

John 6:41-58

Introduction

This morning, we pick right up where we left off last week, in the middle of a “back and forth” between Jesus and the Jewish people. What we saw last week is that throughout this dialogue the people are always trying to maintain some semblance of “control.”

Jesus told them: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which *the Son of Man* will give to you” (27). And they responded: “What must *we do* to be *working* the works of God” (28). To which Jesus responded: “This is the work *of God*, that *you believe* in Him whom He has sent” (v. 29). Do you see how Jesus is calling them to abandon all their illusions of being “in control” and instead submit to His word in a wholehearted response of faith? But the people respond: “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?” (30) The people are still insisting that if they come to Jesus, this should be an independent and autonomous (self-directed; self-determined) choice that they make. But to their request for a “greater work”—greater than the feeding of the five thousand and greater than the “bread from heaven” in the days of Moses (31)—Jesus answers that the only “greater work” there is the substance and reality to which both of these “signs” were pointing. There are only two categories of works: the type and the archetype, the shadow and the substance, the lesser and the greater. Therefore, the only truly “greater work” that Jesus can perform is to give not the perishable food, but the food that endures to eternal life – the “*true*” “bread from heaven” (32-33). But the people are blinded to this “greater work” that Jesus does. They’re blinded because they still want some semblance of “control” – because they want to make their own *independent* decisions about Jesus. So they respond to Jesus: “Sir, give us this bread always” (34). They’re still thinking about perishable bread and they’re still saying that they’ll believe in Him *if* He gives them this bread “always.” To which Jesus responds: “**I am** the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst” (35). On the one hand, this is an invitation and a promise extended to everyone: “Come to Me and you will never hunger again; believe in Me and you will never be thirsty again.” And yet even this coming to Him and believing in Him is not an independent choice that we make. Therefore, the failure of the vast majority of the people to believe in Jesus is no indication of the failure of Jesus Himself. Listen to Jesus’ words in verses 36-40:

- John 6:36–40 — But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. **All** that the Father gives me **will** come to me, and he who comes to me I will never cast out [I will forever keep him in **because** he has been given to Me by my Father]. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Do you hear clearly in these words the invitation and the promise extended to all? And do you also hear equally as clearly in these words the saving sovereignty of God? Even as Jesus calls the people to Himself, He’s stripping them of all “control” in the most breathtaking (or devastating?) way possible. That *I* come to Jesus is not *ultimately* due to my choice (though I do make a

genuine and real choice), but to His prior sovereign choice of me – to the fact that He chose me to *give* to His Son.

The Jews, you could say, have been backed into a corner. Jesus has shown all of their thinking and arguments to be rooted in temporal and fleshly priorities and therefore also wholly misguided and even irrational. And yet having been backed into the corner they still fight for control. We read in verses 41-42:

I. John 6:41–42 — So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” 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’?”

It’s important to understand that the people aren’t grumbling about Jesus because He said He is “bread” (not yet) but only because He said He is the bread “*that came down from heaven.*” How can He say He came down from heaven when **they know** who He is? How can Jesus speak of His Father sending Him from heaven and giving Him a people to preserve and keep until He raises them up on the last day when **they know** not only who His father is (Joseph) but also His mother?

It’s obvious that the people aren’t interested in hearing—and don’t want to know—the true answer to these questions. They purposely choose to assume that Jesus is saying He descended from out of heaven as a pre-existent *man* – in other words that He existed in heaven as a man and that God then sent this man down out of heaven. They purposely choose to assume that Jesus is denying the fact that He was born of a woman named Mary and that He had an earthly “father” named Joseph. But of course, that *would* be absurd and Jesus *isn’t* denying any of this (the virginal conception aside).

Though the people weren’t able to fully understand what Jesus *did* mean when He spoke of “coming down from heaven,” they knew very well what He *didn’t* mean, and yet they pretend not to know in order that they might be the ones in control – in order that they might have that ultimate power of independently judging (deciding) for themselves the legitimacy of Jesus’ word. “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”?’” This isn’t a rational objection, which explains in part why instead of responding *to* Jesus, they resort to grumbling *about* Him among themselves.

