

John 5:14-21

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on John 5:14-21 emphasizes the dangers of sin, the significance of Christ's healing, and the call to repentance and faith in Jesus' authority.

Scripture: John 5:14-44, Romans 1:20, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Corinthians 11:32, Hebrews 6:18

Topics: "Sin And Punishment", "Repentance And Forgiveness"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the consequences of sin, emphasizing that sin can lead to physical ailments as a form of punishment from God. He highlights the importance of repentance and warns about the eternal punishment for unrepented sins. Chrysostom also discusses the correlation between diseases and sinful living, urging listeners to bear every stroke of punishment with thankfulness. He delves into the significance of Jesus addressing sins when performing miracles, showcasing His divine knowledge and compassion.

Transcript

Afterward Jesus finds him in the Temple, and said to him, Behold, you are made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you.

1. A fearful thing is sin, fearful, and the ruin of the soul, and the mischief oftentimes through its excess has overflowed and attacked men's bodies also. For since for the most part when the soul is diseased we feel no pain, but if the body receive though but a little hurt, we use every exertion to free it from its infirmity, because we are sensible of the infirmity, therefore God oftentimes punishes the body for the transgressions of the soul, so that by means of the scourging of the inferior part, the better part also may receive some healing. Thus too among the Corinthians Paul restored the adulterer, checking the disease of the soul by the destruction of the flesh, and having applied the knife to the body, so repressed the evil 1 Corinthians 5:5; like some excellent physician employing external cautery for dropsy or spleen, when they refuse to yield to internal remedies. This also Christ did in the case of the paralytic; as He showed when He said, Behold, you are made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you.

Now what do we learn from this? First, that his disease had been produced by his sins; secondly, that the accounts of hell fire are to be believed; thirdly, that the punishment is long, nay endless. Where now are those who say, I murdered in an hour, I committed adultery in a little moment of time, and am I eternally punished? For behold this man had not sinned for so many years as he suffered, for he had spent a whole lifetime in the length of his punishment; and sins are not judged by time, but by the nature of the

transgressions. Besides this, we may see another thing, that though we have suffered severely for former sins, if we afterwards fall into the same, we shall suffer much more severely. And with good reason; for he who is not made better even by punishment, is afterwards led as insensible and a despiser to still heavier chastisement. The fault should of itself be sufficient to check and to render more sober the man who once has slipped, but when not even the addition of punishment effects this, he naturally requires more bitter torments. Now if even in this world when after punishment we fall into the same sins, we are chastised yet more severely then before, ought we not when after sinning we have not been punished at all, to be then very exceedingly afraid and to tremble, as being about to endure something irreparable? And wherefore, says some one, are not all thus punished? For we see many bad men well in body, vigorous, and enjoying great prosperity. But let us not be confident, let us mourn for them in this case most of all, since their having suffered nothing here, helps them on to a severer vengeance hereafter. As Paul declares when he says, But now that we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world 1 Corinthians 11:32; for the punishments here are for warning, there for vengeance.

What then, says one, do all diseases proceed from sin? Not all, but most of them; and some proceed from different kinds of loose living, since gluttony, intemperance, and sloth, produce such like sufferings. But the one rule we have to observe, is to bear every stroke thankfully; for they are sent because of our sins, as in the Kings we see one attacked by gout 1 Kings 15:23; they are sent also to make us approved, as the Lord says to Job, Do you think that I have spoken to you, save that you might appear righteous? Job 60:8, Septuagint

But why is it that in the case of these paralytics Christ brings forward their sins? For He says also to him in Matthew who lay on a bed, Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you Matthew 9:2: and to this man, Behold, you are made whole; sin no more. I know that some slander this paralytic, asserting that he was an accuser of Christ, and that therefore this speech was addressed to him; what then shall we say of the other in Matthew, who heard nearly the same words? For Christ says to him also, Your sins be forgiven you. Whence it is clear, that neither was this man thus addressed on the account which they allege. And this we may see more clearly from what follows; for, says the Evangelist, Afterward Jesus finds him in the Temple, which is an indication of his great piety; for he departed not into the market places and walks, nor gave himself up to luxury and ease, but remained in the Temple, although about to sustain so violent an attack and to be harassed by all there. Yet none of these things persuaded him to depart from the Temple. Moreover Christ having found him, even after he had conversed with the Jews, implied nothing of the kind. For had He desired to charge him with this, He would have said to him, Are you again attempting the same sins as before, are you not made better by your cure? Yet He said nothing of the kind, but merely secures him for the future.

