



# got life?

## The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

### TOO MUCH TO SWALLOW

*John 6:1–71*

#### I. The Bread Sermon

- A. Nothing is more basic than **bread**. While other cultures may use other staple foods (rice, corn, cassava, etc.), Israel and much of the world use bread as the essential core of daily nourishment. Whether made from wheat or the cheaper barley (Jn 6:9), bread is essential for survival. Jesus insisted that trusting God for daily sustenance was to be part of our regular prayer life: “Give us this day our **daily** bread.”
- B. But the Bible recognizes what everyone already intuitively knows: **man** does not live by bread alone. An animal can be fully satisfied if he has enough to eat. Not so a human person! Our tummies can be full and yet our souls remain empty. “Bread” then is a **sign**!<sup>1</sup> It points beyond itself to a deeper hunger, a deeper need. God gives us bread so that we realize that we need more than bread!

*And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with **manna**...that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by **every word** that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8:3)*

- C. At the beginning of his ministry, as Jesus considered what sort of Messiah he was to be, he stood firm against the **temptation** to be a “bread king.”

*Then Jesus was led up by **the Spirit** into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was **hungry**. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:1–4)*

- D. John 6 begins with a bread miracle, moves to a bread sermon, and ends with a strong personal application. This is one of the most **offensive** sermons Jesus ever preached.

Two Signs that Show What Jesus Can Do	One Sermon that Shows Who Jesus Claims to Be	Two Reactions that Show How People Respond
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeds 5,000 (1–15).</li> <li>• Walks on water (16–21).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You saw the sign but missed the point.</li> <li>• I am the bread of life.</li> <li>• Eat my flesh and drink my blood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a hard saying; we’re leaving!</li> <li>• I’m offended but staying anyway.</li> <li>• You are the Holy One! We’re staying.</li> </ul>
Jesus Gives Bread Jn 6:1–21	Jesus Is Bread Jn 6:22–59	Too Much to Swallow? Jn 6:60–71

<sup>1</sup> John emphasizes signs throughout his Gospel. Thus, bread *signifies* Bread, birth *signifies* Birth, life *signifies* Life, word *signifies* Word, water *signifies* Water, light *signifies* Water, vine *signifies* Vine, and door *signifies* Door.

## II. Examining the text

### A. What can Jesus do? (Jn 6:1–21)

#### 1. Jesus can **feed hungry people** (Jn 6:1–15).

a. Notice, that this situation is designed by Jesus as a **test** for his disciples (Jn 6:6). The test involves several questions:

- What are we to do about **human need** (hunger, poverty, etc.)?
- Do we have **resources** to handle this situation?
- What kind of **Messiah** is Jesus?

b. This is a **sign** (Jn 6:14). The miracle points beyond itself to something more *significant* than the miracle itself. Jesus cares about human need and he can do something about it. But is this what his kingdom is all about?

c. The result of the miracle is twofold:

- 1) The people conclude Jesus is “the **Prophet**.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus can do what Moses did in the wilderness with manna.
- 2) The people want to take Jesus “by force to make him **king**” (Jn 6:15). Jesus is a hero and the masses love him. This is wonderful. Right?

Notice how Jesus responds to his popularity: he **withdraws** to a mountain to be alone. Mark tells us that after the miracle, he “made his disciples get into the boat and go... to the other side” (Mk 6:45). That night, a **storm** hits!

d. Textual notes:

- 1) This is the only miracle of Jesus that is mentioned in **all four** gospels. Obviously, it had very special meaning for the early disciples.
- 2) There were 5,000 men (males) (Jn 6:10). This means Jesus probably fed perhaps **15,000** people or more.
- 3) A denarius was a day’s wage. Two hundred denarii would thus be equivalent to a salary for eight months of work.
- 4) Andrew was always bringing people to Jesus: his brother (Jn 1:40–42), the Greeks (Jn 12:20–22), and here, the boy with the picnic lunch (Jn 6:8–9).
- 5) The Greek verb for “give thanks” (Jn 6:11) is *eucharisteo* (from whence we get the term **Eucharist**). Some believe John is making a reference to Communion here (and also later in the passage when Jesus speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood).

