

# Gospel of John: Chapters 4–6

A Verse-by-Verse Teaching Commentary

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# Chapter 4

## John 4:1–6 — The Stage Is Set: From Judea to Samaria

### VERSES 1–3

“Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.”

The Pharisees have been monitoring Jesus’ growing ministry, and the report of his surpassing John’s disciple-count signals escalating tension. John’s parenthetical clarification — that Jesus himself did not baptize — guards against factions forming around the baptizer rather than around Jesus himself (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:13–15). The withdrawal from Judea is not retreat but redirection. Nothing in John’s Gospel happens by accident; the same divine necessity that governs the cross governs every movement of Jesus’ ministry.

### VERSE 4

“And he had to pass through Samaria.”

The Greek word *dei* — “had to,” or “it was necessary” — is the word of divine compulsion used throughout the Gospels for events ordained by God (cf. 3:14, “the Son of Man must be lifted up”; Luke 24:26). Most Jews avoided Samaria entirely, taking the longer route through the Jordan Valley to bypass Samaritan territory. Jesus’ route is not geographical convenience but divine appointment. The woman at the well is not an interruption to Jesus’ journey — she is its destination.

**dei:** divine necessity / must; appears 101 times in the NT, always expressing God’s ordained purpose

A brief historical note: The Samaritans were descendants of Israelites who remained after the Assyrian conquest of 722 BC and intermarried with Gentile settlers brought to repopulate the land (2 Kings 17:24–41). They accepted only the Pentateuch as Scripture, worshipped Yahweh, and had built their own temple on Mount Gerizim (destroyed by the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus in 128 BC). The hostility between Jews and Samaritans was deep, mutual, and centuries old.

### VERSES 5–6

“So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.”

The well of Jacob is rooted in Genesis 33:19 and 48:22 — land purchased by Jacob and eventually given to Joseph. The geography carries weight: this is the inheritance of Joseph, and Jesus is about to offer something far greater than any patriarchal inheritance. John deliberately records Jesus’ weariness — he is fully human, genuinely exhausted from the journey. This is not theatrical; the incarnation means real hunger, real thirst, real fatigue (cf. Hebrews 4:15, “one who in every respect has been tempted as we are”).

The sixth hour is approximately noon — the hottest part of the day, when respectable women did not typically come to draw water (the usual time was morning or evening). The woman’s arrival at noon is already a signal of social marginalization. The dramatic irony is exquisite: the one who will offer living water is sitting thirsty by a well.

## John 4:7–15 — The Request and the Living Water

### VERSES 7–8

“A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)”

Jesus initiates — a social transgression on two counts. Jewish men did not speak publicly to women they did not know, and Jews did not share vessels with Samaritans, whom they considered ritually impure. Yet Jesus opens by asking her for something, which places him in a position of apparent need rather than superiority. This is consistent with the entire pattern of the incarnation: the one who is Lord of all approaches human beings from a posture of humility and vulnerability.

### VERSE 9

“The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?’ (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)”

She is perceptive and direct. She names the cultural reality immediately rather than simply complying. John’s parenthetical confirms the cultural chasm Jesus is deliberately crossing. Her directness is itself a mark of character — she will engage honestly throughout this conversation, unlike Nicodemus who deflects with questions (3:4, 9).

#### VERSE 10

“Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’”

Jesus pivots from what he is asking to what he is offering. The phrase “if you knew” (Greek: *ei edeis*) implies that a complete understanding of who Jesus is would transform the entire encounter — not just the conversation but her whole life. “Living water” (Greek: *hydor zōn*) in Hebrew idiom (*mayim chayyim*) meant flowing or spring water as opposed to stagnant cistern water. The woman will understand it that way. Jesus means something immeasurably greater: water that gives life itself, which John later interprets as the Spirit poured out after Jesus’ glorification (7:37–39).

#### VERSES 11–12

“Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”

Her response is not foolish — it is concrete and logical. The well is approximately 100 feet deep. He has no bucket. And if he is offering better water than Jacob’s well, he is claiming to surpass the patriarch who is honored as the common ancestor of both Jews and Samaritans. Her rhetorical question — “Are you greater than our father Jacob?” — carries the full weight of Johannine irony: the reader knows the answer is yes, emphatically yes, though she does not yet.

