

Homily 52 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 52 on the Acts of the Apostles explores Paul's defense before King Agrippa, emphasizing his innocence, conversion, and the hope of resurrection.

Scripture: Acts 25:23, Acts 26:1, Acts 26:6, Acts 26:9, Acts 26:23-24

Topics: "Faith And Courage", "Divine Love"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about Paul's defense before Agrippa, highlighting how Paul is proclaimed as a conqueror despite the accusations brought against him. Paul boldly speaks about his life, faith, and conversion, emphasizing his spotless character and unwavering commitment to the hope of the promise made by God. Chrysostom reflects on Paul's unwavering faith, courage, and the power of divine love that transforms a soul, leading to a life of true luxury and pleasure found in inner peace and freedom from worldly sorrows.

Transcript

Acts XXV. 23

"And on the morrow, when Agrippa had come, and Bernice with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

See what an audience is gathered together for Paul. Having collected all his guards, the governor has come, and the king, and the tribunes, with the principal men, it says, of the city. Then Paul being brought forth, see how he is proclaimed as conqueror. Festus himself acquits him from the charges, for what says Festus? And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, you see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself has appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and especially before you, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him. Acts 25:24-27 Mark how he accuses them, while he acquits him.

O what an abundance of justifications! After all these repeated examinations, the governor finds not how he may condemn him. They said he was worthy of death. On this account he said also: When I found, says he that he had committed nothing worthy of death.-- Of whom I have no certain thing to write to my lord. This too is a proof of Paul's spotlessness, that the judge found nothing to say concerning him. Therefore I have brought him forth, he says, before you. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crime laid against him.

Such were the great straits into which the Jews brought themselves and their rulers! What then? Agrippa said to Paul, You are permitted to speak for yourself. Acts 26:1 From his great desire to hear, the king permits him to speak. But Paul speaks out immediately with boldness, not flattering, but for this reason saying that he is happy, namely, because (Agrippa) knew all. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself. I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before you touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews.

Especially because I know you to be expert in all questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech you to hear me patiently. (v. 2, 3.) And yet, had he been conscious of guilt, he should have feared at being tried in the presence of one who knew all the facts: but this is a mark of a clear conscience, not to shrink from a judge who has an accurate knowledge of the circumstances, but even to rejoice, and to call himself happy. I beseech you, he says, to hear me patiently.

Since he is about to lengthen out his speech, and to say something about himself, on this account, he premises an entreaty, and (then) says: My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among my own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews: which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. (v. 4, 5.) Then how should I have become a seditious person, who when young was (thus) testified of by all?

Then too from his sect: after the most straitest sect says he, of our religion I lived. What then, if though the sect indeed be worthy of admiration, you are evil? Touching this also I call all to witness-- touching my life and conversation. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? Acts 26:6-8 Two arguments he lays down for the Resurrection: one, the argument from the prophets: and he does not bring forward any prophet (in particular,) but the doctrine itself as held by the Jews: the other and stronger one, the argument from the facts -- (especially from this,) that Christ Himself held discourse with him. And he lays the ground for this by (other) arguments, relating accurately his former madness.

Then too, with high commendation of the Jews, he says, Night and day, says he, serving (God) look to attain unto. So that even if I had not been of unblemished life, it is not for this (doctrine) that I ought to be brought to trial:-- for which hope, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. And then another argument Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? Since, if such an opinion had not existed, if they had not been brought up in these dogmas, but they were now for the first time brought in, perhaps some one might not have received the saying.

Then he tells, how he persecuted: this also helps the proof: and he brings forward the chief priests as witnesses, and the strange cities, and that he heard Him saying to him, It is hard for you to kick against the pricks, and shows the mercifulness of God, that, though being persecuted He appeared (to men), and did

that benefit not to me only, but also sent me as teacher to others: and shows also the prophecy, now come to pass, which he then heard, Delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send you.

Showing all this, he says: I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who are You, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you persecute, but rise, and stand upon your feet: for I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto you: delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send you, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins Acts 26:9-18:-- observe how mildly he discourses -- God, he says, said (this) to me, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.

By these things, says he, I was persuaded, by this vision He drew me to Himself, and so persuaded me, that I made no delay. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. (v. 19, 20.) I therefore, who instructed others also concerning the most excellent way of living, how should I myself have become the author of sedition and contention?

