

John 2:4-10

by St. John Chrysostom

Christ's refusal to perform the miracle at first was a demonstration of His power and ability to work at His own convenient season, and the miracle of turning water into wine is a reminder of His ability to change our weak and unstable wills.

Scripture: Psalm 37:4, Matthew 15:26, John 2:4-6, John 2:8, John 4:46, John 17:1, 1 Timothy 5:17

Topics: "Miracles Of Jesus", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the miracle at the wedding in Cana, where Jesus turns water into wine, highlighting the significance of Christ's timing and the gradual revelation of His power through miracles. Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of perseverance in faith, as seen in the Canaanitish woman's interaction with Jesus, and the need for a transformation of our wills from being weak and unstable like water to being strong and joyful like wine through Christ. He also warns against the dangers of luxury and gluttony, pointing out the negative physical and spiritual effects, and encourages seeking pleasure and delight in spiritual things rather than worldly excess.

Transcript

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

1. In preaching the word there is some toil, and this Paul declares when he says, Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. 1 Timothy 5:17 Yet it is in your power to make this labor light or heavy; for if you reject our words, or if without actually rejecting them you do not show them forth in your works, our toil will be heavy, because we labor uselessly and in vain: while if you heed them and give proof of it by your works, we shall not even feel the toil, because the fruit produced by our labor will not suffer the greatness of that labor to appear. So that if you would rouse our zeal, and not quench or weaken it, show us, I beseech you, your fruit, that we may behold the fields waving with grain, and being supported by hopes of an abundant crop, and reckoning up your riches, may not be slothful in carrying on this good traffic.

It is no slight question which is proposed to us also today. For first, when the mother of Jesus says, They have no wine, Christ replies, Woman, what have I to do with you? Mine, hour is not yet come. And then, having thus spoken, He did as His mother had said; an action which needs enquiry no less than the words. Let us then, after calling upon Him who wrought the miracle, proceed to the explanation.

The words are not used in this place only, but in others also; for the same Evangelist says, They could not lay hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come John 8:20; and again, No man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come John 7:30; and again, The hour has come, glorify Your Son. John 17:1 What then do the words mean? I have brought together more instances, that I may give one explanation of all. And what is that explanation? Christ did not say, Mine hour is not yet come, as being subject to the necessity of seasons, or the observance of an hour; how can He be so, who is Maker of seasons, and Creator of the times and the ages? To what else then did He allude? He desires to show this; that He works all things at their convenient season, not doing all at once; because a kind of confusion and disorder would have ensued, if, instead of working all at their proper seasons, He had mixed all together, His Birth, His Resurrection, and His coming to Judgment. Observe this; creation was to be, yet not all at once; man and woman were to be created, yet not even these together; mankind were to be condemned to death, and there was to be a resurrection, yet the interval between the two was to be great; the law was to be given, but not grace with it, each was to be dispensed at its proper time. Now Christ was not subject to the necessity of seasons, but rather settled their order, since He is their Creator; and therefore He says in this place, Mine hour is not yet come. And His meaning is, that as yet He was not manifest to the many, nor had He even His whole company of disciples; Andrew followed Him, and next to him Philip, but no one else. And moreover, none of these, not even His mother nor His brethren, knew Him as they ought; for after His many miracles, the Evangelist says of His brethren, For neither did His brethren believe in Him. John 7:5 And those at the wedding did not know Him either, for in their need they would certainly have come to and entreated Him. Therefore He says, Mine hour is not yet come; that is, I am not yet known to the company, nor are they even aware that the wine has failed; let them first be sensible of this. I ought not to have been told it from you; you are My mother, and renderest the miracle suspicious. They who wanted the wine should have come and besought Me, not that I need this, but that they might with an entire assent accept the miracle. For one who knows that he is in need, is very grateful when he obtains assistance; but one who has not a sense of his need, will never have a plain and clear sense of the benefit.

Why then after He had said, Mine hour is not yet come, and given her a denial, did He what His mother desired? Chiefly it was, that they who opposed Him, and thought that He was subject to the hour, might have sufficient proof that He was subject to no hour; for had He been so, how could He, before the proper hour had come, have done what He did? And in the next place, He did it to honor His mother, that He might not seem entirely to contradict and shame her that bare Him in the presence of so many; and also, that He might not be thought to want power, for she brought the servants to Him.

