A HARMONY OF THE FOUR GOSPELS — CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

John 4–6 Woven Into the Continuing Narrative

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Preface: Continuation of the Fourth Gospel

Chapter eighteen of the harmony continues the Gospel of John, covering the three great chapters that follow the opening prologue and the Nicodemus discourse: John 4 (the Samaritan woman at the well and the healing of the nobleman's son), John 5 (the healing at the pool of Bethesda and the discourse on the Son's authority), and John 6 (the feeding of the five thousand, the walking on water, and the Bread of Life Discourse).

These three chapters represent the heart of John's distinctive theological and narrative contribution. John 4 contains the longest recorded conversation Jesus has with any individual in the Gospels — the Samaritan woman. John 5 contains the most extensive single statement of Jesus's relationship to the Father. And John 6 contains the Bread of Life Discourse — the passage most directly relevant to eucharistic theology in the entire New Testament and the one most debated by exegetes across the centuries.

Where the Synoptic Gospels covered the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on water in chapter nine of this harmony, those accounts are revisited here through John's distinctive lens, which provides both additional narrative detail and the extended theological interpretation that the Synoptics do not supply.

Each section is identified by its source: **[John]** throughout.

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Part Seventeen: The Woman at the Well, the Pool of Bethesda, and the Bread of Life

Section 193 — The Woman at the Well [John 4:1–26]

When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples), he left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.

And he must needs pass through Samaria.

So he cometh to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph: and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. For his disciples were gone away into the city to buy food.

The Samaritan woman therefore saith unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a Samaritan woman? (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his sons, and his cattle?

Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.

The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw.

Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.

The woman answered and said unto him, I have no husband. Jesus saith unto her, Thou saidst well, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: this hast thou said truly.

The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father. Ye worship that which ye know not: we worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers.

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh (he that is called Christ): when he is come, he will declare unto us all things.

Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.

Section 194 — The Woman's Testimony; the Harvest Field [John 4:27–42]

And upon this came his disciples; and they marvelled that he was speaking with a woman; yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why speakest thou with her?

So the woman left her waterpot, and went away into the city, and saith to the people, Come, see a man, who told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?

They went out of the city, and were coming to him.

In the meanwhile the disciples prayed him, saying, Rabbi, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not. The disciples therefore said one to another, Hath any man brought him aught to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work.

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest. He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. For herein is the saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.

And from that city many of the Samaritans believed on him because of the word of the woman, who testified, He told me all things that ever I did.

So when the Samaritans came unto him, they besought him to abide with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his word; and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.

Section 195 — The Healing of the Nobleman's Son [John 4:43–54]

And after the two days he went forth from thence into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country.

So he came again unto Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.

Jesus therefore said unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe.

The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.

Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way.

And as he was now going down, his servants met him, saying, that his son lived. So he inquired of them the hour when he began to amend. They said therefore unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.

This is again the second sign that Jesus did, having come out of Judaea into Galilee.

Section 196 — The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda [John 5:1–18]

After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole, with whatsoever disease he was holden.

And a certain man was there, who had been thirty and eight years in his infirmity. When Jesus saw him lying, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wouldest thou be made whole?

The sick man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

Jesus saith unto him, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk. And straightway the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked.

Now it was the sabbath on that day. So the Jews said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath, and it is not lawful for thee to take up thy bed.

But he answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.

They asked him, Who is the man that said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? But he that was healed knew not who it was; for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in the place.

Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.

The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole. And for this cause the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did these things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh even until now, and I work.

For this cause therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only brake the sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Section 197 — The Discourse on the Son's Authority [John 5:19–47]

Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner.

For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he show him, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom he will.

For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent him.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.

For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself: and he gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man.

Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.

I can of myself do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is righteous; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. It is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye have sent unto John, and he hath borne witness unto the truth. But the witness which I receive is not from man: howbeit I say these things, that ye may be saved.

He was the lamp that burneth and shineth; and ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light. But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.

And the Father that sent me, he hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he sent, him ye believe not.

Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and ye will not come to me, that ye may have life.

I receive not glory from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in yourselves. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.

How can ye believe, who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?

Think not that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, on whom ye have set your hope. For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

Section 198 — The Feeding of the Five Thousand: John's Account [John 6:1–15]

After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they beheld the signs which he did on them that were sick.

