

# John 11:30-40

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's sermon on John 11:30-40 emphasizes the profound significance of faith, the reality of Jesus' humanity, and the call to live a life of holiness amidst trials and grief.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:21, John 11:32, John 11:39-40, Hebrews 12:14

**Topics:** "Faith And Works", "Holy Living"

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## Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of true wisdom, faith, and holy living in the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. He highlights how Martha's faith and actions led to witnessing the glory of God through Christ's miracle. Chrysostom also warns against the dangers of corrupt living despite having a right faith, stressing the need for holiness and purity in all aspects of life to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

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## Transcript

Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met Him. The Jews then which were with her, and what follows.

1. A great good is philosophy; the philosophy, I mean, which is with us. For what the heathen have is words and fables only; nor have these fables anything truly wise in them; since everything among those men is done for the sake of reputation. A great good then is true wisdom, and even here returns to us a recompense. For he that despises wealth, from this at once reaps advantage, being delivered from cares which are superfluous and unprofitable; and he that tramples upon glory from this at once receives his reward, being the slave of none, but free with the real freedom; and he that desires heavenly things hence receives his recompense, regarding present things as nothing, and being easily superior to every grief. Behold, for example, how this woman by practicing true wisdom even here received her reward. For when all were sitting by her as she mourned and lamented, she did not wait that the Master should come to her, nor did she maintain what might have seemed her due, nor was she restrained by her sorrow, (for, in addition to the other wretchedness, mourning women have this malady, that they wish to be made much of on account of their case,) but she was not at all so affected; as soon as she heard, she quickly came to Him. Jesus was not yet come into the town. He proceeded somewhat slowly, that He might not seem to fling Himself upon the miracle, but rather to be entreated by them. At least, it is either with an intention of implying this that the Evangelist has said the, rises up quickly, or else he shows that she ran so as to anticipate Christ's arrival. She came not alone, but drawing after her the Jews that were in the house. Very

wisely did her sister call her secretly, so as not to disturb those who had come together, and not mention the cause either; for assuredly many would have gone back, but now as though she were going to weep, all followed her. By these means again it is proved that Lazarus was dead.

John 11:32

And she fell at His feet.

She is more ardent than her sister. She regarded not the multitude, nor the suspicion which they had concerning Him, for there were many of His enemies, who said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? John 11:37; but cast out all mortal things in the presence of her Master, and was given up to one thing only, the honor of that Master. And what says she?

Lord, if You had been here, my brother had not died.

What does Christ? He converses not at all with her for the present, nor says to her what He said to her sister, (for a great multitude was by, and this was no fit time for such words,) He only acts measurably and condescends; and to prove His human nature, weeps in silence, and defers the miracle for the present. For since that miracle was a great one, and such as He seldom wrought, and since many were to believe by means of it, lest to work it without their presence should prove a stumbling-block to the multitude, and so they should gain nothing by its greatness, in order that He might not lose the quarry, He draws to Him many witnesses by His condescension, and shows proof of His human nature. He weeps, and is troubled; for grief is wont to stir up the feelings. Then rebuking those feelings, (for He groaned in spirit means, restrained His trouble,) He asked,

John 11:34

Where have ye laid him?

So that the question might not be attended with lamentation. But why does He ask? Because He desired not to cast Himself on (the miracle), but to learn all from them, to do all at their invitation, so as to free the miracle from any suspicion.

They say unto Him, Come and see.

John 11:35

Jesus wept.

Do you see that He had not as yet shown any sign of the raising, and goes not as if to raise Lazarus, but as if to weep? For the Jews show that He seemed to them to be going to bewail, not to raise him; at least they said,

John 11:36-37

Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

Not even amid calamities did they relax their wickedness. Yet what He was about to do was a thing far more wonderful; for to drive away death when it has come and conquered, is far more than to stay it when coming on. They therefore slander Him by those very points through which they ought to have marveled at His power. They allow for the time that He opened the eyes of the blind, and when they ought to have admired Him on account of that miracle, they, by means of this latter case, cast a slur upon it, as though it had not even taken place. And not from this only are they shown to be all corrupt, but because when He had not yet come, nor exhibited any action, they prevent Him with their accusations without waiting the end of the matter. Do you see how corrupt was their judgment?

