

SERMON GUIDE

The Cloud: John Chrysostom

Deuteronomy 31:6



7.28.2024

SERMON NOTES

Exegesis

VS 6 -- *“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”*

The context of this passage is the transfer of power from Moses to Joshua. Joshua is stepping into leadership of the people of Israel. He has been a number two to Moses for years. Now he is stepping into a position where he is the spokesman and leader to the people for God. He is commanded not to fear doing what the Lord commands him. He is told not to be in fear or dread the nations he is going to drive out of the land. The reason why his labor is not in isolation. God is with him. This knowledge of walking in God's will and with God's presence should lead him to courageous action. This should be true for all of us. We should not fear or dread those who will come against us for walking in God's commands or proclaiming God's commands. He is with us. He will not forsake us.

Why do we need this exhortation today? Because speaking the truth and walking in the truth will make you a target. People do not like to hear the truth. Our culture is in a war against truth. They would rather live comfortably in a lie than have people shining a light on reality. It requires developing the virtue of courage to be a faithful Christian in 2024. Without courage, you'll let the scorn or disapproval of those who hate the truth to steer you. Seeking their approval will act as a steering wheel on your back to silence you. This is why it is important to study church history and learn from the examples of people like John Chrysostom.

Biographical Sketch

John "Chrysostom" (which was a nickname) was born in 349 AD. He was from Antioch, the leading intellectual center of the ancient world and Christianity at this time. His mother was widowed and a very pious/devout Christian woman. John's father was a military officer that died when John was young. John was tutored by a famous rhetoric teacher that taught in both Athens and Constantinople. He was a very intelligent and quick study.

He entered the monastery after he finished his education. He embraced the rigors of ascetic life so fully that it damaged his health, and was something that caused long-term problems for him. The strain to his health led him out of the monastery and back into public life. He quickly progressed from lector to deacon to priest at the church in Antioch. In time, John's preaching began to draw attention, especially after what has been called the "Affair of Statues."

In the spring of 388AD (John is 39 years old), a rebellion erupted in Antioch over the announcement of increased taxes. The result led to citizens of the city destroying and desecrating the statues of the emperor and his family. The result? The imperial officials punished the city leaders, even killing some. The Archbishop, Flavian, rushed to the capital in Constantinople (800 miles away) to beg the Emperor for reprieve and clemency. This opened up the opportunity for John to preach to the city in Flavian's absence. When Flavian returned to the city 8 weeks later, John's reputation had grown and he soared. From that point on, he was in high demand all over to preach.

He preached through entire books of the Bible. He rarely ever used allegory in his preaching (a common trait of preaching in the early church). He spoke plainly and emphasized the meaning of Scripture, giving powerful personal application for his listeners. His favorite books to preach from were Paul's letters. He called Paul, "that vessel of election, the trumpet of heaven." His preaching was so good it earned him the nickname "Chrysostomos," which means, "golden mouth/tongue." His preaching was considered the best in the early church. It was humorous. And it was direct. Many pagans in Antioch came to faith as a result of John's preaching.

His sermons lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours. They were always well attended. But he was easily discouraged. He once remarked, "My work is like that of a man who is trying to clean a piece of ground into which a muddy stream is constantly flowing." On another occasion he lamented about how those that listened to him quickly forgot what they heard, "My sermons are applauded merely from custom, then everyone runs off to horse racing again and gives much more applause to jockeys, showing indeed unrestrained passion for them! There they put their heads together with great attention, and say with mutual rivalry, 'This horse did not run well, this one stumbled,' and one holds to this jockey and another to that. No one thinks any more of my sermons, nor of the holy and awesome mysteries that are accomplished here."

But it was his preaching that got him into trouble and eventually led to his untimely death. In early 398, John was seized by soldiers and transported to the capital of the Roman Empire in Constantinople. He was forcibly consecrated as the archbishop of the city. His kidnapping was arranged by a government official that wanted the city to have the best preacher/orator in Christianity. This is a true story. This would be like the US government kidnapping John Piper or R.C. Sproul in their primes and make them go to Washington DC to pastor there. John did not resist, but accepted it as God's providence in his life.

But John did not soften his words or adjust his preaching to his new audience, which included many members of the imperial family. He preached just as he did in Antioch on themes such as abortion, prostitution, gluttony, the theater, and swearing. He hammered against the abuses of wealth and power. He once said, "Riches are not forbidden, but the pride of them is." and "The rich man is not one who is in possession of much, but one who gives much." He lived this. He used his considerable household budget (provided by the government) to give to the poor and build hospitals.

