

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

by St. John Chrysostom

The apostles' trials are an opportunity for God to show His power and disclose His grace, and we must overcome our trials by faith and hope, looking to the things that are not seen.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:9-14, 2 Corinthians 4:16-17

Topics: "Suffering And Grace", "Eternal Glory"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the endurance of hardships and trials faced by believers, emphasizing that despite being pressed on every side, perplexed, pursued, and smitten down, they are not forsaken or destroyed, as they carry the treasure of faith in earthen vessels through God's grace. He highlights the manifestation of God's power and grace in times of suffering, leading to lowliness of mind, increased faith, and preparation for eternal life. Chrysostom urges believers to focus on the eternal glory that outweighs temporary afflictions, encouraging them to endure hardships with faith and hope, knowing that the inward renewal through trials leads to an eternal weight of glory.

Transcript

We are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken.

He still dwells upon proving that the whole work is to be ascribed to the power of God, repressing the highmindedness of those that glory in themselves. 'For not this only,' says he, 'is marvelous, that we keep this treasure in earthen vessels, but that even when enduring ten thousand hardships, and battered on every side, we [still] preserve and lose it not. Yet though there were a vessel of adamant, it would neither have been strong enough to carry so vast a treasure, nor have sufficed against so many machinations; yet, as it is, it both bears it and suffers no harm, through God's grace.' For, we are pressed on every side, says he, but not straitened. What is, on every side?

'In respect of our foes, in respect of our friends, in respect of necessities, in respect of other needs, by them which be hostile, by them of our own household.' Yet not straitened. And see how he speaks contrarieties, that thence also he may show the strength of God. For, we are pressed on every side, yet not straitened, says he; perplexed, yet not unto despair; that is, 'we do not quite fall off. For we are often, indeed, wrong in our calculations, and miss our aim, yet not so as to fall away from what is set before us: for these things are permitted by God for our discipline, not for our defeat.'

2 Corinthians 4:9. Pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed. For these trials do indeed befall, but not the consequences of the trials. And this indeed through the power and Grace of God. In other places indeed he says that these things were permitted in order both to their own humble-mindedness, and to the safety of others: for that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn, 2 Corinthians 12:7 he says: and again, Lest any man should account of me above that which he sees me to be, or hears from me; and in another place again, that we should not trust in ourselves: 2 Corinthians 1:9 here, however, that the power of God might be manifested. Do you see how great the gain of his trials? For it both showed the power of God, and more disclosed His grace. For, says He, My grace is sufficient for you. 2 Corinthians 12:9 It also anointed them unto lowliness of mind, and prepared them for keeping down the rest, and made them to be more hardy. For patience, says he, works probation, and probation hope. Romans 5:4 For they who had fallen into ten thousand dangers and through the hope they had in God had been recovered, were taught to hold by it more and more in all things.

2 Corinthians 4:10

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body.

And what is the dying of the Lord Jesus, which they bare about? Their daily deaths by which also the resurrection was showed. 'For if any believe not,' he says, 'that Jesus died and rose again, beholding us every day die and rise again, let him believe henceforward in the resurrection.' Do you see how he has discovered yet another reason for the trials? What then is this reason? That his life also may be manifested in our body. He says, 'by snatching us out of the perils. So that this which seems a mark of weakness and destitution, this, [I say,] proclaims His resurrection. For His power had not so appeared in our suffering no unpleasantness, as it is now shown in our suffering indeed, but without being overcome.'

2 Corinthians 4:11

For we which live are also delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in us in our mortal flesh.

For every where when he has said any thing obscure, he interprets himself again. So he has done here also, giving a clear interpretation of this which I have cited. 'For therefore, we are delivered,' he says, 'in other words, we bear about His dying that the power of His life may be made manifest, who permits not mortal flesh, though undergoing so great sufferings, to be overcome by the snowstorm of these calamities.' And it may be taken too in another way. How? As he says in another place, If we die with him, we shall also live with Him. 2 Timothy 2:11 'For as we endure His dying now, and choose while living to die for His sake: so also will he choose, when we are dead, to beget us then unto life. For if we from life come into death, He also will from death lead us by the hand into life.'

2 Corinthians 4:12

So then death works in us, but life in you.

Speaking no more of death in the strict sense, but of trials and of rest. 'For we indeed,' he says, 'are in perils and trials, but you in rest; reaping the life which is the fruit of these perils. And we indeed endure the dangerous, but you enjoy the good things; for you undergo not so great trials.'