2. He comes then to the tomb; and again rebukes His feelings. Why does the Evangelist carefully in several places mention that He wept, and that, He groaned? That you may learn that He had of a truth put on our nature. For when this Evangelist is remarkable for uttering great things concerning Christ more than the others, in matters relating to the body, here he also speaks much more humbly than they. For instance, concerning His death he has said nothing of the kind; the other Evangelists declare that He was exceedingly sorrowful, that He was in an agony; but John, on the contrary, says, that He even cast the officers backwards. So that he has made up here what is omitted there, by mentioning His grief. When speaking of His death, Christ says, I have power to lay down My life John 10:18, and then He utters no lowly word; therefore at the Passion they attribute to Him much that is human, to show the reality of the Dispensation. And Matthew proves this by the Agony, the trouble, the trembling, and the sweat; but John by His sorrow. For had He not been of our nature, He would not once and again have been mastered by grief. What did Jesus? He made no defense with regard to their charges; for why should He silence by words those who were soon to be silenced by deeds? A means less annoying, and more adapted to shame them.

John 11:39

He says, Take ye away the stone.

Why did not He when at a distance summon Lazarus, and place him before their eyes? Or rather, why did He not cause him to arise while the stone yet lay on the grave? For He who was able by His voice to move a corpse, and to show it again endowed with life, would much more by that same voice have been able to move a stone; He who empowered by His voice one bound and entangled in the grave-clothes to walk, would much more have been able to move a stone; why then did He not so? In order to make them witnesses of the miracle; that they might not say as they did in the case of the blind man, It is he, It is not he. For their hands and their coming to the tomb testified that it was indeed he. If they had not come, they might have deemed that they saw a vision, or one man in place of another. But now the coming to the place, the raising the stone, the charge given them to loose the dead man bound in grave-clothes from his bands; the fact that the friends who bore him from the tomb, knew from the grave-clothes that it was he; that his sisters were not left behind; that one of them said, He now stinks, for he has been dead four days; all these things, I say, were sufficient to silence the ill-disposed, as they were made witnesses of the miracle. On this account He bids them take away the stone from the tomb, to show that He raises the man. On this account also He asks, Where have ye laid him? that they who said, Come and see, and who conducted Him, might not be able to say that He had raised another person; that their voice and their hands might bear witness, (their voice by saying, Come and see, their hands by lifting the stone, and loosing the grave-clothes,) as well as their eyes and ears, (the one by hearing His voice, the other by seeing Lazarus come forth,) and their smell also by perceiving the ill-odor, for Martha said, He now stinks, for he has been dead four days.

Therefore I said with good reason, that the woman did not at all understand Christ's words, Though he were dead, yet shall he live. At least observe, that she speaks as though the thing were impossible on account of the time which had intervened. For indeed it was a strange thing to raise a corpse which had been dead four days, and was corrupt. To the disciples Jesus said, That the Son of Man may be glorified, referring to Himself; but to the woman, You shall see the glory of God, speaking of the Father. Do you see that the weakness of the hearers is the cause of the difference of the words? He therefore reminds her of what He had spoken unto her, well near rebuking her, as being forgetful. Yet He did not wish at present to confound the spectators, wherefore He says,

John 11:40

Said I not unto you, that if you would believe, you should see the glory of God? 3. A great blessing truly is faith, great, and one which makes great those who hold it rightly with (good) living. By this men (are enabled) to do the things of God in His name. And well did Christ say, If you have faith you shall say unto this mountain, Remove, and it shall remove Matthew 17:20; and again, He that believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do.

John 14:12 What means He by greater? Those which the disciples are seen after this to work. For even the shadow of Peter raised a dead man; and so the power of Christ was the more proclaimed. Since it was not so wonderful that He while alive should work miracles, as that when He was dead others should be enabled to work in His name greater than He wrought. This was an indisputable proof of the Resurrection; nor if (that Resurrection) had been seen by all, would it have been equally believed.

For men might have said that it was an appearance, but one who saw that by His name alone greater miracles were wrought than when He conversed with men, could not disbelieve unless he were very senseless. A great blessing then is faith when it arises from glowing feelings, great love, and a fervent soul; it makes us truly wise, it hides our human meanness, and leaving reasonings beneath, it philosophizes about things in heaven; or rather what the wisdom of men cannot discover, it abundantly comprehends and succeeds in.

Let us then cling to this, and not commit to reasonings what concerns ourselves. For tell me, why have not the Greeks been able to find out anything? Did they not know all the wisdom of the heathen? Why then could they not prevail against fishermen and tentmakers, and unlearned persons? Was it not because the one committed all to argument, the others to faith? And so these last were victorious over Plato and Pythagoras, in short, over all that had gone astray; and they surpass those whose lives had been worn out in astrology and geometry, mathematics and arithmetic, and who had been thoroughly instructed in every sort of learning, and were as much superior to them as true and real philosophers are superior to those who are by nature foolish and out of their senses.

