

John 6:26-27

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking spiritual nourishment over earthly desires, highlighting the eternal significance of faith and work in the Christian life.

Scripture: Matthew 6:19

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Eternal Priorities"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of seeking spiritual nourishment over earthly desires, as Jesus rebukes the crowds for seeking Him only for physical satisfaction. Chrysostom explains that while work is necessary, Christians should not be consumed by earthly pursuits but focus on laboring for eternal life and sharing with those in need. He clarifies that taking no thought for earthly things does not mean idleness but rather prioritizing spiritual growth and generosity. Chrysostom urges believers to value the eternal over the temporary, highlighting the everlasting nature of spiritual blessings compared to the fleeting pleasures of this world.

Transcript

Jesus answered them, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, You seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life.

1. The mild and gentle is not always useful, but there are times when the teacher needs sharper language. For if the disciple be dull and gross, then, in order to touch his dullness to the quick, we must rouse him with a goad. And this the Son of God has done in the present as well as in many other cases. For when the crowds had come and found Jesus, and were flattering Him, and saying, Master, when did You get here? to show that He desires not honor from men, but looks to one thing only, their salvation, He answers them sharply, wishing to correct them not in this way only, but also by revealing and exposing their thoughts. For what says He? Verily, verily, I say unto you, (speaking positively and with a confirmation,) You seek Me, not because ye saw miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. He chides and reproves them by these words, yet does not so abruptly or violently, but very sparingly. For He says not, O you gluttons and belly-slaves, I have wrought so many wonders, and you never have either followed Me, or marveled at My doings; but mildly and gently somewhat in this manner; You seek Me, not because ye saw miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled; speaking not only of the past, but also of the present miracle. It was not, He says, the miracle of the loaves that astonished you, but

the being filled. And that He said not this of them by conjecture they straightway showed, for on this account they came the second time, as being about to enjoy the same (food) as before. Wherefore they said, Our fathers did eat manna in the wilderness. Again they draw Him to (the subject of) carnal food, which was the chief accusation and charge against them. But He stops not at rebukes, but adds instruction also, saying, Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life.

Which the Son of Man gives unto you; for Him has God the Father sealed.

What He says, is of this kind: Make no account of this earthly, but of that spiritual food. But since some of those who desire to live in doing nothing have abused this speech, as though Christ would entirely abolish working, it is seasonable to say somewhat to them. For they slander, so to speak, all Christianity, and cause it to be ridiculed on the score of idleness. First however, we must mention that saying of Paul. What says he? Remember the Lord, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35 Now how can it be possible for him to give who has not? How then says Jesus to Martha, You are careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that good part? Luke 10:41-42; and again, Take no thought for the morrow. Matthew 6:34 For it is necessary now to resolve all these questions, not only that we may check men if they would be idle, but also that the oracles of God may not appear to bring in what is contradictory.

Now Paul in another place says, But we beseech you, brethren, that you increase more and more, that you study to be quiet, and to do your own business; that you may walk honestly toward them that are without 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12; and again; Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his own hands, that he may have to give to him that needs. Ephesians 4:28 Here the Apostle bids not simply work, but to work so vigorously and laboriously, as to have thereby somewhat to give to others. And in another place the same says again; These hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. Acts 20:34 And writing to the Corinthians he said, What is my reward then? Verily, that when I preach the Gospel, I may make the Gospel of Christ without charge. 1 Corinthians 9:18 And when he was in that city, he abode with Aquila and Priscilla, and wrought, for by their occupation they were tentmakers. Acts 18:3

These passages show a yet more decided opposition as to the letter; we must therefore now bring forward the solution. What then must be our reply? That to take no thought, does not mean not to work, but not to be nailed to the things of this life; that is, to take no care for tomorrow's ease, but to deem that superfluous. For a man may do no work, and (yet) lay up treasure for the morrow; and a man may work, yet be careful for nothing; for carefulness and work are not the same thing; it is not as trusting to his work that a man works, but, that he may impart to him that needs.