#### VERSES 13–14

“Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’”

Physical water meets a need that always recurs — thirst returns. The water Jesus gives becomes an internal spring rather than an external resource. The recipient does not simply receive water; they become a source of it. The Greek word for “welling up” (*hallomenou*) is the same word used in Acts 3:8 for the lame man leaping after his healing — it conveys irrepressible, dynamic upwelling. This anticipates 7:38: “out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

**hallomenou:** to spring up, leap, well up — a word of vigorous, spontaneous movement

#### VERSE 15

“The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.’”

She still understands literally, but her desire is genuine and her words carry a double meaning many interpreters have noticed: she is tired of the well in more ways than one. The pattern of her coming alone at noon suggests social isolation and shame. The daily trek to the well is itself a burden. Her request, though not yet spiritually formed, is an authentic expression of longing — and Jesus will answer the longing beneath the literal request.

### John 4:16–26 — True Worship and the Messiah Revealed

#### VERSES 16–18

“Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come here.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.’”

Jesus’ pivot to her domestic situation is not a change of subject — it is the deepest possible continuation of it. He is offering living water to satisfy the deepest thirst, and he now names the wells she has been drinking from: five marriages and a current live-in relationship. In the ancient world, five marriages almost certainly involved serial abandonment, divorce, or loss rather than simply death. Jesus states her history with complete

accuracy and zero condemnation. He calls her honest (“What you have said is true”), credits her with truthfulness even in a deflecting answer. This graceful confrontation is unlike anything in the ancient world: he sees her fully and does not turn away.

**VERSE 19**

“The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.’”

The recognition that Jesus has supernatural knowledge moves her to identify him as a prophet — one who speaks and knows the Word of God. In response, she immediately raises the most pressing theological controversy of her world. This is not deflection; for a Samaritan, worship location was the defining question of religious identity.

**VERSE 20**

“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”

Mount Gerizim, visible from the well, was the Samaritan holy mountain (cf. Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12). The Samaritans grounded their worship tradition in the Pentateuch, which commanded blessings spoken from Gerizim. Jews insisted that Jerusalem — where Solomon built the temple ordained by David — was the legitimate center of worship. This was not a minor theological nuance; it was the defining boundary between the two communities.

**VERSES 21–24**

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’”

Jesus dissolves the geographical dispute entirely by announcing that the era of place-bound worship is ending. The “hour” that “is coming and is now here” is the eschatological moment that Jesus himself embodies and that his glorification (the cross and resurrection) will fully inaugurate. He does not avoid the historic question: “salvation is from the Jews” is an honest acknowledgment of Jewish priority in revelation and in the line through which the Messiah comes. But then he transcends it.

True worship requires two things: spirit and truth. “Spirit” (Greek: *pneuma*) points to the Holy Spirit, through whom alone God can be truly worshipped — worship is Spirit-enabled, not geographically located. “Truth” points to Jesus himself: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (14:6). Both the Spirit and the Son are necessary for genuine worship of the Father. This is one of the most important passages in all of Scripture on the theology of Christian worship: it is Trinitarian, spiritual, and liberated from every form of geographic or institutional confinement.

**VERSE 25**

“The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.’”

The Samaritan expectation of the Messiah was shaped not by the Davidic royal tradition but by the Mosaic Taheb — a restorer figure who would teach all things (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15–18). Her expectation is revelatory and instructional: the Messiah comes to explain. She has prepared her own heart to receive the answer.

**VERSE 26**

“Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he.’”

The Greek is *ego eimi* — “I AM.” This is the divine name revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14) and the signature declaration of the Johannine Jesus (cf. 6:35; 8:12; 8:58; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). It is the most direct and unambiguous messianic self-declaration Jesus makes to anyone in the four Gospels — and he makes it not to a Sanhedrin member in Jerusalem but to a five-times-married Samaritan woman, alone at a well at noon. The pattern of divine grace consistently confounds every human scale of priority and worthiness.