2. Why then, when He had cured the halt and maimed, did He not in any instance make mention of the like? Methinks that the diseases of these (the paralytic) arose from acts of sin, those of the others from natural infirmity. Or if this be not so, then by means of these men, and by the words spoken to them, He has spoken to the rest also. For since this disease is more grievous than any other, by the greater He corrects also the less. And as when He had healed a certain other He charged him to give glory to God, addressing this exhortation not to him only but through him to all, so He addresses to these, and by these to all the rest of mankind, that exhortation and advice which was given to them by word of mouth. Besides this we may also say, that Jesus perceived great endurance in his soul, and addressed the exhortation to him as to one who was able to receive His command, keeping him to health both by the benefit, and by the fear of future ills.

And observe the absence of boasting. He said not, Behold, I have made you whole, but, You are made whole; sin no more. And again, not, lest I punish you, but, lest a worse thing come unto you; putting both expressions not personally, and showing that the cure was rather of grace than of merit. For He declared not to him that he was delivered after suffering the deserved amount of punishment, but that through lovingkindness he was made whole. Had this not been the case, He would have said, Behold, you have suffered a sufficient punishment for your sins, be steadfast for the future. But now He spoke not so, but how? Behold, you are made whole; sin no more. Let us continually repeat these words to ourselves, and if after having been chastised we have been delivered, let each say to himself, Behold, you are made whole; sin no more. But if we suffer not punishment though continuing in the same courses, let us use for our charm that word of the Apostle, The goodness of God leads [us] to repentance, but after [our] hardness and impenitent heart, [we] treasure up unto [ourselves] wrath. Romans 2:4-5

And not only by strengthening the sick man's body, but also in another way, did He afford him a strong proof of His Divinity; for by saying, Sin no more, He showed that He knew all the transgressions that had formerly been committed by him; and by this He would gain his belief as to the future.

John 5:15

The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus that had made him whole.

Again observe him continuing in the same right feeling. He says not, This is he who said, Take up your bed, but when they continually advanced this seeming charge, he continually puts forward the defense, again declaring his Healer, and seeking to attract and attach others to Him. For he was not so unfeeling as after such a benefit and charge to betray his Benefactor, and to speak as he did with an evil intention. Had he been a wild beast, had he been something unlike a man and of stone, the benefit and the fear would have been enough to restrain him, since, having the threat lodged within, he would have dreaded lest he should suffer a worse thing, having already received the greatest pledges of the power of his Physician. Besides, had he wished to slander Him, he would have said nothing about his own cure, but would have mentioned and urged against Him the breach of the Sabbath. But this is not the case, surely it is not; the words are words of great boldness and candor; he proclaims his Benefactor no less than the blind man did. For what said he? He made clay, and anointed my eyes John 9:6; and so this man of whom we now speak, It is Jesus who made me whole.

John 5:16

Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day.

What then says Christ?

John 5:17

My Father works hitherto, and I work.

When there was need to make excuse for the Disciples, He brought forward David their fellow-servant, saying, Have ye not read what David did when he was an hungered? Matthew 12:2 But when excuse was to be made for Himself, He betook Himself to the Father, showing in two ways His Equality, by calling God His Father peculiarly, and by doing the same things which He did. And wherefore did He not mention what took place at Jericho ? Because He wished to raise them up from earth that they might no longer attend to

Him as to a man, but as to God, and as to one who ought to legislate: since had He not been The Very Son and of the same Essence, the defense would have been worse than the charge. For if a viceroy who had altered a royal law should, when charged with so doing, excuse himself in this manner, and say, Yea, for the king also has annulled laws, he would not be able to escape, but would thus increase the weight of the charge. But in this instance, since the dignity is equal, the defense is made perfect on most secure grounds. From the charges, says He, from which you absolve God, absolve Me also. And therefore He said first, My Father, that He might persuade them even against their will to allow to Him the same, through reverence of His clearly asserted Sonship.

If any one say, And how does the Father 'work,' who ceased on the seventh day from all His works? let him learn the manner in which He works. What then is the manner of His working? He cares for, He holds together all that has been made. Therefore when you behold the sun rising and the moon running in her path, the lakes, and fountains, and rivers, and rains, the course of nature in the seeds and in our own bodies and those of irrational beings, and all the rest by means of which this universe is made up, then learn the ceaseless working of the Father. For He makes His sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:45 And again; If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the fire Matthew 6:30; and speaking of the birds He said, Your Heavenly Father feeds them.

