

Amazing Grace

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[0 : 0 0] it may have happened nearly 3 000 years ago but it could have happened yesterday a broken man finds new life in christ there are many things about our ancient ancestors which we will never understand but there are many things about them which are just the same as they are today for example scientists recently discovered paintings in a cave in cacheres in spain according to radiocarbon dating these paintings were made nearly 64 000 years ago they show red stencils of a human hand now albeit that scientists suspect that that primitive human hand was that of a neanderthal our children still paint red hand stencils in their art classes in nursery school what happened to manassee 3 000 years ago is still happening today no the asidian empire is buried under the sands of the middle east and prisoners of war don't tend to have hooks placed through their nose but the same basic story has been repeated millions of times since the days of manassee and is happening today in places manassee could never have dreamed possible kings and commoners have experienced this most amazing of things that which the former slaver john newton called amazing grace have you experienced the amazing grace of christ have you humbled yourself before god's mighty voice and realizing that your life is in a mess prayed for his forgiveness and restoration have you placed your life into the loving and powerful hands of christ is this not man's greatest need whether he lives in sixth century bc judea or 21st century ad glasgow that we experience for ourselves the amazing grace of god is this not the greatest need of scots and of jews of arabs and of chinese of americans and of asians that we are changed by the amazing grace of christ the pattern of manassee's conversion in second chronicles 33 verses 10 through 13 passes through three stages crisis in verses 10 and 11 conversion verse 12 and correction verse 13 whenever i've been privileged enough to listen to someone's story of how they became christians the three stages have all been present in one form or another crisis conversion correction they are to use a phrase the pathology of amazing grace the pathology of amazing grace are they your story also and is this not the reason that we want to spread the gospel far and near because we want a world which is alienated from god to experience for themselves new life in christ and the amazing grace of god first of all then in verses 10 and 11 we have crisis crisis the lord spoke to manassee and to his people but they paid no attention therefore the lord brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of assyria who captured manassee with hooks bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to babylon one of the major themes of the bible is the power of the word of god the supremacy of his voice speaking over the chaos of a fallen creation and its sinful creatures in verse 10 we read that god spoke to manassee and to his people but they did not listen he spoke through the prophets we read that in second kings 21 last week warning manassee of the consequences of unfaithfulness inviting him to repentance but manassee closed his ears how true to life that is many of us who are now christians spent many many years hearing god speaking through his word to us either as we read the bible privately or as we heard it preached publicly but we did not listen either we preferred to listen to the voices of the world around us than the voice of the lord we knew that if we listened to and obeyed god's voice if we accepted the invitation to repent and to follow christ we would have to give over control of our lives to him we didn't want to do that and so figuratively speaking we put our hands over our ears to drown out his loving and powerful word and yes there may be still some among us who even after all these years of hearing the word of the gospel being preached are still not listening you've heard it proclaimed and applied with conviction with application you've all must have been persuaded but because you don't want to hand over control of your life to christ you're still putting your hands over your ears to drown out the voice of god a number of years ago now alex and susie nelson gave me a christian book with the the wonderful title the furious longing of god the furious longing of god a book beautifully detailing god's infinitely inventive passion for his people and how often through the hard difficulties of our

lives our loving god is speaking speaking to us and drawing us closer to himself god speaks through his prophetic word we may choose not to listen but he continues to speak but all the time the furious longing of god means that he may act in such a way that causes us to take our hands from off our ears so that perhaps for the first time in our lives we'll listen up will come to our senses he'll bring us to a point of crisis in our lives a crisis where we are left with a binary choice trust him the promises of christ reject him and the invitation of the gospel that's how much god furiously longs for you that he'll bring you to an end

of yourself so that for the first time you may find him god loved manasseh and that's why he brought against manasseh the commanders of the armies of assyria who captured him and brought him to babylon they humiliated him they captured manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze did they put a hook in his nose parade him through the streets of jerusalem like a wild animal there could be no greater fear for a king than that he should be treated worse than a commoner and be humiliated and so here we find him at the end of verse 11 in babylon in great distress bound with hooks and chains you know i wonder whether jesus had manasseh in mind when he told the parable of the prodigal son in luke 15 i wonder no i'm pretty sure he did the son who wanted nothing to do with his father went off to a far country where eventually he was humiliated the son of a loving father who longed to eat the husks that even the pigs wouldn't eat that prodigal son was faced with a terminal crisis manasseh the same manasseh could not go down any lower than he was right now he had served the gods of the assidians and this is how they had repaid him by throwing him into a dirty jail cell here's a man in crisis his sins had brought him to this place his sinful way of life had condemned him to walk in the judgment of god rather than the blessing of god barely 50 years later his people would follow him into captivity in baby because of the sin of the nation it would be dragged from jerusalem to baby to live in slavery it sometimes takes a crisis to bring a man to his senses i'm very fond of old western movies and sometimes in old western movies there's a there's a a huge brawl in the in the town's hotel bar and finally you know chairs are being thrown and fists are being punched and windows are being smashed and then finally the sheriff comes in and he fires his gun into the air because it's the only sound these fighting men can hear over and above all the shouting and screaming that gun being fired brought them all to their senses and the fighting stopped when god speaks through his prophetic word we may choose not to listen but when god speaks through the crises of our lives we cannot but listen god's message for us is too important for us to ignore his love for us too great to reject and so having whispered through his word he shouts through our crisis if you are passing through a time of crisis in your life at the moment could it be that god is shouting to you not at you but to you could it be that far from god's displeasure god is furiously loving you in and through these hard circumstances through these crises it may be that your health is breaking down your relationships are strained your work life is unsettling or frankly boring then there's

