

Homily 8 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of suffering for Christ's sake, and the dignity and power that comes with it.

Scripture: Daniel 3:26, Matthew 11:2, Matthew 27:2, John 18:24, Acts 16:25, Acts 16:30

Topics: "Persevering Through Trials", "Faith And Suffering"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the power and blessings of enduring tribulations and being bound for Christ's sake, drawing insights from the experiences of Paul, the three Children in the fiery furnace, and other biblical figures like Joseph, Jeremiah, and John. He emphasizes the importance of maintaining faith, praising God, and spreading His word even in the midst of trials and imprisonment, as exemplified by these faithful individuals. Chrysostom highlights the spiritual strength and courage displayed by those who faced adversity with unwavering devotion to God, showing how their actions led to miraculous interventions and conversions of hearts, ultimately glorifying God's power and grace.

Transcript

Chapter IV. Verses 1, 2

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith you were called, with all lowliness and meekness.

It is the virtue of teachers to aim not at praise, nor at esteem from those under their authority, but at their salvation, and to do every thing with this object; since the man who should make the other end his aim, would not be a teacher but a tyrant. Surely it is not for this that God set you over them, that you should enjoy greater court and service, but that your own interests should be disregarded, and every one of theirs built up. This is a teacher's duty: such an one was the blessed Paul, a man who was free from all manner of vanity, and was contented to be one of the many, nay more, to be the very least even of them. Hence he even calls himself their servant, and so generally speaks in a tone of supplication. Observe him then even now writing nothing dictatorial, nothing imperious, but all chastened and subdued.

I therefore, says he, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith you were called. What is it, tell me, you are beseeching? Is it that you may gain any end for yourself? No, says he, in no wise; it is that I may save others. And yet surely they who beseech, do so for things which are of importance to themselves. True; and this, says he, is of importance to myself, according to what he says

also elsewhere in his writings, Now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord; 1 Thessalonians 3:8 for he ever earnestly desired the salvation of those whom he was instructing.

I, the prisoner in the Lord. Great and mighty dignity! Greater than that of king or of consul, or of any other. Hence it is the very title he uses in writing to Philemon, As Paul the aged, and now a prisoner also of Jesus Christ. Philemon 9 For nothing is so glorious as a bond for Christ's sake, as the chains that were bound around those holy hands; more glorious is it to be a prisoner for Christ's sake than to be an Apostle, than to be a Teacher, than to be an Evangelist. Is there any that loves Christ, he will understand what I am saying. Is any transported and fired with devotion for the Lord, he knows the power of these bonds. Such an one would rather choose to be a prisoner for Christ's sake, than to have the Heavens for his dwelling. More glorious than any gold were the hands he was showing to them, yea, than any royal diadem. Yes, no jewelled tiara bound around the head invests it with such glory, as an iron chain for Christ's sake. Then was the prison more glorious than palaces, yea, than heaven itself. Why say I than palaces? Because it contained a prisoner of Christ. Is there any that loves Christ, he knows the dignity of this title, he knows what a virtue is this, he knows how great a boon he bestowed upon mankind, even this, to be bound for His sake. More glorious this, perhaps to be bound for His sake, than to sit at His right hand, Matthew 20:21 more august this, than to sit upon the twelve thrones. Matthew 19:28

And why speak I of human glories? I am ashamed to compare earthly riches and golden attire to these bonds. But forbearing to speak of those great and heavenly glories, even were the thing attended with no reward at all, this alone were a great reward, this an ample recompense, to suffer these hardships for the sake of the Beloved. They that love, even though it be not God, but man, they know what I am saying, since they are more delighted to suffer for, than to be honored by those they love. But to fully understand these things belongs to the holy company, the Apostles, I mean, and them alone. For hearken to what the blessed Luke says, Acts 5:11 that they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name. To all others indeed it seems to be foolishness, that to suffer dishonor is to be counted worthy, that to suffer dishonor is to rejoice. But to them that understand the love of Christ, this is esteemed of all things the most blessed. Were any to offer me my choice, the whole Heaven or that chain, that chain I would prefer. Were any to ask whether he should place me on high with the Angels, or with Paul in his bonds, the prison I would choose. Were any about to change me into one of those powers, that are in Heaven, that are round about the throne, or into such a prisoner as this, such a prisoner I would choose to be. Nothing is more blessed than that chain. Would that I could be at this moment in that very spot, (for the bonds are said to be still in existence,) to behold and admire those men, for their love of Christ. Would that I could behold the chains, at which the devils fear and tremble, but which Angels reverence. Nothing is more noble than to suffer any evil for Christ's sake. I count not Paul so happy, because he was caught up into Paradise, 2 Corinthians 12:4 as because he was cast into the dungeon; I count him not so happy, because he heard unspeakable words, as because he endured those bonds. I count him not so happy, because he was caught up into the third Heaven, 2 Corinthians 12:2 as I count him happy for those bonds' sake. For that these are greater than those, hear how even he himself knew this; for he says not, I who heard unspeakable words, beseech you: but what? I, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you. Nor yet are we to wonder, though he inscribes not this in all his Epistles, for he was not always in prison, but only at certain times.

