

No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself - Part 2

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a virtuous life, practicing temperance, and enduring trials with fortitude in order to avoid harming ourselves and turn back Heaven-sent wrath.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Isaiah 41:10, Daniel 1:10, Daniel 3:16, Jonah 3:4, Matthew 18:23, John 14:1, Romans 8:31, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Faith And Trials", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of not harming oneself, emphasizing that no external force or circumstance can harm a person who remains vigilant and sober in the Lord. He uses examples from the Bible, such as the three children in the fiery furnace, to illustrate how even in the face of captivity, exile, and severe trials, those who remain faithful to God emerge victorious and unharmed. Chrysostom highlights the power of true doctrine and unwavering faith in overcoming challenges, showcasing how those who do not betray themselves can turn Heaven-sent wrath and adversity into opportunities for greater glory and spiritual growth.

Transcript

10. But do you wish to take vengeance on those who have annoyed you? This, as I was saying just now, is the very reason why wealth ought specially to be avoided. For it prepares you to thrust the sword against yourself, and renders you liable to a heavier account in the future day of reckoning, and makes your punishment intolerable. For revenge is so great an evil that it actually revokes the mercy of God, and cancels the forgiveness of countless sins which has been already bestowed.

For he who received remission of the debt of ten thousand talents, and after having obtained so great a boon by merely asking for it then made a demand of one hundred pence from his fellow servant, a demand, that is, for satisfaction for his transgression against himself, in his severity towards his fellow servant recorded his own condemnation; and for this reason and no other he was delivered to the tormentors, and racked, and required to pay back the ten thousand talents; and he was not allowed the benefit of any excuse or defense, but suffered the most extreme penalty, having been commanded to deposit the whole debt which the lovingkindness of God had formerly remitted.

Matthew 18:23-35 Is this then the reason, pray, why wealth is so earnestly pursued by you, because it so easily conducts you into sin of this kind? Nay verily, this is why you ought to abhor it as a foe and an adversary teeming with countless murders. But poverty, some one will say, disposes men to be discontented and often also to utter profane words, and condescend to mean actions. It is not poverty which does this, but littleness of soul: for Lazarus also was poor, aye! very poor: and besides poverty he suffered from infirmity, a bitterer trial than any form of poverty, and one which makes poverty more severely felt; and in addition to infirmity there was a total absence of protectors, and difficulty in finding any to supply his wants, which increased the bitterness of poverty and infirmity.

For each of these things is painful in itself, but when there are none to minister to the sufferer's wants, the suffering becomes greater, the flame more painful, the distress more bitter, the tempest fiercer, the billows stronger, the furnace hotter. And if one examines the case thoroughly there was yet a fourth trial besides these -- the unconcern and luxury of the rich man who dwelt hard by. And if you would find a fifth thing, serving as fuel to the flame, you will see quite clearly that he was beset by it.

For not only was that rich man living luxuriously, but twice, and thrice, or rather indeed several times in the day he saw the poor man: for he had been laid at his gate, being a grievous spectacle of pitiable distress, and the bare sight of him was sufficient to soften even a heart of stone: and yet even this did not induce that unmerciful man to assist this case of poverty: but he had his luxurious table spread, and goblets wreathed with flowers, and pure wine plentifully poured forth, and grand armies of cooks, and parasites, and flatterers from early dawn, and troops of singers, cupbearers, and jesters; and he spent all his time in devising every species of dissipation, and drunkenness, and surfeiting, and in revelling in dress and feasting and many other things.

But although he saw that poor man every day distressed by grievous hunger and the bitterest infirmity, and the oppression of his many sores, and by destitution, and the ills which result from these things, he never even gave him a thought: yet the parasites and the flatterers were pampered even beyond their need; but the poor man, and he so very poor, and encompassed with so many miseries, was not even vouchsafed the crumbs which fell from that table, although he greatly desired them: and yet none of these things injured him, he did not give vent to a bitter word, he did not utter a profane speech; but like a piece of gold which shines all the more brilliantly when it is purified by excessive heat, even so he, although oppressed by these sufferings, was superior to all of them, and to the agitation which in many cases is produced by them.

