

1 Corinthians 15:47

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the transformative power of the resurrection and the call to live a life aligned with heavenly values.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:48-57

Topics: "Resurrection Power", "Christian Living"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the contrast between the earthly and the heavenly, emphasizing the transformation from a life of sin to a life of righteousness through Christ. He explains how Christ's death and resurrection have defeated sin and death, leading to the promise of immortality for believers. Chrysostom urges his audience to live steadfastly, abounding in good works, knowing that their labor in the Lord is not in vain. He warns against complacency and sinful living, highlighting the importance of repentance and striving for righteousness in preparation for the judgment to come.

Transcript

The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

Having said that the natural was first, and the spiritual afterward, he again states another difference, speaking of the earthy and the heavenly. For the first difference was between the present life and that which is to come: but this between that before grace and that after grace. And he stated it with a view to the most excellent way of life, saying --(for to hinder men, as I said, from such confidence in the resurrection as would make them neglectful of their practice and of perfection, from this topic also again he renders them anxious and exhorts to virtue, saying,)-- The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven: calling the whole by the name of man, and naming the one from the better, and the other from the worst part.

1 Corinthians 15:48

As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: so shall they perish and have an end. As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly: so shall they abide immortal and glorious.

What then? Did not This Man too die? He died indeed, but received no injury therefrom, yea rather by this He put an end to death. Do you see how on this part of his subject also, he makes use of death to establish the doctrine of the resurrection? For having, as I said before, the beginning and the head, so he

speaks, doubt not of the whole body.

Moreover also he frames hereby his advice concerning the best way of living, proposing standards of a lofty and severe life and of that which is not such, and bringing forward the principles of both these, of the one Christ, but of the other Adam. Therefore neither did he simply say, of the earth, but earthy, i.e., gross, nailed down to things present: and again with respect to Christ the reverse, the Lord from heaven.

2. But if any should say, therefore the Lord has not a body because He is said to be from heaven, although what is said before is enough to stop their mouths: yet nothing hinders our silencing them from this consideration also: viz. what is, the Lord from heaven? Does he speak of His nature, or His most perfect life? It is I suppose evident to every one that he speaks of His life. Wherefore also he adds,

1 Corinthians 15:49

As we have borne the image of the earthy, i.e., as we have done evil, let us also bear the image of the heavenly, i.e., let us practise all goodness.

But besides this, I would fain ask you, is it of nature that it is said, he that is of the earth, earthy, and, the Lord from heaven? Yea, says one. What then? Was Adam only earthy, or had he also another kind of substance congenial with heavenly and incorporeal beings, which the Scripture calls soul, and spirit? Every one sees that he had this also. Therefore neither was the Lord from above only although He is said to be from heaven, but He had also assumed our flesh. But Paul's meaning is such as this: as we have borne the image of the earthy, i.e., evil deeds, let us also bear the image of the heavenly, the manner of life which is in the heavens. Whereas if he were speaking of nature, the thing needed not exhortation nor advice. So that hence also it is evident that the expression relates to our manner of life.

Wherefore also he introduces the saying in the manner of advice and calls it an image, here too again showing that he is speaking of conduct, not of nature. For therefore are we become earthy, because we have done evil: not because we were originally formed earthy, but because we sinned. For sin came first, and then death and then the sentence, Dust thou art, and unto dust shall you return. Genesis 3:19 Then also entered in the swarm of the passions. For it is not simply the being born of earth that makes a man earthy, (since the Lord also was of this mass and lump,) but the doing earthly things, even as also he is made heavenly by performing things meet for heaven.

But enough: for why need I labor overmuch in the proof of this, when the apostle himself goes on to unfold the thought to us, thus saying,

1 Corinthians 15:50

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Do you see how he explains himself again, relieving us of the trouble? Which he often does: for by flesh he here denotes men's evil deeds, which he has done also elsewhere; as when he says, But you are not in the flesh: and again, So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Romans 8:8-9 So that when he says, Now this I say, he means nothing else than this: therefore said I these things that you may learn that evil deeds conduct not to a kingdom. Thus from the resurrection he straightway introduced also the doctrine of the kingdom also; wherefore also he adds, neither does corruption inherit incorruption, i.e., neither shall wickedness inherit that glory and the enjoyment of the things incorruptible. For in many other places he calls wickedness by this name, saying, He that sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap

corruption. Galatians 6:8 Now if he were speaking of the body and not of evil doing, he would not have said corruption. For he nowhere calls the body corruption, since neither is it corruption, but a thing corruptible: wherefore proceeding to discourse also of it, he calls it not corruption, but corruptible, saying, for this corruptible must put on incorruption.

