

Encountering God: From Manna to Mountains

Joshua 5:1-15

Last week in our series on Encountering God, we looked at how we can discover God in our adversity.

We saw Elijah, the prophet of God, fleeing for his life, falling into a depression and despair, observing the power and might of God, hearing the quiet voice of God, and returning to continue his ministry for the Lord.

We discovered that God cares for his people and provides for their necessities.

We saw that God often speaks to his people in quiet tones and whispers.

We learned that we are never alone when standing up for God; even if all of mankind falls away, God is still with us.

Our final thought last week was that God has a plan for us that is bigger than ourselves.

I asked you the question: Will we give into our own impulses, or follow His redeeming plan?

I encouraged you to pray and allow God to take you out of your adversity...Just tell Him where you're at...be honest with Him...and let Him know that you want to trust Him to be with you and ultimately deliver you out of the pit.

Today, we're going to continue in our series on Encountering God. This morning I invite you to turn with me to the book of Joshua, the fifth chapter, beginning with verse one and concluding with verse 15. Let us stand as we honor the reading of God's word.

Joshua 5:1-15 (NKJV)

1 So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we[a] had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.

2 At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time." 3 So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.[b] 4 And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. 5 For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised. 6 For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people who were men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord—to whom the Lord swore that He would not show them the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, "a land flowing with milk and honey." [c] 7 Then Joshua circumcised their sons whom He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

8 So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. 9 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal[d] to this day.

10 Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. 11 And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. 12 Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?"

14 So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"

15 Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

So today, we have entitled the message, Encountering God: From Manna to Mountains

If you go back and read the previous four chapters in the book of Joshua, you will find great promises that God has for us... Promises that will bring us through difficult days. If you go back in the previous chapters leading up to today's text, you will see how Joshua was told by God to rise up and cross the Jordan. To cross that river that seemed like such a challenge. God called on the people of Israel to trust Him and to move forward despite the loss of their leader, Moses.

In those words, we find the great promises that God had for Joshua and the nation of Israel. Even in the midst of their suffering, even in the midst of the trouble, God had a plan for them. God had a way out.

Earlier in the book of Joshua, we can read how God promised them that they would cross that river on dry ground. Think about that, on dry ground. God promised them that as they faced that challenge, that river that was overflowing its banks, that He would deliver them. That he would stop those waters from flowing so they could cross unharmed.

This morning as we shift from those earlier chapters, our focus moves away from How God called them to cross the river, HOW they were to cross the river to WHY?

Why is it so important for us to move forward in God's plan? Why is it so important for us to cross this river? Why is it important for us to trust God to take us through the valleys in our lives? We know that in Christ, we have the answer of how, but what is the answer to the question, WHY?

The answer to WHY is also found within our text. Here, we begin reading of what happened once the children of Israel got to the other side of the Jordan. They had finally set foot in Canaan. The land of milk and honey, the land that God had promised to them for so very long. They were beginning to see the culmination of a 40 year journey.

A journey that many did not survive. A journey that only TWO of the men of fighting age survived! The only two people who survived the entire forty years were Joshua and Caleb, the two men who returned from the spy mission and told the Israelites that the enemy was strong, but that they could take them! (Numbers 13:30)

They had seen so many of their brothers and sisters die in that wilderness. So many that had turned their backs on God had lost their lives in that wilderness. Moses had died. But yet, they forged ahead, ever trusting in God to deliver on His promise.

And now, that day had arrived. They were now standing in the land that God had promised them. They were now in the promised land. And what happened once they arrived in that promised land? What happened now that they were standing on the other side of the Jordan?

Josh. 5:10-12 says: Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. 11 And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. 12 Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

Why is this significant? Because God now had a new provision for His children. You see, for 40 years, these people had been eating Manna.

Ex 16:35 says, And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

For forty years, God had been sustaining His children with Manna. That manna had done its job. All of God's children had been fed. All of God's children had been given the provisions that they needed to survive. But now, now that they had crossed to the other side. Now that Moses had been taken home, now that they had faced their challenge, faced their trial and crossed that Jordan. God now had a new provision for His people.

It is easy for us to get used to what we are used to.

We hold onto the old blessing...it's still a blessing but it's old...it was for another time.

We can't move forward with an old blessing.

They were in a NEW place and there was a New provision for that place.

You see manna was absolute...it was what it was.. it just fell from the sky every day...didn't require any faith or any work to receive it.

