

Homily 30 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul and Barnabas preached the word of God to the Gentiles, who were eager to hear, and many were ordained unto eternal life, while the Jews put the word from them and judged themselves unworthy

Scripture: Acts 13:42-43, Acts 13:45-50, Acts 14:1-2

Topics: "Humility In Faith", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of humility and focusing on the true essence of teachings rather than seeking praise or applause. He emphasizes the need for silence, reflection, and calmness in churches to truly absorb and benefit from the teachings. Chrysostom warns against the dangers of seeking glory and recognition, urging listeners to prioritize the substance of the message over eloquence or admiration. He encourages a shift towards a more profound understanding of faith and a humble approach to learning and teaching.

Transcript

Acts XIII. 42

And as they were going out (text rec. 'from the syn. of the Jews,') they besought (the Gentiles) that these words might be spoken unto them on the following sabbath.

Do you mark Paul's wisdom? He not only gained admiration at the time, but put into them a longing desire for a second hearing, while in what he said he dropped some seeds (ἐπιπείν τινα σπέρματα) as it were, and forbore to solve (the questions raised), or to follow out the subject to its conclusion, his plan being to interest them and engage their good-will to himself, and not make (people) listless and indifferent by casting all at once into the minds of those (who first heard him).

He told them the fact, that through this Man is remission of sins announced unto you, but the how, he did not declare. And when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and worshipping proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas-- after this point he puts Paul first -- who, speaking unto them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. Acts 13:43 Do you observe the eagerness, how great it is? They followed them, it says. Why did they not baptize them immediately? It was not the proper time: there was need to persuade them in order to their steadfast abiding therein.

And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. Acts 13:44 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and contradicted the things spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Acts 13:45 See malice wounded in wounding others: this made the Apostles more conspicuous -- the contradiction which those offered. In the first instance then they of their own accord besought them to speak (and now they opposed them): contradicting, it says, and blaspheming.

O recklessness! Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. Acts 13:46 Do you mark how by their contentious behavior they the more extended the preaching, and (how the Apostles here) gave themselves the more to the Gentiles, having (by this very thing) pleaded their justification, and made themselves clear of all blame with their own people (at Jerusalem)? (c) See how by their envy they bring about great things, other (than they looked for): they brought it about that the Apostles spoke out boldly, and came to the Gentiles!

For this is why he says, And speaking out boldly, Paul and Barnabas said. They were to go out to the Gentiles: but observe the boldness coming with measure: for if Peter pleaded in his justification, much more these needed a plea, none having called them there. Acts 11:4 But by saying To you first, he showed that to those also it was their duty (to preach), and in saying Necessary, he showed that it was necessary to be preached to them also. But since you turn away from it-- he does not say, Woe unto you, and You are punished, but We turn unto the Gentiles.

With great gentleness is the boldness fraught! (a) Also he does not say, You are unworthy, but Have judged yourselves unworthy. Lo, we turn unto the Gentiles. For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, I have sent you to be a light of the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. Acts 13:47 For that the Gentiles might not be hurt at hearing this, as if the case were so that, had the Jews been in earnest, they themselves would not have obtained the blessings, therefore he brings in the prophecy, saying, A light of the Gentiles, and, for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

And hearing (this) the Gentiles Acts 13:48-- this, while it was more cheering to them, seeing the case was this, that whereas those were of right to hear first, they themselves enjoy the blessing, was at the same time more stinging to those -- and the Gentiles, it says, hearing (this) were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and believed, as many as were ordained unto eternal life: i.e., set apart for God. Observe how he shows the speediness of the benefit: And the word of the Lord was borne through all the region, Acts 13:49 διεφύρετο, instead of διεκομίζετο, was carried or conveyed through (it). (d) But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

Acts 13:50 The devout women, (b) instead of the proselyte-women. They did not stop at envy, but added deeds also. (e) Do you see what they effected by their opposing the preaching? To what dishonor they brought these (honorable women)? But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. Acts 13:51 Here now they used that terrible sign which Christ enjoined, If any receive you not, shake off the dust from your feet Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; but these did it upon no light ground, but because they were driven away by them.