For if generally speaking poor men, when they see rich men, are consumed with envy and racked by malicious ill-will, and deem life not worth living, and this even when they are well supplied with necessary food, and have persons to minister to their wants; what would the condition of this poor man have been had he not been very wise and noble hearted, seeing that he was poor beyond all other poor men, and not only poor, but also infirm, and without any one to protect or cheer him, and lay in the midst of the city as if in a remote desert, and wasted away with bitter hunger, and saw all good things being poured upon the rich man as out of a fountain, and had not the benefit of any human consolation, but lay exposed as a perpetual meal for the tongues of the dogs, for he was so enfeebled and broken down in body that he could not scare them away? Do you perceive that he who does not injure himself suffers no evil? For I will again take up the same argument.

11. For what harm was done to this hero by his bodily infirmity? Or by the absence of protectors? Or by the coming of the dogs? Or the evil proximity of the rich man? Or by the great luxury, haughtiness and

arrogance of the latter? Did it enervate him for the contest on behalf of virtue? Did it ruin his fortitude? Nowhere was he harmed at all, but that multitude of sufferings, and the cruelty of the rich man, rather increased his strength, and became the pledge for him of infinite crowns of victory, a means of adding to his rewards, an augmentation of his recompense, and a promise of an increased requital. For he was crowned not merely on account of his poverty, or of his hunger or of his sores, or of the dogs licking them: but because, having such a neighbour as the rich man, and being seen by him every day, and perpetually overlooked he endured this trial bravely and with much fortitude, a trial which added no small flame but in fact a very strong one to the fire of poverty, and infirmity and loneliness.

And, tell me, what was the case of the blessed Paul? For there is nothing to prevent my making mention of him again. Did he not experience innumerable storms of trial? And in what respect was he injured by them? Was he not crowned with victory all the more in consequence -- because he suffered hunger, because he was consumed with cold and nakedness, because he was often tortured with the scourge, because he was stoned, because he was cast into the sea? But then some one says he was Paul, and called by Christ. Yet Judas also was one of the twelve, and he too was called of Christ; but neither his being of the twelve nor his call profited him, because he had not a mind disposed to virtue. But Paul although struggling with hunger, and at a loss to procure necessary food, and daily undergoing such great sufferings, pursued with great zeal the road which leads to heaven: whereas Judas although he had been called before him, and enjoyed the same advantages as he did, and was initiated in the highest form of Christian life, and partook of the holy table and that most awful of sacred feasts, and received such grace as to be able to raise the dead, and cleanse the lepers, and cast out devils, and often heard discourses concerning poverty, and spent so long a time in the company of Christ Himself, and was entrusted with the money of the poor, so that his passion might be soothed thereby (for he was a thief) even then did not become any better, although he had been favoured with such great condescension. For since Christ knew that he was covetous, and destined to perish on account of his love of money he not only did not demand punishment of him for this at that time, but with a view to softening down his passion he was entrusted with the money of the poor, that having some means of appeasing his greed he might be saved from falling into that appalling gulf of sin, checking the greater evil beforehand by a lesser one.

12. Thus in no case will any one be able to injure a man who does not choose to injure himself: but if a man is not willing to be temperate, and to aid himself from his own resources no one will ever be able to profit him. Therefore also that wonderful history of the Holy Scriptures, as in some lofty, large, and broad picture, has portrayed the lives of the men of old time, extending the narrative from Adam to the coming of Christ: and it exhibits to you both those who are upset, and those who are crowned with victory in the contest, in order that it may instruct you by means of all examples that no one will be able to injure one who is not injured by himself, even if all the world were to kindle a fierce war against him.

For it is not stress of circumstances, nor variation of seasons, nor insults of men in power, nor intrigues besetting you like snow storms, nor a crowd of calamities, nor a promiscuous collection of all the ills to which mankind is subject, which can disturb even slightly the man who is brave, and temperate, and watchful; just as on the contrary the indolent and supine man who is his own betrayer cannot be made better, even with the aid of innumerable ministrations. This at least was made manifest to us by the parable of the two men, of whom the one built his house upon the rock, the other upon the sand: not that we are to think of sand and rock, or of a building of stone, and a roof, or of rivers, and rain, and wild winds, beating against the buildings, but we are to extract virtue and vice as the meaning of these things, and to perceive from them that no one injures a man who does not injure himself.