I deem it more desirable to suffer evil for Christ's sake, than to receive honor at Christ's hands. This is transcendent honor, this is glory that surpasses all things. If He Himself who became a servant for my sake, and emptied Philipians 2:7 His glory, yet thought not Himself so truly in glory, as when He was

crucified for my sake, what ought not I to endure? For hear His own words: Father, glorify Thou Me. John 17:1 What is this you are saying? You are being led to the cross with thieves and plunderers of graves, you endure the death of the accursed; You are about to be spit upon and buffeted; and callest Thou this glory?

Yes, He says, for I suffer these things for My beloved ones, and I count them altogether glory. If He who loved the miserable and wretched calls this glory, not to be on His Father's throne, nor in His Father's glory, but in dishonor -- if this was His glory, and if this He set before the other: much more ought I to regard these things as glory. Oh! Those blessed bonds! Oh! Those blessed hands which that chain adorned! Not so worthy were Paul's hands when they lifted up and raised the lame man at Lystra, as when they were bound around with those chains.

Had I been living in those times, how eagerly would I have embraced them, and put them to the very apple of my eyes. Never would I have ceased kissing those hands which were counted worthy to be bound for my Lord. Marvellest thou at Paul, when the viper fastened on his hand, and did him no hurt? Marvel not. It revered his chain. Yea, and the whole sea revered it; for then too was he bound, when he was saved from shipwreck. Were any one to grant me power to raise the dead at this moment, I would not choose that power, but this chain.

Were I free from the cares of the Church, had I my body strong and vigorous, I would not shrink from undertaking so long a journey, only for the sake of beholding those chains, for the sake of seeing the prison where he was bound. The traces indeed of his miracles are numerous in all parts of the world, yet are they not so dear as those of his scars. Galatians 6:17 Nor in the Scriptures does he so delight me when he is working miracles, as when he is suffering evil, being scourged, and dragged about.

Insomuch that from his body were carried away handkerchiefs or aprons. Marvellous, truly marvellous, are these things, and yet not so marvellous as those. When they had laid many stripes upon him, they cast him into prison. Acts 16:23 And again; being in bonds, they were singing hymns unto God. Acts 16:25 And again; They stoned him, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. Acts 14:19 Would ye know how mighty a thing is an iron chain for Christ's sake, bound about His servant's body?

Hearken to what Christ Himself says, Blessed are you. Matthew 5:11 Why? When you shall raise the dead? No. But why? When you shall heal the blind? Not at all. But why then? When men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Matthew 5:11 Now, if to be evil spoken of renders men thus blessed, to be evil entreated, what may not that achieve? Hearken to what this blessed one himself says elsewhere; Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness: 2 Timothy 4:8 and yet, more glorious than this crown is the chain: of this, says he, the Lord will count me worthy, and I am in no wise inquisitive about those things.

Enough it is for me for every recompense, to suffer evil for Christ's sake. Let Him but grant me to say, that I fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ: Colossians 1:24 and I ask nothing further.

Peter also was counted worthy of this chain; for he, we read, was bound, and delivered to soldiers, and was sleeping. Acts 12:6 Yet he rejoiced and was not diverted from his right mind and he fell into deep sleep which could not have been, had he been in any great anxiety. However, he was sleeping, being between two soldiers: and an Angel came unto him, and smote him on the side, and raised him up. Now then, were any one to say to me, Which would you? Would you be the Angel that struck Peter, or Peter that was delivered? I would rather choose to be Peter, for whose sake even the Angel came, yea, I would

that I might enjoy those chains. And how is it, say ye, that, as being released from great evils, he prays? Marvel not: he prays, because he is afraid lest he should die; and of dying he is afraid, because he would fain have his life to be still a subject for further sufferings. For hearken to what the blessed Paul himself also says. Philippians 1:23-24 To depart, and to be with Christ, is very far better; Yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake. This he calls even a favor where he writes, and says, To you it has been granted, (as a favor ■ χαρ■σθη) in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer in His behalf. Philippians 1:29 So that this latter is greater than the other: for He gave it of His free grace; verily, a favor it is, exceeding great, yea greater than any one of those, greater than to make the sun and the moon stand still, than to move the world! greater this than to have power over devils, or to cast out devils. The devils grieve not so much at being cast out by the faith which we exert, as when they behold us suffering any evil, and imprisoned for Christ's sake. For this increases our boldness. Not for this is it a noble thing to be in bonds for Christ's sake that it procures for us a kingdom; it is that it is done for Christ's sake. Not for this do I bless those bonds, for that they conduct on to Heaven; it is because they are worn for the sake of the Lord of Heaven. How great a boast to know that he was bound for Christ's sake! How great a happiness, how high an honor, how illustrious a distinction! Fain would I ever be dwelling on these subjects. Fain would I cling to this chain. Fain would I, though in reality I have not the power, yet still in idea, bind this chain round my soul by a temper like his.

