

Unless...
John 6:41-47, April 28th 2024

Dr. Seuss', *the Lorax*, takes place in a treeless wasteland. A boy, eager to learn where the world went wrong goes to an old man who remembers when the place was covered in bright-colored Truffula trees whose leaves were "softer than silk and they had the sweet smell of fresh buttery milk." But eager to turn a profit, he cut down a Truffula tree and from it made a "thneed...a fine something that all people need." Just then from that freshly sawn stump, popped the mustachioed Lorax who said, "I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees." But caught in the grip of greed, he could not hear the Lorax' pleas and cleared the forest to make his fortune. So, with the rest of the woodland creatures the Lorax fled the ruined paradise. The old man remembered, "And all that the Lorax left here in this mess was a small pile of rocks with the one word... "unless." Then the old man looked down on the boy and said, "But now that you're here, the word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear. *Unless* someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." Then he put the very last Truffula seed in the boys' hand.

In our passage this morning, Christ bids us scan the barren wasteland that is the human condition of man since the fall. We see that the fruits of the Spirit which once naturally bloomed in the heart of man have been clear cut by moral corruption. The mind which once instinctively thought God's thoughts after him has been fogged with the smog of sin. The spiritual life which once flourished in man's soul has been swallowed up in death. But in the midst of that wreckage, Jesus takes us to a glorious stone monument with one word, "unless." John 6:44, "No one can come to me *unless* the Father who sent me draws him." By this word "unless" Christ irradiates the darkness of man's misery with the light of heaven. By this word, "unless" Christ interrupts the bad news of our sin with the good news of his salvation. By this word he teaches us that *man's inability to come to God is no match for God's sovereign grace to draw him.*

First, we see *man's inability*. This 6th chapter of John's gospel opened with Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5000, who then followed him across the Sea of Galilee not because they wanted more of Jesus, but because they wanted more of what Jesus could give them. Though they rejoiced when Jesus told them about the bread of God which gives everlasting life, they recoiled in unbelief when Jesus revealed that he was the Bread of Life, come down from heaven to fulfill the will of God and save them from their sins. In **v41** we read, "the Jews grumbled about him." This Greek word "grumble" is an onomatopoeia; like "bam" "pop" or "clap." The Greek word is "gong-goodzo"... a sound intended to imitate the cooed murmuring of a bevy of doves. To grumble is to murmur against. It's to smolder with resentment. We can imagine the people in the crowd maliciously whispering to one another while their angry eyes stayed fixed on Jesus. And as we listen, we can hear what they're saying in **v42**, "*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'?*"

It's true, familiarity breeds resentment. These people couldn't get passed their familiarity with Jesus. They couldn't believe that the adopted son of a carpenter was also the eternally begotten Son of God. They couldn't believe that the fruit of Mary's womb was also the Bread of Heaven; that a Nazarene peasant was also the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. God himself had come down from heaven to save them by becoming one of them. God himself was willing to dwell in their midst and bless them with bread for the bellies and truth for the heart. But rather than falling to their knees before him in love and faith, rather than worshipping him as their incarnate Lord, they grumbled. Their ancestors did the same: after God came down from heaven to save them from their Egyptian slavery; after he showed his awful wrath in 10 plagues, his power in parting the Red Sea, his grace by feeding & watering his people in the wilderness, his steadfast love by leading them to the Promised Land in the pillar of cloud and fire, and his immanence by dwelling in their midst in his own tabernacle tent the people grumbled. For 40 years they

grumbled as God lovingly dragged them away from their slavery to paradise. *Why?* Because they were sinners. And so are we. Even in the new hearts of believers, remnants of that fallen resentment towards God still reside.

Do you ever grumble against God? Maybe you're grumbling this morning? We grumble against God when we grow unsatisfied with his provision for us and begin to resent him for withholding things we feel we need or giving us affliction we think is unnecessary. Grumbling is the result of letting experience shape our theology rather than letting our theology shape our experience. We think, "God if you really loved me I'd have more money, or a nicer car, or a bigger house. God if you were who you claim to be, I'd be able to find a job. If you were really all powerful, you'd heal me or my loved one. If you really cared you would have given me a spouse, or you would have given me a different spouse, or you wouldn't have taken my spouse away." *Can you hear the difference between prayer and grumbling?* While prayer springs from faith, grumbling oozes from unbelief. In prayer we wrestle with God as we humble ourselves and ask hard questions. But there is not grappling in grumbling, there is only resignation & bitterness. Such grumbling is a sin that grieves the Lord Jesus who in **v43**, commands the people "Do not grumble!" When the sediment of contempt towards God begins to settle at the bottom of our hearts we must confess and repent of our ingratitude and remember Paul's words in Rom 8:32, "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?" You may not have everything, but if you be in Christ you have everything you need.

