

Homily 4 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily explores the significance of Christ's genealogy, the nature of His miraculous birth, and the virtues displayed by Joseph and Mary.

Scripture: Daniel 3:17, Matthew 25:35, Hebrews 11:38

Topics: "Faith And Courage", "Spiritual Wealth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of imitating the faith and courage of the three young men in the fiery furnace, who chose to remain faithful to God even in the face of great danger. He emphasizes the need to prioritize spiritual wealth over material riches, urging believers to show compassion and generosity towards the poor and needy. Chrysostom warns against the dangers of idolizing wealth and exhorts listeners to find true glory in humility, self-restraint, and gratitude towards God, even in times of adversity.

Transcript

Matt. I. 17.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

He has divided all the generations into three portions, to indicate that not even when their form of government was changed did they become better, but alike under an aristocracy, and under a king, and under an oligarchy, they were in the same evil ways, and whether popular leaders, or priests, or kings controlled them, it was no advantage to them in the way of virtue.

But wherefore has he in the middle portion passed over three kings, and in the last, having set down twelve generations, affirmed them to be fourteen? The former question I leave for you to examine; for neither is it needful for me to explain all things to you, lest ye should grow indolent: but the second we will explain. To me then he seems in this place to be putting in the place of a generation, both the time of the captivity, and Christ Himself, by every means connecting Him with us. And full well does he put us in mind of that captivity, making it manifest that not even when they went down there, did they become more sober-minded; in order that from everything His coming may be shown to be necessary.

Why then, one may say, does not Mark do this, nor trace Christ's genealogy, but utter everything briefly? It seems to me that Matthew was before the rest in entering on the subject (wherefore he both sets down the genealogy with exactness, and stops at those things which require it): but that Mark came after him, which is why he took a short course, as putting his hand to what had been already spoken and made manifest.

How is it then that Luke not only traces the genealogy, but does it through a greater number? As was natural, Matthew having led the way, he seeks to teach us somewhat in addition to former statements. And each too in like manner imitated his master; the one Paul, who flows fuller than any river; the other Peter, who studies brevity.

2. And what may be the reason that Matthew said not at the beginning, in the same way as the prophet, the vision which I saw, and the word which came unto me? Because he was writing unto men well disposed, and exceedingly attentive to him. For both the miracles that were done cried aloud, and they who received the word were exceeding faithful. But in the case of the prophets, there were neither so many miracles to proclaim them; and besides, the tribe of the false prophets, no small one, was riotously breaking in upon them: to whom the people of the Jews gave even more heed. This kind of opening therefore was necessary in their case.

And if ever miracles were done, they were done for the aliens' sake, to increase the number of the proselytes; and for manifestation of God's power, if haply their enemies having taken them captives, fancied they prevailed, because their own gods were mighty: like as in Egypt, out of which no small mixed multitude went up; and, after that, in Babylon, what befell touching the furnace and the dreams. And miracles were wrought also, when they were by themselves in the wilderness; as also in our case: for among us too, when we had just come out of error, many wonderful works were shown forth; but afterwards they stayed, when in all countries true religion had taken root.

And what took place at a later period were few and at intervals; for example, when the sun stood still in its course, and started back in the opposite direction. And this one may see to have occurred in our case also. For so even in our generation, in the instance of him who surpassed all in ungodliness, I mean Julian, many strange things happened. Thus when the Jews were attempting to raise up again the temple at Jerusalem, fire burst out from the foundations, and utterly hindered them all; and when both his treasurer, and his uncle and namesake, made the sacred vessels the subject of their open insolence, the one was eaten with worms, and gave up the ghost, the other burst asunder in the midst. Moreover, the fountains failing, when sacrifices were made there, and the entrance of the famine into the cities together with the emperor himself, was a very great sign. For it is usual with God to do such things; when evils are multiplied, and He sees His own people afflicted, and their adversaries greatly intoxicated with their dominion over them, then to display His own power; which he did also in Persia with respect to the Jews.

3. Wherefore, that he was not acting without an object, or by chance, when he distributed Christ's forefathers into three portions, is plain from what has been said. And mark, too, whence he begins, and where he ends. From Abraham to David; from David to the captivity of Babylon; from this unto Christ Himself. For both at the beginning he put the two in close succession, David and Abraham, and also in summing up he mentions both in the same way. And this, because, as I have already said, it was to them that the promises were made.

But why can it be, that as he mentioned the captivity of Babylon, he did not mention also the descent into Egypt? Because they had ceased to be any longer afraid of the Egyptians, but the Babylonians they

dreaded still. And the one thing was ancient, but the other fresh, and had taken place of late. And to the one they were carried down for no sins, but to the other, transgressions were the cause of their being removed.