#### 2. Jesus can **walk on water** (Jn 6:16–21)

a. The storm is also a sign; it is *significant*. Don’t just look *at* it, look **through** it. The storm points beyond itself to a crisis that is brewing that has the potential to sink the apostolic mission!

---

<sup>2</sup> See Deuteronomy 18:15–18, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen...”

- b. The disciples are in a boat without Jesus—making no progress. Rowing **against the wind** is hard. Working at cross purposes with the Creator is impossible!
- c. Jesus comes walking on the water; he comes to his disciples in a way that they **never expected** him to come. He does not conform to their expectations. This “frightens” them (Jn 6:19).
- d. When Jesus reaches them, he says, “I am” (Jn 6:20). This is the language of **deity**.
- e. With Jesus in the boat all is well and immediately they reach their destination.

B. Who does Jesus claim to be? (Jn 6:22–59)

These verses describe a dialogue between Jesus and his audience but we can call it a “**sermon**” because of the important message that he is teaching. Jesus is explaining the *significance* of the signs he has just performed. His message has two parts:

1. Your interest in me is all wrong (Jn 6:26–33).

Like the Samaritan woman at the well, these followers of Jesus “worship what [they] do not know” (Jn 4:22). They are clueless and blind to who Jesus is and the nature of the life he is offering them. Jesus wants them to wise up to their **ignorance**. They will never see the truth until they acknowledge their **blindness**.

- a. They are seeking him for the **wrong reasons** (Jn 6:26).  
Their motivation is wrong. They are seeking Jesus because he gave them free food and they “ate their fill.” Their interest in spirituality and religion is motivated by greed and selfishness. They want the gift but have no interest in the Giver. They saw the sign but missed the whole point of the miracle!
- b. They are hungry for the **wrong bread** (Jn 6:27).  
The food they are working so hard to obtain is “food that perishes.” Such food will one day turn rotten and those who eat it will one day die. Why do you labor so hard for something that produces such meager results?
- c. They are working in the **wrong way** (Jn 6:28–29).  
They think religion is about *doing* something rather than **believing** something! What they are hungry for cannot be obtained by human effort. It is a gift and can only be received by faith. But believing is not easy. The “work of God is that you believe in him whom he has sent.”
- d. They are seeking for the wrong kind of **evidence** (Jn 6:30–31).  
They pretend that if Jesus would only show them a “sign” (like Moses did with manna) then they would believe in him. Really? Jesus has just fed 5,000 people and walked on water and yet they ask him for a sign so they can believe! Jesus is showing them that faith is ultimately a matter of **the will**, not a matter of the evidence (see Jn 7:17). These are people who will not believe even though someone rises from the dead (Jn 11–12; see Lk 16:31).
- e. They have the wrong understanding of **Scripture** (Jn 6:32–33).

They give Moses credit for the manna in the wilderness. Jesus corrects their interpretation of Scripture by reminding them that it was God, not Moses, who gave them bread to eat.

How clueless these people are! When they finally say, “Sir, give us this bread always” (Jn 6:34), they have **no clue** what they are asking for.

2. The bread you really want (Jn 6:34–59).

The people are hoping for a new Moses to bring more free manna. But Jesus reminds them that this kind of bread is limited in what it can do. Those who eat it will still die (Jn 6:49). Jesus is offering them a **new kind** of bread, something infinitely better than manna, even better than the bread he had miraculously provided.

a. What the bread is.

The important thing in the two signs (miracle feeding, walking on water) is not what Jesus does but **who Jesus is!** The signs point to the Giver—not the gift.

- “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35, 48).
- “I am the bread that comes down from heaven” (Jn 6:41).
- “I am the living bread” (Jn 6:51).

Then, more specifically, Jesus says:

- “The bread... is my **flesh**” (Jn 6:51).
- “My flesh is **true food** and my blood is true drink” (Jn 6:55).

b. What the bread does.

While the manna had limited benefits, the bread that Jesus is offering has amazing properties!

- When you eat it, you will never be hungry or thirsty again (Jn 6:35).
- This bread gives life (Jn 6:53, 57).
- This bread gives eternal life (Jn 6:40, 47, 54) and those who eat it will never die (Jn 6:50, 51, 58).
- Those who eat this bread will be raised on the last day and will live forever (Jn 6:40, 44, 54).

c. How the bread is to be consumed.