Therefore neither the rain although driven furiously along, nor the streams dashing against it with much vehemence, nor the wild winds beating against it with a mighty rush, shook the one house in any degree: but it remained undisturbed, unmoved: that you might understand that no trial can agitate the man who does not betray himself. But the house of the other man was easily swept away, not on account of the force of the trials (for in that case the other would have experienced the same fate), but on account of his own folly; for it did not fall because the wind blew upon it, but because it was built upon the sand, that is to say upon indolence and iniquity.

For before that tempest beat upon it, it was weak and ready to fall. For buildings of that kind, even if no one puts any pressure on them, fall to pieces of themselves, the foundation sinking and giving way in every direction. And just as cobwebs part asunder, although no strain is put upon them, but adamant remains unshaken even when it is struck: even so also they who do not injure themselves become stronger, even if they receive innumerable blows; but they who betray themselves, even if there is no one to harass them, fall of themselves, and collapse and perish. For even thus did Judas perish, not only having been unassailed by any trial of this kind, but having actually enjoyed the benefit of much assistance.

13. Would you like me to illustrate this argument in the case of whole nations? What great forethought was bestowed upon the Jewish nation! Was not the whole visible creation arranged with a view to their service? Was not a new and strange method of life introduced among them? For they had not to send down to a market, and so they had the benefit of things which are sold for money without paying any price for them: neither did they cleave furrows nor drag a plough, nor harrow the ground, nor cast in seed, nor had they need of rain and wind, and annual seasons, nor sunshine, nor phases of the moon, nor climate, nor anything of that kind; they prepared no threshing floor, they threshed no grain, they used no winnowing fan for separating the grain from the chaff, they turned no mill-stone, they built no oven, they brought neither wood nor fire into the house, they needed no baker's art, they handled no spade, they sharpened no sickle, they required no other art, I mean of weaving or building or supplying shoes: but the word of God was everything to them.

And they had a table prepared off hand, free of all toil and labour. For such was the nature of the manna; it was new and fresh, nowhere costing them any trouble, nor straining them by labour. And their clothes, and shoes, and even their physical frame forgot their natural infirmity: for the former did not wear out in the course of so long a time nor did their feet swell although they made such long marches. Of physicians, and medicine, and all other concern about that kind of art, there was no mention at all among them; so completely banished was infirmity of every kind: for it is said He brought them out with silver and gold; and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.

But like men who had quitted this world, and were transplanted to another and a better one, even so did they eat and drink, neither did the sun's ray when it waxed hot smite their heads; for the cloud parted them from the fiery beam, hovering all round them, and serving like a portable shelter for the whole body of the people. Neither at night did they need a torch to disperse the darkness, but they had the pillar of fire, a source of unspeakable light, supplying two wants, one by its shining, the other by directing the course of their journey; for it was not only luminous, but also conducted that countless host along the wilderness with more certainty than any human guide.

And they journeyed not only upon land but also upon sea as if it had been dry land; and they made an audacious experiment upon the laws of nature by treading upon that angry sea, marching through it as if it

had been the hard and resisting surface of a rock; and indeed when they placed their feet upon it the element became like solid earth, and gently sloping plains and fields; but when it received their enemies it wrought after the nature of sea; and to the Israelites indeed it served as a chariot, but to their enemies it became a grave; conveying the former across with ease, but drowning the latter with great violence.

And the disorderly flood of water displayed the good order and subordination which marks reasonable and highly intelligent men, fulfilling the part at one time of a guardian, at another of an executioner, and exhibiting these opposites together on one day. What shall one say of the rocks which gave forth streams of water? What of the clouds of birds which covered the whole face of the earth by the number of their carcasses? What of the wonders in Egypt? What of the marvels in the wilderness?

