

John 4:28-39

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the urgency of spiritual zeal and the importance of sharing one's testimony to lead others to Christ's salvation.

Scripture: Matthew 24:37, John 4:31-32, John 4:34-37, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Philippians 4:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:3

Topics: "Spiritual Priorities", "Repentance"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the fervor and zeal required to obtain blessings from Christ, using the example of the Samaritan woman who left her water pot to share the news of Jesus. He highlights the importance of prioritizing spiritual matters over worldly concerns and the wisdom in speaking prudently and drawing others to Christ. Chrysostom emphasizes the significance of doing God's will and finishing His work, comparing it to the nourishment of food. He encourages believers to imitate the woman's boldness in repentance and not be ashamed before men but fear God, who sees all and will judge accordingly.

Transcript

The woman then left her water pot, and went her way into the city, and says to the men, Come, see a Man which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?

1. We require much fervor and uproused zeal, for without these it is impossible to obtain the blessings promised to us. And to show this, Christ at one time says, Except a man take up his cross and follow Me, he is not worthy of Me Matthew 10:38; at another, I have come to send fire upon the earth, and what will I if it be already kindled? Luke 12:49; by both these desiring to represent to us a disciple full of heat and fire, and prepared for every danger. Such an one was this woman. For so kindled was she by His words, that she left her water pot and the purpose for which she came, ran into the city, and drew all the people to Jesus. Come, she says, see a Man which told me all things that ever I did.

Observe her zeal and wisdom. She came to draw water, and when she had lighted upon the true Well, she after that despised the material one; teaching us even by this trifling instance when we are listening to spiritual matters to overlook the things of this life, and make no account of them. For what the Apostles did, that, after her ability, did this woman also. They when they were called, left their nets; she of her own accord, without the command of any, leaves her water pot, and winged by joy performs the office of Evangelists. And she calls not one or two, as did Andrew and Philip, but having aroused a whole city and people, so brought them to Him.

Observe too how prudently she speaks; she said not, Come and see the Christ, but with the same condescension by which Christ had netted her she draws the men to Him; Come, she says, see a Man who told me all that ever I did. She was not ashamed to say that He told me all that ever I did. Yet she might have spoken otherwise, Come, see one that prophesies; but when the soul is inflamed with holy fire, it looks then to nothing earthly, neither to glory nor to shame, but belongs to one thing alone, the flame which occupies it.

Is not this the Christ? Observe again here the great wisdom of the woman; she neither declared the fact plainly, nor was she silent, for she desired not to bring them in by her own assertion, but to make them to share in this opinion by hearing Him; which rendered her words more readily acceptable to them. Yet He had not told all her life to her, only from what had been said she was persuaded (that He was informed) as to the rest. Nor did she say, Come, believe, but, Come, see; a gentler expression than the other, and one which more attracted them. Do you see the wisdom of the woman? She knew, she knew certainly that having but tasted that Well, they would be affected in the same manner as herself. Yet any one of the grosser sort would have concealed the reproof which Jesus had given; but she parades her own life, and brings it forward before all men, so as to attract and capture all.

John 4:31

In the mean time His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, eat. . .

Asked, here is besought, in their native language; for seeing Him wearied with the journey, and the oppressive heat, they entreated Him; for their request concerning food proceeded not from hastiness, but from loving affection for their Teacher? What then says Christ?

John 4:32-33

I have meat to eat that you know not of. Therefore, said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought Him anything to eat?

Why now do you wonder that the woman when she heard of water, still imagined mere water to be meant, when even the disciples are in the same case, and as yet suppose nothing spiritual, but are perplexed? Though they still show their accustomed modesty and reverence toward their Master, conversing one with the other, but not daring to put any question to Him. And this they do in other places, desiring to ask Him, but not asking. What then says Christ?

John 4:34

My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.

He here calls the salvation of men meat, showing what an earnest desire He has of providing for us; for as we long for food, so He that we may be saved. And hear how in all places He reveals not all off-hand, but first throws the hearer into perplexity, in order that having begun to seek the meaning of what has been said, and then being perplexed and in difficulty, he may when what he sought appears, receive it the more readily, and be made more attentive to listening. For wherefore said He not at once, My meat is to do the will of My Father? (though not even this would have been clear, yet clearer than the other.) But what says He? I have meat to eat that you know not of; for He desires, as I said, first to make them more attentive through their uncertainty, and by dark sayings like these to accustom them to listen to His words. But what is the will of the Father? He next speaks of this, and explains.

John 4:35

Say ye not, that there are yet four months, and then comes harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look upon the fields, for they are white already to harvest.

