

John 4:13-22

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus teaches the woman about the Spirit as water and fire, and the importance of spiritual reading and living the Scriptures in daily life.

Scripture: John 4:14-16, John 4:20, Philipians 3:1

Topics: "Living Water", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, highlighting the symbolism of water as the grace of the Spirit, both cleansing and refreshing the soul. He emphasizes how Jesus gently leads the woman to a deeper understanding of spiritual truths, revealing Himself as the source of living water that satisfies eternally. The sermon explores the woman's progression from initial doubt to belief, contrasting her openness to Jesus with the disbelief of the Jews. Chrysostom challenges the congregation to prioritize spiritual reading and understanding of the Scriptures, emphasizing the transformative power of God's Word in sanctifying the soul and drawing one closer to God.

Transcript

Jesus answered and said to her, Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting Life.

1. Scripture calls the grace of the Spirit sometimes Fire, sometimes Water, showing that these names are not descriptive of its essence, but of its operation; for the Spirit, being Invisible and Simple, cannot be made up of different substances. Now the one John declares, speaking thus, He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with Fire Matthew 3:11: the other, Christ, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. John 7:38 But this, says John, spoke He of the Spirit, which they should receive. So also conversing with the woman, He calls the Spirit water; for, Whosoever shall drink of the water which I shall give him, shall never thirst. So also He calls the Spirit by the name of fire, alluding to the rousing and warming property of grace, and its power of destroying transgressions; but by that of water, to declare the cleansing wrought by it, and the great refreshment which it affords to those minds which receive it. And with good reason; for it makes the willing soul like some garden thick with all manner of trees fruitful and ever-flourishing, allowing it neither to feel despondency nor the plots of Satan, and quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

And observe, I pray you, the wisdom of Christ, how gently He leads on the woman; for He did not say at first, If you knew who it is that says to you, Give Me to drink, but when He had given her an occasion of calling Him a Jew, and brought her beneath the charge of having done so, repelling the accusation He says, If you knew who it is that says to you, Give Me to drink, you would have asked of Him; and having compelled her by His great promises to make mention of the Patriarch, He thus allows the woman to look through, and then when she objects, Are you greater than our father Jacob? He says not, Yea, I am greater, (for He would have seemed but to boast, since the proof did not as yet appear,) but by what He says He effects this. For He said not simply, I will give you water, but having first set that given by Jacob aside, He exalts that given by Himself, desiring to show from the nature of the things given, how great is the interval and difference between the persons of the givers, and His own superiority to the Patriarch. If, says He, you admire Jacob because he gave you this water, what will you say if I give you Water far better than this? You have yourself been first to confess that I am greater than Jacob, by arguing against Me, and asking, 'Are you greater than Jacob, that you promise to give me better water?' If you receive that Water, certainly you will confess that I am greater. Do you see the upright judgment of the woman, giving her decision from facts, both as to the Patriarch, and as to Christ? The Jews acted not thus; when they even saw Him casting out devils, they not only did not call Him greater than the Patriarch but even said that He had a devil. Not so the woman, she draws her opinion whence Christ would have her, from the demonstration afforded by His works. For by these He justifies Himself, saying, If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not; but if I do, if you believe not Me, believe the works. c. x. 37, 38 And thus the woman is brought over to the faith.

Wherefore also He, having heard, Are you greater than our father Jacob, leaves Jacob, and speaks concerning the water, saying, Whosoever shall drink of this water, shall thirst again; and He makes His comparison, not by depreciating one, but by showing the excellence of the other; for He says not, that this water is naught, nor that it is inferior and contemptible, but what even nature testifies that He says: Whosoever shall drink of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever shall drink of the Water which I shall give him, shall never thirst. The woman before this had heard of living Water John 4:10, but had not known its meaning. Since because that water is called living which is perennial and bubbles up unceasingly from uninterrupted springs, she thought that this was the water meant. Wherefore He points out this more clearly by speaking thus, and establishing by a comparison the superiority (of the water which He would give). What then says He? Whosoever shall drink of the Water that I shall give him, shall never thirst. This and what was said next especially showed the superiority, for material water possesses none of these qualities. And what is it that follows? It shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. For as one that has a well within him could never be seized by thirst, so neither can he that has this Water.

The woman straightway believed, showing herself much wiser than Nicodemus, and not only wiser, but more manly. For he when he heard ten thousand such things neither invited any others to this hearing, nor himself spoke forth openly; but she exhibited the actions of an Apostle, preaching the Gospel to all, and calling them to Jesus, and drawing a whole city forth to Him. Nicodemus when he had heard said, How can these things be? And when Christ set before him a clear illustration, that of the wind, he did not even so receive the Word. But the woman not so; at first she doubted, but afterwards receiving the Word not by any regular demonstration, but in the form of an assertion, she straightway hastened to embrace it. For when Christ said, It shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting Life, immediately the woman says,

John 4:15

Give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.