What of the triumphs and bloodless victories? For they subdued those who opposed them like men keeping holiday rather than making war. And they vanquished their own masters without the use of arms; and overcame those who fought with them after they left Egypt by means of singing and music; and what they did was a festival rather than a campaign, a religious ceremony rather than a battle. For all these wonders took place not merely for the purpose of supplying their need, but also that the people might preserve more accurately the doctrine which Moses inculcated of the knowledge of God; and voices proclaiming the presence of their Master were uttered on all sides of them.

For the sea loudly declared this, by becoming a road for them to march upon, and then turning into sea again: and the waters of the Nile uttered this voice when they were converted into the nature of blood; and the frogs, and the great army of locusts, and the caterpillar and blight declared the same thing to all the people; and the wonders in the desert, the manna, the pillar of fire, the cloud, the quails, and all the other incidents served them as a book, and writing which could never be effaced, echoing daily in their memory and resounding in their mind.

Nevertheless after such great and remarkable providence, after all those unspeakable benefits, after such mighty miracles, after care indescribable, after continual teaching, after instruction by means of speech, and admonition by means of deeds, after glorious victories, after extraordinary triumphs, after abundant supply of food, after the plentiful production of water, after the ineffable glory with which they were invested in the eyes of the human race, being ungrateful and senseless they worshipped a calf, and paid reverence to the head of a bull, even when the memorials of God's benefits in Egypt were fresh in their minds, and they were still in actual enjoyment of many more.

14. But the Ninevites, although a barbarous and foreign people who had never participated in any of these benefits, small or great, neither words, nor wonders, nor works, when they saw a man who had been saved from shipwreck, who had never associated with them before, but appeared then for the first time, enter their city and say yet three days and Nineveh shall be overthrown, Jonah 3:4 were so converted and reformed by the mere sound of these words, and putting away their former wickedness, advanced in the direction of virtue by the path of repentance, that they caused the sentence of God to be revoked, and arrested the threatened disturbance of their city, and averted the heaven-sent wrath, and were delivered from every kind of evil. For, we read, God saw that every man turned from his evil way, and was converted to the Lord. Jonah 3:10 How turned? I ask. Although their wickedness was great, their iniquity unspeakable, their moral sores difficult to heal, which was plainly shown by the prophet when he said their wickedness ascended even unto the heaven: Jonah 1:2 indicating by the distance of the place the magnitude of their wickedness; nevertheless such great iniquity which was piled up to such a height as to reach even to the heaven, all this in the course of three days in a brief moment of time through the effect

of a few words which they heard from the mouth of one man and he an unknown shipwrecked stranger they so thoroughly abolished, removed out of sight, and put away, as to have the happiness of hearing the declaration God saw that every one turned from his evil way, and He repented of the evil which God said He would do them. Do you see that he who is temperate and watchful not only suffers no injury at the hands of man, but even turns back Heaven-sent wrath? Whereas he who betrays himself and harms himself by his own doing, even if he receives countless benefits, reaps no great advantage. So, at least, the Jews were not profited by those great miracles, nor on the other hand were the Ninevites harmed by having no share in them; but inasmuch as they were inwardly well-disposed, having laid hold of a slight opportunity they became better, barbarians and foreigners though they were, ignorant of all divine revelation, and dwelling at a distance from Palestine.

15. Again, I ask, was the virtue of the three children corrupted by the troubles which beset them? Whilst they were still young, mere youths, of immature age, did they not undergo that grievous affliction of captivity? Had they not to make a long journey from home, and when they had arrived in the foreign country were they not cut off from fatherland and home and temple, and altar and sacrifices, and offerings, and drink offerings, and even the singing of psalms? For not only were they debarred from their home, but as a consequence from many forms of worship also.

Were they not given up into the hands of barbarians, wolves rather than men? And, most painful calamity of all, when they had been banished into so distant and barbarous a country, and were suffering such a grievous captivity were they not without teacher, without prophets, without ruler? for, it is written, there is no ruler, nor prophet, nor governor, nor place for offering before You and finding mercy. Yea moreover they were cast into the royal palace, as upon some cliff and crag, and a sea full of rocks and reefs, being compelled to sail over that angry sea without a pilot or signal man, or crew, or sails; and they were cooped up in the royal court as in a prison.

