

Homily 41 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 41 emphasizes the power of faith in God, the dangers of sin, and the transformative impact of true repentance.

Scripture: Psalm 78:34, Matthew 8:29, Matthew 11:28, Mark 1:24, Mark 9:36, Luke 6:34, John 3:17, Acts 16:17, Acts 19:13-14, Ephesians 4:26

Topics: "Anger Management", "Christian Forgiveness"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of not giving in to anger and seeking revenge, highlighting the detrimental effects of holding onto grudges and the need to forgive others as a sign of greatness of soul. He emphasizes the power of sin over demons, urging believers to focus on freeing themselves and others from sin rather than seeking power over demons. Chrysostom warns against the dangers of anger, comparing it to a form of madness that leads to self-destruction and separation from God, and encourages humility, forgiveness, and self-control as the path to salvation and the kingdom of heaven.

Transcript

Acts XIX. 8, 9

And he went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when various were hardened, and believed not, but spoke evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

(a) See him in every place forcing his way into the synagogue, and in this manner departing thence. For in every place, he wished to have the occasion given him by them. (c) He wished to separate the disciples thence, and to have the beginning for ceasing to assemble with them, given by (the Jews) themselves. And it was not for nothing that he did this (b) which I have said. He was henceforth provoking them to jealousy. For both the Gentiles readily received him, and the Jews, upon the Gentiles receiving him, repented. (a) This is why he continually made a stir among them, for three months arguing and persuading concerning the kingdom of God: for you must not suppose because you hear of his speaking boldly, that there was any harshness: it was of good things that he discoursed, of a kingdom: who would not have heard him?

But when various were hardened, speaking evil of the way. They might well call it the way; this was indeed the way, that led into the kingdom of heaven. He departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this was done for the space of two years, so that all that were in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. Acts 19:10 (a) Do you mark how much was effected by his persisting? Both Jews and Greeks heard: (c) all that dwelt in Asia: it was for this also that the Lord suffered him not to go into Asia Acts 16:6 (on a former occasion); waiting, as it seems to me, for this same conjuncture. (Hom. xl. p. 245.) (b) And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. (v. 11, 12.)

Not touched the wearer only (and so were healed), but also receiving them, they laid them upon the sick (and so healed them). (g) He that believes in Me, says Christ, does greater works than those which I do. John 14:12 This, and the miracle of the shadows is what He meant (in those words). (d) Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches. Acts 19:13 So entirely did they do all by way of trade!

Observe: vagabond, or, itinerant, Jewish exorcists. And to believe indeed, they had no mind; but by that Name they wished to cast out the demons. By Jesus, whom Paul preaches. Only see what a name Paul had got! And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Acts 19:14-16 They did it in secret: then their impotence is publicly exposed. (f) Then not the Name does anything, unless it be spoken with faith. (h) See how they used their weapons against themselves! (j) So far were they from thinking Jesus to be anything great: no, they must needs add Paul, as thinking him to be something great. Here one may marvel how it was that the demon did not cooperate with the imposture of the exorcists, but on the contrary exposed them, and laid open their stage-play.

He seems to me (to have done this) in exceeding wrath: just as it might be, if a person being in uttermost peril, should be exposed by some pitiful creature, and wish to vent all his rage upon him. Jesus I know, and Paul I know. For, that there may not seem to be any slight put upon the Name of Jesus, (the demon) first confesses (Him), and then has permission given him. For, to show that it was not any weakness of the Name, but all owing to the imposture of those men, why did not the same take place in the case of Paul?

They fled out of that house naked and wounded: he sorely battered their heads, perhaps rent their garments. (e) And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, that dwelt at Ephesus, and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many of them that had believed came confessing and making known their practices. (v. 17, 18.) For since they had got to possess such power as, by means of the demons, to do such things, well might this be the consequence.

