

Homily 35 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul and Silas face persecution and suffering for their faith, but remain undismayed and continue to preach the gospel, while also warning against the dangers of idleness and luxury.

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the story of Lydia, a woman of faith whose heart was opened by the Lord to receive the teachings of Paul. He emphasizes the importance of God's work in opening our hearts to His word and the need for us to respond with attentiveness and faith. Chrysostom also reflects on the encounter with the possessed damsel, highlighting the wisdom and discernment needed to distinguish true testimonies from deceptive sources. He challenges his audience to avoid idleness and luxury, urging them to embrace a life of purposeful work and spiritual growth, resisting the temptations of inaction and harmful activities.

Transcript

Acts XVI. 13, 14

And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont (Chrys. was thought likely) to be made; and we sat down, and spoke unto the women which resorted there. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

See again Paul judaizing. Where it was thought, it says, both from the time and from the place, that prayer would be.-- Out of the city, by a river side: for it is not to be supposed that they prayed only where there was a synagogue; they also prayed out of synagogue, but then for this purpose they set apart, as it were, a certain place, because as Jews they were more corporeal -- and, on the sabbath-day, when it was likely that a multitude would come together. And we sat down, and spoke to the women which resorted there.

Mark again the freedom from all pride. And a certain woman: a woman and she of low condition, from her trade too: but mark (in her) a woman of elevated mind (φιλοσοφον). In the first place, the fact of God's calling her bears testimony to her: And when she was baptized, it says, she and her household -- mark how he persuaded all of them -- she besought us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us Acts 16:15: then look at her wisdom, how she importunes (δυσωπε), the Apostles how full of humility her words are, how full of wisdom.

If you have judged me faithful, she says. Nothing could be more persuasive. Who would not have been softened by these words? She did not request (or, claim) did not entreat simply: but she left them to decide, and (yet) exceedingly forced them: And she constrained us, it says, by those words. And again in a different way: for see how she straightway bears fruit, and accounts it a great gain. If you have judged me, that is, That ye did judge me is manifest, by your delivering to me such (holy) mysteries (i.e. sacraments, see p. 225, note 3): and she did not dare to invite them before this.

But why was there any unwillingness on the part of Paul and those with them, that they should need to be constrained? It was either by way of calling her to greater earnestness of desire, or because Christ had said, Enquire who is worthy, and there abide. Luke 10:8 (It was not that they were unwilling), but they did it for a purpose. -- And it came to pass, it says, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. (v. 16, 17.)

What may be the reason that both the demon spoke these words, and Paul forbade him? Both the one acted maliciously, and the other wisely: the demon wished in fact to make himself credible. For if Paul had admitted his testimony, he would have deceived many of the believers, as being received by him: therefore he endures to speak what made against himself, that he may establish what made for himself: and so the demon himself uses accommodation (συγκαταβ■σκει) in order to destruction.

At first then, Paul would not admit it, but scorned it, not wishing to cast himself all at once upon miracles; but when it continued to do this, and pointed to their work (κα■ τ■ ργον ■δε■κνυ) who preach unto us the way of salvation, then he commanded it to come out. For it says, Paul being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. (a) And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains had gone, they caught Paul and Silas. (v. 18, 19.) (d) So then Paul did all, both miracles and teaching, but of the dangers Silas also is partaker.

And why says it, But Paul being grieved? It means, he saw through the malice of the demon, as he says, For we are not ignorant of his devices. 2 Corinthians 2:11 (b) And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains had gone. Everywhere money the cause of evils. O that heathen cruelty! They wished the girl to be still a demoniac, that they might make money by her. They caught Paul and Silas, it says, and dragged them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them unto the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city!

Acts 16:20: by doing what? Then why did you not drag them (hither) before this? Being Jews: the name was in bad odor. And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. Acts 16:21 They made a charge of treason of it (ε■ς καθοσ■ωσιν ■γαγον). (e) Why did they not say, Because they cast out the demon, they were guilty of impiety against God? For this was a defeat to them: but instead of that, they have recourse to a charge of treason (■ π■ καθοσ■ωσιν): like the Jews when they said, We have no king but Cæsar: whoever makes himself a king speaks against Cæsar.

John 19:14 (c) And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. Acts 16:22 O the irrational conduct! They did not examine, did not allow them to speak. And yet, such a miracle having taken place, you ought to have worshipped them, ought to have held them as saviors and benefactors. For if money was what ye wished, why, having found so great wealth, did ye not run to it? This makes you more famous, the having power to cast out demons than the

obeying them.

Lo, even miracles, and yet love of money was mightier. (f) And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison.-- great was their wrath-- charging the jailer to keep them safely Acts 16:23: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. Acts 16:24 Observe, he also again thrust them into the inner prison: and this too was done providentially, because there was to be a great miracle.

