

Homily 6 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

The resurrection of Jesus is the proof of his divinity and the fulfillment of prophecy, bringing the promise of the Holy Spirit and the call to faith in Jesus.

Scripture: Matthew 3:11, Matthew 11:29, Acts 2:22-24, Acts 2:31, Acts 2:34, Acts 2:36

Topics: "Christ's Resurrection", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of recognizing Jesus as a man sent from God, proven through miracles and signs, and how the crucifixion of Jesus was part of God's plan despite the wicked actions of men. He emphasizes the significance of Christ's resurrection, highlighting that it was not possible for death to hold Him, and how David's prophecy foretold of this event. Chrysostom urges the audience to embrace meekness and gentleness over anger and wrath, illustrating the detrimental effects of giving in to rage and the importance of following Christ's teachings to avoid falling into the devil's destructive ways.

Transcript

Acts II. 22

You men of Israel, hear these my words.

[He men of Israel]: it is not for flattery that he uses this term; but, as he has borne hard upon them, he relaxes a little, and puts them in mind of their great ancestor [Israel]. Here again he begins with an introduction, that they may not become excited, now that he is going to make express mention to them of Jesus: for in what preceded, there was no reason why they should be excited, while the Prophet was the subject of discourse: but the name of Jesus would have given offense at the very outset.-- And he does not say, Do as I bid you, but, Hear; as being not at all exacting.

And observe how he forbears to speak of the high matters, and begins with the very low: Jesus, he says: and then straightway mentions the place He belonged to, being one which was held in mean estimation: Jesus of Nazareth: and does not say anything great about Him, nor even such as one would say about a Prophet, so far: Jesus, he says, of Nazareth, a man proved (to be) from God among you. Observe; what great matter was this, to say that He was sent from God? For this was the point which on all occasions both He and John and the Apostles were studious to show.

Thus hear John saying: The same said to me On whom you shall see the Spirit descending, and abiding on him, this is He. John 1:33 But Christ Himself does this to an extreme; Of Myself I am not come, He sent Me. John 7:28 And everywhere in the Scriptures this seems the point most studiously insisted upon. Therefore also this holy leader of the blessed company, the lover of Christ, the good shepherd, the man put in trust with the keys of heaven, the man who received the Spiritual Wisdom, when he has first subdued the Jews by fear; and has shown what great things have been vouchsafed to the disciples, and what a right they have to be believed, then first proceeds to speak concerning Him.

Only think what boldness it was to say it, in the midst of the murderers -- that He is risen! And yet he does not all at once say, He is risen; but what?-- He came, says he, from God: this is manifest by the signs which-- he does not yet say, Jesus Himself wrought: but what?-- which God wrought by Him in the midst of you. He calls themselves as witnesses. A man proved (to be sent) from God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God wrought by him in the midst of you, as also ye yourselves know.

Then, having fallen upon the mention of that their sacrilegious outrage, observe how he endeavors to quit them of the crime: Him, he says, being by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God delivered up: Acts 2:23 [adding however,] you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: for though it was predetermined, still they were murderers. [By the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God:] all but using the same words as Joseph did; just as he said to his brethren; Be not angry one with another by the way: God sent me hither.

Genesis 45:5, 24 It is God's doing. What of us, then? (it might be said,) it was even well done on our part. That they may not say this, therefore it is that he adds, By wicked hands you have crucified and slain. Here then he hints at Judas; while at the same time he shows them that it was not from any strength of theirs, and would not have been, if He had not Himself permitted it: it was God that delivered Him up. He has transferred the evil entire upon the head of Judas, now already parted from them; for he it was that delivered Him over to them by the kiss.

Or, By wicked hands, refers to the soldiers: for neither is it simply, You have slain, but, By wicked men you have done this. And observe how everywhere they make it of great importance that the Passion should first be confessed. Whom God Raised Up Acts 2:24, says he. This was the great thing; and observe how he sets it in the middle of his discourse: for the former matters had been confessed; both the miracles and the signs and the slaying -- Whom God, says he, raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be kept in its power.

It is something great and sublime that he has hinted at here. For the expression, It was not possible, even itself is that of one assigning something. It shows that death itself in holding Him had pangs as in travail, and was sore bestead: whereas, by pains, or, travail-pangs, of death, the Old Testament means danger and disaster: and that He so rose as never more to die. For the assertion, Seeing that it was not possible that He should be holden of it, means this, that His rising was not common to the rest.

