

Homily 54 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of kindness, compassion, and hospitality, and how these virtues can lead to the spread of the gospel and the respect and admiration of others.

Topics: "Christian Hospitality", "Divine Providence"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on Acts 28:1, highlighting the kindness shown by barbarous people towards Paul and his companions during a storm. Despite being prisoners, they were received with warmth and care. The sermon emphasizes Paul's humility and practical actions, such as gathering wood for a fire, rather than performing miracles for show. The narrative showcases the barbarians' natural judgment and their recognition of divine justice. Through various incidents, including Paul's healing of Publius and others, the sermon underscores the power of compassion, hospitality, and faith in the face of adversity.

Transcript

Acts XXVIII. 1

And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

Showed, he says, no little kindness to us -- barbarians (as they were)-- having kindled a fire: else it were of no use that their lives be saved, if the wintry weather must destroy them. Then Paul having taken brushwood, laid it on the fire. See how active he is; observe how we nowhere find him doing miracles for the sake of doing them, but only upon emergency. Both during the storm when there was a cause he prophesied, not for the sake of prophesying, and here again in the first instance he lays on brushwood:-- nothing for vain display, but (with a simple view) to their being preserved, and enjoying some warmth.

Then a viper fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffers not to live. Acts 28:4 Well also was this permitted, that they should both see the thing and utter the thought, in order that, when the result ensued, there might be no disbelieving the miracle. Observe their good feeling (towards the distressed), in saying this (not aloud, but) among themselves -- observe (also) the natural judgment clearly expressed even among barbarians, and how they do not condemn without assigning a reason.

And these also behold, that they may wonder the more. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. (v. 5, 6.) They expected him, it says, to fall down dead: and again, having seen that nothing of the kind happened to him, they said, He is a god. Again viz. as in Acts 14:11, another excess on the part of these men.

In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. (v. 7, 8.) Behold again another hospitable man, Publius, who was both rich and of great possessions: he had seen nothing, but purely out of compassion for their misfortune, he received them, and took care of them.

So that he was worthy to receive kindness: wherefore Paul as a requital for his receiving them, healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: who also honored us with many honors; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary (v. 9, 10), both us and the rest. See how when they were quit of the storm, they did not become more negligent, but what a liberal entertainment was given to them for Paul's sake: and three months were they there, all of them provided with sustenance.

See how all this is done for the sake of Paul, to the end that the prisoners should believe, and the soldiers, and the centurion. For if they were very stone, yet from the counsel they heard him giving, and from the prediction they had heard him making, and from the miracles they knew him to have wrought, and from the sustenance they by his means enjoyed, they must have got a very high notion of him. See, when the judgment is right, and not preoccupied by some passion, how immediately it gets right judgments, and gives sound verdicts.

And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and the Three Taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

Acts 28:11-15 Already the preaching has reached to Sicily: see how it has run through (even to those lands): at Puteoli also they found some: others also came to meet them. Such was the eagerness of the brethren, it nothing disconcerted them, that Paul was in bonds. But observe also how Paul himself also was affected after the manner of men. For it says, he took courage, when he saw the brethren. Although he had worked so many miracles, nevertheless even from sight he received an accession (of confidence).

From this we learn, that he was both comforted after the manner of men, and the contrary. And when we came to Rome, Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. Acts 28:16 Leave was given him to dwell by himself. No slight proof this also of his being held in much admiration: it is clear they did not number him among the rest. And it came to pass, that after three days he called together them that were the chief of the Jews. After three days he called the chief of the Jews, that their ears might not be preoccupied.

And what had he in common with them? For they would not (else) have been like to accuse him. Nevertheless, it was not for this that he cared; it was for the teaching that he was concerned, and that what he had to say might not offend them.

(Recapitulation.) And the barbarians, etc. Acts 28:2 The Jews then, beholding all the many miracles they did, persecuted and harassed (Paul); but the barbarians, who had seen none, merely on the ground of his misfortune, were kind to him.-- No doubt, say they, this man is a murderer: Acts 28:4. They do not simply pronounce their judgment, but say, No doubt, (i.e.) as any one may see and vengeance, say they, suffers him not to live. Why then, they held also the doctrine of a Providence, and these barbarians were far more philosophic than the philosophers, who allow not the benefit of a Providence to extend to things below the moon: whereas (these barbarians) suppose God to be present everywhere, and that although a (guilty) man may escape many (a danger), he will not escape in the end.

And they do not assail him immediately, but for a time respect him on account of his misfortune: nor do they openly proclaim their surmise, but speak it among themselves: a murderer; for the bonds led them to suspect this. They showed no small kindness, and yet (some of them) were prisoners. Let those be ashamed that say, Do not do good to those in prison: let these barbarians shame us; for they knew not who these men were, but simply because they were in misfortune (they were kind): thus much they perceived, that they were human beings, and therefore they considered them to have a claim upon their humanity.