(Recapitulation.) Out of the city. Acts 16:13 The place was convenient for hearing the word, aloof from troubles and dangers. (b) On the sabbath. As there was no work going on, they were more attentive to what was spoken. (a) And a certain woman, named Lydia, a seller of purple Acts 16:14: observe how the writer of the history is not ashamed of the occupations (of the converts): (c) moreover neither was this city of the Philippians a great one. Having learned these things, let us also be ashamed of no man.

Peter abides with a tanner Acts 9:43: (Paul) with a woman who was a seller of purple, and a foreigner. Where is pride? Whose heart the Lord opened. Therefore we need God, to open the heart: but God opens the hearts that are willing: for there are hardened hearts to be seen. So that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul. The opening, then, was God's work, the attending was hers: so that it was both God's doing and man's. And she was baptized Acts 16:15, and receives the Apostles with such earnestness of entreaty; with more than that used by Abraham.

And she speaks of no other token than that whereby she was saved Genesis 18:3: she says not, If you have judged me a great, a devout woman; but what? faithful to the Lord: if to the Lord, much more to you. If you have judged me: if you do not doubt it. And she says not, Abide with me, but, Come into my house and abide: with great earnestness (she says it). Indeed a faithful woman!-- A certain damsel possessed with a spirit of Python. Acts 16:16 Say, what is this demon? The god, as they call him, Python: from the place he is so called.

Do you mark that Apollo also is a demon? And (the demon) wished to bring them into temptation: (therefore) to provoke them, the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. Acts 16:17 O thou accursed, thou execrable one! If then you know that it is His way of salvation that they show, why do you not come out freely? But just what Simon wished, when he said, Give me, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost Acts 8:19, the same did this demon: since he saw them becoming famous, here also he plays the hypocrite: by this means he thought to be allowed to remain in the body, if he should preach the same things.

But if Christ receive not testimony from man, John 5:34, meaning John, much less from a demon. Praise is not comely in the mouth of a sinner Sirach 15:9, much less from a demon. For that they preach is not of men, but of the Holy Ghost. Because they did not act in a spirit of boasting. And Paul being grieved, etc. By their clamor and shouting they thought to alarm them (the magistrates): saying, These men do exceedingly trouble our city. Acts 16:18-20 What do you say? Do you believe the demon?

Why not here also? He says, They are servants of the most high God; you say, They exceedingly trouble our city: he says, They show us the way of salvation; you say, They teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive. Acts 16:21 Observe, how they do not attend even to the demon, but look only to one thing, their covetousness. But observe them (Paul and Silas), how they do not answer, nor plead for themselves; (b) For when, says he, I am weak, then am I strong. My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made

perfect in weakness 2 Corinthians 12:9: so that by reason of their gentleness also they should be admired. (a) And the magistrates, etc., charging the jailer to keep them safely Acts 16:22: that they may be the means of a greater miracle. (c) The stricter the custody, the greater the miracle.

It was probably from the wish to cut short the disturbance, that the magistrates did these things; because they saw the crowd urgent, and wished to stay their passion at the instant, therefore they inflicted the stripes: at the same time it was their wish to hear the matter, and that was why they cast them into prison and gave charge to keep them safely. And, it says, he made them fast in the stocks Acts 16:24, (το ξύλον) as we should say, the nervum (νύμβον).

What tears do not these things call for! (Think) what they suffer, while we (live) in luxury, we in theatres, we perishing and drowning (in dissolute living), seeking always idle amusement, not enduring to suffer pain for Christ, not even as far as words, not even as far as talk. These things I beseech you let us ever call to mind, what things they suffered, what things they endured, how undismayed they were, how unoffended. They were doing God's work, and suffered these things! They did not say, Why do we preach this, and God does not take our part? But even this was a benefit to them, even apart from the truth, in the thing itself; it made them more vigorous, stronger, intrepid. Tribulation works endurance. Romans 5:4 Then let us not seek loose and dissolute living. For as in the one case the good is twofold, that the sufferers are made strong, and that the rewards are great; so in the other the evil is twofold, that such are rendered more enervated, and that it is to no good, but only evil. For nothing can be more worthless than a man who passes all his time in idleness and luxury. For the man untried, as the saying is, is also unapproved; unapproved not only in the contests, but also in everything else. Idleness is a useless thing, and in luxury itself nothing is so unsuited to the end proposed as the leading a luxurious life: for it palls with satiety, so that neither the enjoyment of the viands is so great, nor the enjoyment of relaxation, but all becomes vapid, and runs to waste.

