

Homily 53 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul's voyage to Italy was a test of faith, where he and the other prisoners were shipwrecked on the island of Melita, but ultimately saved through God's providence and the guidance of holy men.

Scripture: Mark 15:28, Acts 26:30, Acts 27:1, Acts 27:7, Acts 27:16, Acts 27:22, Acts 27:27, Acts 27:33, Acts 27:37, 1 Timothy 2:9

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the events surrounding Paul's journey, highlighting how Paul's faith and obedience to God's guidance led to miraculous interventions and deliverance from various dangers, including unjust accusations, storms, and shipwrecks. Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of heeding the counsel of holy men like Paul to navigate through life's challenges and avoid spiritual shipwrecks caused by sins and passions. He encourages believers to seek the presence and blessings of saints, whose prayers and guidance can bring calmness, protection, and deliverance from evil spirits, illustrating the power of faith and the transformative impact of righteous living.

Transcript

Acts XXVI. 30-32

And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: and when they had gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man does nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.

See how again also they pass sentence in his favor, and after having said, You are beside yourself, Acts 26:24 they acquit him, as undeserving not only of death, but also of bonds, and indeed would have released him entirely, if he had not appealed to Cæsar. But this was done providentially, that he should also depart with bonds. Unto bonds, he says, as an evil doer. 1 Timothy 2:9 For if his Lord was reckoned among the transgressors Mark 15:28, much more he: but as the Lord did not share with them in their character, so neither did Paul.

For in this is seen the marvellous thing, the being mixed up with such, and yet receiving no harm from them. And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium,

we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon. Acts 27:1-3 See how far Aristarchus also accompanies Paul.

To good and useful purpose is Aristarchus present, as he would take back the report of all to Macedonia. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. Julius gave Paul liberty, it says, acting courteously, that he might refresh himself; as it was but natural that he should be much the worse from his bonds and the fear, and the being dragged hither and there. See how the writer does not hide this either, that Paul wished to refresh himself.

And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. Acts 27:4 Again trials, again contrary winds. See how the life of the saints is thus interwoven throughout: escaped from the court of justice, they fall in with shipwreck and storm. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. (v. 5, 6.) A ship of Alexandria, it says.

It is likely that both those (in the former ship) would bear to Asia the report of what had befallen Paul, and that these would do the same in Lycia. See how God does not innovate or change the order of nature, but suffers them to sail into the unfavorable winds. But even so the miracle is wrought. That they may sail safely, He did not let them go out in the (open) sea, but they always sailed near the land. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce had come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; and, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called the fair havens; near whereunto was the city of Lasea.

Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them. Acts 27:7-9 By the fast here, I suppose he means that of the Jews. For they departed thence a long time after the Pentecost, so that it was much about midwinter that they arrived at the coasts of Crete. And this too was no slight miracle, that they also should be saved on his account. Paul admonished them, and said to them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lies toward the southwest and northwest. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close to Crete.

But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive (R.V. were driven.) Acts 27:10-15 Paul therefore advised them to remain, and he foretells what would come of it: but they, being in a hurry, and being prevented by the place, wished to winter at Phenice. Mark then the providential ordering of the events: first indeed, when the south wind blew softly, supposing they had obtained their purpose, they loosed the vessel, and came forth; then when the wind bore down upon them, they gave way to it driving them, and were with difficulty saved.

And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next

day they lightened the ship; and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, you should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. Acts 27:16-21 Then after so great a storm he does not speak as insultingly over them, but as wishing that at any rate he might be believed for the future. Wherefore also he alleges what had taken place for a testimony of the truth of what was about to be said by him. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; you must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo God has given you all them that sail with you. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island. Acts 27:22-26 And he foretells two things; both that they must be cast upon an island, and that though the ship would be lost, those who were in it should be saved -- which thing he spoke not of conjecture, but of prophecy-- and that he must be brought before Cæsar.

But this that he says, God has given you all, is not spoken boastfully, but in the wish to win those who were sailing in the ship: for (he spoke thus), not that they might feel themselves bound to him, but that they might believe what he was saying. God has given you; as much (as to say), They are worthy indeed of death, since they would not listen to you: however, this is done out of favor to you. But when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; and sounded, and found it twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

Then fearing lest they should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, you cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. Acts 27:27-32 The sailors however, were about to escape, having no faith in what was said: but the centurion does believe Paul, For he says, If these flee, ye cannot be saved: so saying, not on this account, but that he might restrain them, and the prophecy might not fall to the ground.

See how as in a church they are instructed by the calmness of Paul's behavior, how he saved them out of the very midst of the dangers. And it is of providential ordering that Paul is disbelieved, that after proof of the facts, he might be believed: which accordingly was the case. And he exhorts them again to take some meat, and they do as he bids them, and he takes some first, to persuade them not by word, but also by act, that the storm did them no harm, but rather was a benefit to their souls.

And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that you have tarried and continued fasting having taken nothing. Acts 27:33 (b) And how, say you, did they go without food, having taken nothing? How did they bear it? Their fear possessed them, and did not let them fall into a desire of food, being, as they were, at the point of extreme jeopardy; (f) but they had no care for food. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not a hair fall from the head of any of you.