And for a great while, it says, they expected that he would die. Acts 28:6 But when he shook his hand, and flung off the beast, then they saw and were astonished. And the miracle did not take place suddenly, but the men went by the length of time, after they had looked a great while, so plainly was there no deceit, no haste here (συνεπραγμ). Publius, it says, lodged them courteously Acts 28:7: two hundred and seventy-six persons. Consider how great the gain of his hospitality: not as of necessity, not as unwilling, but as reckoning it a gain he lodged them for three days: thereafter having met with his requital, he naturally honored Paul much more, when the others also received healing.

Who also, it says, honored us with many honors Acts 28:10: not that he received wages, God forbid; but as it is written, The workman is worthy of his meat. And when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary. Matthew 10:10 It is plain that having thus received them, they also received the word of the preaching: for it is not to be supposed, that during an entire three months they would have had all this kindness shown them, had these persons not believed strongly, and herein exhibited the fruits (of their conversion): so that from this we may see a strong proof of the great number there was of those that believed.

Even this was enough to establish (Paul's) credit with those (his fellow-voyagers). Observe how in all this voyage they nowhere touched at a city, but (were cast) on an island, and passed the entire winter (there, or) sailing -- those being herein under training for faith, his fellow-voyagers, I mean. (a) And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. Acts 28:11 Probably this was painted on it: so addicted were they to their idols. (d) And when the south wind blew, we came the next day to Puteoli: where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. (v. 13, 14.) (b) Observe them tarrying a while, and again hasting onwards. (e) And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and the Three Taverns Acts 28:15: not fearing the danger. (c) Paul therefore was now so much respected, that he was even permitted to be by himself: for if even before this they used him kindly,

much more would they now. (g) He was suffered, it says, to dwell by himself, with a soldier that kept him.

Acts 28:16 That it might not be possible for any plot to be laid against him there either -- for there could be no raising of sedition now. So that in fact they were not keeping Paul in custody, but guarding him, so that nothing unpleasant should happen: for it was not possible now, in so great a city, and with the Emperor there, and with Paul's appeal, for anything to be done contrary to order. So surely is it the case, that always through the things which seem to be against us, all things turn out for us.

With the soldier -- for he was Paul's guard. And having called together the chief of the Jews Acts 28:17, he discourses to them, who both depart gainsaying, and are taunted by him, yet they dare not say anything: for it was not permitted them to deal with his matter at their own will. For this is a marvellous thing, that not by the things which seem to be for our security, but by their very opposites, all comes to be for us. And that you may learn this -- Pharaoh commanded the infants to be cast into the river.

Exodus 1:22 Unless the infants had been cast forth, Moses would not have been saved, he would not have been brought up in the palace. When he was safe, he was not in honor; when he was exposed, then he was in honor. But God did this, to show His riches of resource and contrivance. The Jew threatened him, saying, Would you kill me? Exodus 1:14 and this too was of profit to him. It was of God's providence, in order that he should see that vision in the desert, in order that the proper time should be completed, that he should learn philosophy in the desert, and there live in security.

And in all the plottings of the Jews against him the same thing happens: then he becomes more illustrious. As also in the case of Aaron; they rose up against him, and thereby made him more illustrious Numbers 16 and 17: that so his ordination should be unquestionable, that he might be held in admiration for the future also from the plates of brass (τῶν πετῶλων τοῦ χαλκοῦ). Of course you know the history: wherefore I pass over the narration. And if you will, let us go over the same examples from the beginning.

Cain slew his brother, but in this he rather benefited him: for hear what Scripture says, The voice of your brother's blood cries unto Me Genesis 4:10: and again in another place, To the blood that speaks better things than that of Abel. Hebrews 12:24 He freed him from the uncertainty of the future, he increased his reward: we have all learned hereby what love God had for him. For what was he injured? Not a whit, in that he received his end sooner. For say, what do they gain, who die more slowly?

Nothing: for the having good days does not depend on the living many years or few years, but in the using life properly. The Three Children were thrown into the furnace, and through this they became more illustrious: Daniel was cast into the pit, and thence was he made more renowned. (Daniel 3 and 6.) You see that trials in every case bring forth great good even in this life, much more in the life to come: but as to malice, the case is the same, as if a man having a reed should set himself to fight with the fire: it seems indeed to beat the fire, but it makes it brighter, and only consumes itself.

For the malice of the wicked becomes food and an occasion of splendor to virtue: for by God's turning the unrighteousness to good account, our character shines forth all the more. Again, when the devil works anything of this kind, he makes those more illustrious that endure. How then, you will say, was this not the case with Adam, but, on the contrary, he became more disgraced? Nay, in this case of all others God turned (the malice of) that (wicked one) to good account: but if (Adam) was the worse for it, it was he that injured himself: for it is the wrongs that are done to us by others that become the means of great good to us, not so the wrongs which are done by ourselves.