This was no hurt to the disciples; on the contrary, they the more continued in the word: And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost Acts 13:52 for the suffering of the teacher does not check his

boldness, but makes the disciple more courageous.

And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews. Acts 14:1 Again they entered into the synagogues. See how far they were from becoming more timid! Having said, We turn unto the Gentiles, nevertheless (by going into the synagogues) they superabundantly fortify their own justification (with their Jewish brethren). So that, it says, a great multitude both of Jews and Greeks believed. For it is likely they discoursed as to Greeks also.

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Acts 14:2 Together (with themselves) now they took to stirring up the Gentiles too, as not being themselves sufficient. Then why did the Apostles not go forth thence? Why, they were not driven away, only attacked. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Acts 14:3 This caused their boldness; or rather, of their boldness indeed their own hearty good-will was the cause-- therefore it is that for a long while they work no signs -- while the conversion of the hearers was (the effect) of the signs, though their boldness also contributed somewhat. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the Apostles. Acts 14:4 No small matter this dividing. And this was what the Lord said, I am not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Matthew 10:34 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were aware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lies round about: and there they preached the Gospel. Acts 14:5-7 Again, as if they purposely wished to extend the preaching after it was increased, they once more sent them out. See on all occasions the persecutions working great good, and defeating the persecutors, and making the persecuted illustrious.

For having come to Lystra, he works a great miracle, by raising the lame man. And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: the same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice -- why with a loud voice? That the multitude should believe-- Stand upright on your feet. (v. 8, 9.) But observe, he gave heed, it says, to the things spoken by Paul.

Do you mark the elevation of the man's mind (φιλοσοφία)? He was nothing defeated (παρεβλήθη) by his lameness for earnestness of hearing. Who fixing his eyes upon him, and perceiving, it says, that he had faith to be made whole. He was already predisposed in purpose of mind. And yet in the case of the others, it was the reverse: for first receiving healing in their bodies, they were then taken in hand for cure of their souls, but this man not so. It seems to me, that Paul saw into his soul.

And he leaped, it says, and walked. Acts 14:10 It was a proof of his perfect cure, the leaping. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

Acts 14:11-13 But this purpose was not yet manifest, for they spoke in their own tongue, saying, The gods in the likeness of men have come down to us: therefore the Apostle said nothing to them as yet. But when they saw the garlands, then they went out, and rent their garments, Which when the Apostles, Barnabas

and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you. (v. 14, 15.)

See how on all occasions they are clean from the lust of glory, not only not coveting, but even repudiating it when offered: just as Peter also said, Why gaze ye on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made him to walk Acts 3:12? So these also say the same. And Joseph also said of the dreams, Is not their interpretation of God? Genesis 40:8 And Daniel in like manner, And to me also, not through the wisdom that is in me was it revealed. Daniel 2:30 And Paul everywhere says this, as when he says, And for these things who is sufficient? Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think (anything) as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God. 2 Corinthians 2:16; 3:5 But let us look over again what has been said.

