

Homily 8 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of reforming our lives, starting with small changes, and building on them to achieve greater virtues, with a focus on the danger of swearing and the need to eradicate this habit.

Scripture: Joshua 1:9, 1 Samuel 2:24, 1 Samuel 3:13, Matthew 5:37, Matthew 7:14, Matthew 25:21, Acts 3:1-8, 1 Corinthians 4:13

Topics: "Faith Healing", "Christian Obedience"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the miraculous healing of a lame man by Peter and John at the temple, emphasizing the power of faith and the compassion of God. The man, who had been lame from birth, is healed by Peter in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, showcasing the authority and love of Christ. Chrysostom urges the congregation to reflect on the importance of reforming their ways, starting with abstaining from sinful habits like swearing, and emphasizes the need for a select few who are truly devoted to God rather than a multitude of lukewarm believers. He warns of the consequences of disobedience and encourages obedience for the sake of salvation and eternal blessings.

Transcript

Acts III. 1

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple, at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

Everywhere we find these two Apostles in great harmony together. To him Simon Peter beckoned. John 13:24 These two also came together to the sepulchre. John 20:3 et seq. And concerning John, Peter said to Christ, And what shall this man do? John 21:21 Now as for the other miracles, the writer of this book omits them; but he mentions the miracle by which they were all put in commotion. Observe again that they do not come to them purposely; so clear were they of ambition, so closely did they imitate their Master.

Why now did they go up to the temple? Did they still live as Jews? No, but for expediency (χρησιμως). A miraculous sign again takes place, which both confirms the converts, and draws over the rest; and such, as they were a sign for having wrought. The disease was in the nature of the man, and baffled the art of medicine. He had been forty years lame Acts 4:20, as the writer says afterwards, and no one during all that time had cured him. And the most obstinate diseases are those which are born with men.

It was a great calamity, insomuch that even to provide for himself his necessary sustenance was impossible for him. The man was conspicuous both from the place, and from his malady. Hear how the matter is related. And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple. Acts 3:2 He sought to receive alms, and he did not know who the men were. Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms.

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. (v. 3, 4.) Yet, not even so were the man's thoughts elevated, but he persisted in his importunity. For such is poverty; upon a refusal, it compels people still to persist. Let this put us to shame who fall back in our prayers. But observe, I pray you, Peter's gentleness: for he said, Look on us. So truly did their very bearing, of itself, betoken their character. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give you. (v. 5-6.) He did not say, I give you something much better than silver or gold: but what? In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up. Acts 3:7 Such was also the way of Christ. Often He healed by word, often by an act, often also He stretched forth the hand, where men were somewhat weak in faith, that the cure might not appear to be spontaneous.

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up. This act made manifest the Resurrection, for it was an image of the Resurrection. And immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked. Acts 3:8 Perhaps it was by way of trying himself that he put it thus to further proof, whether perchance the thing done might not be to no purpose. His feet were weak; it was not that he had lost them. Some say that he did not even know how to walk.

And entered with them into the temple. Of a truth it was marvellous. The Apostles do not urge him; but of his own accord he follows, by the act of following pointing out his benefactors. And leaping and praising God; not admiring them, but God that wrought by them. The man was grateful.

[Now Peter and John went up together into the temple, etc.] You observe how they continued in prayer. The ninth hour: there they prayed together. [And a certain man, etc.] The man was in the act of being carried at that instant. [Whom they laid daily:] (his bearers carried him away:) [at the gate, etc.] just when people went into the temple. And that you may not suppose that they carried him for some other purpose, but that it was in order that he might receive alms, hear what the writer says: so that he might receive alms of those entering into the temple.

Recapitulation of Acts 3:1-8 And this is the reason why he also makes mention of the places, to give evidence of what he relates. And how was it, you may ask, that they did not present him to Christ? Perhaps they were certain unbelieving men, that haunted the temple, as in fact neither did they present him to the Apostles, when they saw them entering, after having done such great miracles. He asked, it is written, to receive an alms. Acts 3:3 Their bearing marked them as certain devout and righteous men. [And Peter fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, etc.] (v. 4-5.)