2 Corinthians 4:13

2. But having the same spirit of faith, according to that which is written, I believed, and therefore did I speak; we also believe, and therefore also we speak; that He which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus. Psalm 116:10

He has reminded us of a Psalm which abounds in heavenly wisdom, and is especially fitted to encourage in dangers. For this saying that just man uttered when he was in great dangers, and from which there was no other possibility of recovery than by the aid of God. Since then kindred circumstances are most effective in comforting, therefore he says, having the same Spirit; that is, 'by the same succor by which he was saved, we also are saved; by the Spirit through which he spoke, we also speak.' Whence he shows, that between the New and Old Covenants great harmony exists, and that the same Spirit wrought in either; and that not we alone are in dangers, but all those of old were so too; and that we must find a remedy through faith and hope, and not seek at once to be released from what is laid upon us. For having showed by arguments the resurrection and the life, and that the danger was not a mark of helplessness or destitution; he thenceforward brings in faith also, and to it commits the whole. But still of this also, he furnishes a proof, the resurrection, namely, of Christ, saying, we also believe, and therefore also we speak. What do we believe? Tell me.

2 Corinthians 4:14-15

That He which raised up Jesus, shall raise up also, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the grace, being multiplied through the many, may cause the thanksgiving to abound unto the glory of God.

Again, he fills them with lofty thoughts, that they may not hold themselves indebted to men, I mean to the false Apostles. For the whole is of God Who wills to bestow upon many, so that the grace may appear the greater. For your sakes, therefore, was the resurrection and all the other things. For He did not these things for the sake of one only, but of all.

2 Corinthians 4:16

Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

How does it decay? Being scourged, being persecuted, suffering ten thousand extremities. Yet the inward man is renewed day by day. How is it renewed? By faith, by hope, by a forward will, finally, by braving those extremities. For in proportion as the body suffers ten thousand things, in the like proportion has the soul goodlier hopes and becomes brighter, like gold refined in the fire more and more. And see how he brings to nothing the sorrows of this present life.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

For the light affliction, he says, which is for the moment, works more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

Having closed the question by a reference to hope, (and, as he said in his Epistle to the Romans, We are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; Romans 8:24 establishing the same point here also,) he sets side by side the things present with the things to come, the momentary with the eternal, the light with

the weighty, the affliction with the glory. And neither is he content with this, but he adds another expression, doubling it and saying, more and more exceedingly. Next he also shows the mode how so great afflictions are light. How then light? While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. So will both this present be light and that future great, if we withdraw ourselves from the things that are seen. For the things that are seen are temporal. 2 Corinthians 4:18 Therefore the afflictions are so too. But the things that are not seen are eternal. Therefore the crowns are so also. And he said not the afflictions are so, but the things that are seen; all of them, whether punishment or rest, so that we should be neither puffed up by the one nor overborne by the other. And therefore when speaking of the things to come, he said not the kingdom is eternal; but, the things which are not seen are eternal, whether they be a kingdom, or again punishment; so as both to alarm by the one and to encourage by the other.

3. Since then the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal, let us look to them. For what excuse even can we have, if we choose the temporal instead of the eternal? For even if the present be pleasurable, yet it is not abiding; while the woe it entails is abiding and irremissible. For what excuse will they have who have been counted worthy of the Spirit and have enjoyed so great a gift, if they become of grovelling mind and fall down to the earth.

For I hear many saying these words worthy of all scorn, 'Give me today and take tomorrow.' 'For,' says one, 'if indeed there be such things there as you affirm, then it is one for one; but if there be no such thing at all, then it is two for nothing.' What can be more lawless than these words? Or what more idle prating? We are discoursing about Heaven and those unspeakable good things; and you bring forth unto us the terms of the race-course, yet art not ashamed nor hide your face, while uttering such things as befit maniacs?

Blushest thou not that art so riveted to the present things? Will you not cease from being distraught and beside yourself, and in youth a dotard? Were Greeks indeed to talk in this way, it were no marvel: but that believers should vent such dotage, of what forgiveness does it admit? For do you hold those immortal hopes in utter suspicion? Do you think these things to be utterly doubtful? And in what are these things deserving of pardon? 'And who has come,' says one, 'and brought back word what is there?'

Of men indeed not any one, but God, more trustworthy than all, has declared these things. But you behold not what is there. Neither do you see God. Will you then deny that there is a God, because you see Him not? 'Yes,' he replies, 'I firmly believe there is a God.' If then an infidel should ask you, 'And who came from Heaven and brought back word of this?' what will you answer? Whence do you know that there is a God? 'From the things that are seen,' he answers, 'from the fair order existing through the whole creation, from its being manifest to all.'

