

September 2022 Communion

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Date: 18 September 2022

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[0 : 0 0] Well, friends, would you turn with me, please, to the words that we read in 2 Chronicles chapter 33. 2 Chronicles chapter 33. Reading again verses 18 and 19.

Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh and his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, behold, they are in the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

And his prayer, and how God was moved by his entreaty and all his sin and his faithlessness, and the sites on which he built high places and set up the ashram and the images before he humbled himself, behold, they are written in the chronicles of the seers.

And so Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his house, and Ammon his son reigned in his place. Henry Gereke was a Lutheran pastor who had received an almost impossible assignment.

He had been appointed as chaplain to the Nazi war criminals during the Nuremberg trials in the aftermath of the Second World War. And in the course of his ministry, he witnessed the conversions of men such as Joachim von Ribbentrop and Wilhelm Keitel.

[1 : 2 9] It was a reminder that the Lord is a God who can save even a Nazi war criminal. Well, this evening we're going to look at the conversion of a man whom everyone thought was beyond redemption, beyond salvation, this man Manasseh.

And we're looking at it under two headings, the perversion of Manasseh and then the prayer of Manasseh. The perversion of Manasseh and the prayer of Manasseh.

First we have the perversion of Manasseh. Look at verses 1 to 9. And here the chronicler focuses on the sin of Manasseh. In verses 1 and 2, we're introduced to Manasseh. We're told that he was 12 years old when he began to reign.

In verse 1, his father Hezekiah had brought about various religious reforms. He had cleansed the temple and restored its worship. He had organized the priests and reinstituted the Passover.

Hezekiah was the man, we read about in 2 Chronicles 29, who did what was right in the sight of the Lord. This was the home then that Manasseh grew up in.

[2 : 3 5] He had a godly father. He had a father who prayed for him. He had a father who took him to church. He had a father who would read the Bible with him. And then his father died, leaving Manasseh to reign in his place.

And we're also told that Manasseh reigned for 55 years. Verse 1 again, he enjoys the longest reign out of any of the kings of Judah. Longer than the reign of King David. Longer than the reign of King Solomon.

But the length of his reign isn't as important as what he did with the years that the Lord had given him. Finally, we're told that Manasseh was a wicked king. Verse 2, the chronicler writes that he did evil in the sight of the Lord.

And he adds that he followed the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had driven out before the people of Israel. The Old Testament makes it clear that the Canaanites deserve to be thrown out of the land, driven from the land because of their wickedness.

And here's Manasseh engaging in the same sins as the Canaanites. And as such, he also deserves the same punishment he deserves to be driven out of the land.

[3 : 40] The sinful practices of Manasseh are then spelled out in verses 3 to 8. The chronicler gives a report, a litany of all his sinful activities in verses 3 to 6.

He rebuilt the high places that his father had broken down. He set up altars to the Baals who made Asherah poles. He worshipped all the hosts of heaven and served them.

He built altars for the hosts of heaven in the courts of the temple of the Lord. He sacrificed his sons as an offering to his false gods in the valley of Hinnom. He used fortune-telling, used omens, used sorcery.

He consulted with mediums and necromancers. And the chronicler goes on to give the Lord's assessment on Manasseh in verse 6. One writer has said, If Manasseh had searched the Scriptures for more practices that would most anger the Lord and then commit them, he couldn't have achieved that result any more effectively than he did.

And the chronicler spells that out as he writes that Manasseh did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. The chronicler goes further to describe one particular act of defiance committed by Manasseh in verses 7 and 8.

[4 : 56] He made a carved image. This would have been an erotic image. It would have been a pornographic image. And Manasseh sets it up in the temple, sets it up in the place that the Lord had chosen and placed his own name.

This is Manasseh's ultimate act of rebellions and defiance against the God of his father. It is an act which shows his indifference to the mercy of the Lord because the Lord had given his people such mercy in providing them with a temple.

That temple was the place for sacrifice. That temple was the place for atonement. That temple was the great meeting place between God and man. And Manasseh shows his complete and total contempt and disregard for the Lord as he takes this pornographic image and sets it up in full view, public view, in the temple.