those lingering physical symptoms these things just pile up one after the other life was going swimmingly for you until recently but now you're where the prodigal son was feeding pigs you're where Manasseh was with a hook in his nose in a cell in Babylon could it be could it be that god is furiously loving you by sending you these difficult circumstances like a gunshot in an old western movie to bring you to your senses and make you realize just how much he loves you and how important the gospel of christ is second thing I want to look at with you after a crisis in verse 12 it's conversion conversion when he was in distress he entreated the favor of the lord his god and humbled himself greatly before the god of his fathers for the first time in his life

Manasseh was a king in chains the text tells us that he was in distress the hebrew word behind that means to be in a narrow place it's that sense of panic that's brought on by being confined in a small space and there's nothing you can do about it in adventure movies like Indiana Jones set in pyramids the adventurer will find himself in a room that's filled with treasure but when he picks up a piece of gold that triggers an ancient mechanism and the roof starts moving downwards to crush everything beneath it well the walls of his cell in Babylon are shrinking inwards and the floor is moving upwards and the roof is moving downwards and he feels crushed he is in great distress because for his whole life Manasseh has been the one in charge but now he's out of options and the world is in charge of him he is powerless to stop those walls moving in on him he is no longer king of Jerusalem he doesn't even reign in this small claustrophobic cell in Babylon he's coming to his senses because he begins to realize that this this is where his unfaithfulness had led him as king he thought he was untouchable but there will always be someone tougher bigger and badder than he is and in this case it was the Babylonian jailers and the

[14 : 50] Assyrian masters but it's from here the lowest point at which that western gunshot goes off Manasseh begins to come to his senses I want us to notice a couple of things from this verse about Manasseh his conversion his repentance three things which commend themselves to all of us as Christians in our daily repentance and also to those of us who are not yet Christians to come to Christ for the first time in the first instance although it's obscured in the English text from now on when in that Babylonian cell for the first time in his life Manasseh knew that he was in the presence of God himself let me read you the literal translation from the original language of verse 12 and when distress was to him he entreated the face of Yahweh his God and humbled himself greatly from the face of the God of his fathers when in that

Babylonian cell at a complete end of himself he realized that only two things mattered his distressed heart and the face of God his distressed heart and the face of God and he had never felt this way before but now as that gunshot goes off and the roof of his cell is moving down to crush him under its weight Manasseh realizes that all that matters is his distressed soul and the face of God who cares about what the priests of Baal think for the first time in his life it's Manasseh and God face to face and nothing else and no one else matters the prodigal son when in that far off country realized that his friends there did not matter all that mattered was him and his father there is a rather quaint Latin phrase for this that some of you may have heard namely as Christians we are to live in the coram deo the awareness of the face of God the coram deo the first stage of repentance and conversion is this realization that it's between you as an individual sinful human being and the righteous holy God of heaven and earth it is even for a few fleeting seconds to be aware of God searching your heart the coram deo have you been there are you there now what others think of you and the decisions you make at this stage matter not a whit the only thing that matters is that God's face is shining on you on where you are and who you are right now it is you and him you and him only in the second instance notice the relationship words in verse 12 the covenant words and when distress was to him he entreated the favor of Yahweh his God

Yahweh the Lord his God and humbled himself before the God of his fathers this is covenantal language that God whose face shone upon Manasseh in that Babylonian jail cell he was the God of faithful promise and of steadfast love the God of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Jacob that's the God of Manasseh's fathers the God who had made an everlasting covenant to love his people yeah and I suppose that we think of the face of God as it shone upon Manasseh in that Babylonian jail cell carried features of wrath and anger and judgment with a finger pointed into Manasseh's face saying I told you so because we might suppose that if someone had treated us like Manasseh had treated God we'd be angry wrathful and judgmental but God's not like us

I believe the face of God as it shone upon Manasseh was fatherly in its loving compassionate and endearing expression it was a covenantal face the face of a father who is aggrieved but the face of a father whose arms are outstretched toward his errant child just like the arms of the father in the story of the prodigal son I wonder sometimes whether a wrong view of God keeps some of us from repenting of our sins and trusting in Christ we think of God as a stern judge as someone we have to placate and calm down not as a loving father who is more willing for us to come to him than we are to go to him but the language of the Bible is unequivocal for God so loved the world not a world reconciled to him but a world which had rebelled against him and he loved it he so loved it while we were yet his enemies