The word for “grumbling” (*gongyzo*) appears thirteen times in the Greek Old Testament and eight of these times it refers to the grumbling of the people of Israel in the wilderness (Exod. 17:3; Num. 11:1; 14:27, 29; 16:41; 17:5; Ps. 105:25; cf. 1 Cor. 10:10). We read in Psalm 106:

➤ Psalm 106:24–25 — They despised the pleasant land; **they did not believe in His word**, but **grumbled** in their tents; **they did not listen to the voice of the LORD**.

And the Greek translation of Isaiah 29:24 reads like this (speaking about a future day of salvation):

- Isaiah 29:24 (LXX; cf. Isa. 30:12) — Those who wander by the wind will know understanding, and **those who grumble will learn to listen**, and the faltering tongues will learn to speak peace.

Do you see how in both of these passages “grumbling” is the opposite of a humble “listening”? “Grumbling” is the people’s way of putting their hands over their ears and refusing to believe and obey God’s word. That explains why John chooses to use this word here (and why Jesus uses the same word in the next verse!). When the people ask how Jesus can say that He came down from heaven since they know His father and mother, they’re the ones being absurd. And so this is just their way of putting their hands over their ears and retreating to that “safe” place where they can maintain the illusion of being in control. It’s their way of saying that they have the right to make their own independent decision about Jesus and since He won’t allow them to come to Him in this way, then they have decided that He cannot be who He says He is.

Can you see, now, why when Jesus chooses to respond to their grumbling He doesn’t give them any explanation of what He “really” means by “coming down from heaven”? He knows that’s not what they want. He knows that’s not the real issue. Most importantly, He knows that’s not what they need.

II. John 6:43 — Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves.”

Can you hear in this rebuke an earnest exhortation? When Jesus says “do not grumble,” He’s saying, “stop being unbelieving and *believe!* Stop closing your ears and *listen!*” And what is the key to this “believing”? What is the key to this “listening”? “Do not grumble among yourselves,” Jesus says, and then He continues:

III. John 6:44 — “No one is able to [*dynamai*] come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”

We might read this and think at first that this is supposed to be the reason for the people to stop grumbling – as though this is supposed to make the people feel better about what Jesus is saying. But this statement, in and of itself, is far more likely to *cause* grumbling than anything else. Jesus obviously doesn’t say this in order to pacify the grumbling of the people. Instead, what He’s saying is this: “Stop your grumbling and listen! Stop trying to be the ones ‘in control’ and **understand this**: No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” Do you see how Jesus is using this truth of the sovereignty of God in calling people to Himself? Jesus doesn’t say this because He wants to promote some kind of fatalism or because He wants to show that some, at least, of His listeners have no hope of being saved. It’s the opposite that’s true. Jesus says this precisely because He desires that these lost Jewish people might be saved. So listen again to the “logic” or the intent of Jesus’ words:

Stop trying to be the ones “in control” and *understand this!* No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. ***Therefore***, no one can come to me unless He comes to me not as the one making an independent, autonomous decision about Me, but rather in a wholehearted humble submission to, and an unqualified, childlike belief in Me and in My word.

Do you see now the intimate relationship between the first and the second parts of this statement? In the first part, we're confronted with the mystery of the infinite greatness and the absolute sovereignty and supremacy of God: "No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." If no one is able to come to Jesus unless the Father draws him (because of sin), does this mean that to be "fair" God draws everyone, so that everyone is "able" to come to Jesus? No, it doesn't. In the first place, that still leaves us to make our own independent, autonomous decisions about Jesus; that still leaves us with that *ultimate power* of "*choice*" so that when we come to Jesus we come, in some sense, as the ones in control. The Bible is clear that we do make a genuine and real choice (cf. Josh. 24:15), but the Bible is equally clear that this *choice* is in some mysterious way a "dependent" choice and not an ultimate or a sovereign choice. There's a fundamental difference between the kind of choice that we make and the choice that God makes. God's choice is sovereign, autonomous, and independent; ours is not.