3. In that place then He did all on the Sabbath day by words only, and added nothing more, but refuted their charges by what was done in the Temple and from their own practice. But here where He commanded a work to be done, the taking up a bed, (a thing of no great importance as regarded the miracle, though by it He showed one point, a manifest violation of the Sabbath,) He leads up His discourse to something greater, desiring the more to awe them by reference to the dignity of the Father, and to lead them up to higher thought. Therefore when His discourse is concerning the Sabbath, He makes not His defense as man only, or as God only, but sometimes in one way, sometimes in the other; because He desired to persuade them both of the condescension of the Dispensation, and the Dignity of His Godhead. Therefore He now defends Himself as God, since had He always conversed with them merely as a man, they would have continued in the same low condition. Wherefore that this may not be, He brings forward the Father. Yet the creation itself works on the Sabbath, (for the sun runs, rivers flow, fountains bubble, women bear,) but that you may learn that He is not of creation, He said not, Yea, I work, for creation works, but, Yea, I work, for My Father works.

John 5:18

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

And this he asserted not by words merely, but by deeds, for not in speech alone, but also yet oftener by actions He declared it. Why so? Because they might object to His words and charge Him with arrogance, but when they saw the truth of His actions proved by results, and His power proclaimed by works, after that they could say nothing against Him.

But they who will not receive these words in a right mind assert, that Christ made not Himself equal to God, but that the Jews suspected this. Come then let us go over what has been said from the beginning. Tell me, did the Jews persecute Him, or did they not? It is clear to every one that they did. Did they persecute Him for this or for something else? It is again allowed that it was for this. Did He then break the

Sabbath, or did He not? Against the fact that He did, no one can have anything to say. Did He call God His Father, or did He not call Him so? This too is true. Then the rest also follows by the same consequence; for as to call God His Father, to break the Sabbath, and to be persecuted by the Jews for the former and more especially for the latter reason, belonged not to a false imagination, but to actual fact, so to make Himself equal to God was a declaration of the same meaning.

And this one may see more clearly from what He had before said, for My Father works, and I work, is the expression of One declaring Himself equal to God. For in these words He has marked no difference. He said not, He works, and I minister, but, As He works, so work I; and has declared absolute Equality. But if He had not wished to establish this, and the Jews had supposed so without reason, He would not have allowed their minds to be deceived, but would have corrected this. Besides, the Evangelist would not have been silent on the subject, but would have plainly said that the Jews supposed so, but that Jesus did not make Himself equal to God. As in another place he does this very thing, when he perceives that something was said in one way, and understood in another; as, Destroy this Temple, said Christ, and in three days I will raise It up John 2:19; speaking of His Flesh. But the Jews, not understanding this, and supposing that the words were spoken of the Jewish Temple, said, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and will You rear it up in three days? Since then He said one thing, and they imagined another, (for He spoke of His Flesh, and they thought that the words were spoken of their Temple,) the Evangelist remarking on this, or rather correcting their imagination, goes on to say, But He spoke of the Temple of His Body. So that here also, if Christ had not made Himself equal with God, had not wished to establish this, and yet the Jews had imagined that He did, the writer would here also have corrected their supposition, and would have said, The Jews thought that He made Himself equal to God, but indeed He spoke not of equality. And this is done not in this place only, nor by this Evangelist only, but again elsewhere another Evangelist is seen to do the same. For when Christ warned His disciples, saying, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees Matthew 16:6, and they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread, and He spoke of one thing, calling their doctrine leaven, but the disciples imagined another, supposing that the words were said of bread; it is not now the Evangelist who sets them right, but Christ Himself, speaking thus, How is it that you do not understand, that I spoke not to you concerning bread? But here there is nothing of the kind.

But, says some one, to remove this very thought Christ has added,

John 5:19

'The Son can do nothing of Himself.'

