**The Grumbling of Men and the Love of Christ**
**John 6:41-59**

Let me ask you a question. Do you ever grumble or complain? And if you do, what do you grumble or complain about? Maybe it's just that inner conversation inside your head, or maybe you verbalise it to a friend: that you, or someone you love, is not being treated the way you should, or that something unfair is happening to you, or that circumstances aren't working out the way they should. And if life is a spectrum between being content at one end, and being a serial complainer at the other, where do you fall between the two? Or how much do you oscillate between the two?

Well, we're looking at the gospel of John and at what follows Jesus' feeding the 5000 with just five loaves and two fish. And we've been seeing how Jesus is saying that miracle was not an end in itself. But it was pointing them, and us, to something deeper. To a deeper longing and a deeper satisfaction. To a longing for more than food - for eternity - for life and love and meaning and worth, a longing we all have; and how it's Christ - and only Christ - who can ultimately satisfy that longing.

But the truth is that many of us don't live with that deep sense of satisfaction, and today's passage helps us understand why. So we're going to look at three things: The grumbler's complaint; the Father's love; and the Son's gift.

**The Grumbler's Complaint**
Look at v41: 'So the Jews grumbled about him.' And Jesus is in Capernaum - it's his adopted home town. And this interaction he's having is happening in the synagogue there. So when John talks of the Jews who are grumbling, he could just mean the crowd that's been following him. Except, elsewhere, when John speaks of 'the Jews' he's using it in a restricted sense - about the Jewish religious leaders - like the leaders of this synagogue. And they're grumbling.

And John tells us why: v41, 'Because he [Jesus] said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

But, of course, this is Jesus' home town. So, v42, 'They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"' How can he possibly claim to come from heaven when we know that he comes from round here. And as nice as Capernaum is, it is not heaven. And as for calling God his Father, we know his father and his mother. We know who this guy is.

Now before we look at what they get wrong, they get something right, don't they? Or at least, we can learn something from them - and that is this need to grapple with who Jesus is.

You see, if you're not yet a Christian, just like them you have to come to a decision, don't you: who is Jesus? Is he *just* Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus of Capernaum, son of Joseph, son of Mary - as these men said he was? Or is he who *he* says he is - the One come from heaven? Is he just a man, or is he more than 'just a man'?

And deciding that matters, doesn't it? Or at least Jesus says it does. Because he says that eternity and your longing for eternity hangs on it.

So consider what lies at the root of their grumbling.

In one of the great Christmas carols, we sing, 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel.' But it's that very idea, the idea of incarnation, that this man standing before them could possibly have come from heaven - that's what they're stumbling over. That's what they're grumbling about.

And yet think how that is so often at the root of our own grumbling and complaining. Because when we grumble we're *also* revealing something of what we *really* believe about Christ and his incarnation.

You see, if you were here last week, you'll have heard Hendrik talk about the exclusivity of Christ, that there's no other way to be saved than through him. But maybe you struggle with that. Maybe you even grumble about it: 'well, I don't agree with that.' But is that because deep down - or not so deep down - you don't yet believe, or haven't fully reckoned with the fact, that Christ is the incarnate Son of God, sent from heaven for our salvation. What *you* think, consciously or subconsciously, is that he's just one among many. So you stumble, maybe even grumble, at claims to the opposite.

But for the rest of us, why do we grumble and complain? And I don't mean the surface stuff - that seems to provoke it - I mean, what's the root? You see, in Romans 8:32, Paul writes, 'He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' In other words, if God did not hold back his own Son for us, if Jesus really is the Son of God incarnate for us, if God loves us so much he would come like that for us, we can trust him with everything else; that he is working all these other things, like the stuff that's not working, or people who aren't working, he's working it all for my good. If he has given his Son, I can trust him to give me everything else I need. So why am I grumbling about it?

You see, we tell ourselves that the fault for our grumbling lies with others. But Jesus tells these leaders to stop grumbling: v43, 'do not grumble among yourselves' which means they can control their grumbling, that the reason for our grumbling lies inside us. And could that reason be that I've forgotten, or am not reminding myself, that Christ came from heaven for me, and that God is good and working all things for my good?

Now, just to be clear, there is a right type of discontent - of recognising that things are not the way they should be. In Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, it was discontent with the way his life was working out, with the consequences of his sin, that propelled the son to return to his father. And discontent with some habitual sin in your life, or with the state of your relationship with God, or that feeling that there must be more to life than the shallowness of consumerism, or the hopelessness of atheism, or our longings for meaning and worth beyond ourselves, *that* kind of discontent can turn our hearts to God. Whereas grumbling turns our hearts away from him.

It takes a discontent with the way things are - which may or may not be valid - and turns your heart away from the goodness of God. And it eats up your peace, and robs you of joy and leaves you more discontent than ever.

