

John 2:11-22

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus' miracles and teachings are a call to faith and obedience, and a reminder of the importance of vigilance and self-defense against the devil's attacks.

Scripture: Matthew 16:22, John 2:12-13, John 2:16, John 2:18-20, John 2:22, John 8:28, 1 Corinthians 2:11

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Temple Cleansing"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the beginning of miracles that Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee, emphasizing the importance of being vigilant against the devil's attacks to safeguard our salvation. He highlights the need for individual introspection and cleansing of the soul to fully receive the divine teachings. Chrysostom delves into the significance of Jesus cleansing the Temple, showcasing His authority and zeal for God's house, despite the opposition He faced. He explores the enigmatic ways in which Jesus spoke, challenging the listeners to seek understanding and faith in His words, especially regarding His resurrection. The sermon concludes with an exhortation to emulate the disciples' dedication and wisdom, emphasizing the essential role of alms-giving in securing blessings and entrance into the Kingdom.

Transcript

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee.

1. Frequent and fierce is the devil in his attacks, on all sides besieging our salvation; we therefore must watch and be sober, and everywhere fortify ourselves against his assault, for if he but gain some slight vantage ground, he goes on to make for himself a broad passage, and by degrees introduces all his forces. If then we have any care at all for our salvation, let us not allow him to make his approaches even in trifles, that thus we may check him beforehand in important matters; for it would be the extreme of folly, if, while he displays such eagerness to destroy our souls, we should not bring even an equal amount in defense of our own salvation.

I say not this without a cause, but because I fear lest that wolf be even now standing unseen by us in the midst of the fold, and some sheep become a prey to him, being led astray from the flock and from hearkening by its own carelessness and his craft. Were the wounds sensible, or did the body receive the blows, there would be no difficulty in discerning his plots; but since the soul is invisible, and since that it is which receives the wounds, we need great watchfulness that each may prove himself; for none knows the things of a man as the spirit of a man that is in him. 1 Corinthians 2:11 The word is spoken indeed to all,

and is offered as a general remedy to those who need it, but it is the business of every individual hearer to take what is suited to his complaint. I know not who are sick, I know not who are well. And therefore I use every sort of argument, and introduce remedies suited to all maladies, at one time condemning covetousness, after that touching on luxury, and again on impurity, then composing something in praise of and exhortation to charity, and each of the other virtues in their turn. For I fear lest when my arguments are employed on any one subject, I may without knowing it be treating you for one disease while you are ill of others. So that if this congregation were but one person, I should not have judged it so absolutely necessary to make my discourse varied; but since in such a multitude there are probably also many maladies, I not unreasonably diversify my teaching, since my discourse will be sure to attain its object when it is made to embrace you all. For this cause also Scripture is something multiform, and speaks on ten thousand matters, because it addresses itself to the nature of mankind in common, and in such a multitude all the passions of the soul must needs be; though all be not in each. Let us then cleanse ourselves of these, and so listen to the divine oracles, and with contrite heart hear what has been this day read to us.

And what is that? This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee. I told you the other day, that there are some who say that this is not the beginning. For what, says one, if 'Cana of Galilee' be added? This shows that this was 'the beginning' He made 'in Cana.' But on these points I would not venture to assert anything exactly. I before have shown that He began His miracles after His Baptism, and wrought no miracle before it; but whether of the miracles done after His Baptism, this or some other was the first, it seems to me unnecessary to assert positively.

And manifested forth His glory.

How? asks one, and in what way? For only the servants, the ruler of the feast, and the bridegroom, not the greater number of those present, gave heed to what was done. How then did he manifest forth His glory? He manifested it at least for His own part, and if all present hear not of the miracle at the time, they would hear of it afterwards, for unto the present time it is celebrated, and has not been unnoticed. That all did not know it on the same day is clear from what follows, for after having said that He manifested forth His glory, the Evangelist adds,

And His disciples believed on Him.

His disciples, who even before this regarded Him with wonder. Do you see that it was especially necessary to work the miracles at times when men were present of honest minds, and who would carefully give heed to what was done? For these would more readily believe, and attend more exactly to the circumstances. And how could He have become known without miracles? Because His doctrine and prophetic powers were sufficient to cause wonder in the souls of His hearers, so that they took heed to what He did with a right disposition, their minds being already well affected towards Him. And therefore in many other places the Evangelists say, that He did no miracle on account of the perversity of the men who dwelt there. Matthew 12:38; ch. 13:58, etc.

John 2:12

After this He went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples; and they continued there not many days.