For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come. (v. 21, 22.) See how free from flattery his speech is, and how he ascribes the whole to God. Then his boldness -- but neither do I now desist: and the sure grounds -- for it is from the prophets that I urge the question, Whether the Christ was to suffer: then the Resurrection and the promise, Whether He, as the first to rise from the dead, should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.

Acts 26:23 Festus saw the boldness, and what says he? For Paul was all along addressing himself to the king -- he was in a manner annoyed, and says to him, You are beside yourself, Paul: for, while he thus discoursed, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, you are beside yourself: much learning does make you mad. Acts 26:24 What then says Paul? With gentleness, I am not mad, says he, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. Acts 26:25 Then too he gives him to understand why, turning from him, he addressed his speech to the king: For the king knows of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him: for this thing was not done in a corner.

Acts 26:26 He shows, that (the king) knows all perfectly; at the same time, all but saying to the Jews, And ye indeed ought to have known these things -- for this is the meaning of that which he adds, For this thing was not done in a corner. And Agrippa, said to Paul, ■ Ev ■ λ■ γ■ you persuade me to be a Christian. What is ■ v ■ λ■ γ■? makest short work to persuade me, as if this were an easy thing, to be done in brief: therefore Paul answers, Be it in little, or be it in much, I could pray to God, with no brief and hasty prayer, but ■ πιτεταμ■νως, much and earnestly.--For κα■ ο■ χ■ πλως, we read κα■ ■v πολλ■· ο■ χ■ ■. and transpose τ■ ■στιν ■v ■ λ■ γ■; παρ■ μικρ■v, to its fitting place.

Mod. text ο■ κ■ ■v ■ λ■ γ■· τουτ■στι, μικρ■v, omitting παρ■, meaning this as the explanation of St. Paul's ε■ ξ■. ■v ■ λ■ γ■. Of the Edd., Commel. Sav. Ben. give παρ■, and so Par. Ben. 2, who however rejects the ο■ κ■)--> Within a little, παρ■ μικρ■v . And Paul said, I could pray to God, κα■ ■v ■ λ■ γ■ κα■ ■v πολλ■, (that is) I could pray to God, for my part, not in little (but in much): he does not simply pray, he prays (not briefly, but) with largeness -- that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were such as I am. Then he adds, except these bonds; and yet it was matter of glory; true, but looking to their notion of it, therefore says he, except these bonds. Acts 26:27-29

(Recapitulation.) And on the morrow, etc. Acts 25:23 The Jews desisted ever since Paul exercised his right of appeal. Then also for him the theatre becomes a splendid one: with great pomp they were present. And Festus said, etc. The whole multitude of the Jews-- not some of them only, and others not so -- both at Jerusalem, and also here, they said that he ought not to live any longer. Acts 25:24 And I having found, etc. It shows that he did right in appealing to Cæsar. For if though they had no great matter to allege against him, yet those (at Jerusalem) were mad against him, with good reason may he go to Cæsar.

That after examination had by you, he says, I may get somewhat to write. Observe how the matter is repeatedly put to the test. The Jews therefore may thank themselves for this vindication (of Paul), which would come to the ears of those also who were at Rome. See how they become the unwilling heralds both of their own wickedness and of Paul's virtue, even to the emperor himself: so that Paul was carried away (to Rome) with more renown than if he had gone there without bonds: for not as an impostor and a deceiver, after so many judges had acquitted him, was he now carried there.

Quit therefore of all charges, among those with whom he was bred and born, and not only so, (but) thus free from all suspicion, he makes his appearance at Rome. Then Paul, etc. Acts 26:1-3 And he said not, Why is this? Once for all I have appealed to Cæsar: I have been tried many times: when will there be an end of this? But what did he? Again he is ready to render an account, and that, before the man who was the best informed on the subject; and with much boldness, seeing they were not his judges to condemn him: but still, though they were not his judges, since that declaration was in force, Unto Cæsar shall you go, he renders an account and gives full answers, touching all the things, and not merely on one and another here and there.

They accuse me of sedition, accuse me of heresy, accuse me that I have profaned the temple: touching all these things I answer for myself: now that these are not things in accordance with my ways, my accusers themselves are witnesses: my manner of life from my youth, etc. Acts 26:4 which is what he says on a former occasion Being a zealot. Acts 22:3 And when the whole people was present, then he challenges their testimony: not before the tribunal, but before Lysias, and again here, when more were present: whereas in that hearing there needed not much vindication of himself, since Lysias' letter exculpated him.