One writer puts it like this, This was no quiet rebellion. It was an insult that was hurled in the face of the Most High. Verse 9 gives us summary of Manasseh's reign up to this point.

The chronicler tells us that Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray. He did all that he could to win their hearts and to wean them away from the Lord.

[6 : 17] He led them astray. The word can mean that he seduced them to sin. And you know, friends, that is so important for us to remember. It is far more serious to lead someone into sin than to sin on your own.

On the day of judgment, every single one of us are going to have to give an account of our lives to the Lord. But we are also going to have to give an account of how we influenced others.

The example that we set. Every preacher, every politician, every professor, every prime minister, every person will have to give an account before the throne of God of the example that they set.

Manasseh doesn't simply lead the people astray.

That would have been bad enough. But he causes them to sink to new depths that no one had ever sunk before. It's therefore no exaggeration to say that Manasseh was the wickedest man, the most perverted man on the face of the earth.

[7 : 39] And you know, friends, as we consider these verses, we are being reminded of just how far a person can actually wander from the Lord. That is what we see in this passage.

Here's Manasseh, a child of many prayers, a child brought up going to church, a child whose family had enjoyed the Lord's blessing, the Lord's benediction.

And the same man wanders further and further from the Lord. He's a man who deliberately and defiantly disregards and disobeys the Lord.

Like the prodigal in Jesus' parable, Manasseh is a man who finds himself in a very far country.

He is far from his earthly father, Hezekiah, but also far from his heavenly father. And perhaps that applies to someone who's here tonight.

[8 : 39] You might be here tonight and you're not a Christian. You grew up in a Christian home. You had praying parents. You had godly grandparents.

But as you grew older, you wandered further and further from the Lord. You dismissed church as boring. You dismissed the Lord and His word as irrelevant to your life.

And even as you find yourself sitting in this building tonight, maybe beside your husband, maybe beside your wife, maybe beside your parents, you know that your heart is very far from the Lord.

Or you might be here and you're backslidden. You were once close to the Lord and you could speak about His blessing, His benediction in your life. You were once able to speak of His presence.

You spoke of His provision. You spoke of the fact that you were resting on His promises. You spoke of the fact that you knew His peace that passed all understanding. But then you began to allow things into your life that were contrary to the word of God.

[9 : 47] And perhaps there was a time when you trembled over those sins. You couldn't believe that you fell into them when you first did. But no more. You're spending your days wandering further and further and further from the Lord with less and less remorse.

You are sinking into a deeper and deeper pit. You are a professing Christian and you're thinking to yourself, Where am I going? What have I done?

Or you might be here tonight and you have a manasseh in your family. You brought them up to go to church. And you prayed for them and you prayed for them with many tears.

And there may have been days when they showed an interest in the Lord. Days when they asked you for a Bible. Days when they asked you how to read the Bible. Days when they asked you to take them along to youth fellowship.

Days when they wanted to go along to camp. But then they began to wander. And they've wandered ever since. And now like manasseh, they're in that far country.

[10 : 54] I was thinking about that recently when I was thinking of one of my own favorite preachers, John Piper. I love John Piper's preaching. I love his books that he's written.

But he has a son right now who has completely walked away from the faith of his parents. He posts videos mocking the faith of his father. Maybe that's you tonight.

Maybe you have a son. You have a daughter. You have a grandchild. And they just don't get why you love the Lord so much. Well, tonight these verses are giving us a very vivid picture of just how far a person can wander from the Lord.

And how far they can wander from the Lord despite all their gospel privileges. And Barvis are a very privileged people. Aren't they? You've had a man faithfully preaching the word from this pulpit for eight years.

You had Calumnean before that. And you had other ministers before them faithfully preaching the word. But it's amazing how far a person can wander despite all their gospel privileges.

[12 : 11] But we move from the perversion of Manasseh to the prayer of Manasseh. Look at verses 10 to 20. And here the chronicler focuses on the repentance of Manasseh and its aftermath.

In verses 10 to 13 we see Manasseh's repentance. The chronicler tells us about Manasseh's refusal to listen to the Lord in verse 10. The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people.

In 2 Kings chapter 21 we hear the message that the Lord gave Manasseh through the prophets. The prophets come to Manasseh and they say we have a message from the Lord. And it's a message that will make your ears tingle.