And many of them that practised curious arts, brought their books together, and burnt them in the presence of all men;-- having seen that there was no more use of them now that the demons themselves do these things -- and reckoned up the price of them, and found the amount fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. (v. 19, 20.) (i) And (so) he disputed, in the school of one Tyrannus for two years: where were believers, and believers exceedingly (advanced in the faith).

Moreover (Paul) writes (to them) as to great men.

(Recapitulation.) (b) And having entered in to the synagogue, etc. Acts 19:8 But why ■ παρρησι■ζετο? It means, he was ready to confront dangers, and disputed more openly, not veiling the doctrines. (a) But when some were hardened, and spoke evil of the way, having departed from them, he separated the disciples. Acts 19:9 He put a stop, it means, to their evil-speaking: he did not wish to kindle their envy, nor to bring them into more contention. (c) Hence let us also learn not to put ourselves in the way of evil-speaking men, but to depart from them: he did not speak evil, when himself evil spoken of.

He disputed daily, and by this gained the many, that, being evil intreated and (evil) spoken of, he did not (utterly) break away from them, and keep aloof. (e) The evil-speakers are defeated. They calumniated the doctrine itself; (therefore) so as neither to rouse the disciples to wrath, nor * * * them, he withdrew, showing that everywhere alike they repel salvation from them. Here now he does not even apologize, seeing that the Gentiles everywhere have believed. In the school of one Tyrannus: it was not that he sought the place, but without more ado where there was a school (there he discoursed). (d) And look, no sooner is the trial from those without over, than this from the demons begins.

Mark the infatuated Jewish hardness. Having seen his garments working miracles, they paid no heed to it. What could be greater than this? But, on the contrary, it resulted in just the opposite effect. If any of the heathens believe not, having seen the (very) dust working these effects, let him believe. (f) Wonderful, how great the power of them that have believed! Both Simon for the sake of merchandise sought the grace of the Spirit, and these for this object did this. What hardness (of heart)!

Why does not Paul rebuke them? It would have looked like envy, therefore it is so ordered. This same took place in the case of Christ Mark 9:36: but then the person is not hindered, for it was the beginning of the new state of things: since Judas also is not hindered, whereas Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead: and many Jews even for opposing (Christ) suffered nothing, while Elymas was blinded. For I am not come, says Christ, to judge the world, but that the world might be saved.

John 3:17 And seven sons, etc. Acts 19:14 See the villany of the men! They still continued to be Jews, while wishing to make a gain of that Name. All that they did was for glory and profit. (g) Look, in every case, how men are converted not so much in consequence of good things as of things fearful. In the case of Sapphira, fear fell upon the Church, and men dared not join themselves to them: here they received handkerchiefs and aprons, and were healed: and after this, then they came confessing their sins. (Hereby) the power of the demons is shown to be a great one, when it is against unbelievers.

For why did he not say, Who is Jesus? He was afraid, lest he also should suffer punishment; but, that it might be permitted him to take revenge upon those who mocked him, he did this; Jesus, says he, I know, etc. He was in dread of Paul. For why did not those wretched men say to him, We believe? How much more splendid an appearance they would have made had they said this, that is, if they had claimed Him as their Master? But instead of that, they spoke even those senseless words, By Jesus, whom Paul preaches.

Do you mark the forbearance (of the writer), how he writes history and does not call names? This makes the Apostles admirable. And the evil spirit, etc. Acts 19:15, for what had happened at Philippi Acts 16:16 had given a lesson to these also. He mentions the name, and the number, thereby giving to the persons then living a credible proof of what he wrote. And why were they itinerant? For the sake of merchandise: not assuredly to bear tidings of the word; how should that be their object?

And how ran they anon, preaching by the things they suffered? Insomuch, it says, that all that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord. Ought not this to have converted all? And marvel not, for nothing convinces malice. But come now, let us look at the affair of the exorcists, with what an evil disposition (they acted). Why the same was not done in the case of Christ, is an inquiry for another time, and not for the present, save that this also was well and usefully ordered.