The foundations of the prison-house, we read, were shaken where Paul was bound, and every one's bands were loosed. Acts 16:26 Beholdest thou then in bonds a nature that can dissolve bonds themselves? For as the Lord's death put death itself to death, so also did Paul's bonds loose the men in bonds, shake the house of bondage, open the doors. Yet is not this the natural effect of bonds, but the very reverse; it is to keep him that is bound in safety, not to open for him the prison walls. No, of bonds then in general this is not the nature, but of those bonds which are for Christ's sake, it is. The jailor fell down before Paul and Silas. Acts 16:29 And yet neither is this again the effect of chains in general, to lay the binders at the feet of the bound: no, but, on the contrary, to put these last under the hands of the former. Whereas here, the man who was free was under the feet of the man who had been bound. The binder was beseeching him whom he had bound to release him from his fear. Tell me, was it not thou that bound him? Did you not cast him into the inner prison? Did you not make his feet fast in the stocks? Why do you tremble? Why are you troubled? Why do you weep? Why have you drawn your sword? Never bound I, says he, anything like this! I knew not that the prisoners of Christ had power so mighty as this. What do you say? They received power to open Heaven, and should they not be able to open a prison? They loosed them that were bound by evil spirits, and was a piece of iron likely to conquer them? You know not the men. And therefore also were thou pardoned. That prisoner is Paul, whom all the Angels reverence. He is Paul, whose very handkerchiefs and napkins cast out devils, and chase diseases to flight. And sure the bond which is of the devil is adamantine, and far more indissoluble than iron; for this indeed binds the soul, the other only the body. He therefore that released souls that were bound, shall not he have power to release his own body? He that could burst asunder the bonds of evil spirits, shall he not unloose a rivet of iron? He that by his very garments unloosed those prisoners, and released them from the spell of devils, shall not he of himself set himself at liberty? For this was he first bound himself, and then loosed the prisoners, that you might understand that Christ's servants in bonds possess a power far greater than they that are at liberty. Had one who was at liberty wrought this, then had it not been so marvellous. So then the chain was not a token of weakness, but rather of a greater power, and thus is the saint's might more illustriously displayed, when, even though in bonds, he overpowers them that are at liberty, when he that is in bonds sets not only himself at liberty, but them that are in bonds also. Where is the use of walls? What the advantage of thrusting him into the inner prison, whereas he opened the outer

also? And why too was it done in the night? And why with an earthquake?

Oh, bear with me a little, and give me leave while I refrain from the Apostle's words, and revel in the Apostle's deeds, and banquet on Paul's chain; grant me still longer to dwell upon it. I have laid hold on that chain, and no one shall part me from it. More securely at this moment am I bound by affection, than was he then in the stocks. This is a bond which no one can loose, for it is formed of the love of Christ; this neither the Angels, no, nor the kingdom of Heaven, has power to unloose. We may hear Paul's own words; Romans 8:38-39 Neither angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now then, why did the event take place at midnight? And wherefore too with an earthquake? Hearken, and marvel at the providential orderings of God. Every one's bands were loosed, and the doors were opened. And yet was this done only for the jailor's sake, not with a view to display, but with a view to his salvation: for that the prisoners knew not that they were loosed, is evident from Paul's exclamation; for what said he? He cried with a loud voice, saying, Do yourself no harm, for we are all here. Acts 16:28 But never would they all have been within, had they seen the doors opened, and themselves set at liberty. They who were used to cut through walls, and to scale roofs and parapets, and to venture on all sorts of attempts in chains, never would have endured to remain within, with their bands loosed, and the doors opened, with the jailer himself asleep; no, but the bond of sleep was to them instead of the bonds of iron. So that the thing took place and yet no damage ensued from the miracle to the jailer who was to be saved. And besides this too, they that are bound are bound most securely in the night, not in the day; and so accordingly might we behold them bound again with all care and sleeping: but had these things been done in the day time, there would have been great stir and tumult.

Then again, wherefore was the building shaken? It was to arouse the jailer, to behold what was done, for he alone was worthy of being saved. And do thou too, behold, I pray, the exceeding greatness of the grace of Christ, for well were it in the midst of Paul's bonds to make mention also of the grace of God, nay indeed the very bonds themselves are of the gift and grace of God. Some indeed there are who complain Why was the jailer saved? and from those very circumstances, for which they ought to admire the loving-kindness of God they find fault with it.

Nor is it anything to be wondered at. Such are those sickly persons, that find fault even with the food that nourishes them, which they ought to prize, and who affirm that honey is bitter: and those dim sighted persons who are darkened by the very thing which ought to enlighten them. Not that these effects arise from the nature of the objects themselves, but from the weakness of the persons who are unable to use them properly. What, however, was I saying? When they ought to be admiring God's loving-kindness, in that He took a man who had fallen into the most desperate wickedness, and was making him better, they find fault: Why, how was it that he did not take the thing to be the work of witchcraft and of sorcery, and confine them the more closely, and cry out?

