

Homily 37 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 37 emphasizes the importance of preaching Christ's suffering and the necessity of unity and sound doctrine within the church community.

Scripture: Exodus 23:2, Matthew 5:9, Acts 17:3, Romans 3:12, Romans 9:3, Romans 10:1, 2 Corinthians 1:11, 1 Thessalonians 2:16, Hebrews 10:24

Topics: "Church Unity", "Gospel Preaching"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the journey of Paul and his companions through various cities, emphasizing Paul's dedication to sharing the Gospel with both Jews and Gentiles. Despite facing opposition and persecution, Paul's unwavering commitment to preaching Christ's suffering and resurrection leads to the conversion of many, including devout Greeks and chief women. Chrysostom highlights the importance of reasoning from Scriptures and the need for believers to search and confirm the teachings they receive. He also stresses the unity and mutual dependence within the Church, urging for love, good works, and the rejection of internal conflicts and sinful desires.

Transcript

Acts XVII. 1, 2, 3

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Again they haste past the small cities, and press on to the greater ones, since from those the word was to flow as from a fountain into the neighboring cities. And Paul, as his manner was, went into the synagogue of the Jews. Although he had said, We turn to the Gentiles Acts 13:46, he did not leave these alone: such was the longing affection he had towards them. For hear him saying, Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved Romans 10:1: and, I wished myself accursed from Christ for my brethren.

Romans 9:3 But he did this because of God's promise and the glory: and this, that it might not be a cause of offense to the Gentiles. Opening, it says, from the Scriptures, he reasoned with them for three sabbaths, putting before them that the Christ must suffer. Do thou mark how before all other things he

preaches the Passion: so little were they ashamed of it, knowing it to be the cause of salvation. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

Acts 17:4 The writer mentions only the sum and substance of the discoursing: he is not given to redundancy, and does not on every occasion report the sermons. But the Jews which believed not (the best texts omit which believed not), moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down have come hither also; whom Jason has received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

Acts 17:5-7 Oh! What an accusation! Again they get up a charge of treason against them, saying, there is another king (one) Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. (v. 8, 9.) A man worthy to be admired, that he put himself into danger, and sent them away from it. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming there went into the synagogue of the Jews.

These were more noble, it says, than they of Thessalonica: more noble, i.e. more gentle (■ πεικ■στεροι) (in their behavior): in that they received the word with all readiness, and this not inconsiderately, but with a strictness wherein was no passion, searching the Scriptures whether these things were so. (v. 10, 11.) Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came there also, and stirred up the people.

And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. Acts 17:12-14 See how he at one time gives way, at another presses on, and in many things takes his measures upon human considerations. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with speed, they departed. Acts 17:15 But let us look again at what has been said.

(Recapitulation.) Three sabbath-days, it says, being the time when they had leisure from work, he reasoned with them, opening out of the Scriptures Acts 17:2: for so used Christ also to do: as on many occasions we find Him reasoning from the Scriptures, and not on all occasions (urging men) by miracles. Because to this indeed they stood in a posture of hostility, calling them deceivers and jugglers; but he that persuades men by reasons from the Scriptures, is not liable to this imputation.

And on many occasions we find (Paul) to have convinced men simply by force of teaching: and in Antioch the whole city was gathered together Acts 13:44: so great a thing is this also, for indeed this itself is no small miracle, nay, it is even a very great one. And that they might not think that they did it all by their own strength, but rather that God permitted it, two things resulted, namely, Some of them were persuaded, etc. (c) And of devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few: but those others did the contrary: the Jews moved with envy, etc. (v. 4, 5) (b) and, from the fact that the being called was itself a matter of God's fore-ordering, (a) they neither thought great things of themselves as if the triumph were their own, nor were terrified as being responsible (for all).

But how comes it that he said, That we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision Galatians 2:9, and yet discoursed to the Jews? (α) He did this as a thing over and above. (β) For he did other things also more than he was obliged. For instance, Christ ordained that they should live by the Gospel 1 Corinthians 9:14; 1:17, but our Apostle did it not: Christ sent him not to baptize, yet he did baptize. Mark how he was equal to all. Peter to the circumcision, he to the Gentiles, to the greater part. (α) Since if it was necessary for him to discourse to Jews, how said he again: For He that wrought effectually in him toward the circumcision, the same was mighty also in me toward the Gentiles Galatians 2:8?

In the same way as those Apostles also had intercourse with the Gentiles, though they had been set apart for the circumcision, so likewise did our Apostle. The more part of his work indeed was with the Gentiles: still he did not neglect the Jews either, that they might not seem to be severed from them. And how was it, you will ask, that he entered in the first place into the synagogues, as if this were his leading object? True; but he persuaded the Gentiles through the Jews, and from the things which he discoursed of to the Jews.

