

John 3:35-4:12

by St. John Chrysostom

Christ's sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, faith, and righteous living for salvation, and reveals Himself to a Samaritan woman as a deliberate act of kindness.

Scripture: John 3:35 - 4:1, John 4:4, John 4:7

Topics: "Humility And Faith", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of humility, gradual spiritual growth, and the power of wisdom in leading people to faith. He emphasizes the necessity of both faith in Jesus and a righteous life for salvation, highlighting that faith alone is not sufficient. Chrysostom also discusses Jesus' interactions with the Samaritan woman, showcasing His humility, freedom from pride, and willingness to engage with those considered outsiders. He urges the audience to imitate the woman's eagerness to learn and calls for a deeper commitment to spiritual matters over worldly distractions, reminding them of the eternal consequences of neglecting their souls.

Transcript

The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He that believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.

1. Great is shown to be in all things the gain of humility. Thus it is that we have brought arts to perfection, not by learning them all at once from our teachers; it is thus that we have built cities, putting them together slowly, little by little; it is thus that we maintain our life. And marvel not if the thing has so much power in matters pertaining to this life, when in spiritual things one may find that great is the power of this wisdom. For so the Jews were enabled to be delivered from their idolatry, being led on gently and little by little, and hearing from the first nothing sublime concerning either doctrine or life. So after the coming of Christ, when it was the time for higher doctrines, the Apostles brought over all men without at first uttering anything sublime. And so Christ appears to have spoken to most at the beginning, and so John did now, speaking of Him as of some wonderful man, and darkly introducing high matter.

For instance, when commencing he spoke thus: A man cannot receive anything of himself John 3:27: then after adding a high expression, and saying, He that comes from heaven is above all, he again brings down his discourse to what is lowly, and besides many other things says this, that God gives not the Spirit by measure. Then he proceeds to say, The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. And after that, knowing that great is the force of punishment, and that the many are not so much led by the

promise of good things as by the threat of the terrible, he concludes his discourse with these words; He that believes in the Son has everlasting life; but he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him. Here again he refers the account of punishment to the Father, for he says not the wrath of the Son, (yet He is the Judge,) but sets over them the Father, desiring so the more to terrify them.

Is it then enough, says one, to believe in the Son, that one may have eternal life? By no means. And hear Christ Himself declaring this, and saying, Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven Matthew 7:21; and the blasphemy against the Spirit is enough of itself to cast a man into hell. But why speak I of a portion of doctrine? Though a man believe rightly on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, yet if he lead not a right life, his faith will avail nothing towards his salvation. Therefore when He says, This is life eternal, that they may know You the only true God John 17:3, let us not suppose that the (knowledge) spoken of is sufficient for our salvation; we need besides this a most exact life and conversation. Since though he has said here, He that believes in the Son has eternal life, and in the same place something even stronger, (for he weaves his discourse not of blessings only, but of their contraries also, speaking thus: He that believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him;) yet not even from this do we assert that faith alone is sufficient to salvation. And the directions for living given in many places of the Gospels show this. Therefore he did not say, This by itself is eternal life, nor, He that does but believe in the Son has eternal life, but by both expressions he declared this, that the thing does contain life, yet that if a right conversation follow not, there will follow a heavy punishment. And he did not say, awaits him, but, abides on him, that is, shall never remove from him. For that you may not think that the shall not see life, is a temporary death, but may believe that the punishment is continual, he has put this expression to show that it rests upon him continually. And this he has done, by these very words forcing them on to Christ. Therefore he gave not the admonition to them in particular, but made it universal, the manner which best might bring them over. For he did not say, if you believe, and, if you believe not, but made his speech general, so that his words might be free from suspicion. And this he has done yet more strongly than Christ. For Christ says, He that believes not is condemned already, but John says, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. With good cause; for it was a different thing for a man to speak of himself and for another to speak of him. They would have thought that Christ spoke often of these things from self-love, and that he was a boaster; but John was clear from all suspicion. And if at a later time, Christ also used stronger expressions, it was when they had begun to conceive an exalted opinion of Him.