And observe how John is everywhere silent, while Peter makes excuse for him also; Silver and gold, he says, have I none. Acts 3:6 He does not say, I have none here, as we are wont to speak, but absolutely, I have none. What then? he might say, do you take no notice of me, your suppliant? Not so, but of what I have, receive thou. Do you remark how unassuming Peter is, how he makes no display even to the object of his beneficence? [In the name, etc. And he took him by the hand, etc.]

Acts 3:7 And the mouth and the hand did all. Such sort of persons were the Jews; lame, and the right thing being to ask for health, these same ask for money, grovelling on the ground: for this it was that they beset the temple -- to get money. What then does Peter? He did not despise him; he did not look about for some rich subject; he did not say, If the miracle is not done to some great one (ε■ς ■κε■νον), nothing great is done: he did not look for some honor from him, no, nor heal him in the presence of people; for the man was at the entrance, not where the multitude were, that is, within.

But Peter sought no such object; nor upon entering did he proclaim the matter: no, it was by his bearing that he attracted the lame man to ask. And the wonder is, that he believed so readily. For those who are set free from diseases of long standing, hardly believe their very eyesight. Once healed, he remains with the Apostles, giving thanks to God. And he entered, it is said, with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. Acts 3:8 Observe how restless he is, in the eagerness of his delight, at the same time shutting the mouths of the Jews.

Also, that he leaped, was to prevent the suspicion of hypocrisy; for after all, this was beyond the possibility of deception. For if previously he was totally unable to walk, even when hunger pressed hard (and indeed he would not have chosen to share with his bearers the proceeds of his begging, if he had been able to manage for himself), this holds still more in the present case. And how should he have feigned in behalf of those who had given him no alms? But the man was grateful, even after his recovery. And thus on either side his faith is shown, both by his thankfulness, and by the recent event.

He was so well known to all, that they recognized him. And all the people, it says, saw him walking and praising God; and they recognized (■πεγ■νωσκον) that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple. Acts 3:9 It is well said, they recognized, inasmuch as he was one unknown now by reason of what had happened: for we use this term with regard to objects, which we find a difficulty in recognizing. [And they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.] Needs must it be believed that the name of Christ remits sins, seeing it produces even such effects as this. (And as he held Peter and John, all the people came together at the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. Acts 3:11 From his good feelings and love towards the Apostles, the lame man would not leave them; perhaps he was thanking them openly, and praising them. And all the people, it is said, ran together unto them. And when Peter saw them, he answered. Acts 3:12 Again it is he who acts, and addresses the people.

And in the former instance, it was the circumstance of the tongues that aroused them to hearing, now it was this miracle; then, he took occasion to speak from their accusations now, from their supposition. Let us then consider, in what this address differs from the former, and in what it agrees with that. The former was held in a house, before any one has come over, and before they themselves have wrought anything; this, when all are wondering, and the healed man is standing by; when none doubt, as in the other case where some said These men are full of new wine. Acts 12:13 At the one, he was surrounded by all the Apostles as he spoke; but at this, he has John alone; for by this time he is bold, and become more energetic. Such is the nature of virtue; once started, it advances, and never stops. Observe also how it was divinely ordered, that the miracle should take place in the temple, that others also might wax bold, while the Apostles work not in holes (ε■ς καταδ■σεις) and corners, and in secret: though not in the interior of the temple either, where the greater number were. How then, I pray you, was it believed? The man himself who was healed proclaimed the benefit. For there was no reason why he should lie, nor why he should have joined a different set of people. Either then it was because of the spaciousness of the place, that he there wrought the miracle, or because the spot was retired. And observe the event. They

went up for one object, and they accomplished another. Thus also did Cornelius: he prayed and fasted * *
*. But hitherto they always call Him, of Nazareth. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, said Peter, walk. For in the first instance, the thing required was, that He should be believed in.

