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Teaching Notes

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## **A.C.T.S. Heroes of the Faith**

### **John Chrysostom (c. 345-407)**

#### I. The “Golden Mouth”: Fiery Preacher

- Imagine a preacher so gifted that, whenever he preached, the people were so spellbound that pickpockets were able to ply their trade with great success.
- Imagine a preacher so gifted that crowds of people would rudely push and shove their way to the front of the church in order to hear him better.
- Imagine a preacher so popular with the people at his first pastorate that he had to be kidnapped in order to move him to his new position.
- Imagine a preacher so popular that the people of the capitol city of the most powerful empire in the world rioted when they heard he’d been exiled for preaching the Word of God!

Such a preacher once lived... His name was John Chrysostom! Name “Chrysostom” means “Golden Mouth,” given to John 150 years after his death because of his power and eloquence as a preacher

Some church historians believe he was the greatest preacher in the history of the Christian church

#### **A story:**

In John’s day, the people did not sit during the sermons, but rather stood and milled about in fellowship and conversation... John sometimes preached as long as two hours at a time, but nobody seemed to mind, and they frequently clamored for more when he was done! People often responded to his sermons with applause, with shouts or catcalls, sometimes even with boos, hisses or silence.

At one point in one of his sermons, John became so frustrated at the unruliness of the congregation during the sermons that he said, “Christ never had to contend with such ill-disciplined hearers, but the disciples always simply listened quietly and politely until he had finished.” John concluded his sermon by suggesting that, from now on all applause be forbidden... this announcement brought down the house with a wild ovation!!

Hard to believe that anyone would care so much about preaching??

All of it is true... but as we shall see, the people weren't so very different from us today

#### A. The Role of Preaching

***1 Corinthians 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.***

- MTV generation of images and short attention spans
- Also “Post-Modern” culture of “truth for me, truth for you” rejects authority
- Is preaching obsolete?

God has ordained the simple verbal communication of the message as the enduring means of Gospel advance... preaching will never be obsolete

John Chrysostom gives us a powerful example of the impact of a sold-out preacher who lived his faith as well as preached it

#### B. Can We Handle the Heat??

Mark Galli, editor of *Christian History*: “There was a fire in John’s gut; he loved Jesus Christ and had little patience with Christians who did not lay every ounce of body, mind, and soul at Jesus’ feet. As much as I am drawn by his spiritual fire, I have to admit, I’m hesitant to get too close, lest I get singed.”

After his death, one of John’s many admirers wrote, “It would be a great thing to attain to his stature, but it would be hard. Nevertheless even the following of him is lovely and magnificent.”

John speaks to the shallowness of our modern, materialistic, pleasure-seeking age

John speaks also to the issues of wealth and poverty, of social justice and compassion on the poor

John speaks to the passion each Christian should have for the Word of God

John also demonstrates the kind of courage a Christian must have in speaking the truth in love

### Major Events of John Chrysostom's Life

c. 345	Born in Antioch
381	Ordained a deacon in Antioch
386	Appointed presbyter (elder) and chief preacher in Antioch
387	Delivered famous Homilies on the Statutes
397	Became Archbishop of Constantinople
404	Exiled from Constantinople
407	Died in exile in Pontus

## II. An Overview of John's Life

In John's day, Christianity was rapidly becoming the official religion of the Eastern Roman empire, despite the fact that only half the population of Constantinople and Antioch were Christian

Sundays were declared state and legal holidays; pagan festivals were abolished; the theater and circus were forbidden on Sundays; ultimately all pagan temples and sacrifices were forbidden

### A. Early Life: The Impact (Again) of a Godly Mother

#### 1. Born around A.D. 347 in Antioch

*Acts 11:26 "The disciples were called 'Christians' first at Antioch."*

Major center of early Christianity; became, next to Jerusalem, the most important capital in the Apostolic Christian church; we'll talk more about Antioch as a Christian center later

Acts 13: Paul and Barnabas were sent out from Antioch on their first missionary journey

The site of the early controversy over circumcision... a place of the early clash between Jewish and Gentile Christians

#### 2. Father Secundus an officer in the Roman army... died when John was an infant, John's mother (Anthusa) was only 20!!

