

## 27. GRUMBLING AND GRACE(6:41-51)



We find ourselves in the middle section of Jesus' teaching on Him being the bread of life. For us two thousand years later we may find peace in those words, however, for certain hearers in the synagogue in Capernaum that day, things are somewhat different. Instead of peace, there is confusion and grumbling.

Verse 41 sets the scene and provides two very important pieces of information that we need to take note of, things that are easily missed.

1. There is a shift in who it is that Jesus is talking to. Note how John describes these people in verse 41, he calls them "*the Jews*". This is not a reference to the nationality of the people concerned as all Israelites were typically Jews, rather John uses this term to refer to the religious leaders of Judaism who follow the Pharisaical system (e.g. 1:19). This distinction is also seen in the fact that so far throughout chapter 6, John consistently refers to the people seeking Jesus as the crowd (cf. vv2, 5, 22, and 24). "*The Jews*", however, are highly significant in John's Gospel as they are Jesus' primary opponents. However, in this case they are not religious leaders from Jerusalem, but the leaders in the Capernaum synagogue who hear His words, but their mindset is essentially the same as the religious leaders in Jerusalem.
2. How the Jews essentially quote Jesus' words, "*So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven'*", but this is not exactly what He said. In verse 35 He says that He is the bread of life and only in verse 38 do we read that He states that He has come down from heaven. The Jews have seemingly combined these two separate statements, which is rather ironic for in combining them, they summarise Jesus' words and their statement is essentially true. Unfortunately though, they are offended and reject the truth.

And so verse 41 sets up a scene of conflict – on the one side you have the grumbling of the Jews, and on the other you have the grace of God.



### THE GRUMBLING OF THE JEWS

The word that John uses for grumbling means to speak and complain in low tones so as not to be heard by others that they are not talking to. So *the Jews* are not being open in their complaint of Jesus so that others can hear, but mumble under their breath.

The text is very specific about what it is they are grumbling about, that He is the bread that came down from heaven. More specifically, they are offended because as we read in verse 42, they know Him and His human family, they said, "*Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?*" – a rhetorical expecting a positive answer.

This should be a surprise as Capernaum is not too far away from Nazareth, only about 40 kilometres. Jesus probably often travelled to Capernaum as a boy with his father to assist him with his carpentry work,

and perhaps Mary and his brothers and sisters came with on occasion. In a way, the Jews watched Him grow up, so in their mind it is impossible that He could be someone who came down from heaven. He is just a man.



**NOTE:** It appears from the text that the Jews do not know about the virgin birth yet. Despite the region of Galilee being a fairly close-knit community it seems that Mary and Joseph kept that detail to themselves, or at most only shared it to a select few who they could trust, such as Elizabeth and Zechariah (cf. Luke 1:39-45). Based on this fact, we see that the Jews speak from a lack of knowledge.

But their words are not just complaints, they are argumentative and clearly show that the Jews do not understand anything that Jesus has said about who He is. This is a common problem with non-believers, and many who claim to be Christian but are not, who presume that they know the truth, when in reality they do not and probably never studied the Bible for themselves.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. In the sermon, the illustration was given of people judging Charles and Susannah Spurgeon for selling their eggs without knowing the full story. In what ways has someone judged you without all the facts or where you have done the same concerning someone else?
2. Have you ever judged God in the same way when something did not go as you wanted or expected? What would have been a better way to respond?

Jesus hears their grumbling and rebukes them in verse 43, *“Do not grumble among yourselves”*. He is, in effect telling them, *“Shut up and listen to me”*. So much for trying to talk so quietly that Jesus does not hear them. This leads us into verses 43 to 51 where we see the other side of the conflict.



### THE GRACE OF GOD.

Here we see that Jesus does not address the specifics of their grumbling about His family or origins, but instead addresses the heart of their unbelief by restating His claim about being the bread of life more forcefully, and by providing some additional information.

### A Jewish Understanding of God



God is a mountain with a cloud on top.

The parts we see below the cloud are the things that we can know about God. They are real and somewhat tangible – they can be tested and we can fully and truly know those things about Him.

But the parts at the top in the clouds, are hidden and we cannot see or understand them. We know they are there – we see the effects of them being there, but we cannot fully know those things. They are, and will always be, a mystery to us.