(Recapitulation.) And when they had gone out, etc. Acts 13:42. Not merely were the multitudes drawn to them, but how? They besought to have the same words spoken to them again, and by their actions they showed their earnestness. Now when the congregation, etc. Acts 13:43 See the Apostles on all occasions exhorting, not merely accepting men, nor courting them, but, speaking unto them, it says, they persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. But when the Jews, etc. Acts 13:45 Why did they not contradict before this? Do you observe who on all occasions they were moved by passion? And they not only contradicted, but blasphemed also. For indeed malice stops at nothing. But see what boldness of speech! It was necessary, he says, that the word should have been spoken first to you, but since you put it from you,-- Acts 13:46 it is not put as affronting (though) it is in fact what they did in the case of the prophets: Talk not to us, said they, with talk -- Isaiah 30:10: but since you put it from you-- it, he says, not us: for the affront on your part is not to us. For that none may take it as an expression of their piety (that he says,) You judge not yourselves worthy, therefore he first says, You put it from you, and then, We turn unto the Gentiles. The expression is full of gentleness. He does not say, We abandon you, but so that it is possible -- he would say -- that we may also turn hither again: and this too is not the consequence of the affront from you, for so has (the Lord) commanded us.-- Acts 13:47 Then why have ye not done this? It was indeed needful that the Gentiles should hear, and this not before you: it is your own doing, the before you. For so has the Lord commanded us: I have set you for a light of the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation, i.e. for knowledge which is unto salvation, and not merely of the Gentiles, but of all men, unto the ends of the earth -- As many as were ordained unto eternal life Acts 13:48: this is also a proof, that their having received these Gentiles was agreeable with the mind of God. But ordained, not in regard of necessity: whom He foreknew, says the Apostle, He did predestinate. Romans 8:29 And the word of the Lord, etc. Acts 13:49 No longer in the city (only) were (their doctrines) disseminated, but also in the (whole) region. For when they of the Gentiles had heard it, they also after a little while came over. But the Jews stirred up the devout women, and raised persecution-- observe even of what is done by the women, they are the authors -- and cast them, it says, out of their coasts Acts 13:50, not from the city merely. Then, what is more terrible, they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. But the disciples, it says, were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost. (v. 51, 52.) The teachers were suffering persecution, and the disciples rejoiced.

And so spoke, that a great multitude, etc. Acts 14:1 Do you mark the nature of the Gospel, the great virtue it has? Made their minds evil-affected, it says, against the brethren: Acts 14:2 i.e. slandered the Apostles, raised numberless accusations against them: (these people, being simple, they made evil-affected, disposed them to act a malignant part. And see how on all occasions he refers all to God. Long time, he says, abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace. Acts 14:3

Think not this (expression, Gave testimony,) has anything derogatory (to the Lord's Divine Majesty): Who witnessed, it is said, before Pontius Pilate. 1 Timothy 6:13 Then the boldness -- and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. Here he speaks it as concerning their own nation. And the multitude of the city, etc. (v. 4, 5.) Accordingly they did not wait for it, but saw the intention of attacking them, and fled, on no occasion kindling their wrath, to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe, and the adjacent region. Acts 14:6 They went away into the country, not into the cities only.-- Observe both the simplicity of the Gentiles, and the malignity of the Jews. By their actions they showed that they were worthy to hear: they so honored them from the miracles only. The one sort honored them as gods, the other persecuted them as pestilent fellows: and (those) not only did not take offense at the preaching, but what say they? The gods, in the likeness of men, have come down to us; but the Jews were offended. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius. (v. 11, 12.) I suppose Barnabas was a man of dignified appearance also. Here was a new sort of trial, from immoderate zeal, and no small one: but hence also is shown the virtue of the Apostles, (and) how on all occasions they ascribe all to God.

Let us imitate them: let us think nothing our own, seeing even faith itself is not our own, but more God's (than ours). For by grace are you saved through faith; and this, says he, not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8 Then let us not think great things of ourselves, nor be puffed up, being as we are, men, dust and ashes, smoke and shadow. For say, Why do you think great things of yourself? Have you given alms, and lavished your substance? And what of that? Think, what if God had chosen not to make you rich?

Think of them that are impoverished, or rather, think how many have given (not their substance only, but) their bodies moreover, and after their numberless sacrifices, have felt still that they were miserable creatures! You gave for yourself, Christ (not for Himself, but) for you: you did but pay a debt, Christ owed you not.-- See the uncertainty of the future, and be not high-minded, but fear Romans 11:20; do not lessen your virtue by boastfulness. Would you do something truly great?