Then, however, before their thoughts can enter at all into his meaning, he brings David upon them, an authority which sets aside all human reasoning. For David says (with reference) to Him. Acts 2:25 And observe how, once more, the testimony is lowly. For therefore he begins the citation further up, with the matters of lowlier import: therefore was death not in the number of grievous things [because], says he, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, that He is on my right hand that I should not be moved: Acts 2:25-27 and, that You will not leave my soul in hell.

Then, having finished the citation from the Prophet, he adds; Men and brethren. Acts 2:29 When he is about to say anything great, he uses this opening address, to rouse and to conciliate them. Let me be allowed, he says, to speak freely to you of the patriarch David. Remarkable lowliness, in a case where he was giving no hurt, nor was there any reason why the hearers should be angry. For he did not say, This is not said concerning David, but concerning the Christ. But in another point of view: by his reverential expression towards the blessed David, he awed them; speaking of an acknowledged fact as if it were a bold thing to say, and therefore begging them to pardon him for saying it.

And thereupon his expression is not simply concerning David, but concerning the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried: he does not also say, and is not risen again, but in another way (though this too would have been no great thing to say), And his sepulchre is with us unto this day, he has said what comes to the same thing. Then -- and even so he does not come to the mention of Christ, but what next?-- he goes on with his encomium upon David, Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that with an oath God had sworn unto him.

Acts 2:30 But this he says, that were it but on account of the honor shown to David, and the descent from him, they may accept what is said concerning Christ's resurrection, as seeing that it would be an injury to the prophecy, and a derogating from (τῆς εἰς αὐτοῦ τιμῆς) their honor, if this were not the fact. And knowing, he says, that with an oath God had sworn unto him-- he does not say simply promised-- of the fruit of his loins after the flesh to raise up Christ, to seat Him upon his throne.

Observe how he has again only hinted at what is sublime. For now that he has soothed them with his expression, he confidently adds this: The prophet [says it] of His resurrection, that neither was His soul left in hell, nor did His flesh see corruption. Acts 2:31 This again is wonderful: it shows that His resurrection was not like that of other men. For though death laid hold on Him, yet it did not its own work then.-- And, as regards the sin, he has spoken of that, covertly and darkly; of the punishment, he forbore to add anything; but that they had slain Him, this he has spoken out; for the rest he now comes to the sign given by God.

And when it is once proved, that He, the slain, was just, was dear to God, then, though thou be silent of the punishment, be sure that he which did the sin will condemn himself more than ever you can condemn him. So then, that he refers all to the Father, is in order that they may receive what is said: and that assertion, Not possible, he fetches in from the prophecy. Well then, let us again look over what has been said.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man proved (to be sent) from God unto you. Recapitulation of Acts 2:22-31: one, of whom, by reason of His works, there can be no doubt; but who, on the contrary, is demonstrated. Thus also Nicodemus said, No man can do these miracles which Thou doest -- By miracles, and wonders, and signs which God wrought by Him in the midst of you John 3:2: not secretly. Setting out from facts notorious to those whom he was addressing, he then comes to things hidden. Thereupon [in saying, By the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,] Acts 2:23 he shows that it was not because they had the power to do it, and that there was a wisdom and a Divine arrangement in the event, seeing it was from God. He rapidly passes over the unpleasant part, [adding, Whom God raised up, etc.] Acts 2:24. For it is always a point of great importance with them to show that He was once dead. Though you should deny it, says he, (οἱ κείμενοι) those (present) will bear witness to the fact. [Having loosed the pangs of death.] He that gives Death trouble, may much more give trouble to them that crucified Him: however, nothing of the kind is here said, as that He had power to slay you. Meanwhile, let us also learn thus to hold. For one that

is in pain like a woman in travail, does not hold the thing held, and is not active but passive; and makes haste to cast it off. And it is well said: For David says in reference to him (v. 25); that you may not refer that saying to the Prophet.-- [Therefore being a Prophet, and knowing, etc.] (v. 30, 31.) Do you observe how he now interprets the prophecy, and does not give it bare of comment? How did He seat Him upon David's throne? For the kingdom after the Spirit is in heaven. Observe how, along with the resurrection, he has also declared the kingdom in the fact of His rising again. He shows that the Prophet was under constraint: for the prophecy was concerning Him. Why does he say, not, Concerning His kingdom (it was a great matter), but Concerning His resurrection? And how did He seat Him upon his (David's) throne? Why, He reigns as King over Jews also, yea, what is much more, over them that crucified Him. For His flesh saw no corruption. This seems to be less than resurrection, but it is the same thing.

