

**Joshua 5:9-12** <sup>9</sup> And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called Gilgal<sup>1</sup> to this day. <sup>10</sup> While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. <sup>11</sup> And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. <sup>12</sup> And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

## “The Day the Manna Ceased”

One of the most memorable Saturday Night Live skits for me is from a show when Steve Martin guest hosted. The show ended with him walking out on stage and looking up with a great deal of “what the...” on his face and he says “What in the h.... is that?” and then he says it with more emphasis, “What in the h.... is that?” Then Bill Murray comes out and gives a very priceless look of “What the...?” and says, “I don’t know. What in the h.... is that?” They just keep staring up into the air and asking that question and eventually the whole cast and crew is on the stage looking up asking, “What in the h..... is that?” The skit to me was just a great bit of comedy; very simple and required the cast to use their faces and vary the way they asked a simple question. So now we’re going to have a little acting class. I want you all to pick up your hymnal and look at it with the best “What the...” expression you can muster and with great puzzlement ask, “What in the heck is that?” Do it. Do it again.

Well, that’s a hymnal with songs of praise, psalms, prayer, encouragement, devotion, and overall a great help to your spiritual walk. We’ve started to use a video projector here lately to project the words to some of the hymns and so forth and unfortunately one of the draw backs to that is losing the sense of having an unexplored repository of spiritual knowledge in your hands. A hymnal is a great witness to the voice, indeed our voice of praise and prayer and lament and joy, indeed, our relationship to the Triune God of Grace in song. We can hold the hymnal in our hands and, especially after singing one of the weirdest songs we’ve ever tried to follow, ask “What in the heck is that?” The answer to that question is “Even that weird dirge of a hymn was somebody’s attempt to bring manna to the people of God.”

The hymnal is full of manna for us. Well, you probably don’t know it, but in Hebrew the word “manna” simply means “What is it?” So, you’re out in the desert just freed from slavery in Egypt and you have no food (or water) and so you complain to Moses, “The LORD has brought us out here to die of starvation. Let’s go back to Egypt. At least there we had cucumbers to eat!” In response Moses rants on you a little and then the next morning you wake up and there’s this stuff on the ground with the dew. It looks like coriander and smells like bdellium (a type of myrrh) and so you ask “What in the heck is that?” Moses explains to you that it is manna. It is “What is it?” You get you some. You can grind it up and make cakes out of it and eat it. The first five days of the week gather just enough for your to eat. On the sixth day, gather enough for two days because it won’t come down on the seventh. Oh and by the way, if you gather more than you need it will become worm ridden, rotten, and stinky.” So, the thing about which you said, “What in the heck is that?” is the very thing that will sustain your life for the next forty years and unfortunately your children’s life for 40 years of their lives. Pick that hymnal up again. “Ask what is it?” It is manna. It will help sustain you for periods of time throughout your life. Pick up your Bible. It is manna. Through those words your Father in heaven will speak to you the words of life, the bread of life, the Word of life – Christ Jesus – the word, the bread that will sustain you in this life. Indeed, you will not find life-giving words elsewhere.

Worship, prayer, Christian fellowship, Bible study, singing hymns, these are manna for us. They sustain us in the wilderness as we are wandering from slavery to the old life of sin and feeling God-forsaken to the Promised Land of new life in Christ and God’s presence with us. But, let me push you a bit here. We also live in a day when the manna has ceased. Friends, we are eating the produce of the Promised Land. What I mean by that is we’ve been given the Holy Spirit who makes us to eat of the true bread from Heaven and be nourished in him. The Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus resurrected and ascended and therefore makes it so that we are being created anew in the New Creation life. Because the Holy Spirit indwells us and is at work in us and in our lives, we therefore are partakers in Jesus’ life, the new life of resurrection. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, without his working Christ in us our worship, prayer, Christian fellowship, and Bible Study are all just empty religious ritual. Without the Holy Spirit our faith is not real trust in the Trinity whom we have come to know as the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Rather, faith is nothing more than belief that there is a God because of our putting too much into coincidences. The Holy Spirit with and in us is real forgiveness, real reconciliation to God. Jesus death and resurrection was not simply some great exchange of his life for ours that is external to us and about which we must make a decision to believe it or not. Everything God accomplished for us in the very fact of becoming human as Jesus of Nazareth and the reconciling work he carried out in his life, death, and resurrection is made real in us by the gift of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is not given to us then we are not truly and utterly forgiven and reconciled to God for God would still be withholding himself from us. It’s like telling a person you forgive them and then refusing to trust them and rebuild the relationship anew.