**John 4:27–42 — The Harvest: Witness and Belief****VERSE 27**

“Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you seek?’ or, ‘Why are you talking with her?’”

The disciples’ silence is itself instructive. They have grown enough in their relationship with Jesus to recognize that questioning him would be misplaced, even when his behavior violates their social assumptions. Their restraint is a quiet mark of developing trust.

#### VERSES 28–30

“So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’ They went out of the town and were coming to him.”

She leaves her water jar — a detail that has delighted readers for two thousand years. She came for water and found something that made the water jar irrelevant. Her witness is not polished theology; it is honest testimony: “he told me all that I ever did.” And her invitation is not a declaration but a question: “Can this be the Christ?” The open question is more inviting than a pronouncement. She becomes the first missionary in John’s Gospel, and her method — personal experience combined with an open invitation — remains among the most effective approaches to sharing faith.

#### VERSES 31–34

“Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, ‘Rabbi, eat.’ But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’... ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.’”

The disciples are thinking about lunch; Jesus is articulating his deepest sustenance. As living water transcended Jacob’s well, this food transcends physical nourishment. Doing the will of the Father — bringing the woman, the village, these Samaritans to faith — energizes Jesus in a way that food cannot. This is an important word for anyone in ministry or teaching: fruitfulness in God’s work is not a distraction from life’s necessities; it is their deeper counterpart.

#### VERSES 35–38

“Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.”

Samaritan villagers are already coming across the fields toward Jesus (v.30) — they are the living parable. The agricultural proverb assumed a four-month gap between sowing and reaping; the kingdom operates differently. Jesus also collapses the distance between sower and reaper: in kingdom work, later workers join a harvest others prepared. The disciples will reap where prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself have sown. No minister can claim sole credit for a conversion; we always build on the labor of those who came before.

#### VERSES 39–42

“Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony... They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”

The village’s final confession — “the Savior of the world” — is remarkable for its universalism. Jewish messianic expectation typically focused on Israel’s national restoration; the Samaritans, positioned as outcasts by both communities, are the first in John’s Gospel to confess Jesus in global terms. The title anticipates 1 John 4:14 and the full scope of the cross. Their faith follows a two-stage pattern: testimony from the woman, then direct encounter with Jesus. Second-hand faith can become first-hand faith when people are genuinely brought into the presence of Jesus himself.

### John 4:43–54 — The Second Sign: The Royal Official’s Son

#### VERSES 43–45

“After the two days he departed for Galilee... The Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast.”

There is subtle irony here: Jesus had noted that “a prophet has no honor in his own hometown” (v.44), yet the Galileans welcome him — though John immediately signals that their welcome is sign-based (they had seen what he did in Jerusalem). A welcome rooted in sign-appetite rather than genuine discipleship is fragile. John treats sign-faith with consistent ambivalence throughout the Gospel: signs can open doors to authentic faith, but they cannot substitute for it (cf. 2:23–25).

**VERSES 46–48**

“So he came again to Cana in Galilee... And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill... and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. So Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.’”

The return to Cana deliberately echoes the first sign (2:1–11) and sets up a literary parallel: both signs involve desperate need, a test before the miracle, and a response of household faith. The “official” (Greek: *basilikos* — a royal official, likely connected to Herod Antipas’ court at Capernaum) represents secular authority humbled by helplessness. Jesus’ apparent rebuke — “unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” — uses the plural “you,” addressing the crowd’s appetite for spectacle more than the official himself, who does not debate the point.

**VERSES 49–50**

“Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son will live.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.”

Everything extraneous falls away: he is a father, and his child is dying. The plea is among the most human in the Gospel. Jesus responds not with physical presence or a journey to Capernaum, but with a word — a bare, unaccompanied declaration. The crisis point of the account follows: “the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.” He believes before any confirmation arrives, 20 miles from the child, with nothing yet to show. This is the faith John commends throughout: trust in the word of Jesus that acts before the evidence appears.

**VERSES 51–54**

“As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.’ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live.’ And he himself believed, and all his household.”