Know all the Jews, he says, which knew me from the beginning. And he does not say what kind of life his was, but leaves it to their own conscience, and lays the whole stress on his sect, as he would not have chosen that sect, if he had been a man of evil disposition and bad character (πονηρὸς καὶ μοχθηρὸς). But, for this hope (manuscripts and Edd. ἀρσέως) he says, I stand and am judged. (v. 6, 7.) This hope is honored among themselves also, because of this they pray, because of this they worship, that unto this they may attain: this same do I show forth.

Why then, it is acting like madmen, to be doing all things for the sake of attaining to this, and yet to persecute him who believes in the same. I indeed thought with myself, that is, I determined, to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Acts 26:9 I was not one of Christ's disciples: among those who fought against Him, was I. Whence also he is a witness who has a right to be believed, because he, a man who was doing numberless things, makes war on the believers, persuading them to blaspheme, stirring up all against them, cities, rulers, and by himself doing all this of his own accord, was thus suddenly changed.

Then again the witnesses, those who were with him: next he shows what just cause he had to be persuaded, both from the light, and from the prophets, and from the results, and from the things which have now taken place. See accordingly, how both from the prophets, and from these particulars, he confirms the proof to them. For that he may not seem to be broaching some novelty, although he had great things to say, yet he again takes refuge with the prophets, and puts this as a question for discussion.

Now this had a stronger claim upon belief, as having actually come to pass: but since he alone saw (Christ), he again fetches proof of it from the prophets. And see how he does not discourse alike in the court of justice, and in the assembly (of his own people); there indeed he says, ye slew Him: but here no such thing, that he might not kindle their anger more: but he shows the same thing, by saying, Whether the Christ was to suffer. He so frees them from accusations: for the prophets, he says, say this.

Therefore receive ye also the rest. Since he has mentioned the vision, he then without fear goes on to speak also of the good wrought by it. To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. For to this end have I appeared unto you Acts 26:16-18, not to punish, but to make you an Apostle. He shows the evils which possess unbelievers, Satan, darkness; the good things belonging to believers, light, God, the inheritance of the saints. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, etc. (v. 19, 20.)

He not only exhorts them to repent, but also to show forth a life worthy of admiration. And see how everywhere the Gentiles are admitted into connection with the people (Israel): for those who were present were of the Gentiles. Testifying, he says, both to great and small, Acts 26:22 that is, both to distinguished and undistinguished. This is also for the soldiers. Observe: having left the post of defendant, he took up that of teacher -- and therefore also it is that Festus says to him, You are beside yourself-- but then, that he may not seem to be himself the teacher, he brings in the prophets, and Moses: Whether the Christ was to suffer, whether He as the first to rise from the dead should show light both to the people, and to the Gentiles.

Acts 26:23 And Festus said with a loud voice -- in such anger and displeasure (did he speak)-- Paul, you are beside yourself. What then said Paul? I am not mad, etc. For this thing, he says, was not done in a corner. (v. 25, 26.) Here he speaks of the Cross, of the Resurrection: that the doctrine had come to every part of the world. King Agrippa, he says, do you believe-- he does not say, the Resurrection, but -- the prophets? Acts 26:27 Then he forestalls him, and says: I know that you believe? ■ Ev ■ λ■ γ■ (i.e. within a

little,) almost thou persuades the to be a Christian.

Acts 26:28 Paul did not understand what the phrase $\nu \lambda \gamma$ meant: he thought it meant $\xi \lambda \iota \gamma \omicron \upsilon$ (i.e. with little cost or trouble), wherefore also he answers (as) to this: so unlearned was he. And he said not, I do not wish (that), but, I pray that not only thou, but also all that hear. Mark how free from flattery his speech is.-- I pray that this day they may be all such as I am, except these bonds. Acts 26:29 He, the man that glories in his bonds, that puts them forth as a golden chain, deprecates them for these men: for they were as yet too weak in their minds, and it was rather in condescension that he so spoke.