But when you know that Christ loves you so much that he would empty himself of the glory of heaven and come as a man for you, you won't doubt his goodness or his sovereignty over all things and all people. And so when you hear those early rumbles of discontent, that grumbling starting in your heart, say to your heart what Jesus says to these men, 'why do you grumble?'

Ok, but why can these men *not* see Jesus for who he really is?

**The Father's Love**
Look at v43-44: 'Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."' So, the reason they can't see who Jesus really is, the reason they're not believing in him, is not because they know his family, and it's not because they are so insightful and have seen through his play for power. It's not that they've attended course 101 on intersectionality and critical theory and they can see an attempt at colonial domination a mile off, it's that God the Father is not drawing them to his Son. They think they know his father, but they know nothing at all, because they've not been given the eyes to see.

And so Jesus is stating here, in the negative, 'no one can come to me unless the Father draws him,' what in v37 he stated in the positive, "*All* that the Father gives me *will* come to me."

In other words, the Father sends the Son and the Father draws you to the Son. And if he draws you come. And if he doesn't you don't. And you might hear that and think, 'Are you saying this is predestination?' And the answer's 'no, I'm not saying that - Jesus is.'

And before you start grumbling about that, look back at chapter 5 and how Jesus critiqued other leaders by saying "*You refuse to come to me* that you may have life" (5:40). Meaning they're morally responsible for how they respond to Christ, whether or not they come. And so are these leaders in Capernaum, and so are you and I.

And yet none of us can come, Jesus says, without God our Heavenly Father taking us by the hand and leading us.

And if you're already a Christian, your own experience tells you that's true. I grew up in a totally non-Christian family and became a Christian when I was about 17 through my physics teacher Mike Gouldstone. And at the time, I would have said it was my own free decision to become a Christian. And it was. I listened to Mike explain the gospel and I wanted to take that step. But afterwards you begin to realise, yes, but who sent the guys from the Gideon's into my previous school, probably 5 years before that, and put a New Testament in my hand and told me to read it? And who was working in my heart as I read it, as I became more and more convinced of my need for God and my need for forgiveness? And what about when I first pitched up to a church and saw the expression on the face of a previous teacher who was visibly stunned I'd become a Christian and who said, 'I've been praying for you for years'. And who gave Mike the skills for being a great teacher so that when he also spoke about Christ he made the gospel plausible?

Was it my decision to become a Christian? Sure. But that's not why I came to Christ. It's not why any of us come to Christ. We only ever come, because all along, in his love and his grace, God leads us and draws us and opens our eyes, and gives us the faith, to see the truth of who Jesus really is.

So, v45, Jesus says, "'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."

So the leaders are grumbling, but they're not coming, because they're not listening or learning from God and he's not drawing them.

And yet, if you look, when Jesus says, 'they will all be taught by God' he's quoting the prophet Isaiah - chapter 54. And there's an argument, that's probably correct, that at this time, given it was Passover, the liturgical readings in the synagogue would have been Exodus 16, and the provision of manna, and this passage - Isaiah 54. So when Jesus quotes this, he's reminding them of what they've just heard read. And the passage begins with God addressing the people, "O afflicted one, storm tossed and not comforted" (Is 54:11).

In other words, God sees the people's afflictions. He sees their storms of life. He sees their plight - just as he sees yours. But in place of all their trouble God promises that he's going to bless them and establish them, and - as Jesus quotes here - teach them. But do you see what that means that Jesus is saying? Because if the day of being taught by God is here, then the day of promise, the day of restoration, the day of God bringing calm out of storms, and hope out of wreckage, and life out of death - that new day has come.

But will you come? You see, when Augustine preached on this passage 1600 years ago, he said that God draws us to Christ in three ways. He draws us by love, he draws us by delight, and he draws us by hunger.

Think what he's saying. You see, if you've ever been in love, you know what he's saying. Because when the one you love, and the one who loves you, calls, you go, don't you? I mean this summer Jaqueline and Etienne got married, and all Etienne has to do is go, 'Jacqueline…' And Jaqueline goes, 'yes Etienne!' And she's drawn by love.

Or let's say you're in to art, and you're walking past a second-hand shop, and through the window, up on the wall, you see a painting, and it stops you in your tracks and you move closer to the window, peering in, thinking, can it really be one of the masters? And your hand is on the door and you're going in. Why? Because you're drawn by delight, you're drawn by beauty.

Or imagine you're visiting a friend for dinner and it's past the time when you would normally eat, and they give you a drink and sit you in the living room, while they're in the kitchen cooking for you. But out of that kitchen are coming smells that are putting your salivary glands into overdrive, and you hold out for a bit, but before long you are on your feet and moving to the kitchen. And you are drawn by hunger and the expectation that you are going to be filled.