Never let a surmise of your attainments as great enter your mind. But you are a virgin? So were those in (the Gospel) virgins, but they got no benefit from their virginity, because of their cruelty and inhumanity. Matthew 25:12 Nothing like humility: this is mother, and root, and nurse, and foundation, and bond of all good things: without this we are abominable, and execrable, and polluted. For say -- let there be some man raising the dead, and healing the lame, and cleansing the lepers, but with proud self-complacency: than this there can be nothing more execrable, nothing more impious, nothing more detestable.

Account nothing to be of yourself. Have you utterance and grace of teaching? Do not for this account yourself to have anything more than other men. For this cause especially you ought to be humbled, because you have been vouchsafed more abundant gifts. For he to whom more was forgiven, will love more Luke 7:47: if so, then ought thou to be humbled also, for that God having passed by others, took notice of you. Fear thou because of this: for often this is a cause of destruction to you, if you be not watchful.

Why do you think great things of yourself? Because you teach by words? But this is easy, to philosophize in words: teach me by your life: that is the best teaching. Do you say that it is right to be moderate, and do you make a long speech about this thing, and play the orator, pouring forth your eloquence without a check? But better than thou is he shall one say to you, who teaches me this by his deeds-- for not so much are those lessons wont to be fixed in the mind which consist in words, as those which teach by things: since if you have not the deed, thou not only hast not profited him by your words, but hast even hurt him

the more -- better thou were silent.

Wherefore? Because the thing you propose to me is impossible: for I consider, that if you who hast so much to say about it, succeedest not in this, much more am I excusable. For this cause the Prophet says, But unto the sinner said God. Why do you declare My statutes? Psalm 60:16 For this is a worse mischief, when one who teaches well in words, impugns the teaching by his deeds. This has been the cause of many evils in the Churches. Wherefore pardon me, I beseech you, that my discourse dwells long on this evil affection (πῦθελ).

Many take a deal of pains to be able to stand up in public, and make a long speech: and if they get applause from the multitude, it is to them as if they gained the very kingdom (of heaven): but if silence follows the close of their speech, it is worse than hell itself, the dejection that falls upon their spirits from the silence! This has turned the Churches upside down, because both you desire not to hear a discourse calculated to lead you to compunction, but one that may delight you from the sound and composition of the words, as though you were listening to singers and minstrels (κιθαροδῶν καὶ κιθαριστῶν, supra p. 68): and we too act a preposterous and pitiable part in being led by your lusts, when we ought to root them out.

And so it is just as if the father of a poor cold-blooded child (already, more delicate than it ought to be), should, although it is so feeble, give it cake and cold (drink) and whatever only pleases the child, and take no account of what might do it good; and then, being reproved by the physicians, should excuse himself by saying, What can I do? I cannot bear to see the child crying. Thou poor, wretched creature, thou betrayer! For I cannot call such a one a father: how much better were it for you, by paining him for a short time, to restore him to health forever, than to make this short-lived pleasure the foundation of a lasting sorrow?

Just such is our case, when we idly busy ourselves about beautiful expressions, and the composition and harmony of our sentences, in order that we may please, not profit: (when) we make it our aim to be admired, not to instruct; to delight, not prick to the heart; to be applauded and depart with praise, not to correct men's manners! Believe me, I speak not other than I feel -- when as I discourse I hear myself applauded, at the moment indeed I feel it as a man (for why should I not own the truth?): I am delighted, and give way to the pleasurable feeling: but when I get home, and bethink me that those who applauded received no benefit from my discourse, but that whatever benefit they ought to have got, they lost it while applauding and praising, I am in pain, and groan, and weep, and feel as if I had spoken all in vain.