And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat, Acts 27:34-36 seeing that there was no question about their lives being saved. (d) And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. Acts 27:37-41 They made towards shore, having given the rudder-handles to the wind: for oftentimes they do it not in this way. They were borne along, having loosed the rigging, i.e. the sails. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves; for when there is a strong wind, this is the consequence, the stern bearing the brunt (of the storm). (a) And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

Acts 27:42 Again the devil tries to hinder the prophecy, and they had a mind to kill some, but the centurion suffered them not, that he might save Paul, so much was the centurion attached to him. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land. (v. 43, 44.)

And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. Acts 28:1 Do you mark what good came of the storm? Why then it was no mark of their being forsaken, that the storm came upon them. (c) Now this that happened was in consequence of the season of the year; but the wonder is greater, that at such a season they were saved from the midst of the dangers, both he, and for his sake the rest, (e) and this too in the Hadriatic. There were two hundred and seventy-six souls in all: no small matter this also, if indeed they believed.

The voyage was at an unseasonable time. (g) It is natural to suppose they would ask the reason why they were sailing, and would learn all. Nor was it for nothing that the voyage was so protracted; it afforded Paul an opportunity for teaching.

(Recapitulation.) And Paul says, I perceive that (this voyage will be) with hurt and loss. Acts 27:10 And observe how unassuming the expression is. That he may not seem to prophesy, but to speak as of conjecture, I perceive, says he. For they would not have received it, had he said this at the outset. In fact he does prophesy on this former occasion, as he does afterward, and says (there), The God whom I serve, leading them on. Then how comes it that it was not with loss (of any) of their lives?

It would have been so, but that God brought them safe through it. For as far as depended on the nature of the thing, they had perished, but God prevented it. Then, to show that it was not from conjecture that he so spoke, the master of the ship said the contrary Acts 27:11, and he a man of experience in the matter: so far was it from being the case that Paul's advice was given from conjecture. Moreover, the place suggested this same (which the master said), being not commodious; and it was evident that from conjecture the more part advised Acts 27:12 as they did, rather than Paul.

Then, severe the storm (that ensued), deep the darkness: and that they may not forget, the vessel also goes to pieces, and the grain is flung out and all beside, that they may not have it in their power after this

to be shameless. For this is why the vessel goes to pieces, and their souls are tightly braced. Moreover, both the storm and the darkness contributed not a little to his obtaining the hearing he did. Accordingly observe how the centurion does as he bids him, insomuch that he even let the boat go, and destroyed it.

And if the sailors did not as yet comply with his bidding, yet afterwards they do so: for in fact this is a reckless sort of people. Acts 27:13-20 Sirs, you should have hearkened to me, etc. Acts 27:21 One is not likely to have a good reception, when he chides in the midst of calamity; but when he tells them what more there is (to come) of the calamity, and then predicts the good, then he is acceptable. Therefore he attacks them then first, when all hope that they should be saved was taken away: that none may say, Nothing has come of it.

And their fear also bears witness. Moreover, the place is a trying one, for it was in the Adriatic, and then their long abstinence. They were in the midst of death. It was now the fourteenth day that they were going without food, having taken nothing. Wherefore, said he, I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health Acts 27:34, that you should eat, lest ye perish of hunger. Observe, his giving thanks after all that had happened strengthened them. For this showed an assured mind that they would be saved. (b) Then were they all of good cheer; and they also took some meat.

Acts 27:36 And not only so, but henceforth they so cast all their care upon Paul, that they even cast out the grain Acts 27:37, being so many. (a) Two hundred and seventy-six souls Acts 27:38: whence had they victuals? (c) See how they do their part as men, and how Paul does not forbid them. And when it was day, etc., they loosed the rudder-bands. (v. 39, 40.) And the vessel goes to pieces in the daytime, that they may not be clean dissolved with the terror: that you may see the prophecy brought out as fact.

And the soldiers' counsel, etc. Acts 27:42 Do you mark that in this respect also they were given to Paul? Since for his sake the centurion suffered them not to be slain. So confessedly wicked do those men seem to me to have been: insomuch that they would have chosen even to slay them: but some swam on shore, others were borne on boards, and they all were thus saved, and the prophecy received accomplishment; (a prophecy,) although not solemn from length of time, since he did not deliver it a number of years before, but keeping close to the nature of the things themselves: (still a prophecy it was,) for all was beyond the reach of hope.

And (so) it was through themselves being saved that they learned who Paul was. But some one may say: why did he not save the ship? That they might perceive how great a danger they had escaped: and that the whole matter depended, not on the help of man, but on God's hand saving them independently of a ship. So that righteous men, though they may be in a tempest, or on the sea, or in the deep, suffer nothing dreadful, but even save others together with themselves. If (here was) a ship in danger and suffering wreck, and prisoners were saved for Paul's sake, consider what a thing it is to have a holy man in a house: for many are the tempests which assail us also, tempests far more grievous than these (natural ones), but He can also give us to be delivered, if only we obey holy men as those (in the ship) did, if we do what they enjoin.

