

John 12:8-24

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the significance of Lazarus' resurrection and the implications of Jesus' impending death for both Jews and Gentiles.

Scripture: Matthew 21:8, John 12:9-30

Topics: "Christ's Kingship", "Resurrection Doctrine"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the belief and disbelief in Jesus among the Jews, highlighting the corrupt rulers' murderous intentions towards Lazarus and their rejection of Christ despite witnessing miracles. He explains how Jesus' entry into Jerusalem fulfilled prophecies and symbolized His meekness and kingship. Chrysostom emphasizes the disciples' ignorance and lack of understanding regarding Jesus' teachings and the significance of His impending Passion. He challenges the disbelief in the Resurrection, pointing out the necessity of the body's resurrection and refuting heretical teachings that deny this fundamental Christian belief.

Transcript

Much people of the Jews therefore knew that He was there, and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead.

1. As wealth is wont to hurl into destruction those who are not heedful, so also is power; the first leads into covetousness, the second into pride. See, for instance, how the subject multitude of the Jews is sound, and their rulers corrupt; for that the first of these believed Christ, the Evangelists continually assert, saying, that many of the multitude believed on Him John 7:31-48; but they who were of the rulers, believed not. And they themselves say, not the multitude, Hath any of the rulers believed on Him? But what says one? The multitude who know not God are accursed John 7:49; the believers they call accursed, and themselves the slayers, wise. In this place also, having beheld the miracle, the many believed; but the rulers were not contented with their own evil deeds, they also attempted to kill Lazarus. Suppose they did attempt to slay Christ because He broke the Sabbath, because He made Himself equal to the Father, and because of the Romans whom you allege, yet what charge had they against Lazarus, that they sought to kill him? Is the having received a benefit a crime? Do you see how murderous is their will? Yet He had worked many miracles; but none exasperated them so much as this one, not the paralytic, not the blind. For this was more wonderful in its nature, and was wrought after many others, and it was a strange thing to see one, who had been dead four days, walking and speaking. An honorable action, in truth, for the

feast, to mix up the solemn assembly with murders. Besides, in the one case they thought to charge Him concerning the Sabbath, and so to draw away the multitudes; but here, since they had no fault to find with Him, they make the attempt on the man who had been healed. For here they could not even say that He was opposed to the Father, since the prayer stopped their mouths. Since then the charge which they continually brought against Him was removed, and the miracle was evident, they hasten to murder. So that they would have done the same in the case of the blind man, had it not been in their power to find fault respecting the Sabbath. Besides, that man was of no note, and they cast him out of the temple; but Lazarus was a person of distinction, as is clear, since many came to comfort his sisters; and the miracle was done in the sight of all, and most marvelously. On which account all ran to see. This then stung them, that while the feast was going on, all should leave it and go to Bethany. They set their hand therefore to kill him, and thought they were not daring anything, so murderous were they. On this account the Law at its commencement opens with this, You shall not kill Exodus 20:13; and the Prophet brings this charge against them, Their hands are full of blood. Isaiah 1:15

But how, after not walking openly in Jewry, and retiring into the wilderness, does He again enter openly? Having quenched their anger by retiring, He comes to them when they were stilled. Moreover, the multitude which went before and which followed after was sufficient to cast them into an agony; for no sign so much attracted the people as that of Lazarus. And another Evangelist says, that they strewed their garments under His feet Matthew 21:8, and that the whole city was moved Matthew 21:10; with so great honor did He enter. And this He did, figuring one prophecy and fulfilling another; and the same act was the beginning of the one and the end of the other. For the, Rejoice, for your King comes unto you meek Zechariah 9:9, belonged to Him as fulfilling a prophecy, but the sitting upon an ass was the act of one prefiguring a future event, that He was about to have the impure race of the Gentiles subject to Him.

But how say the others, that He sent disciples, and said, Loose the ass and the colt Matthew 21:2, while John says nothing of the kind, but that having found a young ass, He sat upon it? Because it is likely that both circumstances took place, and that He after the ass was loosed, while the disciples were bringing it, found (the colt), and sat upon it. And they took the small branches of palm trees and olives, and strewed their garments in the way, showing that they now had a higher opinion concerning Him than of a Prophet, and said,

John 12:13

Hosannah, blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.

Do you see that this most choked them, the persuasion which all men had that He was not an enemy of God? And this most divided the people, His saying that He came from the Father. But what means,

John 12:15

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion.

