

Saved For Good Works

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[0 : 00] 2 Chronicles chapter 33. 2 Chronicles 33. I'm going to read a few verses from verse 10. The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention.

Therefore the Lord brought upon them the commanders of the armies of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon. And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him back again to Jerusalem into his kingdom.

Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God. Afterward, he built an outer wall for the city of David west of Gihon in the valley and for the entrance into the fish gate and carried it round Ophel and raised it to a very great height.

He also put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities of Judah. And he took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem.

[1 : 13] And he threw them outside the city. He also restored the altar of the Lord and offered on it sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving. And he commanded Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel.

Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the Lord their God. 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 there in the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

That's a reference to the book of Kings. And his prayer and how God was moved by his entreaty and all his sin and his faithfulness and the sites on which he built high places and set up the asherdorm and the images before he humbled himself.

Behold, they are written in the chronicles of the seers. So Manasseh slept with his fathers and they buried him in his house and Ammon, his son, reigned in his place.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[2 : 37] Amen. Once in a generation, perhaps even once in a century, a genuinely new word is coined, which moves us forward in our understanding of what it means to live as a Christian.

If I was pushed to point to a 20th century term, it would be the one coined by the late Dr. Jim Packer, when in his wonderful book, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, he wrote these words.

Only a life of present convertedness can justify confidence that a person was converted at some point in his or her past.

Only a life of present convertedness can justify confidence that a person was converted at some point in his or her past.

The term is convertedness, the present state of being converted, or to put it another way, the present state of living as a converted person.

[3 : 48] However you wish to define it, every professing Christian must be satisfied with nothing less than to quote Dr. Packer, a life of present convertedness.

Now, in coining that phrase, convertedness, Packer wasn't really inventing anything new. Rather, he was restating, in a way that only he could, include the truth of Ephesians 2 verse 10, words we read together.

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Both Packer and Paul were concerned that Christians must express the grace they have been shown by Christ in the gospel by consecrating their lives to Christ, in living through Jesus, in living

like Jesus, in living for Jesus.

Both were concerned to emphasize that we've been saved to serve, that we've been saved for good works. That is what Packer calls a life of present convertedness.

[5 : 08] In fact, Packer goes back to Paul, goes back to Jesus, goes back to Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33 verses 14 through 20.

What is true of the Christian today, namely, that having been shown grace by Christ, we consecrate our lives to Christ, was just as true for Manasseh in 550 BC or so.

Having been converted, and that's the right term to use, in that jail cell in Babylon, which we looked at last week, and having been returned to his kingdom in Jerusalem, King Manasseh consecrated the rest of his life to living for his God.

He lived a life of convertedness. A few months ago, I was doing some research on how to apply my sermons better, that they may be more interesting for you.

Well, that you may learn more, and we may all benefit more from the Word. I read books about application, and I spoke to senior colleagues in the ministry about how they apply their sermons.

[6 : 27] One of these senior colleagues was Matthias' father, who was a pastor in New York City. Kirk really helped me to understand something which I had never really figured on before, namely, that the pursuit of holiness in the Christian life, the pursuit of Christ-likeness, is the pursuit of true humanity.

The life of convertedness is the pursuit of that which it means to be a real human being made in the image of God and living out the purpose for which God created us and Christ recreated us.

And so here in 2 Chronicles 33, we have a converted King Manasseh living a life of convertedness, pursuing what it means to be a real human being and the authentic King of Judah.

in the sight of God. You know, that's one of the aims of the holiness of grace, a life of good works, this life of present convertedness, that we begin to regain our God-given humanity.

I want us to consider briefly this evening two aspects of the humanity of the converted Manasseh which he pursued.

[7 : 54] The pursuit of authenticity and the pursuit of legacy. And the challenge for all of us this evening is clear. To go back to Dr. Packer's quote, only a life of present convertedness can justify confidence that a person was converted at some point in his or her past.

So first of all then, the pursuit of authenticity. The pursuit of authenticity. Manasseh was many things. A man, a husband, a father, and a king.

And a life of present convertedness means transformation in every area of life. And so the Gospels, the New Testament epistles, are filled with instructions for how to live a grace-filled life in all our relationships.

But going back to Kirk van der Swag's really helpful insight, a life of present convertedness is nothing less than the pursuit of authentic humanity.

The pursuit of everything God has called us to do and to be. In other words, growing in grace and in holiness means becoming a more complete and authentic human being in every area of our lives.

[9 : 20] The Christian singer, Amy Grant, wrote a song called Hats, where she compares the different roles that she has to wearing different hats.

