

One of my most enjoyable things about vacations is time to read. While reading *50 People Every Christian Ought to Know*, I came across the short biography of George H. Morrison (1866-1928) a Scottish pastor in Glasgow at the beginning of the twentieth century. That in turn directed me to a book on his sermons. I was particularly impressed by his sermon on the Ceasing of the Manna. I credit him with the inspiration for this message.

As you may recall, the manna was God's answer to the hunger cry that arose from the Children of Israel in the wilderness. They were only a short time out of Egypt when they started murmuring about dying of hunger and wanting to return (Exodus 16:2-3). They were told to go out the next morning and find bread from heaven on the ground. Each family was to gather a certain amount per person and not try to save any for the next day. On the sixth day they were to gather two days' worth so they would not have to work on the Sabbath. God said He was testing them to see if they would do as He commanded (Exodus 16:4).

Well, some of the people gathered more than they could eat, and the next morning they found it stank and had worms in it (Exodus 16:20). On the Sabbath some of the people went out expecting to find some manna to gather, and they found none (Exodus 16:27-30). God was teaching them that His word through Moses could be counted on and should be obeyed for their own good (Deuteronomy 8:16).

We can see some wonderful spiritual parallels in spending time with God each morning to get our spiritual manna from heaven. He'll always have some of that heavenly food for our spiritual nourishment, if we will take the time to gather it. On the Sabbath, we don't have to work for it, the Pastor has already gathered enough for you to feed on. By the grace of God, this morning and every Sunday when we get together, the Lord will have given me or one of the elders something to nourish your soul. And I pray that during the week you have been gathering your own spiritual manna by being in the Word of God and prayer. Otherwise, you'll be spiritually malnourished when you arrive and won't be able to receive as much.

This morning, however, I'd like to focus on when the manna ceased. When the Israelites rejected the good counsel of Joshua and Caleb and refused to go into the Promised Land, God declared that everyone 20 years and older would never enter (Numbers 13:29-31). It sounds like a harsh judgment unless you read the whole story and find how rebellious they were in the face of God's abundant mercy and patience (Psalm 78:40). The children of that older generation would watch them die in the wilderness during the next 40 years. From this we can see that everyone under the age

**Commented [notes1]: Exodus 16:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> • And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness,  
<sup>3</sup> • and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

**Commented [notes2]: Exodus 16:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> • Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not."

**Commented [notes3]: Exodus 16:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> • But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

**Commented [notes4]: Exodus 16:27-30 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> • On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.

<sup>28</sup> • And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?"

<sup>29</sup> • See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day."

<sup>30</sup> • So the people rested on the seventh day.

**Commented [notes5]: Deuteronomy 8:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> • who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.

**Commented [notes6]: Numbers 14:29-31 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> • your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me,

<sup>30</sup> • not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

<sup>31</sup> • But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected.

**Commented [notes7]: Psalm 78:40 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> • How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert!

of 20 and all those who would be born during those years of wandering in the wilderness would know only manna as their main sustenance. Those born after the Exodus would have lived on manna their entire life.

Imagine going out every morning of your life and picking up your food on the ground, knowing that it was God's miraculous provision for you because you were God's chosen people. It was a blessing, but like most blessings, it had its down side. If you've ever had to eat the same food every day, you know how monotonous that can be. The Israelites did complain about it and remembered the variety they had in Egypt (Numbers 11:5). Most of the time they talked about going back to Egypt, they mentioned the food as a reason to return. Food has a powerful influence on our life. After about a week in India, I start craving anything other than rice and curry. I even dream about it. You don't realize how much you think about food until you try to fast for a while.

On the other hand, it was pretty tasty stuff to have to eat. The Bible describes it as tasting like wafers made with honey (Exodus 16:31). They prepared it in different ways such as baking or boiling it. It must have provided all the nutrients they needed. What a blessing of favor and provision! It was referred to as the food of angels (Psalm 28:24-25). Even when they murmured, rebelled, were cowardly, the manna was always there to sustain them. **If God's gifts depended on our faithfulness, the miracle would have ceased shortly after it began.** God had a plan, and His patience and mercy can be plainly seen in His faithfulness to provide until they reached their destination.

Our passage for today tells us that when the people entered the Promised Land, celebrated Passover there, and ate the grain of the land, the manna ceased. Now think for a moment what it would have been like for those who ate manna their entire life to get up in the morning and discover that there was no manna on the ground. Can you see their bewildered faces as they looked out on the land, empty jar in hand? They might have wondered if they had the wrong day of the week and had forgotten to prepare for the Sabbath, but no, it was a day when it normally fell all around the camp. What a shock that must have been. I see the whole camp asking one another, "What do we do now? Has God forsaken us? Can we survive without this blessing?" But there below them on the plains are the fields of ripe grain, God's provision in a different form, variety and richness that they once had craved but had long since forgotten.

