

# Homily 29 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

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*Paul's sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth and transformation through faith in Christ, using the history of Israel and the witnesses to the Resurrection to illustrate God's plan.*

**Scripture:** Acts 13:22

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "True Repentance"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of actively engaging with the Scriptures and applying its teachings to our lives. He emphasizes the need for true repentance, confession, almsgiving, justice, and temperance, using examples from the Bible to illustrate how to overcome various passions and sins. Chrysostom urges the congregation to seek spiritual growth and transformation through diligent practice of virtue, warning against complacency and routine in church attendance without genuine fruitfulness. He challenges the listeners to examine their lives, address their weaknesses, and strive for a deeper connection with God through active participation in their faith.

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## Transcript

Acts XIII. 16, 17

Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and you that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought He them out of it.

Behold Barnabas giving place to Paul-- how should it be otherwise?-- to him whom he brought from Tarsus; just as we find John on all occasions giving way to Peter: and yet Barnabas was more looked up to than Paul: true, but they had an eye only to the common advantage. Then Paul stood up, it says -- this was a custom of the Jews-- and beckoned with his hand. And see how he prepares the way beforehand for his discourse: having first praised them, and showed his great regard for them in the words, you that fear God, he so begins his discourse.

And he says not, You proselytes, since it was a term of disadvantage. The God of this people chose our fathers: and the people -- See, he calls God Himself their God peculiarly, Who is the common God of men; and shows how great from the first were His benefits, just as Stephen does. This they do to teach them, that now also God has acted after the same custom, in sending His own Son; Luke 20:13: as (Christ) Himself (does) in the parable of the vineyard -- And the people, he says, He exalted when it sojourned in

the land of Egypt-- and yet the contrary was the case: true, but they increased in numbers; moreover, the miracles were wrought on their account: and with an high arm brought He them out of it.

Of these things (the wonders) which were done in Egypt, the prophets are continually making mention. And observe, how he passes over the times of their calamities, and nowhere brings forward their faults, but only God's kindness, leaving those for themselves to think over. And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness. Acts 13:18 Then the settlement. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He divided their land to them by lot.

Acts 13:19 And the time was long; four hundred and fifty years. And after that He gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. Acts 13:20 Here he shows that God varied His dispensations towards them (at various times). And afterward they desired a king: and (still) not a word of their ingratitude, but throughout he speaks of the kindness of God. And God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

Acts 13:21 And when he had removed him, He raised up unto them David to be their king: to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, which shall fulfil all My will. Of this man's seed has God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus. (v. 22, 23.) This was no small thing that Christ should be from David. Then John bears witness to this: When John had first preached before His coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom do you think that I am? I am not He. But, behold, there comes one after me, whose shoes of His feet I am not worthy to loose. (v. 24, 25.) And John too not merely bears witness (to the fact), but (does it in such sort that) when men were bringing the glory to him, he declines it: for it is one thing (not to affect) an honor which nobody thinks of offering; and another, to reject it when all men are ready to give it, and not only to reject it, but to do so with such humility.

Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you fears God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain. Acts 13:26-28 On all occasions we find them making a great point of showing this, that the blessing is peculiarly theirs, that they may not flee (from Christ), as thinking they had nothing to do with Him, because they had crucified Him.

Because they knew Him not, he says: so that the sin was one of ignorance. See how he gently makes an apology even on behalf of those (crucifiers). And not only this: but he adds also, that thus it must needs be. And how so? By condemning Him, they fulfilled the voices of the prophets. Then again from the Scriptures. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. But God raised Him from the dead. And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people -- Acts 13:29-31 that He rose again.

And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God has fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, You are My Son, this day have I begotten You. And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he says also in another Psalm, You shall not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but He, Whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Acts 13:32-39 Observe how Paul here is more vehement in his discourse: we nowhere find Peter saying this.

Then too he adds the terrifying words: Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. (v. 40, 41.)

(a) Observe how he twines (the thread of) his discourse (alternately) from things present, from the prophets. Thus, from (this man's) seed according to the promise -- Acts 13:23: (c) the name of David was dear to them; well then, is it not (a thing to be desired) that a son of his, he says, should be their king?-- (b) then he adduces John: then again the prophets, where he says, By condemning they fulfilled, and again, All that was written: then the Apostles as witnesses of the Resurrection: then David bearing witness.