Wherefore comes He with His mother to Capernaum? For He has done no miracle there, and the inhabitants of that city were not of those who were rightminded towards Him, but of the utterly corrupt. And this Christ declared when He said, And thou, Capernaum, which are exalted to heaven, shall be thrust down to hell. Luke 10:15 Wherefore then goes He? I think it was, because He intended a little after to go up to Jerusalem, that He then went to Capernaum, to avoid leading about everywhere with Him, His mother and His brethren. And so, having departed and tarried a little while to honor His mother, He again commences His miracles after restoring to her home her who had borne Him. Therefore the Evangelist says, After not many days,

John 2:13

He went up to Jerusalem.

He received baptism then a few days before the passover. But on going up to Jerusalem, what did He, a deed full of high authority; for He cast out of the Temple those dealers and money changers, and those who sold doves, and oxen, and sheep, and who passed their time there for this purpose.

2. Another Evangelist writes, that as He cast them out, He said, Make not my Father's house a den of thieves, but this one,

John 2:16

(Make not My Father's house) a house of merchandise.

They do not in this contradict each other, but show that he did this a second time, and that both these expressions were not used on the same occasion, but that He acted thus once at the beginning of His ministry, and again when He had come to the very time of His Passion. Therefore, (on the latter occasion,) employing more strong expressions, He spoke of it as (being made) a den of thieves, but here at the commencement of His miracles He does not so, but uses a more gentle rebuke; from which it is probable that this took place a second time.

And wherefore, says one, did Christ do this same, and use such severity against these men, a thing which He is nowhere else seen to do, even when insulted and reviled, and called by them 'Samaritan' and 'demoniac'? For He was not even satisfied with words only, but took a scourge, and so cast them out. Yes, but it was when others were receiving benefit, that the Jews accused and raged against Him; when it was probable that they would have been made savage by His rebukes, they showed no such disposition towards Him, for they neither accused nor reviled Him. What say they?

John 2:18

What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that You do these things?

Do you see their excessive malice, and how the benefits done to others incensed them more (than reproofs)?

At one time then He said, that the Temple was made by them a den of thieves, showing that what they sold was gotten by theft, and rapine, and covetousness, and that they were rich through other men's calamities; at another, a house of merchandise, pointing to their shameless traffickings. But wherefore did He this? Since he was about to heal on the Sabbath day, and to do many such things which were thought

by them transgressions of the Law, in order that He might not seem to do this as though He had come to be some rival God and opponent of His Father, He takes occasion hence to correct any such suspicion of theirs. For One who had exhibited so much zeal for the House was not likely to oppose Him who was Lord of the House, and who was worshipped in it. No doubt even the former years during which He lived according to the Law, were sufficient to show His reverence for the Legislator, and that He came not to give contrary laws; yet since it was likely that those years were forgotten through lapse of time, as not having been known to all because He was brought up in a poor and mean dwelling, He afterwards does this in the presence of all, (for many were present because the feast was near at hand,) and at great risk. For he did not merely cast them out, but also overturned the tables, and poured out the money, giving them by this to understand, that He who threw Himself into danger for the good order of the House could never despise his Master. Had He acted as He did from hypocrisy, He should only have advised them; but to place Himself in danger was very daring. For it was no light thing to offer Himself to the anger of so many market-folk, to excite against Himself a most brutal mob of petty dealers by His reproaches and His blows, this was not the action of a pretender, but of one choosing to suffer everything for the order of the House.

And therefore not by His actions only, but by His words, He shows his agreement with the Father; for He says not the Holy House, but My Father's House. See, He even calls Him, Father, and they are not angry; they thought He spoke in a general way: but when He went on and spoke more plainly, so as to set before them the idea of His Equality, then they become angry.

And what say they? What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that You do these things? Alas for their utter madness! Was there need of a sign before they could cease their evil doings, and free the house of God from such dishonor? And was it not the greatest sign of His Excellence that He had gotten such zeal for that House? In fact, the well-disposed were distinguished by this very thing, for They, His disciples, it says,

John 2:17

Remembered that it is written, The zeal of your house has eaten me up.

But the Jews did not remember the Prophecy, and said, What sign showest Thou unto us? Psalm 69:9, both grieving that their shameful traffic was cut off, and expecting by these means to stop Him, and also desiring to challenge Him to a miracle, and to find fault with what He was doing. Wherefore He will not give them a sign; and before, when they came and asked Him, He made them the same answer, A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. Matthew 16:4 Only then the answer was clear, now it is more ambiguous. This He does on account of their extreme insensibility; for He who prevented them without their asking, and gave them signs, would never when they asked have turned away from them, had He not seen that their minds were wicked and false, and their intention treacherous. Think how full of wickedness the question itself was at the outset. When they ought to have applauded Him for His earnestness and zeal, when they ought to have been astonished that He cared so greatly for the House, they reproach Him, saying, that it was lawful to traffic, and unlawful for any to stop their traffic, except he should show them a sign. What says Christ?