For what could be better than those bonds which always in his Epistles he prefers (to all things else), saying, Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ: Ephesians 3:1 and again, On this account I am bound with this chain Acts 28:20, but the word of God is not bound; and, Even unto bonds, as an evil-doer. 2 Timothy 2:9 The punishment was twofold. For if indeed he had been so bound, as with a view to his good, the thing would have carried with it some consolation: but now (he is bound) both as an evil-doer, and as with a view to very ill consequences; yet for none of these things cared he.

Such is a soul winged with heavenly love. For if those who cherish the foul (earthly passion which men call) love, think nothing either glorious or precious, but those things alone which tend to gratify their lust, they think both glorious and honorable, and their mistress is everything to them; much more do those, who have been taken captive by this heavenly love, think nothing of the cost ($\tau \pi \tau \mu \iota \alpha$). But if we do not understand what I am saying, it is no marvel, while we are unskilled in this Divine Wisdom.

For if any one be caught with the fire of Christ's love, he becomes such as a man would become who dwelt alone upon the earth, so utterly careless is he for glory or disgrace: but just as if he dwelt alone, he would care for nothing, no more does he in this case. As for trials, he so despises them, both scourges and imprisonments, as though the body in which he suffers these things were another's and not his own, or as though he had got a body made of adamant: while as for the sweet things of this life, he so laughs them to scorn, is so insensible to them, as we are insensible of dead bodies, being ourselves dead.

He is as far from being taken captive by any passion, as the gold refined in the fire and purified is free from alloy. For even as flies would not dart into the midst of a flame, but fly from it, so the passions dare not even to come near this man. Would that I could bring forward examples of all this from among ourselves: but since we are at a loss for such, we must needs betake ourselves to this same Paul. Observe him then, how he felt towards the whole world. The world is crucified unto me, he says, and I unto the world Galatians 6:14: I am dead to the world, and the world is dead to me.

And again: It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. ib. And, to show you that he was as it were in solitude, and so looked upon the things present, hear himself saying, While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. 2 Corinthians 4:18 What do you say? Answer me. And yet what you say is the contrary; you see the things invisible, and the visible you see not. Such eyes as you had gotten, such are the eyes which are given by Christ: for as these bodily eyes see indeed the things that are seen, but things unseen they see not: so those (heavenly eyes) do the contrary: none that beholds the invisible things, beholds the visible: no one beholding the things seen, beholds the invisible.

Or is not this the case with us also? For when having turned our mind inwards we think of any of the unseen things, our views become raised above the things on earth. Let us despise glory: let us be willing to be laughed at rather than to be praised. For he indeed who is laughed at is nothing hurt: but he who is praised is much hurt. Let us not think much of those things which terrify men, but as we do in the case of

children, this let us do here: namely, if we see any one terrifying children, we do not hold that man in admiration: since in fact whoever does frighten, only frightens children; for were it a man, he could not frighten him.

Just as those who frighten (children in sport), do this either by drawing up their eyelids, or by otherwise distorting their face, but with the eye looking naturally and mild they would not be able to do this: so these others do this, by distorting their mental vision (τῆς διορατικῆς τῆς διανοίας). So that of a mild man and beautiful in soul nobody would be afraid; on the contrary, we all respect him, honor and venerate him. See ye not, how the man who causes terror is also an object of hatred and abhorrence to us all?

For of those things which are only able to terrify what do we not turn away from? Is it not so with wild beasts, with sounds, with sights, with places, with the air, such as darkness? Let us not therefore think it a great thing, if men fear us. For, in the first place, no man indeed is frightened at us: and, secondly, it is no great thing (if they were). Virtue is a great good: and see how great. However wretched we may deem the things by means of which it consists, yet we admire virtue itself, and count them blessed (that have it).

For who would not count the patient sufferer blessed, although poverty and such like things seem to be wretched? When therefore it shines forth through those things which seem to be wretched, see how surpassingly great this is! Do you think much, O man, because you are in power? And what sort of power? Say, was it conferred by appointment? (If so,) of men you have received power: appoint yourself to it from within. For the ruler is not he who is so called, but he who is really so.

For as a king could not make a physician or an orator, so neither can he make a ruler: since it is not the (imperial) letters nor the name that makes a ruler. For, if you will, let any man build a medicine-shop, let him also have pupils, let him have instruments too and drugs, and let him visit those who are sick: are these things sufficient to make a physician? By no means: but there is need of art, and without that, not only do these things profit nothing, but they even hurt: since it were better that he who is not a physician should not even possess medicines.