It will make your ears tremble. But Manasseh pays no attention. He was an expert at tuning out when confronted with God's word. No matter how passionate the preacher.

No matter how solemn the sermon. He knew exactly how to deafen his ears and deaden his conscience. And maybe that's true of some who are here tonight. No matter how much this man is calling from the pulpit to his unconverted friend.

[13 : 16] You know just how to deaden your ears and deafen your conscience. And so the Lord now takes drastic action. Verse 11.

He brings up the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria. They capture Manasseh. They put a hook through his nose and bind him with bronze chains. And they bring him to Babylon as their prisoner.

He is now driven out of the land of promise. And it's at this very low point that Manasseh finally prays. Look at verses 12 and 13. He's in distress.

And in his distress he humbly prays to the Lord. He comes before the Lord as a beggar. He entreats the Lord. Here is this mind and this mouth which should be given over to so much evil.

And that mind, that mouth is now framing, forming a prayer to the Lord. We might imagine this scene in heaven. Prayer comes before the throne of God.

[14 : 16] And there is a deathly hush. One of the angels turns to his friend. And he says, I know that voice. That's a voice. That's a voice I know well. That's a voice that I heard in all the pubs and clubs of Jerusalem.

That's a voice that I heard in the sea angling in Stornoway. That's a voice that I heard in the crit. That's a voice that I heard again and again on a Friday night and the weekends. That's Manasseh's voice.

And that voice is praying. Can you believe it? And the Lord responds to Manasseh's prayer. Look at verse 13.

The God who's described as being a rock is moved by the prayer of Manasseh. The God who cannot tolerate sin hears this broken sinner.

And he brings him back to Judah and back to his kingdom. And you know, I wonder if that amazes these angels even more. How amazing that Manasseh should be found praying to the Lord.

[15 : 17] But how much more amazing that the Lord would hear and respond to the prayer of the wickedest man, the most perverted man on the face of the earth. We move from Manasseh's repentance, though, to his restoration program in verses 14 to 17.

Upon returning to his kingdom, Manasseh begins to restore the walls of Jerusalem. Verse 14. He builds the outer wall and ensures that it's a very great height. He sees the need to protect his capital from future invasion.

He then restores the fortified cities of Judah. He stations military commanders in all these cities. These fortified cities were outposts. They were designed to be the first line of defense of a foreign army, a foreign invasion came.

And Manasseh sees the need to ensure that they are ready and equipped for any future invasion. But most importantly, look at verses 15 and 17. He restores the Lord's worship.

He removes the foreign gods and the idols that he has set up in the temple. And he removes all the altars and he throws them outside the city. He then restores the altar of the Lord.

[16 : 26] And he offers peace offerings and thanksgiving offerings to the Lord. And he commands Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel, their covenant God.

Manasseh's a changed man. He's got a new perspective, a new passion, new priorities. But there is one problem. It was easy for Manasseh to lead the people into sin.

Far harder for him to lead them out of sin. And the chronicler notes that while the people offered sacrifices to the Lord, their God, they offered those sacrifices on the high places.

It was a compromised worship. A worship not fully regulated and controlled by the Word of God. The Lord said, you will worship in the temple. You will worship in Jerusalem.

And these people are worshiping on the high places. The account of Manasseh's life then concludes with him resting with his fathers. Verses 18 to 20, the chronicler tells us about where additional information concerning Manasseh can be found.

[17 : 33] In verses 18 and 19, he notes that Manasseh's acts and his prayers and the words of the seers who spoke to him are recorded in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

He then notes that Manasseh's prayer and how God was moved by his prayer and all his sins and acts of faithlessness are recorded in the chronicles of the seers.

And having given that information, the chronicler tells us that Manasseh died and was buried. Verse 20. Now think about this. Manasseh had sinned so greatly.

Done so much evil in the eyes of the Lord. No one would have been surprised. No one would have been outraged to read that Manasseh died in a Babylonian dungeon.

That he died outside the promised land. But Manasseh dies. And look at where he's buried. He is buried in his house, in his palace in Judah, inside the promised land as a testimony to the grace of God.