And also with regard to the very names, if any one were to attempt to translate their etymologies, even thence would he derive great matter of divine speculation, and such as is of great importance with regard to the New Testament: as, for instance, from Abraham's name, from Jacob's, from Solomon's, from Zorobabel's. For it was not without purpose that these names were given them. But lest we should seem to be wearisome by running out a great length, let us pass these things by, and proceed to what is urgent.

4. Having then mentioned all His forefathers, and ending with Joseph, he did not stop at this, but added, Joseph the husband of Mary; intimating that it was for her sake he traced his genealogy also. Then, lest when you have heard of the husband of Mary, you should suppose that Christ was born after the common law of nature, mark, how he sets it right by that which follows. You have heard, says he, of an husband, you have heard of a mother, you have heard a name assigned to the child, therefore hear the manner too of the birth. The birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise. Matthew 1:18 Of what kind of birth are you telling me, I pray you, since you have already mentioned His ancestors? I still wish to tell you the manner also of His birth. Do you see, how he wakens up the hearer? For as though he were about to speak of something unusual, he promises to tell also the manner thereof.

And observe a most admirable order in the things he has mentioned. For he did not proceed directly to the birth, but puts us in mind first, how many generations he was from Abraham, how many from David, and from the captivity of Babylon; and thus he sets the careful hearer upon considering the times, to show that this is the Christ who was preached by the prophets. For when you have numbered the generations, and hast learned by the time that this is He, you will readily receive likewise the miracle which took place in His birth. Thus, being about to tell of a certain great thing, His birth of a virgin, he first shadows over the statement, until he has numbered the generations, by speaking of an husband of Mary; or rather he does even put in short space the narration of the birth itself, and then proceeds to number also the years, reminding the hearer, that this is He, of whom the patriarch Jacob had said, He should then at length come, when the Jewish rulers had come to an end; of whom the prophet Daniel had proclaimed beforehand, that He should come after those many weeks. And if any one, counting the years spoken of to Daniel by the angel in a number of weeks, would trace down the time from the building of the city to His birth, by reckoning he will perceive the one to agree with the other.

5. How then was He born, I pray you? When as His mother Mary was espoused: Matthew 1:18 He says not virgin, but merely mother; so that his account is easy to be received. And so having beforehand prepared the hearer to look for some ordinary piece of information, and by this laying hold of him, after all he amazes him by adding the marvellous fact, saying, Before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. He says not, before she was brought to the bridegroom's house; for indeed she was therein. It being the way of the ancients for the most part to keep their espoused wives in their house: Genesis 19:8, 14 in those parts, at least, where one may see the same practised even now. Thus also Lot's sons-in-law were in his house with him. Mary then herself likewise was in the house with Joseph.

And wherefore did she not conceive before her espousal? It was, as I said at first, that what had been done might be concealed awhile, and that the Virgin might escape every evil suspicion. For when he, who had most right of all to feel jealousy, so far from making her a show, or degrading her, is found even receiving and cherishing her after her conception; it was quite clear that, unless he had fully persuaded

himself that what was done was of the operation of the Holy Spirit, he would not have kept her with him, and ministered to her in all other things. And most properly has he said, that she was 'found' with child, the sort of expression that is wont to be used with respect to things strange, and such as happen beyond all expectation, and are unlooked for.

Proceed therefore no further, neither require anything more than what has been said; neither say thou, But how was it that the Spirit wrought this of a virgin? For if, when nature is at work, it is impossible to explain the manner of the formation; how, when the Spirit is working miracles, shall we be able to express these? And lest you should weary the evangelist, or disturb him by continually asking these things, he has said who it was that wrought the miracle, and so withdrawn himself. For I know, says he, nothing more, but that what was done was the work of the Holy Ghost.

6. Shame on them who busy themselves touching the generation on high. For if this birth, which has witnesses without number, and had been proclaimed so long a time before, and was manifested and handled with hands, can by no man be explained; of what excess of madness do they come short who make themselves busy and curious touching that unutterable generation? For neither Gabriel nor Matthew was able to say anything more, but only that it was of the Spirit; but how, of the Spirit, or in what manner, neither of them has explained; for neither was it possible.

Nor think that you have learned all, by hearing of the Spirit; nay, for we are ignorant of many things, even when we have learned this; as, for instance, how the Infinite is in a womb, how He that contains all things is carried, as unborn, by a woman; how the Virgin bears, and continues a virgin. How, I pray you, did the Spirit frame that Temple? How did He take not all the flesh from the womb, but a part thereof, and increased it, and fashioned it? For that He did come forth of the Virgin's flesh, He has declared by speaking of that which was conceived in her; Galatians 4:4 and Paul, by saying, made of a woman; whereby he stops the mouths of them that say, Christ came among us as through some conduit. For, if this were so, what need of the womb? If this were so, He has nothing in common with us, but that flesh is of some other kind, and not of the mass which belongs to us. How then was He of the root of Jesse? How was He a rod? How Son of man? How was Mary His mother? How was He of David's seed? How did he take the form of a servant? Philippians 2:7 how was the Word made flesh? John 1:14 and how says Paul to the Romans, Of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is God over all? Romans 9:5 Therefore that He was of us, and of our substance, and of the Virgin's womb, is manifest from these things, and from others beside; but how, is not also manifest. Do not either thou then inquire; but receive what is revealed, and be not curious about what is kept secret.

