

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 6:41-50

1. Do you know people who talk like they know Jesus?
2. What do those people really know about Him?
3. Describe how people can grumble against God.
4. Explain the tension between the fact that only sinners who God draws come to Christ and yet everyone is responsible to come to Christ to be saved.

GOD'S PLAN FOR ACCOMPLISHING HIS WILL

John 6:41-51

One common appeal for sharing the good news of the gospel is to tell sinners that God has a wonderful plan for their lives. That is a good positive appeal that is intended to generate interest. Who doesn't want to govern their lives according to a wonderful plan. Of course that depends on what you mean by wonderful. Too often when the sinner hears this offer, he or she conjures up visions of good health, a good job, nice vacations, a perfect family, and early retirement. That is a plan that appeals to the temporary, non-lasting, sin-tainted desires of the human flesh. God doesn't make plans like that.

According to chapter six, Jesus told the people in the crowd who were seeking for Him, that they were seeking the wrong thing (v.26). He told them that they had missed God's will altogether (v.27). Jesus

explained that God's will was for them to believe Him because He was doing the work of God the heavenly Father (vv.35-40).

We will discover in the text before us that not everyone was excited about God's will. That was to be expected. And if they were a bit disappointed to learn that God's will was all about eternal things, they were really going to be upset to learn how God intended to accomplish His will through Jesus Christ. People who seek some kind of solace in religion are still typically disappointed to learn the truth about God's plan. God's plan for sinners to gain eternal life is not at all like the methods and plans human wisdom works out.

If you work up enough nerve to tell a needy sinner that God has revealed His plan for the forgiveness of sins so that the sinner can enjoy eternal life, he or she will often respond just like the Jews responded to Jesus. They doubted and grumbled among themselves. Surely they could invent a better plan for life. Well, no one ever has. And no one ever will create a better plan for accomplishing God's will regarding salvation.

Religious Unbelievers Criticize God's Plan (vv.41-42).

Jesus' claim to divinity unnerves religious but unregenerated people. Jesus said some things that didn't sit well with the crowd, *So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven" (v.41)*. Religious or not, such people respond like others who doubt God. The people in the crowd at Capernaum came by this response naturally. Their forefathers were notorious for grumbling at God. Seven times in Exodus and Numbers we read about their grumbling. For example, *And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness (Exodus 16:2)*. Or we read, *And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him – what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD."* Then Moses said to Aaron, *"Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling'" (Exodus 16:8-9)*.

The Greek word for *grumbled* in our text describes a person who expresses dissatisfaction or discontent by muttering. It's the kind of thing we parents heard from our children from the time they were able to talk until they grew up and left home. They learned it from us adults

who express our discontent by grumbling and complaining until the day we die. We also know from experience that grumbling because of discontent is common in human relationships. In the story Jesus told about a farmer who paid divergent wages, the workers grumbled about their pay (Mat. 20:11). Even the disciples grumbled being greatly offended when Mary anointed Jesus' feet with a costly perfume (Mark 14:5).

The sad truth is that it is part of human nature to grumble at God. Moses reminded the stubborn Jews that they were not complaining against him but against God (Exodus 16:8-9). So too the Pharisees regularly complained and whined about God's work when Jesus did it (Luke 5:30; 15:2; 19:7; John 7:32). This kind of griping happens with regularity because we are infected by sin that was the result of Lucifer grumbling at God. Lucifer was dissatisfied with what God gave him and grumbled in his heart. His resulting rebellion authored sin which infects us all so that we tend to think and act like Satan.

What was the people's problem in this setting? Why were they grumbling? They found it impossible to believe Jesus' claim. They wondered how He could be the source of eternal life (v.35). That question was generated by Jesus' statement that He is the bread of life. *Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).* It was not just that Jesus claimed to be bread. That by itself would not make any sense. Rather, the people rightly understood that Jesus claimed to be the source of eternal life just like physical bread is a source or nourishment to physical life.

To promise that whoever comes to Him will never hunger or thirst was the same spiritual promise Jesus gave to the woman at the well. At first that woman was confused about Jesus' offer, thinking only about her physical thirst. So too these people were a bit confused about physical hunger and thirst versus spiritual hunger and thirst. When they figured out that Jesus promised eternal spiritual satisfaction, they were offended. They were especially offended when they learned that the fulfillment of Jesus' promise depended on God the Father drawing sinners to God the Son, which Jesus taught was God's will (6:35-40).

