

John 6:41-71
Numbers 11
Psalm 95

“Flesh and Blood”

May 31, 2020

Is complaining a good thing or a bad thing?

You often hear me say that we should be *good* complainers.
A complaint is a proper way to handle a bad situation.

But the word “complain” is very much like the word “anger.”

Is anger good or bad?

Well, in one sense, anger is *good*.

We *should* be angry that George Floyd is dead.

We *should* be angry at the way that he died –
with a police officer’s knee in his neck.

And proper anger results in a proper complaint.

Unfortunately in the case of the people of Israel,
their anger results in a misdirected complaint.

In Numbers 10, we are told that the people of Israel have just left Mt. Sinai.

They were at Sinai for a year – and now they are leaving Sinai
in order to go to the promised Land.

The people complain in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes –
and the LORD sends fire against them (11:1-3).

Then the rabble among them have a strong craving –
and the people start to grumble about having no meat.

All we have is this *manna* to eat!

They remember the fish – the cucumbers, leeks, and melons –
and they are craving meat.

They are not content with God’s provision.

Notice that Moses asks where he is to get meat

(in John 6, Jesus will ask where are we to buy bread?).

In both stories there is a very definite disproportion between need and resources.

Also, in both stories there is grumbling.

And Jesus not only refers to himself as the bread which came down from heaven,
but also says that the bread that he will give for the life of the world
is his flesh.

I can't help but also note that today is Pentecost Sunday –
the day that came in answer to Moses' cry,
“Would that all the LORD's people were prophets,
that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

That day has come in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
Not just the elders – but all of God's people now have the Spirit of God.

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 95B – a song that remembers the rebellion in the wilderness,
and calls us that *today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts!

Sing Psalm 95B
Read John 6:35-71

Introduction: The Central Message of Jesus (6:27-40)

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ 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.”

We saw last time that there are three parts to Jesus's message in John 6.
Jesus is the Bread of Life.

So first,

- a. You Must Come to Jesus and Believe in Him as the Bread of Life**
You must believe.
Whoever comes to Jesus shall not hunger,
and whoever believes in Jesus will never thirst.

Second,

- b. Those Whom the Father Draws Will Come to Jesus**
All that the Father gives me will come to me.
Jesus says that the Father has given him a people.
There are strong echoes of Numbers 11 in this passage.

But as we saw last time, Jesus' point is that *this time*
the story will end differently.
Why should we believe that the story will end differently this time?
The OT stories sound all too familiar!

They started well – but they never ended well.
They trusted God – and Moses led them out of Egypt –
 but they grumbled in the wilderness.
They trusted God – and Joshua caused them to inherit the Land –
 but they turned so that everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
But then David was a man after God’s own heart –
 and the kingdom was established –
 but his sons strayed and the people went into exile.

What will be different this time?

Verse 39-40

c. And Jesus Will Raise Them Up at the Last Day

Yes, *you* must believe.

Yes, *you* must trust in Jesus.

That’s the same.

And God is the one who saves.

God is the one who elects – who chooses his people.

That hasn’t changed.

What has changed?

Moses died – and stayed dead.

Joshua died – and stayed dead.

David died – and stayed dead.

But Jesus is the Son of God –

He is the Word who was with God – and who was God –

He is the Only-Begotten of the Father –

the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

He tabernacled in our flesh – he bore our humanity –

in order that he might join us to his divinity.

Could Moses raise you up at the last day?

No.

Moses himself died in the wilderness –

he could not even enter the Promised Land himself!

No, Moses cannot get you there.

Could Joshua raise you up?

No – Joshua caused Israel to inherit the land –

but then Joshua died – and the people strayed.

Could David? Hezekiah? The prophets?

No.

Elijah and Elisha came the closest!
They each raised a dead boy –
 thereby showing that Israel's hope was in fact the resurrection of the body –
 but those boys went on to die again!

Elijah cannot raise you at the last day.

Only Jesus.

Only the one who came down from heaven –
 he is the one who can you up at the last day.

These three things are taught in three sections:

35-40

43-51

53-58

Each section states all three, but focuses on one at a time.

vv35-40 focus on the first one:

You must come to Jesus and believe in him if you wish to have eternal life.
But v37-39 makes it clear that God must work first in giving us to Christ.
 Have you ever thought of that way?
 God the Father has given you to his Son, Jesus Christ.

Out of his great love and for his own glory,
 God the Father has taken you,
 and has given you as a gift to Jesus.
 God has sent his Spirit to change your heart,
 so that you might SEE Jesus and believe in him.

Remember what Jesus says in v36.

 "You have seen me and yet do not believe"

There are people who have seen Jesus, and yet their eyes are darkened.