The moment is confirmed with precision: the healing occurred exactly when Jesus spoke. The word of Jesus operates across distance without limitation. This prefigures what the resurrection will make permanent: the risen Christ acts through his word across every barrier of space, time, and death. The result is household faith — the entire *paterfamilias* household believes. John closes the passage by marking it as “the second sign” (v.54), confirming that he is tracking these signs carefully. Each sign in the Book of Signs (chapters 1–12) reveals a dimension of who Jesus is and calls for a response of faith.

# Chapter 5

## John 5:1–9 — The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda

### VERSES 1–4

“After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids — blind, lame, and paralyzed.”

John does not identify the feast, which may signal that Jesus is Lord of all Israel's appointed times, not just one. The pool at Bethesda (meaning “House of Mercy” or “House of Overflow”) has been excavated and found exactly as John describes — two pools separated by a colonnaded partition, with colonnades on four outer sides, totaling five covered walkways. This archaeological detail, long doubted by critical scholars, has been fully vindicated. The five colonnades have also been read symbolically: five = the five books of Moses, the law — which can diagnose the human condition but cannot by itself heal it.

### VERSES 5–6

“One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’”

Thirty-eight years is a precise, verifiable detail — a mark of eyewitness tradition. It is also, intriguingly, the number of years Israel wandered in the wilderness after Kadesh Barnea before being permitted to enter the promised land (Deuteronomy 2:14). Whether John intends a typological parallel is debated, but the connection between long suffering, divine intervention, and the command to rise and walk would not have been lost on readers steeped in the Torah. Jesus' question — “Do you want to be healed?” — seems obvious but is profoundly pastoral: it invites the man's will and desire into the healing encounter, and it diagnoses whether his longing has survived decades of disappointment.

### VERSE 7

“The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.’”

His answer is not “yes, I want to be healed” — it is an explanation of why healing is impossible. He has no one, no community, no advocate, no speed. He has been passed over repeatedly. His worldview has been shaped entirely by the constraints of his condition. He does not ask Jesus for help — he explains why help cannot come. This is a vivid picture of long-term human helplessness: not lack of desire but exhausted expectation. Jesus is about to demonstrate that none of his stated limitations apply to the one who made him.

### VERSES 8–9

“Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, take up your bed, and walk.’ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.”

The command is immediate and tripartite: rise, take your mat, walk. No ritual, no water, no intermediary, no process. Jesus heals by command — the same creative word that spoke the cosmos into existence now speaks wholeness into a broken body. John notes the Sabbath almost as an afterthought at the end of verse 9, but it is the hinge on which the entire controversy of the chapter turns. The healing is the miracle; the Sabbath is the occasion for the theological confrontation to follow.

## John 5:10–18 — Controversy: Sabbath, Sonship, and Equal Authority

### VERSES 10–13

“So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, ‘It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.’... Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.”

A man paralyzed for 38 years is walking — and the first response of the religious authorities is to cite Sabbath regulations about carrying objects. The Mishnah tractate Shabbat explicitly prohibits carrying burdens in public on the Sabbath. Their concern is technically correct within their legal framework, but it represents a catastrophic failure of proportion: they can see the regulation but cannot see the miracle. The man himself

does not yet know his healer's name, a detail that emphasizes the miracle was unconditional — Jesus healed without requiring prior faith or prior knowledge of his identity.

#### VERSE 14

“Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.’”

Jesus seeks the man out — he does not wait to be found. The pastoral warning “sin no more” does not imply his 38-year illness was the direct consequence of a specific sin (Jesus explicitly denies that logic in 9:3 regarding the man born blind). Rather, it offers a warning that spiritual deterioration can exceed physical suffering. The statement is caring, not condemning — Jesus is interested in the whole person, not only the presenting condition.

#### VERSES 17–18

“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working.’ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

Jesus' defense is theological at its core: God the Father never ceases to work — sustaining creation, hearing prayer, granting grace, governing history — even on the Sabbath. The Son acts in perfect concert with the Father. The possessive “My Father” (not “our Father,” as Jesus teaches disciples to pray) was understood immediately as a claim to unique, filial equality with God. The Jewish leaders' response is not a misunderstanding — it is a rejection. They grasped precisely what he was claiming and found it blasphemous. The question for every reader is not whether Jesus made this claim, but how to respond to it.