3. Next, having completed his advice concerning our manner of life, according to his constant custom blending closely subject with subject, he passes again to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body: as follows:

1 Corinthians 15:51

Behold, I tell you a mystery.

It is something awful and ineffable and which all know not, which he is about to speak of: which also indicates the greatness of the honor he confers on them; I mean, his speaking mysteries to them. But what is this?

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. He means as follows: we shall not all die, 'but we shall all be changed,' even those who die not. For they too are mortal. Do not thou therefore because you die, on this account fear, says he, as if you should not rise again: for there are, there are some who shall even escape this, and yet this suffices them not for that resurrection, but even those bodies which die not must be changed and be transformed into incorruption.

1 Corinthians 15:52

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.

After he had discoursed much of the resurrection, then opportunely he points out also its very marvellous character. As thus: not this only, says he, is wonderful that our bodies first turn to corruption, and then are raised; nor that the bodies which rise again after their corruption are better than these present ones; nor that they pass on to a much better state, nor that each receives back his own and none that of another; but that things so many and so great, and surpassing all man's reason and conception, are done in a moment, i.e., in an instant of time: and to show this more clearly, in the twinkling of an eye, says he, while one can wink an eyelid. Further, because he had said a great thing and full of astonishment; that so many and so great results should take place so quickly; he alleges, to prove it, the credibility of Him who performs it; as follows, For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. The expression, we, he uses not of himself, but of them that are then found alive.

1 Corinthians 15:53

For this corruptible must put on incorruption.

Thus lest any, hearing that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, should suppose that our bodies do not rise again; he adds, this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. Now the body is corruptible, the body is mortal: so that the body indeed remains, for it is the body which is put on; but its mortality and corruption vanish away, when immortality and incorruption come upon it. Do not thou therefore question hereafter how it shall live an endless life, now that you have heard of its becoming incorruptible.

1 Corinthians 15:54

4. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Thus, since he was speaking of great and secret things, he again takes prophecy Hosea 13:14 to confirm his word. Death is swallowed up in victory: i.e., utterly; not so much as a fragment of it remains nor a hope of returning, incorruption having consumed corruption.

1 Corinthians 15:55

O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?

Do you see his noble soul? How even as one who is offering sacrifices for victory, having become inspired and seeing already things future as things past, he leaps and tramples upon death fallen at his feet, and shouts a cry of triumph over its head where it lies, exclaiming mightily and saying, O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? It is clean gone, it is perished, it is utterly vanished away, and in vain have you done all those former things. For He not only disarmed death and vanquished it, but even destroyed it, and made it quite cease from being.

1 Corinthians 15:56

Now the sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law.

Do you see how the discourse is of the death of the body? Therefore also of the resurrection of the body. For if these bodies do not rise again, how is death swallowed up? And not this only, but how is the law the power of sin? For that sin indeed is the sting of death, and more bitter than it, and by it has its power, is evident; but how is the law also the power thereof? Because without the law sin was weak, being practised indeed, but not able so entirely to condemn: since although the evil took place, it was not so clearly pointed out. So that it was no small change which the law brought in, first causing us to know sin better, and then enhancing the punishment. And if meaning to check sin it did but develop it more fearfully, this is no charge against the physician, but against the abuse of the remedy. Since even the presence of Christ made the Jews' burden heavier, yet must we not therefore blame it, but while we the more admire it, we must hate them the more, for having been injured by things which ought to have profited them? Yea, to show that it was not the law of itself which gives strength to sin, Christ Himself fulfilled it all and was without sin.

But I would have you consider how from this topic also he confirms the resurrection. For if this were the cause of death, viz. our committing sin, and if Christ came and took away sin, and delivered us from it through baptism, and together with sin put an end also to the law in the transgression of which sin consists, why do you doubt any more of the resurrection? For whence, after all this, is death to prevail? Through the law? Nay, it is done away. Through sin? Nay, it is clean destroyed.

