



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 6: 41-51

Spring 2022

"Cords Of Love"

TRANSCRIPT

Well thank you Joe for the announcements and that story of what happened to your uncle and what the Lord taught him. And that's what Jesus speaks of in this text this morning in John chapter 6. We're going to look at verses 41 through 51.

This is the day after, you'll remember, the Lord did His fourth miracle of feeding the multitude; and the people were so impressed they wanted to make Him king. He eluded that.

They found Him the next day in Capernaum, in the synagogue of Capernaum and that's where we are in our text. He's been teaching them; He said, for example in verse 38, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

They didn't like that. So we read in verse 41,

⁴¹Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." ⁴²They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven?'" ⁴³Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to

Me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

John 6: 41-51

This is a text with a great deal of very important theology for us, so I pray the LORD teach us and build us up in the faith.

(Message) It's been said that, 'Everyone loves a love story.' It's probably true. One of Shakespeare's most popular plays is *Romeo and Juliet*. It's the story of two young people who were so in love they could not live in this world without each other. Well that's love of a kind. It's romantic love, which is mutual love.

But there's another kind of love which is far greater. It's not mutual, it's not shared—it's one sided, it's unconditional, it's love for one's enemies. We can understand love for the lovely, for those who love us—but not love for those who reject us, who oppose us. That's a very different and a very greater love. It's selfless love, and it's the love that moved God the Father, to send His only begotten Son into the world to die for a world that was at war with Him.

Now that's the greatest love story, and the love explained in John chapter 6. In fact, from the beginning of our passage in verse 41, we see the kind of people that God loved and for whom Christ died. In response of the crowd to His teaching we get a glimpse of what these people were like: they "were grumbling about Him". In fact in the Greek text, the first word in this sentence is this word *grumbled*, which lays special

emphasis upon it. "Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him," or literally, "Grumbling therefore were the Jews about Him."

They were unhappy with His teaching, this teaching in which He said, 'He had come down from heaven.' They had seen the connection between the bread that Jesus gave them the day before and the manna that Israel had been given in the wilderness; and they wanted more of it. "Lord" they said, "always give us this bread." (vs34). Now He had warned them not to seek that. Life is more than material wellbeing. "Do not work for the food which perishes," He said, "but for the food which endures to eternal life." (vs27). But they weren't listening.

So Jesus makes things even clearer to them. He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." (vs41b). He has a heavenly, divine origin and He gives eternal life. Now, that got their attention. They understood something of what He was claiming about Himself...and they rejected it.

They knew His parents: His father, Joseph, and His mother Mary. And they had seen Him at the carpenter's bench. So they asked, "How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven?' " (vs42).

They had no idea of the virgin birth. They had no understanding of the prologue of this Gospel: Chapter 1, verses 1 through 18 and its revelation. They didn't know that, 'the Christ is the Word, who was in the beginning with God; and was God.'

Any suggestion of that, though, offended them. In their mind it was a fantastic claim, for 'He was one of them.' He was a carpenter; He was the son of a carpenter and no better than they were—certainly not a visitor from heaven. And the idea that they needed eternal life, that He said He could give, also figured into their grumbling. They had no spiritual need that He could meet for they were Jews; they were Israelites.

But in all of this, they were very much like the world today. This is not just a Jewish issue; this is Gentile as well. It's a problem of the human race. It's a problem of the human heart. And so in this modern age of science and naturalism, men may hold to the golden rule but they dismiss the deity of Christ and salvation in the cross as outdated, dogmatic orthodoxies.

Christianity for them is ethical, it's not theological. People don't believe that they are alienated from God or that they have any need for the Gospel—so they have no hunger for the bread of heaven.

Well, that's the world today in the 21st century, just as it was in the 1st century. Human nature hasn't changed. The Gospel is all foolishness to them. Which really shouldn't surprise us as we read this or as we find that in the people that we talk to in everyday life because the Bible teaches just that.

It's what Paul stated in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 14 and 15, "The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them..." Jesus knew that. So it's instructive to see how He responded to this crowd, this grumbling crowd. In verse 43 He stated, "Do not grumble among yourselves."

"In the first place, their grumbling was insulting.", that's how Don Carson, one of the commentators on the Gospel of John put it. And it was: It was blasphemous. They had witnessed His miracles: They had witnessed His miracles all through Galilee before they even witnessed that miracle the day before in which He fed the multitude. On what ground did they question Him?

