

“Manasseh: A Good Ending to a Bad Start”

2 Chronicles 33

Heb. 4:12 says,

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Since God is alive and speaks through His Word He speaks to our sins but also our needs and our joys. When we read the psalms it's as if the psalmist is saying to God what we're thinking right now. When we read Jesus or Paul's words it's as if they are speaking right to our heart. When we read Proverbs or Job or Ecclesiastes we hear the same questions we've voiced to God. When we read the stories of the different people in the Bible we can identify with them because we've gone through something similar. And when we read about how people came to faith in God, we can usually find someone whose testimony is similar to ours.

If you grew up in a Christian home and you heard the gospel very early in life you can identify with Timothy who from infancy heard the Scriptures from his family and eventually became convinced of the gospel himself and accepted Christ (2 Tim. 3:14-15). Or maybe you were living life for yourself and made some poor decisions that got you into trouble. But God in his grace led you to a Paul, like Onesimus in the letter to Philemon and you got saved and turned your life around. Or you've lived a pretty good life, was blessed with family, health and wealth but you weren't happy. You started searching for God and like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 God brought along a Philip at just the right time who explained to you what the Scriptures said, that joy and peace could only be found in Jesus.

There are other amazing testimonies in the Bible that we still hear happen today. When we hear of a religious zealot – maybe even a persecutor of Christians come to faith in Jesus through a vision or dream, we recall that's how the apostle Paul was saved. When we hear of death bed or death row conversions we remember that's how the thief on the cross was saved. When we hear of miraculous changes of people coming to Christ we might think of those whose demons (Mary Magdalene) were cast out or Nebuchadnezzar (who was turned into an animal for 7 years).

And what about the rebellious youth who grew up in a godly home but didn't want anything to do with God to the point where he/she deliberately went against all that he/she knew about God until God brought them to their knees and they submitted to God? That's Manasseh's testimony isn't, here in 2 Chron. 33.

So far we've seen many good kings who had great starts but not the best endings. Yet here we have a king who had a terrible start but an excellent ending. He was Hezekiah's son, one of Israel's most faithful kings and yet he purposely undid all that Hezekiah accomplished in regards to worshipping God at the temple. But strangely enough Manasseh has the longest reign of any king in Judah; 55 years! Why would God allow him to stay in power so long, especially someone who deliberately led people away from Himself? The answer is simply the grace of God.

God Extends Grace Even to the Most Defiant People
(33:1-10)

When we read in Lamentations 3:22-23 that God's grace and mercies are new every morning, that's not only for the people of God. That's also available to anyone who has yet to accept God's grace. God is waiting for them to repent of their sins and turn to Him in faith. He gave that to all of us, some of whom He waited 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years for us to turn to Him. Why hasn't He destroyed the world and sent Jesus back yet? Grace. 2 Peter 3:9,

⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

That's the heart of God, delaying judgment, making His grace and mercies available to all every day so that some will finally repent of their sins and come to faith. Even the Manassehs who shake their fist in the face of God, almost defying God to actor show Himself. The thing with the Manassehs is they . . .

Know about God but reject Him (v.1; 32:32-33)

He was Hezekiah's son. If he began his reign when he was 12, that meant Hezekiah had died, which also means he was born 3 years after his miraculous healing. Had God not healed Hezekiah, Manasseh would never have been born. So when you hear Christians question God about allowing wicked people to continue to hurt others the answer is always the same; He's extending grace to them to see if they will repent. *"Even while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).*

The final tribute for Hezekiah is mentioned in the last verses of ch. 32,

³²The other events of Hezekiah's reign and his acts of devotion are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. ³³Hezekiah rested with his ancestors and was buried on the hill where the tombs of David's descendants are. All Judah and the people of Jerusalem honored him when he died. And Manasseh his son succeeded him as king.

Manasseh was an eyewitness to the acts of devotion of his father and would have had contact with Isaiah too. I'll come back to that a little later. He heard about God. He would have gone to the temple many times as a boy but he wanted nothing to do with God. Listen to what he did; we haven't read anyone who was this bad.

²He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. ³He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. ⁴He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "My Name will remain in Jerusalem forever." ⁵In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. ⁶He sacrificed his children in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced divination and witchcraft, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger. ⁷He took the image he had made and put it in God's temple, . . . ⁹But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.

Manasseh was worse than the average unbeliever from the other nations! When you read all he did and that he deliberately put these idols in the temple where God had said this place stands for My Name alone, it is quite clear Manasseh was one of those . . .

Who deliberately opposes the Word of God (vv.2-9)

It's so clear when you read Deut. 18:9-13 which is God's list of things not to do, that it's almost like Manasseh took that passage and made sure he did them all!

⁹When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. [Let's go and see what the other nations do!] ¹⁰Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, [Check, did that] who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, [Check, did all that] ¹¹or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. [Check, did that too!]¹² Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.

The Chronicler emphasizes God's statements about the temple being a place for His Name alone yet Manasseh went out of his way to erase God's Name from the temple and fill it with every form of idolatry he could think of that he heard that the other nations did, only he was even worse than they were!

Maybe you know people –maybe even your own family members – who grew up going to a good church, heard the gospel but then rejected it. And not just rejected the gospel but almost deliberately did everything opposite to what they knew God said not to do. God is still extending His grace towards them. Giving them a new day, a new opportunity to respond to His grace and mercy. He even sends people to them with the Word like He did Manasseh but they are those . . .