Do you see how little by little she is led up to the highest doctrines? First she thought Him some Jew who was transgressing the Law; then when He had repelled that accusation, (for it was necessary that the person who was to teach her such things should not be suspected,) having heard of living water, she supposed that this was spoken of material water; afterwards, having learned that the words were spiritual, she believed that the water could remove the necessity caused by thirst, but knew not yet what this could be; she still doubted, deeming it indeed to be above material things, but not being exactly informed. But here having gained a clearer insight, but not yet fully perceiving the whole, (for she says, Give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw,) she for the time prefers Him to Jacob. For (says she) I need not this well if I receive from you that water. Do you see how she sets Him before the Patriarch? This is the act of a fairly-judging soul. She had shown how great an opinion she had of Jacob, she saw One better than he, and was not held back by her prepossession. Thus this woman was neither of an easy temper, (she did not carelessly receive what was said, how can she have done so when she enquired with so great exactness?) nor yet disobedient, nor disputatious, and this she showed by her petition. Yet to the Jews once He said, Whosoever shall eat of My flesh shall never hunger, and he that believes in Me shall never thirst John 6:35; but they not only did not believe, but were offended at Him. The woman had no such feeling, she remains and petitions. To the Jews He said, He that believes in Me shall never thirst; not so to the woman, but more grossly, He that drinks of this Water shall never thirst. For the promise referred to spiritual and unseen things. Wherefore having raised her mind by His promises, He still lingers among expressions relating to sense, because she could not as yet comprehend the exact expression of spiritual things. Since had He said, If you believe in Me you shall not thirst, she would not have understood His saying, not knowing who it could be that spoke to her, nor concerning what kind of thirst He spoke. Wherefore then did He not this in the case of the Jews? Because they had seen many signs, while she had seen no sign, but heard these words first. For which reason He afterwards reveals His power by prophecy, and does not directly introduce His reproof, but what says He?

John 4:16-19

Go, call your husband, and come there. The woman answered and said I have no husband. Jesus says unto her, You have well said, I have no husband: for you have had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not your husband: in that you said truly. The woman says unto Him, Sir, I perceive that You are a Prophet.

2. O how great the wisdom of the woman! How meekly does she receive the reproof! How should she not, says some one? Tell me, why should she? Did He not often reprove the Jews also, and with greater reproofs than these? (for it is not the same to bring forward the hidden thoughts of the heart, as to make manifest a thing that was done in secret; the first are known to God alone, and none other knows them but he who has them in his heart; the second, all who were sharers in it know;) but still when reproved did not bear it patiently. When He said, Why do you seek to kill me? John 7:19, they not only did not admire as the woman did but even mocked at and insulted Him; yet they had a demonstration from other miracles, she had only heard this speech. Still they not only did not admire, but even insulted Him, saying, You have a demon, who seeks to kill you? While she not only does not insult but admires, and is astonished at Him, and supposes Him to be a Prophet. Yet truly this rebuke touched the woman more than the other touched them; for her fault was hers alone, theirs was a general one; and we are not so much stung by what is general as by what is particular. Besides they thought they should be gaining a great object if they could slay Christ, but that which the woman had done was allowed by all to be wicked; yet was she not

indignant, but was astonished and wondered. And Christ did this very same thing in the case of Nathanael. He did not at first introduce the prophecy, nor say, I saw you under the fig-tree, but when Nathanael said, Whence do you know me? then He introduced this. For He desired to take the beginnings of His signs and prophecies from the very persons who came near to Him, so that they might be more attached by what was done, and He might escape the suspicion of vainglory. Now this He does here also; for to have charged her first of all that, You have no husband, would have seemed burdensome and superfluous, but to take the reason (for speaking) from herself, and then to set right all these points, was very consistent, and softened the disposition of the hearer.

And what kind of connection, says some one, is there in the saying, 'Go, call your husband'? The discourse was concerning a gift and grace surpassing mortal nature: the woman was urgent in seeking to receive it. Christ says, Call your husband, showing that he also must share in these things; but she, eager to receive (the gift), and concealing the shamefulness of the circumstances, and supposing that she was conversing with a man, said, I have no husband. Christ having heard this, now seasonably introduces His reproof, mentioning accurately both points; for He enumerated all her former husbands, and reproved her for him whom she now would hide. What then did the woman? She was not annoyed, nor did she leave Him and fly, nor deem the thing an insult, but rather admired Him, and persevered the more. I perceive, says she, that You are a Prophet. Observe her prudence; she did not straightway run to Him, but still considers Him, and marvels at Him. For, I perceive, means, Thou appearest to me to be a Prophet. Then when she suspected this, she asks Him nothing concerning this life, not concerning bodily health, or possessions, or wealth, but at once concerning doctrines. For what says she?