#### 3. Anthusa: another amazing godly mother from church history

- Beautiful and talented... had many opportunities to remarry, but scorned every one of them and devoted herself to raising her son
- She provided him with the best possible education... training him in all the best schools in Antioch

- Hottest career at the time was in rhetoric... public speaking; especially useful for a career in law [Augustine trained in rhetoric]
- John was trained by greatest rhetoric teacher in Antioch, a pagan named Libanius; initially John's goal was to become a lawyer (like John Calvin later)
- Libanius openly disdained Christianity, choosing rather to practice the pagan cults
- He saw how talented John was and was grooming him to take his place as professor of rhetoric
- Mother had other desires and was praying for him daily to become a Christian
- Her influence was so powerful that Libanius was heard to remark: "Lord, what women these Christians have!!" What a tribute to Anthusa!!

#### B. John Conversion and Call to Monasticism

1. Sometime in the years of his formal education, John declared himself a Christian; baptized at the church at Antioch at age 18
2. Immediately he longed for time apart from the world to go into seclusion and meditate
3. Mother begged him to wait:

***"She took him into the room where he had been born and in tears told him the one thing that made her widowhood easier was that John resembled her father. She reminded him that the young have their lives in front of them but that she would soon face death. She asked him to spare her a second loneliness and not leave her before she died. She pleaded: 'When you have committed me to the ground, and united me with your father's bones, then set out on your long travels and sail whatever sea you please. Then there will be nobody to hinder. But until I breathe my last, be content to live with me.'"***

John relented and put off his plans for desert asceticism for several years

4. John becomes a monk

In 370, his mother died, and John entered monastic seclusion in the desert

He studied under famous monk Diodorus for a while, then lived in a cave for two years by himself

[NOTE: Diodorus rejected the popular method of allegorical scripture interpretation and taught John to stick closely to the straight meaning of the text... this was the famous "Antiochene exegesis"; the Reformation brought it back to Christianity, and I use it today]

His asceticism was so severe that it destroyed his health... his body never fully recovered

YET asceticism hardened his spiritual determination and purified his soul from worldly pleasures

HE ALSO MEMORIZED LONG PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE which he later quoted from memory, making his preaching more powerful in the future

5. John speaks on seclusion and contemplation

***“For what purpose did Christ go up into the mountain? To teach us that loneliness and retirement is good when we are to pray to God.... For the wilderness is the mother of quiet; it is a calm and a harbor, delivering us from all turmoils.”***

C. Ministry in Antioch

1. Before monastic retreat, ordained a lector = reader of Scripture during service

2. On return, ordained a deacon in church at Antioch in 381

- Served under and discipled by two archbishops: Meletius, Flavian...
- Both archbishops had suffered for their orthodox views when Arianism was the state religion... they taught John about suffering for his convictions

3. Weasled out of ordination the first time

Friend Basil and he both felt called to ministry

Both felt inadequate

John talked Basil into it, implying he would go with him

Basil went forward for ordination, unaware that John had escaped and gone into hiding

John was intimidated by the high responsibilities of ordained ministry, but didn't want the church to be deprived of his friend Basil... so he tricked him

BUT out of this came John's greatest work on ministry: *On the Priesthood* (written to justify his act of deception)... written when he was still in his twenties

It contained some of his core values for ministry

4. Finally ordained into ministry as a presbyter (elder) and chief preacher in 386

Church called him forcefully to it... he felt no strong inner call from God!!

Began preaching at age 39... quite late in his life, just like Augustine

39 years of preparation, 18 years of preaching... BUT accomplished more in those 18 years than most preachers in a lifetime!!

5. Served large and influential church in Antioch for 12 years... 386-398

Antioch: city of great wealth... capital of Syria... major center of Christian learning; best known for Olympic games, theatrical presentations and festivals

6. The “Affair of the Statues”: Rebellion in Antioch

- 388, rebellion erupted in Antioch over increased taxes
- Statues of the emperor and his wife were desecrated
- Officials of the empire began to punish city leaders, killing some of them for the riots
- Archbishop Flavian rushed 800 miles to Constantinople to plead for forgiveness
- In his place, John preached to a city in turmoil

***“Improve yourselves now, truly, not as when during one of the numerous earthquakes or in famine or drought or in similar visitations you leave off your sinning for three and four days and then begin the old life again.... Stop evil slandering, harbor no enmities, give up the wicked custom of frivolous cursing and swearing. If you do this, you will surely be delivered from the present distress and attain eternal happiness.”***

After 8 weeks, on the day before Easter, Archbishop Flavian returned with the wonderful news of the emperor’s pardon

John had made a name for himself during the crisis!!