Many things conspired to prevent this; first, that he heard them singing praises to God. And sorcerers never would have been singing such hymns as those, for he heard them, it is said, singing praises unto God. Secondly, the fact, that they themselves did not take flight, but even withheld him from killing himself. Now had they done it for their own sake, they never would have remained still within; they would themselves have escaped first of all. Great again was their kindness also; they withheld the man from killing himself, even him who had bound them, thus all but saying unto him, Truly, you bound us with all

safety, and most cruelly, that you yourself might be loosed from the most cruel of all bonds.

For every one is shackled with the chains of his own sins; and those bonds are accursed, whereas these for Christ's sake are blessed, and worth many an earnest prayer. For that these bonds can loose those other bonds of sin, he showed to us by things which are matters of sense. Did you behold them released, who had been bound with iron? You shall see yourself also delivered from other galling bonds. These bonds, the prisoners' bonds, not those of Paul, I mean, are the effect of those other bonds, the bonds of sins.

They who were confined within, were doubly prisoners, and the jailer himself was a prisoner. They indeed were bound both with iron and with sins, he with sins only. Them did Paul loose to assure the faith of him, for the chains which he loosed were visible. And thus too did Christ Himself; but rather in the inverse order. In that instance, there was a double palsy. What was it? There was that of the soul by sins, and also that of the body. What then did the Lord do? Son, says He, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven.

Matthew 9:3-6 He first loosed the bonds of the real and true palsy, and then proceeds to the other: for when certain of the Scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth; Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Arise, and walk? But, that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, (then says he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, and take up your bed, and go unto your house.

Having wrought the invisible miracle, He confirmed it by the visible, the spiritual by the bodily cure. And why did He do thus? That it might be fulfilled, which is spoken, Luke 19:22 Out of your own mouth will I judge you, thou wicked servant. For what said they? None can forgive sins, but God alone. Of course, therefore, no Angel, nor Archangel, nor any other created power. This you have yourselves confessed. And what then ought to be said? If I shall be shown to have forgiven sins, it is fully evident that I am God.

However, He said it not thus, but what said He? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins; then says He to the sick of the palsy, Arise, and take up your bed, and go unto your house. Matthew 9:6 When therefore, He would say, I work the more difficult miracle, it is plain that there is no pretext left you, no room for gainsaying about the easier one. Hence it was that He wrought the invisible miracle first, because there were many gainsayers; and then He led them from the invisible to the visible itself.

Surely then the faith of the jailer was no light or hasty faith. He saw the prisoners. And he saw nothing, he heard nothing wrong; he saw that nothing was done by sorcery, for they were singing hymns unto God. He saw that every thing done proceeded from overflowing kindness, for they did not avenge themselves against him, although they had it in their power; for it was in their power to rescue both themselves and the prisoners, and escape; and if not the prisoners, at all events themselves; but they did not do this. Thus did they challenge his reverence, not only by the miracle, but also by their behavior. For how did Paul cry out? He cried with a loud voice, saying, Do yourself no harm, for we are all here. You see at once his freedom from vain-glory and arrogance, and his fellow-feeling. He said not, It is for us these wonders have been wrought, but as though he were merely one of the prisoners, he said, For we are all here. And yet, even though they had not before this loosed themselves, nor had done so by means of the miracle, still they might have been silent, and have set all that were bound at liberty. For had they held their peace, and had they not with their loud crying stayed his hand, he would have thrust the sword through his throat. Wherefore also Paul cried out, because he had been cast into the inner ward: as though he had said, To

your own injury have you done this, that you have thrust in so far those that could deliver you from the danger. However they imitated not the treatment they had received at his hands; though, had he died, all would have escaped. You see that they chose rather to remain in bonds, than to allow him to perish. Hence too might he reason within himself, Had they been sorcerers, doubtless they would have set the others at liberty, and have released themselves from their bonds: (for it is likely that many such had also been imprisoned.) He was the more amazed, in that having often received sorcerers in charge, he had yet witnessed nothing done like this. A sorcerer never would have shaken the foundations, so as to startle the jailer from sleep, and thus render his own escape more difficult.

Now, however, let us proceed to look at the jailor's faith. And, says the Scripture, he called for lights and sprang in, and trembling for fear fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? He grasped fire and sword, and cried, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, you and your house. Acts 16:29-31 This is not the act of sorcerers, he would say, to deliver a doctrine like this. No mention any where here of an evil spirit. You see how worthy he was to be saved: for when he beheld the miracle, and was relieved from his terror, he did not forget what most concerned him, but even in the midst of so great peril, he was solicitous about that salvation which concerned his soul: and came before them in such a manner as it was meet to come before teachers: he fell down at their feet. And they spoke, it continues, the word of the Lord, unto him with all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. Acts 16:32-33 Observe the fervency of the man! He did not delay; he did not say, Let day come, let us see, let us look about us; but with great fervency, he was both himself baptized, and all his house. Yes, not like most men now-a-days, who suffer both servants and wives and children to go unbaptized. Be, I beseech you, like the jailor. I say not, in authority, but in purpose; for what is the benefit of authority, where purpose is weak? The savage one, the inhuman one, who lived in the practice of unnumbered wrongs and made this his constant study, has become all at once so humane, so tenderly attentive. He washed, it is said, their stripes.