For neither the Old Testament proofs seemed so cogent when taken by themselves as they are in this way, nor yet the latter testimonies apart from the former: wherefore he makes them mutually confirm each other. Men and brethren, etc. Acts 13:26 For since they were possessed by fear, as having slain Him, and conscience made them aliens (the Apostles), discourse not with them as unto Christicides, neither as putting into their hands a good which was not theirs, but one peculiarly their own. (d) For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers: as much as to say, not you, but they: and again, apologizing even for those, Because they knew Him not, and the voices of the Prophets which are read every sabbath day, in condemning Him, they fulfilled them.

A great charge it is against them that they continually hearing heeded not. But no marvel: for what was said above concerning Egypt and the wilderness, was enough to show their ingratitude. And observe how this Apostle also, as one moved by the Spirit Himself, continually preaches the Passion, the Burial. (g) Having taken Him down from the tree. Observe, what a great point they make of this. He speaks of the manner of His death. Moreover they bring Pilate (conspicuously) forward, that (the fact of) the Passion may be proved by the mention of the tribunal (by which he was condemned), but at the same time, for the greater impeachment of those (His crucifiers), seeing they delivered Him up to an alien.

And he does not say, They made a complaint (against Him), (■ ν■τυχον, al. ■ ντυγγ■νει) but, They desired, though having found no cause of death (in Him), that He should be slain. (e) Who appeared, he says, for many days to them that came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. Romans 11:2 Instead of \*\* he says, Who are His witnesses unto the people, to wit, The men which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. Then he produces David and Esaias bearing witness. The faithful (mercies), the abiding (mercies), those which never perish. (h) Paul loved them exceedingly.

And observe, he does not enlarge on the ingratitude of the fathers, but puts before them what they must fear. For Stephen indeed with good reason does this, seeing he was about to be put to death, not teaching them; and showing them, that the Law is even now on the point of being abolished: Acts 7 but not so Paul; he does but threaten and put them in fear. (f) And he does not dwell long on these, as taking it for granted that the word is of course believed; nor enlarge upon the greatness of their punishment, and assail that which they affectionately love, by showing the Law about to be cast out: but dwells upon that which is for

their good (telling them), that great shall be the blessings for them being obedient, and great the evils being disobedient.

But let us look over again what has been said. You men of Israel, etc. Acts 13:16-21 The Promise then, he says, the fathers received; you, the reality. (j) And observe, he nowhere mentions right deeds of theirs, but (only) benefits on God's part: He chose: Exalted: Suffered their manners: these are no matters of praise to them: They asked, He gave. But David he does praise (and him) only, because from him the Christ was to come. I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, which shall fulfil all My will. Acts 13:22 (i) Observe also; it is with praise (that he says of him), David after that he had served the will of God: just as Peter -- seeing it was then the beginning of the Gospel-- making mention of him, said, Let it be permitted me to speak freely of the patriarch David. Acts 2:29 Also, he does not say, Died, but, was added to his fathers. (k) Of this man's seed, etc. When John, he says, had first preached before His entry -- by entry he means the Incarnation -- the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. Acts 13:23-25 Thus also John, writing his Gospel, continually has recourse to him: for his name was much thought of in all parts of the world. And observe, he does not say it Of this man's seed, etc. from himself, but brings John's testimony.

Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham-- he also calls them after their father -- unto you was the word of this salvation sent. Acts 13:26 Here the expression, Unto you, does not mean, Unto (you) Jews, but it gives them a right to sever themselves from those who dared that murder. And what he adds, shows this plainly. For, he says, they that dwell at Jerusalem, because they know Him not. Acts 13:27 And how, you will say, could they be ignorant, with John to tell them?

What marvel, seeing they were so, with the prophets continually crying aloud to them? Then follows another charge: And having found no cause of death in Him: in which ignorance had nothing to do. For let us put the case, that they did not hold Him to be the Christ: why did they also kill Him? And they desired of Pilate, he says, that He should be slain. Acts 13:28 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him. Acts 13:29 Observe what a point he makes of showing that the (whole) thing was a (Divine) Dispensation.