7. And Joseph her husband, being, says he a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. Matthew 1:19

Having said that it was of the Holy Ghost, and without cohabitation, he establishes his statement in another way again. Lest any one should say, Whence does this appear? Who has heard, who has seen any such thing ever come to pass?-- or lest you should suspect the disciple as inventing these things to favor his Master;-- he introduces Joseph as contributing, by what he underwent, to the proof of the things mentioned; and by his narrative all but says, If you doubt me, and if you suspect my testimony, believe her husband.

For Joseph, says he, her husband, being a just man. By a just man in this place he means him that is virtuous in all things. For both freedom from covetousness is justice, and universal virtue is also justice;

and it is mostly in this latter sense that the Scripture uses the name of justice; as when it says, a man that was just and true; Job 1:1 and again, they were both just. Luke 1:6 Being then just, that is good and considerate, he was minded to put her away privily. For this intent he tells what took place before Joseph's being fully informed, that you might not mistrust what was done after he knew.

However, such a one was not liable to be made a public example only, but that she should also be punished was the command of the law. Whereas Joseph remitted not only that greater punishment, but the less likewise, namely, the disgrace. For so far from punishing, he was not minded even to make an example of her. Do you see a man under self-restraint, and freed from the most tyrannical of passions. For you know how great a thing jealousy is: and therefore He said, to whom these things are clearly known, For full of jealousy is the rage of a husband; Proverbs 6:34 he will not spare in the day of vengeance: and jealousy is cruel as the grave.

Song of Songs 8:6 And we too know of many that have chosen to give up their lives rather than fall under the suspicion of jealousy. But in this case it was not so little as suspicion, the burden of the womb entirely convicting her. But nevertheless he was so free from passion as to be unwilling to grieve the Virgin even in the least matters. Thus, whereas to keep her in his house seemed like a transgression of the law, but to expose and bring her to trial would constrain him to deliver her to die; he does none of these things, but conducts himself now by a higher rule than the law.

For grace having come, there must needs henceforth be many tokens of that exalted citizenship. For as the sun, though as yet he show not his beams, does from afar by his light illumine more than half the world; so likewise Christ, when about to rise from that womb, even before He came forth, shone over all the world. Wherefore, even before her travail, prophets danced for joy, and women foretold what was to come, and John, when he had not yet come forth from the belly, leaped from the very womb. Hence also this man exhibited great self-command, in that he neither accused nor upbraided, but only set about putting her away.

8. The matter then being in this state, and all at their wits' end, the angel comes to solve all their difficulties. But it is worth inquiring, why the angel did not speak sooner, before the husband had such thoughts: but, when he thought on it, not until then, he came; for it is said, While he thought on these things, the angel comes. And yet to her he declares the good tidings even before she conceived. And this again contains another difficulty; for even though the angel had not spoken, wherefore was the Virgin silent, who had been informed by the angel; and why, when she saw her betrothed husband in trouble, did she not put an end to his perplexity?

Wherefore then did not the angel speak before Joseph became troubled. For we must needs explain the former difficulty first. For what reason then did he not speak? Lest Joseph should be unbelieving, and the same happen to him as to Zacharias. For when the thing was visible, belief was thenceforth easy; but when it had not yet a beginning, it was not equally easy to receive his saying. For this reason the angel spoke not at the first, and through the same cause the Virgin too held her peace. For she did not think to obtain credit with her betrothed husband, in declaring to him a thing unheard of, but rather that she should provoke him the more, as though she were cloaking a sin that had been committed. Since if she herself, who was to receive so great a favor, is affected somewhat after the manner of man, and says, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? Luke 1:34 much more would he have doubted; and especially when hearing it from the woman who was under suspicion. Wherefore the Virgin says nothing to him, but the angel, the time demanding it, presents himself to him.