This Jesus -- observe how he does not call Him otherwise -- has God raised up; whereof all we are witnesses. Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted (v. 33, 34): again he takes refuge with the Father, and yet it had been enough to say what precedes: but he knows what a great point this is. Here he has hinted at the Ascension also, and that Christ is in heaven: but neither does he say this openly. And having received, says he, the promise of the Holy Ghost. Observe how, in the beginning of his discourse, he does not say that Jesus Himself had sent It, but the Father: now, however, that he has mentioned His signs and the things done to Him by the Jews, and has spoken of His resurrection, he boldly introduces what he has to say about these matters, again adducing themselves as witnesses by both senses: [He has shed forth this, which you do see and hear.]

And of the resurrection he has made continual mention, but of their outrageous deed he has spoken once for all. And having received the promise of the Holy Ghost. This again is great. The promise, he says; because [promised] before His Passion. Observe how he now makes it all His [He has poured forth this], covertly making a great point. For if it was He that poured it forth, it is of Him that the Prophet has spoken above, In the last days I will pour forth of My Spirit on My Servants, and on Mine handmaids, and I will do wonders in the heaven above.

Acts 2:17 Observe what he secretly puts into it! But then, because it was a great thing, he again veils it with the expression of His having received of the Father. He has spoken of the good things fulfilled, of the signs; has said, that He is king, the point that touched them; has said, that it is He that gives the Spirit. (Arist. Rhet. 1. 3.) (For, however much a person may say, if it does not issue in something advantageous, he speaks to no purpose.) Just as John: The same, says he, shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

Matthew 3:11 And it shows that the Cross not only did not make Him less, but rendered Him even more illustrious, seeing that of old God promised it to Him, but now has given it. Or [it may be], the promise which He promised to us. He so foreknew it about to be, and has given it to us greater after the resurrection. And, has poured it out, he says; not requiring worthiness: and not simply gave, but with abundance. Whence does this appear? Henceforth after the mention of His giving the Spirit, he confidently speaks also of His ascension into heaven; and not only so, but again adducing the witness, and reminding them of that Person concerning Whom Christ once spoke.

Matthew 22:43 For not David, says he ascended into the heavens. Acts 2:34 Here he no longer speaks in lowly phrase, having the confidence which results from the things said; nor does he say, Be it permitted me to speak, or the like: But he says himself; The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool. Now if He be David's Lord, much more shall they not disdain Him. Sit on My right hand; he has set the whole matter here; until I make Your enemies Your footstool: here also he has

brought upon them a great terror, just as in the beginning he showed what He does to His friends, what to his enemies.

And again, as to the act of subjugation, not to provoke unbelief, he ascribes it to the Father. Since then these are great things that he has uttered, he again brings his discourse down to lowly matters. Let therefore, he says, the whole house of Israel know assuredly: i.e. question ye not, nor doubt ye: then also in the tone of command it follows; that God has made Him both Lord -- this he says from David -- and Christ, Acts 2:36, this from the Psalm: For when it would have been rightly concluded, Let therefore the whole house of Israel know assuredly that He sits on the right hand of God, this, which would have been great, he forbears, and brings in a different matter which is much more humble, and the expression Hath made; i.e. has ordained: so that there is nothing about (ομοουσις) communication of substance here, but the expression relates to this which has been mentioned.

Even this Jesus, Whom you crucified. He does well to end with this, thereby agitating their minds. For when he has shown how great it is, he has then exposed their daring deed, so as to show it to be greater, and to possess them with terror. For men are not so much attracted by benefits as they are chastened by fear.

