

Philippians 1:22-26

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life worthy of the Gospel, standing firm in one's faith, and rejoicing in sufferings, as exemplified by Paul's spirit.

Scripture: Job 38:7, Psalm 106:2, Romans 9:3, 1 Corinthians 9:27, 2 Corinthians 6:5, 2 Corinthians 11:23, Galatians 5:4, Philippians 2:27

Topics: "Faith And Sacrifice", "Christian Perseverance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the exemplary spirit of Paul, who faced the choice between departing to be with Christ or remaining in the flesh for the sake of others. Paul's selfless dedication to the progress and joy in the faith of his followers is highlighted, emphasizing the noble and sacrificial nature of his decision. Chrysostom urges the congregation to emulate Paul's unwavering faith and commitment to Christ, even in the face of adversity and persecution, as a testament to their salvation and steadfastness in the Gospel.

Transcript

Then what I shall choose I know not. But I am in a strait between the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; which is very far better: yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide, yea and abide with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith; that your glorying may abound in Jesus Christ in me, through my presence with you again.

Nothing can be more blessed than the spirit of Paul, for the reason that nothing is more noble. We all shudder at death, I am wont to say, some by reason of our many sins, of whom I too am one, others from love of life, and cowardice, of whom may I never be one; for they who are subject to this fear are mere animals. This then, which we all shudder at, he prayed for, and hasted toward Him; saying, To depart is very far better. What do you say? When you are about to change from earth to heaven, and to be with Christ, do you not know what to choose?

Nay, far is this from the spirit of Paul; for if such an offer were made to any one on sure grounds, would he not straightway seize it? Yes, for as it is not ours to depart and be with Christ, neither, if we were able to attain to this, were it ours to remain here. Both are of Paul, and of his spirit. He was confidently persuaded. What? Are you about to be with Christ? And do you say, What I shall choose I know not? And not this only, but do you choose that which is here, to abide in the flesh?

What in the world? Did you not live an exceeding bitter life, in watchings, in shipwrecks, in hunger and thirst, and nakedness, in cares and anxiety? with the weak thou were weak, and for those who were made to stumble you burn. 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 In much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in fastings, in pureness. 2 Corinthians 6:5-6 Five times did you receive forty stripes save one, thrice were you beaten with rods, once were you stoned a night and a day you have been in the deep, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils among false brethren. 2 Corinthians 11:24-26 Did you not, when the whole nation of the Galatians returned to the observance of the law, did you not cry aloud, and say, Whosoever of you would be justified by the law, you are fallen away from grace?

Galatians 5:4 How great was then your grief, and still do you desire this perishing life? Had none of these things befallen you, but had your success, wherever success attended you, been without fear, and full of delight, yet should not thou hasten to some harbor, from fear of the uncertain future? For tell me, what trader, whose vessel is full of untold wealth, when he may run into port, and be at rest, would prefer to be still at sea? What wrestler, when he might be crowned, would prefer to contend?

What boxer, when he might put on his crown, would choose to enter afresh into the contest, and offer his head to wounds? What general is there, who when he might be quit of war with good report, and trophies, and might with the king refresh himself in the palace, would choose still to toil, and to stand in battle array? How then do you, who livest a life so exceeding bitter, wish to remain still here? Did you not say, I am in dread, lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected? 1 Corinthians 9:27 If for no other cause, yet surely for this, you ought to desire your release; were the present full of innumerable goods, yet for the sake of Christ your Desire. oughtest to desire thy release from these things." Field retains it as if necessary. Yet it is not necessary, and is in character quite similar to the additions which are so common in the altered text.--J.A.B.]]-->

Oh that spirit of Paul! nothing was ever like it, nor ever will be! Thou fearest the future, you are compassed by innumerable dreadful things, and will you not be with Christ? No, he answers, and this for Christ's sake, that I may render more loving unto Him those whom I have made his servants, that I may make the plot which I have planted bear much fruit. 1 Corinthians 3:9. Did you not hear me, when I declared that I sought not that which profited myself 1 Corinthians 10:33, but my neighbor? Heardest thou not these words, I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ Romans 9:3, that many might come unto Him? I, who chose that part, shall I not much rather choose this, shall I not with pleasure harm myself by this delay and postponement, that they may be saved?