2. Behold, He again by familiar words leads them up to the consideration of greater matters; for when He spoke of meat, He signified nothing else than the salvation of the men who should come to Him; and again, the field and the harvest signify the very same thing, the multitude of souls prepared for the reception of the preaching; and the eyes of which He speaks are those both of the mind and of the body; (for they now beheld the crowd of Samaritans advancing;) and the readiness of their will He calls, fields already white. For as the ears of grain, when they have become white, and are ready for reaping, so these, He says, are prepared and fitted for salvation.

And wherefore instead of calling them fields and harvest, did He not plainly say, that the men were coming to believe and were ready to receive the Word, having been instructed by the Prophets; and now bringing forth fruit? What mean these figures used by Him? For this He does not here only, but through all the Gospel; and the Prophets also employ the same method, saying many things in a metaphorical manner. What then may be the cause of this? For the grace of the Spirit did not ordain it to be so without a reason, but why and wherefore? On two accounts; one, that the discourse may be more vivid, and bring what is said more clearly before our eyes. For the mind when it has laid hold on a familiar image of the matters in hand, is more aroused, and beholding them as it were in a picture, is occupied by them to a greater degree. This is one reason; the other is, that the statement may be sweetened, and that the memory of what is said may be more lasting. For assertion does not subdue and bring in an ordinary hearer so much as narration by objects, and the representation of experience. Which one may here see most wisely effected by the parable.

John 4:36

And he that reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit unto life eternal.

For the fruit of an earthly harvest profits not to life eternal, but to this which is for a time; but the spiritual fruit to that which has neither age nor death. Do you see that the expressions are of sense, but the thoughts spiritual, and that by the very words themselves He divides things earthly from heavenly? For when in discoursing of water He made this the peculiar property of the heavenly Water, that he who drinks it shall never thirst, so He does here also when He says, that this fruit is gathered unto eternal life.

That both he that sows and he that reaps may rejoice together.

Who is he that sows? Who he that reaps? The Prophets are they that sowed but they reaped not, but the Apostles. Yet not on this account are they deprived of the pleasure and recompense of their labors, but they rejoice and are glad with us, although they reap not with us. For harvest is not such work as sowing. I therefore have kept you for that in which the toil is less and the pleasure greater, and not for sowing because in that there is much hardship and toil. In harvest the return is large, the labor not so great; nay there is much facility. By these arguments He here desires to prove, that the wish of the Prophets is, that all men should come to Me. This also the Law was engaged in effecting; and for this they sowed, that they might produce this fruit. He shows moreover that He sent them also, and that there was a very intimate connection between the New Covenant and the Old, and all this He effects at once by this parable. He makes mention also of a proverbial expression generally circulated.

John 4:37

Herein is that saying true, One sows and another reaps.

These words the many used whenever one party had supplied toil and another had reaped the fruits; and He says, that the proverb is in this instance especially true, for the Prophets labored, and you reap the fruits of their labors. He said not the rewards, (for neither did their great labor go unrewarded,) but the fruits. This also Daniel did, for he too makes mention of a proverb, Wickedness proceeds from the wicked; and David in his lamenting makes mention of a similar proverb. Therefore He said beforehand, that both he that sows and he that reaps may rejoice together. For since He was about to declare, that one has sowed and another reaps, lest any one should deem that the Prophets were deprived of their reward, He asserts something strange and paradoxical, such as never chances in sensual things, but is peculiar to spiritual only. For in things of sense, if it chance that one sow and another reap, they do not rejoice together, but those who sowed are sad, as having labored for others, and those who reap alone rejoice. But here it is not so, but those who reap not what they sowed rejoice alike with those who reap; whence it is clear that they too share the reward.

John 4:38

I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labors; other men labored, and you are entered into their labors.

By this He the more encourages them; for when it seemed a very hard matter to go through all the world and preach the Gospel, He shows them that it is even most easy. The very difficult work was that other, which required great labor, the putting in the seed, and introducing the uninitiated soul to the knowledge of God. But wherefore utters He these sayings? It is that when He sends them to preach they may not be confounded, as though sent on a difficult task. For that of the Prophets, He says, was the more difficult, and the fact witnesses to My word, that you have come to what is easy; because as in harvest time the fruits are collected with ease, and in one moment the floor is filled with sheaves, which await not the revolutions of the seasons, and winter, and spring, and rain, so it is now. The facts proclaim it aloud. While He was in the midst of saying these things, the Samaritans came forth, and the fruit was at once gathered together. On this account He said, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white. Thus He spoke, and the fact was clear, and the words seen (true) by the event. For says St. John,

John 4:39

Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman which testified, He told me all that ever I did.

They perceived that the woman would not from favor have admired One who had rebuked her sins, nor to gratify another have paraded her own course of life.