Jesus begins by stating His case in a negative sense in verse 44, *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”*. The verb translated as draws literally means to “pull or drag”. John uses the same word later in chapter 21 to describe how they dragged the fishing nets ashore after their great

catch. Luke also uses it in Acts 16 to describe the violent force with which Paul and Silas are dragged into the forum and again later in chapter 21 when Paul is dragged out of the temple.

This is not merely a moral influence or a gentle persuasion. God is not standing there beckoning people with His finger saying “come here”. The Father is not like some salesman tempting you to come to him and purchase his wares. He is not enticing you with the good things of Heaven or some earthly blessings promising that they will be yours if you just come to Jesus. Nor is He on His knees pleading, hoping that you will hear His voice and turn to Him.

No. This verb implies a strong force that gets the job done and implies that the Father is literally dragging those whom He has chosen.

Now many people have a problem with this picture, however, as we have seen several times already, man is in rebellion against God. The description Paul gives in Romans 3:10-18 of mankind without Christ – which includes all Christians before they were saved – presents people who would never voluntarily choose Jesus. Instead, their natural inclination is to run away from Him. The only way for people like that to come to Christ is that they literally have to be dragged to Him by the Father.

This highlights yet again the fact there is nothing that man can do to save himself, but it is a work of God. Nor is it a fifty-fifty partnership when God does His part and man does his – no, God does all the work. And as we were reminded last time, even the faith and repentance that we respond with, are gifts of God that He works in us.



#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. What is the significance of Jesus' teaching that only the ones the Father “draws” to him can come to him?
2. Consider your life before you became a Christian. What was it like? What kinds of things did you get up to? What was your attitude like? Now consider, if God had not drawn (dragged) you away from that life, where do you think you may have ended up?

Theologians refer to this drawing to Christ by the term Irresistible Grace. That is, God’s grace draws us, literally drags us out of our sin and to Christ, presenting us as a gift to the Son who redeems us. As we are drawn, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgement, causing us to turn from sin and towards Christ (cp. 1:12-13).

But being drawn to Him is not all that there is to it, look at verse 45, “*It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me*”. This quote comes from Isaiah 54:13. This passage in Isaiah, as well as many others, looks forward to the time when God Himself will teach His people, and those who hear and learn, will come to the Messiah.

### Irresistible vs Prevenient Grace



John Calvin (1509-1564) taught that salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of God alone. That the entire process is All the work of God (John 6:29) and is by grace alone. Therefore, God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.

Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) taught that salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God (who takes the initiative) and man (who must respond). Since a human response is the determining factor, God does not ultimately determine who will receive the gift of salvation.

The battle between these two positions by followers of Calvin and Arminius has continued ever since the death of Arminius in 1609, and will probably continue until Christ returns. For Calvinists, the sovereignty of God is at stake – Is God really in charge of the universe? Can the will of a truly sovereign God ever be thwarted? For Arminians, human free will is at stake. If the human will is not free, can people really be held accountable for their choices?

The question is, though, is there such a thing as free will considering that Paul talks about man being a slave to sin before becoming a Christian (cf. Rom. 6)

However, there are those who will hear but not learn – similar to what we saw in verse 36 that seeing is not always believing. Although hearing is essential in coming to faith (cf. Rom. 10:17), hearing the Gospel does not always lead to faith. Jesus and the ministry of the Apostles are evidence of that. Those people are like those described in Isaiah 9:6 and Matthew 13:14 “*who hear but do not understand and see but do not perceive*”.

In verse 46, Jesus identifies Himself as the one from the Father, but also that He has seen the Father. What Jesus is doing here is turning the crowds earlier argument against them. In verse 31 the crowd appealed to the feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness under Moses and implied that for Jesus to be anything like Moses, then at a minimum He ought to provide bread for them at all times.

Jesus’ response then was to tell them that He is greater than the manna provided in the wilderness in that He is the bread of life – that physical food only lasted a day, but the bread that He supplies, that is Himself, will not waste away.

