

# The Masterpiece in the Gallery

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn to 2 Chronicles and we'll look at this passage in chapter 33 verses 1 to 20. This portrait we have is of Manasseh, son of the previous king that we've looked at for some time, Hezekiah.

There's a much shorter account of Manasseh's reign, although it was actually the longest reign of any king ever in Judah and Israel.

He reigned for 55 years, which is a long reign. And we're thankful to have this account in Chronicles because if you look at the equivalent account in 2 Kings, there is no account in 2 Kings of his repentance and his turning back to the Lord and of the way that the Lord then used him to restore the worship in Judah and Jerusalem that he himself had in the first part of his reign been very instrumental in dismantling.

Evil is a fascination for so many people. Evil draws our attention to it. Look at all the times you find books, documentaries, films made of mass killers and other people who have committed atrocities similar to that.

It's something that programmers and documentary makers will focus on in order to actually bring something to us of these gruesome events. There's a fascination about evil and people have always been fascinated by it and drawn to it.

[ 1 : 49 ] And there may be very different reasons for that. And Manasseh would certainly be one of those studies that documentary makers or that type of person would actually be fascinated and interested by in order to give us an account of his life.

The question is, would they include the second part of his life the way the Bible does? Because the second part of it is really in many ways such an amazing turnaround from what you read first of all about him.

The account you have here, the portrait, is really divided into two sections. There are two images in the portrait. There are two sides to Manasseh's life.

The first part filled with mass evil and wickedness and rebellion against God. The second one, and in the light of the first one it's absolutely remarkable, you have the second one filled with repentance, with prayer, with turning to God, with obedience to God and again following him in his worship.

So the portrait shows us these two contrasts. But the picture you could say really is not so much about Manasseh. It's a picture of what God can do.

[ 3 : 11 ] It's a picture of God taking a life that's gone so incredibly badly as three and turning it right round and making it a trophy of his grace.

In a little tweet or on Facebook when last night I just asked a question just to prepare the way for today.

Of what is Manasseh a good example? Why is Manasseh, what is he an example of? Well the answer is just what we said. Manasseh is an example of God's grace.

And what God's grace and what the power of God's grace can achieve and does achieve when God exercises his grace, his power in anybody's life.

Let's look at the two sides of this portrait. Manasseh's revolution against God. Because that's really what it was. Remember that his father was this great king Hezekiah.

[ 4 : 11 ] Who had carried out all of these great reforms. Who had established again the proper worship of God in Jerusalem. Who had cast out all of these idols. Who had cleansed the temple.

Who had reestablished the people in their worship of God. So Manasseh when he began to reign he was a revolutionary. He was involved in a revolution against God and against the ways of his father.

Now he was the boy king first of all. He was 12 years old when he began to reign. And that tells us that he was born during the final 15 years of Hezekiah's reign.

That's the extra period if you like that God gave to Hezekiah. Remember he was ill and he prayed to the Lord in his illness. You find in the previous chapter. And the Lord answered him.

We're not told in Chronicles the details of the answer. It's in 2 Kings. The Lord said I have added 15 years to your life. During that time Manasseh was born.

[ 5 : 15 ] They weren't the best years of Hezekiah's life by any means. And that probably is one of the reasons why Manasseh turned out in the beginning anyway to be the kind of person he was.

We are influenced in some ways by our upbringing. We influence others by the upbringing we give them.

And we are convinced of that from the teaching of the Bible that it's important to bring up our children in the ways of the Lord. In the teachings of the Lord. In the company of the Lord's people. In the worship of God's church. All of these things have their own beneficial positive effect. That doesn't give us a guarantee that those who are brought up in the church will not go away from the ways of the Lord.

That they will not turn their back on the ways of the Lord. Yet the truth of God is given to them. The truth of God has come to be placed in their hearts. We pray that that seed will continue.

[ 6 : 17 ] Will sprout and then will continue to grow in their lives at some point in the future. That's in the hands of the Lord. That's what we do. But what we're doing in raising our children in the church and in the ways of the Lord.