Let us not, I pray you, give over at the beginning of the story: and if one has named some particular achievement of virtue, and then has dropped it for awhile, let us begin over again. If we get into the right mood (■ v ■ξει), we shall soon arrive at the end, soon reach the summit. For earnestness, it is said, begets earnestness, and dulness begets dulness. He who has effected some little reformation, thereby receives encouragement to approach greater things, and thence again to go on something more than that; and just as it is with fire, the more wood it lays hold on, the more vehement it becomes, so likewise zeal, the more pious reflections it kindles, the more effectually is it armed against their opposites. As, for example: There are set in us, like so many thorns, perjury, falsehood hypocrisy, deceit, dishonesty, abusiveness, scoffing, buffoonery, indecency, scurrility; again under another head, covetousness, rapacity, injustice, calumny, insidiousness; again, wicked lust, uncleanness, lewdness, fornication, adultery; again, envy, emulation, anger, wrath, rancor, revenge, blasphemy, and numberless others. If we effect a reformation in the first instances, not only in them will the success have been achieved, but through them in the following cases also. For reason has then gained more strength to overthrow those other vices. For instance, if he, who has frequently sworn, once extirpates that satanic habit, he has not only gained this point, but a habit of piety in other respects will have been brought in. For no one, I suppose, averse to swearing would easily consent to do any other wicked act; he will feel a reverence for the virtue already acquired. Just as the man who wears a beautiful robe, will blush to roll himself in the mire; so is it also here. From this beginning he will come to learn not to be angry, not to strike, not to insult. For if once he has come right in little matters, the whole affair is done. Often, however, something of this sort takes place, that a person has once reformed, and then again through carelessness falls back into the old sins but too readily, so that the case becomes irremediable. For instance, we have made it a law to ourselves not to swear; we have got on well, for some three, or even four days; after that being hard put to it, we scattered away the whole of our collected gain; we then fall into indolence and recklessness. Still it is not right to give over; one must set to work zealously again. For it is said, he that has built up a house, and then sees his building pulled down, will have less spirit for building again. Yes, but for all this, one must not be dispirited, but must once more set to work zealously.

Let us then lay down daily laws for ourselves. For a time let us begin with the easier. Let us retrench all that superfluity of paths, and put a bridle on our tongues; let no one swear by God. Here is no outlay, here is no fatigue, here is no cost of time. It is sufficient to will, and all is done. It is a matter of habit. I beseech and entreat you, let us contribute thus much of zeal. Tell me, if I had bid you contribute your money, would not each one of you readily cast in according to his ability? If you saw me in extreme danger, would you not, if it had been possible, have cut off your own flesh to give me? Well, I am in danger now, and in great danger, such indeed that, were I withal confined to a dungeon, or had I received ten thousand stripes, or were a convict in the mines, I could not suffer more. Reach me then the hand. Consider how great is the danger, that I should not have been able to reform this which is least: I say least in regard to the labor required. What shall I have to say hereafter, when thus called to account? Why did you not remonstrate? Why did you not enjoin? Why did you not lay the law before them? Why did you not check the disobedient? It will not be enough for me to say, that I did admonish. It will be answered, You ought to have used more vehement rebuke; since Eli also admonished. 1 Samuel 2:24 But God forbid I should compare you with Eli's sons. Indeed, he did admonish them and say, Nay, my sons, do not so; evil is the report that I hear of you. 1 Samuel 3:13 But subsequently the Scripture says, that he did not admonish his

sons: since he did not admonish them severely, or with threats. For is it not strange indeed, that in the synagogues of the Jews the laws are in such force, and whatever the teacher enjoins is performed; while here we are thus despised and rejected? It is not my own glory that I care for (my glory is your good report), but it is for your salvation. Every day we lift up our voice, and shout in your ears. But there is none to hear. Still we take no strong measures. I fear we shall have to give an account at the coming Day of this excessive and unseasonable leniency.

