

Homily 42 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul's journey to Jerusalem and Rome is marked by trials and afflictions that test the faith of the disciples and the Ephesians.

Topics: "Trials And Tribulations", "Spiritual Strength"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the trials faced by Paul in Acts 19, highlighting how God uses trials to stir up and awaken disciples, making them more energetic. He emphasizes the importance of not sinking under trials, as God provides a way of escape. Chrysostom encourages believers to find comfort and strength in affliction, as it fosters unity, deepens friendships, and compels listeners to seek solace in the preaching of the Word.

Transcript

Acts XIX. 21, 23

After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about the Way.

He sends Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, but himself remains at Ephesus. Having made a long enough stay in that city, he wishes to remove elsewhere again. But how is it, that having from the first chosen to depart into Syria, he turns back to Macedonia? He purposed, it says, in the Spirit, showing that all (that he did) was done not of his own power. Now he prophesies, saying, I must also see Rome: perhaps to comfort them with the consideration of his not remaining at a distance, but coming nearer to them again, and to arouse the minds of the disciples by the prophecy.

At this point, I suppose, it was that he wrote his Epistle to the Corinthians from Ephesus, saying, I would not have you ignorant of the trouble which came to us in Asia. 2 Corinthians 1:8 For since he had promised to go to Corinth, he excuses himself on the score of having loitered, and mentions the trial relating the affair of Demetrius. There arose no small stir about the Way. Do you see the renown (acquired)? They contradicted, it says: (then) came miracles, twofold: (then) again, danger: such is the way the threads alternate throughout the whole texture (of the history).

For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver temples of Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen. Acts 19:24. Which made, it says, silver temples of Diana. And how is it possible that temples could be made of silver? Perhaps as small boxes (κιβώτια.) Great was the honor paid to this (Diana) in Ephesus; since, when (Hom. in Eph. Prol.) their temple was burnt it so grieved them, that they forbade even the name of the incendiary ever to be mentioned.

See how, wherever there is idolatry, in every case we find money at the bottom of it. Both in the former instance it was for money, and in the case of this man, for money. Acts 19:13 It was not for their religion, because they thought that in danger; no, it was for their lucrative craft, that it would have nothing to work upon. Observe the maliciousness of the man. He was wealthy himself, and to him indeed it was no such great loss; but to them the loss was great, since they were poor, and subsisted on their daily earnings.

Nevertheless, these men say nothing, but only he. And observe: Whom having collected, and the workmen of like occupation, having themselves common cause with him, he said, Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth Acts 19:25; then he brought the danger home to them, that we are in danger of falling from this our craft into starvation. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at naught; but also, that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worships.

And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Acts 19:26-28 And yet the very things he spoke were enough to bring them to true religion: but being poor senseless creatures, this is the part they act. For if this (Paul being) man is strong enough to turn away all, and the worship of the gods is in jeopardy, one ought to reflect, how great must this man's God be, and that he will much more give you those things, for which you are afraid.

Already (at the outset) he has secured a hold upon their minds by saying, This Paul has turned away much people, saying, that they be no gods, which are made with men's hands. See what it is that the heathen are so indignant at; because he said that they which be made of men are no gods. Throughout, he drives his speech at their craft. Then that which most grieved them he brings in afterwards. But, with the other gods, he would say, we have no concern, but that the temple also of the great goddess Diana is in danger to be destroyed.

Then, lest he should seem to say this for the sake of lucre, see what he adds: Whom the whole world worships. Observe how he showed Paul's power to be the greater, proving all (their gods) to be wretched and miserable creatures, since a mere man, who was driven about, a mere tentmaker, had so much power. Observe the testimonies borne to the Apostles by their enemies, that they overthrew their worship. There (at Lystra) they brought garlands and oxen. Acts 14:13 Here he says, This our craft is in danger to be set at naught.-- You have filled (all) everywhere with your doctrine.

Acts 5:28 So said the Jews also with regard to Christ: You see how the world is going after Him John 12:19; and, The Romans shall come and take away our city. John 11:48. And again on another occasion, These that have turned the world upside down have come hither also. Acts 17:6.-- And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath. Upon what was that wrath called forth? On hearing about Diana, and about their source of gain. And cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

And the whole city was filled with confusion: and rushed with one accord into the theatre. Acts 19:29. Such is the way with vulgar minds, any trivial occasion shall hurry them away and inflame their passions. Therefore it behooves to do (things) with (strict) examination. But see how contemptible they were, to be so exposed to all (excitements)! Having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they dragged them: (here) again recklessly, just as did the Jews in the case of Jason; and everywhere they set upon them.