I say to myself: What profit comes to me from my labors, while the hearers do not choose to benefit by what they hear from us? Nay, often have I thought to make a rule which should prevent all applauding, and persuade you to listen with silence and becoming orderliness. But bear with me, I beseech you, and be persuaded by me, and, if it seem good to you, let us even now establish this rule, that no hearer be permitted to applaud in the midst of any person's discourse, but if he will needs admire, let him admire in silence: there is none to prevent him: and let all his study and eager desire be set upon the receiving the things spoken.-- What means that noise again?

I am laying down a rule against this very thing, and you have not the forbearance even to hear me!-- Many will be the good effects of this regulation: it will be a discipline of philosophy. Even the heathen philosophers-- we hear of their discoursing, and nowhere do we find that noisy applause accompanied their words: we hear of the Apostles, making public speeches, and yet nowhere do the accounts add, that

in the midst of their speeches the hearers interrupted the speakers with loud expressions of approbation.

A great gain will this be to us. But let us establish this rule: in quiet let us all hear, and speak the whole (of what we have to say). For if indeed it were the case that we departed retaining what we had heard, what I insist upon is, that even so the praise is not beneficial -- but not to go too much into particulars (on this point); let none tax me with rudeness -- but since nothing is gained by it, nay, it is even mischievous, let us loose the hindrance, let us put a stop to the boundings, let us retrench the gambollings of the soul.

Christ spoke publicly on the Mount: yet no one said anything, until He had finished His discourse. I do not rob those who wish to be applauded: on the contrary, I make them to be more admired. It is far better that one's hearer, having listened in silence, should by his memory throughout all time applaud, both at home and abroad, than that having lost all he should return home empty, not possessed of that which was the subject of his applauses. For how shall the hearer be otherwise than ridiculous?

Nay, he will be deemed a flatterer, and his praises no better than irony, when he declares that the teacher spoke beautifully, but what he said, this he cannot tell. This has all the appearance of adulation. For when indeed one has been hearing minstrels and players, it is no wonder if such be the case with him, seeing he knows not how to utter the strain in the same manner: but where the matter is not an exhibition of song or of voice, but the drift and purport of thoughts and wise reflection (φιλοσοφία), and it is easy for every one to tell and report what was said, how can he but deserve the accusation, who cannot tell what the matter was for which he praised the speaker?

Nothing so becomes a Church as silence and good order. Noise belongs to theatres, and baths, and public processions, and market-places: but where doctrines, and such doctrines, are the subject of teaching, there should be stillness, and quiet, and calm reflection, and a haven of much repose (φιλοσοφία καὶ πολὺς ἡσυχία). These things I beseech and entreat: for I go about in quest of ways by which I shall be enabled to profit your souls. And no small way I take this to be: it will profit not you only, but us also.

So shall we not be carried away with pride (καταχρησασθαι), not be tempted to love praises and honor, not be led to speak those things which delight, but those which profit: so shall we lay the whole stress of our time and diligence not upon arts of composition and beauties of expression, but upon the matter and meaning of the thoughts. Go into a painter's study, and you will observe how silent all is there. Then so ought it to be here: for here too we are employed in painting portraits, royal portraits (every one of them), none of any private man, by means of the colors of virtue-- How now?

Applauding again? This is a reform not easy, but (only) by reason of long habit, to be effected.-- The pencil moreover is the tongue, and the Artist the Holy Spirit. Say, during the celebration of the Mysteries, is there any noise? Any disturbance? When we are baptizing (βαπτίζμεθα), when we are doing all the other acts? Is not all Nature decked (as it were) with stillness and silence? Over all the face of heaven is scattered this charm (of repose).-- On this account are we evil spoken of even among the Gentiles, as though we did all for display and ostentation.

But if this be prevented, the love of the chief seats also will be extinguished. It is sufficient, if any one be enamoured of praise, that he should obtain it after having been heard, when all is gathered in. Yea, I beseech you, let us establish this rule, that doing all things according to God's will, we may be found worthy of the mercy which is from Him, through the grace and compassion of His only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father together with the Holy Spirit be glory, dominion, honor, now

and ever, world without end. Amen.

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