For they are not simply saved, but themselves also contributed to other men's believing (πιστευεσθε). Though the holy man be in bonds, he does greater works than those who are free. And look how this was the case here. The free centurion stood in need of his bound prisoner: the skilful pilot was in want of him who was no pilot -- nay rather, of him who was the true pilot. For he steered as pilot not a vessel of this (earthly) kind, but the Church of the whole world, having learned of Him Who is Lord also of

the sea; (steered it,) not by the art of man, but by the wisdom of the Spirit.

In this vessel are many shipwrecks, many waves, spirits of wickedness, from within are fightings, from without are fears 2 Corinthians 7:5: so that he was the true pilot. Look at our whole life: it is just such (as was this voyage). For at one time we meet with kindness, at another with a tempest; sometimes from our own want of counsel, sometimes from our idleness, we fall into numberless evils; from our not hearkening to Paul, when we are eager to go somewhere, where he bids us not.

For Paul is sailing even now with us, only not bound as he was then: he admonishes us even now, and says to those who are (sailing) on this sea, take heed unto yourselves: for after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you Acts 20:29: and again, In the last times perilous times shall come: and men shall be lovers of their own selves, lovers of money, boasters. 2 Timothy 3:2 This is more grievous than all storms. Let us therefore abide where he bids us -- in faith, in the safe haven: let us hearken unto him rather than to the pilot that is within us, that is, our own reason.

Let us not straightway do just what this may suggest; not what the owner of the ship: no, but what Paul suggests: he has passed through many such tempests. Let us not learn (to our cost) by experience, but before the experience let us avoid both harm and loss. Hear what he says: They that will be rich fall into temptation. 1 Timothy 6:9 Let us therefore obey him; else, see what they suffered, because they did not take his counsel. And again he tells in another place what causes shipwrecks: Who, he says, have made shipwreck concerning the faith.

But do thou continue in the things which you have learned and wast assured of. 1 Timothy 1:19 Let us obey Paul: though we be in the midst of a tempest, we shall surely be freed from the dangers: though we remain without food fourteen days, though hope of safety may have left us, though we be in darkness and mist, by doing his bidding, we shall be freed from the dangers. Let us think that the whole world is a ship, and in this the evildoers and those who have numberless vices, some rulers, others guards, others just men, as Paul was, others prisoners, those bound by their sins: if then we do as Paul bids us, we perish not in our bonds, but are released from them: God will give us also to him.

Or think you not that sins and passions are grievous bonds? For it is not the hands only that are bound, but the whole man. For tell me, when any one possessed of much money uses it not, nor spends it, but keeps it close, is he not bound more grievously than any prisoner by his miserliness, a bond that cannot be broken? What again, when a man gives himself up to (the belief in) Fate, is not he too bound with other fetters? What, when he gives himself up to observations (of times)?

What, when to omens? Are not these more grievous than all bonds? What again, when he gives himself up to an unreasonable lust and to love? Who shall break in pieces these bonds for you? There is need of God's help that they may be loosed. But when there are both bonds and tempest, think how great is the amount of dangers. For which of them is not enough to destroy? The hunger, the tempest, the wickedness of those on board, the unfitness of the season? But against all these, Paul's glory stood its ground.

So is it now: let us keep the saints near us, and there will be no tempest: or rather, though there be a tempest, there will be great calm and tranquillity, and freedom from dangers: since that widow had the saint for her friend, and the death of her child was loosed, and she received back her son alive again. 1 Kings 17:17 Where the feet of saints step, there will be nothing painful; and if such should happen, it is for proving us and for the greater glory of God. Accustom the floor of your house to be trodden by such feet, and an evil spirit will not tread there.

For as where a sweet odor is, there a bad odor will not find place: so where the holy ointment is, there the evil spirit is choked, and it gladdens those who are near it, it delights, it refreshes the soul. Where thorns are, there are wild beasts: where hospitality is, there are no thorns: for almsgiving having entered in, more keenly than any sickle it destroys the thorns, more violently than any fire. Be not thou afraid: (the wicked one) fears the tracks of saints, as foxes do lions.

For the righteous, it says, is as bold as a lion. Proverbs 28:1 Let us bring these lions into our house, and all the wild beasts are put to flight, the lions not needing to roar, but simply to utter their voice. For not so much does the roaring of a lion put the wild beasts to flight, as the prayer of a righteous man puts to flight evil spirits: let him but speak, they cower. And where are such men now to be found, you will say? Everywhere, if we believe, if we seek, if we take pains.

Where have you sought, tell me? When did you take this work in hand? When did you make this your business? But if you seek not, marvel not that thou dost not find. For he that seeks finds Matthew 7:7, not he that seeks not. Listen to those who live in deserts: away with your gold and silver: (such holy men) are to be found in every part of the world. Though thou receive not such an one in your house, yet go thou to him, live with the man, be at his dwelling-place, that you may be able to obtain and enjoy his blessing.

For a great thing it is to receive a blessing from the saints: which let us be careful to obtain, that being helped by their prayers we may enjoy mercy from God, through the grace and loving-kindness of His only-begotten Son, 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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