

Katamares: Acts: 11:19-30.

11:19 *Those Believers Who Were Scattered*

The Faith Is Spread by Persecution.

Chrysostom: The persecution brought a not inconsiderable success. "For by turning everything to their good, God cooperates with those who love him." ² Had their purpose been to work zealously to establish the church, they would not have done anything different. They dispersed the teachers, and look how the preaching spread. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 25.³

11:20 *Some Spoke to the Greeks*

Trusting in the Grace of God.

Chrysostom: Look! Not even in tribulation did they succumb to lamentations and tears, as we do, but dedicated themselves to a great and good work and preached the word even more undaunted. They did not ask, "Should we, who are Cyrenians and Cyprians, attack so splendid and great a city?" Instead, trusting in the grace of God, they applied themselves to the work of teaching, and the Gentiles themselves did not disdain to learn from them. Notice how all these things were accomplished through small means; how the preaching grew; and how, similar to those in Jerusalem, they bestowed their care on everyone, treating the entire world as a single household. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 25.⁴

11:22 *Barnabas Sent to Antioch*

That the Gospel May Spread.

Chrysostom: "News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch." When such a great city was receiving the word, why did they not go themselves? Because of the Jews. But they sent Barnabas. Only it was no small part, and so it was providentially arranged for Paul to go there as well. It was both natural and providential that they turned him [toward Antioch] and that he was not shut up in Jerusalem, that voice of the gospel, that trumpet of heaven. Do you see how on all occasions Christ uses their faults to serve a need for the benefit of the church? Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 25.⁵

11:24 A Good Man

Great Grace Through Small Means.

Chrysostom: The more insignificant they were, the brighter the grace working great results by small means. "And he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord, for he was a good man." I think by "good" here he means a kind, unaffected person, very much eager for the salvation of his neighbors. "For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." "With steadfast purpose," he says. With encomium and praise, for, like rich land, this city received the word and brought forth much fruit. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 25.⁶

11:25 Barnabas Looked for Saul

Persecution to Be Expected from Those We Know Best.

Origen: Now it is good to read through the history what Jeremiah suffered among the people, in reference to whom he said, "I said: No more shall I speak or name the name of the Lord," ⁷ and again elsewhere, "I have unceasingly been an object of derision." ⁸ But whatever he also suffered at the hand of the reigning king of Israel ⁹ has been written in his prophecy. But that those from among the people came frequently to stone even Moses has also been written, and the stones of that place were not his homeland, but those following him were, that is, the people, by whom he too was dishonored. And Isaiah is reported to have been cut up by the people. Now, if someone does not accept this report because it is found in the apocryphal Isaiah, let him believe in what is written in the letter to the Hebrews: "They were stoned, cut up, put to the test." ¹⁰ The "cut up" is referred to Isaiah, just as the verse "they were murdered by the sword" ¹¹ applies to Zechariah, who was murdered "between the temple and the altar," ¹² as the Savior taught bearing witness, I believe, to a writing not contained in the shared and publicly accepted books but to one that is probably apocryphal. But they were dishonored by the Jews and went about "in sheepskins, in goatskins, impoverished, suffering tribulation" and the following. ¹³ For "all who desire to live uprightly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." ¹⁴ Now it is probably because he learned that a prophet cannot have honor "in his homeland," that Paul, having proclaimed the word in many other places, did not preach in Tarsus. Commentary on Matthew 10.18.¹⁵

11:26 Called Christians

Because of Paul, They Were Worthy of the Name.

Chrysostom: Surely they were called Christians because Paul spent such a long time among them. "For a whole year," it says, "they met with the church and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians." This is no small praise for the city, but enough to match it against all cities. For Antioch was the first city, before all the others, to have the benefit of listening to Paul for so long, and because of this the people there were the first to be deemed worthy of the name. Look at the success of Paul, to what heights it raised, like a standard, that name! Elsewhere, three thousand or five thousand or so great a number believed, but nothing like this. Elsewhere, the believers were called "they of the way"; here, they were given the name Christians. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 25.16

What Does the Name Mean?