And mark, on the other hand, the fervency of Paul also. Bound, scourged, thus he preached the Gospel. Oh, that blessed chain, with how great travail did it travail that night, what children did it bring forth! Yea of them too may he say, Whom I have begotten in my bonds. Philemon 10 Mark thou, how he glories, and will have the children thus begotten, to be on that account the more illustrious! Mark thou, how transcendent is the glory of those bonds, in that they give lustre not only to him that wore them, but also to them who were on that occasion begotten by him. They have some advantage, who were begotten in Paul's bonds, I say not in respect of grace, (for grace is one and the same,) nor in respect of remission, (for remission is one and the same to all,) but in that they are thus from the very outset taught to rejoice and to glory in such things. The same hour of the night, it is said, he took them, and washed their stripes, and was baptized.

And now then behold the fruit. He straightway recompensed them with his carnal things. He brought them up into his house, and set meat before them, and rejoiced greatly with all his house, having believed in God. For what was he not ready to do, now that by the opening of the prison doors, heaven itself was opened to him? He washed his teacher, he set food before him, and rejoiced. Paul's chain entered into the prison, and transformed all things there into a Church; it drew in its train the body of Christ, it prepared the spiritual feast, and travailed with that birth, at which Angels rejoice. And was it without reason then that I said that the prison was more glorious than Heaven? For it became a source of joy there; yes, if there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, Luke 15:7 if, where two or three are gathered together in His

Name, there is Christ in the midst of them; Matthew 18:20 how much more, where Paul and Silas, and the jailor and all his house were, and faith so earnest as theirs! Observe the intense earnestness of their faith.

But this prison has reminded me of another prison. And what then is that? It is that where Peter was. Not, however, that any thing like this took place there. No. He was delivered to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him and he sang not, he watched not, but he slept; neither, again, had he been scourged. And yet was the peril greater, for in the case before us indeed the end was accomplished, and the prisoners Paul and Silas, had undergone their punishment; but in his case it was yet to come.

So that though there were no stripes to torture him, yet was there the anticipation of the future to distress him. And mark too the miracle there. Behold, an angel of the Lord, it is related, stood by him, and a light shined in the cell; and he smote Peter on the side, and awoke him, saying, Rise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. Acts 12:7 In order that he might not imagine the transaction to be the work of the light alone, he also struck Peter. Now no one saw the light, save himself only, and he thought it was a vision.

So insensible are they that are asleep to the mercies of God. And the angel, it proceeds, said to him, Gird yourself and bind on your sandals; and he did so. And he says unto him, Cast your garment about you, and follow me. And he went out and followed, and he knew not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. And when they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate, that leads unto the city, which opened to them of his own accord; and they went out, and passed on through one street; and straightway the angel departed from him.

Acts 12:8-10 Why was not the same thing done here as was done in the case of Paul and Silas? Because in that case they were intending to release them. On that account God willed not that they should be released in this manner. Whereas in blessed Peter's case, they were intending to lead him forth to execution. But what then? Would it not have been far more marvellous, some one may say, had he been led forth, and delivered over into the king's hands, and then had been snatched away from the very midst of his imminent peril, and sustained no harm?

For thus moreover, neither had the soldiers perished. Great is the question which has been raised upon this matter. What! Did God, it is said, save His own servant with the punishment of others, with the destruction of others? Now in the first place, it was not with the destruction of others; for this did not arise from the ordering of providence, but arose from the cruelty of the judge. How so? God had so providentially ordered it, as that not only these men need not perish, but moreover that even he, the judge, should have been saved, just as in this case of the jailor.

But he did not use the boon aright. Now as soon as it was day, it continues, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And what then? Herod makes strict inquiry into the matter, and he examined the guards, it is related, and commanded that they should be put to death. Acts 12:18-19 Now, indeed, had he not examined them, there might have been some excuse for executing them. Whereas, as it is, he had them brought before him, he examined them, he found that Peter had been bound, that the prison had been well secured, that the keepers were before the doors.

No wall had been broken through, no door had been opened, nor was there any other evidence whatever of false dealing. He ought upon this to have been awed by the power of God, which had snatched Peter from the very midst of perils, and to have adored Him who was able to do such mighty works. But, on the contrary, he ordered those men off to execution. How then in this case is God the cause? Had He indeed

caused the wall to be broken through, and thus had extricated Peter, possibly the deed might have been put to the account of their negligence.

But if He so providentially ordered it, as that the matter should be shown to be the work not of the evil agency of man, but of the miraculous agency of God, why did Herod act thus? For had Peter intended to flee, he would have fled as he was, with his chains on. Had he intended to fly, in his confusion he never would have had so great forethought as to take even his sandals, but he would have left them. Whereas, as it is, the object of the Angel's saying unto him, Bind on your sandals, was that they might know that he had done the thing not in the act of flight, but with full leisure.