Man! He does the contrary. He says this not to take away, but to confirm, His Equality. But attend carefully, for this is no common question. The expression of Himself is found in many places of Scripture, with reference both to Christ and to the Holy Ghost, and we must learn the force of the expression, that we may not fall into the greatest errors; for if one take it separately by itself in the way in which it is obvious to take it, consider how great an absurdity will follow. He said not that He could do some things of Himself and that others He could not, but universally,

4. The Son can do nothing of Himself. I ask then my opponent, Can the Son do nothing of Himself, tell me? If he reply, that He can do nothing, we will say, that He has done of Himself the very greatest of all goods. As Paul cries aloud, saying, Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant. Philippians 2:6-7 And

again, Christ Himself in another place says, I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again: and, No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. John 10:18 Do you see that He has power over life and death, and that He wrought of Himself so mighty a Dispensation? And why speak I concerning Christ, when even we, than whom nothing can be meaner, do many things of ourselves? Of ourselves we choose vice, of ourselves we go after virtue, and if we do it not of ourselves, and not having power, we shall neither suffer hell if we do wrong, nor enjoy the Kingdom if we do right.

What then means, Can do nothing of Himself? That He can do nothing in opposition to the Father, nothing alien from, nothing strange to Him, which is especially the assertion of One declaring an Equality and entire agreement.

But wherefore said He not, that He does nothing contrary, instead of, He cannot do? It was that from this again He might show the invariableness and exactness of the Equality, for the expression imputes not weakness to Him, but even shows His great power; since in another place Paul says of the Father, That by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie Hebrews 6:18: and again, If we deny Him -- He abides faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. 2 Timothy 2:12-13 And in truth this expression, impossible, is not declaratory of weakness, but power, power unspeakable. For what He says is of this kind, that that Essence admits not such things as these. For just as when we also say, it is impossible for God to do wrong, we do not impute to Him any weakness, but confess in Him an unutterable power; so when He also says, I can of My own Self do nothing John 5:30, His meaning is, that it is impossible, nature admits not, that I should do anything contrary to the Father. And that you may learn that this is really what is said, let us, going over what follows, see whether Christ agrees with what is said by us, or among you. You say, that the expression does away with His Power and His proper Authority, and shows His might to be but weak; but I say, that this proves His Equality, His unvarying Likeness, (to the Father,) and the fact that all is done as it were by one Will and Power and Might. Let us then enquire of Christ Himself, and see by what He next says whether He interprets these words according to your supposition or according to ours. What then says He?

For whatever things the Father does these also does the Son likewise.

Do you see how He has taken away your assertion by the root, and confirmed what is said by us? Since, if Christ does nothing of Himself, neither will the Father do anything of Himself, if so be that Christ does all things in like manner to Him. If this be not the case, another strange conclusion will follow. For He said not, that whatsoever things He saw the Father do, He did, but, except He see the Father doing anything, He does it not; extending His words to all time; now He will, according to you, be continually learning the same things. Do you see how exalted is the idea, and that the very humility of the expression compels even the most shameless and unwilling to avoid groveling thoughts, and such as are unsuited to His dignity? For who so wretched and miserable as to assert, that the Son learns day by day what He must do? And how can that be true, You are the same, and Your years shall not fail? Psalm 102:27, or that other, All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made John 1:3; if the Father does certain things, and the Son sees and imitates Him? Do you see that from what was asserted above, and from what was said afterwards, proof is given of His independent Power? And if He brings forward some expressions in lowly manner, marvel not, for since they persecuted Him when they had heard His exalted sayings, and deemed Him to be an enemy of God, sinking a little in expression alone, He again leads His discourse up to the sublimer doctrines, then in turn to the lower, varying His teaching that it might be easy of acceptance even to the indisposed. Observe, after saying, My Father works, and I work; and after declaring Himself equal with God, He adds, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the

Father do. Then again in a higher strain, Whatever things the Father does, these also does the Son likewise. Then in a lower,

John 5:20

The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these.

Do you see how great is the humility of this? And with reason; for what I said before, what I shall not cease to say, I will now repeat, that when He utters anything low or humbly, He puts it in excess, that the very poverty of the expression may persuade even the indisposed to receive the notions with pious understanding. Since, if it be not so, see how absurd a thing is asserted, making the trial from the words themselves. For when He says, And shall show Him greater works than these, He will be found not to have yet learned many things, which cannot be said even of the Apostles; for they when they had once received the grace of the Spirit, in a moment both knew and were able to do all things which it was needful that they should know and have power to do, while Christ will be found to have not yet learned many things which He needed to know. And what can be more absurd than this?