And Jesus went up into the mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. Now the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great multitude cometh unto him, saith unto Philip, Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

Philip answered him, Two hundred shillings' worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, who hath five barley loaves, and two fishes: but what are these among so many?

Jesus said, Make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, he distributed to them that were set down; likewise also of the fishes as much as they would.

And when they were filled, he saith unto his disciples, Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost. So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves, which remained over unto them that had eaten.

When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world. Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king, withdrew again into the mountain himself alone.

Section 199 — Walking on the Water: John's Account [John 6:16–21]

And when evening came, his disciples went down unto the sea; and they entered into a boat, and were going over the sea unto Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

And the sea was rising by reason of a great wind that blew. When therefore they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they behold Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the boat: and they were afraid.

But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. They were willing therefore to receive him into the boat: and straightway the boat was at the land whither they were going.

Section 200 — The Bread of Life Discourse [John 6:22–71]

On the morrow the multitude that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, save one, and that Jesus entered not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples went away alone (howbeit there came boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks): when the multitude therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they themselves got into the boats, and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?

Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled. Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him the Father, even God, hath sealed.

They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the works of God?

Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

They said therefore unto him, What then doest thou for a sign, that we may see, and believe thee? what workest thou? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.

Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

They said therefore unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

But I said unto you, that ye have seen me, and yet believe not. All that which the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

And this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

The Jews therefore murmured concerning him, because he said, I am the bread which came down out of heaven.

And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how doth he now say, I am come down out of heaven?

Jesus answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day.

It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me.

Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he that is from God, he hath seen the Father.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life.

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.

The Jews therefore strove one with another, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him.

As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me.

This is the bread which came down out of heaven: not as the fathers ate, and died; he that eateth this bread shall live for ever.

These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.

Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?

But Jesus knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at this, said unto them, Doth this cause you to stumble? What then if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life.

But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who it was that should betray him.

And he said, For this cause have I said unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it be given unto him of the Father.

Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away?

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God.

Jesus answered them, Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil? Now he spake of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.

Appendix: Notes on Chapter Eighteen

On the Woman at the Well

The conversation at the well (Section 193) is the longest recorded dialogue between Jesus and any individual in the four Gospels — longer than the Nicodemus conversation, longer than any exchange with the Pharisees or disciples. Its setting is doubly transgressive: Jesus speaks to a woman alone (scandalizing the disciples, John 4:27) and to a Samaritan (a people held in contempt by Jews as half-breed schismatics since the Assyrian deportations of the eighth century B.C.E.). The conversation moves through five distinct stages: the request for water; the offer of living water; the exposure of the woman's marital history; the theological discussion about the proper place of worship; and the climactic self-disclosure — the only instance in the Synoptics or John where Jesus unambiguously identifies himself as the Messiah in response to a direct question: *"I that speak unto thee am he."*

The woman's five husbands and the man she currently lives with who is not her husband has generated extensive interpretive discussion. Some read it allegorically — the five husbands as the five gods introduced into Samaria by the five nations of 2 Kings 17:24–41. Others read it straightforwardly as a biographical fact about a woman with a complicated personal history. Both readings are possible, and they are not mutually exclusive.

The declaration on worship — *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth"* — is the theological center of the passage and one of the most radical statements on worship in the New Testament. It dissolves the geographical dispute between Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim by transcending it entirely: the locus of true worship is neither mountain but the interior of the worshipper, constituted by the Spirit and oriented toward truth. This saying is the Johannine counterpart to the Sermon on the Mount's teaching that inward disposition matters more than outward observance.

The woman's testimony to the city — *"Come, see a man, who told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?"* — is the first extended evangelistic speech in John's Gospel, and it is given by a Samaritan woman. The disciples, who have been sent to buy food, return and are astonished to find Jesus speaking with her. They say nothing. She has already gone. The harvest Jesus describes to them — *"Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest"* — is already underway before their eyes.

