

Philippians 3:7-10

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of valuing Christ above all worldly gains and understanding the transformative power of faith and suffering in the Christian journey.

Scripture: Luke 15:18, Romans 3:20, Romans 6:4, 1 Corinthians 9:27, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Philippians 3:7, Philippians 3:12

Topics: "Faith In Christ", "Resurrection Power"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of counting all earthly gains as loss compared to the knowledge of Christ Jesus, highlighting the need to prioritize gaining Christ above all else, even if it means suffering the loss of worldly things. He addresses the heretics who misinterpret Paul's words about the Law, explaining that the Law was a necessary stepping stone to lead humanity to Christ, but true righteousness comes through faith in Christ, not through adherence to the Law. Chrysostom encourages believers to press on in their faith journey, striving to attain the resurrection from the dead through enduring trials and conforming to the likeness of Christ, ultimately emphasizing the need for unwavering faith, perseverance, and a deep understanding of the power of Christ's resurrection.

Transcript

Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I counted all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God.

In our contests with heretics, we must make the attack with minds in vigor, that they may be able to give exact attention. I will therefore begin nay present discourse where the last ended. And what was that? Having enumerated every Jewish boast, both those from his birth, and those that were from choice, he added, Howbeit, what things were gain to me, these have I counted to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may gain Christ. Here the heretics spring to their attack: for even this comes of the wisdom of the Spirit, to suggest to them hopes of victory, that they may undertake the fight.

For if it had been spoken plainly, they would have acted here as they have done in other places, they would have blotted out the words, they would have denied the Scripture, when they were unable at all to

look it in the face. But as in the case of fishes, that which can take them is concealed so that they may swim up, and does not lie open to view; this in truth has come to pass here too. The Law, they say, is called dung by Paul, it is called loss. He says, it was not possible to gain Christ except I suffered this loss. All these things induced the heretics to accept this passage, thinking it to be favorable to them: but when they had taken it, then did he enclose them on all sides with his nets. For what do they themselves say? Lo! The Law is loss, is dung; how then do ye say that it is of God?

But these very words are favorable to the Law, and how they are so, shall be hence manifest. Let us attend accurately to his very words. He said not, The Law is loss: but I counted it loss. But when he spoke of gain, he said not, I counted them, but they were gain. But when he spoke of loss he said, I counted: and this rightly; for the former was naturally so, but the latter became so, from my opinion. What then? Is it not so? says he. It is loss for Christ.

And how has the law become gain? And it was not counted gain, but was so. For consider how great a thing it was, to bring men, brutalized in their nature, to the shape of men. If the law had not been, grace would not have been given. Wherefore? Because it became a sort of bridge; for when it was impossible to mount on high from a state of great abasement, a ladder was formed. But he who has ascended has no longer need of the ladder; yet he does not despise it, but is even grateful to it.

For it has placed him in such a position, as no longer to require it. And yet for this very reason, that he does not require it, it is just that he should acknowledge his obligation, for he could not fly up. And thus is it with the Law, it has led us up on high; wherefore it was gain, but for the future we esteem it loss. How? Not because it is loss, but because grace is far greater. For as a poor man, that was in hunger, as long as he has silver, escapes hunger, but when he finds gold, and it is not allowable to keep both, considers it loss to retain the former, and having thrown it away, takes the gold coin; so also here; not because the silver is loss, for it is not; but because it is impossible to take both at once, but it is necessary to leave one.

Not the Law then is loss, but for a man to cleave to the Law, and desert Christ. Wherefore it is then loss when it leads us away from Christ. But if it sends us on to Him, it is no longer so. For this cause he says loss for Christ; if for Christ, it is not so naturally. But why does not the Law suffer us to come to Christ? For this very cause, he tells us, was it given. And Christ is the fulfilling of the Law, and Christ is the end of the Law. It does suffer us if we will. For Christ is the end of the Law.

He who obeys the Law, leaves the Law itself. It suffers, if we take heed to it, but if we do not take heed, it suffers not. Yea verily, and I have counted all things but loss. Why, he means, do I say this of the Law? Is not the world good? Is not the present life good? But if they draw me away from Christ, I count these things loss. Why? for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord. For when the sun has appeared, it is loss to sit by a candle: so that the loss comes by comparison, by the superiority of the other.