Who shall utter Your mighty acts, O Lord Psalm 106:2, because You suffered not Paul to be hidden, because You made manifest to the world such a man? All the Angels of God praised You with one accord, when You made the stars Job 38:7, and so too surely when You made the sun, but not so much as when You manifested Paul to the whole world. By this, the earth was made more brilliant than the heaven, for he is brighter than the solar light, he has shot forth more brilliant rays, he has shed abroad more joyous beams. What fruit has this man borne for us! not by making fat our grain, not by nurturing our pomegranates, but by producing and perfecting the fruit of holiness, and when falling to pieces, continually recovering them. For the sun itself can nothing profit fruits that are once decayed, but Paul has called out of their sins those who had manifold decays. And it gives place to the night, but he had mastery over the Devil. Nothing ever subdued him, nothing mastered him. The sun, when it mounts the heavens, darts down its rays, but he, as he rose from beneath, filled not the mid space of heaven and earth with light, but as soon as he opened his mouth, filled the Angels with exceeding joy. For if there is joy in heaven over

one sinner that repents Luke 15:7, while he at his first address caught multitudes, does he not fill with joy the Powers above? What say I? It suffices that Paul should only be named, and the heavens leap for joy. For if when the Israelites went forth out of Egypt, the mountains skipped like rams Psalm 114:4, how great, do you think, was the joy, when men ascended from earth to heaven!

Ver. 24. For this cause to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake.

And what excuse is left to us? oftentimes it happens that a man who possesses a little and poor city, chooses not to depart to another place, preferring his own rest. Paul might depart to Christ, and would not, (Christ whom he so desired, as for his sake to choose even hell,) but still remained in the contest on behalf of man. What excuse shall we have? May we then even make mention of Paul? Look to his deeds. He showed that to depart was better, persuading himself not to grieve: he showed them, that if he remained, he remained for their sake, that it proceeded not from wickedness of those who plotted against him. He subjoined also the reason, that he might secure their belief. For if this is necessary, that is, I shall by all means remain, and I will not remain simply, but will remain with you. For this is the meaning of the word, and I shall abide with, i.e. I shall see you. For what cause? For your progress and joy in the faith. Here too he rouses them, to take heed unto themselves. If, says he, for your sakes I abide, see that you shame not my abiding. For your progress, I have chosen to remain, when I was about to see Christ. I have chosen to remain, because my presence advances both your faith and your joy. What then? Did he remain for the sake of the Philippians only? He stayed not for their sake only; but this he says, that he may show regard to them. And how were they to progress in the faith ? That you may be more strengthened, like young fowl, who need their mother until their feathers are set. This is a proof of his great love. In like sort, we also rouse some of you, when we say, for your sake have I remained, that I may make you good.

Ver. 26. That your glorying may abound in Christ Jesus in me, through my presence with you again.

You see that this explains the word abide with you. Behold his humility. Having said, for your progress, he shows that it was for his own profit too. This also he does, when he writes to the Romans, and says, That is, that we may be comforted together in you. Romans 1:11-12 Having previously said, That I may impart unto you some spiritual gift. And what means, That your glorying may abound? This glorying was, their establishment in the faith. For an upright life is glorying in Christ. And do you say, Your glorying in me, through my presence with you again? Yes, he answers; For what is our hope, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye? 1 Thessalonians 2:19 Because you are our glorying, even as we also are yours 2 Corinthians 1:14, i.e. that I may be able to rejoice in you greatly. How do you say, That your glorying may abound? I may glory the more when you make progress.