What God had taught through the manna, He continued to teach in a new form. We are dependent upon God to supply our needs. Remember that the manna was there to test them to see if they would obey or not. Now the rain and harvest will teach them the same lessons (1Kings 8:35). The ceasing of the manna had deep lessons of the heart for them and for us today (1 Corinthians 10:6)

**Commented [notes8]: Numbers 11:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> • We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.

**Commented [notes9]: Exodus 16:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> • Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.

**Commented [notes10]: Psalm 78:24-25 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> • and he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven.  
<sup>25</sup> • Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance.

**Commented [notes11]: 1 Kings 8:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> • "When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them,

**Commented [notes12]: 1 Corinthians 10:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> • Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

The first lesson that Morrison points out is that in our gains there is loss. They gained the plains of Jericho and the fruits of the land, but lost the bread of angels. For 40 years their goal had been to enter the land, and now that they are there, elated and feeling victorious, the miracle of the morning had ceased. **They realized with every gain there is some kind of loss.** To move forward we often must let go of some past blessing.

If we will follow Christ, we must learn that God's way is contrary to man's (Isaiah 55:8). We will find that it is only when we lose our life that we find it (Matthew 10:39). We find that in giving we receive (Acts 20:35). In loss there is often great gain if we will receive it. The trials take us to rich places we would otherwise never have discovered. The difficulty draws us to a deeper walk with our Lord and fellowship in His sufferings.

But remember, **if we gain by what we lose, it is also true that we lose by what we gain.** In every advance of our spiritual life, we must let go of something of the past. Often it is something we thought as indispensable as they considered their daily manna. In Morrison's words, "And he alone is wise and brave and cheerful who recognizes that inevitable law, and presses forward, undaunted, to the best with the courage to forget what is behind. We gain the Promised Land and lose the manna. We gain experience and lose the morning dew. We gain the strength and energy of manhood, and lose the freshness and wonder of the child. We gain the peace and the beauty of old age, and lose the strength and energy of manhood." <sup>14</sup> If our life would be focused on the call of God, there are ten thousand promising interests that we must set aside. We must learn the "one thing" of the Apostle Paul, forgetting what is behind and focusing like a laser on what lies before us (Philippians 3:13).

It is the sorrow, the pain, and the loss that gives us the capacity to comfort others with the comfort we are comforted from God (2Corinthians 1:4). What a harsh world this would be if we had no capacity to truly understand the loss of others! If it weren't for trials and pain and the cross, what a shallow world this would be. Yet, even when we take these trials to God and allow Him to turn them into blessings, we know there is something that will never be the same again. If we are wise, we let go of the grip we had on that former blessing, and look forward to what God has ahead of us, the fields below that are ready for harvest.

**The ceasing of the manna teaches us to be careful in what we would label "indispensable."** There is only one indispensable thing in life, the Lord of life. When our eyes become fixed on the blessing instead of the Blessor, it is good that He removes the blessing from us to redirect our focus. Just as the Children of Israel had most likely grown to think they could not survive without manna, so we tend to think of some blessing of God as a necessity to our life. It may be a job, a relationship, finances, a loved one, social security, or health. We can't imagine one day waking up to find it gone. We don't see how we could go on. But we must remember, the Lord of life is the only indispensable One. He can and will see us through all else if we will fix our eyes on

**Commented [notes13]: Isaiah 55:8 (ESV)**  
<sup>8</sup> • For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

**Commented [notes14]: Matthew 10:39 (ESV)**  
<sup>39</sup> • Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

**Commented [notes15]: Acts 20:35 (ESV)**  
<sup>35</sup> • In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

**Commented [notes16]:** Morrison, George H. (2013-03-07). Addresses by The Reverend George H. Morrison: "The Wings Of The Morning" and "The Return of the Angels" (Kindle Locations 433-435). Stover Creek Publications. Kindle Edition.

**Commented [notes17]: Philippians 3:13 (ESV)**  
<sup>13</sup> • Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

**Commented [notes18]: 2 Corinthians 1:4 (ESV)**  
<sup>4</sup> • who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Him. That is one reason He tells us to love Him above all else (Deuteronomy 6:5). At some time or other we will be faced with letting go of all else. Unless we are clinging to the One that never changes, we will be battered by the circumstances of life. Have we learned that all else is dispensable?

There are also many doctrines that are dispensable. The indispensable ones are the ones of the nature and work of Jesus. These we are to defend and cling to with all our might by the grace of God (Jude 3). But how many are focused on issues that make no difference in how we live today? We can get in a tiff about things that have nothing to do with the salvation and transformation offered to us by Jesus.