But the admirable and great ones, and beloved of God, need none of these motives: men, such as was Paul: not of the kingdom, not of hell, made he account. For this is indeed to love Christ, this to be no hireling, nor to reckon it a matter of trafficking and trading, but to be indeed virtuous, and to do all for the love of God. Romans 9:3 Then what tears does it not deserve, when, owing so large a measure, we do not even like traders seek the kingdom of heaven! He promises us so great things, and not even so is He worthy to be heard?

What can come up to this enmity! And yet, they are mad after money-making, though it be with enemies, though it be with slaves, though it be with persons most hostile to them, that they come in contact, though it be with persons utterly evil, if only they expect that they shall be enabled by their means to make money, they will do everything, will flatter, and be obsequious, and make themselves slaves, and will esteem them more to be revered than all men, to get some advantage out of them: for the hope of money does not allow them to give a thought to any such considerations as these.

But the Kingdom is not so powerful as money is; nay, rather, not in the smallest proportion as powerful. For it is no ordinary Being that promises: but this is greater than even the Kingdom itself that we receive it from such a Giver! But now the case is the same as if a king, wishing, after ten thousand other benefits, to make us his heirs and coheirs with his son [should be despised]: while some captain of a band of robbers, who has done ten thousand wrongs to us and to our parents, and is himself fraught with ten thousand wickednesses, and has utterly marred our honor and our welfare, should, on presenting a single penny, receive our worship.

God promises a Kingdom, and is despised: the Devil helps us to hell, and he is honored! Here God, there Devil. But let us see the difference of the tasks enjoined. For if there were none of these considerations in the case: if it were not, here God, there Devil; not, here one helping to a kingdom, there to a hell: the nature itself of the tasks enjoined were sufficient to induce us to comply with the former. For what does each enjoin? The one, the things which make glorious; the other the things which put to shame: one, the things which involve in ten thousand calamities and disgraces; the other, the things which have with them abundant refreshment.

For look: the one says, Learn ye of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls. Matthew 11:29: the other says, Be thou savage, and ungentle, and passionate, and wrathful, and more a wild beast than a man. Let us see which is more useful, which, I pray you, more profitable. Speak not of this, say you. * * * But consider that he is the devil: above all indeed, if that be shown: there is need also to undergo toils, and, on the other hand, the prize of victory will be greater.

For not he that enjoins easy tasks is the kind (κηδεμ■ν) benefactor, but he that enjoins what is for our good. Since fathers also enjoin disagreeable tasks; but for this they are fathers: and so again do masters to slaves: but kidnappers and destroyers (λυμε■νες) on the other hand, do just the reverse. And yet that the commands of Christ are attended with a pleasure, is manifest from that saying. For to what sort do you take the passionate man to belong, and to what the forbearing and meek?

Does not the soul of the (■ κε■νου) one seem to be in a kind of solitary retreat, enjoying exceeding quiet; while that of (το■του) the other is like a market-place and tumult and the midst of cities, where great is the clamor of those going out, the noise of camels, mules, asses: of men shouting loud to those that meet them, that they may not be trodden under foot: and again, of silver-beaters, of braziers, of men thrusting and pushing this way and that and some overborne, some overbearing?

But the soul of (το■του) the former is like some mountain-top, with its delicate air, its pure sunshine, its limpid gushing fountains, its multitude of charming flowers, while the vernal meads and gardens put on their plumage of shrubs and flowers, and glance with rifling waters: and if any sound is heard there, it is sweet, and calculated to affect the ear with a sense of much delight. For either the warbling birds perch on the outermost spray of the branching trees, and cicadas, nightingales and swallows, blended in one harmony, perform a kind of concerted music; or the zephyr gently stirring the leaves, draws whistling tones from pines and firs, resembling oft the notes of the swan: and roses, violets, and other flowers, gently swayed, and (κυαν■ζοντα) dark-dimpling, show like a sea just rippled over with gentle undulations.

Nay, many are the images one might find. Thus, when one looks at the roses, one shall fancy that he beholds in them the rainbow; in the violets a waving sea; in the lilies, the sky. But not by the spectacle alone, and the beholding, does such an one then cause delight: but also in the very body of him that looks to the meadow, rather it refreshes him, and causes him to breathe freely, so that he thinks himself more in heaven than on earth. There is withal a sound of a different kind, when water from the mountain-steep, borne by its own force through ravines gently plashes over its pebbly bed with lulling noise, and so relaxes our frame with the pleasurable sensations, as quickly to draw over our eyes the soft languor of slumber.