The whole plan sounds pretty fantastic to human wisdom. Furthermore, they wondered how Jesus the man from Nazareth could have come down from heaven? He had plainly said, *"I am the bread that came down from heaven" (v.41).* That's the stuff Greek mythology was

made of. The Greeks' imaginary gods often left Mount Olympus to have interaction with humans and appear as humans. This was so much a part of first century culture that people in Lystra were sure that Paul and Barnabas were Zeus and Hermes. It is a reminder that Satan, in all his brilliance, always creates a falsehood similar to truth in order to confuse. Human nature being what it is, we discover that still today people easily dismiss the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh because that sounds too much like Greek Mythology.

Since all of this teaching from Jesus seemed too fantastic, the people proved again that human wisdom trumps faith for unbelievers (v.42). In this case, the people assumed they knew Jesus. *They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" (v.42a).* How could Jesus be from God since the people knew His family? They knew the carpenter's family in Nazareth. More specifically, it appears that Jesus' family had moved to Capernaum at some point. Matthew recorded that *leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali (Matthew 4:13).* The theory is that Joseph died and Mary, with the other kids, moved to the town where Jesus had moved. Surely the people in Capernaum were scratching their heads over Jesus' comments.

Even more confusing was the popular opinion that Messiah would suddenly show up and not have a known background. That idea is expressed by the people's assured response, *But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from (John 7:27).* This conclusion was based on a misinterpretation of a couple Old Testament passages. Isaiah had written, *By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? (Isaiah 53:8).* Malachi promised a similar thing: *Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:1).*

As the confused response indicates, it is not unusual for humans to misunderstand God's Word. Even the disciples misunderstood the idea and the timing of the kingdom that Christ would establish. But they were learning to trust God speaking through Christ even when they did not understand. That was the problem with the Jews and with modern peers.

They refused to trust Jesus' words. They wondered, *How does he now say, "I have come down from heaven" (v.42b)?* It's possible this response expressed a sense of confusion. But it's more likely saying, "Since we know Him and His family, we doubt very much that He came down from heaven!" Things haven't changed much. Our peers also believe a lot about Jesus. But when it comes to God giving Himself as the sacrifice to cover our sins, they often doubt that possibility because they cannot imagine how it could happen.

God the Son Explains God's Plan (vv.43-51).

How does God carry out His will about eternal life? God the Father draws believers to God the Son (vv.43-46). So Jesus told the people not to complain about the Father's plan. Grumblers always think they have a better plan. Therefore, *Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves" (v.43).* Notice that Jesus didn't bother to answer their argument that because they knew who He was, He could not be Messiah. Jesus didn't try to explain (in terms they would understand) how He was the living bread or how He came from heaven. He simply pointed out the futility of their grumbling among themselves. What were they going to solve by grumbling about what they could not understand.

I often wonder if this is not what our theological debates sound like to God. We argue, write books, and establish whole movements within religion based on speculative opinions about what God said or does. We must look like ancient Jews who grumbled among themselves that Jesus must be wrong about Himself because they understood the old scriptures. This was like third grader grumbling and complaining because the teacher proposed the base angle theorem of geometry which states that if the two sides of a triangle are congruent, the angles opposite these sides are congruent. Of course they are not going to grasp the truth of what she said based on their math experience up to that point. Nor do we have the ability to grasp the wonderful truths of God's plan of salvation if left to our own limited, finite, human wisdom.

God's plan is simple, but it is hard to accept. Jesus put it like this: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day (v.44).* How could it be stated more simply? God does the miraculous work of drawing a sinner to Jesus by bringing that sinner face-to-face with the truth of the Bible and, being brought under conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit, the sinner confesses

the sin and, putting faith in Jesus' finished work on Calvary, is saved to be raised by Jesus Himself in the last days.

We can still read the words and should still be able to understand what Jesus meant. And yet we hear all manner of teaching that cuts across this simple explanation or contradicts it. For example, it is common believe that "You can be saved whenever you want." Or there are groups who teach "You must be baptized in order to be saved." Or "You must do righteous works to be saved." Very common is this idea: "You just do the best you can because when you stand before God He will weigh your good works against your bad works in order to decide if you can be saved." Many who refuse to mention the problem of sin like to say, "Come to Jesus because He has a wonderful plan for your life." None of those ideas wash with the truth that a sinner comes to Christ for forgiveness of sin's penalty only because God the Father draws that sinner.

Jesus indicated that people who read the Bible ought to be familiar with God's plan. It is stated in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus said, *"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'" (v.45).* God taught this to the Jews through the Prophets that they studied in the synagogue every Saturday. God still teaches through the Old Testament. The story and plan of salvation is all through the Old Testament so that even people who claim that only the Torah and the Psalms are the Bible have enough teaching to be saved.