But also, His response was corrective. They would never come to the meaning of His words, never understand His revelation by discussion and by debate. Understanding comes through faith. The right response is given by that distressed father in Mark, chapter 9, verse 24, "I believe. Help my unbelief." They were confident in their own ability, but spiritual understanding comes, not by natural ability, it comes supernaturally, it comes by divine help.

And that's what the Lord states clearly in the next verse, verse 44, 'No man can come to Me', "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." Now the Lord said that earlier in verse 37, only in a bit

different language. There it was in the positive, "All that the Father gives Me will come...": meaning 'will believe'.

Here the Lord puts it in the negative, "No one can come...unless the Father...draws him." In both verses, the emphasis is on the divine initiative—that God is the first mover. Men are first given and then drawn by God.

That's 'sovereign grace', often referred to as 'irresistible grace'. That's the theological term, *irresistible*. And it's a doctrine and a term that's often misunderstood as being *unstoppable*: Like an avalanche of snow that falls from a high mountain and comes with irresistible force that sweeps everything away in its path; houses, trees, cars—and people unwillingly, (against their wills), are swept away.

Well that's not the biblical doctrine of irresistible grace. It's not a coercive force: God does not compel people to believe against their will so that He drags them into heaven kicking and screaming. Now people sometimes speak of their conversion like that. C. S. Lewis described himself as 'kicking, struggling, looking in every direction for a chance to escape'—but all that described was God's patience in drawing him to Himself. When conversion came for Lewis, it came without regret. In fact he titled his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*.

God never does violence to a person's will. So words other than irresistible are sometimes used; like *efficacious*, or *effectual*, or *unconquerable grace*. All that *irresistible* means is that the Holy Spirit so works in the lives of people that they ultimately do believe; He changes those whom God has chosen. He makes them willing so that they all come; not by force, not by compulsion, but gladly, willingly, and without fail.

And that is necessary because, of themselves, men will not come. They cannot come. Notice that again, "No one can come", the Lord said. (vs44a). Every man, every woman is unable to, due to his or her spiritual condition.

Theologians traditionally speak of that spiritual condition, that *inability*, as 'total depravity'—which also can be misleading. A person hears that and it suggests to them that everyone is equally wicked, degenerate, and as bad as they can be. But that's not the meaning of *total depravity*. What it means is, Adam's fall affected everyone, everyone in the human race, (except our Lord). And the effect on each individual is total: Sin has infected man in all his parts, body and soul, physically, mentally, emotionally, volitionally—in every way. And the result of that is man's mind and will are under the influence of the fall. They are under the influence of sin and they're governed by wrong principles.

Christian apologist, Cornelius Van Til described unbelieving man as, "Having colored glasses fixed to his face so that all he sees of God's revelation is seen through these tinted glasses, these tinted lenses—and it distorts everything. And they're so firmly fixed that man can't remove them, they are part of him."

Only God can remove them through the Holy Spirit and regeneration through the new birth. Only then can man see God as He truly is—as his Creator and real; and Christ as the Savior. But until then the Gospel is just foolishness to the natural man, the unbelieving, unregenerate person; male, female, he or she can't believe. No one can come. It's impossible.

So really, a better description of man's condition is '*total inability*'. He is unable to think clearly about God. He may be a brilliant person, brilliant in math, a theoretical physicist—an Einstein. But he can't understand God so he can't choose God.

It doesn't mean that man or woman can't choose. When Martin Luther spoke of the will as being "in bondage" he didn't mean people couldn't make decisions or choices. They can and do. Everyone exercises his or her will freely. But because all people are fallen and infected with sin, our choices are determined by our nature; which the Bible says is naturally "hostile toward God", "at enmity with God". If that sounds harsh, turn to Romans 8, verse 7: That's exactly what Paul says, 'We are at war with God, naturally.'

We can illustrate man's condition from the animal kingdom. Many animals are carnivorous, and others are herbivorous. Some eat meat, others only eat grass. You could place a bale of hay in front of a lion and it wouldn't eat it. It would starve before it ate hay. Put meat in front of a lamb and it won't eat it. Not because they are physically unable to do it. They're not. They are able. They have mouths and teeth. They have stomachs and appetites. But it's against their nature to do it; and so lions don't eat hay and lambs don't eat meat. And it's the same way with man, with his human nature.