Is giving them the best upbringing. Something that Manasseh did not have. At least in the final years of Hezekiah's life. He was old.

He wasn't as faithful to the Lord then as he was previously as we saw. In any case, he became the paganizing king. He introduced or reintroduced all the things you mentioned.

That's mentioned here in the chapter about idolatrous worship. It summarizes first in verse 2. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

According to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. Isn't it interesting and isn't it important that what some people regard as quite acceptable.

[ 7 : 20 ] It makes no difference to the Lord what sort of label human beings may give to certain kinds of practices or behavior. As far as the Lord is concerned, what is an abomination is an abomination.

Even if you relabel it with something else. You can call it. It doesn't matter what you call it in human terms. But if the Lord has said, that is abominable to me, that's how it remains.

We have to learn that lesson in the days in which we live too. Because when certain things are seen and are practiced and are done, which the Bible calls are abominations to the Lord, that's what they remain.

It doesn't matter how we repackage it and try and make it acceptable to modern thinking. So that's what the summary is in verse 2.

And then in verse 9 you have another summary. The two verses within which all of these terrible things are packaged to give us an account of the evils in Manasseh's revolution.

[ 8 : 28 ] Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel.

In other words, the very reason that God brought his judgment upon the Canaanites who inhabited this land before he took Israel in it. Why were the Canaanites driven out?

Why were Israel used by God in the destruction of the Canaanites, in the terrible war against them and flattening their cities and driving them out?

Because of their abominable practices, because of the evil of their ways, because the sins of the Canaanites and the Canaanite religion were abominable in the sight of God.

And when you read that Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel, that's enough to tell you this is absolutely appalling.

[ 9 : 34 ] Appalling in itself, but appalling especially when it's done by the people who have God as their God. What was it? Well, he restored the high places.

Verse 3, all the way through gives you the details. He rebuilt the high places. He actually made asherahs, which were sort of sacred places, poles that were used in idolatry.

He worshipped all the hosts of heaven. He served them. He built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said in Jerusalem, Shall my name be forever? He built altars for all the hosts of heaven, that's the stars, the planets, in the two courts of the house of the Lord.

And he burned his sons in the valley of the son of Hinnom. And used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery. And so the list goes on.

And it reached horrific depths when it involved child sacrifice. Hardly credible, unimaginable evil.

[10:49] Burning children as sacrifices to false gods to idols. This valley of the son of Hinnom comes to give its name in the New Testament.

It was a valley where all the rubbish was dumped outside of Jerusalem. It was always a constantly smouldering bonfire. And in that valley, this horrible practice of child sacrifice was also carried out. And it's given its name in the New Testament to the Greek word Gehenna. It comes from the Hebrew words Gehenna. The valley of Hinnom.

And Gehenna is the word that Jesus uses for hell. Gehenna. Gehenna. The place of everlasting burning.

And that gives you a glimpse, just to use these verses, a glimpse into the kind of place Jerusalem was in these days of Manasseh.

[11:57] You wouldn't want to live in Jerusalem in Manasseh's days. You wouldn't want to have been under the leadership of Manasseh in those days. You wouldn't have wanted to be a faithful believer in God.

Surrounded by all that mass idolatry. And that mass wickedness. And that mass evil. In the days of Manasseh. You imagine how difficult it would be.

For somebody who was true to God. Trying to actually carry out their faithful lives in the worship of God. In that sort of situation. There were some.

Your heart goes out to them. But you know that's what Manasseh carried out in the name of progress.

And that's what makes these passages in the Old Testament so relevant to the days in which we live. That's why we're studying. That's why we're looking as we walk through this gallery of the portrait of kings.

[12:57] We're stopping and we're looking at these portraits. And we're looking at what we see and we're saying. That's so relevant. That picture is so up to date. For my days.

For my years. For the times that I'm living in. How is it up to date? Well that's what you really find. Because here is a picture of defiance against God.