### John 5:19–30 — The Son's Equal Authority: Life and Judgment

#### VERSES 19–20

“So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.’”

The double “Truly, truly” (Greek: Amen, amen) introduces solemn, authoritative declarations — a formula used exclusively by Jesus in John's Gospel (25 occurrences). The Son's dependence on the Father is not a statement of inferiority but of relational unity: the Son does nothing autonomously or independently, which is precisely what makes him fully trustworthy. The Father-Son relationship is characterized by complete transparency (“shows him all”) and love. This is the Trinitarian foundation for Jesus' miracles: he does not act unilaterally but in perfect communion with the Father.

#### VERSES 21–23

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”

Two divine prerogatives are claimed simultaneously: the power to give life and the authority to execute judgment. In Jewish theology, both were exclusively God's. By claiming both for the Son, Jesus asserts full divine authority. The Christological implication is non-negotiable: to honor the Father, one must honor the Son. There is no path to the Father that bypasses the Son (cf. 14:6). The honor owed to both is identical in kind — not parallel devotions to two separate beings but the unified worship owed to the one God who is Father and Son.

#### VERSE 24

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

This is one of the most important statements in the Gospel about salvation. Eternal life is a present possession for the believer — “has eternal life” uses the present tense, not future. The believer “has passed” (Greek aorist: a completed, decisive action) from death to life. The crisis of judgment has already been resolved for the one who hears and believes. This is John's realized eschatology: the decisive verdict is rendered now, in the act of faith, not deferred until a final courtroom.

#### VERSES 25–30

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live... for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

Jesus holds together two dimensions of resurrection. The hour “that is now here” is the spiritual resurrection available to every hearer in the present: to hear and believe is to pass from death to life immediately. The hour “that is coming” is the bodily resurrection at the end of the age — when the same voice that said “Get up, take up your bed, and walk” will call the dead from their tombs. The healing at Bethesda is a sign pointing forward to this ultimate authority. The basis of final judgment is not religious affiliation but response to what one has done — which in John’s Gospel is ultimately the question of what one has done with Jesus.

## John 5:31–47 — The Four Witnesses

### VERSES 31–35

“If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who bears witness about me... He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.”

Jesus appeals to the legal principle requiring corroborating testimony (Deuteronomy 19:15): a single witness is insufficient. He immediately introduces a fourfold testimony on his behalf. The first witness is John the Baptist, described as “a burning and shining lamp.” A lamp is derived light — it illuminates by reflecting another source. The crowds “rejoiced for a while” in John’s witness, but a lamp is not the sun. John prepared the way; Jesus is the way. Their enjoyment of John’s ministry without following it to its destination is itself a form of unbelief.

### VERSE 36

“But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.”

The second witness is the works — the signs themselves. The healing at Bethesda is not primarily an act of compassion (though it certainly is that); it is testimony about Jesus’ identity and mission. Signs in John’s Gospel are never ends in themselves; they always point beyond themselves to the person who performs them. This is why “sign-faith” is insufficient — one must move from the sign to the Sign-giver.

### VERSES 37–40

“And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me... You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

The third witness is the Father himself — expressed through the Spirit, through the living voice of God in Scripture, through the whole redemptive narrative. The fourth and most pointed witness is the Scriptures themselves. This is one of the NT’s most incisive critiques of religious intellectualism: it is entirely possible to search the Scriptures exhaustively (Greek: *eraunate* — to examine thoroughly, to scrutinize) and miss their central subject. The Pharisees knew the text; they did not know the One to whom every page of the text points. Scripture is not itself the source of life — it bears witness to the Source of life.

