

# Homily 5 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

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*Peter's sermon explained the significance of the events happening and called his listeners to repentance, emphasizing the promise of salvation to all who would call upon the name of the Lord.*

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Salvation"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches a powerful sermon based on Acts 2:14, addressing the men of Judea and Jerusalem, correcting misconceptions and gently reasoning with mockers. He emphasizes the prophecy of Joel about the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days, offering hope to all, regardless of age or gender. Chrysostom skillfully navigates through the prophecy, warning of impending judgment and the need to call upon the name of the Lord for salvation. He contrasts worldly pleasures with spiritual benefits, urging listeners to heed the laws of God and avoid the consequences of sin, ultimately pointing to the mercy and goodness of God.

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## Transcript

Acts II. 14

You men of Judea, and all you that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words.

[He men of Judea, and all you that dwell at Jerusalem,] whom the writer above described as strangers. Here he directs his discourse to those others, the mockers, and while he seems to reason with those, he sets these right. For indeed it was divinely ordered that some mocked, that he might have a starting-point for his defense, and by means of that defense, might teach. [And all you that dwell in Jerusalem.] It seems they accounted it a high encomium to dwell in Jerusalem too.

Be this, says he, known unto you, and hearken unto my words. In the first instance he made them more disposed to attend to him. For not as you suppose, says he, are these drunken. Do you observe the mildness of his defense? Acts 2:15 Although having the greater part of the people on his side, he reasons with those others gently; first he removes the evil surmise, and then he establishes his apology. On this account, therefore, he does not say, as you mock, or, as you deride, but, as you suppose; wishing to make it appear that they had not said this in earnest, and for the present taxing them with ignorance rather than with malice.

For these are not drunken, as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. And why this? Is it not possible at the third hour to be drunken? But he did not insist upon this to the letter; for there was nothing of the kind about them; the others said it only in mockery. Hence we learn that on unessential points one must not spend many words. And besides, the sequel is enough to bear him out on this point: so now the discourse is for all in common. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass in the last days, says the Lord God. (v. 16, 17.

Joel 2:28.) Nowhere as yet the name of Christ, nor His promises but the promise is that of the Father. Observe the wisdom: observe the considerate forbearance: (συγκαταβασιν.) He did not pass on to speak at once of the things relating to Christ; that He had promised this after His Crucifixion; truly that would have been to upset all. And yet, you will say, here was sufficient to prove His divinity. True, it was, if believed (and the very point was that it should be believed); but if not believed, it would have caused them to be stoned.

And I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh. He offers even to them excellent hopes, if they would have them. And so far, he does not leave it to be regarded as the exclusive advantage of himself and his company; which would have made them be looked upon with an evil eye; thus cutting off all envious feeling. And your sons shall prophesy. And yet, he says, not yours this achievement, this distinction; the gift has passed over to your children. Himself and his company he calls their sons, and those [whom he is addressing] he calls his and their fathers.

And your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy. So far he shows that he and his have found favor, in that they had received (καταξίωθηεντας) [the Spirit]; not so they whom he is addressing; for that they had crucified [the Lord]. So Christ also, willing to mitigate their wrath, said, By whom do your sons cast out devils? Matthew 12:27 He did not say, My disciples; for indeed it seemed a flattering mode of expression.

And so Peter also did not say, 'They are not drunk, but speak by the Spirit.' but he takes refuge with the prophet, and under shelter of him, so speaks. As for the accusation [of drunkenness], he cleared himself of that by his own assertion; but for the grace, he fetches the prophet as witness. I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh. [And your sons, etc.] To some the grace was imparted through dreams, to others it was openly poured forth. For indeed by dreams the prophets saw, and received revelations.

Then he goes on with the prophecy, which has in it also something terrible. And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs [in the earth beneath]. Acts 2:19 In these words he speaks both of the judgment to come, and of the taking of Jerusalem. Blood and fire, and vapor of smoke. Observe how he describes the capture. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. Acts 2:20 This results from the (διὰ θόσους) internal affection of the sufferers. It is said, indeed, that many such phenomena actually did occur in the sky, as Josephus attests. At the same time the Apostle strikes fear into them, by reminding them of the darkness which had lately occurred, and leading them to expect things to come. Before that great and notable day of the Lord come. For be not confident, he means to say, because at present you sin with impunity. For these things are the prelude of a certain great and dreadful day. Do you see how he made their souls to quake and melt within them, and turned their laughter into pleading for acquittal? For if these things are the prelude of that day, it follows that the extreme of danger is impending. But what next? He again lets them take breath, adding, And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved. Romans 10:13 This is said concerning Christ, as Paul

affirms, but Peter does not venture as yet to reveal this.