You see that Paul makes a comparison from superiority, not from diversity of kind; for that which is superior, is superior to somewhat of like nature to itself. So that he shows the connection of that knowledge by the same means, by which he draws the superiority from the comparison. For whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them dung, that I may gain Christ. It is not yet manifest, whether he speaks of the Law, for it is likely that he applies it to the things of this world.

For when he says, the things which were gain to me, those I have counted loss for Christ; yea verily, he adds, I count all things loss. Although he said all things, yet it is things present; and if you wish it to be the

Law too, not even so is it insulted. For dung comes from wheat, and the strength of the wheat is the dung, I mean, the chaff. But as the dung was useful in its former state, so that we gather it together with the wheat, and had there been no dung, there would have been no wheat, thus too is it with the Law.

Do you see, how everywhere he calls it loss, not in itself, but for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things but loss. Wherefore again? For the excellency of the knowledge (of Him), for whom I suffered the loss of all things. Again, wherefore too I count all things to be loss, that I may gain Christ.

See how, from every point, he lays hold of Christ as his foundation, and suffers not the Law to be anywhere exposed, or receive a blow, but guards it on every side. And that I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, even that which is of the Law. If he who had righteousness, ran to this other righteousness because his own was nothing, how much rather ought they, who have it not, to run to Him? And he well said, a righteousness of my own, not that which I gained by labor and toil, but that which I found from grace. If then he who was so excellent is saved by grace, much more are you. For since it was likely they would say that the righteousness which comes from toil is the greater, he shows that it is dung in comparison with the other. For otherwise I, who was so excellent in it, would not have cast it away, and run to the other. But what is that other? That which is from the faith of God, i.e. it too is given by God. This is the righteousness of God; this is altogether a gift. And the gifts of God far exceed those worthless good deeds, which are due to our own diligence.

But what is By faith that I may know Him? So then knowledge is through faith, and without faith it is impossible to know Him. Why how? Through it we must know the power of His resurrection. For what reason can demonstrate to us the Resurrection? None, but faith only. For if the resurrection of Christ, who was according to the flesh, is known by faith, how can the generation of the Word of God be comprehended by reasoning? For the resurrection is less than the generation. Why? Because of that there have been many examples, but of this none ever; for many dead arose before Christ, though after their resurrection they died, but no one was ever born of a virgin. If then we must comprehend by faith that which is inferior to the generation according to the flesh, how can that which is far greater, immeasurably and incomparably greater, be comprehended by reason? These things make the righteousness; this must we believe that He was able to do, but how He was able we cannot prove. For from faith is the fellowship of His sufferings. But how? Had we not believed, neither should we have suffered: had we not believed, that if we endure with Him, we shall also reign with Him 2 Timothy 2:12, we should not have endured the sufferings. Both the generation and the resurrection is comprehended by faith. Do you see, that faith must not be absolutely, but through good works; for he especially believes that Christ has risen, who in like sort gives himself up to dangers, who has fellowship with Him in His sufferings. For he has fellowship with Him who rose again, with Him who lives; wherefore he says, And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead. He says, being made conformable unto His death, i.e. having fellowship; whereas He suffered from men, thus I too; wherefore he said, becoming conformed and again in another place, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh. Colossians 1:24 That is, these persecutions and sufferings work the image of His death, for He sought not His own, but the good of many.

Therefore persecutions, and afflictions, and straits, ought not to disturb you, but ought even to make you glad, because through them we are conformed to His death. As if he had said, We are molded to His