**eraunate:** to search carefully, scrutinize — used of intensive, methodical investigation

### VERSES 44–47

“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?... For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

Jesus identifies the deepest barrier to faith: not intellectual difficulty but moral and social orientation. They seek glory (Greek: *doxa* — honor, approval, reputation) from one another. This horizontal orientation makes vertical faith impossible; the longing for human approval crowds out the longing for divine approval. The irony is complete: these are men who devoted their lives to the Torah, yet Moses — the very one they invoke as their authority — wrote of Jesus (Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 22:18; 49:10; Deuteronomy 18:15–18). To reject Jesus is to misread Moses. The failure is not Moses’; it is theirs.

# Chapter 6

## John 6:1–15 — The Feeding of the Five Thousand

### VERSES 1–4

“After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.”

John alone among the evangelists mentions the Passover proximity, and it is not incidental — it frames the entire chapter. The Passover lamb’s blood saved Israel from death in Egypt; Jesus will describe himself as the true Bread from heaven whose flesh, given for the world, is the ultimate Passover provision. The mountain setting evokes Moses receiving the Torah on Sinai and feeding Israel with manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16). John is constructing a sustained Moses typology that will run through the entire Bread of Life discourse.

### VERSES 5–9

“Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.... Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many?’”

Jesus tests Philip to create the conditions in which his provision will be most clearly seen — not to expose failure but to set the stage for revelation. Philip’s answer is logistical and accurate: 200 denarii (approximately eight months’ wages for a day laborer) would buy only a little food for such a crowd. Andrew makes a small gesture of faith — he finds the boy — but immediately undercuts it: “what are these for so many?” Barley loaves were the food of the poor (wheat was more expensive). The offering is meager by any human calculation, but it is offered. The miracle will not come from human abundance but from divine multiplication of humble offering — a pattern throughout both Testaments (cf. Elijah and the widow’s oil, 2 Kings 4:1–7).

### VERSES 10–13

“Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down.’... Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.”

The eucharistic echoes are unmistakable and intentional: Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks (Greek: *eucharisteō* — the root of “Eucharist”), and distributes. This sequence — take, give thanks, distribute — would have been immediately recognizable to John’s early Christian readers who participated in the Lord’s Supper. The provision is not merely adequate but lavish: “as much as they wanted.” The twelve baskets of fragments (one per tribe, or simply a sign of overflowing abundance) underscore that Jesus’ provision always exceeds the need. “That nothing may be lost” anticipates his words in 6:39: “I should lose nothing of all that he has given me.” Nothing entrusted to Jesus is wasted.

### VERSES 14–15

“When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, ‘This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!’ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

The crowd correctly identifies Jesus as the Prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15) — but then immediately attempts to co-opt him for a political agenda. A king who can feed armies without supply lines is an irresistible military asset. Jesus refuses this version of messiahship entirely and withdraws alone. The cross, not a throne by popular acclaim, is the path his kingship will take. His kingship will be established not by nationalist fervor but by self-giving sacrifice. This is a perpetual temptation for religious movements: to use Jesus for agendas he did not come to advance.

## John 6:16–21 — Jesus Walks on Water

### VERSES 16–18

“When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.”

The disciples are in the place of obedience — they go because Jesus directed them to — and the storm comes anyway. Darkness has fallen, Jesus is physically absent, the sea is rising. The church has recognized its own experience in this scene across two millennia: faithfulness does not exempt from storms, and the absence of Jesus’ felt presence does not mean abandonment. A different kind of encounter is coming.

#### VERSES 19–20

“When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. But he said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’”

“It is I” is again ego eimi — “I AM.” The divine name spoken over a storm-tossed sea echoes Psalm 107:23–30 (God who stills the storms) and Job 9:8 (God who “tramples the waves of the sea”). Jesus’ walking on water is not primarily a nature miracle; it is a theophany — the Creator walking on his own creation. The disciples’ terror and the divine reassurance (“Do not be afraid”) follow the classic biblical pattern of every encounter with the Living God (cf. Isaiah 6:5; Daniel 10:12; Revelation 1:17). The most repeated divine command in Scripture is some form of “do not be afraid.”

#### VERSE 21

“Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.”

John records the second miracle almost without comment: the immediate arrival at the destination. He does not explain or theologize it; he simply notes it. When Jesus is received into the vessel of a life, the destination is reached. The journey is transformed by the presence of the One who governs wind and sea.