9. Why then, it may be asked, did he not so in the Virgin's case also, and declare the good tidings to her after the conception? Lest she should be in agitation and great trouble. For it were likely that she, not knowing the certainty, might have even devised something amiss touching herself, and have gone on to strangle or to stab herself, not enduring the disgrace. For wondrous indeed was that Virgin, and Luke points out her excellency, saying, that when she heard the salutation, she did not straightway pour herself out, neither did she accept the saying, but was troubled, seeking what manner of salutation this might be. Luke 1:29 Now she who was of such perfect delicacy would even have been distracted with dismay at the thought of her shame, not expecting, by whatever she might say, to convince any one who should hear of it, but that what had happened was adultery. Therefore to prevent these things, the angel came before the conception. Besides that, it was meet that womb should be free from trouble which the Maker of all things entered; and the soul rid of all perturbation, which was thought worthy to become the minister of such mysteries. For these reasons He speaks to the Virgin before the conception, but to Joseph at the time of travail.

And this many of the simpler sort, not understanding, have said there is a discordance; because Luke says it was Mary to whom he declared the good tidings, but Matthew, that it was Joseph; not knowing that both took place. And this sort of thing it is necessary to bear in mind throughout the whole history; for in this way we shall solve many seeming discordances.

10. The angel then comes, when Joseph is troubled. For in addition to the causes mentioned, with a view also to the manifestation of his self-command, he defers his coming. But when the thing was on the point of taking place, then at last he presents himself. While he thought on these things, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream. Matthew 1:20

Do you see the mildness of the husband? So far from punishing, he did not even declare it to any one, no not even to her whom he suspected, but was thinking it over with himself, as aiming to conceal the cause even from the Virgin herself. For neither is it said that he was minded to cast her out, but to put her away, so very mild and gentle was the man. But while he is thinking on these things, the angel appears in a dream.

And why not openly, as to the shepherds, and to Zacharias, and to the Virgin? The man was exceedingly full of faith, and needed not this vision. Whereas the Virgin, as having declared to her very exceeding good tidings, greater than to Zacharias, and this before the event, needed also a marvellous vision; and the shepherds, as being by disposition rather dull and clownish. But this man, after the conception, Mark only, what a number of results are here. The man's self-command is thoroughly shown; the word spoken in season contributes to his faith, and the history is freed from suspicion, in that it shows him to have felt what it was likely a husband would feel. 11. How then does the angel assure him? Hear and marvel at the wisdom of his words. For being come he says, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto you Mary your wife." He straightway puts him in mind of David, of whom the Christ was to spring, and he does not allow him to be greatly perturbed, by the title of his forefathers, reminding him of the promise made to the whole race. Else why does he call him "Son of David"? "Fear not:" and yet in another case God does not so, but when one was devising about a certain woman what he ought not, He spoke the word more in a way of rebuke, and with a threat.(1) And yet there too, the act was of ignorance, for not with knowledge did that person take Sarah; yet nevertheless He rebuked him: but here mildly. For exceeding great were the mysteries He was dispensing,(2)--> and wide the interval between the two men; wherefore neither was there need of rebuke.

But by saying, fear not, he signifies him to have been afraid, lest he should give offense to God, as retaining an adulteress; since, if it had not been for this, he would not have even thought of casting her out. In all ways then he points out that the angel came from God, bringing forward and setting before him all, both what he thought to do, and what he felt in his mind.

Now having mentioned her name, he stayed not at this, but added also, your wife; whereas he would not have called her so, if she had been corrupted. And here he calls her that is espoused a wife; as indeed the Scripture is wont to call betrothed husbands sons-in-law even before marriage.

But what means, to take unto you? To retain her in his house, for in intention she had been now put away by him. Her, being put away, do thou retain, says he, as committed unto you by God, not by her parents. And He commits her not for marriage; but to dwell with you; and by my voice does He commit her. Much as Christ Himself afterwards committed her to His disciple, so even now unto Joseph.

12. Then having obscurely signified the matter in hand, he mentioned not the evil suspicion; but, in a manner more reverent and seemly, by telling the cause of travail he removed this also; implying that the very thing which had made him afraid, and for which he would have cast her out -- this very thing, I say, was a just cause why he should take her and retain her in his house. Thus more than entirely doing away with his distress. For she is not only free, says he, from unlawful intercourse, but even above all nature is her conception. Not only therefore put away your fear, but even rejoice more exceedingly, 'for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.'

A strange thing it was which he spoke of, surpassing man's reason, and above all the laws of nature. How then is he to believe, to whom such tidings are altogether new? By the things that are past, says he, by the revelations. For with this intent he laid open all things that were in his mind, what he felt, what he feared, what he was resolved to do -- that by these he might assure himself of this point.

Or rather, not by things past only, but like wise by things to come, he wins him over. And she shall bring forth, says he, a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus. Matthew 1:21 For do not thou, because He is of the Holy Ghost, imagine that you are an alien to the ministry of this dispensation. Since although in the birth you have no part, but the Virgin abode untouched, nevertheless, what pertains to a father, not injuring the honor of virginity, that do I give you, to set a Name on that which is born: for you shall call Him. For though the offspring be not yours, yet shall you exhibit a father's care towards Him. Wherefore I do straightway, even from the giving of the name, connect you with Him that is born.