When Jesus says, "No one is able to come to Me unless the Father draws him," this does not mean that God draws everyone so that everyone is able to come to Jesus. We know this because this "drawing" is not a drawing that only makes something possible, but rather a drawing that's 100% effectual. **All** whom the Father draws **do** come to Jesus. In the Bible, whenever someone "draws" something or someone this *means* (based on the very "definition" of the word) that the drawing is successful (cf. Jn. 21:6 where the disciples were *not able* to draw the net full of fish into the boat and therefore they *did not* draw the net full of fish into the boat; see also Acts 21:30; Js. 1:14; 2:6; and all of the 36 occurrences of this word in the LXX). If Peter "drew" his sword, then that means that the sword was successfully drawn (Jn. 18:10). If Peter and the disciples "drew" the net full of fish to shore, then what have we just said? We've said that the net full of fish was successfully drawn to the shore (Jn. 21:11). If the owners of the slave girl "dragged" Paul and Silas into the marketplace, then what have we just said? We've said that Paul and Silas were, in fact, dragged into the marketplace (Acts 16:19). In the same way, if the Father "draws" a person to Himself, that is to say that that person has been successfully *drawn* to Jesus.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," Jesus says, "**And I will raise him up on the last day.**" *Who* will Jesus raise up on the last day? The one whom the Father draws – because *all* whom the Father draws are able (enabled) to come to Jesus and therefore do, without fail, come to Jesus. It's this very point that Jesus continues to make in verses 45-47:

IV. John 6:45–46 — "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will **ALL** be taught by God' [the emphasis here is on that word, "all," and so also the sovereignty of God in salvation that *guarantees* the "all"; cf. Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:33-34]. **EVERYONE** who has heard and learned from the Father [this is the visible and practical manifestation of having been drawn by the Father] **comes to me** [everyone who has been drawn by the Father comes to me]— not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father [the proof that a person has heard and learned from the Father is that he comes to Jesus, the only one who has seen the Father]."

The "drawing" work of the Father is unfailingly effective so that all whom the Father draws will and do come freely to Jesus. While the unbeliever and even many Christians may be offended by

this truth, Jesus rejoiced and gloried in this truth (cf. Mat. 11:25-27). While the wisdom of the world says that this truth must lead to fatalism and despair, Jesus used this very truth as the means of calling people to believe unreservedly in Him and to come to Him in a wholehearted and glad surrender (cf. Mat. 11:25-30).

Stop your grumbling and listen! Stop trying to be the ones “in control” and *understand this*: No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And indeed, *all* whom the Father draws *will* come to me and I will raise them up on the last day. **THEREFORE** it follows from this that no one can come to me unless He comes to me not as the one making his own independent, autonomous decision about Me, but rather in a wholehearted humble submission to, and an unqualified, childlike belief in Me and in My word.

Do you see the intimate relationship between the first and second parts of this statement? The meaning of the first part is explicitly clear, even though throughout the centuries Christians have attempted to find many ways around that clear meaning. No one is able to come to Jesus unless the Father draws him; the Father does not draw everyone; all that the Father draws will come to Jesus; the Father’s drawing is the ultimate and 100% effectual cause of our coming. Jesus doesn’t offer any “explanation” of this mystery. So then, why does He proclaim it? Why, especially, does He proclaim this mystery here? The answer is because He desires the salvation of those who are listening to Him and therefore He would strip from them all their illusions of being “in control”; He would call them to abandon any thought of making their own independent decisions about Him and to come to Him instead humbly, submissively, and unreservedly believing. Jesus moves immediately from the awesome mystery of God’s sovereignty in salvation to these wonderful words of invitation and of promise:

V. John 6:47 — “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **believes** has eternal life.”

Jesus doesn’t say, “he who believes *in Me*,” or, “he who believes *in My name*,” or, “he who believes *in the Son of Man*,” or, “*in the one whom the Father sent*,” but only, “he who **believes**.” The object of this believing is assumed, but the emphasis is all on what this *believing* is — an unqualified, unreserved submission and surrender to Jesus and to His word as the one whom God has sent. The necessity of this believing is about to be demonstrated as Jesus goes on to explain *how* it is that those who believe will have eternal life.