But they did not need old provision anymore...it was no longer RELEVANT.

They were not in wilderness anymore.

The wilderness was not their real resting place.

Perhaps they were getting comfortable with the wilderness.

Manna was just "Road Trip" food. God had a banquet prepared for them.

Notice the smooth transition from the Passover meal to the next day provision:

Verses 11-12—food came from the ground; manna ceased immediately.

God took them from surviving to THRIVING!

TWO things changed once they crossed over- MANNA and MOUNTAINS

1. They went from surviving on manna, to feasting on all the blessed foods of the Holy Land, and

2. They went from pressing toward their goal (the Holy Land) to claiming their mountains! This was a fundamental shift in their mindset-

In the Desert, they were pressing toward a goal they could only dream of;

In the Promised Land, they actually began to believe God for greater things!

They were no longer satisfied with survival...now they wanted to succeed.

I believe firmly today, that God has a new provision in store for us. I believe with all of my heart that God wants to pour out His blessings on us like we've never seen before. I believe has amazing things in store for us as a church, and I believe that God has amazing things in store for you.

Now understand, there was nothing wrong with God's manna. In fact, it had been nothing short of miraculous. Something that all of the people of Israel knew was a gift directly from the very hands of God. They knew that God had done amazing things for them by providing that manna during their 40 year journey.

But now, God had a new miraculous provision for His people. Now, God wanted to do even more amazing things for them in the future. God had a new provision that would meet their new needs, their new situations.

God got rid of the negative stuff from the old generation...the ancestors.

He had to protect the future of the youth.

These are the CHILDREN of the wilderness.

All they knew was manna.

But it was harvest time when they showed up in the promised land, even after 40 years.

This is the providence of God. God already provides.

What is one of the reasons WHY we must move forward and cross this Jordan? Because God has a brand new provision in store for each of us.

1. Because God has a brand new provision in store for each of us. PROVISION

2. Another reason WHY we must move forward is VISION

Look in verses 13-15.

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" 14 So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" 15 Then the Commander of the LORD'S army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

Here we read of Joshua lifting his eyes and looking towards Jericho. Jericho, which was the next great challenge they would face. And as he lifted his eyes, he saw a MAN. No ordinary man. This was the Lord Himself in all His glory. And here, Joshua heard the same words that Moses heard back in Exodus chapter 3 at the burning bush when God told Moses to remove his shoes for he was standing on holy ground.

In this situation, Joshua was looking upon the very face of God. This was, as theologians describe, a Christophany. This is a temporary vision of Himself to give His people the encouragement they need to carry on.

Every time a CHRISTOPHANY took place in the OT, God was about to move the children of God beyond their greatest expectations. In each and every case, He called them...beyond the confines of their limited faith...and out of their comfort zones.

He was the Fourth Man in the furnace in Daniel-and Shadrach, Meeshach and Abendego became fire proof...

He was the Burning Bush that was not consumed in Exodus-and Moses went from being a hired hand in hiding to the liberator of Israel...

Here, Joshua must have been asking the question, WHAT AM I GOING TO DO NOW? I've lead these people across this river, but now, I'm looking at this place called Jericho. This place that seems so protected, so safe. How are we going to conquer it? And so, God in all His wisdom, decides that Joshua needs a bit of pep talk. Joshua needed a BRAND NEW VISION.

God was not happy with them just crossing over...

He wants Joshua to set his sights on Jericho (the future).

The mountains represented the next challenge, the new frontier.

The next reason WHY we must carry on is that God wants to give us a BRAND NEW VISION in our lives. He wants to give us that encouragement that we need to carry on. He knows we're asking questions of ourselves. Questions like HOW? WHY? WHAT DO I DO NOW? He knows exactly what we're going through, and He doesn't want us to go through it alone.

God appeared to Joshua here to give him encouragement, to give him direction, to help him see how and why to carry on. God gave Joshua the comfort of knowing that God would deliver Jericho into their hands. That He would deliver them through the days ahead. And, God wants to do the same for us.

For almost 95 years, we've seen the vision. Six of those years I have been your Pastor. We've seen where God has led us. Many times, it's been through the wilderness. We've been delivered from bad times. And, we've had many mountain-top experiences as well. God has brought us so far and we've seen God at work in more ways than we could have possibly imagined. And yet, God today wants to give us a BRAND NEW VISION for the future.