See, by saying what did they persuade men? (By telling them) that He was crucified? Why, what could be less persuasive than this? That He was buried -- by them to whom it was promised that He should be salvation? That He who was buried forgives sins, yea, more than the Law (has power to do)? And (observe), he does not say, From which you would not but, from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses. Acts 13:39 Every one, he says: be who he may. For those (ordinances) are of no use, unless there be some benefit (accruing therefrom.)

This is why he brings in forgiveness later: and shows it to be greater, when, the thing being (otherwise) impossible, yet this is effected. Who are His witnesses, he says, unto the people -- the people that slew Him. Who would never have been so, were they not strengthened by a Divine Power: for they would never have borne such witness to bloodthirsty men, to the very persons that killed Him. But, He has raised up Jesus again: This day, he says, I have begotten you. Acts 13:33 Aye, upon this the rest follows of course.

Why did he not allege some text by which they would be persuaded that forgiveness of sins is by Him? Because the great point with them was to show, in the first place, that He was risen: this being acknowledged, the other was unquestionable. Through this man, nay more, by Him, is remission of sins. Acts 13:38 And besides, he wished to bring them to a longing desire of this great thing. Well then, His death was not dereliction, but fulfilling of Prophecy.-- For the rest, he puts them in mind of historical facts,

wherein they through ignorance suffered evils without number.

And this he hints in the conclusion, saying, Look, you despisers, and behold. And observe how, this being harsh, he cuts it short. Let not that, he says, come upon you, which was spoken for the others, that I work a work which you shall in no wise believe, though one declare it unto you. Acts 13:41 Marvel not that it seems incredible: this very thing was foretold from the first -- (that it would not be believed). Behold, you despisers, as regards those who disbelieve in the Resurrection.

This too might with reason be said to us: Behold you despisers. For the Church indeed is in very evil case, although you think her affairs to be in peace. For the mischief of it is, that while we labor under so many evils, we do not even know that we have any. What do you say? We are in possession of our Churches, our Church property, and all the rest, the services are held, the congregation comes to Church every day. True, but one is not to judge of the state of a Church from these things.

From what then? Whether there be piety, whether we return home with profit each day, whether reaping some fruit, be it much or little, whether we do it not merely of routine and for the formal acquittance of a duty (■ φοσιο■μενοι). Who has become a better man by attending (daily) service for a whole month? That is the point: otherwise the very thing which seems to bespeak a flourishing condition (of the Church,) does in fact bespeak an ill condition, when all this is done, and nothing comes of it.

Would to God (that were all), that nothing comes of it: but indeed, as things are, it turns out even for the worse. What fruit do you get from your services? Surely if you were getting any profit by them, you ought to have been long leading the life of true wisdom (τ■ς φιλοσοφ■ας), with so many Prophets twice in every week discoursing to you, so many Apostles, and Evangelists, all setting forth the doctrines of salvation, and placing before you with much exactness that which can form the character aright.

The soldier by going to his drill, becomes more perfect in his tactics: the wrestler by frequenting the gymnastic ground becomes more skilful in wrestling: the physician by attending on his teacher becomes more accurate, and knows more, and learns more: and thou -- what have you gained? I speak not to those who have been members of the Church only a year, but to those who from their earliest age have been attending the services. Think you that to be religious is to be constant in Church-going (παραβ■λλειν τ■ συν■ξει)?

This is nothing, unless we reap some fruit for ourselves: if (from the gathering together in Church) we do not gather (συν■γωμεν) something for ourselves, it were better to remain at home. For our forefathers built the Churches for us, not just to bring us together from our private houses and show us one to another: since this could have been done also in a market-place, and in baths, and in a public procession:-- but to bring together learners and teachers, and make the one better by means of the other.

With us it has all become mere customary routine, and formal discharge of a duty: a thing we are used to; that is all. Easter comes, and then great the stir, great the hubbub, and crowding of -- I had rather not call them human beings, for their behavior is not commonly human. Easter goes, the tumult abates, but then the quiet which succeeds is again fruitless of good. Vigils, and holy hymn-singing. -- And what is got by these? Nay, it is all the worse. Many do so merely out of vanity.