Natural man does not believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not because he's unable to think and to reason, but because he doesn't have the will in the right direction. He has a will. He makes decisions. He can choose. He has all of these. The fall didn't affect man's faculties. It didn't rob him of his faculties, remove these things like a mind and a will; but it so affected his will and his mind that his very nature is turned against the Light. He can't see the Light correctly. He can't see the truth. It's like putting hay before a lion.

And so, when he hears the invitation of the Gospel to believe in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, he won't believe it because, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 14, it's "foolishness to him." 'You're telling me I'm a sinner?! I'm not a sinner! I'm a good citizen.' He can't understand the meaning of the Gospel in the sense that he cannot understand it as true. He can understand the words. He can understand the meaning in the sense of the point of it and what is being said, but he can't understand it in the sense that it's true—and it's to be believed. In his mind, or her mind, it's "foolishness." And if it's foolishness, one doesn't choose it. If it's foolishness, it can't be wise and right. So in his mind, he dismisses it as that.

Now, what I'm saying, what Luther said, what I think the apostle Paul teaches, and what I think our Lord is saying here, (that man's mind is blind and his will is in bondage), is something that the natural man does not agree with. For example, Pelagius disagreed with that violently.

You remember Pelagius? He was the opponent of St. Augustin. He didn't believe we inherited anything bad from Adam. He got furious, in fact, when he read Augustin's prayer in *The Confessions*, "Command what You will, but give what You command." (In other words, 'Lord, You can command me to do whatever You wish, and I will do it if and only if You give me what You command. Give me the ability.')

Well, Pelagius didn't like that. In fact, it made him so angry he almost got in a fist fight with someone over it. He taught 'free will'. He taught 'human ability'—that, 'We can choose the good as easily as we can choose the bad. God's grace is the Law and its warnings and its promises. God's grace is the example that He gave us in Christ. And if we just follow those, we're able to do it. That's all we need.' Now that's the theology of the natural man. That's the theology of "The man on the street", as John Stott put it. That's the way things appear to be.

But they're not that way—not according to Scripture. Sin has penetrated every part of man to affect and influence his perception of things. The Bible teaches that—from Genesis to Revelation. Prophet Jeremiah wrote in Jeremiah 17, verse 9, "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" That's a rhetorical question and the point is, 'No one can know it. No one can thoroughly understand one's mind and one's heart.'

In Romans 3, Paul quotes Psalm 14 and Psalm 53, which state that "No one is righteous." "No one understands." "No one seeks for God." (Rom 3:10-11). —No one. No, not one.

That is universally the human condition—and mankind cannot fix it. They don't want to fix it because they are not able to perceive the problem. Their spiritual eyes are out of focus. They don't see things correctly.

It's like the Hubble Space Telescope, which was, until recently, our window on deep space. It was launched in 1990, but weeks later it was clear that there was a problem. The images it sent back were not clear. The mirrors had been polished to the

wrong shape. Only slightly—by a fraction of a nanometer. But it was enough so that it was out of focus and the function was worthless.

Well that's man's spiritual vision. It's out of focus. The government and NASA had a choice to make; that is, abandon the telescope or fix it at great cost. They chose to go back up and correct the problem.

And God chose to come down and correct the problem. That's what Jesus said next, 'The Father *sent* the Son on a mission': It was to redeem the lost. And further, 'the Father,' Jesus said, '*draws* people to Him.' That's His sovereign work of grace.

This word *draw* is used later in the Gospel, chapter 18, of Peter *drawing* his sword. It's used in chapter 21 of the disciples *dragging* a net full of fish ashore. In Acts 16, it's used of Paul and Silas being *dragged* into the marketplace in Philippi to face the authorities.

William Barkley, who has written a number of popular New Testament commentaries, did a word study on this word *draw*. And he wrote that "Always there is this idea of resistance." But oddly, he then added that, "Man's resistance can defeat the pull of God." I say *oddly* because there's not one example of successful resistance in the New Testament in regard to this word *draw*. Peter got his sword out, the disciples got the net ashore, Paul and Silas ended up before the authorities. Man cannot defeat God's pull. Man may resist for a time, like C. S. Lewis did, but ultimately God's grace prevails—and is irresistible.