### John 6:22–40 — The Bread of Life Discourse — Part 1

#### VERSE 26

“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.’”

Jesus diagnoses the motive beneath the crowd’s pursuit with unsettling clarity. They experienced a material blessing and want more of the same. They are not following the sign-giver because they have understood the sign; they are following the bread-giver because they want more bread. This is the perennial danger of a needs-based religion: it seeks Jesus for what he provides rather than for who he is. When the provision stops, so does the pursuit.

#### VERSE 27

“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. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”

The seal (Greek: *esphragisen*) was the mark of divine authorization stamped on official documents. The Father has authenticated the Son as the one through whom enduring nourishment comes. The contrast between perishing and enduring food echoes the contrast between Jacob’s well and living water in chapter 4. Jesus is establishing a pattern: everything the old covenant offered in physical and provisional form, he offers in spiritual and permanent form.

#### VERSES 28–29

“Then they said to him, ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’”

The crowd thinks in categories of religious performance: what do we do? Jesus collapses the entire program of religious works into a single act: believe. This is not a counsel of passivity — belief in John’s Gospel is active, ongoing, and whole-person commitment (the Greek present tense of “believe” denotes continuous action). But it is reception rather than achievement. The “work of God” — what God requires — is faith in the one God has sent. Paul will articulate the same insight in different language in Romans 3:28.

#### VERSES 30–33

“So they said to him, ‘Then what sign do you do... Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”’ Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it

was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

The crowd invokes the Exodus precedent: if Jesus is greater than Moses, where is his ongoing daily provision? Jesus corrects their attribution at the root: Moses did not give the manna — God did. And the same Father who provided manna for one generation in the wilderness is now giving something infinitely greater: not bread that sustained physical life temporarily, but bread that gives eternal life to the whole world. The typology is explicit: manna prefigured Jesus. The Exodus is not merely history; it is theology in narrative form.

### VERSE 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.’”

The first of the seven great “I AM” statements with a predicate nominative in John’s Gospel (ego eimi ho artos tēs zoēs). These statements — Bread of Life, Light of the World, Door, Good Shepherd, Resurrection and Life, Way/Truth/Life, True Vine — constitute John’s central Christological witness. The hunger and thirst here are soul-hunger and soul-thirst: the deep human longing for meaning, forgiveness, belonging, and union with God. “Coming” and “believing” are used in parallel — both describe the act of faith in its active and receptive dimensions. The double emphatic negative in Greek (“shall not hunger... shall never thirst”) makes the promise absolute: final and lasting satisfaction is found in Jesus alone.

**ego eimi ho artos tēs zoēs:** I AM the bread of life — the divine name ego eimi applied to the one who gives and sustains eternal life

### VERSES 36–40

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 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.”

These verses hold together divine sovereignty and human responsibility in a way that has occupied Christian theology for centuries. “All that the Father gives me will come to me” — the Father’s electing purpose is the foundation. “Whoever comes to me I will never cast out” — the invitation is genuinely open, universal, and the promise of reception is absolute. Both are simultaneously true in John’s presentation, and both serve the same pastoral function: the security of the believer rests not on the steadiness of their own faith but on the will of the Father and the faithfulness of the Son. “I will lose nothing” — the Son’s preservation of what the Father gives him includes bodily resurrection on the last day. Salvation in John is not a partial or provisional rescue but a total redemption of the whole person.

## John 6:41–59 — The Bread of Life Discourse — Part 2

### VERSES 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?”’”

The grumbling (Greek: egoggyzon) deliberately echoes the Exodus narrative, where Israel “grumbled” in the wilderness (Exodus 16:2; Numbers 11:1). They know his earthly family — Joseph’s son from Nazareth — and they cannot reconcile that with a claim to heavenly origin. Their familiarity becomes a stumbling block. The same pattern recurs throughout history: people who grew up around Christianity often find it hardest to encounter Jesus with fresh eyes. Familiarity with the human story can obscure the divine identity.