John 4:1-3

When therefore Jesus knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (though Jesus Himself baptized not but His disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.

He indeed baptized not, but they who carried the news, desiring to excite their hearers to envy, so reported. Wherefore then 'departed' He? Not from fear, but to take away their malice, and to soften their envy. He was indeed able to restrain them when they came against Him, but this He would not do continually, that the Dispensation of the Flesh might not be disbelieved. For had He often been seized and escaped, this would have been suspected by many; therefore for the most part, He rather orders matters after the manner of a man. And as He desired it to be believed that He was God, so also that, being God, He bore the flesh; therefore even after the Resurrection, He said to the disciple, Handle Me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones Luke 24:39; therefore also He rebuked Peter when he said, Be it far from

You, this shall not be unto you. Matthew 16:22 So much was this matter an object of care to Him.

2. For this is no small part of the doctrines of the Church; it is the chief point of the salvation wrought for us; by which all has been brought to pass, and has had success, for it was thus that the bonds of death were loosed, sin taken away, and the curse abolished, and ten thousand blessings introduced into our life. And therefore He especially desired that the Dispensation should be believed, as having been the root and fountain of innumerable goods to us.

Yet while acting thus in regard of His Humanity, He did not allow His Divinity to be overcast. And so, after His departure He again employed the same language as before. For He went not away into Galilee simply, but in order to effect certain important matters, those among the Samaritans; nor did He dispense these matters simply, but with the wisdom that belonged to Him, and so as not to leave to the Jews any pretense even of a shameless excuse for themselves. And to this the Evangelist points when he says,

John 4:4

And He must needs go through Samaria.

Showing that He made this the by-work of the journey. Which also the Apostles did; for just as they, when persecuted by the Jews, came to the Gentiles; so also Christ, when the Jews drove Him out, then took the Samaritans in hand, as He did also in the case of the Syrophenician woman. And this was done that all defense might be cut away from the Jews, and that they might not be able to say, He left us, and went to the uncircumcised. And therefore the disciples excusing themselves said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken unto you; but seeing ye judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. Acts 13:46 And He says again Himself, I am not come but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel Matthew 15:24; and again, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to give it to dogs. But when they drove Him away, they opened a door to the Gentiles. Yet not so did He come to the Gentiles expressly, but in passing. In passing then,

John 4:5-6

He comes to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Why is the Evangelist exact about the place? It is, that when you hear the woman say, Jacob our father gave us this well, you may not think it strange. For this was the place where Levi and Simeon, being angry because of Dinah, wrought that cruel slaughter. And it may be worth while to relate from what sources the Samaritans were made up; since all this country is called Samaria.

Whence then did they receive their name? The mountain was called Somor from its owner 1 Kings 16:24: as also Esaias says, and the head of Ephraim is Somoron Isaiah 7:9, Septuagint, but the inhabitants were termed not Samaritans but Israelites. But as time went on, they offended God, and in the reign of Pekah, Tiglath-Pileser came up, and took many cities, and set upon Elah, and having slain him, gave the kingdom to Hoshea. 2 Kings 15:29 Against him Shalmaneser came and took other cities, and made them subject and tributary. 2 Kings 17:3 At first he yielded, but afterwards he revolted from the Assyrian rule, and betook himself to the alliance of the Ethiopians.

The Assyrian learned this, and having made war upon them and destroyed their cities, he no longer allowed the nation to remain there, because he had such suspicions that they would revolt. 2 Kings 17:4

But he carried them to Babylon and to the Medes, and having brought thence nations from various places, planted them in Samaria, that his dominion for the future might be sure, his own people occupying the place. After this, God, desiring to show that He had not given up the Jews through weakness, but because of the sins of those who were given up, sent lions against the foreigners, who ravaged all their nation.

These things were reported to the king, and he sent a priest to deliver to them the laws of God. Still not even so did they desist wholly from their impiety, but only by halves. But as time went on, they in turn abandoned their idols, and worshipped God. And when things were in this state, the Jews having returned, ever after entertained a jealous feeling towards them as strangers and enemies, and called them from the name of the mountain, Samaritans. From this cause also there was no little rivalry between them.