Besides, even while saying to the Canaanitish woman, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to give it unto dogs Matthew 15:26, He still gave the bread, as considering her perseverance; and though after his first reply, He said, I am not sent save unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet even after saying this, He healed the woman's daughter. Hence we learn, that although we be unworthy, we often by perseverance make ourselves worthy to receive. And for this reason His mother remained by, and openly brought to Him the servants, that the request might be made by a greater number; and therefore she added,

John 2:5

Whatsoever He says unto you, do it.

For she knew that His refusal proceeded not from want of power, but from humility, and that He might not seem without cause to hurry to the miracle; and therefore she brought the servants.

John 2:6-7

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus said to them, Fill the waterpots with water; and they filled them up to the brim.

It is not without a reason that the Evangelist says, After the manner of the purifying of the Jews, but in order that none of the unbelievers might suspect that lees having been left in the vessels, and water having been poured upon and mixed with them, a very weak wine had been made. Therefore he says, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, to show that those vessels were never receptacles for wine. For because Palestine is a country with but little water, and brooks and fountains were not everywhere to be found, they always used to fill waterpots with water, so that they might not have to hasten to the rivers if at any time they were defiled, but might have the means of purification at hand.

And why was it, that He did not the miracle before they filled them, which would have been more marvelous by far? For it is one thing to change given matter to a different quality, and another to create matter out of nothing. The latter would indeed have been more wonderful, but would not have seemed so credible to the many. And therefore He often purposely lessens the greatness of His miracles, that it may be the more readily received.

But why, says one, did not He Himself produce the water which He afterwards showed to be wine, instead of bidding the servants bring it? For the very same reason; and also, that He might have those who drew it out to witness that what had been effected was no delusion since if any had been inclined to be shameless, those who ministered might have said to them, We drew the water, we filled the vessels. And besides what we have mentioned, He thus overthrows those doctrines which spring up against the Church. For since there are some who say that the Creator of the world is another, and that the things which are seen are not His works, but those of a certain other opposing god, to curb these men's madness He does most of His miracles on matter found at hand. Because, had the creator of these been opposed to Him, He would not have used what was another's to set forth His own power. But now to show that it is He who transmutes water in the vine plants, and who converts the rain by its passage through the root into wine, He effected that in a moment at the wedding which in the plant is long in doing. When they had filled the waterpots, He said,

John 2:8-10

Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast; and they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and says unto him, Every man at the beginning does set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worst; but you have kept the good wine until now.

Here again some mock, saying, this was an assembly of drunken men, the sense of the judges was spoilt, and not able to taste what was made, or to decide on what was done, so that they did not know whether what was made was water or wine: for that they were drunk, it is alleged, the ruler himself has shown by what he said. Now this is most ridiculous, yet even this suspicion the Evangelist has removed. For he does

not say that the guests gave their opinion on the matter, but the ruler of the feast, who was sober, and had not as yet tasted anything. For of course you are aware, that those who are entrusted with the management of such banquets are the most sober, as having this one business, to dispose all things in order and regularity; and therefore the Lord called such a man's sober senses to testify to what was done. For He did not say, Pour forth to them that sit at meat, but, Bear unto the governor of the feast.

And when the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom. And why did he not call the servants? For so the miracle would have been revealed. Because Jesus had not Himself revealed what had been done, but desired that the power of His miracles should be known gently, little by little. And suppose that it had then been mentioned, the servants who related it would never have been believed, but would have been thought mad to bear such testimony to one who at that time seemed to the many a mere man; and although they knew the certainty of the thing by experience, (for they were not likely to disbelieve their own hands,) yet they were not sufficient to convince others. And so He did not reveal it to all, but to him who was best able to understand what was done, reserving the clearer knowledge of it for a future time; since after the manifestation of other miracles this also would be credible. Thus when he was about to heal the nobleman's son, the Evangelist has shown that it had already become more clearly known; for it was chiefly because the nobleman had become acquainted with the miracle that he called upon Him, as John incidentally shows when he says, Jesus came into Cana of Galilee, where He made the water wine. John 4:46 And not wine simply, but the best.