And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not, Acts 19:30 so far were they from all display and love of glory. And certain of the Asiarchs, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre Acts 19:31 to a disorderly populace and tumult. And Paul complies, for he was not vainglorious, nor ambitious. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused. Such is the nature of the multitude: it recklessly follows, like fire when it has fallen upon fuel; and the more part knew not wherefore they had come together.

Acts 19:32 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. It was the Jews that thrust him forward; but as providence ordered it, this man did not speak. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people. Acts 19:33 But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Acts 19:34 A childish understanding indeed! As if they were afraid, lest their worship should be extinguished, they shouted without intermission.

For two years had Paul abode there, and see how many heathen there were still! And when the town clerk had appeased the people, he said, You men of Ephesus, what man is there that knows not how that the city of the Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Acts 19:35 As if the thing were not palpable. With this saying first he extinguished their wrath. And of the Diopetes. There was another sacred object (■ ἐρ■v) that was so called.

Either he means the piece of burnt earth or her image. This (is) a lie. Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, you ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For you have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. (v. 36, 37.) All this however he says to the people; but in order that those (workmen) also might become more reasonable, he says: Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

But if you enquire anything concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause, for which (matter) we shall not be able to give an account for this concourse. Acts 19:38-40 A lawful assembly, he says, for there were three assemblies according to law in each month; but this one was contrary to law. Then he terrified them also by saying, We are in danger to be called to account for sedition. But let us look again at the things said.

(Recapitulation.) After these things were ended, it says, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. Acts 19:21 He no longer speaks here after the manner of a man, or, He purposed to pass through those regions, without tarrying longer. Wherefore does he send away Timothy and Erastus? Of this I suppose he says, Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens

alone.

He sent away, it says, two of those who ministered to him 1 Thessalonians 3:1, both to announce his coming, and to make them more eager. But he himself tarried awhile in Asia. Acts 19:22 Most of all does he pass his time in Asia; and with reason: there, namely, was the tyranny, of the philosophers. (Afterwards) also he came and discoursed to them again. And the same time etc. Acts 19:23, for indeed the superstition was excessive. (a) You both see and hear, so palpable was the result that was taking place -- that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul by persuading has turned away, not by violence: this is the way to persuade a city.

Then, what touched them closely, that they be no gods which are made with hands. Acts 19:26 He overturns, says he, our craft: (e) From this work we have our wealth. Hath persuaded. How did he persuade -- he, a man of mean consideration? How prevail over so great a force of habit? By doing what -- by saying what? It is not for a Paul (to effect this), it is not for a man. Even this is enough, that he said, They are no gods. Now if the impiety (of the heathen religions) was so easy to detect, it ought to have been condemned long ago: if it was strong, it ought not to have been overthrown so quickly. (b) For, lest they should consider within themselves (how strange), that a human being should have such power as this, and if a human being has power to effect such things, why then one ought to be persuaded by that man, he adds: (f) not only is this our craft in danger to be set at naught, but also, as if forsooth alleging a greater consideration, the temple of the great goddess Diana, etc. (c) whom all Asia and the world worships.

Acts 19:27 (g) And when they heard, they were filled with wrath, and shouted, Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Acts 19:28 For each city had its proper gods. (d) They thought to make their voice a barrier against the Divine Spirit. Children indeed, these Greeks! (h) And their feeling was as if by their voice they could reinstate the worship of her, and undo what had taken place! And the whole city, etc. Acts 19:29 See a disorderly multitude! And when Paul, etc. Acts 19:30 Paul then wished to enter in that he might harangue them: for he took his persecutions as occasions for teaching: but the disciples suffered him not.

Mark, how great forethought we always find them taking for him. At the very first they brought him out that they might not (in his person) receive a mortal blow; and yet they had heard him say, I must also see Rome. But it was providential that he so predicts beforehand, that they might not be confounded at the event. But they would not that he should even suffer any evil. And certain of the Asiarchs besought him that he would not enter into the theatre. Knowing his eagerness, they besought him: so much did all the believers love him.-- And they drew Alexander, etc.

Acts 19:33 This Alexander, why did he wish to plead? Was he accused? No, but it was to find an opportunity, and overturn the whole matter, and inflame the anger of the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Acts 19:34 Do you mark the inordinate rage? Well, and with rebuke does the town clerk say, What man is there that knows not how that the city of the Ephesians -- Acts 19:35 (coming to the point) which they were frightened about.

