

Homily 4 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 4 on Ephesians emphasizes the importance of spiritual life, the nature of spiritual death, and the call to good works and mercy.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Gods Mercy"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the transformation from spiritual death to life through God's mercy and love, contrasting the consequences of corporal and spiritual dying. He emphasizes the influence of the Devil in leading people astray and the importance of resisting disobedience. Chrysostom highlights the richness of God's mercy and love, demonstrated through the salvation offered to those who were once dead in sin. He stresses the necessity of faith, grace, and good works in the Christian journey, urging believers to walk in the virtues prepared by God.

Transcript

Chapter II. Verses 1-3

And you did He quicken, when you were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein aforetime ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived, in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh, and of the mind; and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest.

There is, we know, a corporal, and there is also a spiritual, dying. Of the first it is no crime to partake, nor is there any peril in it, inasmuch as there is no blame attached to it, for it is a matter of nature, not of deliberate choice. It had its origin in the transgression of the first-created man, and thenceforward in its issue it passed into a nature, and, at all events, will quickly be brought to a termination; whereas this spiritual dying, being a matter of deliberate choice, has criminality, and has no termination. Observe then how Paul, having already shown how exceedingly great a thing it is, in so much that to heal a deadened soul is a far greater thing than to raise the dead, so now again lays it down in all its real greatness.

And you, says he when you were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein aforetime ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience. You observe the gentleness of Paul, and how on all occasions he encourages the hearer, not bearing too hard upon him. For whereas he had said, You have arrived at the

very last degree of wickedness, (for such is the meaning of becoming dead,) that he may not excessively distress them, (because men are put to shame when their former misdeeds are brought forward, cancelled though they be, and no longer attended with danger,) he gives them, as it were, an accomplice, that it may not be supposed that the work is all their own, and that accomplice a powerful one. And who then is this? The Devil. He does much the same also in the Epistle to the Corinthians, where, after saying, Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and after enumerating all the other vices, and adding in conclusion, shall inherit the kingdom of God; he then adds, and such were some of you; he does not say absolutely, you were, but some of you were, that is, thus in some sort were ye. Here the heretics attack us. They tell us that these expressions (prince of all the power of the air, etc.) are used with reference to God, and letting loose their unbridled tongue, they fit these things to God, which belong to the Devil alone. How then are we to put them to silence? By the very words they themselves use; for, if He is righteous, as they themselves allow, and yet has done these things, this is no longer the act of a righteous being, but rather of a being most unrighteous and corrupted; and corrupted God cannot possibly be.

Further, why does he call the Devil the prince of the world? Because nearly the whole human race has surrendered itself to him and all are willingly and of deliberate choice his slaves. And to Christ, though He promises unnumbered blessings, not any one so much as gives any heed; while to the Devil, though promising nothing of the sort, but sending them on to hell, all yield themselves. His kingdom then is in this world, and he has, with few exceptions, more subjects and more obedient subjects than God, in consequence of our indolence.

According to the power, says he, of the air, of the spirit.

Here again he means, that Satan occupies the space under Heaven, and that the incorporeal powers are spirits of the air, under his operation. For that his kingdom is of this age, i.e., will cease with the present age, hear what he says at the end of the Epistle; Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this darkness; Ephesians 6:12 where, lest when you hear of world rulers you should therefore say that the Devil is uncreated, he elsewhere Galatians 1:4 calls a perverse time, an evil world, not of the creatures. For he seems to me, having had dominion beneath the sky, not to have fallen from his dominion, even after his transgression.

That now works, he says, in the sons of disobedience.

You observe that it is not by force, nor by compulsion, but by persuasion, he wins us over; disobedience or untractableness is his word, as though one were to say, by guile and persuasion he draws all his votaries to himself. And not only does he give them a word of encouragement by telling them they have an associate, but also by ranking himself with them, for he says,

Among whom we also all once lived.

All, because he cannot say that any one is excepted.

In the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

That is, having no spiritual affections. Yet, lest he should slander the flesh, or lest it should be supposed that the transgression was not great, observe how he guards the matter,

Doing, he says, the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

That is, the pleasurable passions. We provoked God to anger, he says, we provoked Him to wrath, we were wrath, and nothing else. For as he who is a child of man is by nature man, so also were we children of wrath even as others; i.e., no one was free, but we all did things worthy of wrath.

Ver. 4. But God, being rich in mercy.

