

Homily 4 on Second Thessalonians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the mystery of lawlessness, the power of Christ's coming, and the importance of faith and prayer in the face of evil.

Topics: "Eschatology", "Apostasy"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on 2 Thessalonians 2:6-9, discussing the mystery of lawlessness at work and the restraint of the lawless one until the Roman empire is taken out of the way. He identifies Nero as a type of Antichrist and emphasizes the importance of not causing unnecessary enmities. Chrysostom highlights the deceit and unrighteousness associated with those who perish due to their rejection of the truth. He encourages believers to stand firm in their faith, hold fast to traditions, and pray for the spread of the Word of the Lord.

Transcript

2 Thessalonians 2:6-9

And now you know that which restrains, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness does already work: only there is one that restrains now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming: even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan.

One may naturally enquire, what is that which withholds, and after that would know, why Paul expresses it so obscurely. What then is it that withholds, that is, hinders him from being revealed? Some indeed say, the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman empire, to whom I most of all accede. Wherefore? Because if he meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely, but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts, withhold him. And otherwise he ought now to have come, if he was about to come when the gifts ceased; for they have long since ceased. But because he said this of the Roman empire, he naturally glanced at it, and speaks covertly and darkly. For he did not wish to bring upon himself superfluous enmities, and useless dangers. For if he had said that after a little while the Roman empire would be dissolved, they would immediately have even overwhelmed him, as a pestilent person, and all the faithful, as living and warring to this end. And he did not say that it will be quickly, although he is always saying it -- but what? that he may be revealed in his own season, he says,

For the mystery of lawlessness does already work. He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of Antichrist. For he too wished to be thought a god. And he has well said, the mystery; that is, it works not openly, as the other, nor without shame. For if there was found a man before that time, he means, who was not much behind Antichrist in wickedness, what wonder, if there shall now be one? But he did not also wish to point him out plainly: and this not from cowardice, but instructing us not to bring upon ourselves unnecessary enmities, when there is nothing to call for it. So indeed he also says here. Only there is one that restrains now, until he be taken out of the way, that is, when the Roman empire is taken out of the way, then he shall come. And naturally. For as long as the fear of this empire lasts, no one will willingly exalt himself, but when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavor to seize upon the government both of man and of God. For as the kingdoms before this were destroyed, for example, that of the Medes by the Babylonians, that of the Babylonians by the Persians, that of the Persians by the Macedonians, that of the Macedonians by the Romans: so will this also be by the Antichrist, and he by Christ, and it will no longer withhold. And these things Daniel delivered to us with great clearness.

And then, he says, shall be revealed the lawless one. And what after this? The consolation is at hand. Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming, even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan.

For as fire merely coming on even before its arrival makes torpid and consumes the little animals that are afar off; so also Christ, by His commandment only, and Coming. It is enough for Him to be present, and all these things are destroyed. He will put a stop to the deceit, by only appearing. Then who is this, whose coming is after the working of Satan, With all display all power, but nothing true, but for deceit. And lying wonder, he says, that is, false, or leading to falsehood.

Ver. 10. And with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing.

Why then, you say, did God permit this to be? And what dispensation is this? And what is the advantage of his coming, if it takes place for the ruin of our race? Fear not, beloved, but hear Him saying, In them that are perishing, he has strength, who, even if he had not come, would not have believed. What then is the advantage? That these very men who are perishing will be put to silence. How? Because both if he had come, and if he had not come, they would not have believed in Christ; He comes therefore to convict them. For that they may not have occasion to say, that since Christ said that He was God -- although He nowhere said this openly -- but since those who came after proclaimed it, we have not believed. Because we have heard that there is One God from whom are all things, therefore we have not believed. This their pretext then Antichrist will take away. For when he comes, and comes commanding nothing good, but all things unlawful, and is yet believed from false signs alone, he will stop their mouths. For if you believe not in Christ, much more ought you not to believe in Antichrist. For the former said that He was sent from the Father, but the latter the contrary. For this reason Christ said, I have come in My Father's name, and you receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name. him you will receive. John 5:43 But we have seen signs, you say. But many and great signs were also wrought in the case of Christ; much more therefore ought you to have believed in Him. And yet many things were predicted concerning this one, that he is the lawless one, that he is the son of perdition, that his coming is after the working of Satan. But the contrary concerning the other, that He is the Saviour, that He brings with Him unnumbered blessings.