Therefore receive also in the same way the doctrine of the judgment. 'How?' he asks. I will question you, and do thou answer me. Is this God just, and will He render to each according to his deserving? Or, on the contrary, does He will the wicked should live happily and in luxury, and the good in the contrary things? 'By no means,' he answers, 'for man even would not feel thus.' Where then shall they who have done virtuously here, enjoy the things that be good? And where the wicked the opposites, except there is to be a life and retribution hereafter?

Do you see that at present it is one for one, and not two for one. But I will show you, as I proceed, that it is not even one against one, but it shall be for the righteous two for nothing; and for the sinners and these that live here riotously, quite the contrary. For they that have lived riotously here have received not even

one for one; but those who pass their life in virtue two for nothing. For who are at in rest, they that have abused this present life, or they that followed heavenly wisdom?

Perhaps you will say the former, but I prove it of the latter, summoning for my witnesses those very men that have enjoyed these present things; and they will not be so shameless as to deny what I am going to say. For oftentimes have they imprecated curses upon matchmakers and upon the day that their bridal chamber was wreathed, and have proclaimed them happy who have not married. Many too of the young, even when they might have married, have refused for no other reason than the troublesomeness of the thing.

And this I say, not as accusing marriage; for it is honorable; Hebrews 13:4 but those who have used it amiss. Now if they who have lived a married life, often considered their life not worth the living; what shall we say of those who have been swept down into whores' deep pits, and are more slavishly and wretchedly treated than any captive? What of those who have grown rotten in luxury and have enveloped their bodies with a thousand diseases? 'But it is a pleasure to be had in honor.'

Yea, rather, nothing is bitterer than this slavery. For he that seeks vain honor is more servile than any slave, and desirous of pleasing any body; but he that treads it under foot is superior to all, who cares not for the glory that comes from others. 'But the possession of wealth is desirable.' Yet we have often shown that they who are loose from it and have nothing, enjoy greater riches and repose. 'But to be drunken is pleasant.' But who will say this? Surely then if to be without riches is pleasanter than to have them, and not to marry than to marry, and not to seek vainglory than to seek it, and not to live luxuriously than to live so; even in this world they who are not riveted to those present things have the advantage.

And as yet I say not how that the former, even though he be racked with ten thousand tortures, has that good hope to carry him through: while the latter, even though he is in the enjoyment of a thousand delights, has the fear of the future disquieting and confounding his pleasure. For this, too, is no light sort of punishment; nor therefore the contrary, of enjoyment and repose. And besides these there is a third sort. And what is this? In that the things of worldly delight do not even while they are present appear such, being refuted both by nature and time; but the others not only are, but also abide immovable.

Do you see that we shall be able to put not two for nothing only, but three even, and five, and ten, and twenty, and ten thousand for nothing? But that you may learn this same truth by an example also -- the rich man and Lazarus, -- the one enjoyed the things present, the other those to come. Luke 16:19, etc. Seems it then to you to be one and one, to be punished throughout all time, and to be an hungered for a little season? To be diseased in your corruptible body, and to scorch miserably in an undying one?

To be crowned and live in undying delights after that little sickness, and to be endlessly tormented after that short enjoyment of his goods. And who will say this? For what will you we should compare? The quantity? The quality? The rank? The decision of God concerning each? How long will you utter the words of beetles that are for ever wallowing in dung! For these are not the words of reasoning men, to throw away a soul which is so precious for nothing, when there needs little labor to receive heaven.

Will you that I teach you also in another way that there is an awful tribunal there? Open the doors of your conscience, and behold the judge that sits in your heart. Now if you condemn yourself, although a lover of yourself, and cannot refrain from passing a righteous verdict, will not God much rather make great provision for that which is just, and pass that impartial judgment upon all; or will He permit everything to go on loosely and at random? And who will say this? No one; but both Greeks and barbarians, both poets

and philosophers, yea the whole race of men in this agree with us, though differing in particulars , and affirm that there are tribunals of some sort in Hades; so manifest and uncontroverted is the thing.