Then lest on the other hand any one should from this suspect him to be the father, hear what follows, with what exact care he states it. She shall bring forth, he says, a Son: he does not say, bring forth to you, but merely she shall bring forth, putting it indefinitely: since not to him did she bring forth, but to the whole world.

13. For this cause too the angel came bringing His name from Heaven, hereby again intimating that this is a wondrous birth: it being God Himself who sends the name from above by the angel to Joseph. For neither was this without an object, but a treasure of ten thousand blessings. Wherefore the angel also interprets it, and suggests good hopes, in this way again leading him to belief. For to these things we are wont to be more inclined, and therefore are also fonder of believing them.

So having established his faith by all, by the past things, by the future, by the present, by the honor given to himself, he brings in the prophet also in good time, to give his suffrage in support of all these. But before

introducing him, he proclaims beforehand the good things which were to befall the world through Him. And what are these? Sins removed and done away. For He shall save His people from their sins.

Here again the thing is signified to be beyond all expectation. For not from visible wars, neither from barbarians, but what was far greater than these, from sins, he declares the glad tidings of deliverance; a work which had never been possible to any one before.

But wherefore, one may ask, did he say, His people, and not add the Gentiles also? That he might not startle the hearer yet a while. For to him that listens with understanding he darkly signified the Gentiles too. For His people are not the Jews only, but also all that draw near and receive the knowledge that is from Him.

And mark how he has by the way discovered to us also His dignity, by calling the Jewish nation His people. For this is the word of one implying nought else, but that He who is born is God's child, and that the King of those on high is the subject of his discourse. As neither does forgiving sins belong to any other power, but only to that single essence.

14. Forasmuch then as we have partaken of so great a gift, let us do everything not to dishonor such a benefit. For if even before this honor, what was done was worthy of punishment, much more now, after this unspeakable benefit. And this I say not now for no cause, but because I see many after their baptism living more carelessly than the uninitiated, and having nothing peculiar to distinguish them in their way of life. It is, you see, for this cause, that neither in the market nor in the Church is it possible to know quickly who is a believer and who an unbeliever; unless one be present at the time of the mysteries, and see the one sort put out, the others remaining within. Whereas they ought to be distinguished not by their place, but by their way of life. For as men's outward dignities are naturally to be discovered by the outward signs with which they are invested, so ours ought to be discernible by the soul. That is, the believer ought to be manifest not by the gift only, but also by the new life. The believer ought to be the light and salt of the world. But when thou dost not give light even to yourself, neither bind up your own gangrene, what remains, whereby we are to know you? Because you have entered the holy waters? Nay, this to you becomes a store of punishment. For greatness of honor is, to them who do not choose to live worthy of the honor, an increase of vengeance. Yea, the believer ought to shine forth not only by what he has received from God, but also by what he himself has contributed; and should be discernible by everything, by his gait, by his look, by his garb, by his voice. And this I have said, not that display, but that the profit of beholders, may be the rule by which we frame ourselves.

15. But now, whatever things I might seek to recognize you by, I find you in all points distinguished by the contraries of the same. For whether by your place I would fain discern you, I see you spending your day in horse races, and theatres, and scenes of lawlessness, in the wicked assemblies in the market places, and in companies of depraved men; or by the fashion of your countenance, I see you continually laughing to excess, and dissolute as a grinning and abandoned harlot; or by your clothes, I see you in no better trim than the people on the stage; or by your followers, you are leading about parasites and flatterers; or by your words, I hear you say nothing wholesome, nothing necessary, nothing of moment to our life; or by your table, yet heavier from thence will the charge against you appear.

By what then, tell me, am I to recognize the believer in you, while all the things I have mentioned give the contrary sentence? And why do I say, the believer? Since I can not clearly make out whether you are a man. For when you are like an ass, kicking, and like a bull, wantoning, and like a horse neighing after

women; when thou dost play the glutton like the bear, and pamper your flesh as the mule, and bear malice like the camel; when you prowl as a wolf, art wrathful as a serpent, sting like a scorpion, and art crafty as a fox, treasure the poison of wickedness like an asp or a viper, and war against your brethren like that evil demon;--how shall I be able to number you with men, not seeing in you the marks of man's nature.

Why, while I am seeking the difference of catechumen and believer, I come near not to find even the difference between a man and a wild beast. For what shall I call you? A wild beast? Nay, the wild beasts are possessed by some one of these defects, but you heap all together, and far surpass their brutishness. Shall I then call you a devil?(1) Nay, a devil is not a slave to the dominion of the belly, neither does he set his love on riches. When therefore you have more faults than either wild beasts or devils, how, I pray you, shall we call you a man?

