

Homily 2 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily explores the profound implications of Jesus Christ's genealogy and His dual nature as both God and man.

Topics: "Scripture Study", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of delving into the Scriptures and the genealogy of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the significance of understanding the lineage of David and Abraham. He highlights the miraculous nature of God becoming man, the role of Joseph and Mary in the genealogy, and the need for spiritual nourishment through the Scriptures to combat worldly distractions and temptations. Chrysostom urges the congregation to prioritize the study of God's Word, as it has the power to transform the soul, bring repentance, and lead to a life of righteousness and victory over the schemes of the devil.

Transcript

Matt. I. 1.

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

Do you indeed remember the charge, which we lately made you, entreating you to hearken unto all the things that are said with all silence, and mystical quietness? For we are today to set foot within the holy vestibule, wherefore I have also put you in mind of the charge.

Since, if the Jews, when they were to approach a mountain that burned, and fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest; -- or rather when they were not so much as to approach, but both to see and to hear these things from afar -- were commanded for three days before to abstain from their wives, and to wash their garments, and were in trembling and fear, both themselves and Moses with them; much more we, when we are to hearken to such words, and are not to stand far from a smoking mountain, but to enter into Heaven itself, ought to show forth a greater self-denial; not washing our garments, but wiping clean the robe of our soul, and ridding ourselves of all mixture with worldly things. For it is not blackness that you shall see, nor smoke, nor tempest, but the King Himself sitting on the throne of that unspeakable glory, and angels, and archangels standing by Him, and the tribes of the saints, with those interminable myriads.

For such is the city of God, having the Church of the first-born, the spirits of the just, the general assembly of the angels, the blood of sprinkling, whereby all are knit into one, and Heaven has received the things of

earth, and earth the things of Heaven, and that peace has come which was of old longed for both by angels and by saints.

Herein stands the trophy of the cross, glorious, and conspicuous, the spoils won by Christ, the first-fruits of our nature, the booty of our King; all these, I say, we shall out of the Gospels know perfectly. If you follow in becoming quietness, we shall be able to lead you about everywhere, and to show where death is set forth crucified, and where sin is hanged up, and where are the many and wondrous offerings from this war, from this battle.

You shall see likewise the tyrant here bound, and the multitude of the captives following, and the citadel from which that unholy demon overran all things in time past. You will see the hiding places, and the dens of the robber, broken up now, and laid open, for even there also was our King present.

But be not thou weary, beloved, for if any one were describing a visible war, and trophies, and victories, would you feel no satiety at all; nay, you would not prefer either drink or meat to this history. But if that kind of narrative be welcome, much more this. For consider what a thing it is to hear, how on the one side God from Heaven, arising out of the royal thrones, leaped down Wisdom 18:15 unto the earth, and even unto hell itself, and stood in the battle array; and how the devil on the other hand set himself in array against Him; or rather not against God unveiled, but God hidden in man's nature.

And what is marvellous, you will see death destroyed by death, and curse extinguished by curse, and the dominion of the devil put down by those very things whereby he did prevail. Let us therefore rouse ourselves thoroughly, and let us not sleep, for lo, I see the gates opening to us; but let us enter in with all seemly order, and with trembling, setting foot straightway within the vestibule itself.

2. But what is this vestibule? The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham.

What do you say? Did you not promise to discourse of the Only-begotten Son of God, and do you make mention of David, a man born after a thousand generations, and say that he is both father and ancestor? Stay, seek not to learn all at once, but gently and little by little. Why, it is in the vestibule that you are standing, by the very porch; why then do you hasten towards the inner shrine? As yet you have not well marked all without. For neither for a while do I declare unto you that other generation: or rather not even this which comes after, for it is unutterable, and unspeakable. And before me the Prophet Esaias has told you this; where when proclaiming His passion, and His great care for the world, and admiring who He was, and what He became, and whither He descended, he cried out loud and clear, saying thus, Who shall declare His generation?

