

John 5:6-13

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of rejoicing with those who are well pleasing unto God and overcoming the evil of envy, which disables the eyes of the soul and endangers one's own salvation.

Scripture: John 5:8-12, Romans 12:15, Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:11

Topics: "Faith And Healing", "Overcoming Envy"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the miraculous healing of the paralytic man by the pool of Bethesda, highlighting the man's patience, suffering, and faith in Jesus' power to make him whole. Despite his long-standing illness and lack of help, the man responds with humility and obedience when Jesus commands him to rise, take up his bed, and walk. Chrysostom emphasizes the wisdom of God in gradually revealing His power and the importance of faith in receiving miracles. He also delves into the destructive nature of envy, warning against its dangers and urging listeners to cultivate charity and rejoice in the blessings of others.

Transcript

Jesus says unto him, Will you be made whole? The impotent man answered Him, Yea, Sir, but I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool.

1. Great is the profit of the divine Scriptures, and all-sufficient is the aid which comes from them. And Paul declared this when he said, Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written aforetime for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world have come, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:11 For the divine oracles are a treasury of all manner of medicines, so that whether it be needful to quench pride, to lull desire to sleep, to tread under foot the love of money, to despise pain, to inspire confidence, to gain patience, from them one may find abundant resource. For what man of those who struggle with long poverty or who are nailed to a grievous disease, will not, when he reads the passage before us, receive much comfort? Since this man who had been paralytic for thirty and eight years, and who saw each year others delivered, and himself bound by his disease, not even so fell back and despaired, though in truth not merely despondency for the past, but also hopelessness for the future, was sufficient to over-strain him. Hear now what he says, and learn the greatness of his sufferings. For when Christ had said, Will you be made whole? Yea, Lord, he says, but I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool. What can be more pitiable than these words? What more sad than these circumstances? Do you see a heart crushed through long sickness? Do

you see all violence subdued? He uttered no blasphemous word, nor such as we hear the many use in reverses, he cursed not his day, he was not angry at the question, nor did he say, Have You come to make a mock and a jest of us, that Thou asks whether I desire to be made whole? but replied gently, and with great mildness, Yea, Lord; yet he knew not who it was that asked him, nor that He would heal him, but still he mildly relates all the circumstances and asks nothing further, as though he were speaking to a physician, and desired merely to tell the story of his sufferings. Perhaps he hoped that Christ might be so far useful to him as to put him into the water, and desired to attract Him by these words. What then says Jesus?

John 5:8

Rise, take up your bed, and walk.

Now some suppose that this is the man in Matthew who was lying on a bed Matthew 9:2; but it is not so, as is clear in many ways. First, from his wanting persons to stand forward for him. That man had many to care for and to carry him, this man not a single one; wherefore he said, I have no man. Secondly, from the manner of answering; the other uttered no word, but this man relates his whole case. Thirdly, from the season and the time; this man was healed at a feast, and on the Sabbath, that other on a different day. The places too were different; one was cured in a house, the other by the pool. The manner also of the cure was altered; there Christ said, Your sins be forgiven you, but here He braced the body first, and then cared for the soul. In that case there was remission of sins, (for He says, Your sins be forgiven you,) but in this, warning and threats to strengthen the man for the future; Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you. John 5:14 The charges also of the Jews are different; here they object to Jesus, His working on the Sabbath, there they charge Him with blasphemy.

Consider now, I pray you, the exceeding wisdom of God. He raised not up the man at once, but first makes him familiar by questioning, making way for the coming faith; nor does He only raise, but bids him take up his bed, so as to confirm the miracle that had been wrought, and that none might suppose what was done to be illusion or a piece of acting. For he would not, unless his limbs had been firmly and thoroughly compacted, have been able to carry his bed. And this Christ often does, effectually silencing those who would fain be insolent. So in the case of the loaves, that no one might assert that the men had been merely satisfied, and that what was done was an illusion, He caused that there should be many relics of the loaves. So to the leper that was cleansed He said, Go, show yourself to the priest Matthew 8:4; at once providing most certain proof of the cleansing, and stopping the shameless mouths of those who asserted that He was legislating in opposition to God. This also He did in like manner in the case of the wine; for He did not merely show it to them, but also caused it to be borne to the governor of the feast, in order that one who knew nothing of what had been done, by his confession might bear to Him unsuspected testimony; wherefore the Evangelist says, that the ruler of the feast knew not whence it was, thus showing the impartiality of his testimony. And in another place, when He raised the dead, He said, Give ye him to eat; supplying this proof of a real resurrection, and by these means persuading even the foolish that He was no deceiver, no dealer in illusions, but that He had come for the salvation of the common nature of mankind.

2. But why did not Jesus require faith of this man, as He did in the case of others, saying, Believest thou that I am able to do this? It was because the man did not yet clearly know who He was; and it is not before, but after the working of miracles that He is seen so doing. For persons who had beheld His power exerted on others would reasonably have this said to them, while of those who had not yet learned who

He was, but who were to know afterwards by means of signs, it is after the miracles that faith is required. And therefore Matthew does not introduce Christ as having said this at the beginning of His miracles, but when He had healed many, to the two blind men only.

Observe however in this way the faith of the paralytic. When he had heard, Take up your bed and walk, he did not mock, nor say, What can this mean? An Angel comes down and troubles the water, and heals only one, and do You, a man, by a bare command and word hope to be able to do greater things than Angels? This is mere vanity, boasting, mockery. But he neither said nor imagined anything like this, but at once he heard and arose, and becoming whole, was not disobedient to Him that gave the command; for immediately he was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked. What followed was even far more admirable. That he believed at first, when no one troubled him, was not so marvelous, but that afterwards, when the Jews were full of madness and pressed upon him on all sides, accusing and besieging him and saying, It is not lawful for you to take up your bed, that then he gave no heed to their madness, but most boldly in the midst of the assembly proclaimed his Benefactor and silenced their shameless tongues, this, I say, was an act of great courage. For when the Jews arose against him, and said in a reproachful and insolent manner to him ("It is not lawful . . ."):

John 5:10-11

It is the Sabbath day, it is not lawful for you to carry your bed . . . He that made me whole, the Same said to me, Take up your bed, and walk.