3. For such are the miraculous works of Christ, they are far more perfect and better than the operations of nature. This is seen also in other instances; when He restored any infirm member of the body, He made it better than the sound.

That it was wine then, and the best of wine, that had been made, not the servants only, but the bridegroom and the ruler of the feast would testify; and that it was made by Christ, those who drew the water; so that although the miracle were not then revealed, yet it could not in the end be passed in silence, so many and constraining testimonies had He provided for the future. That He had made the water wine, He had the servants for witnesses; that the wine was good that had been made, the ruler of the feast and the bridegroom.

It might be expected that the bridegroom would reply to this, (the ruler's speech,) and say something, but the Evangelist, hastening to more pressing matters, has only touched upon this miracle, and passed on. For what we needed to learn was, that Christ made the water wine, and that good wine; but what the bridegroom said to the governor he did not think it necessary to add. And many miracles, at first somewhat obscure, have in process of time become more plain, when reported more exactly by those who knew them from the beginning.

At that time, then, Jesus made of water wine, and both then and now He ceases not to change our weak and unstable wills. For there are, yes, there are men who in nothing differ from water, so cold, and weak, and unsettled. But let us bring those of such disposition to the Lord, that He may change their will to the quality of wine, so that they be no longer washy, but have body, and be the cause of gladness in themselves and others. But who can these cold ones be? They are those who give their minds to the fleeting things of this present life, who despise not this world's luxury, who are lovers of glory and dominion: for all these things are flowing waters, never stable, but ever rushing violently down the steep.

The rich today is poor tomorrow, he who one day appears with herald, and girdle, and chariot, and numerous attendants, is often on the next the inhabitant of a dungeon, having unwillingly quitted all that show to make room for another. Again, the gluttonous and dissipated man, when he has filled himself to bursting, cannot retain even for a single day the supply conveyed by his delicacies, but when that is dispersed, in order to renew it he is obliged to put in more, differing in nothing from a torrent.

For as in the torrent when the first body of water is gone, others in turn succeed; so in gluttony, when one repast is removed, we again require another. And such is the nature and the lot of earthly things, never to be stable, but to be always pouring and hurrying by; but in the case of luxury, it is not merely the flowing and hastening by; but many other things that trouble us. By the violence of its course it wears away the strength of the body, and strips the soul of its manliness, and the strongest currents of rivers do not so easily eat away their banks and make them sink down, as do luxury and wantonness sweep away all the bulwarks of our health; and if you enter a physician's house and ask him, you will find that almost all the causes of diseases arise from this.

For frugality and a plain table is the mother of health, and therefore physicians have thus named it; for they have called the not being satisfied health, (because not to be satisfied with food is health,) and they have spoken of sparing diet as the mother of health. Now if the condition of want is the mother of health, it is clear that fullness is the mother of sickness and debility, and produces attacks which are beyond the skill even of physicians. For gout in the feet, apoplexy, dimness of sight, pains in the hands, tremors, paralytic attacks, jaundice, lingering and inflammatory fevers, and other diseases many more than these, (for we have not time to go over them all,) are the natural offspring, not of abstinence and moderate diet, but of gluttony and repletion.

And if you will look to the diseases of the soul that arise from them, you will see that feelings of coveting, sloth, melancholy, dullness, impurity, and folly of all kinds, have their origin here. For after such banquets the souls of the luxurious become no better than asses, being torn to pieces by such wild beasts as these (passions). Shall I say also how many pains and displeasures they have who wait upon luxury? I could not enumerate them all, but by a single principal point I will make the whole clear.

At a table such as I speak of, that is, a sumptuous one, men never eat with pleasure; for abstinence is the mother of pleasure as well as health, while repletion is the source and root not only of diseases, but of displeasure. For where there is satiety there desire cannot be, and where there is no desire, how can there be pleasure? And therefore we should find that the poor are not only of better understanding and healthier than the rich, but also that they enjoy a greater degree of pleasure.

Let us, when we reflect on this, flee drunkenness and luxury, not that of the table alone, but all other which is found in the things of this life, and let us take in exchange for it the pleasure arising from spiritual things, and, as the Prophet says, delight ourselves in the Lord; Delight yourself in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart Psalm 37:4; that so that we may enjoy the good things both here and hereafter, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory, world without end. Amen.

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