It is not then of that we are now to speak, but of this beneath, this which took place on earth, which was among ten thousand witnesses. And concerning this again we will relate in such wise as it may be possible for us, having received the grace of the Spirit. For not even this may any one set forth altogether plainly, forasmuch as this too is most awful. Think not, therefore, it is of small things you are hearing, when you hear of this birth, but rouse up your mind, and straightway tremble, being told that God has come upon earth. For so marvellous was this, and beyond expectation, that because of these things the very angels formed a choir, and in behalf of the world offered up their praise for them, and the prophets from the first were amazed at this, that He was seen upon earth, and conversed with men Baruch 3:37 . Yea, for it is far beyond all thought to hear that God the Unspeakable, the Unutterable, the Incomprehensible, and He that is equal to the Father, has passed through a virgin's womb, and has vouchsafed to be born of a woman, and to have Abraham and David for forefathers. But why do I say Abraham and David? For

what is even more amazing, there are those women, whom we have lately mentioned.

3. Hearing these things, arise, and surmise nothing low: but even because of this very thing most of all should you marvel, that being Son of the Unoriginate God, and His true Son, He suffered Himself to be called also Son of David, that He might make you Son of God. He suffered a slave to be father to Him, that He might make the Lord Father to you a slave.

Do you see at once from the beginning of what nature are the Gospels? If you doubt concerning the things that pertain to you, from what belongs to Him believe these also. For it is far more difficult, judging by human reason, for God to become man, than for a man to be declared a Son of God. When therefore you are told that the Son of God is Son of David and of Abraham, doubt not any more that thou too, the son of Adam, shall be son of God. For not at random, nor in vain did He abase Himself so greatly, only He was minded to exalt us. Thus He was born after the flesh, that you might be born after the Spirit; He was born of a woman, that you might cease to be the son of a woman.

Wherefore the birth was twofold, both made like us, and also surpassing ours. For to be born of a woman indeed was our lot, but to be born not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of man, but of the Holy Ghost, John 1:13 was to proclaim beforehand the birth surpassing us, the birth to come, which He was about freely to give us of the Spirit. And everything else too was like this. Thus His baptism also was of the same kind, for it partook of the old, and it partook also of the new. To be baptized by the prophet marked the old, but the coming down of the Spirit shadowed out the new. And like as though any one were to place himself in the space between any two persons that were standing apart, and stretching forth both his hands were to lay hold on either side, and tie them together; even so has He done, joining the old covenant with the new, God's nature with man's, the things that are His with ours.

Do you see the flashing brightness of the city, with how great a splendor it has dazzled you from the very beginning? How it has straightway shown the King in your own form; as though in a camp? For neither there does the king always appear bearing his proper dignity, but laying aside the purple and the diadem, he often disguises himself in the garb of a common soldier. But there it is, lest by being known he should draw the enemy upon himself; but here on the contrary, lest, if He were known, He should cause the enemy to fly from the conflict with Him, and lest He should confound all His own people: for His purpose was to save, not to dismay.

4. For this reason he has also straightway called Him by this title, naming Him Jesus. For this name, Jesus, is not Greek, but in the Hebrew language it is thus called Jesus; which is, when interpreted into the Greek tongue, A Saviour. And He is called a Saviour, from His saving His people.

Do you see how he has given wings to the hearer, at once speaking things familiar, and at the same time by these indicating to us things beyond all hope? I mean that both these names were well known to the Jews. For, because the things that were to happen were beyond expectation, the types even of the names went before, in order that from the very first all the unsettling power of novelty might be taken away. Thus he is called Jesus, who after Moses brought the people into the land of promise. Have you seen the type? Behold the truth. That led into the land of promise, this into heaven, and to the good things in the heavens; that, after Moses was dead, this after the law had ceased; that as a leader, this as a King.

However, lest having heard the word Jesus, you should by reason of the identity of the name be perplexed, he has added, Jesus Christ, Son of David. But that other was not of David, but of another tribe.

5. But wherefore does he call it a book of the generation of Jesus Christ, while yet this book has not the birth only, but the whole dispensation? Because this is the sum of the whole dispensation, and is made an origin and root of all our blessings. As then Moses calls it the book of heaven and earth, Genesis 2:4 although he has not discoursed of heaven and earth only, but also of all things that are in the midst thereof; so also this man has named his book from that which is the sum of all the great things done. For that which teems with astonishment, and is beyond hope and all expectation, is that God should become man. But this having come to pass, all afterwards follows in reasonable consequence.