Why do we need to carry on? Why do we need to move forward? Why do we need to cross? Because God is standing just on the other side, waiting to encourage us to greater heights, greater miracles, greater accomplishments. God is waiting to give us that brand new vision.

I believe that God wants to call us as a church to a greater work. He wants us to reach out as we've never done before. He wants us to help the hurting. To share the hope of the Gospel with the lost like we've never done before. He wants us to be there for others when they have no where to go in the midst of their problems. God is calling UBC to reach this community, to reach this state, to reach this nation and to reach this world with a bigger vision than the one that has brought us this far.

God wants us to give us a brand new vision of reaching across this city to bring the Gospel to those who have not heard. He wants to give us a brand new vision of social justice, a family wellness center that addresses spirit, mind and body, after school programs that develop our youth academically, socially and emotionally, a workforce development and entrepreneurship program, financial literacy ministry and transitional housing for those who are just starting out, starting over or facing difficult circumstances. He wants to give us a brand new vision of supporting and sending missionaries all over the world to tell people everywhere that Jesus loves and that He died for them.

God has a BRAND NEW VISION for our future.

The third reason WHY we must carry on is found within these same verses that we've just read. You see Joshua was standing there and all of a sudden, he was standing in the presence of God. Yes this was an opportunity to get a brand new vision, a chance to see what God had in store. To see where God would take them next.

But also, it was a BRAND NEW ENCOUNTER. He was standing in the very presence of God. He was in the midst of a FRESH ENCOUNTER WITH GOD. Oh how Joshua must have felt. He had heard Moses talk about that day when Moses approached that burning bush. I'm sure that Moses shared with him what it was like. How it felt. How it changed him.

And here and now, Joshua was encountering that same God. Here, Joshua was now in the midst of that FRESH ENCOUNTER. I am sure that Joshua's heart was beating faster than ever. I'm sure that Joshua started to break out in a cold sweat. He was as nervous as he'd ever been. His breathing had picked up to an overwhelming pace. Here he was in the presence of God.

WHY DO WE NEED TO CARRY ON? Why do we need to cross this Jordan? Why do we need to continue on in our journey? Because God is calling us to a FRESH ENCOUNTER with Him. Oh we're not going to have Him show up in the middle of the road talking to us as Moses and Joshua did. We're not going to have him appearing like that. We're not going to see a burning bush or an angelic, glorified Man standing before us. But we will have a Fresh Encounter all the same.

In fact, the kind of encounter that God is calling us to is far more personal, far more powerful, far more meaningful than even Moses and Joshua had. Yes, this calling, this encounter is one that we can have on a continual basis.

The new encounter God call us to is personal, intimate and continual...

Goes beyond our "salvation experience."

We need that continuing encounter to move forward.

To move forward requires faith...Joshua and Caleb always had faith (minority report).

Indeed, God is calling us to a FRESH ENCOUNTER that can continue throughout the rest of our lives. Why did God want Joshua to cross and to keep moving forward? Because God wanted to call Joshua unto Himself.

He had a great plan in store for Joshua. He knew that Jericho would be conquered. He knew what the end result would be, and He needed Joshua to follow through. To encounter God, to

experience His power, His encouragement, His presence. And then, Joshua would be ready for the task ahead.

In our lives, in our challenges, in our problems... We can be sure that God has a great plan in store for us. God knows what lies ahead for us. He knows the victories that we will experience. He knows what we will be able to accomplish in His power and in His presence. It's just that sometimes we aren't ready for that FRESH ENCOUNTER. We miss out on so much of what God has for us, because we're not ready.

So how then do we make sure we're ready? We prepare our hearts in order to be in the presence of God. We prepare ourselves by pursuing holiness. Joshua 3:5 says, And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

We know that we must prepare ourselves for that FRESH ENCOUNTER with Him.

Lev. 11:44 After all, I, the LORD, am your God. You must be holy because I am holy....45 I, the LORD, am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God. You must therefore be holy because I am holy.

Before the new generation could experience all that God had for them, they had to be circumcised...these are adult men (not new born babies)...and they were circumcised. OUCH! The youth allowed these old men to circumcise them. The older you are the harder it is to experience circumcision. (Ad lib.)

Circumcision is cutting away old things that can't come to promised land!