Think how sick at heart it must make me, to see it all like (so much water) poured into a cask with holes in it! But you will assuredly say to me, We know the Scriptures. And what of that? If you exemplify the Scriptures by your works, that is the gain, that the profit. The Church is a dyer's vat: if time after time

perpetually ye go hence without receiving any dye, what is the use of coming here continually? Why, the mischief is all the greater. Who (of you) has added ought to the customary practices he received from his fathers?

For example: such an one has a custom of observing the memorial of his mother, or his wife, or his child: this he does whether he be told or whether he be not told by us, drawn to it by force of habit and conscience. Does this displease you, you ask? God forbid: on the contrary, I am glad of it with all my heart: only, I would wish that he had gained some fruit also from our discoursing, and that the effect which habit has, were also the effect as regards us (your teachers)-- the superinducing of another habit.

Else why do I weary myself in vain, and talk uselessly, if you are to remain in the same state, if the Church services work no good in you? Nay, you will say, we pray. And what of that? Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven. Matthew 7:21 Many a time have I determined to hold my peace, seeing no benefit accruing to you from my words; or perhaps there does accrue some, but I, through insatiableness and strong desire, am affected in the same way as those that are mad after riches.

For just as they, however much they may get, think they have nothing; so I, because I ardently desire your salvation, until I see you to have made good progress, think nothing done, because of my exceeding eager desire that you should arrive at the very summit. I would that this were the case, and that my eagerness were in fault, not your sloth: but I fear I conjecture but too rightly. For you must needs be persuaded, that if any benefit had arisen in all this length of time, we ought ere now to have done speaking.

In such case, there were no need to you of words, since both in those already spoken there had been enough said for you, and you would be yourselves able to correct others. But the fact, that there is still a necessity of our discoursing to you, only shows, that matters with you are not in a state of high perfection. Then what would we have to be brought about? For one must not merely find fault. I beseech and entreat you not to think it enough to have invaded the Church, but that you also withdraw hence, having taken somewhat, some medicine, for the curing of your own maladies: and, if not from us, at any rate from the Scriptures, you have the remedies suitable for each.

For instance, is any passionate? Let him attend to the Scripture-readings, and he will of a surety find such either in history or exhortation. In exhortation, when it is said, The sway of his fury is his destruction Sirach 1:22; and, A passionate man is not seemly Proverbs 11:25; and such like: and again, A man full of words shall not prosper Psalm 140:11; and Christ again, He that is angry with his brother without a cause Matthew 5:22; and again the Prophet, Be angry, and sin not Psalm 4:4; and, Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce.

Genesis 49:7 And in histories, as when you hear of Pharaoh filled with much wrath, and the Assyrian. Again, is any one taken captive by love of money? Let him hear, that There is not a more wicked thing than a covetous man: for this man sets even his own soul for sale Sirach 9:9; and how Christ says, You cannot serve God and mammon Matthew 6:24; and the Apostle, that the love of money is a root of all evils 1 Timothy 6:10; and the Prophet, If riches flow in, set not your heart upon them Psalm 62:10; and many other like sayings.

And from the histories you hear of Gehazi, Judas, the chief scribes, and that gifts blind the eyes of the wise. Deuteronomy 16:19 Is another proud? Let him hear that God resists the proud James 4:6; and, Pride

is the beginning of sin Sirach 10:14 and, Every one that has a high heart, is impure before the Lord. Proverbs 16:5 And in the histories, the devil, and all the rest. In a word, since it is impossible to recount all, let each choose out from the Divine Scriptures the remedies for his own hurts.

So wash out, if not the whole at once, a part at any rate, part today, and part tomorrow, and then the whole. And with regard to repentance too, and confession, and almsgiving, and justice also, and temperance, and all other things, you will find many examples. For all these things, says the Apostle, were written for our admonition. 1 Corinthians 10:11 If then Scripture in all its discoursing is for our admonition, let us attend to it as we ought. Why do we deceive ourselves in vain?