### VERSE 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.”

The word “draws” (Greek: helkuō) is used elsewhere in John for hauling in a net full of fish (21:6, 11) and for Jesus drawing all people to himself from the cross (12:32). It suggests irresistible attraction rather than mere invitation, but attraction toward the Son rather than compulsion away from human will. All three persons of the Trinity are active in salvation: the Father draws, the Son receives and preserves, the Spirit gives life (v.63). The promise of resurrection on the last day appears three times in this discourse (vv.39, 40, 44) — John underscores that salvation is not merely spiritual but encompasses the whole person, body included.

### VERSE 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.”

The discourse reaches its sharpest and most confrontational point. The bread is not wisdom, not teaching, not a symbol of spiritual nourishment — it is his flesh, given for the life of the world. The cross is now explicit within the Bread of Life metaphor. The Passover Lamb (introduced in v.4) and the wilderness manna converge in the figure of Jesus, whose body, offered in sacrifice, is the food that gives eternal life. This anticipates both the Last Supper institution and the Eucharist in the life of the church, though its primary referent is the historical event of the incarnation and crucifixion itself.

#### VERSES 53–56

“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. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day... Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”

The language intensifies dramatically. In verse 54 the verb for “eat” shifts from the ordinary *phagō* to the more visceral *trōgō* — to munch or gnaw — a word that resists spiritualization. Yet the interpretive key appears in verse 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.” The eating and drinking are not literal cannibalism but a metaphor of total appropriation: to eat his flesh and drink his blood is to receive his death as one’s own, to trust wholly that his body given and his blood shed are the very source of life. The result of this reception is the most intimate relational language in the Gospel — mutual indwelling: “I in him, and he in me.”

**trōgō:** to gnaw, munch, chew — deliberately visceral language that resists purely symbolic interpretation

**menō (abides):** to remain, dwell, stay — John’s key word for permanent relational union; appears 40 times in the Gospel and epistles

### John 6:60–71 — The Hard Saying and Peter’s Great Confession

#### VERSE 60

“When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’”

Not merely the hostile authorities, but many of Jesus’ broader circle of disciples find the teaching intolerable. “Hard” (Greek: *sklēros*) means harsh, rough, difficult to accept — not intellectually complex but personally demanding. The teaching requires absolute dependence on Jesus for life itself, which is an enormous and humbling claim. It cannot be partially accepted or intellectually appreciated from a comfortable distance; it demands surrender.

#### VERSES 61–63

“But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, ‘Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 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.’”

Jesus does not soften the teaching — he intensifies it. The ascension will be even more offensive to earthly-minded hearers than the incarnation. Then he provides the hermeneutical key to the entire discourse: his words are “spirit and life.” They belong to a register that natural categories cannot access. The Spirit is the necessary interpreter of the spiritual. The same principle Paul articulates in 1 Corinthians 2:14 is at work here: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

#### VERSES 66–69

“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘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.’”

This is the great Johannine confession — the equivalent of Matthew’s Caesarea Philippi moment (Matthew 16:13–16). Peter does not say “we fully understand.” He says “where else would we go?” This is the bedrock of persevering faith: not the absence of confusion or difficulty, but the recognition that there is no alternative. Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. The title “Holy One of God” is a messianic designation pointing to Jesus’ unique consecration, his set-apartness to the Father’s purposes. It is a confession not of full comprehension but of irreplaceable commitment.

Note also the two verbs in Peter’s confession: “we have believed” (past act) “and have come to know” (progressive result). In John, faith precedes full understanding; understanding grows from faith, not the

reverse. This is the epistemology of discipleship: we do not understand our way into belief — we believe our way into understanding.

#### VERSES 70–71

“Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.’ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.”

The chapter closes with a shadow that anticipates the passion narrative. Even within the Twelve, one is already aligned with the adversary. Jesus knows this from the beginning (v.64: “Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him”). His foreknowledge does not prevent the betrayal — it encompasses it. The cross is not a failure of divine oversight or a tragedy that surprised God; it is the will of the Father being accomplished through even the darkest of human choices. The omniscience of Jesus in John’s Gospel is not merely impressive — it is the ground of confidence that nothing in redemptive history is out of his hands.

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End of Commentary: Gospel of John, Chapters 4–6