John 4:20

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, (meaning Abraham and his family, for there they say that he led up his son,) and how say ye that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship?

3. Do you see how much more elevated in mind she has become? She who was anxious that she might not be troubled for thirst, now questions concerning doctrines. What then does Christ? He does not resolve the question, (for to answer simply to men's words was not His care, for it was needless,) but leads the woman on to the greater height, and does not converse with her on these matters, until she has confessed that He was a Prophet, so that afterwards she might hear His Word with abundant belief; for having been persuaded of this, she could no longer doubt concerning what should be said to her.

Let us now after this be ashamed, and blush. A woman who had had five husbands, and who was of Samaria, was so eager concerning doctrines, that neither the time of day, nor her having come for another purpose, nor anything else, led her away from enquiring on such matters; but we not only do not enquire concerning doctrines, but towards them all our dispositions are careless and indifferent. Therefore everything is neglected. For which of you when in his house takes some Christian book in hand and goes over its contents, and searches the Scriptures?

None can say that he does so, but with most we shall find draughts and dice, but books nowhere, except among a few. And even these few have the same dispositions as the many; for they tie up their books, and keep them always put away in cases, and all their care is for the fineness of the parchments, and the beauty of the letters, not for reading them. For they have not bought them to obtain advantage and benefit from them, but take pains about such matters to show their wealth and pride.

Such is the excess of vainglory. I do not hear any one glory that he knows the contents, but that he has a book written in letters of gold. And what gain, tell me, is this? The Scriptures were not given us for this only, that we might have them in books, but that we might engrave them on our hearts. For this kind of possession, the keeping the commandments merely in letter, belongs to Jewish ambition; but to us the Law was not so given at all, but in the fleshy tables of our hearts.

And this I say, not to prevent you from procuring Bibles, on the contrary, I exhort and earnestly pray that you do this, but I desire that from those books you convey the letters and sense into your understanding, that so it may be purified when it receives the meaning of the writing. For if the devil will not dare to approach a house where a Gospel is lying, much less will any evil spirit, or any sinful nature, ever touch or enter a soul which bears about with it such sentiments as it contains.

Sanctify then your soul, sanctify your body, by having these ever in your heart, and on your tongue. For if foul speech defiles and invites devils, it is clear that spiritual reading sanctifies and draws down the grace of the Spirit. The Scriptures are divine charms, let us then apply to ourselves and to the passions of our souls the remedies to be derived from them. For if we understand what it is that is read, we shall hear it with much readiness. I am always saying this, and will not cease to say it.

Is it not strange that those who sit by the market can tell the names, and families, and cities of charioteers, and dancers, and the kinds of power possessed by each, and can give exact account of the good or bad qualities of the very horses, but that those who come hither should know nothing of what is done here, but should be ignorant of the number even of the sacred Books? If you pursue those worldly things for pleasure, I will show you that here is greater pleasure. Which is sweeter, tell me, which more marvelous, to see a man wrestling with a man, or a man buffering with a devil, a body closing with an incorporeal power, and him who is of your race victorious?

These wrestlings let us look on, these, which also it is seemly and profitable to imitate, and which imitating, we may be crowned; but not those in which emulation brings shame to him who imitates them. If you behold the one kind of contest, you behold it with devils; the other, with Angels and Archangels, and the Lord of Archangels. Say now, if you were allowed to sit with governors and kings, and to see and enjoy the spectacle, would you not deem it to be a very great honor?

And here when you are a spectator in company with the King of Angels, when you see the devil grasped by the middle of the back, striving much to have the better, but powerless, do you not run and pursue after such a sight as this? And how can this be? says some one. If you keep the Bible in your hands; for in it you shall see the lists, and the long races, and his grasps, and the skill of the righteous one. For by beholding these things you shall learn also how to wrestle so yourself, and shall escape clear of devils; the performances of the heathen are assemblies of devils, not theaters of men.

Wherefore I exhort you to abstain from these Satanic assemblies; for if it is not lawful to enter into an idol's house, much less to Satan's festival. I shall not cease to say these things and weary you, until I see some change; for to say these things, as says Paul, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Philippians 3:1 Be not then offended at my exhortation. If any one ought to be offended, it is I who often speak and am not heard, not you who are always hearing and always disobeying.

God grant that you be not always liable to this charge, but that freed from this shame you be deemed worthy to enjoy the spiritual spectacle, and the glory which is to come, through 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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