1 Corinthians 15:57

But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the trophy He Himself erected, but the crowns He has caused us also to partake of. And this not of debt, but of mere mercy.

1 Corinthians 15:58

5. Wherefore, brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable.

Just and seasonable is this exhortation after all that had gone before. For nothing so disquiets as the thought that we are buffeted without cause or profit.

Always abounding in the work of the Lord: i.e., in the pure life. And he said not, working that which is good, but abounding; that we might do it abundantly, and might overpass the lists.

Knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

What do you say? Labor again? But followed by crowns, and those above the heavens. For that former labor on man's expulsion from paradise, was the punishment of his transgressions; but this is the ground of the rewards to come. So that it cannot in fact be labor, both on this account and by reason of the great help which it receives from above: which is the cause of his adding also, in the Lord. For the purpose of the former was that we might suffer punishment; but of this, that we might obtain the good things to come.

Let us not therefore sleep, my beloved. For it cannot, it cannot be that any one by sloth should attain to the kingdom of heaven, nor they that live luxuriously and softly. Yea it is a great thing, if straining ourselves and keeping under the body and enduring innumerable labors, we are able to reach those blessings. See ye not how vast this distance between heaven and earth? And how great a conflict is at hand? And how prone a thing to evil man is? And how easily sin besets us? And how many snares are in the way?

Why then do we draw upon ourselves so great cares over and above those of nature, and give ourselves more trouble, and make our burden greater? Is it not enough, our having to care for our food and clothing and houses? Is it not enough to take thought for things necessary? Although even from these Christ withdraws us, saying, Be not anxious for your life what you shall eat, neither for your body what you shall put on. Matthew 6:25 But if one ought not to be anxious for necessary food and clothing, nor for tomorrow; they who bring on so great a mass of rubbish and bury themselves under it, when shall they shall have power to emerge? Have you not heard Paul saying, No soldier on service entangles himself in the affairs of this life? 2 Timothy 2:4 But we even live luxuriously and eat and drink to excess and endure buffeting for external things, but in the things of heaven behave ourselves unmanly. Do you not know that the promise is too high for man? It cannot be that one walking on the ground should ascend the arches of heaven. But we do not even study to live like men, but have become worse than the brutes.

Do you not know before what a tribunal we are to stand? Do ye not consider that both for our words and thoughts an account is demanded of us, and we take no heed even to our actions. For whosoever looks on a woman, says He, to lust after her has already committed adultery with her. Matthew 5:28 And yet they who must be accountable for a mere idle look, refuse not even to lie rotting in the sin itself. Whosoever shall say to his brother, You fool, shall be cast into hell fire. Matthew 5:22 But we even dishonor them with ten thousand reproaches and plot against them craftily. He that loves one that loves him is no better than the heathen: Matthew 5:46-47 but we even envy them. What indulgence then shall we have, when commanded as we are to pass over the old lines, we weave ourselves a thread of life by a yet more scanty measure than theirs? What plea shall deliver us? Who will stand up and help us when we are punished? There is no one; but it must needs be that wailing and weeping and gnashing our teeth, we shall be led away tortured into that rayless gloom, the pangs which no prayer can avert, the punishments which cannot be assuaged.

Wherefore I entreat and beseech, and lay hold of your very knees, that while we have this scant viaticum of life, you would be pricked in your hearts by what has been said, that you would be converted, that you would become better men; that we may not, like that rich man, lament to no purpose in that world after our departure, and continue thenceforth in incurable wailings. For though you should have father or son or friend or any soever who has confidence towards God, none of these shall ever deliver you, your own works having destroyed you. For such is that tribunal: it judges by our actions alone, and in no other way is it possible there to be saved.

And these things I say, not to grieve you nor to throw you into despair, but lest nourished by vain and cold hopes, and placing confidence in this person or that, we should neglect our own proper goodness. For if we be slothful, there will be neither righteous man nor prophet nor apostle nor any one to stand by us; but if we have been earnest, having in sufficiency the plea which comes from each man's own works, we shall depart with confidence, and shall obtain the good things that are laid up for them that love God; to which may we all attain, etc. etc.

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