For, bound as he was, and fixed between the two soldiers, he never would have found sufficient time to unbind the chains also, and especially as he too, like Paul, was in the inner ward. Thus then was the punishment of the keepers owing to the unrighteousness of the judge. For why did not the Jews act in the same way? For now again I am reminded of yet another prison. The first was that at Rome, next, was this at Cæsarea, now we come to that at Jerusalem. When then the chief Priests and the Pharisees heard from those whom they had sent to the prison to bring Peter out, that they found no man within, but both doors closed, and the keepers standing at the doors, why was it that they not only did not put the keepers to death, but, so far from it, they were much perplexed concerning them whereunto this would grow.

Now if the Jews, murderous as they were in their designs against them, yet entertained not a thought of the kind, much more should not thou, who did every thing to please those Jews. For this unrighteous sentence vengeance quickly overtook Herod.

But now if any complain of this, then complain too about those who are killed on the highway, and about the ten thousand others who are unjustly put to death, and further, of the infants also that were slaughtered at the time of Christ's birth; for Christ also, according to what you allege, was the cause of their deaths. But it was not Christ, but rather the madness and tyranny of Herod's father. Do you ask, Why then did He not snatch Him out of Herod's hands? True, He might have done so, but there would have been nothing gained by so doing. How many times, at least, did Christ escape even from the grasp of their hands? And yet what good did this do to that unfeeling people? Whereas here there is even much profit arising to the faithful from what was done. For as there were records made, and the enemies themselves bore testimony to the facts, the testimony was above suspicion. As therefore in that instance the mouths of the enemies were stopped in no other way whatever, but only by the persons who came acknowledging the facts, so was it also here. For why did the jailor here do nothing like what Herod did? Nay, and the things which Herod witnessed were not at all less wonderful than those which this man witnessed. So far as wonder goes, it is no less wonderful to be assured that a prisoner came out when the doors were closed, than it is to behold them set open. Indeed this last might rather have seemed to be perhaps a vision of the imagination, the other never could, when exactly and circumstantially reported. So that, had this man been as wicked as Herod, he would have slain Paul, as Herod did the soldiers; but such he was not.

If any one should ask, 'Why was it that God permitted the children also to be murdered?' I should fall, probably, into a longer discourse, than was originally intended to be addressed to you.

At this point, however, let us terminate our discourse, with many thanks to Paul's chain, for that it has been made to us the source of so many blessings, and exhorting you, should you have to suffer any thing for Christ's sake, not only not to repine, but to rejoice, as the Apostles did, yea, and to glory; as Paul said,

Most gladly, therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, 2 Corinthians 12:9 for because of this it was that he heard also those words, My grace is sufficient for you. Paul glories in bonds; and do you pride yourself in riches? The Apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to be scourged, and do you seek for ease and self-indulgence? On what ground then, do you wish to attain the same end as they, if here on earth you are traveling the contrary road from them? And now, says Paul, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost testifies unto me in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. Acts 20:22 And why then do you set out, if bonds and afflictions abide you? For this very reason, says he, that I may be bound for Christ's sake, that I may die for His sake. For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 21:13

Moral. Nothing can be more blessed than that soul. In what does he glory? In bonds, in afflictions, in chains, in scars; I bear branded on my body, says he, the marks of Jesus, Galatians 6:17 as though they were some great trophy. And again, For because of the hope of Israel, says he, I am bound with this chain. Acts 28:20 And again, For which I am an ambassador in chains. Ephesians 6:20 What is this? Are you not ashamed, are you not afraid going about the world as a prisoner? Do you not fear lest any one should charge your God with weakness? Lest any one should on this account refuse to come near you and to join the fold? No, says he, not such are my bonds. They can shine brightly even in kings' palaces. So that my bonds, says he, became manifest in Christ, throughout the whole prætorian guard: and most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear. Philippians 1:13-14 Behold ye a force in bonds stronger than the raising of the dead. They beheld me bound, and they are the more courageous. For where bonds are, there of necessity is something great also. Where affliction is, there verily is salvation also, there verily is solace, there verily are great achievements. For when the devil kicks, then is he, doubtless, hit. When he binds God's servants, then most of all does the word gain ground. And mark how this is every where the case. Paul was imprisoned; and in the prison he did these things, yea, says he, by my very bonds themselves. He was imprisoned at Rome, and brought the more converts to the faith; for not only was he himself emboldened, but many others also because of him. He was imprisoned at Jerusalem, and preaching in his bonds he struck the king with amazement, Acts 26:28 and made the governor tremble. Acts 24:25 For being afraid, it is related, he let him go, and he that had bound him was not ashamed to receive instruction concerning the things to come at the hands of him whom he had bound. In bonds he sailed, and retrieved the wreck, and bound fast the tempest. It was when he was in bonds that the monster fastened on him, and fell off from his hand, having done him no hurt. He was bound at Rome, and preaching in bonds drew thousands to his cause, holding forward, in the place of every other, this very argument, I mean his chain.