And if you art not to be styled a man, how shall we address you as a believer? 16. And what is yet more grievous is this, that being in such evil case, we have no idea whatever of the deformity of our own soul, nor discern the hideousness thereof. And yet when you are sitting at a hairdresser's, and having your hair cut, you take the mirror, and examine with care the arrangement of your locks, and ask them that stand by, and the haircutter himself, if he has well disposed what is on the forehead; and being old, for so it often happens, art not ashamed of going wild with the fancies of youth: while of our own soul, not only deformed, but transformed into a wild beast, and made a sort of Scylla or Chimaera, according to the heathen fable, we have not even a slight perception.

And yet in this case too there is a mirror, spiritual, and far more excellent, and more serviceable than that other one; for it not only shows our own deformity, but transforms it too, if we be willing, into surpassing beauty. This mirror is the memory of good men, and the history of their blessed lives; the reading of the Scriptures; the laws given by God. If thou be willing once only to look upon the portraitures of those holy men, thou will both see the foulness of your own mind, and having seen this, will need nothing else to be set free from that deformity.

Because the mirror is useful for this purpose also, and makes the change easy. Let no man therefore continue in the form of the irrational creatures. For if the slave does not enter into the father's house, how will you, having become even a wild beast, be able to set your foot within those vestibules? And why say I, a wild beast? Nay, such a one is more unmanageable than any wild beast. For they, although by nature savage, yet when they have had the advantage of man's art, oftentimes grow tame; but thou who hast changed their natural wildness into this unnatural gentleness, what sort of plea will you have, when you have trained your own natural meekness into the savageness that is contrary to nature?

When that which is wild by nature you exhibit in gentle mood, but present yourself, by nature so gentle, unnaturally savage? And the lion(2) you tame and make tractable, but your own wrath you render wilder than any lion. And yet in that case there are two hindrances, first that the beast is deprived of reason, and then that it is the most wrathful of all things; nevertheless by the excellency of the wisdom given to you of God, you overcome even nature. Thou therefore, who in who beasts art victorious over nature herself, how is it that in your own case together with nature you give up your admirable quality of free will(3) }--> also?

Further, if I were bidding you make another man gentle, not even so ought I to seem as one enjoining impossible things; however, you might then object that you have not the control of another's disposition, and that it does not altogether rest with you. But now it is your own wild beast, and a thing which

absolutely depends on you. What plea then have you? Or what fair excuse will you be able to put forth, turning as you are a lion into a man, and regardless that you yourself art of a man becoming a lion; upon the beast bestowing what is above nature, but for yourself not even preserving what is natural? Yea, while the wild beasts are by your earnest endeavors advanced into our noble estate, you are by yourself cast down from the throne of the kingdom, and thrust out into their madness. Thus, imagine, if you will, your wrath to be a kind of wild beast, and as much zeal as others have displayed about lions, so much do thou in regard of yourself, and cause that way of taking things to become gentle and meek. Because this too has grievous teeth and talons, and if you tame it not, it will lay waste all things. For not even lion nor serpent has such power to rend the vitals as wrath, with its iron talons continually doing so. Since it mars, we see, not the body only, but the very health likewise of the soul is corrupted by it, devouring, rending, tearing to pieces all its strength, and making it useless for everything. For if a man nourishing worms in his entrails, shall not be able so much as to breathe, his inward parts all wasting away; how shall we, having so large a serpent eating up all within us (it is wrath I mean), how, I say, shall we be able to produce anything noble?

17. How then are we to be freed from this pest? If we can drink a potion that is able to kill the worms within us and the serpents. And of what nature, it will be asked, may this potion be, that has such power? The precious Blood of Christ, if it be received with full assurance, (for this will have power to extinguish every disease); and together with this the divine Scriptures carefully heard, and almsgiving added to our hearing; for by means of all these things we shall be enabled to mortify the affections that mar our soul. And then only shall we live; for now surely we are in no better state than the dead: forasmuch as it cannot be, that while those passions live, we should live too, but we must necessarily perish. And unless we first kill them here, they will be sure to kill us in the other life; or rather before that death they will exact of us, even here, the utmost penalty. Yes, for every such passion is both cruel and tyrannical and insatiable, and never ceases to devour us every day. For their teeth are the teeth of a lion, Joel 1:6 or rather even far more fierce. For the lion, as soon as ever he is satisfied, is wont to leave the carcass that has fallen in his way; but these passions neither are satisfied, nor do they leave the man whom they have seized, until they have set him near the devil. For so great is their power, that the very service which Paul showed forth to Christ, Romans 8:38 despising both hell and the kingdom for His sake, even this same do they require of them whom they have seized. For whether it be with the love of women, or of riches, or of glory, that any one is entangled, he laughs at hell thenceforth, and despises the kingdom, that he may work the will of these. Let us not then doubt Paul when he says that he so loved Christ. For when some are found so doing service to their passions, how should that other afterwards seem incredible? Yea, and this is the reason why our longing for Christ is feebler, because all our strength is consumed on this love, and we rob, and defraud, and are slaves to vainglory; than which what can be more worthless?