His zeal upset people. They thought they were getting a man who was an eloquent speaker, but they got a guy who was equally passionate about the state of the church. He wanted to see true faith and reform in the church. He said, "Nothing will divide the church so much as the love of power." He actively called out hypocrisy in the church and government. This included calling out other bishops and priests by name. The residents of the city loved him, but the ruling class and elites did not. From his position of leadership and influence, he actively sent missionaries to pagan areas to convert them to Christianity. He was involved in trying to reconcile splintered groups of Christians to unite them back together for the work of the gospel.

John did not worry about tact or political correctness. He once said, "We must not mind insulting men, if by respecting them we offend God." This created many enemies for him, including the imperial family and other bishops. You might think to yourself, "is it worth saying things if it's going to cost you relationships, physical well-being, or opportunities?" But John said, "Only those who do not fight are never wounded." It eventually led to a coo against him. A council was created and trumped up charges of heresy were leveled against him, deposing him from his office. The Emperor and Empress were involved in this. John was found guilty and sentenced to death, but the people of the city rioted and

protested. So his death sentence was quickly changed to exile/banishment. However, that night, after the trial concluded, there was a disaster in the palace. It is not clear what it was. Some say it was a minor earthquake that hit there. Whatever it was a big enough deal for the Empress to decide that John wouldn't be banished. So they let him off with a warning. He went back to his role as the bishop of Constantinople. But the people who he had spoken out against before had not changed, so John's preaching did not change either. He refused to hide the truth.

He made it two more months before they decided to reinstate the banishment. This didn't stop his writing and speaking of the truth. He continued railing against the corruption and sin he saw. Even non-Christians in the city began to question if an injustice had occurred against him because of issues that unfolded in the city, including the death of the Empress just a few months after his banishment. They equated it all to the judgment of God. Eventually he was banished further away to neutralize him as a threat against the city. They transported him across Asia Minor the brutal weather conditions took a toll on him and his health began to fail almost immediately. He died on the eastern shore of the Black Sea on September 14th, 407AD. He was 58 years old. It is said that his last words spoken were, "Glory to God for all things."

Thirty-four years after his death, the son of the Emperor and Empress that exiled him, publicly asked for forgiveness for the sins of his parents against John of Antioch. During his lifetime, his preaching made a huge impact on many. And while he never wrote a theological work that made a lasting mark, there are two things that continue to endure from him. He wrote an Easter sermon that is still read by Christians today and in church services today. It's considered one of the greatest sermons ever given in all of Christian history. And parts of it are actually done as interactive with the congregation reciting portions. I will actually read it before we take communion this morning.

Another lasting legacy of his is a liturgy he wrote outlining a worship service. It has continued to be used in many churches around the world (particularly the Orthodox church) for 1,500 years since he wrote it.

On character and Christian living:

“No matter how just your words may be, you ruin everything when you speak with anger.”

“As a moth gnaws a garment, so doth envy consumes a man.”

“Faithfulness in little things is a big thing.”

“Be ashamed when you sin, not when you repent.”

On marriage and raising children:

“The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together.”

“The primary goal in the education of children is to teach, and to give the example of, a virtuous life.”

“What greater work is there than training the mind and forming the habits of the young?”

On prayer:

“Why not learn to enjoy the little things-there are so many of them.”

“It is simply impossible to lead, without the aid of prayer, a virtuous life.”

“Prayer is the root, the fountain, the mother of a thousand blessings.”

Application

1. Don't be afraid to speak what is true in the face of men who will hate it.

You may not have a pulpit or huge social media following. But we are called to love the truth. We are to stand for the truth. And in a world that hates the truth, there will be times when we may have to speak it in the face of opposition. Many people struggle with this because they care too much about what others think of them over what honors and pleases God. John Chrysostom famously said about this, "If you knew how quickly people would forget about you after your death, you will not seek in your life to please anyone but God." We must not live our lives fearful of what others will think about us because we live and speak the truth.

2. Seek continual holiness and obedience to God with your life.

John pushed for the reform of the church and holiness in the Christian life. He knew the importance of ongoing obedience and turning from sin. He believed the life of the Christian was an evidence of the authenticity of their faith. This aligns with the teaching of Scripture. We are called as those who have been rescued and redeemed by Christ to seek holiness. We are to become in practice what Christ has declared us to be in standing. Christ died for our sins and gave us his righteousness. Therefore, we ought to put away sin and strive to honor God with our entire lives. Chrysostom even goes so far in

one sermon as to say that one of the reasons God lets Satan remain on earth is to require His people to fight against him for their holiness. Satan's temptations and snares are a way to sharpen the iron of our faith and obedience.