6. But wherefore did he not say, the Son of Abraham, and then the Son of David? It is not, as some suppose, that he means to proceed upward from the lower point, since then he would have done the same as Luke, but now he does the contrary. Why then has he made mention of David? The man was in the mouths of all, both from his distinction, and from the time, for he had not been so very long since dead, like Abraham. And though God made promises to both, yet the one, as old, was passed over in silence, while the other, as fresh and recent, was repeated of all. Themselves, for instance, say, Does not Christ come of the seed of David, and out of Bethlehem, the town where David was? John 7:42 And no man called Him Son of Abraham, but all Son of David; and that because this last was more in the recollection of all, both on account of the time, as I have already said, and because of his royalty. On this principle again all the kings whom they had in honor after his time were named from him, both by the people themselves and by God. For both Ezekiel and other prophets besides speak of David as coming and rising again; not meaning him that was dead, but them who were emulating his virtue. And to Hezekiah He says, I will defend this city, for my own sake and for my servant David's sake. 2 Kings 19:34 And to Solomon too He said, that for David's sake He rent not the kingdom during his lifetime. For great was the glory of the man, both with God and with men.

On account of this he makes the beginning at once from him who was more known, and then runs up to his father; accounting it superfluous, as far as regards the Jews, to carry the genealogy higher up. For these were principally the persons held in admiration; the one as a prophet and a king, the other as a patriarch and a prophet.

7. But whence is it manifest that He is of David? one may say. For if He was not sprung of a man, but from a woman only, and the Virgin has not her genealogy traced, how shall we know that He was of David's race? Thus, there are two things inquired; both why His mother's genealogy is not recited, and wherefore it can be that Joseph is mentioned by them, who has no part in the birth: since the latter seems to be superfluous, and the former a defect.

Of which then is it necessary to speak first? How the Virgin is of David. How then shall we know that she is of David? Harken unto God, telling Gabriel to go unto a virgin betrothed to a man (whose name was Joseph), of the house and lineage of David. What now would you have plainer than this, when you have heard that the Virgin was of the house and lineage of David?

Hence it is evident that Joseph also was of the same. Yes, for there was a law, which bade that it should not be lawful to take a wife from any other stock, but from the same tribe. And the patriarch Jacob also foretold that He should arise out of the tribe of Judah, saying on this wise: there shall not fail a ruler out of Judah, nor a governor out of his loins, until He come for whom it is appointed, and He is the expectation of the Gentiles.

Well; this prophecy does indeed make it clear that He was of the tribe of Judah, but not also that He was of the family of David. Was there then in the tribe of Judah one family only, even that of David, or were there not also many others? And might it not happen for one to be of the tribe of Judah, but not also of the family of David?

Nay, lest you should say this, the evangelist has removed this suspicion of yours, by saying, that He was of the house and lineage of David.

And if you wish to learn this from another reason besides, neither shall we be at a loss for another proof. For not only was it not allowed to take a wife out of another tribe, but not even from another lineage, that is, from another kindred. So that if either we connect with the Virgin the words, of the house and lineage of David, what has been said stands good; or if with Joseph, by that fact this also is proved. For if Joseph was of the house and lineage of David, he would not have taken his wife from another than that whence he himself was sprung.

What then, one may say, if he transgressed the law? Why, for this cause he has by anticipation testified that Joseph was righteous, on purpose that you might not say this, but having been told his virtue, might be sure also that he would not have transgressed the law. For he who was so benevolent, and free from passion, as not to wish, even when urged by suspicion, to attempt inflicting punishment on the Virgin, how should he have transgressed the law for lust? He that showed wisdom and self-restraint beyond the law (for to put her away, and that privily, was to act with self-restraint beyond the law), how should he have done anything contrary to the law; and this when there was no cause to urge him?