Because all their kings had for the most part been an unjust and covetous kind of men, and had given them over to their enemies, and had perverted the people, and made them subject to their foes; Be of good courage, It says, this is not such an one, but meek and gentle; as is shown by the ass, for He entered not with an army in His train, but having an ass alone.

John 12:16

But this the disciples knew not, that it was written of Him.

2. Do you see that they were ignorant on most points, because He did not reveal to them? For when He said, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up John 2:19, neither then did the disciples understand. And another Evangelist says, that the saying was hid from them Luke 18:34, and they knew not that He should rise from the dead. Now this was with reason concealed from them, (wherefore another Evangelist says, that as they heard it from time to time, they grieved and were dejected, and this because they understood not the saying concerning the Resurrection,) it was with reason concealed, as being too high for them: but why was not the matter of the ass revealed to them? Because this was a great thing also. But observe the wisdom of the Evangelist, how he is not ashamed to parade their former ignorance. That it was written they knew, that it was written of Him they knew not. For it would have offended them if He being a King were about to suffer such things, and be so betrayed. Besides, they could not at once have taken in the knowledge of the Kingdom of which He spoke; for another Evangelist says, that they thought the words were spoken of a kingdom of this world. Matthew 20:21

John 12:17

But the multitude bore witness that He had raised Lazarus.

For so many would not have been suddenly changed, unless they had believed in the miracle.

John 12:19

The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after Him.

Now this seems to me to be said by those who felt rightly, but had not courage to speak boldly, and who then would restrain the others by pointing to the result, as though they were attempting impossibilities. Here again they call the multitude the world. For Scripture is wont to call by the name world both the creation, and those who live in wickedness; the one, when It says, Who brings out His world by number Isaiah 40:26; the other when It says, The world hates not you, but Me it hates. John 7:7 And these things it is necessary to know exactly, that we may not through the signification of words afford a handle to the heretics.

John 12:20

And there were certain of the Greeks that came up to worship at the Feast.

Being now near to become proselytes, they were at the Feast. When therefore the report concerning Him was imparted to them, they say,

John 12:21

We would see Jesus.

Philip gives place to Andrew as being before him, and communicates the matter to him. But neither does he at once act with authority; for he had heard that saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles Matthew 10:5: therefore having communicated with the disciple, he refers the matter to his Master. For they both spoke to Him. But what says He?

John 12:23-24

The hour has come, that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone.

What is, The hour has come? He had said, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, (thus cutting away all excuse of ignorance from the Jews,) and had restrained the disciples. When therefore the Jews continued disobedient, and the others desired to come to Him, Now, says He, it is time to proceed to My Passion, since all things are fulfilled. For if we were to continue to wait for those who are disobedient and not admit these who even desire to come, this would be unbefitting our tender care. Since then He was about to allow the disciples to go to the Gentiles after the Crucifixion, and beheld them springing on before, He said, It is time to proceed to the Cross. For He would not allow them to go sooner, that it might be for a testimony unto them. Until that by their deeds the Jews rejected Him, until they crucified Him, He said not, Go and make disciples of all nations Matthew 28:19, but, Go not into the way of the Gentiles Matthew 10:5, and, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel Matt 15:24, and, It is not meet to take the children's bread and give it unto dogs. Matthew 15:26 But when they hated Him, and so hated as to kill Him, it was superfluous to persevere while they repulsed Him. For they refused Him, saying, We have no king but CÃsar. John 19:15 So that at length He left them, when they had left Him. Therefore He says, How often would I have gathered your children together, and you would not? Matthew 23:37

What is, Except a grain of grain fall into the ground and die? He speaks of the Cross, for that they might not be confounded at seeing, that just when Greeks also came to Him, then He was slain, He says to them, This very thing specially causes them to come, and shall increase the preaching of Me. Then since He could not so well persuade them by words, He goes about to prove this from actual experience, telling them that this is the case with grain; it bears the more fruit when it has died. Now, says He, if this be the case with seeds, much more with Me. But the disciples understood not what was spoken. Wherefore the Evangelist continually puts this, as making excuse for their flight afterwards. This same argument Paul also has raised when speaking of the Resurrection.

3. What sort of excuse then will they have who disbelieve the Resurrection, when the action is practiced each day, in seeds, in plants, and in the case of our own generation? For first it is necessary that the seed die, and that then the generation take place. But, in short, when God does anything, reasonings are of no use; for how did He make us out of those things that were not? This I say to Christians, who assert that they believe the Scriptures; but I shall also say something else drawn from human reasonings.