This time Jesus takes that argument one step further by alluding to an event in Exodus 33. There Moses asked God to see His glory, but that request was denied, for as Exodus 33:20 tells us, “*man cannot see the face of God and live*”. However, God showed Moses some grace and allowed him to see a portion of God’s glory from behind. That privilege changed Moses for life as his face shone with the glory of God and from then on, he wore a veil when before the people (cf. Exo. 34:29)

Jesus is effectively saying, “You think Moses was great in that he saw God’s back. But I tell you, I have not only seen His back, I have seen Him face-to-face”. Moses was denied seeing God’s face, but Jesus has been, and always will be, in a face-to-face relationship with the Father (cf. John 1:1). So although the crowd appealed to the greatness of Moses, Jesus tells that that one greater than Moses is in their midst.

If these Jews really want to know God and learn from Him as promised in Isaiah, then they need to listen to the One who is from God and has seen Him.

We, likewise, are to learn from the bread of life.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. To learn from the Bread of Life today we need to regularly read and study God's Word, pray, fellowship with other believers, and be sensitive to the Holy Spirit guiding us. Which of these areas is your weakest? Why? What steps will you put in place to try and rectify the situation?

We now come to verses 47 and 48 that are Jesus' summary of the entire debate. However, our English translations of verse 47 do not fully express Jesus' point. In the ESV it reads, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life"*. But a more faithful way to translate it that expresses what Jesus means is, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes ALREADY has eternal life"*. This means, yet again, that you cannot believe unless you are already born again – one is born again before one prays a prayer or answers an altar call.

But when did that happen? When does a believer receive eternal life? Theologians have tried to answer this question through a doctrine known as the order of salvation, of which there are varied opinions that we will not go into. The answer is found in Ephesians 1:3-14. Note especially verses 3 to 5.

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him"*.

Note the past tense of when the blessing occurred in the phrases, *"has blessed"* and *"before the foundation of the world"*. God chose us and blessed us before He created the world. That is, He chose us to be holy and blameless, called us, drew us to the Son, and gave us to the Son so that He might redeem us and in turn for us to believe in Him, before anything in this world even existed. To put it another way – we were born again before we were born in the flesh. This is what Jesus means in John 6:47 when He says that whoever believes already has eternal life. This is truly astounding.

Because God is not bound by time, in His eyes we were saved before time began, even though that is not how we experience it.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. How does the idea that you were essentially given eternal life before you were physically born challenge your thinking? What significance does it have for your life?

Now when you consider Jesus words, they are a slap in the face for the Jews, because note the tone of His comments in verse 47, it is as though He is talking about other people and not of those He is talking

too. He does not say those of you who believe, but whoever believes, implying that none of these Jews believe, and possibly never will, because God is not drawing them. Again, this is similar to what He said to the crowd in verse 36, *“But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe”*. Quite an indictment and no wonder it leads to the response we see in verse 66 of some of His disciples turning away and not following Him any more.

But as serious a charge as this may be, Jesus still shows grace to the Jews. He could have responded in a more serious manner, like He wanted to in Numbers 11 and 14 when the people grumbled against God while in the wilderness. However, similar to that event, Jesus shows grace and does not destroy them, but uses it as a teaching opportunity.

Finally in verses 48 to 51, Jesus essentially repeats what He has already said, but adds some new information in verse 51. He states about himself what the Jews stated in verse 41 — only this time He inserts a crucial and revealing word. Jesus declares, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven”*. In other words, He is not just the bread that aids with keeping one alive, but that He is the source of life itself. Not just physical life, but more importantly, spiritual life.

So here Jesus contrasts himself again to the manna that came down from heaven in the wilderness. The people ate it but they all eventually die. However, those who eat of the Living Bread will have eternal life. The point is, this is not about physical food satisfying the stomach for a short period, but about living bread satisfying the soul for all eternity. And it is not about something that will happen in the future, nor in the present, but about something that happened in the past, the consequences and outworking of which are being seen in the present.

Another piece of new information He provides is that the bread He is talking about is His flesh, but that we will deal with in our next study.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. In the sermon, three practical applications were given. Consider each one as listed below, and consider what steps you will take to put these into action.
  - 1.1. Evangelistic prayer.
  - 1.2. Engage in evangelistic work and discipleship.
  - 1.3. Do not be discouraged when people do not respond
  
2. In what other practical ways can you apply this passage to your life?