But again, He does not draw people violently to Himself; forcing them to come against their wills. He draws them lovingly so that they are persuaded and enabled to come to Him; and come willingly, come joyfully.

Hosea, the great love story of the Old Testament, speaks of God leading His people back to Himself with *ropes* or *cords* of love.(Hos 11:4). The same language is in Jeremiah 31, verse 3, where God spoke to Israel. He called Israel His rebellious people and then said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness." God does not force anyone into a relationship with Him. But those

He draws always come and they come gladly—and they come without fail. He's God; He's God almighty.

How does He do that? What are these 'cords of love' that He spoke of in Hosea and that He uses to draw people? Well, I think it's explained next in verse 45, when Jesus said that, 'God teaches them', and quotes the Old Testament as proof of this. Isaiah 54, verse 13, "All your sons will be taught of the LORD." God illumines their minds. God enlightens them. He persuades people of the truth with the truth. Makes it understandable.

Here in John, the text is translated, "And they shall all be taught of God." (vs45). That's not 'universalism', not, 'all without exception', obviously, but 'all who are drawn.' They are taught. They understand. So why was it that you and your college friend heard the same Gospel, the same night, under the same circumstances, and you believed, and he or she didn't? You were taught. He or she wasn't. Why did Augustin understand all of this and Pelagius didn't? —Because Pelagius wasn't very bright? No, he was a very intelligent man, very influential man. He wasn't *taught*. He wasn't *drawn*. Augustin was.

That's what the Lord is teaching here. And if it seems unfair that He would draw some and not others, remember, He's drawing rebels, those who don't want Him. It's grace, it's love for enemies—not Romeo for Juliet. It's as P. T. Forsyth put it, "We were rebels, taken with weapons in our hands." So the Lord's words here are reason for thanksgiving: Apart from His teaching, none would come. Because of His teaching, all who are taught do come. And they're many. They're not few.

What an encouragement that is to us, or it should be when we feel that we fail in our attempts to evangelize and use the Gospel in a persuasive and effective way. But ultimately we're not the teacher—God is; The Holy Spirit is and He does not fail. He opens eyes and He draws the lost into salvation.

That's love, and the love that we see here. The Lord was teaching them about the love of God and He was teaching them in a loving way. He wasn't teaching man's

inability and God's sovereignty in order to close doors on people and end all their hope on these grumbling people. He was showing them their need and humbling them.

Arthur Pink wrote, "If it be true that I am powerless, what then can I do? Why, acknowledge my helplessness and cry out for help. If I cannot come to Christ except the Father draws me, then my responsibility is to beg the Father to draw me. That's the effect this should have on one."

And it is to that human responsibility that the Lord turns in the next verses, in verses 46 through 51, and the necessity to act—the necessity of faith: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life." (vs47). Only believers have eternal life. Faith is necessary. It's the only way to life which is only in Christ. And the Lord emphasizes that by again calling Himself "the bread of life." He is the source of life and sustains that life; just as bread sustains human life. He alone, He only satisfies the hunger of the human soul. And as we nourish our souls on Him, we become like Him. We're changed.

I've read that certain silk worms have their silk colored by the leaves that they eat. Well that's true of us when we feed on Christ, when we study the Scriptures, when we learn of Him; we're colored like Christ—and become like Him. The things we do, the deeds that we do, our actions, reflect Him. We have love for others the way He had love for us.

Well, the crowd in the synagogue was looking for satisfaction of a different kind—only material satisfaction. They wanted literal bread, like the bread their ancestors ate in the wilderness—manna. And in a way you can understand that. It was good food. The psalmist called it 'angels food.' (Ps 78:25). Who wouldn't want that? But it was only material. It only satisfied, in a way, physically—and only for a moment. And all of those who ate that bread died.

The bread Jesus offered was very different. It too, came down from heaven—but from the very court of heaven. And all who eat it, He said in verse 50, 'do not die'; don't

die spiritually; they don't die eternally. But they must eat; they must act; they must believe—that is their human responsibility. There's no life without faith.

And He makes that all the more clear in verse 51, "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." 'Eating' is believing.

