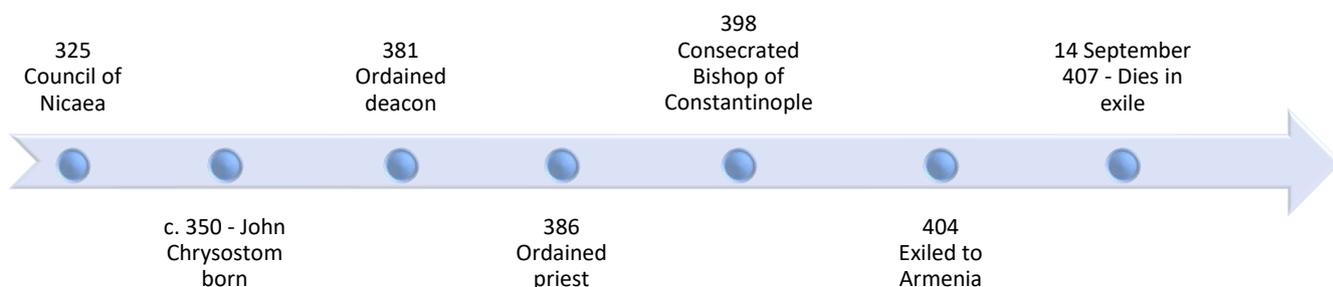


John Chrysostom

Proclaiming the Gospel

Life and Times of John Chrysostom



At this [Basil] wept even more, and rose to go. Then I clasped him and kissed his head, and led him out, urging him to bear his fortune bravely. ‘For I trust in Christ,’ I said, ‘who called you and set you over his own sheep, that you will gain such assurance from this ministry that when I stand in peril on that great Day, you will receive me into your everlasting habitation. (*On the Priesthood*, 6.13, translated by Graham Neville)

The Popular Preacher

What makes these sermons so engaging, and do they speak to you at all personally?

Direct call to whole-hearted commitment:

But you, though you owe so much to God and have been ordered to forgive so that you might receive it in return – do you not forgive? Why ever not, I ask you? Good grief! How much kindness do we enjoy, and how much wickedness do we display? How much drowsiness? How much sluggishness? How easy is virtue? Here there is no need for bodily strength, or wealth, or riches, or power, or friendship, or anything else, but to be willing is alone sufficient, and then the whole deed is accomplished and accompanied with great benefit. Has someone grieved you or insulted you or mocked you? Consider that you too do many such things to others, even to the Lord himself. Let go and forgive.

(Homilies on Philemon, 1.777F–778A, translation my own)

Do you see how great wealth makes people mad? How it inflames them? ... But even today there are people who don’t distance themselves from wealth, but are much sillier. How, tell me, do those who make silver pots and vessels and flasks differ in silliness from the golden plane tree? How do the women differ (I am embarrassed, but have to say it) who make silver chamber-pots? Those of you who make them should be ashamed.... I know that many people will make fun of me on this point, but I won’t pay any attention – just let there be a further comment. In truth wealth makes people silly and mad. If they had such abundance, they would wish for the earth to be gold, and walls to be gold, perhaps even heaven and air to be of gold. What madness is this, what transgression of decency, what fever? Another person, made in the image of God, is dying of cold, while you’re equipping yourselves with such things? What arrogance! What more would a mad person do? Do you so revere excrement that you would receive it in silver?

(Homily on Colossians 7.377C-378A, translated by Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen)

In what ways do these three passages encourage you with the good news of Jesus?

Encouragements of the Gospel:

But as for our contest with the devil, Christ does not stand in the middle, but is wholly on our side. That he is not in the middle but is wholly with us, consider from the following. He anointed *us* when we entered the contest, but *him* he bound. He anointed *us* with the oil of joy, but *him* he bound with unbreakable chains so that he might be fettered for the combat. If I happen to trip up, he reaches out his hand and sets me up after my fall and makes me walk again. ‘For you tread,’ he says, ‘upon snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy.’

(Catechetical Homilies 3.9, translation my own)

Why are you ashamed, why do you blush, tell me, to admit your sins? You are not speaking to a human being, are you, who might reproach you? You are not confessing to your fellow servant, are you, who might expose you? No, rather to the Master, who protects and cherishes you, to the physician you are showing your wound. He is not unaware, is he, even if you do not confess, since he understands everything even before it is done. So why do you not confess? The sin does not become more burdensome because of your self-accusation, does it? Rather it becomes easier and lighter. For this reason he wishes you to confess, not in order to punish you, but in order to forgive you; not in order that he may learn your sin (how could that be, since he knows already?), but in order that you may learn how great a debt he forgives you. If you do not confess the greatness of the debt, you do not discover the excess of grace.

(On the Rich Man and Lazarus, Homily 4, translated by Catherine Roth)

He called his work a ‘gospel’ for good reason: for he came announcing to all the removal of punishment, release from sins, righteousness, holiness, redemption, adoption, inheritance of the heavens, kinship with the Son of God; to the hostile, the hard-hearted, those sitting in darkness. What, then, could ever be the equal of this good news? God on earth, man in heaven; and everything becoming topsy-turvy. Angels singing with men, men having fellowship with angels, and with all the powers above. And it was possible to see the lengthy war wound up, and reconciliation of God made with our nature, the devil disgraced, demons fleeing, the hold of death loosened, paradise opened, curse destroyed, sin cast aside, error driven away, truth returning, the word of piety being sown everywhere and growing, the citizenship of above planted on earth, those powers having friendly relations with us, and angels dwelling continually on earth, and there being great hope for the future.

Therefore has he called the history a ‘gospel’... For not by toil and sweat, not by fatigue and suffering, but simply by being loved by God have we received what we have received.

(Homilies on Matthew 1.57.15.50–16.14, translation my own)

Questions for discussion:

What lessons will you take away from John Chrysostom’s life and ministry?

Do you think preachers today should be tougher on calling people to a holy life?

Why/why not?

What could we learn from the early Christians we’ve studied for the life of our churches today?