

# John 1:49-2:4

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's sermon explores the depth of faith through Nathanael's confession and Jesus' first miracle at Cana, emphasizing personal righteousness over familial ties.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 6:5, Psalm 49:7, Hosea 12:12, Luke 2:51, Luke 11:27, John 1:51 - 2:1, John 2:3

**Topics:** "Divine Revelation", "Jesus' Divinity"

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## Description

John Chrysostom delves into the importance of understanding the depth of the Divine Scriptures through careful study and prayer. He contrasts the confessions of Peter and Nathanael, highlighting the significance of confessing Jesus as both the Son of God and the King of the world. Chrysostom explains how Jesus gradually reveals His divinity to Nathanael through the mention of Angels ministering to Him, leading Nathanael to acknowledge Him as Lord of the Angels. He also reflects on the interaction between Jesus and His mother at the wedding in Cana, emphasizing the wisdom behind Jesus' response to her request for a miracle, ensuring His miracles are received without suspicion.

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## Transcript

Nathanael answered and says unto Him, Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel. Jesus answered, and said to him, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig-tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.

1. Beloved, we need much care, much watchfulness, to be able to look into the depth of the Divine Scriptures. For it is not possible to discover their meaning in a careless way, or while we are asleep, but there needs close search, and there needs earnest prayer, that we may be enabled to see some little way into the secrets of the divine oracles. Today, for instance, here is no trifling question proposed to us, but one which requires much zeal and enquiry. For when Nathanael said, You are the Son of God, Christ replies, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig-tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.

Now what is the question arising from this passage? It is this. Peter, when after so many miracles and such high doctrine he confessed that, You are the Son of God Matthew 16:16, is called blessed, as having received the revelation from the Father; while Nathanael, though he said the very same thing before seeing or hearing either miracles or doctrine, had no such word addressed to him, but as though he had not said so much as he ought to have said, is brought to things greater still. What can be the reason of this? It is, that Peter and Nathanael both spoke the same words, but not both with the same intention.

Peter confessed Him to be The Son of God but as being Very God; Nathanael, as being mere man. And whence does this appear? From what he said after these words; for after, You are the Son of God, he adds, You are the King of Israel. But the Son of God is not King of Israel only, but of all the world.

And what I say is clear, not from this only, but also from what follows. For Christ added nothing more to Peter, but as though his faith were perfect, said, that upon this confession of his He would build the Church; but in the other case He did nothing like this, but the contrary. For as though some large, and that the better, part were wanting to his confession He added what follows. For what says He?

John 1:51

Verily, verily I say unto you, Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Do you see how He leads him up little by little from the earth, and causes him no longer to imagine Him a man merely? For One to whom Angels minister, and on whom Angels ascend and descend, how could He be man? For this reason He said, You shall see greater things than these. And in proof of this, He introduces the ministry of Angels. And what He means is something of this kind: Does this, O Nathanael, seem to you a great matter, and have you for this confessed me to be King of Israel? What then will you say, when you see the Angels ascending and descending upon Me? Persuading him by these words to own Him Lord also of the Angels. For on Him as on the King's own Son, the royal ministers ascended and descended, once at the season of the Crucifixion, again at the time of the Resurrection and the Ascension, and before this also, when they came and ministered unto Him Matthew 4:11, when they proclaimed the glad tidings of His birth, and cried, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace Luke 2:14, when they came to Mary, when they came to Joseph.

And He does now what He has done in many instances; He utters two predictions, gives present proof of the one, and confirms that which has to be accomplished by that which is so already. For of His sayings some had been proved, such as, Before Philip called you, under the fig-tree I saw you; others had yet to come to pass, and had partly done so, namely, the descending and ascending of the Angels, at the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension; and this He renders credible by His words even before the event. For one who had known His power by what had gone before, and heard from Him of things to come, would more readily receive this prediction too.

What then does Nathanael? To this he makes no reply. And therefore at this point Christ stopped His discourse with him, allowing him to consider in private what had been said; and not choosing to pour forth all at once, having cast seed into fertile ground, He then leaves it to shoot at leisure. And this He has shown in another place, where He says, The kingdom of heaven is like to a man that sows good seed, but while he slept, his enemy comes, and sows tares among the wheat.

John 2:1-2

On the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. And Jesus was called to the marriage. And the mother of Jesus was there, and His brethren.

