

# Grumble Grumble

Then the Jews began to complain about (Jesus) because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven” (v. 41).

In John's Gospel, the phrase, “the Jews” usually refers to Jesus’ opponents -- usually in Jerusalem -- in the south. However, today’s Gospel takes place in Galilee -- in the north -- in the city of Capernaum. Jesus was raised in nearby Nazareth, but at some point, he moved to Capernaum and made that his home. We know this because Matthew tells us in chapter 4 “He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum.”

We read elsewhere that Jesus was rejected by the people of Nazareth -- his hometown as a child. Luke tells us that the people of Nazareth were so outraged by Jesus' preaching that they tried to kill him -- tried to throw him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-29). Now we are going to see him rejected in Capernaum -- in his hometown as an adult.

John says, “Then the Jews began to complain about (Jesus).” Why were they complaining? He had just returned home from a trip across the Sea of Galilee -- just a big lake, really -- where he had fed five thousand people with a few loaves and fishes. Now he was returning home. You would think that the people would welcome him with open arms. If he could feed five thousand people on the other side of the lake, what might he do in his hometown! Just think about the possibilities!

- He might solve the homeless problem!
- He might get the beggars off the street!
- He might even help the middle class -- they certainly deserve a break! They are the ones who do all the work, after all -- but they make too little money to get by and too much to get help. It would certainly be nice if Jesus would do something for them.

So you would think that these people would welcome Jesus with open arms -- the hometown boy made good -- the one who could put their town on the map.

And, in fact, they did just that. They welcomed Jesus home -- and for exactly those reasons -- but Jesus wasn't having any of it. He told them that they were interested

only in a free lunch, and said as much: “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life” (6:27). He also said, “I am the bread of life” (6:35). He said that he had come down from heaven (6:38) and told them to believe in him (6:29).

That was too much for them, and they began to complain -- some translations say that they began to grumble. I like that -- grumble! You can just hear the “grumble-grumble” coming from that crowd! Who does he think he is, talking like that!

Grumble, grumble! The crowd was upset because Jesus said that he was the bread of life come down from heaven! They said, “What is he talking about! We know him! He didn't come from heaven -- he moved here from Nazareth -- we know his father and mother!”

We can have a certain amount of sympathy for these people. Jesus was making some pretty extravagant claims. C.S. Lewis put it this way:

“A man who was merely a man  
and said the sort of things Jesus said  
wouldn't be a great moral teacher.  
He'd either be a lunatic --  
on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg--  
or else he'd be the Devil of Hell.  
You must make your choice.  
Either this man was, and is, the Son of God,  
or else a madman or something worse”

What would you think if your neighbor said that he was the bread of life come down from heaven!

Grumble, grumble! The Greek word is gonguzo -- the same word that is used of the Israelites when they complained to Moses in the wilderness:

- Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, and they grumbled, “There is no water out here in the desert. We are going to die of thirst: (Exod. 15:24).

Grumble, grumble!

- So Moses gave them water, and then they grumbled, “Oh, the food was so much better in Egypt. We are going to starve in this desert” (Exod. 16:3). Grumble, grumble!
- So Moses gave them food, but they continued to complain (Exod. 17:3). Grumble, grumble!

When I first read that story, I thought, “Those Israelites! They never learn! What a bunch of ingrates!”

And then I read this story about these Jesus in his hometown, and thought, “These people just saw Jesus feed thousands of people with a few loaves and fishes. Isn't that proof enough for them! What a bunch of dullards!”

But it isn't a bad idea, when you think that someone else is stupid, to take a look in the mirror. We aren't so different from the people in the Bible. If we look closely, we might see ourselves in them.

Grumble, grumble! The Israelites grumbled because God wasn't living up to their expectations -- or was saying things that they didn't want to hear -- or asking things that they didn't want to give. Does that sound like anyone that you know?

Little kids will raise a fuss won't they when they don't get what they want? Anyone who is a parent knows what it is to hear children grumble. It is telling I think that grumbling isn't something we have to be taught. It comes naturally and is part of our fallen nature.

I know that in my own life I do my share of grumbling. Just ask Peggy.

I want life to be easier. I have this tendency to look at other people thinking to myself there life is so much easier than mine and I grumble.

When I think back to my holiday there were times I grumbled about feeling inadequate as I compared myself to others with whom I spent time. I grumbled that my friend's eleven year-old was keen on playing baseball with me, while my

eleven-year-old would rather play Game Boy. Grumble grumble. I even grumbled to God in prayer much like the Israelites did in the desert.

- I grumble when I know people who are smarter than me and say to God why didn't you make me more intelligent.

Yes if I am honest I grumble far too much? How about you?

We are also tempted to complain when God wants something from us that we don't want to give:

- We read in the Bible about tithing -- and feel that we really should do that -- but we are already stretched to the limit. "Lord, I would like to tithe, but you just haven't given me enough money yet!" Grumble, grumble!
- Or we read in the Bible about sexual fidelity -- and we say, "Lord, get serious! This is the 21st Century!" Grumble, grumble!

I am like Lucy who asks Charlie Brown "Why do you think we're put on earth, Charlie Brown?" Charlie replies, "To make others happy."

Lucy says, "I don't think I'm making anyone very happy. Of course, nobody's making me very happy either."

Then in the final panel, Lucy screams at the top of her lungs, "SOMEBODY'S NOT DOING HIS JOB!"

This is a telling cartoon. Somehow I expect, and perhaps you do too that God will take care of us. That he will do our bidding. In a book called *The Governance of God*, the author Salvianus addresses this problem of grumbling when he writes:

Since we fulfill none of God's commands,  
why do we complain about God, who has more reason to complain about all of us?  
What is our reason for saying in sorrow that God does not heed us,  
when we ourselves do not heed Him?  
What is our reason for muttering that God does not look down towards earth,  
when we ourselves do not look up towards Heaven?

As we learn to look up to heaven we will learn to replace grumbling with gratitude. Remember Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (v. 35). His comment is precisely on target, because the people whom I have been describing are hungry and thirsty -- not because we have nothing, but because we want more. And if we had more, we would want more still.

How can we be satisfied if we refuse to be satisfied!

Jesus has the answer. He says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

What he is really promising is that, if we will place our lives in his hands -- trust him instead of the worldly "stuff" that we are so used to pursuing -- feed on his word instead spiritual junk food -- that we will be satisfied -- that we will find peace.

In the passage Jesus says at verse 44. "No one can come to me unless drawn by my Father."

The Bible commentator William Barclay notes that this word, drawn, "almost always implies some kind of resistance. It is the word for drawing a heavily laden net to the shore (John 21:6, 11). It is the word that is used of Paul and Silas being dragged before the magistrates in Philippi (Acts 16:19)... Always there is this idea of resistance. God can and does draw men, but man's resistance can defeat the pull of God" If we continue to grumble this can effect our relationship with God so that we become more focused on our grumbling Spirit and it turns our heart away from God and his word.

As we learn to see our grumbling for what it is, resistance to God and thanklessness and learn to turn our hearts towards Jesus grumbling can be replaced by peace.

It seems impossible, but we have seen it happen. We all know people who love Jesus -- people whose focus is different -- people who seem so calm and grounded. We wonder how they do it. We would like to have the rock-steadiness that we see in their lives.

Jesus says that we can have it. He says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me

will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Try it! Trust him, and see if his promise is not faithful!