And he knew, that this was most suitable for the Gentiles, and most conducive to belief. Therefore he says: Inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles. Romans 11:13 And his Epistles too all fight against the Jews.-- That the Christ, he says, must needs have suffered. Acts 17:3 If there was a necessity for His suffering, there was assuredly a necessity for His rising again: for the former was far more wonderful than the latter. For if He gave Him up to death Who had done no wrong, much rather did He raise Him up again.

But the Jews which believed not took unto them certain of the baser sort, and set all the city on an uproar Acts 17:5: so that the Gentiles were more in number. The Jews thought not themselves enough to raise the disturbance: for because they had no reasonable pretext, they ever effect such purposes by means of uproar, and by taking to themselves base men. And when they found them not, it says, they haled Jason and certain brethren. Acts 17:6 O the tyranny! Dragged them without any cause out of their houses.

These all, say they, do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar Acts 17:7: for since they spoke nothing contrary to what had been decreed, nor made any commotion in the city, they bring them under a different charge: saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people, etc. Acts 17:8 And what are you afraid of, seeing He is dead? (β) And when they had taken security, etc. Acts 17:9 See how by giving security Jason sent Paul away: so that he gave his life (to the hazard) for him. (α) And brethren, etc.

Acts 17:10 See how the persecutions in every case extend the preaching. Now these, it says, were more noble than those in Thessalonica Acts 17:11: i.e. they were not (men) practising base things, but some were convinced, and the others (who were not), did nothing (of that sort). (β) Daily, it says, searching the Scriptures whether these things were so: not merely upon a sudden impetus or (burst of) zeal. More noble, it says: i. e. in point of virtue (α) Therefore many of them, etc.

Acts 17:12 And here again are Greeks. (β) But when the Jews of Thessalonica, etc. Acts 17:13, because there were lewd persons there. And yet that city was greater. But it is no wonder in the greater city the people were worse: nay, of course to the greater city there go the worse men, where the occasions of disturbances are many. And as in the body, where the disease is more violent for having more matter and fuel, just so is it here. (α) But look, I beg you, how their fleeing was providentially ordered, not from cowardice: otherwise they would have ceased to preach, and would not have exasperated them still more.

But from this (flight) two things resulted: both the rage of those (Jews) was quenched, and the preaching spread. But in terms befitting their disorderly conduct, he says, Agitating the multitude. (β) Just what was

done at Iconium -- that they may have the additional condemnation of destroying others besides themselves. ch. 14:2, 19 This is what Paul says of them: Forbidding to preach to the Gentiles, to fill up their sins always, for the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. 1 Thessalonians 2:16 Why did he not stay?

For if at Lystra, ch. 14:19, 21 there, where he was stoned, he nevertheless stayed a long time, much more here. Why? (The Lord) did not wish them to be always doing signs; for this is itself a sign, not less than the working of signs -- that being persecuted, they overcame without signs. So that just as now He prevails without signs, so was it on many occasions His will to prevail then. Consequently neither did the Apostles run after signs: as in fact he says himself, We preach Christ crucified 1 Corinthians 1:23-- to them that crave signs, to them that crave wisdom, we give that which cannot even after signs persuade, and yet we do persuade!

So that this was a mighty sign. See then, how when the preaching is extended, they are not in a hurry to run after signs. For it was right that thenceforth the believers should be mighty signs to the rest. Howbeit, by retreating and advancing they did these things. (α) And immediately, it says, the brethren sent away Paul. Acts 17:14 Here now they send Paul alone: for it was for him they feared, lest he should suffer some harm, the head and front of all being in fact none other than he. (β) They sent him away, it says, as it were to the sea: that it might not be easy for them to seize him.

For at present they could not have done much by themselves; and with him they accomplished and achieved many things. For the present, it says, they wished to rescue him. (α) So far is it from being the case, that (supernatural) Grace worked all alike on all occasions: on the contrary, it left them to take their measures upon human judgment, (only) stirring them up and rousing them out of sleep, and making them to take pains. Thus, observe, it brought them safe only as far as Philippi, but no more after that.

And receiving, it says, a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed. Acts 17:15 For though he was a Paul, nevertheless he needed them. And with good reason are they urged by God to go into Macedonia, for there lay Greece moreover bright (before them). Acts 16:9

See what zeal the rest of the disciples showed with respect to their leaders: not as it is now with us, who are separated and divided into great and small: some of us exalted, while others are envious: for this is the reason why those are envious, because we are puffed up, because we will not endure to be put upon a par with them. The reason why there is harmony in the body, is because there is no puffing up: and there is no puffing up, because the members are of necessity made to stand in need of each other, and the head has need of the feet.

And God has made this to be the case with us, and, for all that, we will not endure it: although even without this, there ought to be love among us. Hear ye not how they that are without accuse us when they say, Needs make friendships? The laity have need of us; and we again exist for them. Since teacher or ruler would not exist, if there were not persons to be taught, nor would he perform his part, for it would not be possible. As the land has need of the husbandman, and the husbandman of the land, so is it here.