Not merely merciful, but rich in mercy; as it is said also in another place; In the multitude of your mercies. Psalm 69:17 And again, Have mercy upon me, according to the multitude of your tender mercies. Psalm 51:1

Ver. 4. For His great love, wherewith He loved us.

Why did He love us? For these things are not deserving of love, but of the sorest wrath, and punishment. And thus it was of great mercy.

Ver. 5. Even when we were dead through our trespasses He quickened us together with Christ.

Again is Christ introduced, and it is a matter well worthy of our belief, because if the Firstfruits live, so do we also. He has quickened both Him, and us. Do you see that all this is said of Christ incarnate? Beholdest thou the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe? Ephesians 1:19 Them that were dead, them that were children of wrath, them has he quickened. Beholdest thou the hope of his calling?

Ver. 6. He raised us up with Him and made us sit with Him.

Do you behold the glory of His inheritance? That He has raised us up together, is plain. But that He has made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, how does this hold? It holds as truly, as that He has raised us together. For as yet no one is actually raised, excepting that inasmuch as as the Head has risen, we also are raised, just as in the history, when Jacob did obeisance, his wife also did obeisance to Joseph. Genesis 37:9-10 And so in the same way has He also made us to sit with Him. For since the Head sits, the body sits also with it, and therefore he adds in Christ Jesus. Or again, if it means, not this, it means that by the laver of Baptism He has raised us up with Him. How then in that case has He made us to sit with Him? Because, says he, if we suffer we shall also reign with Him, 2 Timothy 2:12 if we be dead with Him we shall also live with Him. Truly there is need of the Spirit and of revelation, in order to understand the depth of these mysteries. And then that you may have no distrust about the matter, observe what he adds further.

Ver. 7. That in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in kindness towards us, in Christ Jesus.

Whereas he had been speaking of the things which concerned Christ, and these might be nothing to us, (for what, it might be said, is it to us, that He rose) therefore he shows that they do moreover extend to us, inasmuch as He is made one with us. Only that our concern in the matter he states separately. Us, says he, who were dead through our trespasses He raised up with Him, and made us sit with Him. Wherefore, as I was saying, be not unbelieving, take the demonstration he adduces both from former things, and from His Headship, and also from His desire to show forth His goodness. For how will He show it, unless this come to pass? And He will show it in the ages to come. What? That the blessings are both great, and more certain than any other. For now the things which are said may to the unbelievers seem to be foolishness; but then all shall know them. Would you understand too, how He has made us sit together

with Him? Hear what Christ Himself says to the disciples, You also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:28 And again, But to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give, but it is for them for whom it has been prepared of My Father. Matthew 20:23 So that it has been prepared. And well says he, in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus, for to sit on His right hand is honor above all honor, it is that beyond which there is none other. This then he says, that even we shall sit there. Truly this is surpassing riches, truly surpassing is the greatness of His power, to make us sit down with Christ, Yea, had you ten thousand souls, would you not lose them for His sake? Yea, had you to enter the flames, ought you not readily to endure it? And He Himself too says again, Where I am, there shall also My servant be. John 12:26 Why surely had ye to be cut to pieces every day, ought ye not, for the sake of these promises cheerfully to embrace it? Think, where He sits? Above all principality and power. And with whom it is that you sit? With Him. And who you are? One dead, by nature a child of wrath. And what good have you done? None. Truly now it is high time to exclaim, Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! Romans 11:33

Ver. 8. For by grace, says he have you been saved.

In order then that the greatness of the benefits bestowed may not raise you too high, observe how he brings you down: by grace you have been saved, says he,

Through faith;

Then, that, on the other hand, our free-will be not impaired, he adds also our part in the work, and yet again cancels it, and adds,

And that not of ourselves.

Neither is faith, he means, of ourselves. Because had He not come, had He not called us, how had we been able to believe? For how, says he, shall they believe, unless they hear? Romans 10:14 So that the work of faith itself is not our own.

It is the gift, said he, of God, it is not of works.

Was faith then, you will say, enough to save us? No; but God, says he, has required this, lest He should save us, barren and without work at all. His expression is, that faith saves, but it is because God so wills, that faith saves. Since, how, tell me, does faith save, without works? This itself is the gift of God.

Ver. 9. That no man should glory.

That he may excite in us proper feeling touching this gift of grace. What then? says a man, Hath He Himself hindered our being justified by works? By no means. But no one, he says, is justified by works, in order that the grace and loving-kindness of God may be shown. He did not reject us as having works, but as abandoned of works He has saved us by grace; so that no man henceforth may have whereof to boast. And then, lest when you hear that the whole work is accomplished not of works but by faith, you should become idle, observe how he continues,

Ver. 10. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.