Obviously the same truth stated even more clearly is all through the New Testament. God teaches about this amazing work of salvation through the Bible. Therefore, we must agree with Jeremiah who said of God, *Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts (Jeremiah 15:16).* In a similar statement Peter wrote in the New Testament, *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation (1 Peter 2:2).*

Yes, God teaches all about His plan of salvation through His Word. But not everyone who hears learns. Multitudes of people sit in church services regularly and hear the Bible taught. But they go away unchanged in their hearts because while they hear, they cannot learn. They cannot learn if God does not draw them. In contrast, those who hear and learn gladly run to Jesus where they find eternal salvation.

We know the plan because God the Son has revealed the truth. Jesus said, “*Not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father*” (v.46). We do not need to see God in order to trust Him. We trust the word of Jesus who came from God because He reveals the character of God in every way. The writer to the Hebrew Christians opened his letter with these amazing words: *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high* (Hebrews 1:1-3). God has taught His plan for salvation. We must hear and learn it. Not all will. But some will.

Those who God draws eat the Bread of Life (vv.47-51). Jesus made it clear that He is the bread that gives eternal life. He is the bread of life. He bluntly repeated, “*I am the bread of life*” (v.48). That sounds like a very simple statement. But all that is contained in that title or claim was the cause of consternation for the people. He meant, “You must have intimate relation with Christ (full dependance) in order to have life.” But, you cannot have life unless you believe Him. And you cannot believe Him unless you come to Him. And you cannot come to Him unless God the Father draws you. Obviously then, salvation through the Bread of Life is not your plan – it’s God’s.

In contrast to full dependance on Christ, Jesus pointed out that the Jewish forefathers ate bread that satisfied temporarily. *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died* (v.49). He reminded the crowd that they had appealed to their forefathers’ experience. Those ancient folks did indeed eat bread that God indeed sent from heaven. That was pretty miraculous. And they died! The important question is not whether you or your forefather’s religious experience was outstanding or unusual or even deeply religious. The question is, “Have you eaten (become wholly dependent on) the only Bread that gives eternal life?”

In contrast to daily bread, Jesus came from heaven to offer living bread. He taught, “*This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die*” (v.50). “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my*

flesh” (v.51). He is real heavenly bread. Manna the forefathers ate had some serious heavenly characteristics. But Jesus is God from heaven in the flesh. Ultimately, the tradition regarding Moses and manna was all about eating what God the Son gave, without finding lasting satisfaction.

Jesus held Himself out to be the living bread. Physical bread meets physical needs. But the physical ends in death. The spirit of the person lives somewhere forever. The spirit of a person needs living bread. Jesus alone gives everlasting life because Jesus alone is the author of eternal life. You must come to Him to gain it. You must believe Him. You have to eat this bread! Twice in this context Jesus repeated that need. *So that one may eat of it and not die* (v.50). *If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever* (v.51). Eating, in this case, is a picture of full, complete dependence. Faith is just that. It is to depend on Christ alone to provide the eternal life you cannot provide.

Can you believe it? That is the crux of the matter. Jesus put it like this: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life*” (v.47). Eating Christ is as simple as believing Him. When we really believe Him, life is transformed. Suddenly the physical, temporal desires of the flesh are not the important things. Suddenly eternal-kind of things are the focus of life. The forgiveness of sins thrusts us into an eternal quality of life immediately. It is generally rather easy to determine if we are more interested in the temporal passing desires of our flesh or interested in eternal righteousness. Real belief in Christ results in a radically transformed life.

In an article written in *Worship Facilities Magazine* (fall 2014) lead pastor Greg Lindsey of Discovery Church in Broomfield, Co. is quoted as saying, “At Discovery Church we are trying to create an environment around here that is much like the life (non-church) people may live – every single day of their lives. So, we turn up the music – we rock out the band – and do whatever we can to create a safe place for people to come, bump into, and experience Jesus.”

That is what the people in the crowd at Capernaum did. They bumped into an amazing experience that dealt with daily bread, the temporary satisfaction of a fleshly need. And Jesus taught them that they totally missed eternal life. That may not be too bad of a situation – as long as you’re alive. But like the Jewish forefathers who ate heavenly bread, we all die. Then what? I assure you the bumping into Jesus at a rock concert (which by the way is not any more likely than bumping into Jesus at a strip club) will not suffice to give you eternal life.

Jesus taught that eternal life is a complete and full dependance on Him that causes a radical transformation of life so that the forgiven sinner is completely changed regarding his view of everyday life. Not only did the Jews in the crowd not get it, but they grumbled about it. Not only do people in our day, who are satisfied with a religious experience, not get it, but they will often accuse you of being a legalist if you teach what Jesus taught. The important question is this: Do you understand God's plan for accomplishing His will (which is eternal life) through Jesus Christ? Do you get it?