As indeed, because the fact is that when hurt by others, we grieve, but not so when hurt by ourselves, therefore it is that God shows, that he who suffers unjustly at the hands of another, gets renown, but he who injures himself, receives hurt: that so we may bear the former courageously, but not the latter. And besides, the whole thing there was Adam's own doing. Wherefore did you the woman's bidding? Genesis 3:6 Wherefore when she counselled you contrary (to God), did you not repel her?

You were assuredly yourself the cause. Else, if the devil was the cause, at this rate all that are tempted ought to perish: but if all do not perish, the cause (of our destruction) rests with ourselves. But, you will say, all that are tempted ought (at that rate) to succeed. No: for the cause is in ourselves. At that rate it ought to follow that (some) perish without the devil's having anything to do with it. Yes: and in fact many do perish without the devil's being concerned in it: for surely the devil does not bring about all (our evil doings); no, much comes also from our own sluggishness by itself alone: and if he too is anywhere concerned as a cause, it is from our offering the occasion.

For say, why did the devil prevail in Judas' case? When Satan entered into him John 13:27, you will say. Yes, but hear the cause: it was because he was a thief, and bare what was put in the bag. John 12:6 It was he that himself gave the devil a wide room for entering into him: so that it is not the devil who puts into us the beginning, it is we that receive and invite him. But, you will say, if there were no devil, the evils would not have become great. True, but then our punishment would admit of no plea for mitigation: but as it is, beloved, our punishment is more mild, whereas if we had wrought the evils of ourselves, the chastisements would be intolerable.

For say, if Adam, without any counsel, had committed the sin he did, who would have snatched him out of the dangers? But he would not have sinned, you will say? What right have you to say this? For he who had so little solidity, that was so inert and so ready for folly as to receive such advice as this, much more would he without any counsel have become this (that he did become). What devil incited the brethren of Joseph to envy? If then we be watchful brethren, the devil becomes to us the cause even of renown.

Thus, what was Job the worse for his falling into such helplessness of distress? Speak not of this instance, you will say: (Job was not the worse,) but the weak person is the worse. Yes, and the weak person is the worse, even if there be no devil. But in a greater degree, you will say, when there is the devil's power working along with him. True, but he is the less punished, when he has sinned through the devil's working with him; for the punishments are not the same for all sins.

Let us not deceive ourselves: the devil is not the cause of our taking harm, if we be watchful: rather what he does, is to awake us out of our sleep; what he does, is to keep us on the alert. Let us for a while examine these things: suppose there were no wild beasts, no irregular states of the atmosphere; no sicknesses, no pains, no sorrows, nor anything else of the kind: what would not man have become? A hog rather than a man, revelling in gluttony and drunkenness, and troubled by none of those things.

But as it is, cares and anxieties are an exercise and discipline of philosophy, a method for the best of training. For say, let a man be brought up in a palace, having no pain, nor care, nor anxiety, and having neither cause for anger nor failure, but whatever he sets his mind upon, that let him do, in that let him succeed, and have all men obeying him: (see whether) such a man would not become more irrational than any wild beast. But as it is, our reverses and our afflictions are as it were a whetstone to sharpen us.

For this reason the poor are for the most part wiser than the rich, as being driven about and tost by many waves. Thus a body also, being idle and without motion, is sickly and unsightly: but that which is

exercised, and suffers labor and hardships, is more comely and healthy: and this we should find to hold also in the case of the soul. Iron also, lying unused, is spoilt, but if worked it shines brightly; and in like manner a soul which is kept in motion. Now these reverses are precisely what keeps the soul in motion.

Arts again perish, when the soul is not active: but it is active when it has not everything plain before it: it is made active by adverse things. If there were no adverse things, there would be nothing to stir it: thus, if everything existed ready-made in beautiful sort, art would not have found wherein to exercise itself. So, if all things were level to our understanding, the soul would not find wherein to exert itself: if it had to be carried about everywhere, it would be an unsightly object.

See you not, that we exhort nurses not to make a practice of carrying children always, that they may not bring them into a habit (of wanting to be carried) and so make them helpless? This is why those children which are brought up under the eyes of their parents are weak, in consequence of the indulgence, which by sparing them too much injures their health. It is a good thing, even pain in moderation; a good thing, care; a good thing, want; for they make us strong: good also are their opposites: but each of these when in excess destroys us; and the one relaxes, but the other (by overmuch tension) breaks us.

Do you see not, that Christ also thus trains His own disciples? If they needed these things, much more do we. But if we need them, let us not grieve, but even rejoice in our afflictions. For these are remedies, answering to our wounds, some of them bitter, others mild; but either of them by itself would be useless. Let us therefore return thanks to God for all these things: for He does not suffer them to happen at random, but for the benefit of our souls. Therefore, showing forth our gratitude, let us return Him thanks, let us glorify Him, let us bear up courageously, considering that it is but for a time, and stretching forward our minds to the things future, that we may both lightly bear the things present, and be counted worthy to attain unto the good things to come, through the grace and mercy of His only begotten Son, with Whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost together be glory, might, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-54-on-the-acts-of-the-apostles/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net