Observe the words he uses. He here alludes to the regeneration, which is in reality a second creation. We have been brought from non-existence into being. As to what we were before, that is, the old man, we are dead. What we are now become, before, we were not. Truly then is this work a creation, yea, and more noble than the first; for from that one, we have our being; but from this last, we have, over and above, our well being.

For good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.

Not merely that we should begin, but that we should walk in them, for we need a virtue which shall last throughout, and be extended on to our dying day. If we had to travel a road leading to a royal city, and then when we had passed over the greater part of it, were to flag and sit down near the very close, it were of no use to us. This is the hope of our calling; for for good works he says. Otherwise it would profit us nothing.

Moral. Thus here he rejoices not that we should work one work, but all; for, as we have five senses, and ought to make use of all in their proper season, so ought we also the several virtues. Now were a man to be temperate and yet unmerciful, or were he to be merciful and yet grasping, or were he to abstain indeed from other people's goods, and yet not bestow his own, it would be all in vain. For a single virtue alone is not enough to present us with boldness before the judgment-seat of Christ; no, we require it to be great, and various, and universal, and entire. Hear what Christ says to the disciples, Go, you and make disciples of all the nations -- teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you. Matthew 28:19 And again, Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, shall be called least in the kingdom of Heaven, Matthew 5:19 that is, in the resurrection; nay, he shall not enter into the kingdom; for He is wont to call the time also of the resurrection, the kingdom. If he break one, says He, he shall be called least, so that we have need of all. And observe how it is not possible to enter without works of mercy; but if even this alone be wanting, we shall depart into the fire. For, says He, Depart, you cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. Why and wherefore? For I was an hungered, and you gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink. Matthew 25:42 Beholdest thou, how without any other charge laid against them, for this one alone they perished. And for this reason alone too were the virgins also excluded from the bride-chamber, though sobriety surely they did possess. As the Apostle says and the sanctification, without which no man shall see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 Consider then, that without sobriety, it is impossible to see the Lord; yet it does not necessarily follow that with sobriety it is possible to see Him, because often-times something else stands in the way. Again, if we do all things ever so rightly, and yet do our neighbor no service, neither in that case shall we enter into the kingdom. Whence is this evident? From the parable of the servants entrusted with the talents. For, in that instance, the man's virtue was in every point unimpaired, and there had been nothing lacking, but forasmuch as he was slothful in his business, he was rightly cast out. Nay, it is possible, even by railing only, to fall into Hell. For whosoever says Christ, shall say to his brother, You fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire. Matthew 5:22 And if a man be ever so right in all things, and yet be injurious, he shall not enter.

And let no one impute cruelty to God, in that he excludes those who fail in this matter, from the kingdom of Heaven. For even with men, if any one do any thing whatsoever contrary to the law, he is banished from the king's presence. And if he transgresses so much as one of the established laws, if he lays a false accusation against another, he forfeits his office. And if he commits adultery, and is detected, he is disgraced, and even though he have done ten thousand right acts, he is undone; and if he commits murder, and is convicted, this again is enough to destroy him.

Now if the laws of men are so carefully guarded, how much more should those of God be. But He is good, a man says. How long are we to be uttering this foolish talk? Foolish, I say, not because He is not good, but in that we keep thinking that His goodness will be available to us for these purposes, though I have again and again used ten thousand arguments on this subject. Listen to the Scripture, which says, Say not, His mercy is great, He will be pacified for the multitude of my sins.

Sirach 5:6 He does not forbid us to say, His mercy is great. This is not what He enjoins; rather he would have us constantly say it, and with this object Paul raises all sorts of arguments, but his object is what follows. Do not, he means, admire the loving-kindness of God with this view, with a view to sinning, and saying, His mercy will be pacified for the multitude of my sins. For it is with this object that I too discourse so much concerning His goodness, not that we may presume upon it, and do any thing we choose, because in that way this goodness will be to the prejudice of our salvation; but that we may not despair in our sins, but may repent.

For the goodness of God leads you to repentance, Romans 2:4 not to greater wickedness. And if you become depraved, because of His goodness, you are rather belying Him before men. I see many persons thus impugning the long-suffering of God; so that if you use it not aright, you shall pay the penalty. Is God a God of loving-kindness? Yes, but He is also a righteous Judge. Is He one who makes allowance for sins? True, yet renders He to every man according to his works. Does He pass by iniquity and blot out transgressions?