Who refuse to heed God's warnings (v.10)

¹⁰The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention.

How did God do that? V. 18,

¹⁸The other events of Manasseh's reign, including his prayer to his God and the words the seers spoke to him in the name of the LORD,

God sent prophets; Isaiah would have been one of them. In the parallel account in 2 Kings 21:16 we read

¹⁶Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end—besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of the LORD.

In Heb. 11 we read about how the many Old Testament patriarchs, prophets and Jews lived by faith, as well as many in the early days of the church. In Heb. 11:36 we read about those who suffered for their faith.

³⁶Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— ³⁸the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

Jewish tradition has it that the one sawed in two was Isaiah. Guess who their tradition says ordered Isaiah's death? Manasseh.

Yet it was Isaiah himself who said in Is. 59:1,

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, ...

As we see here in 2 Chron. 33:11-13,

God Can Use Their Defiance to Humble Them **(33:11-13)**

The Assyrians were still the major power in Manasseh's day and had already taken the Northern Kingdom as captives to Nineveh, forced Judah and many others to pay a tax lest Assyria come and take them away. Manasseh probably in his arrogance missed a payment or two and may have even conversed with the Babylonians in plans to overthrow Assyria. So they sent an entourage to Jerusalem, captured Manasseh, put a hook in his nose and dragged him to Nineveh with a little chat with the king.

Even though Manasseh rejected the Word of God, he also knew what it said. And God said if you rebel against Me I will send you off to a nation whose language you do not understand. Never underestimate all those years of sharing the word of God even if people don't seem to respond. Because the sending of the Word of God is never in vain and it will accomplish the purpose for which God sends it. Manasseh humbles himself before the Lord.

God can use people's defiance of Him . . .

To show them He is sovereign (v.11)

¹¹ So the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.

God did this and Manasseh realized it. He realized from the Word he had heard in the past that God is sovereign, His Word is true and He does control the fate of Israel let alone the nations. God used Manasseh's defiance

To cause him to repent (v.12)

The Assyrians were known for their cruelty. The nose ring was to humiliate others to show who was in control. Manasseh realized God was on control using the Assyrians to punish his defiance and disobedience. He repented because he was fully aware of all his sins which he did so deliberately and flagrantly.

God also used the people's defiance to humble them

To see His grace and mercy (v.13)

The Assyrians did something unusual; they released Manasseh, told him to behave, pay his tribute and stay away from the Babylonians most likely. But God brought this all about. The Assyrians were doing what He willed.

¹²In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. ¹³And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.

His heart and eyes were opened to see that his release was merciful on 2 accounts. Often the Assyrians would kill this kind of rebellion but they didn't. Manasseh saw God's hand. He also realized he deserved death because God's Word says death to those who practice sorcery and the occult. But God spared him because He wanted to use him. In His grace He gave Manasseh his kingdom and throne back and an opportunity to undo the damage he had caused. And that's what Manasseh sought to do.

¹⁴ Afterward he rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David, west of the Gihon spring in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate and encircling the hill of Ophel; he also made it much higher. He stationed military commanders in all the fortified cities in Judah.¹⁵ He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the LORD, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem; and he threw them out of the city. ¹⁶ Then he restored the altar of the LORD and sacrificed fellowship offerings and thank offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel. ¹⁷ The people, however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the LORD their God.

Here's another way we see the grace and mercy of God:

God is willing to Use Anyone Who Calls on Him **(33:14-20)**

Earlier we read that Manasseh had shed much innocent blood. But here we see him rebuilding the walls of the city, making them higher and increased the military presence all around Judah. God was now using Manasseh

To protect people instead of hurting them (v.14)

He starts acting like the king he should be. Instead of hurting people he's helping people. He knows the Assyrians could be back. He knows the Babylonians are strengthening and Egypt was always a threat. Manasseh was aware of a future calamity so he did what he could to prepare the people.

This is what happens spiritually when these kinds of people get saved. They start telling others about how God saved them from an eternity in hell and now God wants to save others too. When you've received grace and mercy you want to share that with others. It is not uncommon for people who have seen saved out of a horrific lifestyle that God will use to share the gospel in a powerful and humble way. This is what Manasseh spent the last few years of his life doing:

Pointing people back to God (vv.15-18)

He spent all those years defiantly misdirecting people away from worshipping God at the temple, and here he cleans God's house, throws all those idols out of the city and restores proper worship of God in His place which God said was to always happen there. Very cool.

One of the best endings we've read in all the kings, even though it had the worst start. But what an encouraging piece of Scripture for the Manassehs in your family, the Manassehs who walked away from strong Christian backgrounds and the Manassehs who defy God all around the world purposely making life miserable for the true people of God.

Is 'the arm of the Lord too short to save'? (Is. 59:1). Absolutely not. Pray for the living Word of God that was spoken to them in the past would accomplish the purpose God intends for it because we know it won't return empty.

Pray the Word of God to get to them today because it penetrates *even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

Pray that the grace and mercies that arrived fresh today would not be wasted but that people will see that God has spared their life, and given them time to repent

And **pray** that when they repent God will use them in mighty ways to point others to Himself.

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