

Jews Grumble and Stumble

HN/SS 26/12/04 am

Reading: Isaiah 7, Matthew 7

Study: John 6: 41-46

Psalms: 107:1-7, 8-11, 17-22, 40-43

Murmuring and muttering. Grumbling and stumbling, confounded – confused – complaining. This is the picture we get of the Jews who saw the miracles and heard the words of Jesus. In Jerusalem he healed a cripple – but it was on the Sabbath. They condemned him to death. In Galilee after seeing him feed 5000 men they wanted to make him king. Then they heard him declare *I am the bread of life. The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.* They could have believed in him and received this life. But No – they grumbled among themselves.

Still today we find men complaining about life yet grumbling about the gospel of Jesus Christ- when all Jesus calls them to do is believe. I recently tried to share this glorious gospel of Jesus Christ with a man. I wanted to read a passage and he began to walk off. I said let me pray for you and your family. I heard later he was very angry at me.

It can be the same in the church – don't forget the Jews were very religious people. Many a church-goer has mumbled and grumbled about the word preached and refused to listen any more. They prefer to sit at home complaining about the church and the preacher. They live in the delusion of self- righteousness just like these Jews.

At this time of the year in particular great confusion about Jesus arises. People try to celebrate the birth of Jesus – but who is Jesus. They see nativity scenes and sing carols. 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will toward men' they hear as they push and shove their way around car parks and shopping centres. Jesus was born in a stable and wrapped in swaddling cloths – we struggle to comprehend such a poverty stricken scene today. Jesus a king born in such humble circumstances! The Jews stumbled over this also.

The Jews however did not have to contend with Santa Claus, Christmas trees and all the rest. We see the confusion all around us – 'we cannot have a Christmas trees because it is a religious symbol' said someone. Confusion reigns in the minds of many today, just as it did in the minds of these Jews.

Why did these Jews stumble? Why did they not accept Jesus and believe in him? Why do people stumble today at such a wonderful message – the message of the gospel? As Paul wrote – this gospel is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (I Corinthians 1).

Incarnation

The Jews knew the Scriptures or thought they did. They knew about Jesus also. 'They thought they knew all there was to know about Jesus' paternity, but they spoke in ignorance not only of his virginal conception but also of his true identity'.

Jesus came down from heaven- bread from heaven! In unbelief they murmured among themselves – *is not this Jesus the son of Joseph. We know his mother and father. How can he say I have come down from heaven?* Murmur is a good translation for this is an onomatopoeic word in the Greek. They would not believe that Jesus was divine. They would not believe the evidence of the miraculous signs. They would not believe his words. They would not even believe the Scriptures which speak about him. Unbelief is dangerous.

John does not write in detail about the birth of Jesus but Matthew and Luke do. They make it abundantly clear that Joseph was not the father of Jesus but that Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:35). The Jews of course did not have the written gospel but they could have enquired of his parents who knew full well that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus. Joseph was probably still alive and Mary certainly was. But no – they did not bother to ask.

Neither did they bother to look into the Scriptures where the prophet Isaiah (7:14) said: *Behold the virgin will conceive and bear a Son and you shall call his name Immanuel.* Immanuel means God with us. Maybe they knew this passage but did not understand it. It was not important to their understanding of the Scriptures. They knew the Law of Moses of course and were seeking salvation through the law. They were looking for Messiah, but a political deliver not a poor man from Nazareth who would die on a Cross.

Still today people will read the Scriptures and remain blind to the truth of the gospel. They come with preconceived ideas; they come and sit above the word of God trying to make it say what they want it to say. Paul warned Timothy (II Timothy 6) about those who proudly claim to have knowledge but in truth know nothing – those that are *obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envystrife and reviling* .

Avoid what is falsely called knowledge he wrote. Knowledge is good. But we must also look at the framework in which we place that knowledge. What a great tragedy it is today when scientific knowledge is placed in the framework of evolution leading men to glory themselves rather than God the Creator. What a tragedy it is that the Jews placed their knowledge of the Scriptures in the framework of salvation through the law and a Messiah that would bring only earthly deliverance. You possess knowledge of this world and of the Scriptures but what is the framework in which you place that knowledge?

Note what the Jews missed in all that Jesus said. He came down from heaven for what purpose? To give life, eternal life! I am the bread of life. The Jews made no mention of this in their grumbling. Their grumbling led to stumbling with regard to salvation. He came to satisfy spiritual hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The Jews stopped listening it seems when they heard Jesus claim he was sent from heaven. They did not hear his marvelous, wonderful offer of life to those who believe in him. It can be the same today. People take offense at what the preacher says or does and they stop listening. They murmur and complain. Some even walk out. They refuse to come to worship and deny themselves the blessings of the Lord. Beware what is falsely called knowledge.

Oh, is it good to examine the Scriptures and see that the preaching is faithful to Scripture. By all means be like the Bereans. But not like the Jews who were blinded by their traditions and

self righteousness. How much better it would have been if they had come to Jesus sincerely asking him to help them understand.

Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you shall find said Jesus. If only they had heard the words this is the will of him who sent me that everyone who sees the son and believes in him may have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day.

Sovereignty of God

How did Jesus respond to their murmuring and grumbling? He warned them against such behaviour. Such behaviour is very dangerous. It is dangerous to the faith of the individual and dangerous to the life of the church. But it still goes on in the church today. Murmuring leads to scheming and plotting as men try to get their own way.

Their fathers of course were known for their murmuring against Moses. Although the Jews now revered Moses their fathers gave him a very hard time in the desert. They got sick of the manna and wanted meat. *We remember the fish...and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic we ate in Egypt.* The Lord was angry with them. He gave them meat but also sent a great plague upon them (Numbers 11).

How did Jesus answer the murmuring of the Jews? He could have explained to them from Scripture about the virgin birth, or told them to go and ask Mary about Jesus' birth. But they had already seen his miracles and heard his words. Were they ready to listen? No they were refusing to listen. Jesus had spoken earlier about casting pearls before swine.

Rather Jesus pointed out to them that God was sovereign in choosing and indeed drawing men unto himself. *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.* The inability of man, of himself, to respond to the gospel must be understood. Jesus had already declared that all whom the Father gives will come to me. God grace is irresistible.

Now in the negative form he states that unless the Father draws a man he cannot come. Man is dead in his sin. He cannot make himself alive. Only the Father can quicken dead souls. Only when drawn by the Father, can a person come to Jesus.

'So long as a man remains and is content to remain confident in his own ability, without divine help, to assess experience and the meaning of experience he cannot come to the Lord, he cannot believe; only the Father can move him to this step with its incalculable and final results (Lightfoot).

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