It seems to me that they did this also in mockery, and that in consequence of this (punishment), none dared even at random to name that Name. Why did this put them upon confession? Because this was a most mighty argument of God's omniscience (therefore), before they should be exposed by the demons, they accused themselves, fearing lest they should suffer the same things. For when the demons their helpers are their accusers, what hope is there thenceforth, save the confession by deeds?

But see, I pray you, after such signs had been wrought, what evils within a short space ensue. Such is human nature: it soon forgets. Or, do ye not remember what has been the case among ourselves? Did not God last year shake our whole city? Did not all run to baptism? Did not whoremongers and effeminate and corrupt persons leave their dwellings, and the places where they spent their time, and change and become religious? But three days passed, and they returned again to their own proper wickedness.

And whence is this? From the excessive laziness. And what marvel if, when the things have passed away (this be the case), seeing that, the images lasting perpetually, the result is such? The fate of Sodom-- say, does it not still last (in its effects)? Well, did the dwellers beside it become any the better? And what say you to the son of Noah? Was he not such (as he is represented), did he not see with his eyes so vast a desolation, and yet was wicked? Then let us not marvel how, when such things had been done, these Jews (at Ephesus) believe not, when we see that belief itself often comes round for them into its opposite, into malignity; as, for instance, when they say that He has a devil, He, the Son of God!

Do you not see these things even now, and how men are many of them like serpents, both faithless and thankless, men who, viper-like, when they have enjoyed benefits and have been warmed by some, then they sting their benefactors? This we have said, lest any should marvel, how, such signs having been wrought, they were not all converted. For behold, in our own times happened those (miracles) relating to the martyr Babylas, those relating to Jerusalem, those relating to the destruction of the temples, and not all were converted.

Why need I speak of ancient things? I have told you what happened last year; and none gave heed to it, but again little by little they fell off and sunk back. The heaven stands perpetually crying aloud that it has a Master, and that it is the work of an Artificer, all this that we see -- I mean the world -- and yet some say that it is not so. What happened to that Theodorus last year -- whom did it not startle? And yet nothing came of it, but having for a season become religious, they returned to the point from which they had started in their attempt to be religious.

So it was with the Jews. This is what the Prophet said of them: When He slew them, then they sought Him, and turned early unto God. Psalm 78:34 And what need to speak of those things that are common to all? How many have fallen into diseases, how many have promised, if raised up, to work so great a change, and yet they have again become the same as ever! This, if nothing else, shows that we have natural free-will-- our changing all at once. Were evil natural, this would not be: things that are natural and necessary, we cannot change from.

And yet, you will say, we do change from them. For do we not see some, who have the natural faculty to see, but are blinded by fear? (True --) because this also is natural: * * if a different (necessity of) nature come not also into operation: (thus) it is natural to us, that being terrified we do not see; it is natural to us that when a greater fear supervenes, the other gives way. What then, you will say, if right-mindedness be indeed according to nature, but fear having overpowered it cast it out?

What then if I shall show that some even then are not brought to a right mind, but even in these fears are reckless? Is this natural? Shall I speak of ancient things? Well then, of recent? How many in the midst of those fears continued laughing, mocking, and experienced nothing of the sort? Did not Pharaoh change immediately, and (as quickly) run back to his former wickedness? But here, as if (the demons) knew Him not, they (the exorcists) added, Whom Paul preaches, whereas they ought to have said, the Saviour of the world.

Him that rose again. By this they show that they do know, but they did not choose to confess His glory. Wherefore the demon exposes them, leaping upon them, and saying, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you? So that not you are believers, but you abuse that Name when you say this. Therefore the Temple is desolate, the implement easy to be overcome. So that you are not preachers; mine, says he, you are. Great was the wrath of the demon. The Apostles had power to do this to them, but they did it not as yet.