[20 : 30] Christ died for us he didn't die to make God love us he died for us because God loves us this this coram deo imagery of the face of God shining upon us should not keep us from God in terror but should draw us to God in love this is covenantal conversion this is covenantal repentance as our catechisms tell us that when we come to God in repentance we possess an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ we come expecting mercy not wrath we come expecting forgiveness not judgment and all because Christ has died on the cross to reconcile us to God he has placated his father on our behalf so how's about it a father waits with outstretched arms for us to return running to us even what is keeping you from running to him and then in the third instance from verse 12 notice the action words in this verse the action words and when distress was to him he entreated the face of Yahweh his God and humbled himself greatly before the

God of his fathers he humbled himself greatly he acknowledged that he had done wrong that he was a sinner in need of forgiveness and a rebel in need of reconciliation he had realized that he had done wrong and been wrong others could have told him that it seems from the parallel account in 2nd Kings 21 we read these words last week that the prophets of Judah were always telling him

that he was wrong but it was only now in that crisis moment in that moment of conversion that he saw his sin in all its ugliness and hurtfulness it hid him between the eyes and his heart was filled with grief and shame of the sin he had committed and the sinner he had been like the prodigal son he thought in his heart I have sinned against heaven and against you and so he begged the Lord his God as another translation says he sought his favor he prayed for forgiveness and restoration manasseh had prayed to a thousand other gods before but for the first time in his life he now really prayed like that tax collector in the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector he stood at a distance in this babylonian jail cell and he beat his hand on his breast and he cried out Lord have mercy upon me a sinner he really prayed to the only true and living God who alone could genuinely hear him and answer his prayers he prayed for favor the face of God shone upon him and now he responds by expressing his great humility in committed gratitude yes that's it and no more to be a loyal follower of the gods of the nations you had to offer up your own children as sacrifices in the fires of molly you had to bow down before a wooden totem pole and cut yourself while dancing to be a loyal follower of the god of the bible is the opposite it isn't so much running to god as it is god running to you it isn't so much working for god as god working for you it isn't obedience to the law but the righteousness of faith and a crucified and risen savior jesus christ of nazareth this is repentance and conversion and it's happening all over the world right now will you also live coram deo recognizing the face of god's love shining upon you and praying for his forgiveness lastly and very briefly correction crisis conversion correction verse 13 he prayed to him god was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to jerusalem into his kingdom then manasseh knew that the lord was god the more i study the repentance and conversion of manasseh the more i'm convinced that this account was in jesus mind when he told the parable of the prodigal son you see the problem with the the prodigal son in jesus parable was that he had never really understood how kind how fatherly and how willing his father was to forgive the prodigal returned thinking that he would have to persuade his angry father to have him back not as a son oh no but as only as a servant the prodigal realized the prodigal realized didn't realize rather the prodigal did not realize how much his father had always loved him and how welcome he would be when he returned when he finally returned to his father he was treated to the best of welcomes and the best of feasts and the best of clothes then and only then in the light of his father's forgiveness of him did he truly realize what a gracious man his father really was and how wrong it had been of him to run away from home in the first place with a father's love he had been corrected and it's the same for

Manasseh in verse 3 don't you see God brought him back from the far off country of Babylon and returned him to his kingdom and to the city of his fathers it's also completely undeserved in Manasseh's part as king Manasseh had only ever done what was evil but like that gracious father from the story of the prodigal son God gave a repentant Manasseh more than he'd ever had before and the clincher to our argument is at the very end of verse 13 then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God or more literally straight from the original text then Manasseh knew that the Lord he is God Manasseh knew that the gods he once had worshipped were not real gods that there was only one true and living God God who was the Lord who had forgiven his sin who had shone his loving face into Manasseh's eyes in that

Babylonian jail cell and had rescued him from captivity in Babylon what does it really mean then we'll explore more of this next week as we conclude our studies in Manasseh what does it really mean then to repent and be a loyal follower of God well I guess we could say that we learn an awful lot about ourselves in the process but what it really means and this is where the whole study is headed toward tonight so if you've not listened up to this point listen up now is that repentance and conversion is about realizing how truly gracious God is how graciously holy and how lovingly righteous a father he is how glorious the gospel how endlessly forgiving and compassionate God is Manasseh learned a lot about himself in that

[29 : 00] Babylonian jail cell but the conversion story of Manasseh isn't so much about what he learned about himself but what he learned about the God he'd spent his whole life running away from this God the Lord who loved him infinitely eternally and unchangeably and like the father in the story of the prodigal son ran to Babylon to meet and embrace him the gunshot goes off in the old western movie to hush the clamor and bring us to our senses God brings crisis into Manasseh's life to make him realize how furiously he loved him God's face shines upon Manasseh in his panic a face shining with love invitation and welcome God brings his prodigal home what happened then in 550 BC

Judea has happened Judah rather has happened billions of times since it's happening now across the world it can happen here tonight here and now as a gunshot goes off we come to our senses we realize what God has done for us on the cross of his son and be run into his embrace in the coram deo the face of God this very moment come and learn for yourself that he is the Lord and he is God love to be good say just hear all, or is
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