True, yet makes He inquisition also. How then is it, that these things are not contradictions? Contradictions they are not, if we distinguish them by their times. He does away iniquity here, both by the laver of Baptism, and by penitence. There He makes inquisition of what we have done by fire and torment. If then, some man may say, I am cast out, and forfeit the kingdom, whether I have wrought ten thousand evil deeds or only one, wherefore may I not do all sorts of evil deeds?

This is the argument of an ungrateful servant; still nevertheless, we will proceed to solve even this. Never do that which is evil in order to do yourself good; for we shall, all alike fall short of the kingdom, yet in Hell we shall not all undergo the same punishment, but one a severer, another a milder one. For now, if you and another have despised God's goodness, Romans 2:4 the one in many instances, and the other in a few, you will alike forfeit the kingdom. But if you have not alike despised Him, but the one in a greater, the other in a less degree, in Hell you shall feel the difference.

Now then, why, it may be said, does He threaten them who have not done works of mercy, that they shall depart into the fire, and not simply into the fire, but into that which is prepared for the devil and his angels? Matthew 25:41 Why and wherefore is this? Because nothing so provokes God to wrath. He puts this before all terrible things; for if it is our duty to love our enemies, of what punishment shall not he be worthy, who turns away even from them that love him, and is in this respect worse than the heathen? So that in this case the greatness of the sin will make such an one go away with the devil. Woe to him, it is said, who does not alms; and if this was the case under the Old Covenant, much more is it under the New. If, where the getting of wealth was allowed, and the enjoyment of it, and the care of it, there was such provision made for the succoring the poor, how much more in that Dispensation, where we are commanded to surrender all we have? For what did not they of old do? They gave tithes, and tithes again upon tithes for orphans, widows, and strangers; whereas some one was saying to me in astonishment at another, Why, such an one gives tithes. What a load of disgrace does this expression imply, since what was not a matter of wonder with the Jews has come to be so in the case of the Christians? If there was danger then in

omitting tithes, think how great it must be now.

Again, drunkenness shall not inherit the kingdom. Yet what is the language of most people? Well, if both I and he are in the same case, that is no little comfort. What then? First of all, that you and he shall not reap the same punishment; but were it otherwise, neither is that any comfort. Fellowship in sufferings has comfort in it, when the miseries have any proportion in them; but when they exceed all proportion, and carry us beyond ourselves, no longer do they allow of our receiving any comfort at all.

For tell the man that is being tortured, and has entered into the flames, that such an one is undergoing the same, still he will not feel the comfort. Did not all the Israelites perish together? What manner of comfort did that afford them? Rather, did not this very thing distress them? And this was why they kept saying, We are lost, we are perished, we are wasted away. What manner of comfort then is there here? In vain do we comfort ourselves with such hopes as these. There is but one only comfort, to avoid falling into that unquenchable fire; but it is not possible for one who has fallen into it to find comfort, where there is the gnashing of teeth, where there is the weeping, where is the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched.

For shall you conceive any comfort at all, tell me, when you are in so great tribulation and distress? Will you then be any longer yourself? Let us not, I pray and entreat you, let us not vainly deceive ourselves and comfort ourselves with arguments like these; no, let us practise those virtues, which shall avail to save us. The object before us is to sit together with Christ, and are you trifling about such matters as these? Why, were there no other sin at all, how great punishment ought we not to suffer for these very speeches themselves, because we are so insensate, so wretched, and so indolent, as, even with so vast a privilege before us, to talk thus?

Oh! How much shall you have to lament, when you shall then consider them that have done good! When you shall behold slaves and base-born who have labored but a little here, there made partakers of the royal throne, will not these things be worse to you than torment? For if even now, when you see any in high reputation, though you are suffering no evil, you regard this as worse than any punishment, and by this alone art consumed, and bemoanest yourself, and weepst, and judgest it to be as bad as ten thousand deaths; what shall you suffer then?

Why, even were there no hell at all, the very thought of the kingdom, were it not enough to destroy and consume you? And that such will be the case, we have enough in our own experience of things to teach us. Let us not then vainly flatter our own souls with speeches like these; no, let us take heed, let us have a regard for our own salvation, let us make virtue our care, let us rouse ourselves to the practice of good works, that we may be counted worthy to attain to this exceeding glory, in Jesus Christ our Lord with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit be glory, might, honor, now and ever, and for ages of ages. Amen.

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