Well, let us look over again what has been said. It is well managed, that as against men laughing and mocking, he starts up and begins with, Be this known unto you all and hearken unto my words. But he begins by saying, You men of Judea. By the expression ■ Ιουδαίοι, I take him to mean those that lived in Judea.-- And, if you please, let us compare those expressions in the Gospel, that you may learn what a sudden change has taken place in Peter. A damsel, it is written, came out unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. And, says he, I know not the Man. And being again questioned, he began to curse and to swear. Matthew 26:69-72 But see here his boldness, and his great freedom of speech.-- He did not praise those who had said, We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God; but by his severity towards those others, he made these more earnest, and at the same time his address is clear from all appearance of adulation. And it is well to remark, on all occasions, however the Apostles may condescend to the level of their hearers (συγκαταβασις), their language is clear from all appearance both of adulation and of insolence: which is a difficult point to manage.

Now that these things should have occurred at the third hour, was not without cause. For the brightness of this fire is shown at the very time when people are not engaged in their works, nor at dinner; when it is bright day, when all are in the market-place. Do you observe also the freedom which fills his speech? And hearken to my words. And he added nothing, but, This, says he, is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days. He shows, in fact, that the consummation is near at hand, and the words, In the last days, have a kind of emphasis. [I will pour out, etc.]

And then, that he may not seem to limit the privilege to the sons only, he subjoins, And your old men shall dream dreams. Mark the sequence. First sons; just as David said, Instead of your fathers, were begotten your sons. Psalm 45:17 And again Malachi; They shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. And on my handmaidens, and on my servants. Malachi 4:6 This also is a token of excellence, for we have become His servants, by being freed from sin. And great is the gift, since the grace passes over to the other sex also, not as of old, it was limited to just one or two individuals, as Deborah and Huldah.

He did not say that it was the Holy Ghost, neither did he expound the words of the prophet; but he merely brings in the prophecy to fight its own battle. As yet also he has said nothing about Judas; and yet it was known to all what a doom and punishment he had undergone; for nothing was more forcible than to argue with them from prophecy: this was more forcible even than facts. For when Christ performed miracles, they often contradicted Him. But when Christ brought forward the prophet, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on my right hand, they were silent, and no man, we read, was able to answer Him a word.

Psalm 90:1 And on all occasions He Himself also appealed to the Scriptures; for instance, If he called them gods to whom the word of God came. John 10:35 And in many places one may find this. On this account here also Peter says, I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh; that is, upon the Gentiles also. But he does not yet reveal this, nor give interpretations; indeed, it was better not to do so (as also this obscure saying, I will show wonders in heaven above, put them the more in fear because it was obscure.)

And it would have been more an offense, had it been interpreted from the very first. Then besides, even as plain, he passes over it, wishing to make them regard it as such. But after all, he does interpret to them anon, when he discourses to them upon the resurrection, and after he has paved the way by his discourse. (infra v. 39.) For since the good things were not sufficient to allure them, [it is added, And I will show wonders, etc.]. Yet this has never been fulfilled. For none escaped then [in that former judgment],

but now the faithful did escape, in Vespasian's time.

And this it is that the Lord speaks of, Except those days had been shortened, not all flesh should be saved. -- [Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.] Matthew 24:22 The worst to come first; namely, the inhabitants to be taken, and then the city to be razed and burnt. Then he dwelt upon the metaphor, bringing before the eyes of the hearers the overthrow and the taking. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. What means, the moon turned into blood? It denotes the excess of the slaughter.

The language is fraught with helpless dismay. (supra p. 32.) And it shall come to pass, every one who shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Every one, he says: though he be priest (but he does not yet reveal the meaning), though bond, though free. For there is no male nor female in Christ Jesus, no bond, no free. Galatians 3:28 Well may it be so, for all these are but shadow. For if in king's palaces there is no high-born nor low-born, but each appears according to his deeds; and in art, each is shown by his works; much more in that school of wisdom (φιλοσοφία).

Every one who shall invoke. Invoke: not any how, for it is written, Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord: but with (διὰ τὸ σέως) inward earnest affection, with a life more than commonly good, with the confidence which is meet. Thus far, however, he makes the discourse light, by introducing that which relates to faith, and that terrible which relates to the punishment. For in the invocation is the salvation.

What, I pray you, is this you say? Do you talk of salvation for them after the Cross? Bear with me a little. Great is the mercy of God. And this very fact does, no less than the resurrection, prove him to be God, yea, no less than His miracles-- the fact that He calls these to Him. For surpassing goodness is, above all things, peculiarly God's own. Therefore also He says, None is good save one, that is, God. Luke 18:19 Only let us not take this goodness for an occasion of negligence.