Is it this, says he, that you do not worship her? And he does not say, That knows not Diana, but, our city, that it always worshipped her. Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against. Acts 19:36 Why then do ye make a question about them, as if these things were not plain? (b) Then he quietly chides them, showing that they had come together without reason. And to do nothing rashly, he says. Showing

that they had acted rashly. (a) For you have brought hither, etc. Acts 19:37 They wanted to make religion the pretext for what concerned their own money-making: (c) and it was not right on account of private charges to hold a public assembly.

For he put them to a nonplus, and left them not a word to say for themselves. There being no cause, he says, for this concourse, for which (matter) we shall not be able to give the account. Acts 19:40 See how prudently, how cleverly, the unbelievers (act). Thus he extinguished their wrath. For as it is easily kindled, so also is it easily extinguished. And when he had thus spoken, it says, he dismissed the assembly. Acts 19:41

Do you see how God permits trials, and by them stirs up and awakens the disciples, and makes them more energetic? Then let us not sink down under trials: for He Himself will also make the way of escape, that we may be able to bear them. 1 Corinthians 10:13 Nothing so makes friends, and rivets them so firmly, as affliction: nothing so fastens and compacts the souls of believers: nothing is so seasonable for us teachers in order that the things said by us may be heard. For the hearer when he is in ease is listless and indolent, and seems to suffer annoyance from the speaker: but when he is in affliction and distress, he falls into a great longing for the hearing.

For when distressed in his soul, he seeks on all sides to find comfort for his affliction: and the preaching brings no small comfort. What then, you will say, of the Jews? How was it that in consequence of their weakheartedness, they did not hear? Why, they were Jews, those ever weak and miserable creatures: and besides, the affliction in their case was great, but we speak of affliction in moderation. For observe: they expected to be freed from the evils that encompassed them, and they fell into numberless greater evils: now this is no common distress to the soul.

Afflictions cut us off from the sympathy we have for the present world, as appears in this, that we wish for death immediately, and cease to be loving of the body: which very thing is the greatest part of wisdom, to have no hankering, no ties to the present life. The soul which is afflicted does not wish to be concerned about many things: repose and stillness are all it desired, content for its part to have done with the things present, even though there be nothing else to follow.

As the body when wearied and distressed does not wish to indulge in amours, or gormandizing, but only to repose and lie down in quiet; so the soul, harassed by numberless evils, is urgent to be at rest and quiet. The soul which is at ease is (apt to be) fluttered, alarmed, unsettled: whereas in this there is no vacuity, no running to waste: and the one is more manly, the other more childish; the one has more gravity, in the other more levity. And as some light substance, when it falls upon deep water, is tossed to and fro, just so is the soul when it falls into great rejoicing.

Moreover, that our greatest faults arise out of overmuch pleasure, any one may see. Come, if you will, let us represent to ourselves two houses, the one where people are marrying, the other where they are mourning: let us enter in imagination into each: let us see which is better than the other. Why, that of the mourner will be found full of seriousness (φιλοσοφία); that of the marrying person, full of indecency. For look, (here are) shameful words, unrestrained laughter, more unrestrained motions, both dress and gait full of indecency, words fraught with mere nonsense and foolery: in short, all is ridicule there, all ridiculous.

I do not say the marriage is this; God forbid; but the accompaniments of the marriage. Then nature is beside itself in excess of riot. Instead of human beings, those present become brute creatures, some neighing like horses, others kicking like asses: such utter license, such dissolute unrestraint: nothing

serious, nothing noble: (it is) the devil's pomp, cymbals, and pipes, and songs teeming with fornication and adultery. But not so in that house where there is mourning; all is well-ordered there: such silence, such repose, such composure; nothing disorderly, nothing extravagant: and if any one does speak, every word he utters is fraught with true philosophy: and then the wonderful circumstance is, that at such times not men only, but even servants and women speak like philosophers-- for such is the nature of sorrow -- and while they seem to be consoling the mourner, they in fact utter numberless truths full of sound philosophy.

Prayers are there to begin with, that the affliction may stop there, and go no further: many a one comforting the sufferer, and recitals without number of the many who have the like cause for mourning. For what is man? (they ask) (and thereupon) a serious examination of our nature -- aye, then, what is man! (and upon this) an impeachment of the life (present) and its worthlessness, a reminding (one another) of things to come, of the Judgment. (So from both these scenes) each returns home: from the wedding, grieved, because he himself is not in the enjoyment of the like good fortune; from the mourning, light-hearted, because he has not himself undergone the like affliction, and having all his inward fever quenched.