For though you should become infinitely conspicuous, you will be nothing better than the base: rather for this selfsame cause you will even be baser. For when they who are willing to give you glory, and make you illustrious, do for this very cause ridicule you, that you desire the glory which comes of them, how can such instances fail to turn the contrary way in regard of you. For indeed this thing is among those which attract censure. So that even as in the case of one desiring to commit adultery or fornication, should any one praise or flatter him, by this very act he becomes an accuser rather than a commender of the person indulging such desires: so with regard to him who is desirous of glory; when we all praise, it is accusation rather than praise which we bestow on those who wish to be made glorious.

18. Why then bring upon yourself that, from which the very opposite is wont to befall you. Yea, if you will be glorified, despise glory; so shall you be more illustrious than any. Why feel as Nebuchadnezzar felt? For he too set up an image, thinking from wood and from a senseless figure to procure to himself an increase of fame, and the living would fain appear more glorious by the help of that which has no life. Do you see the excess of his madness; how, thinking to do honor, he rather offered insult, to himself? For when it appears that he is relying rather on the lifeless thing, than on himself and the soul that lives in him, and when for this cause he advances the stock unto such high precedence, how can he be other than ridiculous, endeavoring as he does to adorn himself, not by his way of living, but by planks of wood? Just as if a man should think proper to give himself airs, because of the pavement of his house, and his beautiful staircase rather than because he is a man. Him do many too among us imitate now. For as he for his image, so some men claim to be admired for their clothes, others for their house; or for their mules and chariots, and for the columns in their house. For inasmuch as they have lost their being as men, they go about gathering to themselves from other quarters such glory as is full of exceeding ridicule.

But as to the noble and great servants of God, not by these means, but by such as best became them, even by such did they shine forth. For captives as they were, and slaves, and youths, and strangers, and stripped of all resources of their own, they proved at that time far more awful than he who was invested with all these things. And while Nebuchadnezzar found neither so great an image, nor satraps, nor captains of the host, nor endless legions, nor abundance of gold, nor other pomp, enough to meet his desire, and to show him great; to these, on the other hand, stripped of all this, their high self-restraint alone was sufficient, and showed him that wore the diadem and the purple, as much inferior in glory to those who had no such thing, as the sun is more glorious than a pearl. For they were led forth in the midst of the whole world, being at once youths, and captives, and slaves, and straightway on their appearance the king darted fire from his eyes, and captains, and deputies, and governors, and the whole amphitheatre of the devil, stood around; and a voice of pipes from all sides, and of trumpets, and of all music, borne up to Heaven, was sounding in their ears, and the furnace burned up to a boundless height, and the flame reached the very clouds, and all was full of terror and dismay. But none of these things dismayed them, but they laughed it all to scorn, as they would children mocking them, and exhibited their courage and meekness, and uttering a voice clearer than those trumpets, they said, Be it known unto you, O king. Daniel 3:18 For they did not wish to affront the king, no not so much as by a word, but to declare their religion only. For which cause, neither did they extend their speech to any great length, but set forth all briefly; For there is, say they, a God in Heaven, who is able to deliver us, Daniel 3:17 why do you show me the multitude? Why the furnace? Why the sharpened swords? Why the terrible guards? Our Lord is higher and more mighty than all these.

Then when they considered that it was possible that God might be willing even to permit them to be burnt; lest, if this should come to pass, they might seem to be speaking falsehoods; they add this also and say, If this happen not, be it known unto you, O king, that we serve not your gods. Daniel 3:18 For had they said, Sins are the cause of His not delivering us, should He fail to deliver, they would not have been believed. Wherefore in this place they are silent on that subject, though they speak of it in the furnace, again and again alleging their sins. But before the king they say no such thing; only, that though they were to be burnt, they would not give up their religion.

For it was not for rewards and recompenses that they did what they did, but out of love alone; and yet they were in captivity too, and in slavery, and had enjoyed no good thing. Yea, they had lost their country, and their freedom, and all their possessions. For tell me not of their honors in the king's courts, for holy and

righteous as they were, they would have chosen ten thousand times rather to have been beggars at home, and to have been partakers of the blessings in the temple. For I had rather, it is said, be an outcast in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of sinners. And one day in your courts is better than thousands. They would have chosen then ten thousand times rather to be outcasts at home, than kings in Babylon. And this is manifest, from what they declare even in the furnace, grieving at their continuance in that country. For although themselves enjoyed great honors, yet seeing the calamities of the rest they were exceedingly vexed; and this kind of thing is most especially characteristic of saints, that no glory, nor honor, nor anything else should be more precious to them than their neighbor's welfare. See, for example, how even when they were in a furnace, they made their supplication for all the people. But we not even when at large bear our brethren in mind. And again, when they were inquiring about the dreams, Daniel 2:17-18 they were looking not to their own but the common good, for that they despised death they showed by many things afterwards. But everywhere they put themselves forward, as wishing to prevail with God by importunity. Next, as not accounting themselves either to be sufficient, they flee to the Fathers; but of themselves they said that they offer nothing more than a contrite spirit.

