

John 3:6-11

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of gentleness in communication and the power of the Spirit, using the example of the wind to illustrate the Spirit's freedom and uniqueness.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Topics: "Spiritual Birth", "Holy Spirit"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the profound mysteries of being born of the flesh and of the Spirit, emphasizing the new life and transformation believers experience through Christ. He highlights the exaltation of humanity to heaven by the grace of God, surpassing our unworthiness and failures in the past. Chrysostom explains the spiritual birth through water and the Spirit, contrasting it with physical birth, and the superiority of the Spirit's work in believers. He uses the analogy of the wind to illustrate the mysterious nature of spiritual birth, urging believers to trust in the unseen work of the Spirit. Chrysostom also addresses the importance of controlling anger and speaking gently, emphasizing the need for humility and self-reflection in our interactions with others.

Transcript

That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

1. Great mysteries are they, of which the Only-begotten Son of God has counted us worthy; great, and such as we were not worthy of, but such as it was meet for Him to give. For if one reckon our desert, we were not only unworthy of the gift, but also liable to punishment and vengeance; but He, because He looked not to this, not only delivered us from punishment, but freely gave us a life much more bright than the first, introduced us into another world, made us another creature; If any man be in Christ, says Paul, he is a new creature. 2 Corinthians 5:17 What kind of new creature? Hear Christ Himself declare; Unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. Paradise was entrusted to us, and we were shown unworthy to dwell even there, yet He has exalted us to heaven. In the first things we were found unfaithful, and He has committed to us greater; we could not refrain from a single tree, and He has provided for us the delights above; we kept not our place in Paradise, and He has opened to us the doors of heaven. Well said Paul, O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! Romans 11:33 There is no longer a mother, or pangs, or sleep, or coming together, and embracings of bodies; henceforth all the fabric of our nature is framed above, of the Holy Ghost and water. The water is employed, being made the Birth to him who is born; what the womb is to the embryo,

the water is to the believer; for in the water he is fashioned and formed. At first it was said, Let the waters bring forth the creeping things that have life Genesis 1:20, Septuagint; but from the time that the Lord entered the streams of Jordan, the water no longer gives forth the creeping thing that has life, but reasonable and Spirit-bearing souls; and what has been said of the sun, that he is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber Psalm 18:6, we may now rather say of the faithful, for they send forth rays far brighter than he. That which is fashioned in the womb requires time, not so that in water, but all is done in a single moment. Here our life is perishable, and takes its origin from the decay of other bodies; that which is to be born comes slowly, (for such is the nature of bodies, they acquire perfection by time,) but it is not so with spiritual things. And why? Because the things made are formed perfect from the beginning.

When Nicodemus still hearing these things was troubled, see how Christ partly opens to him the secret of this mystery, and makes that clear which was for a while obscure to him. That which is born, says He, of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. He leads him away from all the things of sense, and suffers him not vainly to pry into the mysteries revealed with his fleshly eyes; We speak not, says He, of flesh, but of Spirit, O Nicodemus, (by this word He directs him heavenward for a while,) seek then nothing relating to things of sense; never can the Spirit appear to those eyes, think not that the Spirit brings forth the flesh. How then, perhaps one may ask, was the Flesh of the Lord brought forth? Not of the Spirit only, but of flesh; as Paul declares, when he says, Made of a woman, made under the Law Galatians 4:4; for the Spirit fashioned Him not indeed out of nothing, (for what need was there then of a womb?) but from the flesh of a Virgin. How, I cannot explain unto you; yet it was done, that no one might suppose that what was born is alien to our nature. For if even when this has taken place there are some who disbelieve in such a birth, into what impiety would they not have fallen had He not partaken of the Virgin's flesh.

That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do you see the dignity of the Spirit? It appears performing the work of God; for above he said of some, that, they were begotten of God, John 1:13, here He says, that the Spirit begets them.

