

John 1:35-40

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing Jesus as the Lamb of God and the urgency of following Him for salvation.

Scripture: Psalm 1:3, John 1:29-40, Philippians 3:1, 2 Timothy 4:2

Topics: "Following Christ", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of continuously reminding ourselves of the teachings of God, as our souls require repeated sowing and carefulness to bear fruit. He emphasizes the need for persistent attention to God's word to mature and withstand temptations. John's repetition of 'Behold the Lamb of God' serves to awaken the listeners from their spiritual slumber and prepare them to follow Christ. The disciples' immediate response to follow Jesus highlights the eagerness to seek eternal life and the importance of recognizing and following the true Messiah.

Transcript

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he says, Behold the Lamb of God. And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

1. The nature of man is somehow a thing slothful, and easily declining to perdition, not by reason of the constitution of the nature itself, but by reason of that sloth which is of deliberate choice. Wherefore it needs much reminding. And for this cause Paul, writing to the Philippians, said, To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Philippians 3:1

The earth when it has once received the seed, straightway gives forth its fruits, and needs not a second sowing; but with our souls it is not so, and one must be content, after having sown many times, and manifested much carefulness, to be able once to receive fruit. For in the first place, what is said settles in the mind with difficulty, because the ground is very hard, and entangled with thorns innumerable, and there are many which lay plots, and carry away the seed; afterwards, when it has been fixed and has taken root, it still needs the same attention, that it may come to maturity, and having done so may remain uninjured, and take no harm from any. For in the case of seeds, when the ear is fully formed and has gained its proper strength, it easily despises rust, and drought, and every other thing; but it is not so with doctrines; in their case after all the work has been fully done, one storm and flood often comes on, and either by the attack of unpleasant circumstances, or by the plots of men skilled to deceive, or by various other temptations brought against them, brings them to ruin.

I have not said this without cause, but that when you hear John repeating the same words, you may not condemn him for vain talking; nor deem him impertinent or wearisome. He desired to have been heard by once speaking, but because not many gave heed to what was spoken from the first, by reason of deep sleep, he again rouses them by this second call. Now observe; he had said, He that comes after me, is preferred before me: and that I am not worthy to unloose the latchet of His shoe; and that He baptizes with the Holy Ghost, and with fire; and that he saw the Spirit descending like a dove, and it abode upon Him, and he bare record that this is the Son of God. No one gave heed, nor asked, nor said, Why do you say these things? In whose behalf? For what reason? Again he had said, Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world; yet not even so did he touch their insensibility. Therefore, after this he is compelled to repeat the same words again, as if softening by tillage some hard and stubborn soil, and by his word as by a plow, disturbing the mind which had hardened into clods, so as to put in the seed deep. For this reason he does not make his discourse a long one either; because he desired one thing only, to bring them over and join them to Christ. He knew that as soon as they had received this saying, and had been persuaded, they would not afterwards need one to bear witness unto Him. As also it came to pass. For, if the Samaritans could say to the woman after hearing Him, Now we believe, not because of your saying, for we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world, the disciples would be much more quickly subdued, as was the case. For when they had come and heard Him but one evening, they returned no more to John, but were so nailed to Him, that they took upon them the ministry of John, and themselves proclaimed Him. For, says the Evangelist, He finds his own brother Simon, and says unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And observe, I pray you, this, how, when he said, He that comes after me is preferred before me; and that, I am not worthy to unloose the latchet of His shoe; he caught no one, but when he spoke of the Dispensation, and lowered his discourse to a humbler tone, then the disciples followed Him.

And we may remark this, not only in the instance of the disciples, but that the many are not so much attracted when some great and sublime thing is said concerning God, as when some act of graciousness and lovingkindness, something pertaining to the salvation of the hearers, is spoken of. They heard that He takes away the sin of the world, and straightway they ran to Him. For, said they, if it is possible to wash away the charges that lie against us, why do we delay? Here is One who will deliver us without labor of ours. Is it not extreme folly to put off accepting the Gift? Let those hear who are Catechumens, and are putting off their salvation to their latest breath.