Through my presence with you again. What then! Did he come to them? Search ye whether he came.

Ver. 27. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

Do you see, how all that he has said, tends to turn them to this one thing, advancement in virtue? Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ. What means this word only, but that this, and nought else, is the only thing we should seek? If we have this, nothing grievous will befall us. That whether I come and see you, or be absent, I may hear of your state. This he says not as if he had changed his purpose, and no longer meant to visit them. But if this come to pass, he says, even though absent, I am able to rejoice. If, that is, I hear that you stand fast in one spirit, with one soul. This is what above all things unites believers, and maintains love unbroken, that they may be one. John 17:11 For a kingdom divided against itself shall not stand. Mark 3:24 For this cause he everywhere counsels his disciples much to be of one

mind. And Christ says, By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35 That is, do not look with expectation toward me, and therefore slumber, as waiting for my coming, and then, when you see me not coming faint. For even from report I can receive pleasure likewise.

What means, In one spirit? By the same gift of grace, viz. that of concord, and zeal; for the Spirit is one, and he shows it; for then are we able to stand in one soul, also, when we all have one Spirit. See how the word one is used for concord. See how their souls being many are called one. Thus was it of old. For they were all, it is written, of one heart and of one soul. Striving together for the faith of the Gospel. Acts 4:32 Does he say, striving together for each other, as though the faith did strive? For did they wrestle against each other? But help each other, he says, in your striving for the faith of the Gospel.

Ver. 28. And in nothing affrighted by the adversaries; which is for them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation.

Well said he, affrighted, this is what befalls us from our enemies, they only frighten. In nothing therefore, he says, whatever happens, whether dangers -- whether plots. For this is the part of those who stand upright; the enemy can do nought but frighten only. Since it was likely that they should be greatly troubled, when Paul suffered such numberless ills, he says, I exhort you not only not to be shaken, but not to be affrighted, yea rather to despise them heartily; for if you are thus affected, you will straightway, by this means, make evident at once their destruction, and your salvation. For when they see, that with their innumerable plots they are unable to frighten you, they will take it as a proof of their own destruction. For when the persecutors prevail not over the persecuted, the plotters over the objects of their plots, the powerful over those subject to their power, will it not be self-evident, that their perdition is at hand, that their power is nought, that their part is false, that their part is weak? And this, he says, comes from God.

Ver. 29. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer in his behalf.

Again does he teach them moderation of spirit by referring all to God, and saying that sufferings in behalf of Christ are of grace, the gift of grace, a free gift. Be not then ashamed of the gift of grace, for it is more wonderful than the power of raising the dead, or working miracles; for there I am a debtor, but here I have Christ for my debtor. Wherefore ought we not only not to be ashamed, but even to rejoice, in that we have this gift. Virtues he calls gifts, yet not in like sort as other things, for those are entirely of God, but in these we have a share. But since even here the greatest part is of God, he ascribes it entirely to Him, not to overturn our free will, but to make us humble and rightly disposed.

Ver. 30. Having the same conflict which you saw in me; i.e. you have also an example. Here again he raises them up, by showing them that everywhere their conflicts were the same with his, their struggles were the same with his, both severally, and in that they united with him in bearing trials. He said not, you have heard, but ye saw, for he strove too at Philippi. Truly this is an exceeding virtue. Wherefore writing to the Galatians, also he said, Did ye suffer so many things in vain, if it be indeed in vain. Galatians 3:4 And again, writing to the Hebrews, he said, But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you were enlightened, you endured a great conflict of suffering; partly, being made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions. Hebrews 10:32-33 And writing again to Macedonians, that is, to the Thessalonians, he said, For they themselves report concerning us, what manner of entering in we had unto you. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 And again, For yourselves, brethren, know our entering in unto you, that it has not been found vain. 1 Thessalonians 2:1 And in like sort does he witness the same things of them all,

labors and strivings. But such things ye will not now find among us; now it is much if one suffer a little in goods alone. And in respect of their goods also he witnesses great things of them. For to some he says, For you took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions Hebrews 10:34; and to others, For it has been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor Romans 15:26; and your zeal has stirred up very many of them. 2 Corinthians 9:2