Well, that’s enough theology for one day. I guess I need to give you some practology, a word which my spellchecker kept trying to automatically change to proctology and for some odd divine coincidental reason I’m sure. And since were speaking of odd coincidences, the name Joshua is our anglicized version of the Hebrew name Yehoshua. Yehoshua is rooted in the word Yeshua which means salvation or saviour or deliverer. Yehoshua translated into Greek is Yesous which we pronounce as Jesus. Moses was

with the people in the desert where they ate manna. God was with them there also, providing for them, until the day when his promise to make them a nation and give them a land would be fulfilled. In the wilderness they became a great and numerous people and were made ready to receive the land and become a great nation. Joshua, on the other hand, led them into the promised land where they would eat of what it provided for them. No longer were they to wander aimlessly. Now they were to go forth with the purpose of taking the land that God was giving them and then become a nation.

Similarly, Jesus our Deliverer has brought us to a place where we are now eating the produce of his kingdom, his reign, as it is breaking forth into our day from the future. We eat him and are nourished on him by the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are being changed by the Holy Spirit bringing us to know the person and personality of Jesus Christ. Yes, we need our hymnals for this. So also we need our Bibles and prayer. We need Christian fellowship. We need worship and teaching. We need the Lord's Supper and Baptism. We need time just to sit in the presence of God. The Holy Spirit uses these forms of manna to open us up to meet Jesus personally. But, unlike Joshua and the conquest of the Land by force, Jesus is leading us forth to do the work of forgiveness and reconciliation. When the promised day of Jesus return happens all will be forgiven. All will be reconciled to God. All will be made new. The earth will be full of the knowing of God as the waters cover the sea as Isaiah prophesies. That day is breaking forth into our lives with the presence of the Holy Spirit bringing real forgiveness and reconciliation to God. Jesus has therefore made us to be ministers of reconciliation. By the work of His Spirit in us he is making us able to speak the gospel, able to speak the truth to people that brings about real forgiveness and reconciliation. Our first order of conquest having crossed into the in-breaking of the promised day by the gift of the Holy Spirit is to forgive and work towards reconciliation with those we need to forgive and those who need to forgive us whether they be in our families, in our church, in our workplaces, or in our community. Our second order of conquest is to help others do the same. Forgiveness and reconciliation is the in-breaking of reign of Christ.

Reconciliation simply means "to meet again". It is to re-establish a trusting and proactive relationship with those whom we were belligerent. It is restoring mutual respect between those who have lost respect for each other and become disrespectful. Reconciliation begins with getting people to come to the truth. When we reconcile a bank account truth is established by making sure that personal records concur with bank records. So also in reconciliation truth is established by getting people to sit down together and have them each say what they believed happened, what they felt and why they did what they did. Truth comes about when they come to the same account of what happened and understand each other and each others feelings and apologies are given and received. Then reconciliation means learning to live together in the wake of the hurt and not trying to hurt one another again. It means striving to understand what went wrong in the first place, changing what patterns need to be changed, and working together to build a stronger, deeper relationship.

Forgiveness and reconciliation is the produce of the Promised Land for us. It's easy for us to play at being spiritual by eating manna. We can come to church and Bible study and pray and worship and all that stuff, but the real food of the Christian faith is the real work of pronouncing that God has reconciled humanity to himself in Christ and getting on with the real work of forgiveness and reconciliation. Do that and I guarantee you people will be looking at you saying "what in heaven's name is that?" because they've been blessed. Amen.