A mother, a wife, a friend, a daughter, an artiste. As do we all. Manasseh wore many different hats and a life of convertedness meant pursuing authenticity in every area of his life.

We know nothing about how grace changed him as a husband and as a father, but we do know how it changed him as a king. For the first time in his life, he wasn't just called king of Judah, but he earned the right to be king of Judah.

He was pursuing authenticity in his kingship, authentic faithfulness to God and to the people God had called him to serve. No longer a prima donna like he had been before, Manasseh was pursuing a life of holiness and grace as God's king.

And in verses 14 through 16, we see three aspects of the authentic kingship of a converted Manasseh. A Manasseh who is living under the lordship of God and is doing the good works of which Paul speaks in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 10.

[10 : 48] He is building, he is purifying, and he is worshiping. He is building, first of all. Building. You will know if you're a student of history at all that even in secular history, bad kings destroy and good kings build.

Bad kings allow their kingdoms to fall into disrepair. Good kings build up the defenses of their kingdoms and the walls of their cities. So the Roman emperor, Hadrian, for example, will always be known for his vast building projects, stretching from Hadrian's Wall to the south of us here to the vast defensive outposts in today's North Africa.

David and Solomon built up a magnificent infrastructure all over Israel, with Solomon in particular building marvelous structures all over the land.

Because this is, after all, what good, authentic kings are meant to do. In the Bible, they are to build Israel up, not to allow it to fall into ruin.

And so in verse 14, for the first time, we find Manasseh building up the walls of Jerusalem. In his pre-converted state, he had neglected them.

[12:16] But the pursuit of authentic kingship meant that his first instinct as king was the glory and the security of the holy city of Jerusalem. He raised the walls, and I quote, to a very great height.

Jerusalem would no longer be the soft touch it once had been. And rather than spend fortunes on idol worship, Manasseh now spent his money on his people.

In verse 14, there's a mention of something called the fish gate. There's hints here of Manasseh's economic reforms. Trade was conducted in the great marketplaces in front of these gates.

And so not only does Manasseh invest in building the physical infrastructure of the city of Jerusalem, he is also investing in its economy. Furthermore, not content with merely rebuilding Jerusalem, Manasseh also strengthens the command and control structure of the entire nation of Judah.

He places competent commanders in every fortified city, ensuring the defense not just of the capital city, but of the whole nation. Invading armies would not just find Jerusalem a hard nut to crack, but all these heavily defended cities also.

[13:34] Their military presence in these cities also dissuaded bandits and robbers from disrupting the trade routes. So the net result of a wholesale improvement was improvement in living conditions for everybody.

And all because King Manasseh was living a life of present convertedness. Now this may seem to us very unspiritual indeed, but let me apply this in two very, very direct ways to us.

Notice, first of all, the impact that godly, wise government has upon the life of the nation. In general, godly leaders govern in such a way as to build up the living conditions of the nations they've been called to lead.

what has godless leaders destroy society. Godly leaders build society. And that's society at every level. Infrastructure, community, economics, defense, etc.

etc. And that's why as Christians and as the church we want to pray for and to contribute to the exercise of good government in Scotland and in the United Kingdom.

[14:54] That's a fair application from this text. But secondly, and more personally to each of us this evening, notice the impact that a life of present convertedness will have upon a person's work ethic.

Upon a person's work ethic. There is a reason that we talk about a Protestant work ethic. Diligence, honesty, seriousness and punctuality.

Being a follower of Christ changes our attitude to work. We want to work and contribute to the well-being of society by producing goods which are useful and by paying our taxes.

Being a follower of Christ changes the way we work. When I worked as a research and development engineer before I came into the ministry, out of our small team of five PhDs, three of us were Christians.

Our manager who himself was a PhD but not a Christian used to tell us how thankful he was for us because it drove his performance bonuses through the roof every year.

[16:13] Being a diligent, honest, serious and punctual employee or employer, student, pupil, whatever, clear, fair and compassionate is a mark of present convertedness.

There are few things more distasteful than engaging the services of a Christian company and finding them unreliable. It was said of the Gadarene demoniac legion that when the demon had been cast forth by Jesus, he was seated, dressed, and in his right mind.

This is a beautiful image of the impact of the gospel upon a human being. When it comes to his professional responsibilities, his work life, his responsibilities in the workplace, even when it comes to the life of a Christian nation, a life of present convertedness translates into being seated,

dressed, and in his right mind.

This is the pursuit of authenticity, the pursuit of true humanity in the workplace, a humanity God created to work.