For they that had power over the demons that did these things to them, much more had power over the men themselves. Mark how their forbearance is shown, in that they whom they repulsed do these things, while the demons whom they courted do the contrary. Jesus, says he, I know. Be ashamed, you that are ignorant (of Him). And Paul I know. Well said, Think not that it is because I despise them, that I do these things. Great was the fear of the demon. And why without these words did he not rend their garments?

For so he would both have sated his wrath, and established the delusion. He feared as I said, the unapproachable force, and would not have had such power had he not said this. But observe how we find the demons everywhere more right minded (than the Jews), not daring to contradict nor accuse the Apostles, or Christ. There they say, We know You who You are Matthew 8:29; and, Why are You come hither before the time to torment us Mark 1:24: and again, I know You who You are, the Son of God.

And here, These men are servants of the most high God Acts 16:17: and again, Jesus I know, and Paul I know. For they exceedingly feared and trembled before those holy persons. Perhaps some one of you, hearing of these things, wishes he were possessed of this power, so that the demons should not be able to look him in the face, and accounts those saints happy for this, that they had such power. But let him hear Christ saying, Rejoice not because the demons are subject unto you Luke 10:20, because He knew that all men rejoice most in this, through vainglory.

For if you seek that which pleases God, and that which is for the common good, there is another, a greater way. It is not so great to free from a demon as it is to rescue from sin. A demon hinders not to attain unto the kingdom of Heaven, nay, even cooperates, unwillingly indeed, but nevertheless cooperates by making him that has the demon more sober-minded; but sin casts a man out.

But it is likely some man will say, God forbid it should ever befall me to be sobered in this way! Nor do I wish it for you, but a very different way, that you should do all from love of Christ: if however, which God forbid, it should so befall you, then even on this behalf I would comfort you. If then the demon does not cast out (from the kingdom of heaven), but sin does cast out, to free a man from sin is greater

beneficence.

From this let us study to free our neighbors, and before our neighbors, our own selves. Let us see to it, lest we have a demon: let us examine ourselves strictly. More grievous than a demon is sin, for the demon makes men humble. See ye not those possessed with a demon, when they have recovered from the attack, how downcast they are, of how sad a countenance, how fraught with shame their faces are, how they have not even courage to look one in the face? See the strange inconsistency!

While those are ashamed on account of the things they suffer, we are not ashamed on account of the things we do; while they are abashed being wronged, we are not abashed when doing wrong: and yet their condition is not a subject for shame, but for pity and tenderness and indulgence: nay, great is the admiration it calls for, and many the praises, when struggling against such a spirit, they bear all thankfully: whereas our condition in very deed is a subject for ridicule, for shame, for accusation, for correction, for punishment, for the worst of evils, for hell-fire; calling for no compassion whatever.

Do you see, that worse than a demon is sin? And those indeed, from the ills they suffer, reap a double profit: first, their being sobered and brought to more self-control; then, that having suffered here the chastisement of their own sins, they depart hence to their Master, purified. For indeed upon this we have often discoursed to you, that those who are punished here, if they bear it thankfully, may naturally be supposed to put away thereby many of their sins. Whereas from sins the mischief resulting is twofold; first, that we offend; secondly, that we become worse.

Attend to what I say. Not this is the only injury we get from sin, that we commit a sin: but another and a worse is this, that our soul receives a habit. Just as it is in the case of the body -- for it will be more plain when put in the form of an example -- as he who has taken a fever has got harm not only in this respect, that he is sick, but also that after the sickness he has become weaker, even though he may return to health after a long disease: just so in the case of sin, though we may regain health, yet we are far from having the strength we need.

For take the case of one who has been insolently abusive: does he not suffer his deserts for his abusive conduct? Aye, but there is another and a worse thing to rue (which is), that his soul has become more insensible to shame. For from each several sin that is committed, even after the sin has been done and has ceased, there remains a kind of venom instilled into our souls. Do you not hear people saying, when they are recovered from sickness, I dare not drink water now? And yet the man has regained his health: aye, but the disease has done him this harm also.