On the Nobleman's Son

The healing of the nobleman's son (Section 195) is the second of John's seven "signs" — the word John consistently uses (*sēmeion*, sign) where the Synoptics use "miracle" or "mighty

work." The Johannine miracle vocabulary is deliberate: miracles in John are not primarily demonstrations of power but signs pointing beyond themselves to theological realities. Each of the seven signs in John's Gospel is paired with a discourse that unpacks its theological meaning: the feeding of the five thousand pairs with the Bread of Life Discourse; the healing of the blind man pairs with the discourse on light; the raising of Lazarus pairs with the declaration "I am the resurrection and the life."

The nobleman's son healed at a distance — Jesus simply says *"Go thy way; thy son liveth"* and the healing is simultaneous with the word — illustrates a principle that runs through all of John's sign-narratives: Jesus's word is sufficient. It need not be accompanied by touch, by proximity, or by any physical medium. The word itself is the creative and healing power of the Logos made flesh.

On the Pool of Bethesda

The healing at Bethesda (Section 196) introduces a detail absent from the Synoptic miracle narratives: the healed man does not know who healed him. Jesus "conveyed himself away," and when found later in the Temple, identifies himself. The man then reports to the authorities that it was Jesus who healed him — an act that is sometimes read as an act of betrayal (comparable to Judas) and sometimes as simple compliance with the religious authorities' question. John does not adjudicate.

The sabbath controversy that follows is the most extended in the Gospel tradition. Jesus's response — *"My Father worketh even until now, and I work"* — provokes the authorities' charge of both sabbath violation and blasphemy: he calls God his own Father, making himself equal with God. This is the charge that will eventually produce his condemnation: John frames it clearly and early.

On the Discourse of John 5

John 5:19–47 (Section 197) is the most sustained theological statement on the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Gospel tradition. Its argument moves through three stages. First, the mutual dependence of the Son on the Father: the Son does nothing of himself but only what he sees the Father doing — not limitation but intimate relational knowledge. Second, the transfer of divine prerogatives: the Father raises the dead and gives life; so the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no man but has committed all judgment to the Son — so that the honor due the Father is equally due the Son. Third, the witnesses to Jesus: John the Baptist (a lamp that burned and shone), the works the Father has given him, the Father's own testimony, and Moses himself — "he wrote of me."

The most quoted verse of this section — *"Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me"* (5:39) — is the key to the entire discourse. The scriptures are not the source of eternal life; they are the witness pointing to him who is. To possess the scriptures without coming to Jesus is to have the map without making the journey.

On the Bread of Life Discourse

John 6:22–71 (Section 200) is the theological and exegetical center of John's Gospel and the single most debated passage in the entire New Testament on questions of eucharistic theology. Its content and its exegetical complexity were analyzed in chapter seventeen of this harmony's academic companion volume on the Eucharist; this section presents the text itself in full, allowing the reader to engage the words directly.

Several structural features of the discourse deserve attention. First, the crowd follows Jesus not for theological reasons but because they were filled with bread (6:26). Jesus immediately redirects: work not for the food that perishes but for the food that abides to eternal life. Second, the crowd asks what they must do to work the works of God — still thinking in terms of merit and effort. Jesus's answer redefines the work of God entirely: *"This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent"* (6:29). Third, the crowd asks for a sign — ironically, immediately after having witnessed the feeding of five thousand — demanding something comparable to the manna Moses provided in the wilderness. Jesus corrects their reading of history: it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; it was the Father. And the Father is giving again, now — bread that gives life to the world.

The great claim — *"I am the bread of life"* (*Egō eimi ho artos tēs zōēs*, 6:35) — is the first of the seven *"I am"* sayings of the Fourth Gospel (the others: the light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way and the truth and the life, the true vine). The force of *egō eimi* in the context of John's Gospel draws on both the Hebrew divine name YHWH (*'ehyeh*, I AM, Exodus 3:14) and the LXX rendering *egō eimi* used repeatedly in Isaiah's great second-person addresses to Israel. Jesus's *"I am"* sayings are not merely self-descriptions; they are, in John's Gospel, implicit divine self-identifications.

The discourse's climax — *"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves"* (6:53) — and the subsequent interpretive key — *"It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life"* (6:63) — together constitute the exegetical tension that has divided readers since the second century. The discourse ends with a crisis: many disciples withdraw; Jesus asks the Twelve whether they also will go. Peter's answer — *"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God"* — is the Johannine equivalent of the Synoptic confession at Caesarea Philippi.

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