8. Now that the Virgin was of the race of David is indeed from these things evident; but wherefore he gave not her genealogy, but Joseph's, requires explanation. For what cause was it then? It was not the law among the Jews that the genealogy of women should be traced. In order then that he might keep the custom, and not seem to be making alterations from the beginning, and yet might make the Virgin known to us, for this cause he has passed over her ancestors in silence, and traced the genealogy of Joseph. For if he had done this with respect to the Virgin, he would have seemed to be introducing novelties; and if he had passed over Joseph in silence, we should not have known the Virgin's forefathers. In order therefore that we might learn, touching Mary, who she was, and of what origin, and that the laws might remain undisturbed, he has traced the genealogy of her espoused husband, and shown him to be of the house of David. For when this has been clearly proved, that other fact is demonstrated with it, namely, that the Virgin likewise is sprung from thence, by reason that this righteous man, even as I have already said, would not have endured to take a wife from another race.

There is also another reason, which one might mention, of a more mystical nature, because of which the Virgin's forefathers were passed over in silence; but this it were not seasonable now to declare, because so much has been already said.

9. Wherefore let us stay at this point our discourse concerning the questions, and in the meanwhile let us retain with accuracy what has been revealed to us; as, for instance, why he mentioned David first; wherefore he called the book, a book of the generation; on what account he said, of Jesus Christ; how the birth is common and not common; whence it was that Mary was shown to be from David; and wherefore Joseph's genealogy is traced, while her ancestors are passed over in silence.

For if you retain these things, you will the more encourage us with respect to what is to come; but if you reject and cast them from your mind, we shall be the more backward as to the rest. Just as no

husbandman would care to pay attention to a soil which had destroyed the former seed.

Wherefore I entreat you to revolve these things. For from taking thought concerning such matters, there springs in the soul some great good, tending unto salvation. For by these meditations we shall be able to please God Himself; and our mouths will be pure from insults, and filthy talking, and reviling, while they are exercising themselves in spiritual sayings; and we shall be formidable to the devils, while arming our tongue with such words; and we shall draw unto ourselves God's grace the more, and it will render our eye more piercing. For indeed both eyes and mouth and hearing He set in us to this intent, that all our members may serve Him, that we may speak His words, and do His deeds, that we may sing unto Him continual hymns, that we may offer up sacrifices of thanksgiving, and by these may thoroughly purify our consciences.

For as a body will be more in health when enjoying the benefits of a pure air, even so will a soul be more endued with practical wisdom when nourished in such exercises as these. Do you see not even the eyes of the body, that when they abide in smoke they are always weeping; but when they are in clear air, and in a meadow, and in fountains and gardens, they become more quicksighted and more healthy? Like this is the soul's eye also, for should it feed in the meadow of spiritual oracles, it will be clear and piercing, and quick of sight; but should it depart into the smoke of the things of this life, it will weep without end, and wail both now and hereafter. For indeed the things of this life are like smoke. On this account also one has said, My days have failed like smoke. He indeed was referring to their shortness of duration, and to their unsubstantial nature, but I would say that we should take what is said, not in this sense alone, but also as to their turbid character.

For nothing does so hurt and dim the eye of the soul as the crowd of worldly anxieties and the swarm of desires. For these are the wood that feeds this smoke. And as fire, when it lays hold of any damp and saturated fuel, kindles much smoke; so likewise this desire, so vehement and burning, when it lays hold of a soul that is (so to speak) damp and dissolute, produces also in its way abundance of smoke. For this cause there is need of the dew of the Spirit, and of that air, that it may extinguish the fire, and scatter the smoke, and give wings to our thoughts. For it cannot, it cannot be that one weighed down with so great evils should soar up to heaven; it is well if being without impediment we can cleave our way there; or rather it is not possible even so, unless we obtain the wing of the Spirit.

Now if there be need both of an unencumbered mind, and of spiritual grace, that we may mount up to that height; what if there be none of these things, but we draw to ourselves whatever is opposite to them, even a satanical weight? How shall we be able to soar upwards, when dragged down by so great a load? For indeed, should any one attempt to weigh our words as it were in just balances; in ten thousand talents of worldly talk he will scarcely find an hundred pence of spiritual words, or rather, I should say, not even ten farthings. Is it not then a disgrace, and an extreme mockery, that if we have a servant, we make use of him for the most part in things necessary, but being possessed of a tongue, we do not deal with our member so well even as with a slave, but on the contrary make use of it for things unprofitable, and mere makeweights? And would it were only for makeweights: but now it is for what are contrary and hurtful and in no respect advantageous to us. For if the things that we spoke were profitable to us, they would assuredly be also pleasing to God. But as it is, whatever the devil may suggest, we speak it all, now laughing, and now speaking wittily; now cursing and insulting, and now swearing, lying, and taking false oaths; now murmuring, and now making vain babblings, and talking trifles more than old wives; uttering all things that are of no concern to us.