Ver. 10, 11, 12. For because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; for this cause God will send them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

That they might be judged. He does not say, that they might be punished; for even before this they were about to be punished; but that they might be condemned, that is, at the dreadful Seat of Judgment, in order that they might be without excuse. Who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. He calls Christ, the Love of the Truth. For because, says he, they received not the love of the truth. For He was both, and came for the sake of both, both as loving men, and on behalf of things that were true.

But had pleasure, he says, in unrighteousness. For he came to the destruction of men and to injure them. For what will he not then work? He will change and confound all things, both by his commandments, and by the fear of him. He will be terrible in every way, from his power, from his cruelty, from his unlawful commandments.

But fear not. In those that perish he will have his strength. For Elijah too will then come to give confidence to the faithful, and this Christ says; Elijah comes, and shall restore all things. Matthew 17:11 Therefore it is said, In the spirit and power of Elijah. Luke 1:17 For he neither wrought signs nor wonders, as Elijah did. For John, it is said, did no miracle, but all things which John spoke of this Man were true. How then was it in the spirit and power of Elijah? That is, he will take upon him the same ministry. As the one was the forerunner of His first Coming, so will the other be of His second and glorious Coming, and for this he is reserved. Let us not therefore fear. He has calmed the minds of the hearers. He causes them no longer to think present things dreadful but worthy of thankfulness. Wherefore he has added,

Ver. 13. But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation, in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

How unto salvation? By sanctifying you through the Spirit. For these are the things that are the efficient causes of our salvation. It is nowhere of works, nowhere of righteous deeds, but through belief of the truth. Here again, in is used for through. And through sanctification of the Spirit, he says,

Ver. 14. Whereunto He called you through our Gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This too is no little thing, if Christ considers our salvation His glory. For it is the glory of the Friend of man that they that are saved should be many. Great then is our Lord, if the Holy Spirit so desires our salvation. Why did he not say faith first? Because even after sanctification we have yet need of much faith, that we may not be shaken. Do you see how He shows that nothing is of themselves, but all of God?

Ver. 15. So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or by Epistle of ours.

Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by Epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther. Here he shows that there were many who were shaken.

Ver. 16, 17. Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, which loved us, and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish them in every good work and word.

Again a prayer after an admonition. For this is truly to benefit. Which loved us, he says, and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace. Where now are those who lessen the Son, because He is

named in the grace of the Laver after the Father? For, lo, here it is the contrary. Which loved us, he says, and gave us eternal comfort. Of what sort then is this? Even the hope of things future. Do you see how by the method of prayer he stirs up their mind, giving them the unspeakable care of God for pledges and signs. Comfort your heart, he says, in every good work and word, that is, through every good work and word. For this is the comfort of Christians, to do something good and pleasing to God. See how he brings down their spirit. Which gave us comfort, he says, and good hope through grace. At the same time he makes them also full of good hopes with respect to future things. For if He has given so many things by grace, much more things future. I indeed, he says, have spoken, but the whole is of God. Stablish; confirm you, that you be not shaken, nor turned aside. For this is both His work and ours, so that it is in the way both of doctrines, and of actions. For this is comfort, to be established. For when any one is not turned aside, he bears all things, whatever may happen to him, with much longsuffering; whereas if his mind be shaken, he will no longer perform any good or noble action, but like one whose hands are paralyzed, so also his soul is shaken, when it is not fully persuaded that it is advancing to some good end.

Chap. iii. 1. Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, even as also it is with you.

He indeed had prayed for them, that they might be established; and now he asks of them, entreating them to pray for him, not that he may not incur danger, for to this he was appointed, but that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, even as also it is with you. And the request is accompanied with commendation. Even as also it is with you.