You have heard the description with pleasure: perhaps also it has made you enamored of solitude. But sweeter far than this solitude is the soul * * of the long-suffering. For it was not for the sake of describing a meadow, nor for the sake of making a display of language, that we have broached this similitude: but the object was, that, seeing how great is the delight of the long suffering, and how, by converse with a long suffering man, one would be far more both delighted and benefited, than by frequenting such spots, you may follow after such men.

For when not even a breath of violence proceeds from such a soul, but mild and engaging words, then indeed does that gentle softness of the zephyr find its counterpart: entreaties also, devoid of all arrogance, but forming the resemblance to those winged warblers -- how is not this far better? For not the body is fanned by the soft breeze of speech; no, it refreshes our souls heated and glowing. A physician, by ever so great attention, could not so speedily rid a man of the fever, as a patient man would cool, by the breath

of his own words, a person who was passionate and burning with wrath.

And why do I speak of a physician? Not even iron, made red-hot and dipped into water, so quickly parts with its heat, as does the passionate man when he comes in contact with the soul of the long-suffering. But as, if it chance that singing birds find their way into the market, they go for nothing there, just so is it with our precepts when they light upon souls addicted to wrathful passions. Assuredly, sweeter is gentleness than bitterness and frowardness.-- Well, but the one was God's bidding, the other the devil's.

Do you see that it was not for nothing that I said, even if there were no devil or God in the case, the things enjoined would be enough in themselves to (■ ποστ■σαι) revolt us? For the one is both agreeable to himself, and serviceable to others, the other displeasing to himself, and hurtful to others. Nothing is more unpleasant than a man in a passion, nothing more noisome, more odious, more shocking, as also nothing more pleasing than one who knows not what it is to be in a passion.

Better dwell with a wild beast than with a passionate man. For the beast, when once tamed, abides by its law; but the man, no matter how often you have tamed him, again turns wild, unless however he should of himself settle down into some such habit (of gentleness).

For as a bright sunny day and winter with all its gloom, so are the soul of the angry and that of the gentle. However, let us at present look not to the mischievous consequences resulting to others, but to those which affect the persons themselves: though indeed it is also no slight mischief (to one's self) to cause ill to another, for the present, however, let that be the consideration. What executioner with his lash can so lacerate the ribs, what red-hot lancets (■ βελ■σκοι) ever so pierced the body, what madness can so dispossess a man of his natural reason, as anger and rage do? I know many instances of persons engendering diseases by giving loose to anger: and the worst of fevers are precisely these. But if they so injure the body, think of the soul. For do not argue that you do not see the mischief, but rather consider, if that which is the recipient of the malignant passion is so hurt, what must be the hurt sustained by that which engenders it! Many have lost their eyes, many have fallen into most grievous disease. Yet he that bears bravely, shall endure all things easily. But, however, both such are the troublesome tasks the devil enjoins, and the wages he assigns us for these is hell. He is both devil and foe to our salvation, and we rather do his bidding than Christ's, Saviour as He is, and Benefactor and Defender, and speaking as He does such words, which are both sweeter, and more reverend, and more profitable and beneficial, and are both to ourselves and to those who live in our company the greatest of blessings. Nothing worse than anger, my beloved, nothing worse than unseasonable wrath. It will not have any long delay; it is a quick, sharp passion. Many a time has a mere word been blurted out in anger, which needs for its curing a whole lifetime, and a deed been done which was the ruin of the man for life. For the worst of it is this, that in a little moment, and by one act, and by a single word, full oft has it cast us out from the possession of eternal good, and brought to nought a world of pains. Wherefore I beseech you to do all you can to curb this savage beast. Thus far, however, I have spoken concerning meekness and wrath; if one should take in hand to treat of other opposites, as covetousness and the mad passion for glory, contrasted with contempt of wealth and of glory; intemperance with sobriety; envy with benevolence; and to marshal them each against its opposite, then one would know how great the difference. Behold how from the very things enjoined it is plainly shown, that the one master is God, the other the devil! Why then, let us do God's bidding, and not cast ourselves into bottomless pits; but while there is time, let us wash off all that defiles the soul, that we may attain unto the eternal blessings, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father and Holy Ghost together be glory, power, honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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