[18 : 38] And you know, friends, as we consider these verses, we are being shown just how gracious the Lord is toward those who have wandered from him. That's what we see in this passage.

Here's Manasseh, a man who had spurned gospel privilege after gospel privilege. Here's Manasseh, a man who had wandered further and further from the Lord. Here's Manasseh, a man who's brought in disgrace to Babylon in bronze chains with a hook through his nose.

Here's Manasseh, a man who cries out in desperation and despair to the Lord from a Babylonian dungeon. And here's the Lord being moved by his entreaty.

Here's the Lord hearing his prayer, bringing him once again to Judah, once again to Jerusalem. It is a beautiful picture of grace.

A beautiful picture of the Lord's goodness to the undeserving. Here is the wickedest man, the most perverted man on the face of the earth.

[19 : 41] But he is not too wicked. He is not too perverted to be saved by the grace of God.

And isn't that an encouragement to us this evening? No one is too wicked or wayward, too dirty or disgraceful, too messy or miserable, too unworthy or undeserving, too sinful or secular to be saved, to be freed from the prospect of eternal condemnation in hell.

If the Lord could save Manasseh, then he can save anyone. I recently came across a story about an old Scottish preacher called Hector MacPhail that illustrates this.

Hector MacPhail had a long ministry, a powerful ministry. He was used greatly by the Lord. But in his old age, he became weak. He became ill. He was no longer able to be as active as he once was.

And he began to doubt his salvation. And his wife called the elders to visit him. And still, he had no assurance of his salvation. And then one night, he had a dream.

[20 : 52] He dreamt that he was at the gates of heaven. And he dreamt that he was looking at those gates. And after a while, a great procession came with loud shouts and singing.

And the angel said to Hector MacPhail in the dream, Do you know who these people are entering into the great heavenly city? And Hector MacPhail said, I don't. And the angel said, Well, those are the patriarchs.

There's Abram. There's Isaac. There's Jacob. Are you going to go into heaven with them? And Hector MacPhail said, No, no, no. I can't go in with them. I am not worthy enough to go in with them. And then after a while, another procession came.

Again, shouting and cheering as they went through the gates of heaven. And the angel said to him, There's the apostles. There's Peter and James and John and Andrew. There they all are.

Will you go in with them, Hector? Oh, no, he said. I can't go in with them. I'm not worthy to go in with them. And then after a while, another procession. And this time, there was John Knox and John Calvin and Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon and all the great reformers.

[21 : 58] Will you go in with them? The angel said, No, I'm not worthy enough to go in with them. And then after a while, another procession. And Hector recognized these people. There were his fellow presbyters, the ministers and elders that he served with.

And there were the deacons on his deacon's court. And there were members from his congregation. And even adherents from his congregation. And the angel said, Will you go in with them? And Hector says, I can't go in with them.

I'm not worthy to go in with them. And then after what seemed to be an eternity, a lone figure approached the gates. And this lone figure looked aside.

He was limping along as if his arms and hands had been bound very tightly. He had a mess in his face as if some cruel iron had been placed through his nose.

And he stumbled and staggered through the gates of heaven. And the angel said, Do you know who that is, Hector? And he said, No, I don't. And the angel said, That's Manasseh.

[23 : 00] Will you go in with Manasseh? And Hector replied, If Manasseh can get into the glory of God, then so can Hector Macphail.

And when he woke up, he called his wife to get the elders of the church. And he told them, Hector Macphail is saved by the grace of the same God who saved Manasseh. Manasseh could go in.

And therefore, old Hector Macphail can go in. I thank God that I can go in. And my friend, if you're here tonight and you're not a Christian, there is a message for you.

If the Lord could save Manasseh, then he can save you. You may have done many things that you have never told anyone else about. Things that leave you struggling under a weight of sin, shame, and guilt.

And I'm telling you tonight, friend, that you can go to Jesus. You can go to the Jesus who can deal with all of your sin, all of your shame, all of your guilt.

[24 : 05] He is willing to save. And not only willing to save, but able to save. If the Lord could save Manasseh, then he can save you. Will you go to him?