So whether it's the inner voice of the Father telling you, in Christ you are loved; or the beauty of his perfections telling you, he's the object of worship you've been searching for; or whether it's the forgiveness or meaning or worth you're hungry for - the Father draws you to Christ.

So if you're beginning to realise that you long to be loved and welcomed home - the Father is drawing you. If you feel unlovable and unworthy, like the prodigal son in his pig sty, and you're increasingly conscious of that, the Father is drawing you. If you're increasingly aware that atheism has nothing to offer you but emptiness and hopelessness - the Father is drawing you. If it's dawning on you that the endless project of self-creation, or the soul-sapping demands of living for the approval of others, is leaving you exhausted - the Father's drawing you. If you're beginning to see that you are worn out by self-righteousness and legalistic religion and the endless to-do lists to make yourself worthy to God and others - and you're thinking 'this cannot be it' - the Father is drawing you. If you feel lost and rootless and long to be grounded - the Father is drawing you.

And think who he is drawing you to. Verse 46, where Jesus says, “Not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; *he has seen the Father*.” And that’s an incredible claim for Jesus to make. Because God said to Moses “You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Ex 33:20). But here is Jesus saying, ‘I have seen God and come from God, and come that you might live.’ Truly live.

**The Son’s Gift**
Verse 47, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.”

Now, you could - and people do - put your faith in just about anything in the hope of eternal life, couldn’t you? And if you’re not yet a Christian, it could be in the teaching of other religions, and if you can detach yourself enough from the desires of this life you will be absorbed into the universal oneness. It could be by trusting in your own ideas of life after death, that either there isn’t anything or if there is somehow all will be well. Or maybe you do have a view of heaven and eternity as a place where you need to gain admission. But when that day comes, and you die, and are standing at the gate, and the angel asks you, ‘on what basis should I let you in?’ What are you going to reply? ‘Look at my politics - I always voted against them over there.’ Or, ‘look at my beliefs - I wasn’t one of those nasty people who believed Jesus was the only way.’ Or ‘look at my life, how I lived, I deserve to come in.’ Or ‘Look at my faith - I read the Bible, I prayed, I fasted, I gave.’ Or ‘Look at my doctrine - if you give me a moment I can probably explain that one about salvation by faith.’

But all of those are expressions of faith in yourself, aren’t they? In what you’ve done, or what you know. And that’s not the faith Jesus is talking about. You see, the only basis for entry to eternal life, now and at the end of life, is Christ. It’s to stand before the angel at the gate and say, ‘on what basis do I come? The Lord Jesus - he said I could come.’ It’s not what I’ve done, it’s what he’s done for me.

Verse 48, “I am the bread of life.” It’s me and only me who can give you life. But you’ve got to eat. Verse 51, “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.”

Now, the idea of eating human flesh is abhorrent isn’t it? Then and now. And to drink blood of any kind was banned under Mosaic law. It’s why, v52, ‘The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”’ But Jesus isn’t talking about some kind of canabalistic feast, is he. He’s talking about putting your faith - not in yourself - but in the one whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for you.

You see, Jesus repeatedly talks here of eating and drinking. But so do we. We talk of swallowing a lie, or devouring a book. We chew over ideas or ruminate on our past. And when we do, what are we saying? We're saying this thing is becoming a part of me, or it’s shaping the way I see the world, or I’m letting it do something to me, to form me and change me.

And Jesus is saying my body is going to be broken for you, and by blood is going to be poured out for you. And as you let the truth of that sink into your heart, as you *feed* on all that I have done for you, as you put your trust in *me*, life - eternal life - will flow in your veins.

Verse 54, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” But compare that to what he said back in v40, “Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him *should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day*.” They’re parallel. So to feed and drink on Christ is the same as to look and believe on him.

Now, just think for a moment how *our* physical bodies - our hands, our mouths, our eyes - can be the cause of so much sin and hurt - to ourselves and to others. But Jesus says his physical body is going to be the source of life. We break things with our bodies, but at the cross, Christ’s body was broken to do the reverse.

And he came down to where we are, and took on a body, so that he might lift us up to where he is and give us resurrection bodies. As he says in v59, “Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” And at the cross he was broken that you might be healed. He was emptied that you might be filled. He became sin so that you might be counted righteous.

So, when Jesus talks of feeding on his flesh and drinking his blood, is he talking about communion and the Lord’s table? No. But he is talking about what the bread and the wine point to. My body broken for you. My blood shed for you. As Augustine said, ‘Believe, and you have eaten.’

So, this week, if you are tempted to grumble, and to look at what God or others are not doing for you, look instead to Christ. Look at him becoming flesh for you. Look at him being broken for you. And know, if he loves you like that, he is going to work all things for your good. And if you’re not yet a Christian - think about your longings, think about your desire for the world, or your life, to be put right - and know the Father is drawing you. So listen to him, learn from him, come to Christ and find life.