1) We must “eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood” (Jn 6:53–54). The gift cannot be separated from the Giver.

2) Eating Jesus is not to be taken literally (cannibalism). It means we must:

- “Look” to Jesus (Jn 6:40).
- “**Come**” to Jesus (Jn 6:35, 37, 39, 45).
- Especially it means that we must “**believe**” in him (Jn 6:35, 40, 47).

3) Strangely, not everyone wants this bread. But why? Only those can come who have been “drawn” by the Father (Jn 6:44, 65). Salvation is **all of grace**. We contribute nothing. And yet, we are fully responsible for our actions. This does not mean some are excluded

from the possibility of salvation. Jesus says the bread he gives is “for the life of **the world**” (Jn 6:51; see Jn 3:16; etc.).

C. How will people respond to Jesus? (Jn 6:60–71)

1. On hearing this sermon, there was consensus among all his followers: “This is a **hard** saying; who can listen to it?” (Jn 6:61). It was not hard to understand; it was hard to accept! This was hard to swallow. They can’t stomach what Jesus says.
2. Jesus asked, “Do you take **offense** at this?” (Jn 6:61). The work in Greek is *scandalizo* and means “to cause to stumble.” Are you scandalized by what Jesus claims about himself? Will his claims cause you to turn away in unbelief?
3. There are three reactions to Jesus’ sermon:
  - a. Many disciples **turned back** and no longer walked with him (Jn 6:66). This is just too much to swallow!
  - b. **Judas** stays but apparently can’t accept what Jesus is saying; he stumbles but remains among the disciples (Jn 6:70–71).
  - c. **Peter** also struggles with what Jesus has said and has considered leaving. But, speaking for the other disciples, he does “the work of God” (Jn 6:29) by affirming his **faith** in the One God has sent.

*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.” (John 6:68–69)*

III. Three reasons why this sermon is so offensive.

A. Jesus exposes the **hypocrisy** among his followers.

Their motivations are impure (Jn 6:26). They want free food. They are hungry for the wrong kind of bread. They pretend to need more evidence before they will believe. Their understanding of Scripture is flawed. Their spirituality is based in works not in faith. They are not willing to do God’s will (Jn 7:17).

B. Jesus **questions** their salvation.

In fact, he pushes so hard that many turn on him and walk away, thus proving the validity of Jesus’ questions.

C. Jesus makes such startling **claims** about himself.

It wasn’t what Jesus *did* that caused the scandal; but who he **claimed to be**. My flesh is real food! Unless you eat my flesh, you have no life in you. For many, this is just too much to swallow.

*If not true, (these claims” are those of a megalomaniac, compared with whom Hitler was the most sane and humble of men. There is no half-way house and there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, “Are you the son of Bramah?” he would have said, “My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.” If you had gone to Socrates and asked, “Are you Zeus?” he would have laughed at you. If you had got to Mohammed and asked, “Are you Allah?” he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, “Are you Heaven?”, I think he would have probably replied, “Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.” The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question.*

*In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man... We may note in passing that he was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects—hatred, terror, adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval. (C. S. Lewis. God in the Dock, 157–158).*

## QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION

1. In worship, is my motivation pure? Do I seek his gifts or am I seeking him?
2. Am I working for the wrong food? Am I laboring to obtain something that simply cannot satisfy the longing in my soul?
3. Am I working or believing? Is my spirituality grounded in what I do or in what he has done?
4. Am I willing to do God's will? Do I demand that God show me a sign before I make an act of total commitment to him?
5. Do I interpret Scripture rightly? Do I conform my life to Scripture or do I try to make Scripture conform to my own expectations and experience?
6. Am I wise enough to recognize my ignorance? Can I see well enough to know how blind I really am?

## Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

By William Williams (1745)

*Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land.  
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;  
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.  
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,  
Feed me till I want no more;  
Feed me till I want no more.*

*Open now the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream doth flow;  
Let the fire and cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through.  
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,  
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield;  
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.*

*When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of deaths, and hell's destruction,  
Land me safe on Canaan's side.  
Songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever give to Thee;  
I will ever give to Thee.*