

# Homily 55 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's Homily 55 emphasizes Paul's defense, his mission to both Jews and Gentiles, and the importance of spiritual readiness in understanding the Gospel.*

**Scripture:** Acts 28:17-28

**Topics:** "Apostle Paul", "Faith Trials"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on Paul's defense before the Jews, highlighting his desire to exculpate himself and others, emphasizing his forgiving nature and the need to address misunderstandings. Paul explains his actions, showing his willingness to appeal to Caesar for safety, not to accuse his nation. Despite some disbelief, Paul continues to preach the kingdom of God, persuading both Jews and Gentiles. Chrysostom reflects on Paul's unwavering faith and the challenges he faced, urging listeners to emulate Paul's strong and pure heart to navigate life's trials and reach the promised blessings through Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

Acts XXVIII. 17-20

And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they had come together, he said to them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spoke against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar; not that I had anything to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

He wished to exculpate both himself and others; himself, that they might not accuse him, and by so doing hurt themselves; and those (others), that it might not seem that the whole thing was of their doing. For it was likely that a report was prevalent, that he had been delivered up by the Jews; and this was enough to alarm them. He therefore addresses himself to this, and defends himself as to his own conduct. How then is it reasonable, it might be said, that they should deliver you up without a cause?

The Roman governors, he says, bear me witness, who wished to let me go. How was it then that they did not let (you) go? When the Jews spoke against it, he says. Observe how he extenuates (in speaking of) their charges against him. Since if he had wished to aggravate matters, he might have used them so as to

bear harder upon them. Wherefore, he says, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar: so that his whole speech is of a forgiving nature. What then? Did you this, that you might accuse them?

No, he says: Not that I had anything to accuse my nation of: but that I might escape the danger. For it is for your sakes that I am bound with this chain. So far am I, he says, from any hostile feeling towards you. Then they also were so subdued by his speech, that they too apologized for those of their own nation: And they said to him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning you, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spoke any harm of you. Acts 28:21 Neither through letters, nor through men, have they made known any harm of you.

Nevertheless, we wish to hear from yourself: But we desire to hear of you what you think. Acts 28:22: and then forestalled him by showing their own sentiments. For as concerning this sect, it is known to us, that everywhere it is spoken against. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses and out of the Prophets, from morning till evening.

And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. (v. 23, 24.) They said not, we speak against it, but it is spoken against. Then he did not immediately answer, but gave them a day, and they came to him, and he discoursed, it says, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the Prophets. And some believed, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spoke the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Acts 28:25-27 But when they departed, as they were opposed to each other, then he reproaches them, not because he wished to reproach those (that believed not), but to confirm these (that believed). Well said Esaias, says he to them. So that to the Gentiles it is given to know this mystery. No wonder then, if they did gainsay: this was foretold from the first. Then again he moves their jealousy (on the score) of them of the Gentiles. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. Amen. Acts 28:28-31 It shows the freedom he had now: without hindrance in Rome, he who had been hindered in Judea; and he remained teaching there for two years. What of the (years) after these?

(Recapitulation.) (d) Who having examined me, says he, found nothing in me Acts 28:18. When those ought to have rescued, they delivered (him) into the hands of the Romans. And such the superabundance, \* \* because those had not power to condemn but delivered him prisoner. Not as having anything to accuse my nation of, Acts 28:19 am I come. See what friendliness of expression my nation: he does not hold them as aliens. He does not say, I do not accuse, but, I have not (whereof) to accuse: although he had suffered so many evils at their hands.

But nothing of all this does he say, nor make his speech offensive: neither does he seem to be sparing them as matter of favor. For this was the main point, to show that they delivered him prisoner to the Romans, when those ought to have condemned him. (a) For this cause, he says, I wished to see you Acts 28:20: that it might not be in any man's power to accuse me, and to say what (naturally) might suggest itself (τ■ παριστ■μενα), that having escaped their hands I have come for this: not to bring evils upon others, but myself fleeing from evils.