19. These men then let us also imitate. Because now too there is set up a golden image, even the tyranny of Mammon. But let us not give heed to the timbrels, nor to the flutes, nor to the harps, nor to the rest of the pomp of riches; yea, though we must needs fall into a furnace of poverty, let us choose it, rather than worship that idol, and there will be in the midst a moist whistling wind. Let us not then shudder at hearing of a furnace of poverty. For so too at that time they that fell into the furnace were shown the more glorious, but they that worshipped were destroyed. Only then all took place at once, but in this case some part will be accomplished here, some there, some both here and in the day that is to come. For they that have chosen poverty, in order that they might not worship mammon, will be more glorious both here and then, but they that have been rich unjustly here, shall then pay the utmost penalty.

From this furnace Lazarus too went forth, not less glorious than those children; but the rich man who was in the place of them that worshipped the image, was condemned to hell. For indeed what we have now mentioned was a type of this. Wherefore as in this instance they who fell into the furnace suffered no hurt, but they who sat without were laid hold of with great fierceness, so likewise shall it be then. The saints walking through the river of fire shall suffer no pain, nay they will even appear joyous; but they that have worshipped the image, shall see the fire rest upon them fiercer than any wild beast, and draw them in. So that if any one disbelieves hell, when he sees this furnace, let him from the things present believe things to come, and fear not the furnace of poverty, but the furnace of sin. For this is flame and torment, but that, dew and refreshment; and by this stands the devil, by that, angels wafting aside the flame.

20. These things let them hear that are rich, that are kindling the furnace of poverty. For though they shall not hurt those others, the dew coming to their aid; yet themselves they will render an easy prey to the flame, which they have kindled with their own hands.

Then, an angel went down with those children; now, let us go down with them that are in the furnace of poverty, and by almsdeeds let us make a dewy air, and waft the flame quite aside, that we may be partakers of their crowns also; that the flames of hell may likewise be scattered by the voice of Christ saying, You saw me an hungered, and fed me. Matthew 25:35 For that voice shall then be with us instead of a moist wind whistling through the midst of the flame. Let us then go down with almsgiving, unto the furnace of poverty; let us behold them that in self-restraint walk therein, and trample on the burning coals; let us behold the marvel, strange and beyond thought, a man singing praise in a furnace, a man giving thanks in fire, chained unto extreme poverty, yet offering much praise to Christ. Since they, who bear

poverty with thankfulness, really become equal to those children. For no flame is so terrible as poverty, nor so apt to set us on fire. But those children were not set on fire; rather, on their giving thanks to the Lord, their bonds too were at once loosed. So likewise now, if when you have fallen into poverty, you are thankful, both the bonds are loosened, and the flame extinguished; or though it be not extinguished (what is much more marvellous), it becomes a fountain instead of a flame: which then likewise came to pass, and in the midst of a furnace they enjoyed a pure dew. For the fire indeed it quenched not, but the burning of those cast in it altogether hindered. This one may see in their case also who live by the rules of wisdom, for they, even in poverty, feel more secure than the rich.

Let us not therefore sit down without the furnace, feeling no pity towards the poor; lest the same befall us as then befell those executioners. For if you should go down to them, and take your stand with the children, the fire will no longer work you any harm; but if you should sit above and neglect them in the flame of their poverty, the flame will burn you up. Go down therefore into the fire, that you may not be burnt up by the fire; sit not down without the fire, lest the flame catch hold of you. For if it should find you among the poor, it will depart from you; but if alienated from them, it will run upon you quickly, and catch you. Do not therefore stand off from them that are cast in, but when the devil gives command to cast them that have not worshipped gold into the furnace of poverty, be not thou of them that cast others in, but of them that are cast in; that you may be of the number of the saved, and not of the burned. For indeed it is a most effectual dew, to be held in no subjection by desire of wealth, to be associate with poor persons. These are wealthier than all, who have trampled under foot the desire of riches. Forasmuch as those children too, by despising the king at that time, became more glorious than the king. And thou therefore, if you despise the things of the world, shall become more honorable than all the world; like those holy men, of whom the world was not worthy. Hebrews 11:38

In order then to become worthy of the things in Heaven, I bid you laugh to scorn things present. For in this way you shall both be more glorious here, and enjoy the good things to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom be glory and might for ever and ever. Amen.

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