So he's building. He's putifying. That's the second thing Manasseh is doing here. He's putifying. From verses one to nine, you will remember that in his pre-converted state, Manasseh had filled the nation of Judah with idols.

[17 : 55] He'd built altars on all the hills, altars devoted to the gods of the nations. He'd even offered up his children as sacrifices to them in the fires of Molech.

He'd carved a totem pole like figure of Asherah and he'd placed it in the temple. We read in verse nine, Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray to do more evil than the nations. You couldn't swing an Egyptian cat in Judah without hitting two or three altars to foreign gods. But that's all over now.

When I said that Manasseh invested in building Judah up, I left out that Manasseh invested in destroying all the altars and idols in Jerusalem.

In verse 15 we read, And he turned aside the foreign gods and the idol from the house of Yahweh, the altars he had built on the mountain of the house of Yahweh, and in Jerusalem, and he threw them out of the city, there to have no place in the holy city of Jerusalem at all.

[19 : 12] And so Manasseh cleanses the city, not only content with his own personal cleansing, he now purifies his environment. And I guess the message for us is this, and treat this as a metaphor, Christians don't have messy gardens.

When I say that, what I'm saying is Christians make every effort to rid everything in their lives which distracts them from following Jesus.

after Zacchaeus met with Jesus, he rid himself of the evil way of working which had made him so rich. When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he didn't stop to argue.

He ran for his life. And there may be things in your life this evening which a life of present convertedness means you get rid of right away.

Things which belong to your old life but they don't belong to the new life. Jesus says if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

[20 : 26] Cleanse yourself from everything, everything that draws you away from following Jesus. No matter how costly it is to get rid of it, what you're being drawn away from is far more precious by far.

A life of present convertedness means that sometimes, sometimes, we say no. The third thing that marked Manasseh's life of convertedness was worshipping, worshipping.

In verse 16 we read, he restored the altar of Yahweh and offered upon it sacrifices of peace offerings and thanksgivings and he said to Judah, serve Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Manasseh's reformations did not end with the destruction of the idols of the foreign gods. It was all in order to promote and to build up the true worship of God, the God he had come to know for himself while suffering in that Babylonian prison cell.

So having removed that idol from the temple, Manasseh began to offer righteous sacrifices, sacrifices of peace and of thanksgiving because he had after all so much to be thankful for.

[21 : 49] He was at peace with God and God brought him back to Jerusalem. God gave him back the years the locusts had eaten. Manasseh's heart so filled with grace is also filled with gratitude and he worships.

That's the heart of a person who lives in present convertedness. A heart devoted to the glory of God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

No longer living for themselves and for what they can get out of life. They are now living for God and for what they can put into life for him.

They're offering their bodies as living sacrifices to him. Their bodies, yes, their minds and their hearts also. Their dreams and their ambitions are his.

Their relationships, their marriages, their friendships. They worship God in the way they love their wives and they are faithful friends. And then perhaps when they hear the call of God to give, they give cheerfully.

[23 : 08] After all, what more can they give to God than he has already given them by giving them his Son on the cross?

And furthermore, Manasseh, content not just with his own transformation, calls upon his people to worship God also. He calls upon them to dedicate themselves to the God of Israel, the God of the covenant, the God of their fathers.

Manasseh's eyes are focused upwards toward God, inwards toward his own heart, and outwards toward other people. Loosely speaking, this is what we call evangelism.

Proclaiming the gospel to our families and our friends, calling upon them to experience for themselves the life-changing love and power of God. Manasseh has become a picture of the ideal king of Judah, the authentic kingship of God's people.

He is now building, purifying, and worshiping. This is how God intended a king to be in Judah. In his pursuit of his humanity and living a life of convertedness, he has become a thousand times better a man and a million times better a king.

[24 : 40] It impacts every area of his life. His relationship to God, to himself, to others, it affects his professional life, it affects his personal life, life.

And Kirk van der Swag said to me that the life of holiness and grace is the pursuit of true humanity in every area. Are you living a life of present convertedness?

Oh, I'm not sure I really care whether you can point to an exact time, day, or hour when you became a believer. I've met many who could, but are not living as believers.

What I care about is that today you are living as a Christian in every area of your life, trusting in Christ, living for Christ.

The late Jim Packer wrote in that marvelous book of his, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, only a life of present convertedness can justify confidence that a person was converted at some point in his or her past.

[25 : 58] Secondly, and more briefly, the pursuit of legacy, the pursuit of legacy. A man's legacy is what he leaves behind him, or perhaps, to put it another way, what he is remembered most for in life.