The most amazing illustration of this in the Bible is the religious leaders not wanting to enter the governor's headquarters for fear they would be defiled and unable to eat the Passover (John 18:28). They were trying to have the Son of God executed in the most demeaning and painful way they could think of, but they worried that they wouldn't be able to celebrate the deliverance from Egypt. Their religiosity so blinded them that they would kill the Lamb of God who was delivering them from the bondage of sin, yet not step in the gentile's house for fear they couldn't celebrate the lambs' blood on the doorpost in Egypt that save their ancestors. The prideful are too self-righteous to consider they may be in error. They couldn't let go of tradition to take hold of where tradition was leading them. Is it any different today?

We have grown up with certain teachings and we repeat them because we thought they explained life to us, but then we see a fresh revelation in the Word of God, and suddenly we find that what we had clung to was untrue or only partially true. We thought the manna of our youth was all there was and then God revealed His nature to us in a clear and undeniable way, and we find the fruit of the land is even more wonderful than the manna we grew up on. Our faith becomes alive and real when it becomes our own.

Certainly Israel saw God in the supernatural provision of manna, but when the manna ceased, Israel saw God in the natural world all around them. The rain, soil, and plants became the provision of God. Once more let me share how Morrison put it: "And so they learned what is so hard to learn, that providence had a wider reach than once they dreamed, and that the common field may be as full of heaven as the manna which is the bread of angels."<sup>2</sup>

We forget that everything is supernatural because everything is from God. I can't help but think of our finances here. Year after year I explain that we can look at our patterns in giving and who has come and gone, but that the Lord is faithful to supply regardless. Every budget cycle there is a suggestion that the special gifts of the past may not come this next year, and sometimes they don't, but by the next cycle we see God is still faithful. There is always enough and then some. We give 20% to missions and more

**Commented [notes19]: Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> - You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

**Commented [notes20]: Jude 1:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> - Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

**Commented [notes21]: John 18:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> - Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.

**Commented [notes22]:**

Morrison, George H. (2013-03-07). Addresses by The Reverend George H. Morrison: "The Wings Of The Morning" and "The Return of the Angels" (Kindle Locations 474-475). Stover Creek Publications. Kindle Edition.

and still there is enough. When God doesn't provide one way, He provides another. In the natural realm of things there is the supernatural invisible hand of God at work teaching us that **the means may change but the Provider never changes.**

Have we learned that the supernatural God is in the natural world and our daily affairs? In times of great crisis we run to Him and feel His nearness and comfort. Have we learned what Israel learned, that every day and every thing is full of the providence of the One that rains manna when we need it (Psalm 139:16). We can be such practical atheists as we go about our mundane daily life that we miss the divine hand of providence shaping the details of our day. Our senses are so filled with sights and sounds and our minds so cluttered with details and things to do that we forget we are on the stage of a drama guided by the invisible hand of God. **By the grace of God we can look through all that is dispensable and see the providence of the indispensable One.**

There is one last lesson that I'd like to bring out from the ceasing of the manna. Jesus declared that the people that ate manna in the wilderness died. Then He made a most bold claim. He said that He is the bread that came down from heaven that man may eat of and never die (John 6:49-51). As we take of this ordinary bread of communion, it shouts of an extraordinary God who is powerfully present to transform our lives. The indispensable One has provided what truly is the indispensable and eternal manna, Jesus, the bread of life.

You and I will one day ask where our blessing went. We will be shocked that our manna ceased. That's because we grew used to it being where we expected it for so long. But God is fitting us for eternity and that often takes some painfully drastic circumstances. Your blessing is still there. It has just taken a different form, richer, fuller, more meaningful, and meant to have you conformed more to the likeness of Jesus.

The blessing of Jesus' presence with the disciples was drastically altered by the cross. But the blessing that followed was His presence in and through them (John 16:7). It is the same blessing that is meant for us if we will let go and let God. Life is a series of letting go of the earthly manna so that we can partake of the Bread of Life that came down from heaven, our Lord Jesus (John 6:35).

#### Questions

- 1 What should we learn from God's provision of manna?
- 2 What did manna mean to the Israelites?
- 3 Under what conditions did God supply manna? Lesson?
- 4 What was it like the first day it stopped? Relate.
- 5 What is the first lesson of manna ceasing?
- 6 Why must we lose by what we gain?

#### Commented [notes23]: Psalm 139:16 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> • Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

#### Commented [notes24]: John 6:49-51 (ESV)

<sup>49</sup> • Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

<sup>50</sup> • This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

<sup>51</sup> • 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."

#### Commented [notes25]: John 16:7 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> • Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

#### Commented [notes26]: John 6:35 (ESV)

<sup>35</sup> • 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.

- 7 What must we set aside to focus on the main thing?
- 8 What is indispensable?
- 9 Where did God redirect Israel's sense of God's miraculous provision?
- 10 What is the difference between manna and Jesus?