Wherefore, with a loud and clear voice, I proclaim to all and testify, that those who are notorious for this transgression, who utter words which come of the evil one, Matthew 5:37 (for such is swearing,) shall not step over the threshold of the Church. Let this present month be the time allowed you for reforming in this matter. Talk not to me, Necessity of business compels me to use oaths, else people do not believe me. To begin with this, retrench those oaths which come merely of habit. I know many will laugh, but it is better to be laughed at now, than wept for hereafter. They will laugh, who are mad. For who, I ask, in his right mind would laugh at the keeping of the commandment? But suppose they do; why, it will not be at us, but at Christ, that such men will laugh. You shudder at the word! I knew you would. Now if this law were of my making, at me would be the laughing; but if Another be the Lawgiver, the jeering passes over to Him. Yes, and Christ was once spit upon, and smitten with the palm, smitten upon the face. Now also He bears with this, and it is no wonder (οὐδὲν ■περικ■)! For this, hell is prepared; for this, the worm that dies not. Behold, again I say and testify; let him laugh that will, let him scoff that lists. Hereunto are we set, to be laughed at and mocked, to suffer all things. We are the offscouring 1 Corinthians 4:13 or the world, as blessed Paul says. If any man refuse to conform to this order, that man I, by my word, as with a trumpet's blast, do prohibit to set foot over the Church's threshold, be he prince, be he even the crowned head. Either depose me from this station, or if I am to remain, expose me not to danger. I cannot bear to ascend this throne, without effecting some great reformation. For if this be impossible, it is better to stand below. Nothing more wretched than a ruler who does his people no good. Do exert yourselves, and attend to this, I entreat you; and let us strive, and of a surety more will come of it. Fast, entreat God (and we will do the same with you) that this pernicious habit may be eradicated. It is no great matter, to become teachers to the world; no small honor to have it said everywhere, that really in this city there is not a man that swears. If this come to pass, you will receive the reward not only of your own good works; indeed what I am to you, this you will become to the world. Assuredly others also will emulate you; assuredly you will be a candle set upon a candlestick.

And is this, you will say, the whole matter? No, this is not all, but this is a beginning of other virtues. He who swears not, will certainly attain unto piety in other respects, whether he will or not, by dint of self-respect and awe. But you will urge that most men do not keep to it, but fall away. Well, better one man that does the will of the Lord, than ten thousand transgressors. In fact, hereby is everything subverted, everything turned upside down, I mean, because after the fashion of the Theatre we desire numbers not a select number. For what indeed will a multitude be able to profit? Would you learn that it is the saints, not the numbers, which make the multitude? Lead out to war ten hundred thousand men, and one saint, and let us see who achieves the most? Joshua the Son of Nun went out to war, and alone achieved all; the rest were of no use. Would you see, beloved, that the great multitude, when it does not the will of God, is no better than a thing of naught? I wish indeed, and desire, and with pleasure would be torn in pieces, to adorn the Church with a multitude, yea, but a select multitude; yet if this be impossible, that the few should be select, is my desire. Do you not see, that it is better to possess one precious stone, than ten thousand farthing pieces? Do you not see that it is better to have the eye sound, than to be loaded with flesh, and yet deprived of sight? Do you not see that it is better to have one healthy sheep, than ten thousand with

the murrain; that fine children, though few, are better than many children diseased withal; that in the Kingdom there will be few, but in hell many? What have I to do with a multitude? What profit therein? None. Rather they are a plague to the rest. It is as if one who had the option of ten healthy persons or ten thousand sick folks, should take to himself the latter in addition to the ten. The many who do nothing well, will avail us only for punishment hereafter, and disgrace for the time being. For no one will urge it as a point in our favor that we are many; we shall be blamed for being unprofitable. In fact, this is what men always tell us, when we say, We are many; aye, but bad, they answer.

Behold again: I give warning, and proclaim with a loud voice, let no one think it a laughing matter: I will exclude and prohibit the disobedient; and as long as I sit on this throne, I will give up not one of its rights. If any one depose me from it, then I am no longer responsible; as long as I am responsible, I cannot disregard them; on account not of my own punishment, but of your salvation. For I do exceedingly long for your salvation. To advance it, I endure pain and vexation. But yield your obedience, that both here and hereafter you may receive a plentiful reward, and that we may in common reap eternal blessings; through the grace and mercy of the only-begotten Son of God; to Whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, power, and honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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