4. 'And wherefore,' says one, 'does he not punish here?' That He may display that longsuffering of His, and may offer to us the salvation that comes by repentance, and not make our race to be swept away, nor pluck away those who by an excellent change are able to be saved, before that salvation. For if he instantly punished upon the commission of sins, and destroyed, how should Paul have been saved, how should Peter, the chief teachers of the world? How should David have reaped the salvation that came by his repentance? How the Galatians? How many others? For this reason then He neither exacts the penalty from all here, (but only from some out of all,) nor yet there from all, but from one here, and from another there; that He may both rouse those who are exceedingly insensible by means of those whom He punishes, and may cause them to expect the future things by those whom He punishes not. Or do you not see many punished here, as those, for instance, who were buried under the ruins of that tower; Luke 13:4-7 as those whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices; as those who perished by an untimely death among the Corinthians, because they partook unworthily of the mysteries 1 Corinthians 11:30; as Pharaoh; as those of the Jews who were slain by the barbarians; as many others, both then, and now, and continually? And yet others too, having sinned in many things, departed without suffering the penalty here; as the rich man in the story of Lazarus; as many others. Luke 16 Now these things He does, both to arouse those who quite disbelieve in the things to come, and to make those who do believe and are careless more diligent. For God is a righteous Judge, and strong, and longsuffering, and visits not with wrath every day. Psalm 7:11. Septuagint But if we abuse His longsuffering, there will come a time when He will no more be longsuffering even for a little, but will straightway inflict the penalty.

Let us not then, in order that for a single moment (for such is this present life) we may live luxuriously, draw on ourselves punishment through endless ages: but let us toil for a moment, that we may be crowned forever. See ye not that even in worldly things most men act in this manner; and choose a brief toil in order to a long rest, even though the opposite falls out unto them? For in this life indeed there is an equal portion of toils and reward; yea, often, on the contrary, the toil is endless while the fruit is little, or not even a little; but in the case of the kingdom conversely, the labor is little while the pleasure is great and boundless. For consider: the husbandman wearies himself the whole year through, and at the very end of his hope of times misses of the fruit of those many toils. The shipmaster again and the soldier, until extreme old age, are occupied with wars and labors; and oftentimes has each of them departed, the one with the loss of his wealthy cargoes, the other, along with victory, of life itself. What excuse then shall we have, tell me, if in worldly matters indeed we prefer what is laborious in order that we may rest for a little, or not a little even; (for the hope of this is uncertain;) but in spiritual things do the converse of this and draw upon ourselves unutterable punishment for a little sloth? Wherefore I beseech you all, though late, yet still at length to recover from this frenzy. For none shall deliver us in that day; neither brother, nor father, nor child, nor friend, nor neighbor, nor any other: but if our works play us false, all will be over and we must needs perish. How many lamentations did that rich man make, and besought the Patriarch and begged that Lazarus might be sent! But hear what Abraham said to him: There is a gulf between us and you, so that they who wish to go forth cannot pass there. Luke 16:26 How many petitions did those virgins make to their fellows for a little oil! But hear what they also say; Peradventure there will not be enough for you and for us; Matthew 25:9 and none was able to bring them in to the bridal chamber.

Thinking then on these things let us also be careful of that which is our life. For mention whatever toils and bring forward besides whatever punishment; all these combined will be nothing in comparison of the good

things to come. Instance therefore, if you will, fire and steel and wild beasts, and if there be anything sorer than these; but yet these are not even a shadow compared with those torments. For these things when applied in excess become then especially light, making the release speedy ; since the body suffices not unto intensity at once and long continuance of suffering; but both meet together, both prolongation and excess, alike in the good and the grievous. Whilst we have time then, let us come before His presence with confession, Psalm 95:2, Septuagint that in that day we may behold Him gentle and serene, that we may escape altogether those threat-bearing Powers. Do you see not how this world's soldiers who perform the bidding of those in authority drag men about; how they chain, how they scourge them, how they pierce their sides, how they apply torches to their torments, how they dismember them? Yet all these things are but plays and joke unto those punishments. For these punishments are temporal; but there neither the worm dies nor is the fire quenched: for that body of all is incorruptible, which is then to be raised up. But God grant that we may never learn these things by experience; but that these fearful things may never be nearer unto us than in the mention of them ; and that we be not delivered over to those tormentors, but may be hence made wise. How many things shall we then say in accusation of ourselves! How many lamentations shall we utter! How many groans! But it will thenceforth be of no avail. For neither can sailors, when the ship has gone to pieces and has sunk, thereafter be of any service; nor physicians when the patient is departed; but they will often say indeed that so and so ought to have been done; but all is fruitless and in vain. For as long indeed as hopes remain from amendment, one ought both to say and do every thing; but when we have no longer any thing in our power, all being quite ruined, it is to no purpose that all is said and done. For even then Jews will then say, Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord: Matthew 23:39 but they will be able to reap none advantage of this cry towards escaping their punishment; for when they ought to have said it, they said it not. That then this be not the case with us in respect to our life, let us now and from this time reform that we may stand at the tribunal of Christ with all boldness; whereunto may all of us attain through the grace and love toward men of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father, with the Holy Spirit, be glory and might for ever and ever. Amen.

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