D. Kidnapped to Serve Christ

- 398 John taken by a senior military official to a chapel outside Antioch’s city walls
- Seized by soldiers, transported 800 miles to Constantinople
- Forcibly consecrated to be Archbishop of Constantinople... one of the most powerful positions in the Christian church
- Kidnapping arranged by Eutropius... the Emperor’s right-hand man
- John simply accepted it as evidence of God’s providence... something he never sought but wouldn’t fight

## E. Archbishop in Constantinople: Godly and Persecuted

1. First early victory: Eutropius falls from power, John brokers a deal while also preaching against his evil use of power

***“O vanity of vanities, all is vanity!”***

After rebuking Eutropius for his worldly use of power, he turned to the people while mighty Eutropius stood broken in front of them:

***“I say this now, not in order to shame the fallen, but to exhort to prudence those who are still upright; not in order to push a shipwrecked person into the deep, but to warn others before they also are shipwrecked!!”***

2. Second early victory: A.D. 400... courageously stopped a revolt of Gothic mercenaries who demanded an Arian church be permitted in the city... John negotiated the release of hostages and convinced the emperor to refuse the request for the Arian church

### 3. CONSTANT TROUBLE

***2 Timothy 3:12 “Everyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”***

Church in Constantinople had 100,000 members; tons of money flowed in; previous Archbishops had lived like kings; many people had entered the service of the church for worldly motives (because the church and state were wedded, and there was power and material prosperity from a life in church service)

John changed all that...

- a. ascetic lifestyle
- b. clearing out the rabble: lazy monks on the payroll cut off
- c. refusing affluent, lavish feasts
- d. wore simple dress
- e. used money given to his position to build hospitals and care for the needy
- f. preached powerful sermons against worldliness

[Read sermon against the theater...] also preached against horse track, gambling

- g. preached vigorous sermons against luxurious lifestyles of emperor, empress, nobles

## F. Politics Conquers Truth: Exiles and Death

1. Eudoxia: friend turns enemy
2. Theophilus: jealous Archbishop of Alexandria... Illegitimate Synod in 403
3. John ousted, the people rioted
4. Earthquake: John reinstated
5. John accused of preaching “Herodias” sermon

***“Herodias is again furious; Herodias again dances; she once more demands the head of John.”***

6. John exiled again; three weeks later, Eudoxia died in childbirth!!
7. John died from the rigors of exile in 407

### III. A Sample of John’s Preaching and Teaching

#### A. John’s Philosophy

- Direct and plainspoken
- A sense of abandon and freedom in the pulpit
- Cared far more about pleasing God than pleasing men or women
- Had a deep concern and compassion on the poor

***John knew that some poor were crafty and took advantage of the church’s benevolence; John said “Whether the poor are worthy or unworthy, the reward for you will be the same!!”***

- Alert and sensitive to the problems of the people
- Scripture was the answer to it all!!!

***“Reading the Scripture is a great means of security against sinning. The ignorance of Scripture is a great cliff and a deep abyss; to know nothing of the divine laws is a great betrayal of salvation.”***

- Knew that the people’s true hearts were on worldly things

***“My sermons are applauded merely from custom, then everyone runs off to horse racing again and gives much more applause to the 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 awesome mysteries that are accomplished here.”***



***“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.”***

- John preached against sin plainly and clearly
  - B. John’s Style: Solid Exegesis, Lofty Language, Fearless Applications
  - C. Philosophy of Ministry: *On the Priesthood*

***“I do not know whether anyone has ever succeeded in not enjoying praise. And if he enjoys it, he naturally wants to receive it. And if he wants to receive it, he cannot help at being pained and distraught over losing it.... Men who are in love with applause have their spirits starved not only when they are blamed offhand, but even when they fail to be constantly praised.”***

- D. Some Samples
  - Instructions to Neophytes
  - Excessive Grief at the Death of Friends
  - Homily to the Rich
  - Homily on the Vanity of the Mind
  - Homily on Philemon

#### IV. Lessons on Scripture Interpretation

- A. Alexandrian Exegesis
- B. Antiochene Exegesis
- C. Comparing Origen to John Chrysostom

#### V. Lessons from John Chrysostom’s Life

- A. The Value and Dangers of Asceticism
- B. Courage in Preaching the Truth
- C. Passion for the Poor
- D. Passion for the Scriptures
- E. Passion for Purity

## F. Passion for God