I said before that He was best known in Galilee; therefore they invite Him to the marriage, and He comes; for He looked not to His own honor, but to our benefit. He who disdained not to take upon Him the form of a servant Philippians 2:7, would much less disdain to be present at the marriage of servants; He who sat

down with publicans and sinners Matthew 9:13, would much less refuse to sit down with those present at the marriage. Assuredly they who invited Him had not formed a proper judgment of Him, nor did they invite Him as some great one, but merely as an ordinary acquaintance; and this the Evangelist has hinted at, when he says, The mother of Jesus was there, and His brethren. Just as they invited her and His brethren, they invited Jesus.

John 2:3

And when they wanted wine, His mother says unto Him, They have no wine.

Here it is worth while to enquire whence it came into His mother's mind to imagine anything great of her Son; for He had as yet done no miracle, since the Evangelist says, This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee. John 2:11

2. Now if any say that this is not a sufficient proof that it was the beginning of His miracles, because there is added simply in Cana of Galilee, as allowing it to have been the first done there, but not altogether and absolutely the first, for He probably might have done others elsewhere, we will make answer to him of that which we have said before. And of what kind? The words of John (the Baptist); And I knew Him not; but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come, baptizing with water. Now if He had wrought miracles in early age, the Israelites would not have needed another to declare Him. For He who came among men, and by His miracles was so made known, not to those only in Judæa, but also to those in Syria and beyond, and who did this in three years only, or rather who did not need even these three years to manifest Himself Matthew 4:24, for immediately and from the first His fame went abroad everywhere; He, I say, who in a short time so shone forth by the multitude of His miracles, that His name was well known to all, was much less likely, if while a child He had from an early age wrought miracles, to escape notice so long. For what was done would have seemed stranger as done by a boy, and there would have been time for twice or thrice as many, and much more. But in fact He did nothing while He was a child, save only that one thing to which Luke has testified Luke 2:46, that at the age of twelve years He sat hearing the doctors, and was thought admirable for His questioning. Besides, it was in accordance with likelihood and reason that He did not begin His signs at once from an early age; for they would have deemed the thing a delusion. For if when He was of full age many suspected this, much more, if while quite young He had wrought miracles, would they have hurried Him sooner and before the proper time to the Cross, in the venom of their malice; and the very facts of the Dispensation would have been discredited.

How then, asks some one, came it into the mind of His mother to imagine anything great of Him? He was now beginning to reveal Himself, and was plainly discovered by the witness of John, and by what He had said to His disciples. And before all this, the Conception itself and all its attending circumstances had inspired her with a very great opinion of the Child; for, said Luke, she heard all the sayings concerning the Child, and kept them in her heart. Why then, says one, did not she speak this before? Because, as I said, it was now at last that He was beginning to manifest Himself. Before this time He lived as one of the many, and therefore His mother had not confidence to say any such thing to Him; but when she heard that John had come on His account, and that he had borne such witness to Him as he did, and that He had disciples, after that she took confidence, and called Him, and said, when they wanted wine, They have no wine. For she desired both to do them a favor, and through her Son to render herself more conspicuous; perhaps too she had some human feelings, like His brethren, when they said, Show yourself to the world John 17:4, desiring to gain credit from His miracles. Therefore He answered somewhat vehemently,

saying,

John 2:4

Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour is not yet come.

To prove that He greatly respected His mother, hear Luke relate how He was subject to His parents Luke 2:51, and our own Evangelist declare how He had forethought for her at the very season of the Crucifixion. For where parents cause no impediment or hindrance in things belonging to God, it is our bounden duty to give way to them, and there is great danger in not doing so; but when they require anything unseasonably, and cause hindrance in any spiritual matter, it is unsafe to obey. And therefore He answered thus in this place, and again elsewhere, Who is My mother, and who are My brethren? Matthew 12:48, because they did not yet think rightly of Him; and she, because she had borne Him, claimed, according to the custom of other mothers, to direct Him in all things, when she ought to have revered and worshipped Him. This then was the reason why He answered as He did on that occasion. For consider what a thing it was, that when all the people high and low were standing round Him, when the multitude was intent on hearing Him, and His doctrine had begun to be set forth, she should come into the midst and take Him away from the work of exhortation, and converse with Him apart, and not even endure to come within, but draw Him outside merely to herself. This is why He said, Who is My mother and My brethren? Not to insult her who had borne Him, (away with the thought!) but to procure her the greatest benefit, and not to let her think meanly of Him. For if He cared for others, and used every means to implant in them a becoming opinion of Himself, much more would He do so in the case of His mother. And since it was probable that if these words had been addressed to her by her Son, she would not readily have chosen even then to be convinced, but would in all cases have claimed the superiority as being His mother, therefore He replied as He did to them who spoke to Him; otherwise He could not have led up her thoughts from His present lowliness to His future exaltation, had she expected that she should always be honored by Him as by a son, and not that He should come as her Master.