What then is His meaning? It was because He had strengthened the paralytic, and was about to raise the dead, that He thus spoke, all but saying, Wonder ye that I have strengthened the paralyzed? You shall see greater things than these. But He spoke not thus, but proceeded somehow in a humbler strain, in order that He might soothe their madness. And that you may learn that shall show is not used absolutely, listen again to what follows.

John 5:21

For as the Father raises up the dead, and quickens them, even so the Son quickens whom He will.

Yet can do nothing of Himself is opposed to whom He will: since if He quickens whom He will, He can do something of Himself, (for to will implies power,) but if He can do nothing of Himself, then He can not quicken whom He will. For the expression, as the Father raises up, shows unvarying resemblance in Power, and whom He will, Equality of Authority. Do you see therefore that cannot do anything of Himself is the expression of One not taking away His (own) authority, but declaring the unvarying resemblance of His Power and Will (to those of the Father)? In this sense also understand the words, shall show to Him; for in another place He says, I will raise him up at the last Day. John 6:40 And again, to show that He does it not by receiving an inward power from above, He says, I am the Resurrection and the Life. John 11:25 Then that you may not assert that He raises what dead He will and quickens them, but that He does not other things in such manner, He anticipates and prevents every objection of the kind by saying, Whatever things He does, these also does the Son likewise, thus declaring that He does all things which the Father does, and as the Father does them; whether you speak of the raising of the dead, or the fashioning of bodies, or the remission of sins, or any other matter whatever, He works in like manner to Him who begot Him.

5. But men careless of their salvation give heed to none of these things; so great an evil is it to be in love with precedence. This has been the mother of heresies, this has confirmed the impiety of the heathen. For God desired that His invisible things should be understood by the creation of this world Romans 1:20, but they having left these and refused to come by this mode of teaching, cut out for themselves another way, and so were cast out from the true. And the Jews believed not because they received honor from one another, and sought not the honor which is from God.

But let us, beloved, avoid this disease exceedingly and with all earnestness; for though we have ten thousand good qualities, this plague of vainglory is sufficient to bring them all to nought. John 5:44 If therefore we desire praise, let us seek the praise which is from God, for the praise of men of whatever kind it be, as soon as it has appeared has perished, or if it perish not, brings to us no profit, and often proceeds from a corrupt judgment. And what is there to be admired in the honor which is from men?

Which young dancers enjoy, and abandoned women, and covetous and rapacious men? But he who is approved of God, is approved not with these, but with those holy men the Prophets and Apostles, who have shown forth an angelic life. If we feel any desire to lead multitudes about with us or be looked at by them, let us consider the matter apart by itself, and we shall find that it is utterly worthless. In fine, if you are fond of crowds, draw to yourself the host of angels, and become terrible to the devils, then shall you care nothing for mortal things, but shall tread all that is splendid underfoot as mire and clay; and shall clearly see that nothing so fits a soul for shame as the passion for glory; for it cannot, it cannot be, that the man who desires this should live the crucified life, as on the other hand it is not possible that the man who has trodden this underfoot should not tread down most other passions; for he who masters this will get the better of envy and covetousness, and all the grievous maladies.

And how, says some one, shall we get the better of it? If we look to the other glory which is from heaven, and from which this kind strives to cast us out. For that heavenly glory both makes us honored here, and passes with us into the life which is to come, and delivers us from all fleshly slavery which we now most miserably serve, giving up ourselves entirely to earth and the things of earth. For if you go into the forum, if you enter into a house, into the streets, into the soldiers' quarters, into inns, taverns, ships, islands, palaces, courts of justice, council chambers, you shall everywhere find anxiety for things present and belonging to this life, and each man laboring for these things, whether gone or coming, traveling or staying at home, voyaging, tilling lands, in the fields, in the cities, in a word, all.

What hope then of salvation have we, when inhabiting God's earth we care not for the things of God, when bidden to be aliens from earthly things we are aliens from heaven and citizens of earth? What can be worse than this insensibility, when hearing each day of the Judgment and of the Kingdom, we imitate the men in the days of Noah, and those of Sodom, waiting to learn all by actual experience? Yet for this purpose were all those things written, that if any one believe not that which is to come, he may, from what has already been, get certain proof of what shall be.

Considering therefore these things, both the past and the future, let us at least take breath a little from this hard slavery, and make some account of our souls also, that we may obtain both present and future blessings; through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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