For, tell me, who of you that stand here, if he were required, could repeat one Psalm, or any other portion of the divine Scriptures? There is not one.

And it is not this only that is the grievous thing, but that while you have become so backward with respect to things spiritual, yet in regard of what belongs to Satan you are more vehement than fire. Thus should any one be minded to ask of you songs of devils and impure effeminate melodies, he will find many that know these perfectly, and repeat them with much pleasure.

10. But what is the answer to these charges? I am not, you will say, one of the monks, but I have both a wife and children, and the care of a household. Why, this is what has ruined all, your supposing that the reading of the divine Scriptures appertains to those only, when you need it much more than they. For they that dwell in the world, and each day receive wounds, these have most need of medicines. So that it is far worse than not reading, to account the thing even superfluous: for these are the words of diabolical invention. Hear ye not Paul saying, that all these things are written for our admonition? 1 Corinthians 10:11

And you, if you had to take up a Gospel, would not choose to do so with hands unwashed; but the things that are laid up within it, do you not think to be highly necessary? It is because of this, that all things are turned upside down.

For if you would learn how great is the profit of the Scriptures, examine yourself, what you become by hearing Psalms, and what by listening to a song of Satan; and how you are disposed when staying in a Church, and how when sitting in a theatre; and you will see that great is the difference between this soul and that, although both be one. Therefore Paul said, Evil communications corrupt good manners. 1 Corinthians 15:33 For this cause we have need continually of those songs, which serve as charms from the Spirit. Yes, for this it is whereby we excel the irrational creatures, since with respect to all other things, we are even exceedingly inferior to them.

This is a soul's food, this its ornament, this its security; even as not to hear is famine and wasting; for I will give them, says He, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but a famine of hearing the word of the Lord. Amos 8:11

What then can be more wretched? When the very evil, which God threatens in the way of punishment, this you are drawing upon your head of your own accord, bringing into your soul a sort of grievous famine, and making it the feeblest thing in the world? For it is its nature both to be wasted and to be saved by words. Yea, this leads it on to anger; and the same kind of thing again makes it meek: a filthy expression is wont to kindle it to lust, and it is trained to temperance by speech full of gravity.

But if a word merely have such great power, tell me, how is it thou dost despise the Scriptures? And if an admonition can do such great things, far more when the admonitions are with the Spirit. Yes, for a word from the divine Scriptures, made to sound in the ear, does more than fire soften the hardened soul, and renders it fit for all good things.

11. In this way too did Paul, when he had found the Corinthians puffed up and inflamed, compose them, and make them more considerate. For they were priding themselves on those very things, touching which they ought to have been ashamed, and to have hid their face. But after they had received the letter, hear the change in them, of which the Teacher himself has borne witness for them, saying on this wise: for this very thing, that you sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of

yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge. In this way do we bring to order servants and children, wives, and friends, and make our enemies friends.

In this way the great men too, they that were dear to God, became better. David, for instance, after his sin, when he had had the benefit of certain words, then it was that he came unto that most excellent repentance; and the apostles also by this mean became what they did become, and drew after them the whole world.

And what is the profit, one may say, when any one hears, but does not what is said? No little will the profit be even from hearing. For he will go on to condemn himself, and to groan inwardly, and will come in time also to do the things that are spoken of. But he that does not even know that he has sinned, when will he cease from his negligence? When will he condemn himself?

Let us not therefore despise the hearing of the divine Scriptures. For this is of Satan's devising; not suffering us to see the treasure, lest we should gain the riches. Therefore he says that the hearing the divine laws is nothing, lest he should see us from the hearing acquiring the practice also.

Knowing then this his evil art, let us fortify ourselves against him on all sides, that being fenced with this armor, we may both abide unconquered ourselves, and smite him on the head: and thus, having crowned ourselves with the glorious wreaths of victory, we may attain unto the good things to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might for ever and ever. Amen.

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