I fear it may be said of us also, that our days have fallen short in vanity, and our years with haste. Psalm 77:33 Who from hearing us has given up the theatres? Who has given up his covetousness? Who has become more ready for almsgiving? I would wish to know this, not for the sake of vainglory, but that I may be inspirited to more zeal, seeing the fruit of my labors to be clearly evident. But as things now are, how shall I put my hand to the work, when I see that for all the rain of doctrine pouring down upon you shower after shower, still our crops remain at the same measure, and the plants have waxed none the higher?

Anon the time of threshing is at hand (and) He with the fan. I fear me, lest it be all stubble: I fear, lest we be all cast into the furnace. The summer is past, the winter has come: we sit, both young and old, taken captive by our own evil passions. Tell not me, I do not commit fornication: for what are you the better, if though thou be no fornicator you are covetous? It matters not to the sparrow caught in the snare that he is not held tight in every part, but only by the foot: he is a lost bird for all that; in the snare he is, and it profits him not that he has his wings free, so long as his foot is held tight.

Just so, you are caught, not by fornication, but by love of money: but caught you are nevertheless; and the point is, not how you are caught, but that you are caught. Let not the young man say, I am no money-lover: well, but perchance you are a fornicator: and then again what are you the better? For the fact is, it is not possible for all the passions to set upon us at one and the same time of life: they are divided and marked off, and that, through the mercy of God, that they may not by assailing us all at once become insuperable, and so our wrestling with them be made more difficult.

What wretched inertness it shows, not to be able to conquer our passions even when taken one by one, but to be defeated at each several period of our life, and to take credit to ourselves for those which (let us alone) not in consequence of our own hearty endeavors, but merely because, by reason of the time of life, they are dormant? Look at the chariot-drivers, do you not see how exceedingly careful and strict they are with themselves in their training-practice, their labors, their diet, and all the rest, that they may not be thrown down from their chariots, and dragged along (by the reins)?-- See what a thing art is.

Often even a strong man cannot master a single horse: but a mere boy who has learned the art shall often take the pair in hand, and with ease lead them and drive them where he will. Nay, in India it is said that a huge monster of an elephant shall yield to a stripling of fifteen, who manages him with the utmost ease. To what purpose have I said all this? To show that, if by dint of study and practice we can throttle into submission (■ γγόμεν) even elephants and wild horses, much more the passions within us.

Whence is it that throughout life we continually fail (in every encounter)? We have never practised this art: never in a time of leisure when there is no contest, talked over with ourselves what shall be useful for us. We are never to be seen in our place on the chariot, until the time for the contest is actually come. Hence the ridiculous figure we make there. Have I not often said, Let us practise ourselves upon those of our own

family before the time of trial? With our servants (παῖδες) at home we are often exasperated, let us there quell our anger, that in our intercourse with our friends we may come to have it easily under control.

And so, in the case of all the other passions, if we practised ourselves beforehand, we should not make a ridiculous figure in the contests themselves. But now we have our implements and our exercises and our trainings for other things, for arts and feats of the palæstra, but for virtue nothing of the sort. The husbandman would not venture to meddle with a vine, unless he had first been practised in the culture of it: nor the pilot to sit by the helm, unless he had first practised himself well at it: but we, in all respects unpractised, wish for the first prizes!

It were good to be silent, good to have no communication with any man in act or word, until we were able to charm (κατεπείθειν) the wild beast that is within us. The wild beast, I say: for indeed is it not worse than the attack of any wild beast, when wrath and lust make war upon us? Beware of invading the market-place (Μεμβλήσις ἐς ἄγορην) with these beasts, until thou have got the muzzle well upon their mouths, until thou have tamed and made them tractable. Those who lead about their tame lions in the market-place, do you not see what a gain they make of it, what admiration they get, because in the irrational beast they have succeeded in producing such tameness -- but, should the lion suddenly take a savage fit, how he scares all the people out of the market-place, and then both the man that leads him about is himself in danger, and if there be loss of life to others, it is his doing?

Well then do thou also first tame your lion, and so lead him about, not for the purpose of receiving money, but that you may acquire a gain, to which there is none equal. For there is nothing equal to gentleness, which both to those that possess it, and to those who are its objects, is exceeding useful. This then let us follow after, that having kept in the way of virtue, and with all diligence finished our course therein, we may be enabled to attain unto the good things eternal, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost together be glory, might, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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