I was compelled to appeal unto Cæsar. Observe them also speaking more mildly to him. We beg, say they: and wish to speak in exculpation of those (at Jerusalem). (e) Whereas they ought to accuse them, they plead for them: by the very fact of their exonerating them, they do in fact accuse them. (b) For this very thing was a proof that they knew themselves exceedingly in the wrong. Had they been confident, they would at any rate have done this, so that he should not have it in his power to make out his story in his own way, and besides they shrank from coming.

And by their many times attempting they showed \* \* (f) As for this sect, it is known to us, say they, that it is everywhere spoken against. (v. 21, 21.) True, but (people) are also everywhere persuaded (as, in fact, here), some were persuaded, and some believed not. And when they had appointed him a day, etc. Acts 28:23-25 See again how not by miracles but by Law and Prophets he puts them to silence, and how we always find him doing this. And yet he might also have wrought signs; but then it would no longer have been matter of faith.

In fact, this (itself) was a great sign, his discoursing from the Law and the Prophets. Then that you may not deem it strange (that they believed not), he introduces the prophecy which says, Hearing you shall hear and not understand, more now than then: and you shall see and not perceive Acts 28:26 more now than then. This is not spoken for the former sort, but for the unbelievers. How then? Was it contrary to the prophecy, that those believed? (Go,) it says, unto this people (that is), to the unbelieving people.

He did not say this to insult them, but to remove the offense. Be it known then, he says, unto you, that unto the Gentiles is sent the salvation of God. They, says he, will hear it too. Acts 28:28 Then why do you discourse to us? Did you not know this? Yes, but that you might be persuaded, and that I might exculpate myself, and give none a handle (against me). (c) The unbelieving were they that withdrew. But see how they do not now form plots against him. For in Judea they had a sort of tyranny.

Then wherefore did the Providence of God order that he should go there, and yet the Lord had said, Get you out quickly from Jerusalem? Acts 22:18 That both their wickedness might be shown and Christ's prophecy made good, that they would not endure to hear him: and so that all might learn that he was ready to suffer all things, and that the event might be for the consolation of those in Judea: for there also (the brethren) were suffering many grievous evils. But if while preaching the Jewish doctrines, he suffered thus, had he preached the doctrines of the glory of Christ, how would they have endured him?

While purifying himself Acts 21:26 he was intolerable, and how should he have been tolerable while preaching? What lay ye to his charge? What have ye heard? He spoke nothing of the kind. He was simply seen, and he exasperated all against him. Well might he then be set apart for the Gentiles: well might he be sent afar off: there also destined to discourse to the Gentiles. First he calls the Jews, then having shown them the facts he comes to the Gentiles. Acts 24:18 Well spoke the Holy Ghost, etc.

But this saying, The Spirit said, is nothing wonderful: for an angel also is said to say what the Lord says: but He (the Spirit) not so. When one is speaking of the things said by the angel, one does not say, Well

said the angel, but, Well said the Lord. Well said the Spirit: as much as to say, It is not me that you disbelieve. But God foreknew this from the first. He discoursed, it says, with boldness, unhindered Acts 28:31: for it is possible to speak with boldness, yet hindered.

His boldness nothing checked: but in fact he also spoke unhindered. (c) Discoursed, it says, the things concerning the kingdom of God: mark, nothing of the things of sense, nothing of the things present. (f) But of his affairs after the two years, what say we? (b) (The writer) leaves the hearer thirsty for more: the heathen authors do the same (in their writings), for to know everything makes the reader dull and jaded. Or else he does this, (e) not having it in his power to exhibit it from his own personal knowledge. (a) Mark the order of God's Providence, I have been much hindered from coming unto you...having a great desire these many years to come unto you.

Romans 15:22-23 (d) But he fed them with hopes. (g) I am in haste to go to Spain, and I hope, says he, to see you in my journey, and to be brought thitherward on my journey by you, if first I be filled with your company in some measure. Romans 15:24 (i) Of this he says, I will come and rest together with you in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel Romans 15:29: and again I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints Romans 15:25: this is the same that he has said here, To do alms to my nation I came.