Hear what he says ("He that made me whole . . ."), all but saying, You are silly and mad who bid me not to take Him for my Teacher who has delivered me from a long and grievous malady, and not to obey whatever He may command. Had he chosen to act in an unfair manner, he might have spoke differently, as thus, I do not this of my own will, but at the bidding of another; if this be a matter of blame, blame him who gave the order, and I will set down the bed. And he might have concealed the cure, for he well knew that they were vexed not so much at the breaking of the Sabbath, as at the curing of his infirmity. Yet he neither concealed this, nor said that, nor asked for pardon, but with loud voice confessed and proclaimed the benefit. Thus did the paralytic; but consider how unfairly they acted. For they said not, Who is it that has made you whole? on this point they were silent, but kept on bringing forward the seeming transgression.

John 5:12-13

What man is that which said to you, Take up your bed and walk? And he that was healed knew not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in that place.

And why did Jesus conceal Himself? First, that while He was absent, the testimony of the man might be unsuspected, for he who now felt himself whole was a credible witness of the benefit. And in the next place, that He might not cause the fury of the Jews to be yet more inflamed, for the very sight of one whom they envy is wont to kindle not a small spark in malicious persons. On this account He retired, and left the deed by itself to plead its cause among them, that He might not say anything in person respecting Himself, but that they might do so who had been healed, and with them also the accusers. Even these last for a while testify to the miracle, for they said not, Wherefore have you commanded these things to be done on the Sabbath day? but, Wherefore doest thou these things on the Sabbath day? not being displeased at the transgression, but envious at the restoration of the paralytic. Yet in respect of human labor, what the paralytic did was rather a work, for the other was a saying and a word. Here then He commands another

to break the Sabbath, but elsewhere He does the same Himself, mixing clay and anointing a man's eyes John 9; yet He does these things not transgressing, but going beyond the Law. And on this we shall hereafter speak. For He does not, when accused by the Jews respecting the Sabbath, always defend Himself in the same terms, and this we must carefully observe.

3. But let us consider awhile how great an evil is envy, how it disables the eyes of the soul to the endangering his salvation who is possessed by it. For as madmen often thrust their swords against their own bodies, so also malicious persons looking only to one thing, the injury of him they envy, care not for their own salvation. Men like these are worse than wild beasts; they when wanting food, or having first been provoked by us, arm themselves against us; but these men when they have received kindness, have often repaid their benefactors as though they had wronged them.

Worse than wild beasts are they, like the devils, or perhaps worse than even those; for they against us indeed have unceasing hostility, but do not plot against those of their own nature, (and so by this Jesus silenced the Jews when they said that He cast out devils by Beelzebub,) but these men neither respect their common nature, nor spare their own selves. For before they vex those whom they envy they vex their own souls, filling them with all manner of trouble and despondency, fruitlessly and in vain.

For wherefore do you grieve, O man, at the prosperity of your neighbor? We ought to grieve at the ills we suffer, not because we see others in good repute. Wherefore this sin is stripped of all excuse. The fornicator may allege his lust, the thief his poverty, the man-slayer his passion, frigid excuses and unreasonable, still they have these to allege. But what reason, tell me, will you name? None other at all, but that of intense wickedness. If we are commanded to love our enemies, what punishment shall we suffer if we hate our very friends?

And if he who loves those that love him will be in no better a state than the heathen, what excuse, what palliation shall he have who injures those that have done him no wrong? Hear Paul, what he says, Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing 1 Corinthians 13:3; now it is clear to every one that where envy and malice are, there charity is not. This feeling is worse than fornication and adultery, for these go no farther than him who does them, but the tyranny of envy has overturned entire Churches, and has destroyed the whole world.

Envy is the mother of murder. Through this Cain slew Abel his brother; through this Esau (would have slain) Jacob, and his brethren Joseph, through this the devil all mankind. Thou indeed now killest not, but thou dost many things worse than murder, desiring that your brother may act unseemly, laying snares for him on all sides, paralyzing his labors on the side of virtue, grieving that he pleases the Master of the world. Yet you war not with your brother, but with Him whom he serves, Him you insult when you prefer your glory to His.

And what is in truth worst of all, is that this sin seems to be an unimportant one, while in fact it is more grievous than any other; for though you show mercy and watchest and fastest, you are more accursed than any if you envy your brother. As is clear from this circumstance also. A man of the Corinthians was once guilty of adultery, yet he was charged with his sin and soon restored to righteousness; Cain envied Abel; but he was not healed, and although God Himself continually charmed the wound, he became more pained and wave-tossed, and was hurried on to murder.

Thus this passion is worse than that other, and does not easily permit itself to be cured except we give heed. Let us then by all means tear it up by the roots, considering this, that as we offend God when we

waste with envy at other men's blessings, so when we rejoice with them we are well pleasing to Him, and render ourselves partakers of the good things laid up for the righteous. Therefore Paul exhorts us to Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep Romans 12:15, that on either hand we may reap great profit.

Considering then that even when we labor not, by rejoicing with him that labors, we become sharers of his crown, let us cast aside all envy, and implant charity in our souls, that by applauding those of our brethren who are well pleasing unto God, we may obtain both present and future good things, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory, now and ever, world without end. Amen.

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