Gregory of Nyssa: Our good Master, Jesus Christ, bestowed on us a partnership in his revered name, so that we get our name from no other person connected with us, and if one happens to be rich and well-born or of lowly origin and poor, or if one has some distinction from his business or position, all such conditions are of no avail because the one authoritative name for those believing in him is that of Christian. Now, since this grace was ordained for us from above, it is necessary, first of all, for us to understand the greatness of the gift so that we can worthily thank the God who has given it to us. Then, it is necessary to show through our life that we ourselves are what the power of this great name requires us to be. The greatness of the gift of which we are deemed worthy through the partnership with the Master becomes clear to us if we recognize the true significance of the name of Christ, so that, when in our prayers we call upon the Lord of all by this name, we may comprehend the concept that we are taking into our soul.... Paul, most of all, knew what Christ is, and he indicated, by what he did, the kind of person named for him, imitating him so brilliantly that he revealed his own Master in himself, his own soul being transformed through his accurate imitation of his prototype, so that Paul no longer seemed to be living and speaking, but Christ himself seemed to be living in him. As this astute perceiver of particular goods says, "Do you seek a proof of the Christ who speaks in me?" ¹⁷ and, "It is now no longer I that live but Christ lives in me." ¹⁸

This man knew the significance of the name of Christ for us, saying that Christ is the "power of God and the wisdom of God." ¹⁹ And he called him "peace," ²⁰ and "light inaccessible" ²¹ in whom God dwells, and

“sanctification and redemption,”²² and “great high priest,”²³ and “Passover,”²⁴ and “a propitiation” of souls,²⁵ “the brightness of glory and image of substance,”²⁶ and “maker of the world,”²⁷ and “spiritual food,”²⁸ and “spiritual drink and spiritual rock,”²⁹ “water,”³⁰ “foundation” of faith,³¹ and “cornerstone,”³² and “image of the invisible God,”³³ and “great God,”³⁴ and “head of the body of the church,”³⁵ and “the firstborn of every creature,”³⁶ “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep,”³⁷ “firstborn from the dead,”³⁸ “firstborn among many brothers,”³⁹ and “mediator between God and humanity,”⁴⁰ and “only begotten Son,”⁴¹ and “crowned with glory and honor,”⁴² and “lord of glory”⁴³ and “beginning” of being,⁴⁴ speaking thus of him who is the beginning, “king of justice and king of peace,”⁴⁵ and “ineffable king of all, having the power of the kingdom,”⁴⁶ and many other such things that are not easily enumerated. When all of these phrases are put next to each other, each one of the terms makes its own contribution to a revelation of what is signified by being named after Christ, and each provides for us a certain emphasis. To the extent that we take these concepts into our souls, they are all indications of the unspeakable greatness of the gift for us. However, since the rank of kingship underlies all worth and power and rule, by this title the royal power of Christ is authoritatively and primarily indicated (for the anointing of kingship, as we learn in the historical books, comes first⁴⁷), and all the force of the other titles depends on that of royalty. For this reason, the person who knows the separate elements included under it also knows the power encompassing these elements. But it is the kingship itself that declares what the title of Christ means.

Therefore, since, thanks to our good Master, we are sharers of the greatest and the most divine and the first of names, those honored by the name of Christ being called Christians, it is necessary that there be seen in us also all of the connotations of this name, so that the title be not a misnomer in our case but that our life be a testimony of it. Being something does not result from being called something. The underlying nature, whatever it happens to be, is discovered through the meaning attached to the name. On Perfection.⁴⁸

11:28 A Great Famine

A Twofold Famine and a Twofold Abundance.

Chrysostom: But no one does this now, even though the famine is more severe than the one then. For it is not the same when misfortune is borne in common and when everyone else has plenty, but the poor one is famishing. Back then, even those who gave were poor. “Everyone according to his ability,” it says.

The famine is twofold, just as the abundance is twofold. Back then, this was a severe famine—a famine not only of hearing the word of the Lord but also of being nourished by alms. Back then, both the poor in Judea enjoyed the benefit and those in Antioch who gave their money, and the latter more than the former. Now, both we and the poor are famishing: they from a lack of necessary sustenance and we because we, in our luxury, lack the mercy of God. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 25.1

11:29 *The Disciples Determine to Send Relief*

The Famine an Occasion of Salvation.

Chrysostom: Do you see how for them the famine was an encouragement to salvation, an opportunity to give alms and a harbinger of many blessings? And so it could have been for you, if you were so inclined. But you were not. The famine was foretold so that they might prepare themselves beforehand for almsgiving. For they were enduring terrible hardships, but before this they were not suffering from famine. And they sent it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. “The disciples,” it says, “each according to his ability.” Do you see that as soon as they believed, they bore fruit not only for their own people, but also for those far away? Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 25.5