Acts 24:17 (h) Do you mark how he did not foresee everything -- that sacred and divine head, the man higher than the heavens, that had a soul able to grasp all at once, the holder of the first place -- Paul? The man whose very name, to them that know him, suffices for rousing of the soul, for vigilance, for shaking off all sleep! Rome received him bound, coming up from the sea, saved from a ship-wreck -- and was saved from the shipwreck of error. Like an emperor that has fought a naval battle and overcome, he entered into that most imperial city. (k) He was nearer now to his crown.

Rome received him bound, and saw him crowned and proclaimed conqueror. There he had said, I will rest together with you: but this was the beginning of a course once more, and he added trophies to trophies, a man not to be overcome. Corinth kept him two years, and Asia three, and this city two for this time; a second time he again entered it, when also he was consummated. Thus he escaped then, and having filled the whole world, he so brought his life to a close. Why did you wish to learn what happened after these two years?

Those too are such as these: bonds, tortures, fightings, imprisonments, lyings in wait, false accusations, deaths, day by day. You have seen but a small part of it? How much soever you have seen, such is he for all the rest. As in the case of the sky, if you see one part of it, go where you will you shall see it such as this: as it is with the sun, though thou see its rays but in part, you may conjecture the rest: so is it with Paul. His Acts you have seen in part; such are they all throughout, teeming with dangers.

He was a heaven having in it the Sun of Righteousness, not such a sun (as we see): so that that man was better than the very heaven. Think you that this is a small thing -- when you say The Apostle, immediately every one thinks of him (as), when you say The Baptist, immediately they think of John? To what shall one compare his words? To the sea, or even to the ocean? But nothing is equal to them.

More copious than this (sea) are (his) streams; purer and deeper; so that one would not err in calling Paul's heart both a sea and a heaven, the one for purity, the other for depth. He is a sea, having for its voyagers not those who sail from city to city, but those from earth to heaven: if any man sail in this sea, he will have a prosperous voyage. On this sea, not winds, but instead of winds the Holy and Divine Spirit wafts the souls which sail thereon: no waves are here, no rock, no monsters: all is calm.

It is a sea which is more calm and secure than a haven, having no bitter brine, but a pure fountain both sweeter than \* \*, and brighter and more transparent than the sun: a sea it is, not having precious stones, nor purple dye as ours, but treasures far better than those. He who wishes to descend into this sea, needs not various, needs not oil, but much loving-kindness (φιλανθρωπισμός): he will find in it all the good things that are in the kingdom of Heaven. He will even be able to become a king, and to take the whole world into his possession, and to be in the greatest honor; he who sails on this sea will never undergo shipwreck, but will know all things well.

But as those who are inexpert in this (our visible sea) are suffocated (in attempting to dive therein), so is it in that other sea: which is just the case with the heretics, when they attempt things above their strength. It behooves therefore to know the depth, or else not to venture. If we are to sail on this sea, let us come well-girded. I could not, he says, speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. 1 Corinthians 3:1 Let no one who is without endurance sail on this sea.

Let us provide for ourselves ships, that is, zeal, earnestness, prayers, that we may pass over the sea in quiet. For indeed this is the living water. Like as if one should get a mouth of fire, such a mouth does that man get who knows Paul well: like as if one should have a sharp sword, so again does such an one become invincible. And for the understanding of Paul's words there is needed also a pure life. For therefore also he said: You have become such as have need of milk, seeing you are dull of hearing.

Hebrews 5:11-12 For there is, there is an infirmity of hearing. For as a stomach which is infirm could not take in wholesome food (which it finds) hard of digestion, so a soul which has become tumid and heated, unstrung and relaxed, could not receive the word of the Spirit. Hear the disciples saying, This is a hard saying: who can hear it John 6:60? But if the soul be strong and healthy, all is most easy, all is light: it becomes more lofty and buoyant: it is more able to soar and lift itself on high.

Knowing then these things, let us bring our soul into a healthy state: let us emulate Paul, and imitate that noble, that adamant soul: that, advancing in the steps of his life, we may be enabled to sail through the sea of this present life, and to come unto the haven wherein are no waves, and attain unto the good things promised to them that love Him, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father and Holy Ghost together be glory, might, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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