You notice there that it mentions specifically. He built altars in the courts of the house of the Lord. He actually took into the very house of the Lord.

Which was to be used exclusively for the Lord. For God. Right under the nose of God so to speak. And a deliberate defiance of God.

He had these altars to paganism built. To carry out these abominable acts. That's what you find today.

[13:58] Defiance of God. Not a kind of quiet secret defiance. But a bold defiance. A confrontational defiance.

A defiance that says. Yes I know what people are saying about the Bible. But I'm still saying it's rubbish. And people should get rid of it. A defiance that says. Let's secularize the whole country. Let's get rid of all religions. Let's especially make sure that we get rid of the Christian religion. And all this nonsense about someone dying on a cross. And all of these things from thousands of years ago.

That happened in these kings in Judah. What on earth has that got to do with modern life? What is it got to do with modern life? It tells you what's in our human hearts for one thing.

That's what. We are a nation. That brazenly defy God.

[14:55] Because we kill unborn children. Just as Manasseh killed the living children of his day. And we have some who call for the killing of the vulnerable.

The aged. The ones who are no longer deemed to be fit to live. There is a bill introduced to parliament. To legalize euthanasia.

To allow doctors to kill people before they're ready to die. We're busy tearing up God's law.

We're marching into a brave new world. Where God no longer exists. And as you look into the brave new world of Manasseh. Where God no longer existed.

It's filled with dark things. Things that are grotesque. Things that destroy human life.  
[ 15 : 56 ] Things that instead of bringing happiness and peace and contentment. Bring unimaginable horror. When people's children are taken away.

And offered as sacrifice to the gods. You know where sin is followed. And where sin is followed boldly.

You'll find that we become very accustomed to sin. Things which previously would have shirked away from. We now see as quite ordinary. They're just some of the facts of life.

And where sin is followed. To the extent where sin is so bold. And where we become so used. And even so inured. Or if you like numbed.

To the very seriousness and the evil of sin. What that means. Ultimately is that sin is going to increase. You're making provision for more sin.

[ 16 : 58 ] For more abomination against God. That's the way that Manasseh led the people of Judah. And you know it shows.

What's in people's hearts. Here they were after the brilliant reign of Hezekiah. Okay. The final part of it was not as it should have been.

But it still wasn't anything like the reign of Manasseh. It had been a great time of revival. Of restoration. Of reformation.

Of re-establishing. Of the right religion. And the right practices in Israel again. And here.

Immediately after the reign of Hezekiah is done with. His son Manasseh comes along.

What does he start doing immediately? He starts dismantling all that his father had built up. And putting in its place. This horrible replacement.

[ 17 : 52 ] This substitute. Of darkness. Just because we have. A reformation.

Or a time of revival. Doesn't mean. It's not going to be succeeded by a time of horror. We have to always. Maintain the standards.

That God. By his grace. Establishes. And it's the responsibility. Of every generation. The one that follows. The one of revival.

And those following that. To maintain. These values. And these principles. So as to pass on. To the next generation. Things which are worthwhile.

Not just worthwhile. Things which are absolutely vital. And crucial. For proper human development. And you know.

[ 18 : 48 ] It does show one thing. And it's something that we have to bear in mind. I know we're doing it already. But we have to come back to it. Again and again. I drum it into our own minds.

This singularly important point. What is it? It's that only God. And the power of God.

Can turn human hearts. You look into this part of Manasseh's reign. You read this half of this chapter. Down to verse 9.

You come to verse 10. The Lord spoke to Manasseh. And to his people. But they paid no attention. And you get a picture. Of the world that you and I live in.

And you come to the conclusion. If God doesn't come. The God who is dismissed. The God who is brazenly challenged.

[ 19 : 47 ] In these horrible practices. The God who is. In our day. Also equally brazenly challenged. If he himself. In his great mercy.