It is not however our lot to be bound now-a-days. And yet there is another chain if we have a mind to wear it. And what is it? It is to restrain our hand, to be not so forward to covetousness. With this chain let us bind ourselves. Let the fear of God be unto us instead of a bond of iron. Let us loose them that are bound by poverty, by affliction. There is no comparison between opening the doors of a prison, and releasing an enthralled soul. There is no comparison between loosing the bonds of prisoners and setting at liberty them that are bruised; Luke 4:18 this last is far greater than the other; for the other there is no reward in store, for this last there are ten thousand rewards.

Paul's chain has proved a long one, and has detained us a length of time. Yea, long indeed it is, and more beautiful than any cord of gold. A chain this, which draws them that are bound by it, as it were by a kind of invisible machinery, to Heaven, and, like a golden cord let down, draws them up to the Heaven of

heavens. And the wonderful thing is this, that, bound, as it is, below, it draws its captives upwards: and indeed this is not the nature of the things themselves. But where God orders and disposes, look not for the nature of things, nor for natural sentence, but for things above nature and natural sequence.

Let us learn not to sink under affliction, nor to repine; for look at this blessed saint. He had been scourged, and sorely scourged, for it is said, When they had laid many stripes upon them. He had been bound too, and that again sorely, for the jailor cast him into the inner ward, and with extraordinary security. And though he was in so many perils, at midnight, when even the most wakeful are asleep with sleep, another and a stronger bond upon them, they chanted and sang praise unto the Lord. What can be more adamant than these souls? They bethought them how that the holy Children sang even in fire and furnace. Daniel 3:1-30 Perhaps they thus reasoned with themselves, we have as yet suffered nothing like that.

But our discourse has done well, in that it has thus brought us out again to other bonds, and into another prison. What am I to do? I would fain be silent, but am not able. I have discovered another prison, far more wonderful and more astonishing than the former. But, come now, rouse yourselves, as though I were just commencing my discourse, and attend to me with your minds fresh. I would fain break off the discourse, but it will not suffer me; for just as a man in the midst of drinking cannot bear to break off his draught, whatever any one may promise him; so I too, now I have laid hold of this glorious cup of the prison of them that were bound for Christ's sake, I cannot leave off, I cannot hold my peace. For if Paul in the prison, and in the night, kept not silence, no, nor under the scourge; shall I, who am sitting here by daylight, and speaking so much at my ease, shall I hold my peace, when men in bonds, and under the scourge, and at midnight could not endure to do so? The holy Children were not silent, no, not in the furnace and in the fire, and are not we ashamed to hold our peace? Let us look then at this prison also. Here too, they were bound, but at once and from the very outset it was evident that they were not about to be burned, but only to enter as into a prison. For why do ye bind men who are about to be committed to the flames? They were bound, as Paul was, hand and foot. They were bound with as great violence as he was. For the jailor thrust him into the inner prison; and the king commanded the furnace to be intensely heated. And now let us see the issue. When Paul and Silas sang, the prison was shaken, and the doors were opened. When the three Children sang, the bonds both of their feet and hands were loosed. The prison was opened, and the doors of the furnace were opened: for a dewy breeze whistled through it.

But many thoughts crowd around me. I know not which to utter first, and which second. Wherefore, let no one, I entreat, require order of me, for the subjects are closely allied.

They who were bound together with Paul and Silas were loosed, and yet nevertheless they slept. In the case of the three Children, instead of that, something else took place. The men who had cast them in, were themselves burned to death. And then, as I was fain to tell you, the king beheld them loose, and fell down before them: he heard them singing their song of praise, and beheld four walking, and he called them. As Paul, though able to do so, came not forth, until he who had cast him in, called him, and brought him forth: so neither did the three Children come forth, until he who had cast them in commanded them to come forth.

What lesson are we taught from this? Not to be over hasty in courting persecution, nor when in tribulation to be over eager for deliverance, and on the other hand when they release us not to continue in it. Further, the jailor, inasmuch as he was able to enter in where the saints were, fell down at their feet. The king came but to the door and fell down. He dared not approach into the prison which he had prepared for them

in the fire. And now mark their words. The one cried, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

Acts 16:30 The other, though not indeed with so great humility, yet uttered a voice no less sweet, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Daniel 3:26 Mighty dignity! You servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. How are they to come forth, O king? Thou cast them into the fire bound; they have continued this long time in the fire. Why, had they been made of adamant, had they been blocks of metal, in singing that entire hymn, must they not have perished?

On this account then they were saved, because they sang praises to God. The fire revered their readiness to suffer and afterwards it revered that wonderful song, and their hymns of praise. By what title do you call them? I said before, You servants of the most high God. Yes, to the servants of God, all things are possible; for if some, who are the servants of men, have, nevertheless, power, and authority, and the disposal of their concerns, much more have the servants of God.

He called them by the name most delightful to them, he knew that by this means he flattered them most: for indeed, if it was in order to continue servants of God, that they entered into the fire, there could be no sound more delightful to them than this. Had he called them kings, had he called them lords of the world, yet would he not so truly have rejoiced them as when he said, You servants of the most high God. And why marvel at this? When, in writing to the mighty city, to her who was mistress of the world, and prided herself upon her high dignities, Paul set down as equivalent in dignity, nay, as far greater, yea incomparably greater than consulship, or kingly name, or than the empire of the world, this title, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. Romans 1:1 You servants of the most high God. Yes, he would say, if they show so great zeal as to be bond-servants, doubtless this is the title by which we shall conciliate them.