The Samaritans did not use all the Scriptures, but received the writings of Moses only, and made but little account of those of the Prophets. Yet they were eager to thrust themselves into the noble Jewish stock, and prided themselves upon Abraham, and called him their forefather, as being of Chaldaea; and Jacob also they called their father, as being his descendant. But the Jews abominated them as well as all (other nations). Wherefore they reproached Christ with this, saying, You are a Samaritan, and hast a devil.

John 8:48 And for this reason in the parable of the man that went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, Christ makes the man who showed pity upon him to have been a Samaritan Luke 10:33, one who by them was deemed mean, contemptible, and abominable. And in the case of the ten lepers, He calls one a stranger on this account, (for he was a Samaritan,) and He gave His charge to the disciples in these words, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. Matthew 10:5

3. Nor was it merely to describe the place that the Evangelist has reminded us of Jacob, but to show that the rejection of the Jews had happened long ago. For during the time of their forefathers these Jews possessed the land, and not the Samaritans; and the very possessions which not being theirs, their forefathers had gotten, they being theirs, had lost by their sloth and transgressions. So little is the advantage of excellent ancestors, if their descendants be not like them. Moreover, the foreigners when they had only made trial of the lions, straightway returned to the right worship of the Jews, while they, after enduring such inflictions, were not even so brought to a sound mind.

To this place Christ now came, ever rejecting a sedentary and soft life, and exhibiting one laborious and active. He uses no beast to carry Him, but walks so much on a stretch, as even to be wearied with His journeying. And this He ever teaches, that a man should work for himself, go without superfluities, and not have many wants. Nay, so desirous is He that we should be alienated from superfluities, that He abridges many even of necessary things. Wherefore He said, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. Matthew 8:20 Therefore He spent most of His time in the mountains, and in the deserts, not by day only, but also by night. And this David declared when he said, He shall drink of the brook in the way Psalm 110:7: by this showing His frugal way of life. This too the Evangelist shows in this place.

John 4:6-8

Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus by the well; and it was about the sixth hour. There comes a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus says unto her, Give Me to drink. For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy meat.

Hence we learn His activity in journeying, His carelessness about food, and how He treated it as a matter of minor importance. And so the disciples were taught to use the like disposition themselves; for they took with them no provisions for the road. And this another Evangelist declares, saying, that when He spoke to them concerning the leaven of the Pharisees Matthew 16:6, they thought that it was because they carried no bread; and when he introduces them plucking the ears of grain, and eating Matthew 12:1, and when he says that Jesus came to the fig-tree by reason of hunger Matthew 21:18, it is for nothing else but only to instruct us by all these to despise the belly, and not to deem that its service is anxiously to be attended to. Observe them, for instance, in this place neither bringing anything with them, nor because they brought not anything, caring for this at the very beginning and early part of the day, but buying food at the time when all other people were taking their meal. Not like us, who the instant we rise from our beds attend to this before anything else, calling cooks and butlers, and giving our directions with all earnestness, applying ourselves afterwards to other matters, preferring temporal things to spiritual, valuing those things as necessary which we ought to have deemed of less importance. Therefore all things are in confusion. We ought, on the contrary, making much account of all spiritual things, after having accomplished these, then to apply ourselves to the others.

And in this place it is not His laboriousness alone that is shown, but also His freedom from pride; not merely by His being tired, nor by His sitting by the way-side, but by His having been left alone, and His disciples having been separated from Him. And yet it was in His power, if He had willed it, either not to have sent them all away, or when they departed to have had other ministers. But He would not; for so He accustomed His disciples to tread all pride beneath their feet.

And what marvel, says one, if they were moderate in their wishes, since they were fishermen and tentmakers? Yes! Fishermen and tentmakers they were; but they had in a moment mounted even to the height of heaven, and had become more honorable than all earthly kings, being deemed worthy to become the companions of the Lord of the world, and to follow Him whom all beheld with awe. And ye know this too, that those men especially who are of humble origin, whenever they gain distinction, are the more easily lifted up to folly, because they are quite ignorant how to bear their sudden honor. Restraining them therefore in their present humblemindedness, He taught them always to be moderate, and never to require any to wait upon them.