Again, says the Evangelist, John stood, and says, Behold, the Lamb of God. Christ utters no word, His messenger says all. So it is with a bridegroom. He says not for a while anything to the bride, but is there in silence, while some show him to the bride, and others give her into his hands; she merely appears, and he departs not having taken her himself, but when he has received her from another who gives her to him. And when he has received her thus given, he so disposes her, that she no more remembers those who betrothed her. So it was with Christ. He came to join to Himself the Church; He said nothing, but merely came. It was His friend, John, who put into His the bride's right hand, when by his discourses he gave into His hand the souls of men. He having received them, afterwards so disposed them, that they departed no more to John who had committed them to Him.

2. And here we may remark, not this only, but something besides. As at a marriage the maiden goes not to the bridegroom, but he hastens to her, though he be a king's son, and though he be about to espouse some poor and abject person, or even a servant, so it was here. Man's nature did not go up, but contemptible and poor as it was, He came to it, and when the marriage had taken place, He suffered it no

longer to tarry here, but having taken it to Himself, transported it to the house of His Father.

Why then does not John take his disciples apart, and converse with them on these matters, and so deliver them over to Christ, instead of saying publicly to them in common with all the people, 'Behold the Lamb of God?'' That it may not seem to be a matter of arrangement; for had they gone away from him to Christ after having been privately admonished by him, and as though to do him a favor, they would perhaps soon have started away again; but now, having taken upon them the following Him, from teaching which had been general, they afterwards remained His firm disciples, as not having followed Him in order to gratify the teacher, but as looking purely to their own advantage.

The Prophets and Apostles then all preached Him absent; the Prophets before His coming according to the flesh, the Apostles after He was taken up; John alone proclaimed Him present. Wherefore he calls himself the friend of the Bridegroom John 3:29, since he alone was present at the marriage, he it was that did and accomplished all, he made a beginning of the work. And looking upon Jesus walking, he says, Behold the Lamb of God. Not by voice alone, but with his eyes also he bore witness to, and expressed his admiration of, Christ, rejoicing and glorying. Nor does he for awhile address any word of exhortation to his followers, but only shows wonder and astonishment at Him who was present, and declares to all the Gift which He came to give, and the manner of purification. For the Lamb declares both these things. And he said not, Who shall take, or Who has taken; but, Who takes away the sins of the world; because this He ever does. He took them not then only when He suffered, but from that time even to the present does He take them away, not being repeatedly crucified, (for He offered One Sacrifice for sins,) but by that One continually purging them. As then The Word shows us His pre-eminence, and The Son His superiority in comparison with others, so The Lamb, The Christ, that Prophet, the True Light, the Good Shepherd, and whatever other names are applied to Him with the addition of the article, mark a great difference. For there were many Lambs, and Prophets, and Christs, and sons, but from all these John separates Him by a wide interval. And this he secured not by the article only, but by the addition of Only-Begotten; for He had nothing in common with the creation.

If it seems to any unseasonable that these things should be spoken at the tenth hour (that was the time of day, for he says, It was about the tenth hour -- John 1:39, such an one seems to me to be much mistaken. In the case indeed of the many, and those who serve the flesh, the season after feasting is not very suitable for any matters of pressing moment, because their hearts are burdened with meats: but here was a man who did not even partake of common food, and who at evening was as sober as we are at morning, (or rather much more so; for often the remains of our evening food that are left within us, fill our souls with imaginations, but he loaded his vessel with none of these things;) he with good reason spoke late in the evening of these matters. Besides, he was tarrying in the wilderness by Jordan, where all came to his baptism with great fear, and caring little at that time for the things of this life; as also they continued with Christ three days, and had nothing to eat. Matthew 15:32 For this is the part of a zealous herald and a careful husbandman, not to desist before he see that the planted seed has got a firm hold. Why then did he not go about all the parts of Judæa preaching Christ, rather than stand by the river waiting for Him to come, that he might point Him out when He came? Because he wished that this should be effected by His works; his own object being in the mean time only to make Him known, and to persuade some to hear of eternal life. But to Him he leaves the greater testimony, that of works, as also He says, I receive not testimony of men. The works which My Father has given Me, the same bear witness of Me. c. v. 34, 36 Observe how much more effectual this was; for when he had thrown in a little spark, at once the blaze rose on high. For they who before had not even given heed to his words, afterwards say, All things which

John spoke were true. John 10:41

3. Besides, if he had gone about saying these things, what was being done would have seemed to be done from some human motive, and the preaching to be full of suspicion.