He that possesses them not, neither saves nor destroys: but he that possesses them, destroys, if he knows not how to use them: since the healing power is not only in the nature of the medicines, but also in the art of the person applying them: where this is not, all is marred. Such also is the ruler: he has for instruments, his voice, anger, executioners, banishments, honors, gifts, and praises; he has also for medicines, the law; has also for his patients, men; for a place to practise in, the court of justice; for pupils, he has the soldiers: if then he know not the science of healing, all these profit him nothing.

The judge is a physician of souls, not of bodies: but if this art of healing the bodies needs so much care, much more that of healing the soul, since the soul is of more importance than the body. Then not the mere having the name of ruler is to be a ruler: since others also are called by great names: as Paul, Peter, James, and John: but the names do not make them that which they are called, as neither does my name make me (to be that which John was); I bear indeed the same name with that blessed man, but I am not the same thing (ἐμὸν ὄνομα, οὐκ ἐστὶν ὄνομα), I am not John, but am called so.

In the same way they are not rulers, but are called so. But those others are rulers even without these adjuncts, just as also a physician, though he may not actually practise his science, yet if he have it in his soul, he is a physician. Those are rulers, who bear rule over themselves. For there are these four things, soul, family; city, world: and the things form a regular progression (ἐκ τοῦ οἴκου ἐκείνου). He therefore that is to superintend a family, and order it well, must first bring his own soul into order; for it is his family: but if he

cannot order his own family, where there is but one soul, where he himself is master, where he is always along with himself, how shall he order others?

He that is able to regulate his own soul, and makes the one part to rule, the other to be subject, this man will be able to regulate a family also: but he that can do this by a family, can do it by a city also: and if by a city, then also by the world. But if he cannot do this for his own soul, how then shall he be able to do it for the world? These things have been spoken by me, that we may not be excited about offices of rule; that we may know what ruling is: for this (which is so called) is not ruling, but a there object of derision, mere slavery, and many other names one might call it by.

Tell me, what is proper to a ruler? Is it not to help one's subjects, and to do them good? What then, if this be not the case? How shall he help others, who has not helped himself? He who has numberless tyrannies of the passions in his own soul, how shall he root out those of others? Again, with respect to luxury or delightful living: the true luxury or delight is not this (which is so called), but quite another thing. For as we have shown that the ruler is not he who is so called, but another (who has something more than the name), so the person who lives indeed in delight is another sort of person (than he whom we so describe).

For luxury or delightful living seems indeed to be, the enjoying pleasure and the gratifying the belly: yet it is not this thing, but the contrary: it is, to have a soul worthy of admiration, and to be in a state of pleasure. For let there be a man eating, drinking, and wantoning; then let him suffer cares and loss of spirits: can this man be said to be in a state of delight? Therefore, it is not eating and drinking, it is the being in pleasure, that makes true luxury or delightful living.

Let there be a man who gets only dry bread, and let him be filled with gladness: is not this pleasure? Well then, it is the true luxury. Let us see then, to whom this befalls -- whether to the rich, or to those who are not rich? Neither to the one part altogether, nor to the other, but to those who so order their own souls, that they may not have many grounds for sorrows. And where is such a life as this to be found? For I see you all eager and wishing to hear what this life is which has no sorrows.

Well then, let this be acknowledged first by you, that this is pleasure, this the true luxury, to have no sorrow to cause annoyance; and ask not of me meats, and wine, and sauces, and silken robes, and a sumptuous table. But if I shall show that apart from all these such a life as that is present (within our reach), then welcome thou this pleasure, and this life: for the most part of painful things happen to us from our not calculating things as we ought. Who then will have the most sorrows -- he that cares for none of these things, or he that cares for them?

He that fears changes, or he that does not fear? He that is in dread of jealousy, of envy, of false accusations, of plottings, of destruction, or he that stands aloof from these fears? He that wants many things, or he that wants nothing? He that is a slave to masters without number, or he that is a slave to none? He that has need of many things, or he that is free? He that has one lord to fear, or he that fears despots innumerable? Well then, greater is the pleasure here. This then let us pursue, and not be excited about the things present: but let us laugh to scorn all the pomp of life, and everywhere practise moderation, that we may be enabled so to pass through this life, that it may be without pain, and to attain unto the good things promised, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost together be glory, might, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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