For He also punishes as God. In fact, the very punishments here spoken of, He brought them to pass, even He who said, Every one who shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved. I speak of the fate of Jerusalem; that intolerable punishment: of which I will tell you some few of the particulars, useful to us in our contest, both with the Marcionites and many other heretics. For, since they distinguish between Christ a good God, and that evil God [of the Old Testament], let us see who it was that effected these things.

The evil God, taking vengeance for Christ? Or not so? How then alien to Him? But was it the good God? Nay, but it is demonstrated that both the Father and the Son did these things. The Father in many places; for instance, when He says in the parable of the vineyard, [He will miserably destroy those wicked husbandmen Matthew 21:41; again in the parable of the marriage feast, the King is said] to send His armies Matthew 22:7: and the Son, when He says, But those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before Me.

Luke 19:27 \* \* \*. And they sent, saying, We will not have You to reign over us. Would you like then to hear the things which actually came to pass? Moreover, Christ Himself also speaks of the future tribulations, than which never any thing more dreadful came to pass; never any thing more ruthless, my beloved, than the deeds then done! And He Himself declared it. For what could you wish to see more grievous than these? \* \* \*-- probed them with their daggers! -- \* \* \* But shall I relate to you the shocking case of the woman, that tragic tale? \* \* \* (Joseph.

B. J. vi. 3. 4.) Did not the actual events cast all misery into the shade? But shall I tell you of famines and pestilences? One might speak of horrors without number: nature was unknown; law unknown; they outdid wild beasts in ferocity. True, these miseries came by the fate of wars; but because God, because Christ so willed it to be. These facts will apply both against the Marcionites and against those who do not believe that there is a hell: for they are sufficient to silence their impudence.

Are not these calamities more severe than the Babylonian? Are not these sufferings more grievous than the famines of that time? Yes, for [never was the like from the beginning of the world] no, nor ever shall be such. Matthew 24:21 And this was Christ's own declaration. In what sense then, think ye, is it said that Christ remitted them their sin? Perhaps it seems a commonplace question: but do ye solve it.-- It is not possible to show anywhere, even in fiction, any thing like what the reality was here.

And had it been a Christian that wrote this history, the matter might be regarded with suspicion: but if he was a Jew, and a Jewish zealot, and after the Gospel, how can the meaning of the facts be otherwise than palpable to all men? For you will see the man, how, everywhere, he always extols the concerns of the Jews.-- There is therefore a hell, O man! And God is good.-- Aye, did you shudder at hearing these horrors? But these, which take place here, are nothing in comparison with what shall be in that world.

Once more I am compelled to seem harsh, disagreeable, stern. But what can I do? I am set to this: just as a severe schoolmaster is set to be hated by his scholars: so are we. For would it not be strange indeed, that, while those who have a certain post assigned them by kings do that which is appointed them, however disagreeable the task may be, we, for fear of your censure, should leave our appointed task undone? Another has a different work. Of you, many have it for their work, to show mercy, to act humanely, to be pleasant and agreeable to the persons to whom you are benefactors.

But to those to whom we do good, we seem stern and severe, troublesome and disagreeable. For we do good, not by the pleasure we give, but by the pain we inflict. So it is also with the physician: though he indeed is not excessively disagreeable, for the benefit afforded by his art is had immediately; ours hereafter. So again the magistrate is odious to the disorderly and seditious; so the legislator is vexatious to them for whom he makes laws. But not so he that invites to enjoyment, not so he that prepares public festivities and entertainments, and puts all the people in garlands: no, these are men that win acceptance, feasting, as they do, whole cities with all sorts of spectacles; contributing largely, bearing all the cost.

And therefore those whom they have treated, requite them for these enjoyments with words of welcome and benediction, with hanging (παράπετ■σμάτα) of tapestries, and a blaze of lamps, and with wreaths, and boughs, and brilliant garments. Whereas, at the sight of the physician, the sick become sad and downcast: at sight of the magistrate, the rioters become subdued: no running riot then, no gambolling, except when he also goes over into their ranks. Let us see, then, which render the best service to their cities; those who provide these festivities, and banquetings, and expensive entertainments, and manifold rejoicings; or those who restrain all those doings, bearing before them stocks, scourges, executioners, dreaded soldiers, and a voice fraught with much terror: and issuing orders, and making men hang down their heads, and with the rod dispersing the idlers in the market-place.

Let us see, I say; these are the disagreeable, those the beloved: let us see where the gain rests. (λ■λει.) What comes then of your pleasure-givers? A kind of frigid enjoyment, lasting till the evening, and tomorrow vanished; mirth ungoverned, words unseemly and dissolute. And what of these? Awe, sobriety, subdued thoughts; reasonableness of mind, an end of idleness; a curb on the passions within; a wall of defense,

next to God, against assailants from without. It is by means of these we have each our property but by those ruinous festivities we dissipate it.