And the two disciples heard him, and followed Jesus.

Yet John had other disciples, but they not only did not follow Jesus, but were even jealously disposed towards him. Rabbi, says one, He that was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bore witness, behold, the same baptizes, and all men come unto him. John 3:26 And again they appear bringing a charge against him; Why do we fast, but your disciples fast not? Matthew 9:14 But those who were better than the rest had no such feeling, but heard, and at once followed; followed, not as despising their teacher, but as being most fully persuaded by him, and producing the strongest proof that they acted thus from a right judgment of his reasonings. For they did not do so by his advice, that might have appeared suspicious; but when he merely foretold what was to come to pass, that He should baptize with the Holy Ghost, [and with fire,] they followed. They did not then desert their teacher, but rather desired to learn what Christ brought with Him more than John. And observe zeal combined with modesty. They did not at once approach and question Jesus on necessary and most important matters, nor were they desirous to converse with Him publicly, while all were present, at once and in an off-hand manner, but privately; for they knew that the words of their teacher proceeded not from humility, but from truth.

John 1:40

One of the two who heard, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

Wherefore then has he not made known the name of the other also? Some say, because it was the writer himself that followed; others, not so, but that he was not one of the distinguished disciples; it behooved not therefore to say more than was necessary. For what would it have advantaged us to learn his name, when the writer does not mention the names even of the seventy-two? St. Paul also did the same. We have sent, says he, with him the brother, (who has often in many things been forward,) whose praise is in the Gospel. 2 Corinthians 8:18 Moreover, he mentions Andrew for another reason. What is this? It is, that when you are informed that Simon having in company with him heard, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men Matthew 4:19, was not perplexed at so strange a promise, you may learn that his brother had already laid down within him the beginnings of the faith.

John 1:38

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and says unto them, What do you seek?

Hence we are taught, that God does not prevent our wills by His gifts, but that when we begin, when we provide the being willing, then He gives us many opportunities of salvation. What do you seek? How is this? He who knows the hearts of men, who dwells in our thoughts, does He ask? He does; not that He may be informed; how could that be? But that by the question He may make them more familiar, and impart to them greater boldness, and show them that they are worthy to hear Him; for it was probable that they would blush and be afraid, as being unknown to him, and as having heard such accounts of Him from the testimony of their teacher. Therefore to remove all this, their shame and their fear, he questions them, and would not let them come all the way to the house in silence. Yet the event would have been the same had He not questioned them; they would have remained by following Him, and walking in His steps would

have reached His dwelling. Why then did He ask? To effect that which I said, to calm their minds, yet disturbed with shame and anxiety, and to give them confidence.

Nor was it by their following only that they showed their earnest desire, but by their question also: for when they had not as yet learned or even heard anything from Him, they call Him, Master; thrusting themselves as it were among His disciples, and declaring what was the cause of their following, that they might hear somewhat profitable. Observe their wisdom also. They did not say, Teach us of Your doctrines, or some other thing that we need to know; but what? Where dwellest Thou? Because, as I before said, they wished in quiet to say somewhat to Him, and to hear somewhat from Him, and to learn. Therefore they did not defer the matter, nor say, We will come tomorrow by all means, and hear you speak in public; but showed the great eagerness they had to hear Him, by not being turned back even by the hour, for the sun was already near its setting, (it was, says John, about the tenth hour.) And therefore Christ does not tell them the marks of His abode, nor its situation, but rather induces them to follow Him by showing them that He had accepted them. For this reason He did not say anything of this kind to them, It is an unseasonable time now for you to enter into the house, tomorrow you shall hear if you have any wish, return home now; but converses with them as with friends, and those who had long been with Him.

How then says He in another place, But the Son of Man has not where to lay His head Luke 9:58, while here He says, Come and see John 1:39 where I abide? Because the expression has not where to lay His head, signifies that He had no dwelling place of His own, not that He did not abide in a house. And this too is the meaning of the comparison. The Evangelist has mentioned that they abode with Him that day, but has not added wherefore, because the reason was plain; for from no other motive did they follow Christ, and He draw them to Him, but only that they might have instruction; and this they enjoyed so abundantly and eagerly even in a single night, that they both proceeded straightway to the capture of others.