Most people from previous generation could not come. (Hebrews 4:11)

Circumcision is renewing of the covenant God previously made with the children of Israel with the new army of youth.

God rolled away the reproach.

Circumcision is preparation for the blessing.

Note there is a healing period after the circumcision before they crossed over.

We must be up to the challenge. We must be prepared to carry on. We must be prepared to face all that lies ahead as we walk through our valleys... through our dark days... through our struggles.

We as a people...as African Americans have been on a journey from slavery to the civil rights movement...up until the present moment...we have experienced ups and downs... achievements and defeats, etc.

We can't be satisfied with the manna of the wilderness...we need to get a new vision as a people and have a collective new encounter with God.

The past is behind us. The future is ahead of us.

God will supply the grace we need to move from the Jordan to Jericho and beyond.

Why must we cross this Jordan? Why must we face this challenge? Why must we carry on in the face of adversity? Why must we never quit?

Today, there are people all across this room, and all across this land, that are facing great struggles. You are facing some dark days in your lives. Every week I talk with people in our church who are going through what seems like insurmountable adversity.

We all stand in the face of these adversities and ask ourselves, WHY? Why is this happening? Why must I continue? Why must I walk on? Why must I face this challenge?

The answer lies in the promises we've read.

Because God has a NEW PROVISION for us. He wants to begin to provide for us in a new way... A way that we're not used to.... A way that we couldn't have imagined.... A provision that will meet every challenge, hat will meet our every need.

He has a NEW VISION for us. He wants us to see Him in all of his glory and know that He will lead us, He will guide us. He will direct our steps. He wants us to see that God is not finished with us. He has great things in store for us, great victories in store, great days ahead.

And He has a NEW ENCOUNTER in store for us. A Fresh Encounter with Almighty God. He wants us to stand in His presence. To bask in His power. To grasp hold of His hand and allow Him to deliver us through any challenge we face.

Today, if you are here and you're in a situation where you're asking WHY? If you're here today and you are facing one of those life-changing trials, one of those valley experiences that knock every bit of the air out of us then I hope you've listened to the words I've shared with you today.

God does have a plan for your life. God does have a way out. He does want to wrap His arms around you, to lead you through those trials, to give you the direction you need, to give you the comfort you need to bring you peace.

He loved you so much that he died on the cross for you. He was buried in a borrowed tomb and remained there for three days. Until, by His own power, his body began to stir and He walked right out of that tomb so that you and I can have victory over Satan, victory in our problems, victory over challenges, victory over sorrows and because of His love and His sacrifice we have VICTORY OVER SIN.

He is there for you today. Just as He was for Moses. Just as He was for Joshua. Just as He was for all the saints of God that we knew who have gone before us. He is standing there ready for you to gaze upon His amazing power and His amazing grace. Ready for you to have an ENCOUNTER with Him, so he can take from the manna of everyday life to possessing the mountain that is in the distance...so you can stop existing and begin living...so you can go from surviving to thriving.

SO, LET ME ASK YOU...

1. What is YOUR next step? Have you asked God to show you what your next goal...your next mountain...your next provision...will be?

2. Are you willing to stand before God and say

I am ready for a fresh touch...

I am ready for a fresh encounter...

I want a new vision

In reality, that is the key. Jerry Falwell said in 1971, when he started Liberty University...

“The only limit to what God can do in the life of the believer, is how far that believer is willing to follow Him. GOD NEVER HESITATES. He is just waiting for a people who are ready.”

Are you willing to step out and trust God?

Are you willing to commit your new direction...your next choices...to Him?

Are you willing to step out in faith and SEIZE YOUR PROMISE?

THEN DO IT.

STEP OUT AS WE SING.

STEP OUT.

COME DOWN THESE AISLES

AND SHOW GO THAT YOU ARE READY AND WILLING TO RECEIVE new provision, new vision and a new encounter with Him.

If you have never really accepted Jesus as your personal Savior, would you do it right now? Do not delay or put it off. If you would like to receive Christ by faith, pray this simple prayer in your heart: I acknowledge that I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died for my sins on the cross, and rose again the third day. I repent of my sins. By faith I receive the Lord Jesus as my Savior. You promised to save me, and I believe You, because You are God and cannot lie. I believe right now that the Lord Jesus is my personal Savior, and that all my sins are forgiven through His precious blood. I thank You, dear Lord, for saving me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, God heard you and saved you. I personally want to welcome you to the family of God.