3. It was then from this motive that He said in this place, Woman, what have I to do with you? and also for another reason not less pressing. What was that? It was, that His miracles might not be suspected. The request ought to have come from those who needed, not from His mother. And why so? Because what is done at the request of one's friends, great though it be, often causes offense to the spectators; but when they make the request who have the need, the miracle is free from suspicion, the praise unmixed, the benefit great. So if some excellent physician should enter a house where there were many sick, and be spoken to by none of the patients or their relations, but be directed only by his own mother, he would be suspected and disliked by the sufferers, nor would any of the patients or their attendants deem him able to exhibit anything great or remarkable. And so this was a reason why He rebuked her on that occasion, saying, Woman, what have I to do with you? instructing her for the future not to do the like; because, though He was careful to honor His mother, yet He cared much more for the salvation of her soul, and for the doing good to the many, for which He took upon Him the flesh.

These then were the words, not of one speaking rudely to his mother, but belonging to a wise dispensation, which brought her into a right frame of mind, and provided that the miracles should be attended with that honor which was meet. And setting other things aside, this very appearance which these words have of having been spoken chidingly, is amply enough to show that He held her in high honor, for by His displeasure He showed that He revered her greatly; in what manner, we will say in the next discourse. Think of this then, and when you hear a certain woman saying, Blessed is the womb

that bare You, and the paps which You have sucked, and Him answering, rather blessed are they that do the will of my Father Luke 11:27, suppose that those other words also were said with the same intention. For the answer was not that of one rejecting his mother, but of One who would show that her having borne Him would have nothing availed her, had she not been very good and faithful. Now if, setting aside the excellence of her soul, it profited Mary nothing that the Christ was born of her, much less will it be able to avail us to have a father or a brother, or a child of virtuous and noble disposition, if we ourselves be far removed from his virtue. A brother, says David, does not redeem, shall man redeem? Psalm 49:7, Septuagint We must place our hopes of salvation in nothing else, but only in our own righteous deeds (done) after the grace of God. For if this by itself could have availed, it would have availed the Jews, (for Christ was their kinsman according to the flesh,) it would have availed the town in which He was born, it would have availed His brethren. But as long as His brethren cared not for themselves, the honor of their kindred availed them nothing, but they were condemned with the rest of the world, and then only were approved, when they shone by their own virtue; and the city fell, and was burnt, having gained nothing from this; and His kinsmen according to the flesh were slaughtered and perished very miserably, having gained nothing towards being saved from their relationship to Him, because they had not the defense of virtue. The Apostles, on the contrary, appeared greater than any, because they followed the true and excellent way of gaining relationship with Him, that by obedience. And from this we learn that we have always need of faith, and a life shining and bright, since this alone will have power to save us. For though His relations were for a long time everywhere held in honor, being called the Lord's kinsmen, yet now we do not even know their names, while the lives and names of the Apostles are everywhere celebrated.

Let us then not be proud of nobleness of birth according to the flesh, but though we have ten thousand famous ancestors, let us use diligence ourselves to go beyond their excellences, knowing that we shall gain nothing from the diligence of others to help us in the judgment that is to come; nay, this will be the more grievous condemnation, that though born of righteous parents and having an example at home, we do not, even thus, imitate our teachers. And this I say now, because I see many heathens, when we lead them to the faith and exhort them to become Christians, flying to their kinsmen and ancestors and house, and saying, All my relations and friends and companions are faithful Christians. What is that to you, thou wretched and miserable? This very thing will be especially your ruin, that you did not respect the number of those around you, and run to the truth. Others again who are believers but live a careless life, when exhorted to virtue make the very same defense, and say, my father and my grandfather and my great-grandfather were very pious and good men. But this will assuredly most condemn you, that being descended from such men, you have acted unworthily of the root from whence you are sprung. For hear what the Prophet says to the Jews, Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept (sheep) Hosea 12:12; and again Christ, Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad. John 8:56 And everywhere they bring forward to them the righteous acts of their fathers, not only to praise them, but also to make the charge against their descendants more heavy. Knowing then this, let us use every means that we may be saved by our own works, lest having deceived ourselves by vain trusting on others, we learn that we have been deceived when the knowledge of it will profit us nothing. In the grave, says David, who shall give you thanks? Psalm 6:5 Let us then repent here, that we may obtain the everlasting goods, which may God grant we all do, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

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