but the things of God, letters coming from heaven are every day read.

Tell me then, I beseech you, if now, when we are all present some one entered, having a golden girdle, and drawing himself up, and with an air of consequence said that he was sent by the king that is on the earth, and that he brought letters to the whole city concerning matters of importance; would you not then be all turned towards him? Would you not, without any command from a deacon, observe a profound silence? Truly I think so. For I have often heard letters from kings read here. Then if any one comes from a king, you all attend; and does a Prophet come from God, and speak from heaven, and no one attend? Or do you not believe that these things are messages from God? These are letters sent from God; therefore let us enter with becoming reverence into the Churches, and let us hearken with fear to the things here said.

What do I come in for, you say, if I do not hear some one discoursing? This is the ruin and destruction of all. For what need of a person to discourse? This necessity arises from our sloth. Wherefore any necessity for a homily? All things are clear and open that are in the divine Scriptures; the necessary things are all plain. But because you are hearers for pleasure's sake, for that reason also you seek these things. For tell me, with what pomp of words did Paul speak? And yet he converted the world. Or with what the unlettered Peter? But I know not, you say, the things that are contained in the Scriptures. Why? For are they spoken in Hebrew? Are they in Latin, or in foreign tongues? Are they not in Greek? But they are expressed obscurely, you say: What is it that is obscure? Tell me. Are there not histories? For (of course) you know the plain parts, in that you enquire about the obscure. There are numberless histories in the Scriptures. Tell me one of these. But you cannot. These things are an excuse, and mere words. Every day, you say,

one hears the same things. Tell me, then, do you not hear the same things in the theaters? Do you not see the same things in the race-course? Are not all things the same? Is it not always the same sun that rises? Is it not the same food that we use? I should like to ask you, since you say that you every day hear the same things; tell me, from what Prophet was the passage that was read? From what Apostle, or what Epistle? But you cannot tell me -- you seem to hear strange things. When therefore you wish to be slothful, you say that they are the same things. But when you are questioned, you are in the case of one who never heard them. If they are the same, you ought to know them. But you are ignorant of them.

This state of things is worthy of lamentation -- of lamentation and complaint: for the coiner coins but in vain. For this you ought more especially to attend, because they are the same things, because we give you no labor, nor speak things that are strange or variable. What then, since you say, that those are the same things, but our discourses are not the same things, but we always speak things that are new to you, do you pay heed to these? By no means. But if we say, Why do you not retain even these? We hear them but once, you say, and how can we retain them? If we say, Why do you not attend to those other things? The same things, you say, are always said-- and every way these are words of sloth and excuse. But they will not always serve, but there will be a time when we shall lament in vain and without effect. Which may God forbid, and grant that having repented here, and attending with understanding and godly fear to the things spoken, we may both be urged on to the due performance of good works, and may amend our own lives with all diligence, that we may be able to obtain the blessings promised to those who love Him, by the grace and lovingkindness, etc.

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