4. Let us then also learn hence to consider all things secondary to the hearing the word of God, and to deem no season unseasonable, and, though a man may even have to go into another person's house, and being a person unknown to make himself known to great men, though it be late in the day, or at any time whatever, never to neglect this traffic. Let food and baths and dinners and the other things of this life have their appointed time; but let the teaching of heavenly philosophy have no separate time, let every season belong to it. For Paul says, In season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort 2 Timothy 4:2; and the Prophet too says, In His law will he meditate day and night Psalm 1:3; and Moses commanded the Jews to do this always. For the things of this life, baths, I mean, and dinners, even if they are necessary, yet being continually repeated, render the body feeble; but the teaching of the soul the more it is prolonged, the stronger it renders the soul which receives it. But now we portion out all our time for trifles and unprofitable silly talking, and we sit together idly during the morning and afternoon, midday and evening besides, and we have appointed places for this; but hearing the divine doctrines twice or thrice in the week we become sick, and thoroughly sated. What is the reason? We are in a bad state of soul; its faculty of desiring and reaching after these things we have relaxed altogether. And therefore it is not strong enough to have an appetite for spiritual food. And this among others is a great proof of weakness, not to hunger nor thirst, but to be disinclined to both. Now if this, when it takes place in our bodies, is a sure sign of grievous disease, and productive of weakness, much more is it so in the soul.

How then, says one, shall we be able to renew it, thus fallen and relaxed, to strength? What doing, what saying? By applying ourselves to the divine words of the prophets, of the Apostles, of the Gospels, and all the others; then we shall know that it is far better to feed on these than on impure food, for so we must term our unseasonable idle talking and assemblies. For which is best, tell me, to converse on things

relating to the market, or things in the law courts, or in the camp, or on things in heaven, and on what shall be after our departure hence?

Which is best, to talk about our neighbor and our neighbor's affairs, to busy ourselves in what belongs to other people, or to enquire into the things of angels, and into matters which concern ourselves? For a neighbor's affairs are not yours at all; but heavenly things are yours. But, says some one, a man may by once speaking finish these subjects altogether. Why do you not think this in matters on which you converse uselessly and idly, why though you waste your lives on this have you never exhausted the subject?

And I have not yet named what is far more vile than this. These are the things about which the better sort converse one with the other; but the more indifferent and careless carry about in their talk players and dancers and charioteers, defiling men's ears, corrupting their souls, and driving their nature into mad excesses by these narratives, and by means of this discourse introducing every kind of wickedness into their own imagination. For as soon as the tongue has uttered the name of the dancer, immediately the soul has figured to itself his looks, his hair, his delicate clothing, and himself more effeminate than all.

Another again fans the flame in another way, by introducing some harlot into the conversation, with her words, and attitudes, and glances, her languishing looks and twisted locks, the smoothness of her cheeks, and her painted eyelids. Were you not somewhat affected when I gave this description? Yet be not ashamed, nor blush, for the very necessity of nature requires this, and so disposes the soul according as the tendency of what is said may be. But if, when it is I that speak, you, standing in the church, and at a distance from these things, were somewhat affected at the hearing, consider how it is likely that they are disposed, who sit in the theater itself, who are totally free from dread, who are absent from this venerable and awful assembly, who both see and hear those things with much shamelessness.

And why then, perhaps one of those who heed not may say, if the necessity of nature so disposes the soul, do you let go that, and blame us? Because, to be softened when one hears these things, is nature's work; but to hear them is not a fault of nature, but of deliberate choice. For so he who meddles with fire must needs be injured, so wills the weakness of our nature; yet nature does not therefore draw us to the fire and to the injury thence arising; this can be only from deliberate perversity.

I beseech you, therefore, to remove and correct this fault, that you may not of your own accord cast yourself down the precipice, nor thrust yourselves into the pits of wickedness, nor run of yourselves to the blaze, lest we place ourselves in jeopardy of the fire prepared for the devil. May it come to pass, that we all being delivered both from this fire and from that, may go to the very bosom of Abraham, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and Holy Ghost, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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