 They look straight at him,

 but having blinded eyes, they do not see their Messiah.

But God the Father has opened your eyes so that you might see Jesus,
 and believe on him so that you might have everlasting life.

The Jews then start grumbling (v41).

1. Jesus Answers the Grumbling of the Jews (v41-51)

⁴¹ So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² 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'?"

Before this, they were called "the people"--
but once "the people" start grumbling, they are called "the Jews"
Just like the Israelites grumbled against Moses in the wilderness,
so now their descendants grumble against Jesus--who is himself the I AM,
the Yahweh whom they had grumbled against in the wilderness.
They can't believe that Jesus is the one who came down from heaven,
after all, they know his parents!

And in Jesus' answer, you can see that Jesus questions whether they know who his Father is!
But Jesus says [43-51]

⁴³ *Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves.*

Again we see all three things:

1. You must come to Jesus and believe in him as the Bread of Life
2. God must call you and draw you to Christ
3. You must continue to feed on Christ if you wish to have eternal life

a. "Whoever Believes Has Eternal Life"

Jesus says,

"stop your grumbling!"

If you would listen to Moses you would listen to me (just like the end of ch 5)

If you have learned from God through the Scripture,
then you would love me.

Verse 47 highlights the importance of faith:

"Whoever believes has eternal life."

But here he focuses particularly on the work of the Father.

b. "No One Can Come to Me Unless the Father who Sent Me Draws Him"

⁴⁴ *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* 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—* ⁴⁶ *not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.* ⁴⁷ *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.*

Jesus says that if the Father draws you – then you will come to Jesus.

I know that some people hear this and say,

"But what if I'm not elect?

What if God doesn't draw me?"

That's *not* the way Jesus wants you to hear that!

Remember verse 47 – “Whoever believes has eternal life.”

Do you want to be saved?

Then believe in Jesus.

Because if you believe in Jesus –
that means that the Father has drawn you!

But also notice that Jesus doesn't mess around.

Jesus does not try to convince people to follow him!
He calls you to believe and follow.

This is not an argument.

They are trying to argue with Jesus.

They are grumbling and disputing –
but Jesus says to you –

“No, knock it off!”

If you have heard and learned from the Father,
then come to me – follow me – let's go!

The Jews are acting like their forefathers.

They are rejecting the Word of God and turning away from the Bread of Life.
And so Jesus calls it for what it is in v48-49.

c. “The Bread that I Will give for the Life of the World Is My Flesh”

⁴⁸ *I am the bread of life.* ⁴⁹ *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.*

Keep it up guys!

You wanna die?

Keep acting like your fathers – and you'll get what they got!

But (v50-51)

⁵⁰ *This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.* 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.”*

If you partake of me, Jesus says,
then you will live forever.

Moses gave you quail – and you choked and died on it.

But I will give you my flesh.

I will give my flesh “for the life of the world.”

We keep seeing this perspective in John.
What Jesus has come to do is nothing less than save the world.
John is not a universalist.
Jesus is not saying that every individual will be saved.
But Jesus *is saying* that he has come so that the world will be saved.

Humanity will be saved.
There will be individuals who refuse to participate in this new humanity –
Jesus does not condemn them –
they have condemned themselves,
because they hated the light.
But Jesus has come to give life to the world –
through giving his flesh for the life of the world.

This launches the final quarrel.
How can we eat this man's flesh?
What on earth is this man talking about!!!????

2. Jesus Answers the Disputing of the Jews (v52-59)

⁵² *The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*

What does Jesus do?
Does he help make everything clear?
Actually, he does--for those who have ears to hear!
listen carefully to his words (v53-55)

a. Life Depends on Eating the Flesh and Blood of the Son of Man

⁵³ *So Jesus said to them, "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. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.*

Jesus very carefully explains that you must continue to feed upon Christ
if you wish to have eternal life.

This eating is not merely a one-time eating.
It's not as though one bite of Jesus will make you live forever!
Jesus is teaching something difficult--yes,
but once you grasp it, it becomes very simple.

V56--"he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."
If you wish to understand this, listen to the next verse:
"As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father,
so he who feeds on me will live because of me."

Okay.

Jesus had said back in 5:26

"As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself."

Just as the Father gives life to the Son,
so also the Son gives life to US.

How does the Son receive life from the Father?

Well, as we've seen, the Son is ONE with the Father.

They are ONE God--they share in ONE life--one essence.

Even so,

when we are united with Christ, we share in his life.

As Paul says in Gal. 2.20,

"I am crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live,
but Christ who lives in me."

Christ's life must become yours.