Back in chapter 4 with the woman at the well, 'drinking' was believing. Here 'eating' is believing. A person must believe in Him in order to have that life which never ends. But in saying that, the Lord stated specifically what they were to believe about Him in order to truly be believing in Him.

There are three things, three articles of faith that are given here in verse 51. *First* is that He has 'come down from heaven'. They were grumbling about that for, 'It didn't make sense to them. They knew who He was, He's the carpenter!...He didn't come down from heaven.'

But that's what one must believe. And what that means is that He is of heavenly origin, so it means to believe in the deity of Christ. One must believe that He is the eternal Son of God, the second member of the Trinity. That's saving faith—it is in that.

There are many 'Jesuses' in the world that are believed in by people. There's the Jesus of the Jehovah's Witnesses, there's the Jesus of the Mormons, there's the Jesus of Protestant liberalism—the 'good man' and 'moral teacher.' But anything short of believing in the deity of Christ, that He is the eternal Son of God, (as I said), that He is the second Person of the Trinity, the Creator of all things, the Sustainer of all things ... anything short of that is not saving faith.

But also He is a man. He's a true man; and that's the *second* article of faith. He speaks here of His flesh. John wrote that early in the book, in chapter 1, verse 14 where he said, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." It's just as important to believe in the Lord's humanity as it is to believe in His deity, because it was as a man that He saved us through His sacrificial death. Only a human being could be the representative and the substitute of human beings. So it was necessary that He become one of us.

"The bread..." He said, "...which I will give for the life of the world..." is Himself, "...My flesh." (vs51b). He willingly gave Himself up to death, "for the life of the world." That's when and how He gained this endless life—this eternal life that He gives.

And that's the *third* article of faith, that Christ is our *substitute*, that He took our place and bore the punishment in our place. We're not saved by, 'trying' to follow Jesus and His life; 'trying' to live like Him—we can't do that. No one can do that. We are saved by trusting in His death for us—His death in our place, suffering the judgment that we deserve. That is true for all who believe whoever they may be.

He gave Himself "for the life of the world". That's the scope of His salvation. That's the breadth of His salvation. It is worldwide. It is for all kinds of people—and for vast multitudes. Now that is truly a love story.

Earlier I called this whole work of salvation 'The greatest love story.' *Romeo and Juliet* is a wonderful story about the joy of love and the strength of love. But it ends sadly with death separating them from the world, and separating them from one another.

But Christ's death didn't separate us from Him. It brought us to Him. It gained for us Him—forever. And it doesn't end in death—but in life with His resurrection from the dead. And all of that is done for us.

Paul wrote in Romans 5, "While we were still helpless", (vs6), this was done; "While we were yet sinners, (vs8), this was done for us; "While we were enemies", (vs10), this was done for us...and not when we were lovers.

God's love is unconditional love. It saves the unworthy. It brings the unable. It's love that only blesses unto eternal life, which begins at the moment of faith.

Do you have that life? If not, the way to receive it is through faith, and faith alone. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved"; it's that simple. (Acts 16:31). Don't think it's impossible because Jesus said, 'No one can come unless the

Father draws him.' You are powerless to save yourself; you need to understand that. But in understanding that, cry out to the LORD who does save, 'Cry to Him!'

When a person falls and breaks his leg and is utterly helpless to stand or walk, what does he do? Well, he doesn't sit there and just say, "Well, I guess that's the end." No he cries out for help! The LORD hears us when we cry to Him. And He'll hear you when you cry. Everyone who is drawn by Him, calls to Him and believes in Him—and all who do are forgiven and saved forever. May God help you to do that if you've not done it.

And if you have, may this be something to rejoice in: God's great unconditional love that has brought us to Him when we could not bring ourselves or had any desire to. May God use that to sanctify us and to give us a great appreciation and thankfulness—and the desire to serve Him.

Father, we do cry 'Hallelujah!' in our hearts. We should as we consider what a great Savior You are. It's all of You. It's all of grace. We could not save ourselves. We cannot come in and of ourselves—but we came, we who have believed in Your Son, because You enabled us to. And You taught us; and You taught us the meaning of the Gospel. We understood it as true and believed it by your grace. So we give You the praise and the thanks, Father.

May we think about these things throughout the week and have a great appreciation for Your goodness to us and may that affect the way we behave and the way we seek to serve You.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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