Ver. 2. And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and evil men; for all have not faith.

This is the manner of one showing also his dangers as to which especially he besought them. From unreasonable and evil men, he says, for all have not faith. Thus he is speaking of those who contradict the Preaching, who oppose and contend against the doctrines. For this he has intimated by saying, For all men have not faith. And here he seems to me not to glance at dangers, but at the men who contradicted and hindered his word, as did Alexander the copper-smith. For he says, he greatly withstood our words. 2 Timothy 4:15 That is, there are some to whom it is given. As if he were speaking of a paternal inheritance, that it is not for all to serve in the Palace. And at the same time he also excites them, as already having such ground of confidence as to be able both to deliver their Teacher from dangers, and to facilitate his preaching.

Therefore we also say the same things. Let no one condemn us of arrogance, nor from an excessive humility deprive us of so great an assistance. For neither do we speak from the same motive from which Paul spoke. For he indeed said these things from a wish to comfort his disciples; but we to reap some great and good fruit. And we are very confident, if you all be willing with one mind to stretch forth your hands to God in behalf of our littleness, that you will succeed in all things. Thus let us make war with our enemies with prayers and supplications. For if thus the ancients made war with men in arms, much more ought we so to make war with men without arms. So Hezekiah triumphed over the Assyrian king, so Moses over Amalek, so Samuel over the men of Ascalon, so Israel over the thirty-two kings. If where there was need of arms, and of battle array, and of fighting, they, leaving their arms, had recourse to prayer; here where the matter has to be accomplished by prayers alone, does it not much more behoove us to pray?

But there, you say, the rulers entreated for the people, but you request the people to entreat for the ruler. I also know it. For those under rule at that time were wretched and mean persons. Wherefore they were saved by the claims and the virtue of their commander alone; but now, when the grace of God has prevailed, and we shall find among those who are ruled many or rather the greater part excelling their ruler in a great degree; do not deprive us of this succor, raise up our hands that they may not be faint, open our mouth for us, that it may not be closed. Entreat God -- for this cause entreat Him. It is in our behalf indeed that it is done, but it is wholly for your sakes. For we are appointed for your advantage, and for your interests we are concerned. Entreat every one of you, both privately and publicly. Mark Paul saying, That for the gift bestowed upon us by means of many, thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf 2 Corinthians 1:11; that is, that He may give grace to many. If in the case of men, the people coming forward ask a pardon for persons condemned and led away to execution, and the king from regard to the multitude revokes the sentence, much more will God be influenced by regard to you, not by your multitude but your virtue.

For violent is the enemy we have. For each of you indeed anxiously thinks of his own interests, but we the concerns of all together. We stand in the part of the battle that is pressed on. The devil is more violently armed against us. For in wars too, he that is on the opposite side endeavors before all others to overthrow the general. For this reason all his fellow-combatants hasten there. For this reason there is much tumult, every one endeavoring to rescue him; they surround him with their shields, wishing to preserve his person. Hear what all the people say to David. (I say not this, as comparing myself to David, I am not so mad, but because I wish to show the affection of the people for their ruler.) You shall go no more out with us to battle, they say, that you quench not the lamp of Israel. 2 Samuel 21:17 See how anxious they were to spare the old man. I am greatly in need of your prayers. Let no one, as I have said, from an excessive humility deprive me of this alliance and succor. If our part be well approved, your own also will be more honorable. If our teaching flow abundantly, the riches will redound to you. Hear the prophet saying, Do the shepherds feed themselves? From Ezekiel 34:2, Septuagint

Do you observe Paul constantly seeking these prayers? Do you hear that thus Peter was delivered from prison, when fervent prayer was made for him? Acts 12:5 I verily believe that your prayer will have great effect, offered with so great unanimity. Do you not think that it is a matter much too great for my littleness to draw near to God, and entreat Him for so numerous a people? For if I have not confidence to pray for myself, much less for others. For it belongs to men of high estimation, to beseech God to be merciful to others; it is for those who have rendered Him favorable to themselves. But he who is himself an offender, how shall he entreat for another? But nevertheless, because I embrace you with a father's heart, because love dares everything, not only in the Church, but in the house also, I make my prayer above all other things for your health both in soul and in body. For there is no other people, before his own. For if Job rising up immediately made so many offerings for his children in the flesh, how much more ought we to do this for our spiritual children?