3. Let us then also imitate this woman, and in the case of our own sins not be ashamed of men, but fear, as is meet, God who now beholds what is done, and who hereafter punishes those who do not now repent. At present we do the opposite of this, for we fear not Him who shall judge us, but shudder at those who do not in anything hurt us, and tremble at the shame which comes from them. Therefore in the very thing which we fear, in this do we incur punishment. For he who now regards only the reproach of men, but when God sees is not ashamed to do anything unseemly, and who will not repent and be converted, in

that day will be made an example, not only before one or two, but in the sight of the whole world.

For that a vast assembly is seated there to behold righteous actions as well as those which are not such, let the parable of the sheep and the goats teach you, as also the blessed Paul when He says, For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad 2 Corinthians 5:10, and again, Who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness. 1 Corinthians 4:5 Have you done or imagined any evil thing, and do you hide it from man?

Yet from God you hide it not. But for this thou cares nothing; the eyes of men, these are your fear. Think then that you will not be able to escape the sight even of men in that day ; for all things as in a picture shall then be set before our very eyes, so that each shall be self-condemned. This is clear even from the instance of Dives, for the poor man whom he had neglected, Lazarus I mean, he saw standing before his eyes, and the finger which he had often loathed, he intreats may become a comfort to him then.

I exhort you therefore, that although no one see what we do, yet that each of us enter into his own conscience, and set reason for his judge, and bring forward his transgressions, and if he desire them not to be exposed to public view then in that fearful day, let him now heal his wounds, let him apply to them the medicines of repentance. For it is in the power, yea, it is in the power of one full of ten thousand wounds to go hence whole. For if you forgive, He says, your sins are forgiven unto you.

Matthew 6:14, not verbally quoted For as sins buried in Baptism appear no more, so these also shall disappear, if we be willing to repent. And repentance is the not doing the same again; for he that again puts his hand to the same, is like the dog that returns to his own vomit, and like him in the proverb who cards wool into the fire, and draws water into a cask full of holes. It behooves therefore to depart both in action and in thought from what we have dared to do, and having departed, to apply to the wounds the remedies which are the contraries of our sins.

For instance: have you been grasping and covetous? Abstain from rapine, and apply almsgiving to the wound. Have you been a fornicator? Abstain from fornication, and apply chastity to the wound. Have you spoken ill of your brother, and injured him? Cease finding fault, and apply kindness. Let us thus act with respect to each point in which we have offended, and let us not carelessly pass by our sins, for there awaits us hereafter, there awaits us a season of account. Wherefore also Paul said, The Lord is at hand: be careful for nothing.

Philippians 4:5-6 But we perhaps must add the contrary of this, The Lord is at hand, be careful. For they might well hear, Be careful for nothing, living as they did in affliction, and labors, and trials; but they who live by rapine, or in luxury, and who shall give a grievous reckoning, would in reason hear not this, but that other, The Lord is at hand, be careful. Since no long time now remains until the consummation, but the world is hastening to its end; this the wars declare, this the afflictions, this the earthquakes, this the love which has waxed cold.

For as the body when in its last gasp and near to death, draws to itself ten thousand sufferings; and as when a house is about to fall, many portions are wont to fall beforehand from the roof and walls; so is the end of the world near and at the very doors, and therefore ten thousand woes are everywhere scattered abroad. If the Lord was then at hand, much more is He now at hand. If three hundred years ago, when those words were used, Paul called that season the fullness of time, much more would he have called the present so.

But perhaps for this very reason some disbelieve, yet they ought on this account to believe the more. For whence do you know, O man, that the end is not at hand, and the words shortly to be accomplished? For as we speak of the end of the year not as being the last day, but also the last month, though it has thirty days; so if of so many years I call even four hundred years the end, I shall not be wrong; and so at that time Paul spoke of the end by anticipation. Let us then set ourselves in order, let us delight in the fear of God; for if we live here without fear of Him, His coming will surprise us suddenly, when we are neither careful, nor looking for Him.

As Christ declared when He said, For as in the days of Noah, and as in the days of Lot, so shall it be at the end of this world. Matthew 24:37, not verbally quoted This also Paul declared when he said, For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 What means, as travail upon a woman with child? Often have pregnant women when sporting, or at their meals, or in the bath or market-place, and foreseeing nothing of what was coming, been seized in a moment by their pains.

Now since our case is like theirs, let us ever be prepared, for we shall not always hear these things, we shall not always have power to do them. In the grave says David, who shall give You thanks? Psalm 6:5 Let us then repent here, that so we may find God merciful unto us in the day that is to come, and be enabled to enjoy abundant forgiveness; which may we all obtain, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and dominion now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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