For observe, these men asserted that the soul was immortal, or rather, they did not merely assert this, but persuaded others of it. The Greeks, on the contrary, did not at first know what manner of thing the soul was, and when they had found out, and had distinguished it from the body, they were again in the same case, the one asserting that it was incorporeal, the other that it was corporeal and was dissolved with the body. Concerning heaven again, the one said that it had life and was a god, but the fishermen both taught and persuaded that it was the work and device of God.

Now that the Greeks should use reasonings is nothing wonderful, but that those who seem to be believers, that they should be found carnal, this is what may justly be lamented. And on this account they have gone

astray, some saying that they know God as He knows Himself, a thing which not even any of those Greeks have dared to assert; others that God cannot beget without passion, not even allowing Him any superiority over men; others again, that a righteous life and exact conversation avail nothing.

But it is not the time to refute these things now. 4. Yet that a right faith avails nothing if the life be corrupt, both Christ and Paul declare, having taken the more care for this latter part; Christ when He teaches, Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven Matthew 7:21; and again, Many will say unto Me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your Name? And I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you that work iniquity Matthew 22:23; (for they who take not heed to themselves, easily slip away into wickedness, even though they have a right faith;) and Paul, when in his letter to the Hebrews he thus speaks and exhorts them; Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Hebrews 12:14 By holiness, meaning chastity, so that it behooved each to be content with his own wife, and not have to do with any other woman; for it is impossible that one not so contented should be saved; he must assuredly perish though he have ten thousand right actions, since with fornication it is impossible to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Or rather, this is henceforth not fornication but adultery; for as a woman who is bound to a man, if she come together with another man, then has committed adultery, so he that is bound to a woman, if he have another, has committed adultery.

Such an one shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven, but shall fall into the pit. Hear what Christ says concerning these, Their worm shall not die, and the fire shall not be quenched. Mark 9:44 For he can have no pardon, who after (possessing) a wife, and the comfort of a wife, then acts shamelessly towards another woman; since this is henceforth wantonness. And if the many abstain even from their wives when it be a season of fast or prayer, how great a fire does he heap up for himself who is not even content with his wife, but mingles with another; and if it is not permitted one who has put away and cast out his own wife to mingle with another, (for this is adultery,) how great evil does he commit who, while his wife is in his house, brings in another.

Let no one then allow this malady to dwell in his soul; let him tear it up by the root. He does not so much wrong his wife as himself. For so grievous and unpardonable is this offense, that if a woman separate herself from a husband which is an idolater without his consent, God punishes her; but if she separate herself from a fornicator, not so. Do you see how great an evil this is? If, It says, any faithful woman have a husband that believes not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. 1 Corinthians 7:13 Not so concerning a harlot; but what?

If any man put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, he causes her to commit adultery. Matthew 5:32 For if the coming together makes one body, he who comes together with a harlot must needs become one body with her. How then shall the modest woman, being a member of Christ, receive such an one, or how shall she join to herself the member of an harlot. And observe the excess of the one (fornication) over the other (idolatry). The woman who dwells with an unbeliever is not impure; (for, It says, the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife 1 Corinthians 6:15) not so with the harlot; but what?

Shall I then make the members of Christ the members of an harlot? In the one case sanctification remains, and is not removed though the unbeliever dwells with his wife; but in the other case it departs. A dreadful, a dreadful thing is fornication, and an agent for everlasting punishment; and even in this world it brings with it ten thousand woes. The man so guilty is forced to lead a life of anxiety and toil; he is nothing better

off than those who are under punishment, creeping into another man's house with fear and much trembling, suspecting all alike both slave and free.

Wherefore I exhort you to be freed from this malady, and if you obey not, step not on the sacred threshold. Sheep that are covered with the scab, and full of disease, may not herd with those that are in health; we must drive them from the fold until they get rid of the malady. We have been made members of Christ; let us not, I entreat, become members of an harlot. This place is not a brothel but a church; if then you have the members of an harlot, stand not in the church, lest you insult the place.

If there were no hell, if there were no punishment, yet, after those contracts, those marriage torches, the lawful bed, the procreation of children, the intercourse, how could you bear to join yourself to another? How is it that you are not ashamed nor blushest? Do you not know that they who after the death of their own wife, introduce another into their own house, are blamed by many? Yet this action has no penalty attached to it: but you bring in another while your wife is yet alive.

What lustfulness is this! Learn what has been spoken concerning such men, Their worm, It says, shall not die, and the fire shall not be quenched. Mark 9:44 Shudder at the threat, dread the vengeance. The pleasure here is not so great as the punishment there, but may it not come to pass that any one (here) become liable to that punishment, but that exercising holiness they may see Christ, and obtain the promised good things, which may we all enjoy, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

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