Why do I say these things? Because if we who are so far removed from the greatness of the work, offer supplications and prayers for you, much more is it just that you should do it. For that one should entreat for many, is exceedingly bold, and requires much confidence: but that many having met together should offer supplication for one, is nothing burdensome. For every one does this not trusting to his own virtue, but to the multitude, and to their unanimity, to which God everywhere has much respect. For He says, where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them. Matthew 20:18 If where two or three are gathered together, He is in the midst, much more is He among you. For that which a man

praying by himself is not able to receive, that he shall receive praying with a multitude. Why? Because although his own virtue has not, yet the common consent has much power.

Where two or three, it is said, are gathered together. Why did you say, Two? For if there be one in Your Name, why are You not there? Because I wish all to be together, and not to be separated. Let us therefore close up together; let us bind one another together in love, let no one separate us. If any one accuses, or is offended, let him not retain it in his mind, whether against his neighbor, or against us. This favor I ask of you, to come to us, and bring the accusation, and receive our defense. Reprove him, it says, lest haply he has not said it. Reprove him, lest haply he has not done it Sirach 19:14-15; and if he has done it, that he add not thereto. For we have either defended ourselves, or being condemned have asked pardon, and henceforth endeavor not to fall into the same faults. This is expedient both for you and for us. For you indeed having accused us perhaps without reason, when you have learned the truth of the matter, will stand corrected, and we have offended unawares and are corrected. For you indeed it is not expedient. For punishment is appointed for those who utter any idle word. But we put off accusations, whether false or true. The false, by showing that they are false; the true, by not again doing the same things. For it must needs happen that he who has the care of so many things should be ignorant, and through ignorance commit errors. For if every one of you having a house, and presiding over wife and children, and slaves, one more and another fewer, among souls that are so easily numbered, is nevertheless compelled to commit many errors involuntarily, or from ignorance, or when wishing to set something right; much more must it be so with us who preside over so many people.

And may God still multiply you and bless you, the little with the great! For although the care becomes greater from the increase of numbers, we do not cease praying that this our care may be increased, and that this number may be added to, and be many times as great and without limit. For fathers, although often harassed by the number of their children, nevertheless do not wish to lose any one. All things are equal between us and you, even the very chief of our blessings. I do not partake of the holy Table with greater abundance, and you with less, but both equally participate of the same. And if I take it first, it is no great privilege, since even among children, the elder first extends his hand to the feast, but nevertheless no advantage is gained thereby. But with us all things are equal. The saving life that sustains our souls is given with equal honor to both. I do not indeed partake of one Lamb and you of another, but we partake of the same. We both have the same Baptism. We have been vouchsafed the same Spirit. We are both hastening to the same kingdom. We are alike brethren of Christ, we have all things in common.

Where then is my advantage? In cares, in labors, in anxieties, in grieving for you. But nothing is sweeter than this grief, since even a mother grieving for her child is delighted with her grief, she thinks carefully of those whom she has brought forth, she is delighted at her cares. And yet care in itself is bitter, but when it is for children, at least it has in it much pleasure. Many of you have I begotten, but after this are my pangs. For in the case of mothers in the flesh the pangs are first, and then the birth. But here the pangs last till the latest breath, lest there should be anywhere some abortion even after the birth. And I indeed have a further longing; for although perchance another has begotten you, yet I nevertheless am harassed with cares. For we do not of ourselves beget you, but it is all of the grace of God. But if we both through the Spirit beget, he will not err who calls those begotten by me, his children, and those begotten by him, mine. All these things then consider, and stretch forth your hand, that you may be our boast and we yours, in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God grant that we may all see with confidence, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, etc.

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