These people had tasted and seen that Jesus was good. They watched him wield his divine power bless them. They sat under his heavenly preaching and heard him claim to be the Son of God, the Bread of Heaven, & Savior of the Word... & still they rejected him. *How? Why?* B/c they can do no other, Jesus explained in **v44**: "No one can come to me..." In a previous study we explored the doctrine of TD: the reality that by the fall, sin has radically corrupted every part of human nature, body & soul, leaving man "dead in sin & trespass," "children of wrath," & "enemies" of God. But now Jesus explains that one of the dreadful symptoms of man's total depravity is the total inability to come to Christ in faith. Some time ago we took the kids to an amusement park. Though Ellie was tall enough to ride the roller coaster, she didn't want to. She was unwilling. Locke on the other hand, really wanted to ride but was too short. He was unable. Sin has left us both unwilling & unable to believe on Christ as Lord and Savior.

Do you remember when two women came to Solomon, both claiming to be the mother of the same child? When Solomon asked for a sword to cut the baby in half one woman said, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death." But the other said, "He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him." And in an instant Solomon knew which woman was telling the truth and which was lying; because no mother could wish their child's execution; no person is able to do that which their soul abhors.

Inversely, the sinner's abhorrence of God and love of sin keeps their hearts chained in willful rebellion & unbelief. Paul explained in **1Cor2:14** "The natural person *does not* accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." And in **Rom8:7-8** Paul said, "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, *it cannot*. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Our **WCF 9:3**, "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." The Reformed theologian Lorraine Boetner explained, "... man, since the fall, is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, wholly inclined to all evil. He possesses a fixed bias of the will against God, and instinctively and willingly turns to evil. He is an alien by birth, and a sinner by choice. The inability under which he labors is not an inability to exercise volition, but an inability to be willing to

exercise holy volitions.” So, you see, sinners cannot come to Christ because they will not. And they will not come to Christ because they cannot... but thanks be to God the verse doesn't not end there! Thanks be to God that man's inability to come to God is no match for God's sovereign grace to draw them! “No one can come to me *unless* the Father who sent me draws him.”

This word “draw” is poorly translated. It makes it sound like God is softly wooing sinners to himself but it means much more than that. It's the same word used in **Jn21:6** to describe the way the disciples hauled a net bursting with fish into their boat. It's the same word used in **Acts 16:19** to describe the way angry Philippians took hold of Paul & Silas and dragged them before the rulers; the same word used in **Acts 21:30** to describe the way the mob seized Paul & dragged him outside the temple. You see God's drawing of a sinner to Christ in faith is an act of sweet violence... like the time Lot and his family lingered in the doomed Sodom, but we read in **Gen 19:16**, the angels “seized him & his wife and his daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.” The drawing of a sinner away from the doomed city of their sin to Christ in faith is God's gracious assault whereby he does not violate our free will but renews it to freely come and freely choose to trust and obey Jesus. By this drawing, the Father privately teaches the gospel to our hearts and having heard and learned from the Father, we cannot but come to his Son. Jesus says as much in **v.45**.

In *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis described God's dragging him to Christ, “*In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape? The words “compelle intrare,” compel them to come in, have been so abused by wicked men that we shudder at them; but, properly understood, they plumb the depth of the Divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.*”

In light of man's total inability to come to Christ unless God draws him, 3 truths are revealed. **First** if Paul is right in Rom 10:7, if “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ;” **WLC 155** “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ” we must be a church radically committed to the bold preaching & teaching of God's word and the proclamation of the gospel. Paul said in 1Cor1:18, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” We might have the best liturgy, music, youth group, mission trips, VBS, but unless they be saturated with Scripture and beaming with Christ, they will be powerless to save a soul.

Second, since the outward call of the gospel is only mighty to save when the Spirit is pleased to work through it in the hearts of those who hear, we must pray for the Lord to pour out his Spirit upon us and bless the ministry of the word. We must pray for the preacher as he is preaching that the Spirit would ignite the word of God with heaven's fire; that through it God would lay his holy hands upon sinners and save them. We must pray not only for the preacher, but for those we yearn to see in heaven. Oftentimes we feel that our work is done when we share the gospel or read the word to our children, neighbors, friends... but it's not. It's not enough to just share God's word... we must pray that God would open and teach their hearts and save them.

Third, if no one can come to Christ, unless the Father draws them... we must go to Jesus! You see, while our hatred of God is able to hold us back from him, it is not able to hold him back from us! He is both mighty to save and willing to save us from our sins! He so delights in showing mercy to the guilty that he was willing to withhold it from his own son, Jesus, as he carried your curse all the way to the cross and died for you. On that cross, Jesus not only paid the infinite debt of your sin to God, he imputed the riches of his righteousness to your account that you might be forgiven of your sins, freed from you bondage to sin, and fit for heaven! **VM**