And whereas those (possessed) persons, albeit suffering ill, are thankful, we, when faring well, blaspheme God, and think ourselves very ill used: for you will find more persons behaving thus in health and wealth than in poverty and sickness. For there stands the demon over (the possessed), like a very hangman, fierce, uttering many (menaces), even as a schoolmaster brandishing the lash, and not suffering them to give way to any laxity. And suppose that some are not at all brought to a sober mind, neither are these liable to punishment; no small thing this: even as fools, even as madmen and children, are not called to account, so neither are these: since for things that are done in a state of unconsciousness, none can be so merciless as to call the doers to account.

Why then, in a far worse condition than those who are possessed of evil spirits are we that sin. We do not, indeed, foam at the mouth, nor distort our eyes, or throw about our hands convulsively; but as for this, would that we did it in our body and not in our soul! Will you that I show you a soul, foaming, filthy, and a

distortion of the mind's eyes? Think of those who are in a passion and drunken with rage; can any form be filthier than the words they discharge? In very deed it is like a sputtering of noisome slaver.

And just as the possessed know none of those who are present, so neither do these. Their understanding darkened, their eyes distorted, they see not who is friend, who foe, who worthy of respect, who contemptible, but they see all alike without a difference. And then, do you not see them, how they tremble, just like those others? But they do not fall to the ground, say you? True, but their soul lies on the ground and falls there in convulsions: since had it stood upright, it would not have come into the condition it is in.

Or think you not that it betokens a soul abjectly sprawling and lost to all self-possession, the things men can do and say when drunken with rage? There is also another form of madness worse than this. What may this be? When men cannot so much as suffer themselves to vent their anger, but instead of that nourish within their own bosoms, to their own proper hurt, as it were a very hangman with his lash, the rancorous remembrance of wrongs. For it is a bane to themselves first, the malice that they bear.

To say nothing of the things to come, what torture, think you, must that man undergo in the scourging of his soul, as day by day he looks how he may avenge himself on his enemy? He chastises himself first, and suffers punishment, swelling (with suppressed passion), fighting against himself, setting himself on fire. For needs must the fire be always burning within you: while raising the fever to such a height, and not suffering it to wane, you think you are inflicting some evil on the other, whereas you are wasting yourself, ever bearing about with you a flame which is always at its height, and not letting your soul have rest, but evermore being in a state of fury, and having your thoughts in a turmoil and tempest.

What is more grievous than this madness, to be always smarting with pain, and ever swelling and inflamed? For such are the souls of the resentful: when they see him on whom they wish to be revenged, straightway it is as if a blow were struck them: if they hear his voice, they cower and tremble: if they be on their bed, they picture to themselves numberless revenges, hanging, torturing that enemy of theirs: and if, beside all this, they see him also to be in renown, O! The misery they suffer!

Forgive him the offense, and free yourself from the torment. Why continue always in a state of punishment, that you may once punish him, and take your revenge? Why establish for yourself a hectic disease? wouldest be quit of it, dost thou keep thine anger?"--> Why, when your wrath would fain depart from you, do you keep it back? Let it not remain until the evening, says Paul. Ephesians 4:26 For like some eating rot or moth, even so does it gnaw through the very root of our understanding.

Why shut up a beast within your bowels? Better a serpent or an adder to lie within your heart, than anger and resentment: for those indeed would soon have done with us, but this remains forever fixing in us its fangs, instilling its poison, letting loose upon us an invading host of bitter thoughts. That he should laugh me to scorn, say you, that he should despise me! O wretched, miserable man, would you not be ridiculed by your fellow-servant, and would you be hated by your Master? Would you not be despised by your fellow-servant, and do you despise your Master?

To be despised by him, is it more than you can bear, but do you not think that God is indignant, because you ridicule Him, because you despise Him, when you will not do as He bids you? But that your enemy will not even ridicule you, is manifest from hence (that), whereas if you follow up the revenge, great is the ridicule, great the contempt, for this is a mark of a little mind; on the contrary, if you forgive him, great is the admiration, for this is a mark of greatness of soul.