Again, observe also the piety of the Children: they showed no indignation, no anger, no gain-saying, but they came forth. Had they regarded it as an act of vengeance that they had been thrown into the furnace, they would have been grieved against the man who had cast them in; as it is, there is nothing of the kind; but, as though they were going forth from Heaven itself, so went they forth. And what the Prophet says of the Sun, that He is as a bridegroom coming forth out of his chamber, Psalm 19:5 one would not go amiss in saying also of them. But though he goes forth thus, yet came they forth there more gloriously than he, for he indeed comes forth to enlighten the world with natural light, they to enlighten the world in a different way, I mean, spiritually. For because of them the king straightway issued a decree, containing these words, It has seemed good unto me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has wrought toward me. How great are His signs! And how mighty are His wonders! Daniel 4:2-3 So that they went forth, shedding a yet more glorious radiance, beaming indeed in that region itself, but, what is more than all, capable, by means of the king's writings, of being diffused over the world and thus of dispelling the darkness which every where prevails. Come forth, said he, and come hither. He gave no commandment to extinguish the flame, but hereby most especially honored them, by believing that they were able not only to walk within it, but even to come out of it while it was still burning.

But let us look again, if it seem good to you, at the words of the jailor, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? What language sweeter than this? This makes the very Angels leap for joy. To hear this language, even the Only-begotten Son of God Himself became a servant. This language they who believed at the beginning addressed to Peter. Acts 2:37 What shall we do? And what said he in answer? Repent and be baptized. To have heard this language from the Jews, gladly would Paul have been cast even in to hell, in his eagerness for their salvation and obedience. But observe, he commits the whole matter to them, he

wastes no unnecessary pains. Let us however look at the next point. The king here does not say, What must I do to be saved? But the teaching is plainer in his case than any language whatever; for he straightway becomes a preacher, he needs not to be instructed like the jailor. He proclaims God, and makes confession of His power. Of a truth your God is the God of Gods and the Lord of Kings, because He has sent His Angel, and has delivered you. Daniel 2:47; 3:28 And what was the sequel? Not one single jailor, but numbers are instructed by the king's writings, by the sight of the facts. For that the king would not have told a falsehood is evident enough to every one, because he never would have chosen to bear such testimony to captives, nor to overthrow his own acts; he never would have chosen to incur the imputation of such utter madness: so that had not the truth been abundantly manifest, he would not have written in such terms, and with so many persons present.

Perceive ye how great is the power of bonds? How great the force of those praises that are sung in tribulation? Their heart failed not, they were not cast down, but were then yet more vigorous, and their courage then yet greater and justly so.

While we are considering these things one question yet remains for us: Why was it that in the prison on the one hand, the prisoners were loosed, while in the furnace the executioners were burnt to death: for that indeed should have been the king's fate, because neither were they who bound them, nor they who cast them into the furnace, guilty of so great sin as the man who commanded this should be done. Why then did they perish? On this point there is not any very great need of minute examination; for they were wicked men. And therefore this was providentially ordered, that the power of the fire might be shown, and the miracle might be made more signal; for if it thus devoured them that were without, how did it show them unscathed that were within it? It was that the power of God might be made manifest. And let no one wonder that I have put the king on a level with the jailor, for he did the same thing; the one was in no wise more noble than the other, and they both had their reward.

But, as I said, the righteous, when they are in tribulations, are then especially more energetic, and when they are in bonds: for to suffer any thing for Christ's sake is the sweetest of all consolation.

Will ye that I remind you of yet another prison? It seems necessary to go on from this chain to another prison still. And which will you? Shall it be that of Jeremiah, or of Joseph, or of John? Thanks to Paul's chain; how many prisons has it opened to our discourse? Will you have that of John? He also was once bound for Christ's sake, and for the law of God. What then? Was he idle when he was in prison? Was it not from thence he sent, by his disciples, and said, Are You He that comes, or look we for another? Matthew 11:2-3 Even when there, then, it seems he taught, for surely he did not disregard his duty. But again, did not Jeremiah prophesy concerning the king of Babylon, and fulfil his work even there in prison? And what of Joseph? Was he not in prison thirteen years? What then? Not even there did he forget his virtue. I have yet to mention the bonds of one and therewith will close my discourse. Our Master Himself was bound, He who loosed the world from sins. Those hands were bound, those hands that wrought ten thousand good deeds. For, they bound Him, it says, and led Him away to Caiaphas; Matthew 27:2; John 18:24 yes, He was bound who had wrought so many marvellous works.

Reflecting on these things, let us never repine; but whether we be in bonds, let us rejoice; or whether we be not in bonds, let us be as though we were bound together with Him. See how great a blessing are bonds! Knowing all these things, let us send up our thanksgiving for all things to God, through Christ Jesus our Lord with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, might, and honor, now and forever and ever. Amen.

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