I think you can see from the summary statement in verses 18 and 19 that Manasseh's legacy was at the best mixed, at the worst dark.

The majority of that for which he is remembered is negative. His so-called acts, the words of the prophets who warned him about what would happen if he kept living such an unrighteous life, his sin, his unfaithfulness, the high places upon which he set up, Asherah poles and idols.

Manasseh would always be chiefly remembered for these things. This was his legacy. We don't know at what stage of his reign Manasseh was savingly changed, but the negative things he had done in the first part of his life by far eclipsed the positive things he did in the second.

Let me explain. God may forgive our sins, but our sins still have consequences. The man who before he was a Christian was a murderer must still serve his prison term even though he has become a Christian.

[27 : 29] Our sins still have consequences. John Newton, though he was the author of that famous hymn, *Amazing Grace*, will always be remembered as the former slave trader.

You can't wipe away the evil of Manasseh's former life and pretend it never happened. For example, although Manasseh purified Jerusalem of all its idols and altars to foreign gods, it would appear from verse 17 that the rural areas of Judah remained largely unchanged.

His spiritual, economic, and infrastructure transformation did not reach out from the city to the country, which goes against the present fixation with the trickle-down effect.

This is quickly witnessed by how quickly the wicked reign of his son Ammon was accepted by the people of Judah. Their hearts hadn't been changed as Manasseh's had.

So you see, the overall picture of the life of Manasseh is negative. He did not walk in the ways of his fathers. But according to the gods of the nations. In fact, the book of Kings does not record his conversion and return to Jerusalem at all.

[28 : 52] As we saw in our first sermon, the life of Manasseh teaches us we need a better king than he. A king who has no skeletons in his cupboard.

A king who is permanently righteous and always loving and whole scale positive. And thank God we have such a king as this in the person of King Jesus.

We need a king who loves us and gives himself for us. A king who even at this present moment intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father.

We need Jesus. And yet for all that, the writer of Chronicles wants us also to remember the positives of Manasseh's reign.

In verse 19 he speaks of his prayer to God, how God was moved by him. He humbled himself in verse 19.

[29 : 54] Manasseh may never be remembered for his world changing construction projects. He may not be known for his military and economic transformation of Judah. his legacy will always be one of personal conversion.

Personal conversion. Having been exiled to Babylon on account of his unfaithfulness to God, he came to his senses in that prison cell and he believed in God.

As a result, God restored him to the land of Judah. He will always be remembered for his late stage conversion. There were two thieves on crosses beside Jesus but only one will ever be remembered for good.

John Newton may well be the former slave trader but he is the author of the hymn Amazing Grace.

What do you want your children to remember you for?

Isn't that the most important question? What do you want your legacy to be?

[31 : 06] Such that in 50 years when you're in heaven those left here will remember your faithfulness to God and give thanks to him on your behalf.

Listen it's not too late even now even if you're but one breath from death because if God can forgive Manasseh he can forgive you right here right now.

The writer of 2nd Chronicles is writing to the people of Judah who had returned to their land after the Babylonian captivity and he's warning them that future unfaithfulness will lead to judgment.

What else trusting in God leads to blessing. And this takes us back right to the very beginning of our studies in Manasseh a couple of weeks ago. In our first sermon I said that the reason I chose to focus upon Manasseh was because as Christians we find ourselves in the position of those to whom Chronicles was first written.

Saved from captivity to our sins by God and now called to live in obedience to God. Saved by the gospel and living out the gospel.

[32 : 37] Saved by Christ living for Christ. My aim was to renew our dedication one and all of us to living out the gospel in our homes in our workplaces to living for Christ in all our relationships private or professional.

In short to live a life of convertedness. I close with Dr. Packer's quote. Only a life of present convertedness can justify confidence that a person was converted at some point in his or her past. Let us pray. Father, we know that many of us can't point to an hour or day or a time when we came to faith in Christ.

Perhaps some of us from being very young children have always trusted in Christ. others of us can say, yes, it was at this time on this day in this month that I first trusted in Jesus.

And we've heard many testimonies of people who can say that and yet these people have fallen away. They don't live a life of present convertedness and therefore we cannot have confidence that they were ever converted at all.

[34 : 01] What's important, Lord, it would seem from your word. This is not so much that we can point to a time or to a day or to an hour, but that today we are living in Christ, like Christ, and for Christ.

Give us, O Lord, the legacy of Manasseh. All the things that we may have done which are negative in life, subsume them under this one great heading.

He was saved by grace. Amazing grace. In Jesus' name we pray these things. Amen.