likeness; as he says in another place, where he writes, bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. 2 Corinthians 4:10 And this too comes from great faith. For we not only believe that He arose, but that after His resurrection also He has great power: wherefore we travel the same road which He travelled, i.e. we become brethren to Him in this respect also. As if he had said, We become Christ's in this respect. O how great is the dignity of sufferings! We believe that we become conformed to His death through sufferings! For as in baptism, we were buried with the likeness of His death, so here, with His death. There did he rightly say, The likeness of His death Romans 6:4-5, for there we died not entirely, we died not in the flesh, to the body, but to sin. Since then a death is spoken of, and a death; but He indeed died in the body, while we died to sin, and there the Man died which He assumed, who was in our flesh, but here the man of sin; for this cause he says, the likeness of His death, but here, no longer the likeness of His death, but His death itself. For Paul, in his persecutions, no longer died to sin, but in his very body. Wherefore, he endured the same death. If by any means, says he, I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead. What do you say? All men will have a share in that. For we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed 1 Corinthians 15:51, and shall all share not only in the Resurrection, but in incorruption. Some indeed to honor, but others as a means of punishment. If therefore all have a share in the Resurrection, and not in the Resurrection only, but also in incorruption, how said he, If by any means I may attain, as if about to share in some special thing? For this cause, says he, I endure these things, if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead. For if you had not died, you would not arise. What is it then? Some great thing seems here to be hinted at. So great was it, that he dared not openly assert it, but says, If by any means. I have believed in Him and His resurrection, nay, moreover, I suffer for Him, yet I am unable to be confident concerning the Resurrection. What resurrection does he here mention? That which leads to Christ Himself. I said, that I believed in Him, and in the power of His resurrection, and that I have fellowship with His sufferings, and that I become conformed to His death. Yet after all these things I am by no means confident; as he said elsewhere, Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. 1 Corinthians 10:12 And again, I fear lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. 1 Corinthians 9:27

Ver. 12. Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus.

Not that I have already obtained. What means already obtained? He speaks of the prize, but if he who had endured such sufferings, he who was persecuted, he who had in him the dying of the Lord Jesus, was not yet confident about that resurrection, what can we say? What means, if I may apprehend? What he before said, If I may attain to the resurrection of the dead. 2 Corinthians 4:10 If I may apprehend, he says, His resurrection; i.e. if I may be able to endure so great things, if I may be able to imitate Him, if I may be able to become conformed to Him. For example, Christ suffered many things, He was spit upon, He was stricken, was scourged, at last He suffered what things he suffered. This is the entire course. Through all these things it is needful that men should endure the whole contest, and so come to His resurrection. Or he means this, if I am thought worthy to attain the glorious resurrection, which is a matter of confidence, in order to His resurrection. For if I am able to endure all the contests, I shall be able also to have His resurrection, and to rise with glory. For not as yet, says he, am I worthy, but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend. My life is still one of contest, I am still far from the end, I am still distant from the prize, still I run, still I pursue. And He said not, I run, but I pursue. For you know with what eagerness a man pursues. He sees no one, he thrusts aside with great violence all who would interrupt his pursuit. He collects together his mind, and sight, and strength, and soul, and body, looking to nothing else than the prize. But if Paul, who so pursued, who had suffered so many things, yet says, if I may attain, what should we say,

who have relaxed our efforts? Then to show that the thing is of debt, he says, For which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus. I was, he says, of the number of the lost, I gasped for breath, I was near dead, God apprehended me. For He pursued us, when we fled from Him, with all speed. So that he points out all those things; for the words, I was apprehended, show the earnestness of Him who wishes to apprehend us, and our great aversion to Him, our wandering, our flight from Him.

So that we are liable for a vast debt, and no one grieves, no one weeps, no one groans, all having returned to their former state. For as before the appearance of Christ we fled from God, so now also. For we can flee from God, not in place, for He is everywhere; and hear the Prophet, when he says, Whither shall I go from Your Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Your presence? Psalm 139:7 How then can we flee from God? Even as we can become distant from God, even as we can be removed afar off. They that are far from You, it says, shall perish. Psalm 73:27 And again, Have not your iniquities separated between Me and you? Isaiah 59:2 How then comes this removal, how comes this separation? In purpose and soul: for it cannot be in place. For how could one fly from Him who is everywhere present? The sinner then flies. This is what the Scripture says, The wicked flees when no man pursues him. Proverbs 28:1 We eagerly fly from God, although He always pursues us. The Apostle hastened, that he might be near Him. We haste, that we may be far off.