But you will say, he knows not this. Let God know it, that you may have the greater reward. For He says, Lend to those of whom you hope not to receive. Luke 6:34 So let us also do good to those who do not even perceive that one is doing them good, that they may not, by returning to us praise or any other thing, lessen our reward. For when we receive nothing from men, then we shall receive greater things from God. But what is more worthy of ridicule, what more paltry, than a soul which is always in anger, and wishing to take revenge?

It is womanly, this disposition, it is babyish. For as the babes are angry even with lifeless things, and unless the mother beats the ground, they will not let go their anger: so do these persons wish to revenge themselves on those who have aggrieved them. Why then, it is they who are worthy of ridicule: for to be overcome by passion, is the mark of a childish understanding, but to overcome it, is a sign of manliness. Why then, not we are the objects of ridicule, when we keep our temper, but they.

It is not this that makes men contemptible -- not to be conquered by passion: what makes them contemptible is this -- to be so afraid of ridicule from without, as on this account to choose to subject one's self to one's besetting passion, and to offend God, and take revenge upon one's self. These things are indeed worthy of ridicule. Let us flee them. Let a man say, that having done us numberless ills, he has suffered nothing in return: let him say that he might again frantically assault us, and have nothing to fear.

Why, in no other (better) way could he have proclaimed our virtue; no other words would he have sought, if he had wished to praise us, than those which he seems to say in abuse. Would that all men said these things of me: he is a poor tame creature; all men heap insults on him, but he bears it: all men trample upon him, but he does not avenge himself. Would that they added, neither, if he should wish to do so, can he: that so I might have praise from God, and not from men. Let him say, that it is for want of spirit that we do not avenge ourselves.

This does us no hurt, when God knows (all): it does but cause our treasure to be in greater safety. If we are to have regard to them, we shall fall away from everything. Let us not look to what they say, but to what becomes us. But, says he, Let no man ridicule me, and some make a boast of this. O! What folly! No man, says he, having injured me, has ridiculed me: that is, I had my revenge. And yet for this you deserve to be ridiculed, that you took revenge. Whence came these words among us -- being, as they are, a disgrace to us and a pest, an overthrow of our own proper life and of our discipline?

It is in downright opposition to God that thou (so) speakest. The very thing which makes you equal to God -- the not avenging yourself -- this you think a subject for ridicule! Are not we for these things worthy to be laughed at, both by ourselves, and by the heathen, when we thus speak against God? I wish to tell you a story of a thing that happened in the old times (which they tell) not on the subject of anger, but of money. A man had an estate in which there was a hidden treasure, unknown to the owner: this piece of ground he sold.

The buyer, when digging it for the purpose of planting and cultivation, found the treasure therein deposited, and came and wanted to oblige the seller to receive the treasure, urging that he had bought a piece of ground, not a treasure. The seller on his part repudiated the gift, saying, The piece of ground (is not mine), I have sold it, and I have no concern whatever with this (treasure). So they fell to altercation about it, the one wishing to give it, the other standing out against receiving it.

So chancing upon some third person, they argued the matter before him, and said to him, To whom ought the treasure to be assigned? The man could not settle that question; he said, however, that he would put

an end to their dispute -- he would (if they pleased) be master of it himself. So he received the treasure, which they willingly gave up to him; and in the sequel got into troubles without end, and learned by actual experience that they had done well to have nothing to do with it.

So ought it be done likewise with regard to anger; both ourselves ought to be emulous not to take revenge, and those who have aggrieved us, emulous to give satisfaction. But perhaps these things also seem to be matter of ridicule: for when that madness is widely prevalent among men, those who keep their temper are laughed at, and among many madmen he who is not a madman seems to be mad. Wherefore I beseech you that we may recover (from this malady), and come to our senses, that becoming pure from this pernicious passion, we may be enabled to attain unto the kingdom of heaven, through the grace and mercy of His only-begotten Son, 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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