That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. His meaning is of this kind; He that is born of the Spirit is spiritual. For the Birth which He speaks of here is not that according to essence, but according to honor and grace. Now if the Son is so born also, in what shall He be superior to men so born? And how is He, Only-begotten? For I too am born of God, though not of His Essence, and if He also is not of His Essence, how in this respect does He differ from us? Nay, He will then be found to be inferior to the Spirit; for birth of this kind is by the grace of the Spirit. Needs He then the help of the Spirit that He may continue a Son? And in what do these differ from Jewish doctrines?

Christ then having said, He that is born of the Spirit is spirit, when He saw him again confused, leads His discourse to an example from sense, saying,

John 3:7-8

Marvel not that I said to you, You must be born again. The wind blows where it lists.

For by saying, Marvel not, He indicates the confusion of his soul, and leads him to something lighter than body. He had already led him away from fleshly things, by saying, That which is born of the Spirit is spirit; but when Nicodemus knew not what that which is born of the Spirit is spirit meant, He next carries him to another figure, not bringing him to the density of bodies, nor yet speaking of things purely incorporeal, (for had he heard he could not have received this,) but having found a something between what is and what is

not body, namely, the motion of the wind, He brings him to that next. And He says of it,

You hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes, and whither it goes.

Though He says, it blows where it lists, He says it not as if the wind had any power of choice, but declaring that its natural motion cannot be hindered, and is with power. For Scripture knows how to speak thus of things without life, as when it says, The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly. Romans 8:20 The expression therefore, blows where it lists, is that of one who would show that it cannot be restrained, that it is spread abroad everywhere, and that none can hinder its passing hither and there, but that it goes abroad with great might, and none is able to turn aside its violence.

2. And you hear its voice, (that is, its rustle, its noise,) but cannot tell whence it comes, and whither it goes; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Here is the conclusion of the whole matter. If, says He, you know not how to explain the motion nor the path of this wind which you perceive by hearing and touch, why are you over-anxious about the working of the Divine Spirit, when you understand not that of the wind, though you hear its voice? The expression, blows where it lists, is also used to establish the power of the Comforter; for if none can hold the wind, but it moves where it lists, much less will the laws of nature, or limits of bodily generation, or anything of the like kind, be able to restrain the operations of the Spirit.

That the expression, you hear its voice, is used respecting the wind, is clear from this circumstance; He would not, when conversing with an unbeliever and one unacquainted with the operation of the Spirit, have said, You hear its voice. As then the wind is not visible, although it utters a sound, so neither is the birth of that which is spiritual visible to our bodily eyes; yet the wind is a body, although a very subtle one; for whatever is the object of sense is body. If then you do not complain because you cannot see this body, and do not on this account disbelieve, why do you, when you hear of the Spirit, hesitate and demand such exact accounts, although you act not so in the case of a body? What then does Nicodemus? Still he continues in his low Jewish opinion, and that too when so clear an example has been mentioned to him. Wherefore when he again says doubtingly,

John 3:9-10

How can these things be? Christ now speaks to him more chidingly; Are you a master in Israel, and know not these things?

Observe how He nowhere accuses the man of wickedness, but only of weakness and simplicity. And what, one may ask, has this birth in common with Jewish matters? Tell me rather what has it that is not in common with them? For the first-created man, and the woman formed from his side, and the barren women, and the things accomplished by water, I mean what relates to the fountain on which Elisha made the iron tool to swim, to the Red Sea which the Jews passed over, to the pool which the Angel troubled, to Naaman the Syrian who was cleansed in Jordan, all these proclaimed beforehand, as by a figure, the Birth and the purification which were to be. And the words of the Prophet allude to the manner of this Birth, as, It shall be announced unto the Lord a generation which comes, and they shall announce His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, whom the Lord has made Psalm 22:30; 30:31, Septuagint; and, Your youth shall be renewed as an eagle's Psalm 103:5, Septuagint; and, Shine, O Jerusalem; behold, Your King comes! Isaiah 60:1; Zechariah 9:9; and, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven. Psalm 32:1, Septuagint Isaac also was a type of this Birth. For tell me, Nicodemus, how was he born? Was it according