Then let us not seek after this. For if we will consider which has the pleasanter life, he that is toiled and hardworked, or he that lives in luxury, we shall find it to be the former. For in the first place, the bodily senses are neither clear nor sound, but dull (χαλνν) and languid; and when those are not right, even of health there is plainly no enjoyment. Which is the useful horse, the pampered or the exercised? Which the serviceable ship, that which sails, or that which lies idle?

Which the best water, the running or the stagnant? Which the best iron, that which is much used, or that which does no work? Does not the one shine bright as silver, while the other becomes all over rusty, useless, and even losing some of its own substance? The like happens also to the soul as the consequence of idleness: a kind of rust spreads over it, and corrodes both its brightness and everything else. How then shall one rub off this rust? With the whetstone of tribulations: so shall one make the soul useful and fit for all things.

Else, how, I ask, will she be able to cut off the passions, with her edge turned (ννκλνσς) and bending like lead? How shall she wound the devil?-- And then to whom can such an one be other than a disgusting spectacle -- a man cultivating obesity, dragging himself along like a seal? I speak not this of those who are naturally of this habit, but of those who by luxurious living have brought their bodies into such a condition, of those who are naturally of a spare habit. The sun has risen, has shot forth his bright beams on all sides, and roused up each person to his work: the husbandman goes forth with his spade, the smith with his hammer, and each artisan with his several instruments, and you will find each handling his proper tools; the woman also takes either her distaff or her webs: while he, like the swine, immediately at the first dawn

goes forth to feed his belly, seeking how he may provide sumptuous fare.

And yet it is only for brute beasts to be feeding from morning to night; and for them, because their only use is to be slaughtered. Nay, even of the beasts, those which carry burdens and admit of being worked, go forth to their work while it is yet night. But this man, rising from his bed, when the (noon-tide) sun has filled the market-place, and people are tired of their several works, then this man gets up, stretching himself out just as if he were indeed a hog in fattening, having wasted the fairest part of the day in darkness.

Then he sits there for a long time on his bed, often unable even to lift himself up from the last evening's debauch, and having wasted (still) more time in this (listlessness), proceeds to adorn himself, and issues forth, a spectacle of unseemliness, with nothing human about him, but with all the appearance of a beast with a human shape: his eyes rheumy from the effect of wine, * * * while the miserable soul, just like the lame, is unable to rise, bearing about its bulk of flesh, like an elephant.

Then he comes and sits in (various) places, and says and does such things, that it were better for him to be still sleeping than to be awake. If it chance that evil tidings be announced, he shows himself weaker than any girl; if good, more silly than any child; on his face there is a perpetual yawn. He is a mark for all that would do harm, if not for all men, at least for all evil passions; and wrath easily excites such a man, and lust, and envy, and all other passions. All flatter him, all pay court to him, rendering his soul weaker than it is already: and each day he goes on and on, adding to his disease.

If he chance to fall into any difficulty of business, he becomes dust and ashes, and his silken garments are of no help to him. We have not said all this without a purpose, but to teach you, that none of you should live idly and at random. For idleness and luxury are not conducive to work, to good reputation, to enjoyment. For who will not condemn such a man? Family, friends, kinsfolk (will say), He is indeed a very encumbrance of the ground. Such a man as this has come into the world to no purpose: or rather, not to no purpose, but to ill purpose against his own person, to his own ruin, and to the hurt of others.

But that this is more pleasant -- let us look to this; for this is the question. Well then, what can be less pleasant than (the condition of) a man who has nothing to do; what more wretched and miserable? Is it not worse than all the fetters in the world, to be always gaping and yawning, as one sits in the market-place, looking at the passers by? For the soul, as its nature is to be always on the move, cannot endure to be at rest. God has made it a creature of action: to work is of its very nature; to be idle is against its nature.

For let us not judge of these things from those who are diseased, but let us put the thing itself to the proof of fact. Nothing is more hurtful than leisure, and having nothing to do: indeed therefore has God laid on us a necessity of working: for idleness hurts everything. Even to the members of the body, inaction is a mischief. Both eye, if it perform not its work, and mouth, and belly, and every member that one could mention, falls into the worst state of disease: but none so much as the soul.

But as inaction is an evil, so is activity in things that ought to be let alone. For just as it is with the teeth, if one eats not, one receives hurt to them, and if one eats things unfitting, it jars them, and sets them on edge: so it is here; both if the soul be inactive, and if inactive in wrong things, it loses its proper force. Then let us eschew both alike; both inaction, and the activity which is worse than inaction. And what may that be? Covetousness, anger, envyings, and the other passions.

As regards these, let us make it our object to be inactive, in order that we may obtain the good things promised to us, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father, together

with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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