John 2:19

Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

Many such sayings He utters which were not intelligible to His immediate hearers, but which were to be so to those that should come after. And wherefore does He this? In order that when the accomplishment of His prediction should have come to pass, He might be seen to have foreknown from the beginning what was to follow; which indeed was the case with this prophecy. For, says the Evangelist,

John 2:22

When He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

But at the time when this was spoken, the Jews were perplexed as to what it might mean, and cast about to discover, saying,

John 2:20

Forty and six years was this Temple in building, and will you rear it up in three days?

Forty and six years, they said, referring to the latter building, for the former was finished in twenty years' time. Ezra 6:15

3. Wherefore then did He not resolve the difficulty and say, I speak not of that Temple, but of My flesh? Why does the Evangelist, writing the Gospel at a later period, interpret the saying, and Jesus keep silence at the time? Why did He so keep silence? Because they would not have received His word; for if not even the disciples were able to understand the saying, much less were the multitudes. When, says the Evangelist, He was risen from the dead, then they remembered, and believed the Scripture and His word. There were two things that hindered them for the time, one the fact of the Resurrection, the other, the greater question whether He was God that dwelt within; of both which things He spoke darkly when He said, Destroy this Temple, and I will rear it up in three days. And this St. Paul declares to be no small proof of His Godhead, when he writes, Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the Resurrection from the dead. Romans 1:4

But why does He both there, and here, and everywhere, give this for a sign, at one time saying, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you shall know that I Am John 8:28; at another, There shall no sign be given you but the sign of the prophet Jonas Matthew 12:39; and again in this place, In three days I will raise it up? Because what especially showed that He was not a mere man, was His being able to set up a trophy of victory over death, and so quickly to abolish His long enduring tyranny, and conclude that difficult war. Wherefore He says, Then you shall know. Then. When? When after My Resurrection I shall draw (all) the world to Me, then you shall know that I did these things as God, and Very Son of God, avenging the insult offered to My Father.

Why then, instead of saying, 'What need is there of signs to check evil deeds?' did He promise that He would give them a sign? Because by so doing He would have the more exasperated them; but in this way He rather astonished them. Still they made no answer to this, for He seemed to them to say what was incredible, so that they did not stay even to question Him upon it, but passed it by as impossible. Yet had they been wise, though it seemed to them at the time incredible, still when He wrought His many miracles they would then have come and questioned Him, would then have intreated that the difficulty might be resolved to them; but because they were foolish, they gave no heed at all to part of what was said, and part they heard with evil frame of mind. And therefore Christ spoke to them in an enigmatical way.

The question still remains, How was it that the disciples did not know that He must rise from the dead? It was, because they had not been vouchsafed the gift of the Spirit; and therefore, though they constantly heard His discourses concerning the Resurrection, they understood them not, but reasoned with themselves what this might be. For very strange and paradoxical was the assertion that one could raise himself, and would raise himself in such wise. And so Peter was rebuked, when, knowing nothing about the Resurrection, he said, Be it far from You. Matthew 16:22 And Christ did not reveal it clearly to them before the event, that they might not be offended at the very outset, being led to distrust His words on account of the great improbability of the thing, and because they did not yet clearly know Him, who He was. For no one could help believing what was proclaimed aloud by facts, while some would probably disbelieve what was told to them in words. Therefore He at first allowed the meaning of His words to be concealed; but when by their experience He had verified His sayings, He after that gave them understanding of His words, and such gifts of the Spirit that they received them all at once. He, says Jesus, shall bring all things to your remembrance. John 14:26 For they who in a single night cast off all respect for Him, and fled from and denied that they even knew Him, would scarcely have remembered what He had done and said during the whole time, unless they had enjoyed much grace of the Spirit.

But, says one, if they were to hear from the Spirit, why needed they to accompany Christ when they would not retain His words? Be cause the Spirit taught them not, but called to their mind what Christ had said before; and it contributes not a little to the glory of Christ, that they were referred to the remembrance of the words He had spoken to them. At the first then it was of the gift of God that the grace of the Spirit lighted upon them so largely and abundantly; but after that, it was of their own virtue that they retained the Gift. For they displayed a shining life, and much wisdom, and great labors, and despised this present life, and thought nothing of earthly things, but were above them all; and like a sort of light-winged eagle, soaring high by their works; reached to heaven itself, and by these possessed the unspeakable grace of the Spirit.

Let us then imitate them, and not quench our lamps, but keep them bright by alms-doing, for so is the light of this fire preserved. Let us collect the oil into our vessels while we are here, for we cannot buy it when we have departed to that other place, nor can we procure it elsewhere, save only at the hands of the poor. Let us therefore collect it thence very abundantly, if, at least, we desire to enter in with the Bridegroom. But if we do not this, we must remain without the bridechamber, for it is impossible, it is impossible, though we perform ten thousand other good deeds, to enter the portals of the Kingdom without alms-doing. Let us then show forth this very abundantly, that we may enjoy those ineffable blessings; which may it come to pass that we all attain, by 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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