Or perhaps you're here tonight and you're backslidden. And again, there's a message for you. If the Lord could save Manasseh, then he can save you. You know, one of the devil's greatest strategies is to tell a backslidden Christian, your sin is too evil, it's too dark, too unspeakable, too unforgivable.

I lose track of how many Christian friends who have backslidden over the years. And they've said things to me like, my sin isn't like anyone else's.

And they have cut themselves off from fellowship with God's people, cut themselves off from the prayer meeting, cut themselves off from the church services until they're nowhere to be seen.

My friend, if you are here tonight and you are backslidden, and you are wondering, is there any way back for me? Hear these words. If the Lord could save Manasseh, he can save you.

[25 : 18] Or perhaps you're here tonight and you have a Manasseh in your family. And again, there's a message for you. If the Lord could save Hezekiah's Manasseh, then he can save your Manasseh.

You might have prayed and prayed and prayed for your prodigal son, your prodigal daughter, pleaded again and again with the Lord to take them out of that far country, but they remain so hardened to the gospel.

In fact, they don't seem softer. They only seem harder and harder to the gospel. And it's more than possible that the devil has been telling you that your prayers, your petitions are pointless.

That your son, your daughter will never change. That your son, your daughter is lost. But this passage is encouraging you to remember that if the Lord could save Hezekiah's Manasseh, then he can save your Manasseh because nothing is impossible for him.

Tonight, friends, whatever the devil may be whispering in your ear or shouting in your face, I want to encourage you, friend, not to lose sight of this glorious gospel of amazing grace.

[26 : 41] Don't lose sight of this good news of a God who can save sinners. We have an elder in our congregation, and he has a lovely phrase.

He says it often in his prayers. He says that the Lord is the God who can save from the uttermost to the guttermost. Don't lose sight of that God.

Don't lose sight of the God who runs toward every returning prodigal. We can trudge our way back to Him, but He runs in joy toward us.

Don't lose sight, friend, of the God who says, come, come to me. That's what Jesus says. He doesn't say, come to Myrtle Campbell.

He doesn't say, come to the Kirk Session of Barvis. He doesn't say, come to the Presbytery of the Western Isles. He says, come to me.

[27 : 44] Come and do business with me. Come and deal with me. And so, friend, if you are here tonight and you are feeling like a Manasseh, I want to urge you to run to this Jesus.

And if you're here tonight, burdened over the Manassehs in your family, run to Jesus with their names on your lips.

Let's pray. O Lord in heaven, we thank you that you are the God who saves sinners, the God who can save from the uttermost to the guttermost.

And sometimes we feel that we are just not good enough. We feel we are so unworthy. And yet we see Manasseh, a man who, as we have seen tonight, was perhaps the wickedest, most perverted man on the face of the earth.

And yet you are the God who saved him. And if you could save the likes of Manasseh, then there is no one whom we can say that you are unable to save.

[28 : 59] And so we pray that this evening we might take heart from the fact that you are the God who is moved by the prayers of the Manassehs of this world. You are the God who hears the prayers of the Manassehs of this world.

You are the God who restores the repentant Manassehs of this world. May we all know what it is to run into the arms of Jesus this evening, knowing that he has promised that he will never cast aside any who come to him.

Bless us and forgive us then as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, let's conclude by singing to the Lord's praise, the words of Psalm 130.

Psalm 130. And singing the whole Psalm. It's the Scottish Psalter version. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried. My voice, Lord, do thou hear unto my supplications voice.

Give an attentive ear, Lord. Who shall stand if thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquity? But yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayest be.

[30 : 07] Let's lift up our voices then to sing to the God of such plenteous redemption as we see in verses 7 and 8 of this Psalm. A God who truly is able and willing to save.

Psalm 130 to God's praise. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried.

My voice, Lord, do thou hear. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried.

Toes mark iniquity, but yet with thee, But yet with thee forgiveness is that fear thou mayest be.

I wait for God. My soul doth wait.

[31 : 52] My hope is in His word. More than may that for morning watch.

My soul waits for the Lord. I say, Lord, may that to watch.

The morning light to see. Let Israel open the Lord.

For with Him mercy's fear. And plentious redemption is ever found within.

And from all His iniquities, Israel shall redeem.

[33 : 39] Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God be with us all, now and for all time, as we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.