3. Endure whatever suffering comes your way with faith and trust in God.

John experienced exile and banishment for speaking the truth. There were people in the cities he preached in that sought to make his life miserable. Powerful people sought to make his life hard. But he endured with faith. Our passage in Deuteronomy is a reminder of this too. Joshua is told not to let the fear or dread of his enemies distract him from the task. He's reminded that God was with him. This didn't mean ease and comfort. It meant he was called to endure through whatever he faced with trust in the Lord. And so are we. Everything we experience in this life is meant to be experienced with faith and trust in God. Our blessings are to be received from His hand. And our trials are to be received in the same way, and we are to trust Him through them. John's life and faith are a part of the great cloud of witnesses for us to learn from. May we be people who endure trials with faith, that pursue holiness in our lives, and speak truth regardless of what it costs us.

The Paschal Homily:

If any be devout and God-loving, let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumph. If any be a good and wise servant, let him enter rejoicing into the joy of his Lord. If any be weary of fasting, let him now receive his reward. If any have labored from the first hour, let him receive today his rightful due. If any have come at the third hour, let him feast with thankfulness. If any have arrived at the sixth hour, let him in no wise be in doubt, for in no wise shall he suffer loss. If any be delayed even until the ninth hour, let him draw near, doubting nothing, fearing nothing. If any have tarried even until the eleventh hour, let him not be fearful on account of his lateness; for the Master, Who is jealous of His honor, receiveth the last even as the first. He giveth rest to him that cometh at the eleventh hour, as well as to him that hath labored from the first hour; and to the last He is merciful, and the first He pleaseth; to the one He giveth, and to the other He bestoweth; and He receiveth the works, and welcometh the intention; and the deed He honoureth, and the offering He praiseth. Wherefore, then, enter ye all into the joy of your Lord; both the first and the second, receive ye your reward. Ye rich and ye poor, with one another exult.

Ye sober and ye slothful, honor the day. Ye that have kept the fast and ye that have not, be glad today. The table is full-laden, delight ye all. The calf is fatted; let none go forth hungry. Let all enjoy the feast of faith, receive all ye the riches of goodness. Let no one bewail his poverty, for the universal kingdom hath been revealed. Let no one weep for his transgressions, for forgiveness hath dawned from the tomb. Let no one fear death, for the death of the Saviour hath set us free. He hath quenched by it, He hath led hades captive, He Who descended into hades. He embittered it, when it tasted of His flesh. And foretelling this, Isaiah cried: "Hades," he saith, "was embittered when he encountered Thee below." It was embittered, for it was abolished. It was embittered, for it was mocked. It was embittered, for it was slain. It was embittered, for it was overthrown. It was embittered, for it was fettered. It received a body and encountered God. It received earth, and met heaven. It received that which it saw, and fell to what it did not see. O death, where is thy sting? O hades, where is thy victory?

Christ is risen, and thou art cast down.

Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen.

Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice.

Christ is risen, and life flourisheth.

Christ is risen, and there is none dead in the tombs.

For Christ, being risen from the dead, is to become the first-fruits of them that have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?



- **REVIEW**

- Read **Deuteronomy 31:6** and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
- What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
- Additional Scripture:
 - Matthew 10:33
 - Matthew 16:24
 - Luke 14:26-27
 - Philippians 1:29
 - Philippians 3:7

- **REFLECT**

- Is it right for Christian to rebel against authorities?
- How do we determine when it is appropriate to rebel?
- Is it right for Christian to have enemies?
- Why should we seek holiness if God has already declared us righteous?

- **RESPOND**

- Where in your life have you failed to be obedient out of fear?
- What can you learn from John Chrysostom's life?
- What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?

- **MEDITATE**

- Deuteronomy 31:6 – “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

- **MEMORIZE**

- Matthew 16:24 – Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”



- **FOLLOW:** How will you follow Jesus this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him?
- **FISH:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story or the gospel?
- **PRAYER**
 - Pray over any request from your group members.
 - **Staff** – Ally Johnson
 - **Ministry** – Communication Director
 - **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
 - **Pray for our short-term teams**
 - Asian Pacific Rim Team #2 departing August 16
 - Central Asia Team #2 departing on September 27
 - **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>