Do you see the praises of the men of that time? But we endure not so much as buffetings or blows, neither insult nor loss of our possessions: they were straightway zealous, and all of them strove as martyrs, while we have grown cold in love toward Christ. Again I am constrained to accuse things present; and what shall I do? It is against my will, yet am I constrained. Were I able by my silence of things which are done, by holding my peace, and not mentioning anything, to remove them, it would behoove me to be silent.

But if the contrary comes to pass; if not only are these things not removed by our silence, but even become worse, we are forced to speak. For he who rebukes sinners, if he does nought else, suffers them not to go farther. For there is no such shameless and rash soul, as not to turn, and remit the extravagance of its evil deeds, on hearing any one continually rebuking it. There is, there is indeed, even in the shameless, a small portion of shame. For God has sown in our nature the seeds of shame; for since fear was insufficient to bring us to a right tone, He has also prepared many other ways for avoiding sin.

For example, that a man should be accused, fear of the enacted laws, love of reputation, the desire of forming friendships; for all these are paths to avoid sin. Ofttimes that which was not done for God's sake, was done through shame; that which was not done for God's sake, was done for fear of men. That which we seek for is, in the first place not to sin, and we shall afterwards succeed in doing this for God's sake. Else why did Paul exhort those, who were about to overcome their enemies, not by the fear of God, but on the score of waiting for the vengeance?

For by so doing, he says, you shall heap coals of fire upon his head. Romans 12:20 For this is his first wish, that our virtue should be established. As I said then, there is in us a sense of shame. We have many good natural affections, which lead to virtue; as, for example, all of us men are naturally moved to pity, and no other good thing so inheres in our nature, but this alone. Whence any one might reasonably enquire, wherefore these seeds have above all others been sown in our nature, by which we melt at tears, by which we are turned to compassion, and are ready to pity.

No one is naturally idle, no one is naturally regardless of his reputation, no one is naturally above emulation, but pity lies deep in every one's nature, however fierce and ungentle he be. And what wonder? We pity beasts, such a superabundance of pity lies deep in us. If we see a lion's cub, we are somewhat affected; much more in the case of one of our race. See, how many maimed are there! And this is sufficient to lead us to pity. Nothing so much pleases God as mercy. Wherefore with this the priests were anointed, and the kings, and the prophets, for they had, in oil, a type of God's love to man; and they further learned, that rulers should have a greater share of mercy.

It showed that the Spirit is to come to men through mercy, since God pities and is kind to man. For, You have mercy upon all, it is written, for You can do all things. Wisdom 11:23 For this cause they were anointed with oil: and indeed it was from mercy He appointed the priesthood. And kings were anointed with oil; and would one praise a ruler, he can make mention of nothing so becoming him as mercy. For pity is peculiar to power. Consider that the world was established by pity, and then imitate your Lord.

The mercy of man is toward his neighbor, but the mercy of the Lord is upon all flesh. Sirach 18:13 How upon all flesh? Whether you mean sinners, or just men, we all need the mercy of God; we all enjoy it, be it Paul, be it Peter, or be it John. And listen to their own words; there is no need of mine. For what says this blessed one? But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly. 1 Timothy 1:13 What then, was there afterwards no need of mercy? Hear what he says; But I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10 And of Epaphroditus he says, For indeed he was sick, near unto death; but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, that I might not have sorrow upon sorrow.

Philippians 2:27 And again he says, We were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life. Yea, we ourselves have had the answer of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver. 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 And again, And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion; and the Lord will deliver me. 2 Timothy 4:17-18 And everywhere we shall find him glorying in this, that by mercy he was saved.