"He therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus at the well"

Do you see that His sitting was because of weariness? Because of the heat? Because of his waiting for His disciples? He knew, indeed, what should take place among the Samaritans, but it was not for this that He came principally; yet, though He came not for this, it behooved not to reject the woman who came to Him, when she manifested such a desire to learn. The Jews, when He was even coming to them, drove Him away; they of the Gentiles, when He was proceeding in another direction, drew Him to them. They envied, these believed on Him. They were angry with, these revered and worshipped Him. What then? Was He to overlook the salvation of so many, to send away such noble zeal? This would have been unworthy of His lovingkindness. Therefore He ordered all the matter in hand with the Wisdom which became Him. He sat resting His body and cooling It by the fountain; for it was the very middle of the day, as the Evangelist has declared, when he says, It was about the sixth hour.

He sat thus. What means thus? Not upon a throne, not upon a cushion, but simply, and as He was, upon the ground.

"There comes a woman of Samaria to draw water"

4. Observe how he declares that the woman came forth for another purpose, in every way silencing the shameless gainsaying of the Jews, that none might say that He acted in opposition to His own command, bidding (His disciples) not to enter into any city of the Samaritans, yet conversing with Samaritans. Matthew 10:5 And therefore the Evangelist has put,

"For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy meat"

Bringing in many reasons for His conversation with her. What does the woman? When she heard, Give Me to drink, she very wisely makes the speech of Christ an occasion for a question, and says,

John 4:9

How is it that thou, being a Jew, ask drink of me, which am a Samaritan? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

And whence did she suppose Him to be a Jew? From His dress, perhaps, and from His dialect. Observe, I pray you, how considerate the woman was. If there was need of caution, Jesus needed it, not she. For she does not say, The Samaritans have no dealings with the Jews, but, The Jews do not admit the Samaritans. Yet still, although free herself from blame, when she supposed that another was falling into it she would not even so hold her peace, but corrected, as she thought, what was done unlawfully. Perhaps some one may ask how it was that Jesus asked drink of her, when the law did not permit it. If it be answered that it was because He knew beforehand that she would not give it, then for this very reason He ought not to have asked. What then can we say? That the rejecting such observances as these was now a matter of indifference to Him; for He who induced others to do them away, would much more Himself pass them by. Not that which goes in, says He, defiles a man, but that which goes out. Matthew 15:11 And this conversation with the woman would be no slight charge against the Jews. For often did He draw them to Himself, both by words and deeds, but they would not attend; while observe how she is detained by a simple request. For He did not as yet enter on the prosecution of this business, nor the way, yet if any came to Him He did not prevent them. And to the disciples also He said thus, Into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. He did not say, And when they come to you, reject them; that would have been very unworthy of His lovingkindness. And therefore He answered the woman, and said,

John 4:10

If you knew the gift of God and who it is that says to you, Give Me to drink, you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water.

First, He shows that she is worthy to hear and not to be overlooked, and then He reveals Himself. For she, as soon as she had learned who He was, would straightway hearken and attend to Him; which none can say of the Jews, for they, when they had learned, asked nothing of Him, nor did they desire to be informed on any profitable matter, but insulted and drove Him away. But when the woman had heard these words, observe how gently she answers:

John 4:11

Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; from whence then have you that living water?

Already He has raised her from her low opinion of Him, and from deeming that He is a common man. For not without a reason does she here call Him, Lord; but assigning to Him high honor. That she spoke these words to honor Him, is plain from what is said afterwards, since she did not laugh nor mock, but doubted for a while. And wonder not if she did not at once perceive all, for neither did Nicodemus. What says he? How can these things be? and again, How can a man be born when he is old? and again, Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? But this woman more reverently: Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; from whence then have you that living water? Christ said one thing, and she imagined another, hearing nothing beyond the words, and as yet unable to form any lofty thought. Yet, had she spoken hastily, she might have said, If you had had that living water, you would not have asked of me, but would rather have provided for yourself. You are but a boaster. But she said nothing like this; she answers with much gentleness, both at first and afterwards. For at first she says, How is it that thou, being a Jew, ask drink of me? she says not, as though speaking to an alien and an enemy, Far be it from me to give to you, who art a foe and a stranger to our nation. And afterwards again, when she heard Him utter great words, a thing at which enemies are most annoyed, she did not mock nor deride ; but what says she?