VI. John 6:48-51 — “**I am** the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. **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**.”

What are we to think of a man who speaks with words like these? We’re confronted again with the inescapable necessity of either plugging our ears and retreating from Him or surrendering ourselves wholly and unreservedly to Him. We understand when we hear words like these that there can be no middle ground.

When Jesus speaks of eating bread and living forever we know this eating isn't a "literal" eating but a figurative and "spiritual" eating Jesus just said in verse forty-seven:

- John 6:47 — Truly, truly, I say to you, *he who **believes*** has eternal life.

And in verse forty:

- John 6:40 — This is the will of my Father, that *everyone who **looks*** on the Son and ***believes*** in him should have eternal life.

And in verse thirty-five:

- John 6:35 — I am the bread of life; *he who **comes*** to me shall not ***hunger***, and *he who **believes*** in me shall never ***thirst***.

So the eating, here in these verses, is a figurative representation of "looking" and "coming" and "believing" (it's not a reference to the Lord's Supper). What the picture of "eating" and "drinking" conveys to us is that eternal life isn't a gift that can ever be separated from the Giver but a gift that's enjoyed only through a perpetual union and communion and fellowship with the one who has this life in Himself. Eternal life is a gift that's enjoyed only through eating continuously the bread that He gives for the life of the world—*which is His flesh*.

Now if the eating is a figurative representation of "looking" and "coming" and "believing," then we know that this "food" that we eat is not to be literally, physically consumed by us. Jesus isn't saying that He will literally give us His flesh to eat. That much should be obvious to everyone (cf. Roman Catholics). But if Jesus was *not* saying that He would literally give us His flesh to eat, then what *was* He saying? In John 1:14 we read:

- John 1:14 — And the Word became **flesh** and dwelt among us.

The point, here, is that the eternal Word took unto Himself our full and our true humanity—our entire earthbound existence in the flesh—even to the point of being subject to death. We read in Hebrews:

- Hebrews 2:14 — Since therefore the children share in **flesh and blood**, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

Looking back from our vantage point, we can see that when Jesus speaks of giving His flesh as bread for the life of the world, He's speaking of giving *Himself* in *death* so that through that death the life that He has in Himself (cf. 1:4; 5:26) might be given to us who believe in Him — who eat His flesh; who feed daily on the crucified and risen Savior and on all the saving benefits of His sacrificial death in our place. Looking back from our vantage point, we see this clearly, but none of the Jews listening to Jesus could see this — not even the Twelve disciples. If it should have been clear to them what Jesus was *not* saying, they still couldn't fully understand what He *was* saying. So what will the Jews do? Will they believe in Jesus and submit themselves

to His word, desiring to grow in understanding? Or, will they demand understanding first, as those who want to be “in control” – as those who want to make their own independent decisions about Jesus?

VII. John 6:52 — The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

The Jews pretend to think and to believe that Jesus is being absurd. They take refuge in this thought by disputing (Jesus’ words) *among themselves*. Jesus hears them disputing, and He knows they don’t really think He’s talking about cannibalism. He knows that their only real problem is the fear of not being able to make their own independent decision about Jesus; of not having that ultimate power of “choice” and so being able to come to Jesus in some sense as those “in control.” So rather than “soften” His words with explanations and qualifications, Jesus only makes them “harder.” And why does Jesus do this? He does this not because He desires to turn them away, but because He would confront them yet again with the absolute necessity of *believing* – of an unqualified, unreserved submission and surrender to Jesus and to His word as the one whom God has sent.

VIII. John 6:53–58 — So Jesus said to them [and He says to us this morning], “Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless** you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have **no** life in you. He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Are you feeding on His flesh and drinking His blood? (Are you *believing* in Him?) Are you abiding in Him and does He abide in you? (Are you *believing* in Him?) Have you given up all illusions of coming to Him based on your own independent and autonomous choice? (Are you *believing* in Him?) Do you rejoice to know that you did not choose Him, but He chose you? In other words, are you *believing* in Him?