For inasmuch as they knew spiritual wisdom, and were superior to worldly things, and despised all human pride and made the wings of their soul soar upwards, they counted their sojourn there as an aggravation of their trouble. For had they been outside the court, and dwelling in a private house they would have enjoyed more independence: but having been cast into that prison (for they deemed the splendour of the palace no better than a prison, no safer than a place of rocks and crags) they were straightway subjected to cruel embarrassment.

For the king commanded them to be partakers of his own table, a luxurious, unclean and profane table, a thing which was forbidden them, and seemed more terrible than death; and they were lonely men hemmed in like lambs among so many wolves. And they were constrained to choose between being consumed by famine or rather led off to execution, and tasting of forbidden meats. What then did these youths do, forlorn as they were, captives, strangers, slaves of those who commanded these things.

They did not consider that this strait or the absolute power of him who possessed the state sufficed to justify their compliance; but they employed every device and expedient to enable them to avoid the sin, although they were abandoned on every side. For they could not influence men by money: how should they, being captives? Nor by friendship and social intercourse? How should they being strangers? Nor could they get the better of them by any exertion of power: how was it possible being slaves?

Nor master them by force of numbers: how could they being only three? Therefore they approached the eunuch who possessed the necessary authority, and persuaded him by their arguments. For when they

saw him fearful and trembling, and in an agony of alarm concerning his own safety, and the dread of death which agitated his soul was intolerable: for I fear said he my lord the king, lest he should see your countenances sadder than the children which are of your sort and so shall you endanger my head to the king, Daniel 1:10 having released him from this fear they persuaded him to grant them the favour.

And inasmuch as they brought to the work all the strength which they had, God also henceforth contributed his strength to it. For it was not God's doing only that they achieved those things for the sake of which they were to receive a reward, but the beginning and starting point was from their own purpose, and having manifested that to be noble and brave, they won for themselves the help of God, and so accomplished their aim.

16. Do you then perceive that if a man does not injure himself, no one else will be able to harm him? Behold at least youthfulness, and captivity and destitution, and removal into a foreign land, and loneliness, and dearth of protectors, and a stern command, and great fear of death assailing the mind of the eunuch, and poverty, and feebleness of numbers, and dwelling in the midst of barbarians, and having enemies for masters, and surrender into the hands of the king himself, and separation from all their kindred, and removal from priests and prophets, and from all others who cared for them, and the cessation of drink offerings and sacrifices, and loss of the temple and psalmody, and yet none of these things harmed them; but they had more renown then than when they enjoyed these things in their native land. And after they had accomplished this task first and had wreathed their brows with the glorious garland of victory, and had kept the law even in a foreign land, and trampled under foot the tyrant's command, and overcome fear of the avenger, and yet received no harm from any quarter, as if they had been quietly living at home and enjoying the benefit of all those things which I mentioned, after they had thus fearlessly accomplished their work they were again summoned to other contests. And again they were the same men; and they were subjected to a more severe trial than the former one, and a furnace was kindled, and they were confronted by the barbarian army in company with the king: and the whole Persian force was set in motion and everything was devised which tended to put deceit or constraint upon them: various kinds of music, and various forms of punishment, and threats, and what they saw on every side of them was alarming, and the words which they heard were more alarming than what they saw; nevertheless inasmuch as they did not betray themselves, but made the most of their own strength, they never sustained any kind of damage: but even won for themselves more glorious crowns of victory than before. For Nabuchadonosor bound them and cast them into the furnace, yet he burnt them not, but rather benefited them, and rendered them more illustrious. And although they were deprived of temple (for I will repeat my former remarks) and altar, and fatherland, and priests and prophets, although they were in a foreign and barbarous country, in the very midst of the furnace, surrounded by all that mighty host, the king himself who wrought this looking on, they set up a glorious trophy, and won a notable victory, having sung that admirable and extraordinary hymn which from that day to this has been sung throughout the world and will continue to be sung to future generations.