Are not these things then worthy of lamentation? Are they not worthy of tears? Whither do you fly, wretched and miserable man? Whither do you fly from your Life and your Salvation? If you fly from God, with whom will you take refuge? If you fly from the Light, whither will you cast your eyes? If you fly from your Life, whence will you henceforth live? Let us fly from the enemy of our Salvation! Whenever we sin we fly from God, we are as runaways, we depart to a foreign land, as he who consumed his paternal goods and departed into a foreign land, who wasted all his father's substance, and lived in want.

We too have substance from our Father; and what is this? He has freed us from our sins; He has freely given to us power, strength for works of virtue; He has freely given to us readiness, patience; He has freely given to us the Holy Ghost in our baptism; if we waste these things we shall henceforth be in want. For as the sick, as long as they are troubled with fevers, and badness of their juices, are unable to arise or work, or do anything, but if any one sets them free, and brings them to health, if they then work not, this comes from their own sloth; thus too is it with us.

For the disease was heavy and the fever excessive. And we lay not upon a bed, but upon wickedness itself, cast away in crime, as on a dunghill, full of sores, and evil odors, squalid, wasting away, more like ghosts than men. Evil spirits encompassed us about, the Prince of this world deriding and assaulting us; the Only-Begotten Son of God came, sent forth the rays of His Presence, and straightway dispelled the darkness. The King, who is on His Father's throne, came to us, having left His Father's throne.

And when I say having left, think not of any removal, for He fills the heavens and the earth, but I speak of the economy; He came to an enemy, who hated Him, who turned himself away, who could not endure to behold Him, who blasphemed Him every day. He saw him lying on a dunghill, eaten with worms, afflicted with fever and hunger, having every sort of disease; for both fever vexed him, which is evil desire; and inflammation lay heavy on him, this is pride; and gnawing hunger had hold of him, which is covetousness; and putrefying sores on every side, for this is fornication; and blindness of eyes, which is idolatry; and dumbness, and madness, which is to worship stocks and stones, and address them; and great deformity, for wickedness is this, foul to behold, and a most heavy disease.

And he saw us speaking more foolishly than the mad, and calling stocks our God, and stones likewise; He saw us in such great guilt, he did not reject us; was not angry, turned not away, hated us not, for He was a Master, and could not hate His own creation. But what does he do? As a most excellent physician, He prepares medicines of great price, and Himself tastes them first. For He Himself first followed after virtue, and thus gave it to us. And He first gave us the washing, like some antidote, and thus we vomited up all our guilt, and all things took their flight at once, and our inflammation ceased, and our fever was quenched, and our sores were dried up.

For all the evils which are from covetousness, and anger, and all the rest, were dissipated by the Spirit. Our eyes were opened, our ears were opened, our tongue spoke holy words: our soul received strength, our body received such beauty and bloom, as it is like that he who is born a son of God should have from the grace of the Spirit; such glory as it is like that the new-born son of a king should have, nurtured in purple. Alas! How great nobility did He confer on us!

We were born, we were nurtured, why do we again fly from our Benefactor? He then, who has done all these things, gives us strength too, for it was not possible, for a soul bowed down by the disease to endure it, did not He Himself give us the strength. He gave us remission of our sins. We devoured all things. He gave us strength, we wasted it. He gave us grace, we quenched it; and how? We consumed it upon nought that was fitting, we used it for no useful end. These things have destroyed us, and what is more dreadful than all, when we are in a foreign country, and feeding on husks, we say not, Let us return to our Father, and say, We have sinned against Heaven, and against You. Luke 15:18 And that too, when we have so loving a Father, who eagerly desires our return. If we will only return to Him, He does not even bear to call in question our former deeds, only let us quit them. It is sufficient apology with Him, that we have returned. Not only He Himself calls not in question, but if another does so, He stops his mouth, though the accuser be one of good repute. Let us return! How long do we stand afar off? Let us perceive our dishonor, let us be sensible of our vileness. Sin makes us swine, sin brings famine to the soul; let us regain ourselves, and be sober again, and return to our former high birth, that we may obtain the good things which are to come, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom to the Father together with the Holy Spirit be glory, might, honor, now and ever and world without end.

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