And the only way that Christ's **life** can become yours, is if his **death** also becomes yours.

This is why we must partake of his flesh and of his blood.

In the OT sacrifices, the animal would be killed,
and then the people would partake of the animal.

In that sacrifice, the death of the animal would become their death
by virtue of their participation in the sacrifice.

So if you ate of the lamb,
then God would place your sins upon that lamb,
and that's lamb's death would replace your death.

But there was a problem with that system.

The death of the lamb became your death,
but you still died.

The manna in the wilderness provided temporary sustenance,
but then they died.

The problem is: how can you live forever,
when all your sacrifices keep dying?

This is where Christ's body and blood are different from all the others.

Because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead.

This is why Jesus keeps emphasizing that he will raise us at the last day.

HIS flesh and blood have the power of eternal life,
because HE will be raised from the dead.

Therefore, if you partake of Jesus's flesh and blood,
then you will live forever.

And, he goes on to say, [v53]

“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

You MUST partake of the flesh and blood of the Son of Man.
And this partaking must be an ongoing feeding.

b. Because the Living Father Sent Me

⁵⁷ 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.

In v57, "the one who feeds on me" refers not merely to a one-time feeding,
but to an ongoing feeding.

In other words,

as Jesus puts it in v56,

"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.

Those who believe in Christ,
those who have been drawn by the Father,
must also **abide** in him.

c. Whoever Feeds on This Bread Will Live Forever

⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread^[c] the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹ Jesus^[d] said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

It is not enough merely to believe once.

Christ calls us to abide in him--to remain in him--to feed upon him.

We do this every Sunday in our worship.

Indeed, we do this every day in our own private and family worship.

But we do this especially in the Lord's Supper.

Because it is in the Supper that we receive the clearest picture of this glorious truth!

When we come to the Table,

we are called to partake of the Living Bread.

And as we eat the Bread and drink the Cup,

we are participating in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

we are participating in his death and resurrection.

His life becomes ours once again.

How many of you come to church every Sunday feeling a bit weary?

How many of you have had an exhausting week?

How many of you have fallen prey to temptation in the last few days?

How many of you are weak and feel like you might collapse?

This is why Jesus gave us the Supper.

It is spiritual food.

In the Supper Christ offers you himself.

In the Supper, Christ comes to you and abides with you.

It is here that you find the grace and the mercy to continue through the next week.

Because the Eucharist is a means of grace.

It is what the Holy Spirit uses to unite us more and more with Christ.

Of course, apart from faith,

apart from God's work of drawing you to himself,

the Supper does nothing!

But to those who believe,

the Lord's Supper is one of the means that God uses to strengthen us

and nourish us with Christ.

3. The Spirit and the Flesh: How Will You Answer Jesus? (v60-71)

a. His Disciples Grumbled and Some Turned Back

⁶⁰ *When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"*

⁶¹ *But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this?" ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."*

When his disciples hear this, they are confused.

At this point Jesus has hundreds of disciples.

There are many who expect Jesus to be their political Messiah.

In that way, it's a lot like today.

There are many today who have their own idea of what Jesus should be.

But the real Jesus hears their grumbling,
and says "Does this offend you?"

Does the real Jesus make you nervous sometimes?

Does he scare you?

The tame Jesus that you imagine – the one who does what you tell him to do –
that's just a figment of your imagination!

“What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where he was before?”

In other words, there is NOTHING that Jesus can do to keep these people with him.

Only the Spirit can give life.

The words that Jesus speaks are spirit and they are life,

but apart from the faith that comes by the work of the Spirit,

there is NOTHING that will prevent these people from leaving.

As Jesus says in v65,
"Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to me
unless it has been granted to him by my Father."

The imaginary Jesus is more popular than the real Jesus!
But the real Jesus is the one who gave his flesh for the life of the world!

As if to prove this, many leave.
so Jesus turns to the 12--Do you also want to go away?

b. Peter's Confession (and Judas's Betrayal)

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." ⁷¹ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

Peter's response needs to be the response of our hearts:

"Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life.
And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God."

Does Peter understand everything?

No.
You don't need to understand everything to believe in Christ.
You simply need to know that there is nowhere else that you can find eternal life.
You need to believe and KNOW that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of the living God,
and that HE alone is the bread of life who gives life everlasting.

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!

Is that the cry of your heart?

Do you despair of all else?
Do you realize that this life is entirely futile and empty apart from Christ?

Brothers and sisters,

Your Lord Jesus is calling you to find your rest and hope in him.
He calls you abide in him--to live your life in his grace and by his power.
If you will trust in him, and partake of his body and his blood;
of his death and of his resurrection life,
then you will find eternal life.