Thus then when a man does not injure himself, he cannot possibly be hurt by another: for I will not cease harping constantly upon this saying. For if captivity, and bondage, and loneliness and loss of country and all kindred and death, and burning, and a great army and a savage tyrant could not do any damage to the innate virtue of the three children captives, bondmen, strangers though they were in a foreign land, but the enemy's assault became to them rather the occasion of greater confidence: what shall be able to harm the temperate man? There is nothing, even should he have the whole world in arms against him. But, some one may say, in their case God stood beside them, and plucked them out of the flame. Certainly He did;

and if you will play your part to the best of your power, the help which God supplies will assuredly follow.

17. Nevertheless the reason why I admire those youths, and pronounce them blessed, and enviable, is not because they tramped on the flame, and vanquished the force of the fire: but because they were bound, and cast into the furnace, and delivered to the fire for the sake of true doctrine. For this it was which constituted the completeness of their triumph, and the wreath of victory was placed on their brows as soon as they were cast into the furnace and before the issue of events it began to be weaved for them from the moment that they uttered those words which they spoke with much boldness and freedom of speech to the king when they were brought into his presence.

We have no need to answer you concerning this thing: for our God in Heaven whom we serve is able to rescue us out of the burning fiery furnace: and He will deliver us out of your hands, O King. But if not, be it known unto you, O King, that we will not serve your Gods nor worship the golden image which you have set up. Daniel 3:16-18 After the utterance of these words I proclaimed them conquerors; after these words having grasped the prize of victory, they hastened on to the glorious crown of martyrdom, following up the confession which they made through their words with the confession made through their deeds.

But if when they had been cast into it, the fire had respect for their bodies, and undid their bonds, and suffered them to go down into it without fear, and forgot its natural force, so that the furnace of fire became as a fountain of cool water, this marvel was the effect of God's grace and of the divine wonder-working power. Yet the heroes themselves even before these things took place, as soon as they set foot in the flames had erected their trophy, and won their victory, and put on their crown, and had been proclaimed conquerors both in Heaven and on earth, and so far as they were concerned nothing was wanting for their renown.

What then would you have to say to these things? Have you been driven into exile, and expelled from your country? Behold so also were they. Have you suffered captivity, and become the servant of barbarian masters. Well! This also you will find befell these men. But you have no one present there to regulate your state nor to advise or instruct you? Well! Of attention of this kind these men were destitute. Or you have been bound, burned, put to death? For you can not tell me of anything more painful than these things.

Yet lo! These men having gone through them all, were made more glorious by each one of them, yea more exceedingly illustrious, and increased the store of their treasures in Heaven. And the Jews indeed who had both temple, and altar, and ark and cherubim, and mercy-seat, and veil, and an infinite multitude of priests, and daily services, and morning and evening sacrifices, and continually heard the voices of the prophets, both living and departed, sounding in their ears, and carried about with them the recollection of the wonders which were done in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and all the rest, and turned the story of these things over in their hands, and had them inscribed upon their door posts and enjoyed the benefit at that time of much supernatural power and every other kind of help were yet no wise profited, but rather damaged, having set up idols in the temple itself, and having sacrificed their sons and daughters under trees, and in almost every part of the country in Palestine having offered those unlawful and accursed sacrifices, and perpetrated countless other deeds yet more monstrous.

But these men although in the midst of a barbarous and hostile land, having their occupation in a tyrant's house, deprived of all that care of which I have been speaking, led away to execution, and subjected to burning, not only suffered no harm there from small or great, but became the more illustrious. Knowing then these things, and collecting instances of the like kind from the inspired divine Scriptures (for it is

possible to find many such examples in the case of various other persons) we deem that neither a difficulty arising from seasons or events, nor compulsion and force, nor the arbitrary authority of potentates furnish a sufficient excuse for us when we transgress.

I will now conclude my discourse by repeating what I said at the beginning, that if any one be harmed and injured he certainly suffers this at his own hands, not at the hands of others even if there be countless multitudes injuring and insulting him: so that if he does not suffer this at his own hands, not all the creatures who inhabit the whole earth and sea if they combined to attack him would be able to hurt one who is vigilant and sober in the Lord. Let us then, I beseech you, be sober and vigilant at all times, and let us endure all painful things bravely that we may obtain those everlasting and pure blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power, now and ever throughout all ages. Amen.

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