Peter, too, became so great, because mercy was shown him. For hear Christ saying to him, Satan has desired to sift you as wheat; and I made supplication for you, that your faith fail not. Luke 22:31-32 John, too, became so great through mercy, and in short all of them. For listen to Christ when He says, You did not choose Me, but I chose you. John 15:16 For we all have need of the mercy of God, as it is written, The mercy of God is upon all flesh. But if these men needed the mercy of God, what should one say of the rest?

For why, tell me, does He make the sun to rise on the evil and the good? Did He withhold the rain for one year, would He not destroy all? And what if He caused overwhelming rain? What if He rained down fire? What if He sent flies? But what do I say? If He were so to do as He once did, would not all perish? If He were to shake the earth, would not all perish? It is now seasonable to say, What is man, that You are mindful of him? Psalm 8:4 Were He only to threaten the earth, all men would become one tomb.

As a drop of water from the bucket, it is written, so are the nations in His sight, they shall be counted as very small dust, as the turning of the balance. Isaiah 40:15 It were as easy for Him to destroy all things, and to make them again, as for us to turn the balance. He then who has such power over us, and sees us sinning every day, and yet punishes us not, how is it but by mercy He bears with us? Since beasts too exist by mercy: You, Lord, will preserve both men and beasts. Psalm 36:7 He looked upon the earth, and filled it with living things. And wherefore? For your sake! And wherefore did He make you? Through His goodness.

There is nothing better than oil. It is the cause of light, and there also it is the cause of light. Then shall your light break forth as the morning Isaiah 58:8, says the Prophet, if you show pity upon your neighbour. And as natural oil contains light, so then does mercy [alms] grant us a great, a marvelous light. Much mention does Paul, too, make of this mercy. In one place, hear him say, Only that we should remember the poor. Galatians 2:10 And in another, If it be meet for me to go also. 1 Corinthians 16:4 And in every place, turn where you will, you see him anxious about this very thing. And again, And let our people also learn to maintain good works. Titus 3:14 And again, These things are good and profitable unto men. Titus 3:8 Listen to a certain other one who says, Alms do deliver from death Tobit 12:9; If You take away pity, Lord, Lord, who shall stand Psalm 130:3; and it is said, If You enter into judgment with your servant Psalm 143:2; A great thing is man; why? and an honorable thing is a merciful man. Proverbs 20:6, Septuagint For this is the true character of man, to be merciful, yea rather the character of God, to show mercy. Do you

see, how strong is the mercy of God? This made all things, this formed the world, this made the angels, it was through mere goodness. For this cause, too, He threatened hell, that we may attain unto the kingdom, and through mercy we do attain unto the kingdom. For wherefore did God, being alone, create so many beings? Was it not through goodness? Was it not through love to men? If you ask why such and such things are, you will always find your answer in Goodness. Let us show mercy to our neighbors, that mercy may be shown to us. These acts of mercy we show not so much to them, as lay up for ourselves against That Day. When the flame of the fire is great, this oil (mercy) is that which quenches the fire, and this brings light to us. Thus by this means shall we be freed from the fire of hell. For whence will He be compassionate and show mercy? Mercy comes of love! Nothing incenses God so much as to be pitiless. A man was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents, and he was moved with compassion, and forgave him. And there were owing to that man from his fellow-servant a hundred pence, and he caught him by the throat. Therefore the Lord delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay what was due. Let us on hearing this be merciful to those who are our debtors in money or in sins. Let no one remember evils, if at least he does not wish to injure himself; for he does not so much aggrrieve the other (as he injures himself). For he either will follow him with vengeance, or he has not done so; but dost you yourself, while not forgiving your neighbor his sins, seek for a kingdom? Lest this should happen to us, let us forgive all, (for it is ourselves that we pardon,) that God may forgive us our sins, and so we may obtain the good things which are in store, through the grace and lovingkindness, etc.

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