Of men some live in vice, others in virtue; and of those who live in vice, many have attained to extreme old age in prosperity, many of the virtuous after enduring the contrary. When then shall each receive his deserts? At what season? Yea, says some one, but there is no resurrection of the body. They hear not Paul, saying, This corruptible must put on incorruption. 1 Corinthians 15:53 He speaks not of the soul, for the soul is not corrupted; moreover, resurrection is said of that which fell, and that which fell was the body.

But why will you have it that there is no resurrection of the body? Is it not possible with God? But this it were utter folly to say. Is it unseemly? Why is it unseemly, that the corruptible which shared the toil and death, should share also the crowns? For were it unseemly, it would not have been created at the beginning, Christ would not have taken the flesh again. But to show that He took it again and raised it up, hear what He says: Reach hither your fingers John 20:27; and, Behold, a spirit has not bones and sinews.

Luke 24:39 But why did He raise Lazarus again, if it would have been better to rise without a body? Why does He this, classing it as a miracle and a benefit? Why did He give nourishment at all? Be not therefore deceived by the heretics, beloved: for there is a Resurrection and there is a Judgment, but they deny these things, who desire not to give account of their actions. For this Resurrection must be such as was that of Christ, for He was the first fruits, the first born of the dead.

But if the Resurrection is this, a purifying of the soul, a deliverance from sin, and if Christ sinned not, how did He rise again? And how have we been delivered from the curse, if so be that He also sinned? And now says He, The prince of this world comes, and had nothing in Me? John 14:30 They are the words of One declaring His sinlessness. According to them therefore He either did not rise again; or that He might rise, He sinned before His Resurrection. But He both rose again, and did no sin.

Therefore He rose in the Body, and these wicked doctrines are nothing else than the offspring of vainglory. Let us then fly this malady. For, It is says, evil communications corrupt good manners. 1 Corinthians 15:33 These are not the doctrines of the Apostles; Marcion and Valentius have newly invented them. Let us then flee them, beloved, for a pure life profits nothing when doctrines are corrupt; as on the other hand neither do sound doctrines, if the life be corrupt. The heathen were the parents of these notions, and those heretics reared them, having received them from Gentile philosophers, asserting that matter is uncreated, and many such like things.

As then they asserted that there could be no Artificer unless there were some uncreated subject matter, so also they disallowed the Resurrection. But let us not heed them, as knowing that the power of God is all sufficient. Let us not heed them. To you I say this; for we will not decline the battle with them. But the man who is unarmed and naked, though he fall among the weak, though he be the stronger, will easily be vanquished. Had you given heed to the Scriptures, had you sharpened yourselves each day, I would not have advised you to flee the combat with them, but would have counseled you to grapple with them; for strong is truth.

But since you know not how to use the Scriptures, I fear the struggle, lest they take you unarmed and cast you down. For there is nothing, there is nothing weaker than those who are bereft of the aid of the Spirit. If these heretics employ the wisdom of the Gentiles, we must not admire, but laugh at them, because they employ foolish teachers. For those men were not able to find out anything sound, either concerning God or the creation, and things which the widow among us is acquainted with, Pythagoras did not yet know, but said that the soul becomes a bush, or a fish, or a dog.

To these, tell me, ought you to give heed? And how could it be reasonable to do so? They are great men in their district, grow beautiful curls, and are enfolded in cloaks; thus far goes their philosophy; but if you look within there is dust and ashes and nothing sound, but their throat is an open sepulcher Psalm 5:9, having all things full of impurity and corruption, and all their doctrines (full) of worms. For instance, the first of them said that water was God, his successor fire, another one air, and they descended to things corporeal; ought we then, tell me, to admire these, who never even had the thought of the incorporeal God?

And if they did ever gain it afterwards, it was after conversing in Egypt with our people. But, that we bring not upon you much confusion, let us here close our discourse. For should we begin to set before you their doctrine, and what they have said about God, what about matter, what about the soul, what about the body, much ridicule will follow. And they will not even require to be accused by us, for they have attacked

each other; and he who wrote against us the book concerning matter, made away with himself.

Therefore that we may not vainly delay you, nor wind together a labyrinth of words, leaving these things we will bid you keep fast hold of the listening to the Holy Scriptures, and not fight with words to no purpose; as also Paul exhorts Timothy 2 Timothy 2:14, filled though he was with much wisdom, and possessing the power of miracles. Let us now obey him, and leaving trifling; let us hold fast to real works, I mean to brotherly-kindness and hospitality; and let us make much account of almsgiving, that we may obtain the promised good things, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for endless ages. Amen.

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