But what will you? Shall we take for another contrast the prisons and the theatres? For the one is a place of suffering, the other of pleasure. Let us again examine. In the former there is seriousness of mind; for where there is sadness, there must needs be seriousness. He who aforesaid was rich, and inflated with his own importance, now will even suffer any common person to converse with him, fear and sorrow, like some mightier fire, having fallen on his soul, and softening down his harshness: then he becomes humble, then of a sad countenance, then he feels the changes of life, then he bears up manfully against everything.

But in a theatre all is the reverse of this -- laughter, ribaldry, devil's pomp, dissoluteness, waste of time, useless spending of days, planning for extravagant lust, adultery made a study of, practical training to fornication, schooling in intemperance, encouragement to filthiness, matter for laughter, patterns for the practice of indecency. Not so the prison: there you will find humbleness of mind, exhortation, incentive to seriousness, contempt of worldly things; (these) are all trodden under foot and spurned and, fear stands over (the man there), as a schoolmaster over a child, controlling him to all his duties.

But if you will, let us examine in a different way. I should like you to meet a man on his return from a theatre, and another coming out of prison; and while you would see the soul of the one fluttered, perturbed, actually tied and bound, that of the other you would see enlarged, set free, buoyant as on wings. For the one returns from the theatre, enfeathered by the sight of the women there, bearing about chains harder than any iron, the scenes, the words, the gestures, that he saw there.

But the other on his return from the prison, released from all (bounds), will no longer think that he suffers any evil as comparing his own case with that of (those) others. (To think) that he is not in bonds will make him thankful ever after; he will despise human affairs, as seeing so many rich men there in calamity, men (once) having power to do many and great things, and now lying bound there: and if he should suffer anything unjustly, he will bear up against this also; for of this too there were many examples there: he will be led to reflect upon the Judgment to come and will shudder, seeing here (in the earthly prison) how it will be there. For as it is with one here shut up in prison, so in that world also before the Judgment, before the Day that is to come. Towards wife, children, and servants, he will be more gentle.

Not so he that comes from the theatre: he will look upon his wife with more dislike, he will be peevish with his servants, bitter towards his children, and savage towards all. Great are the evils theatres cause to cities, great indeed, and we do not even know that they are great. Shall we examine other scenes of laughter also, I mean the feasts, with their parasites, their flatterers, and abundance of luxury, and (compare with them) places where are the halt and blind? As before, in the former is drunkenness, luxury, and dissoluteness, in the latter the reverse.-- See also with regard to the body, when it is hot-blooded, when it is in good case, it undergoes the quickest change to sickness: not so, when it has been kept low.

Then let me make my meaning clearer to you:-- let there be a body having plenty of blood, plenty of flesh, plump with good living: this body will be apt even from any chance food to engender a fever, if it be simply idle. But let there be another, struggling rather with hunger and hardship: this is not easily overcome, not easily wrestled down by disease. Blood, though it may be healthy in us, does often by its very quantity engender disease: but if it be small in quantity, even though it be not healthy, it can be easily worked off.

So too in the case of the soul, that which leads an easy, luxurious life, has its impulses quickly swayed to sin: for such a soul is next neighbor to folly, to pleasure, to vainglory also, and envy, and plottings, and slanderings. Behold this great city of ours, what a size it is! Whence arise the evils? Is it not from those who are rich? Is it not from those who are in enjoyment? Who are they that drag men before the tribunals? Who, that dissipate properties? Those who are wretched and outcasts, or those who are inflated with consequence, and in enjoyment?

It is not possible that any evil can happen from a soul that is afflicted. James 2:6 Paul knew the gain of this: therefore he says, Tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope makes not ashamed. Romans 5:3 Then let us not sink in our afflictions, but in all things give thanks, that so we may get great gain, that we may be well-pleasing to God, who permits afflictions. A great good is affliction: and we learn this from our own children: for without affliction (a boy) would learn nothing useful.

But we, more than they, need affliction. For if there, when the passions (as yet) are quiet, (chastisement) benefits them, how much more us, especially possessed as we are by so many! Nay, we behoove rather to have schoolmasters than they: since the faults of children cannot be great, but ours are exceeding great. Our schoolmaster is affliction. Let us then not draw it down willingly upon ourselves, but when it has come let us bear it bravely, being, as it is, always the cause of numberless good things; that so we may both obtain grace from God, and the good things which are laid up for them that love Him, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with Whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and evermore, world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-42-on-the-acts-of-the-apostles/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net