to the law of nature? By no means; the mode of his generation was midway between this of which we speak and the natural; the natural, because he was begotten by cohabitation; the other, because he was begotten not of blood, (but by the will of God.) I shall show that these figures proclaimed beforehand not only this birth, but also that from the Virgin. For, because no one would easily have believed that a virgin could bear a child, barren women first did so, then such as were not only barren, but aged also. That a woman should be made from a rib was indeed far more wonderful than that the barren should conceive; but because that was of early and old time, another figure, new and fresh, was given, that of the barren women; to prepare the way for belief in the Virgin's travail. To remind him then of these things, Jesus said, Are you a master in Israel, and know not these things?

John 3:11

We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen, and none receives Our witness.

This He added, making His words credible by another argument, and condescending in His speech to the other's infirmity.

3. And what is this that He says, We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen? Because with us the sight is the most trustworthy of the senses, and if we desire to gain a person's belief, we speak thus, that we saw it with our eyes, not that we know it by hearsay; Christ therefore speaks to him rather after the manner of men, gaining belief for His words by this means also. And that this is so, and that He desires to establish nothing else, and refers not to sensual vision, is clear from this; after saying, That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, He adds, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen. Now this (of the Spirit) was not yet born; how then says He, what we have seen? Is it not plain that He speaks of a knowledge not otherwise than exact?

And none receives our witness. The expression we know, He uses then either concerning Himself and His Father, or concerning Himself alone; and no man receives, is the expression not of one displeased, but of one who declares a fact: for He said not, What can be more senseless than you who receive not what is so exactly declared by us? but displaying all gentleness, both by His works and His words, He uttered nothing like this; mildly and kindly He foretold what should come to pass, so guiding us too to all gentleness, and teaching us when we converse with any and do not persuade them, not to be annoyed or made savage; for it is impossible for one out of temper to accomplish his purpose, he must make him to whom he speaks still more incredulous. Wherefore we must abstain from anger, and make our words in every way credible by avoiding not only wrath, but also loud speaking for loud speaking is the fuel of passion.

Let us then bind the horse, that we may subdue the rider; let us clip the wings of our wrath, so the evil shall no more rise to a height. A keen passion is anger, keen, and skillful to steal our souls; therefore we must on all sides guard against its entrance. It were strange that we should be able to tame wild beasts, and yet should neglect our own savage minds. Wrath is a fierce fire, it devours all things; it harms the body, it destroys the soul, it makes a man deformed and ugly to look upon; and if it were possible for an angry person to be visible to himself at the time of his anger, he would need no other admonition, for nothing is more displeasing than an angry countenance. Anger is a kind of drunkenness, or rather it is more grievous than drunkenness, and more pitiable than (possession of) a dæmon. But if we be careful not to be loud in speech, we shall find this the best path to sobriety of conduct. And therefore Paul would take away clamor as well as anger, when he says, Let all anger and clamor be put away from you.

Ephesians 4:31 Let us then obey this teacher of all wisdom, and when we are angry with our servants, let us consider our own trespasses, and be ashamed at their forbearance. For when you are insolent, and your servant bears your insults in silence, when you act unseemly, he like a wise man, take this instead of any other warning. Though he is your servant, he is still a man, has an immortal soul, and has been honored with the same gifts as you by your common Lord. And if he who is our equal in more important and more spiritual things, on account of some poor and trifling human superiority so meekly bears our injuries, what pardon can we deserve, what excuse can we make, who cannot, or rather will not, be as wise through fear of God, as he is through fear of us? Considering then all these things, and calling to mind our own transgressions, and the common nature of man, let us be careful at all times to speak gently, that being humble in heart we may find rest for our souls, both that which now is, and that which is to come; which may we all attain, by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

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