John 4:12

Are you greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?

Observe how she thrusts herself into the noble stock of the Jews. For what she says is somewhat of this kind: Jacob used this water, and had nothing better to give us. And this she said showing that from the first answer (of Christ) she had conceived a great and sublime thought; for by the words, he drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle, she implies nothing else, than that she had a notion of a better Water, but that she never found it, nor clearly knew it. More clearly to explain what she means to say, the sense of her words is this: You can not assert that Jacob gave us this well, and used another himself; for he and his children drank of this one, which they would not have done if they had had another and a better. Now of the water of this well it is not in your power to give me, and you can not have another and a better, unless thou dost confess that you are greater than Jacob. Whence then have you that water which you promise that you will give us? The Jews did not converse with Him thus mildly, and yet He spoke to them on the same subject, making mention of the like water, but they profited nothing; and when He made mention of Abraham, they even attempted to stone Him. Not so does this woman approach Him; but with much gentleness, in the midst of the heat, at noon, she with much patience says and hears all, and does not so much as think of what the Jews most probably would have asserted, that This fellow is mad, and beside himself: he has tied me to this fount and well, giving me nothing, but using big words; no, she endures and perseveres until she has found what she seeks.

5. If now a woman of Samaria is so earnest to learn something profitable, if she abides by Christ though not as yet knowing Him, what pardon shall we obtain, who both knowing Him, and being not by a well, nor in a desert place, nor at noon-day, nor beneath the scorching sunbeams, but at morning-tide, and beneath a roof like this, enjoying shade and comfort, yet cannot endure to hear anything that is said, but are wearied by it. Not such was that woman; so occupied was she by Jesus' words, that she even called others to hear them.

The Jews, on the contrary, not only did not call, but even hindered and impeded those who desired to come to Him, saying, See, have any of the rulers believed on him? But this people, which knows not the

Law, are cursed. Let us then imitate this woman of Samaria; let us commune with Christ. For even now He stands in the midst of us, speaking to us by the Prophets and Disciples; let us hear and obey. How long shall we live uselessly and in vain? Because, not to do what is well-pleasing to God is to live uselessly, or rather not merely uselessly, but to our own hurt; for when we have spent the time which has been given us on no good purpose, we shall depart this life to suffer severest punishment for our unseasonable extravagance.

For it can never be that a man who has received money to trade with, and then has eaten it up, shall have it required at his hands by the man who entrusted it to him; and that one who has spent such a life as ours to no purpose shall escape punishment. It was not for this that God brought us into this present life, and breathed into us a soul, that we should make use of the present time only, but that we should do all our business with a regard to the life which is to come. Things irrational only are useful for the present life; but we have an immortal soul, that we may use every means to prepare ourselves for that other life.

For if one enquire the use of horses and asses and oxen, and other such-like animals, we shall tell him that it is nothing else but only to minister to the present life; but this cannot be said of us; our best condition is that which follows on our departure hence; and we must do all that we may shine there, that we may join the choir of Angels, and stand before the King continually, through endless ages. And therefore the soul is immortal, and the body shall be immortal too, that we may enjoy the never-ending blessings.

But if, when heavenly things are proffered you, you remain nailed to earth, consider what an insult is offered to your Benefactor, when He holds forth to you things above, and thou, making no great account of them chooseth earth instead. And therefore, as despised by you, He has threatened you with hell; that you may learn hence of what great blessings you deprive yourself. God grant that none make trial of that punishment, but that having been well-pleasing to Christ, we may obtain everlasting blessings, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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