And that too which was said to Martha refers not to works and working, but to this, that it is our duty to know the right season, and not to spend on carnal things the time proper for listening. Thus Christ spoke not the words as urging her to idleness, but to rivet her to listening. I came, says He, to teach you needful things, but you are anxious about a meal. Do you desire to receive Me, and to provide for Me a costly table? Provide another sort of entertainment, by giving me a ready hearing, and by imitating your sister's longing for instruction.

He said not this to forbid her hospitality, (away with the thought! How could that be?) but to show that she ought not in the season for listening be busy about other matters. For to say, Labor not for the meat that

perishes, is not the expression of one implying that we ought to be idle; (in fact, this most especially is meat that perishes, for idleness is wont to teach all wickedness;) but that we ought to work, and to impart. This is meat that never perishes; but if any be idle and gluttonous, and cares for luxury, that man works for the meat that perishes.

So too, if a man by his labor should feed Christ, and give Him drink, and clothe Him, who so senseless and mad as to say that such an one labors for the meat that perishes, when there is for this the promise of the kingdom that is to come, and of those good things? This meat endures forever. But at that time, since the multitudes made no account of filth, nor sought to learn who it was that did these things, and by what power, but desired one thing only, to fill their bellies without working; Christ with good reason called such food, meat that perishes.

I fed, He says, your bodies, that after this ye might seek that other food which endures, which nourishes the soul; but you again run after that which is earthy. Therefore ye do not understand that I lead you not to this imperfect food, but to that which gives not temporal but eternal life, which nourishes not the body but the soul. Then when He had uttered such great words concerning Himself, and had said that He would give this food, in order that what was spoken might not stand in their way, to make His saying credible He attributes the supply to the Father.

For after saying, Which the Son of Man shall give you; He adds, Him has God the Father sealed, that is, has sent Him for this purpose, that He might bring the food to you. The saying also admits of another interpretation; for in another place Christ says, He that hears My words, has set to his seal that God is true John 3:33, that is, has showed forth undeniably. Which indeed the expression seems to me to hint at even in this place, for the Father has sealed, is nothing else than has declared, has revealed by His testimony. He in fact declared Himself too, but since He was speaking to Jews, He brought forward the testimony of the Father.

2. Learn we then, beloved, to ask of God the things which it is meet for us to ask of Him. For those other things, those, I mean, which belong to this life, whichever way they may fall out, can do us no injury; for if we be rich, it is here only that we shall enjoy our luxury; and if we fall into poverty, we shall suffer nothing terrible. For neither the splendors nor the pains of the present life have much power in respect either of despondency or pleasure, they are contemptible, and slip away very swiftly. Wherefore they are called a way, with reason, because they pass away, and by their very nature do not long endure, but the things which are to come endure eternally, both those of punishment and those of the Kingdom. Let us then in regard of these things use much diligence to avoid the first and to choose the last. For what is the advantage of this world's luxury? Today it is, and tomorrow it is not; today a bright flower, tomorrow scattered dust; today a burning fire, tomorrow smouldering ashes. But spiritual things are not so, they ever remain shining and blooming, and becoming brighter every day. That wealth never perishes, never departs, never ceases, never brings with it care or envy or blame, destroys not the body, corrupts not the soul, is without ill will, heaps not up malice; all which things attend on the other kind of wealth. That honor lifts not men into folly, does not make them puffed up, never ceases nor is dimmed. Again, the rest and delight of heaven endures continually, ever being immovable and immortal, one cannot find its end or limit. This life then let us desire, for if we do so we shall make no account of present things, but shall despise and mock at them all, and though one should bid us enter into kingly halls, we shall not while we have this hope choose to do so; yet nothing (earthly) seems more near to happiness than such a permission; but to those who are possessed by love of heaven, even this seems little and mean, and worthy of no account. Nothing which comes to an end is to be much desired; whatever ceases, and today is and tomorrow is not,

even though it be very great, yet seems to be very little and contemptible. Then let us not cling to fleeting things which slip away and depart, but to those which are enduring and immovable. To which may we all attain, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory, now and ever and world without end. Amen.

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