Robbers indeed have not invaded it, but vainglory together with pleasure acts the part of robber. Each sees the robber carrying off everything before his eyes, and is delighted at it! A new fashion of robbery, this, to induce people to be glad when one is plundering them! On the other part, there is nothing of the kind: but God, as the common Father, has secured us as by a wall against all [depredators], both seen and unseen. For, Take heed, says He, that you do not your alms before men.

Matthew 6:1 The soul learns from the one, [excess; from the other] to flee injustice. For injustice consists not merely in grasping at more wealth than belongs to us, but in giving to the belly more than its needful sustenance, in carrying mirth beyond its proper bounds, and causing it to run into frantic excesses. From the one, it learns sobriety; from the other, unchastity. For it is unchastity, not merely to have carnal intercourse with women, but even to look upon a woman with unchaste eyes.

From the one, it learns modesty; from the other, conceited self-importance. For, All things, says the Apostle, are lawful for me, but not all things expedient. 1 Corinthians 6:12 From the one, decent behavior; from the other unseemliness. For, as to the doings in the theatres, I pass these. But to let you see that it is not even a pleasure either, but a grief, show me, but a single day after the festival, both those who spent their money in giving it, and those who were feasted with spectacles: and you shall see them all looking dejected enough, but most of all him, your (κελεύων) famous man that has spent his money for it.

And this is but fair: for, the day before, he delighted the common man, and the common man indeed was in high good humor and enjoyment, and rejoiced indeed in the splendid garment, but then not having the use of it, and seeing himself stripped of it, he was grieved and annoyed; and wanted to be the great man, seeing even his own enjoyment to be small compared with his. Therefore, the day after, they change places, and now he, the great man, gets the larger share in the dejection.

Now if in worldly matters, amusements are attended with such dissatisfaction, while disagreeable things are so beneficial, much more does this hold in things spiritual. Why is it that no one quarrels with the laws, but on the contrary all account that matter a common benefit? For indeed not strangers from some other quarter, nor enemies of those for whom the laws are made, came and made these orders, but the citizens themselves, their patrons, their benefactors: and this very thing, the making of laws, is a token of beneficence and good-will.

And yet the laws are full of punishment and restraint, and there is no such thing as law without penalty and coercion. Then is it not unreasonable, that while the expositors of those laws are called deliverers, benefactors, and patrons, we are considered troublesome and vexatious if we speak of the laws of God? When we discourse about hell, then we bring forward those laws: just as in the affairs of the world, people urge the laws of murder, highway robbery, and the like, so do we the penal laws: laws, which not man enacted, but the Only-Begotten Son of God Himself.

Let him that has no mercy, He says, be punished Matthew 18:23; for such is the import of the parable. Let him that remembers injuries, pay the last penalty. Let him that is angry without cause, be cast into the fire. Let him that reviles, receive his due in hell. If you think these laws which you hear strange, be not amazed. For if Christ was not intended to make new laws, why did He come? Those other laws are manifest to us; we know that the murderer and adulterer ought to be punished.

If then we were meant only to be told the same things over again, where was the need of a heavenly Teacher? Therefore He does not say, Let the adulterer be punished, but, whoever looks on with unchaste eyes. And where, and when, the man will receive punishment, He there tells us. And not in fine public monuments, nor yet somewhere out of sight, did He deposit His laws; not pillars of brass did He raise up, and engrave letters thereon, but twelve souls raised He up for us, the souls of the Apostles, and in their minds has He by the Spirit inscribed this writing.

This cite we to you. If this was authorized to Jews, that none might take refuge in the plea of ignorance, much more is it to us. But should any say, I do not hear, therefore have no guilt, on this very score he is most liable to punishment. For, were there no teacher, it would be possible to take refuge in this plea; but if there be, it is no longer possible. Thus see how, speaking of Jews, the Lord deprives them of all excuse; If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: John 15:22: and Paul again, But I say, have they not heard?

Nay, but into all the earth went forth their sound. Romans 10:18 For then there is excuse, when there is none to tell the man; but when the watchman sits there, having this as the business of his life, there is excuse no longer. Nay, rather, it was the will of Christ, not that we should look only upon these written pillars, but that we should ourselves be such. But since we have made ourselves unworthy of the writing, at least let us look to those. For just as the pillars threaten others, but are not themselves obnoxious to punishment, nor yet the laws, even so the blessed Apostles.

And observe; not in one place only stands this pillar, but its writing is carried round about in all the world. Whether you go among the Indians, you shall hear this: whether into Spain, or to the very ends of the earth, there is none without the hearing, except it be of his own neglect. Then be not offended, but give heed to the things spoken, that you may be able to lay hold upon the works of virtue, and attain unto the eternal blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, with Whom to the Father and Holy Ghost together be glory, power, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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