What reward is there for the teacher to receive, when he has none to produce that he has taught? And what for the taught, who have not had the benefit of the best teaching? So that we need each other alike in turn, both the governed, them that govern, and leaders, them that obey: for rulers are for the sake of many. Since no one is sufficient to do anything by himself alone, whether need be to ordain (χειροτονουσαι), or to examine men's counsels and opinions, but they become more honorable by

assembly and numbers.

For instance, the poor need givers, the givers again need receivers. Considering one another he says, to provoke unto love and to good works. Hebrews 10:24 On this account the assembly of the whole Church has more power: and what each cannot do by himself singly, he is able to do when joined with the rest. Therefore most necessary are the prayers offered up, here, for the world, for the Church, from the one end of the earth to the other, for peace, for those who are in adversities.

And Paul shows this when he says, That for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf 2 Corinthians 1:11; that is, that He might confer the favor on many. And often he asks for their prayers. See also what God says with regard to the Ninevites: And shall not I spare that city, wherein dwell more than six score thousand persons? Jonah 4:11 For if, where two or three, He says, are gathered together in My Name Matthew 18:20, they prevail much, how much more, being many?

And yet you may prevail, though thou be but one; yet not equally so. For why are you but one? Why do you not make many? Why do you not become the maker of love? Why do you not create (κατασκευάζεις) friendship? Thou lackest the chief excellence of virtue. For as men's being bad by agreement together more provokes God; so for men to be good by unanimity delights Him more. You shall not follow a multitude, He says, to do evil. Exodus 23:2 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable Romans 3:12, and have become as it were men singing in concert in their wickedness.

Make for yourself friends in preference to domestics, and all besides. If the peacemaker is a son of God, how much more he who makes friends also? Matthew 5:9 If he who reconciles only is called a son of God, of what shall not he be worthy, who makes friends of those who are reconciled? Let us engage ourselves in this trade, let us make those who are enemies to each other friends, and those who are not indeed enemies, but are not friends, them let us bring together, and before all, our own selves.

For as he who is at enmity in his house, and has differences with his wife, carries no authority when reconciling others, but will be told, Physician, heal yourself Luke 4:23, so will a man be told in this case. What then is the enmity that is in us? That of the soul against the body, that of vice against virtue. This enmity let us put an end to, this war let us take away, and then being in peace we shall also address others with much boldness of speech, our conscience not accusing us.

Anger fights against gentleness, love of money against contempt of it, envy against goodness of heart. Let us make an end of this war, let us overthrow these enemies, let us set up these trophies, let us establish peace in our own city. We have within us a city and a civil polity, and citizens and aliens many: but let us banish the aliens, that our own people may not be ruined. Let no foreign nor spurious doctrine enter in, no carnal desire. See we not that, if any enemy has been caught in a city, he is judged as a spy?

Then let us not only banish aliens, but let us drive out enemies also. If we see one, let us deliver up to the ruler, (that is), to conscience (τῷ νουῷ), that imagination which is indeed an alien, a barbarian, albeit tricked out with the garb of a citizen. For there are within us many imaginations of this kind, which are by nature indeed enemies, but are clad in sheep's skins. Just as the Persians, when they have put off the tiara, and the drawers, and the barbarian shoes, and put on the other dress which is usual with us, and have shorn themselves close, and converse in our own tongue, conceal war under their outward garb: but once apply the tortures (βάσινους or tests), and you bring to light what is hidden: so here, examine (or put to the test,) by torture again and again such an imagination as this, and you will quickly see that its spirit is that of

a stranger.

But to show you also by way of example the sort of spies which the devil sends into us to spy out what is in us, come let us strip one of them, and examine it strictly at the tribunal: and if you please, let us bring forward some of those which were detected by Paul. Which things, he says, have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh. Colossians 2:23 The devil wished to bring in Judaism: now if he had introduced it in its own form, he would not have carried his point.

Accordingly, mark how he brought it about. You must neglect the body, he says: this is (the true) philosophy, not to admit of meats, but to guard against them: this is humility. And now again in our own times, in the case of the heretics, he wished to bring us down to the creature. See then how he dressed up his deceit. Had he said, Worship a creature, he would have been detected: but what says he? God (viz. the Son and the Holy Ghost), he says, is a created being. But let us lay bare for the decision of the judges the meaning of the Apostolic writings: there let us bring him: themselves will acknowledge both the preaching and the language.

Many make gains that they may have wherewith to give to the poor, unjust gains: this too is a wicked imagination. But let us undress it, let us convict it, that we may not be taken by it, but that having escaped all the devices of the devil, and holding to the sound doctrines with strictness, we may be able both to pass in safety through this life present, and to obtain the good things promised, 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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