Does not intervene. We're done for. There's no telling. Where we're going to end up. We'll be back. In the days of Manasseh.

You have to be absolutely clear. About that. That. Is where we are headed. Unless. God.

Intervenes. That's not an exaggeration.

It's taught. Right there. In the pages of Chronicles. In the portrait. Of the kings. That's why we have to have. Prayer. As.

Much as we can. So that God. Will hear. As he heard the prayers. Even of Manasseh. And when you find.

[ 20 : 44 ] That this book of the Chronicles. Was written. For the people that came back. From exile. In Babylon. After 70 years there. Long after. Manasseh's time.

Of course. But you remember. We saw that. That's the purpose. One of the purposes. Why. The Chronicle. Wrote these. Chapters of history. For them. They were back in Jerusalem.

They were reestablishing. The worship of God. In Jerusalem. As you find. In the book of Nehemiah. And Ezra. And so on. And then. You know. They've been back. For a long time.

Since they first came back. The first lot of them. Under Zerubbabel. It was over a hundred years. Before some others. Came back. With Ezra and Nehemiah. And the final part. Of the return. To Jerusalem. And there had been a time. Of great disappointment. In many ways. The temple. That they had started. Rebuilding. Was just.

[ 21 : 38 ] For some of them. Pathetic. Compared to the previous. Grand temple of Solomon. That the Babylonians. Had flattened. And God. Was really saying.

To them. Through these writings. It's not. Necessarily. An immediate change. That you're going to see. But I'm the God. Who can turn.

Even. Times like Manasseh. Into times. Of blessing. So his message. To them. Really was. Through these writings.

Keep trusting. In me. Keep praying. To me. Keep serving. Me. That's what he's saying. To you. And to me too. You look around.

You and you see. Well there's not much sign. Of positive change. Spiritually. For the good. You may become. Quite despondent. As you. Pray to God.

[ 22 : 32 ] That things will change. And you're not seeing. Really much change. In fact. All you're seeing. Perhaps. Is more things. Being introduced. To Parliament. Than are contrary. To the word. Of God. More than ever.

Before. Of these things. Coming. To be late. Before our. Members of Parliament. Keep trusting. In God. Keep praying.

To God. Keep serving. God. Don't give up. Just because. You think. That things are not. Really happening. This is the God.

As we'll now see. Who turned. Manasseh's life. Right round. Manasseh's. Manasseh's. Revolution. Against God. Came to an end. When he was taken away.

To. By the Assyrians. And brought to Babylon. That's the second part of the story. The Manasseh's. Restoration. By God. He's first of all. A humiliated king. He was a.

[ 23 : 28 ] A boy king. He was a paganizing king. He now comes to be. A humiliated king. The Assyrians. By this time. Were in control. As we saw last time. Of.

So much of the world. Of the day. And. The people in Babylon. It seems that this is a period. In Manasseh's time. Around about. The time of. An Assyrian king.

Called. Ashur. Banipa. And he. Stamped on a revolt. Against the Assyrians. In. Babylon. Babylonians. Had attempted. A little bit of a revolt.

There. So he really clamped down. Hard on that. And. It looks like. What he did was. He came. And. Took Manasseh. And took him to Babylon.

And said. Look. If you want to rebel. Against me. The king of Assyria. This. Is what happens. To those who rebel. Against me. I make us slaves.

[ 24 : 25 ] Because you read. That he brought him. With a hook. In his nose. And bound him. With chains of bronze. And brought him. To Babylon. Is a humiliated king. He's humiliated.

By. The king of Assyria. He's there. As a slave. To the king of Assyria. And that itself. Reminds us. Of something. That's very important. And that is. That. Just as his sin. And his rebellion. Against God. Made a slave. Of Manasseh. So sin.

And rebellion. Against God. Make slaves. Of people still. Yes. I don't. Say. You find people. In chains. And with. A hook. In their nose. Being dragged along.

By somebody else. Made clear. That they are actually there. Under their control. That they become slaves. To them. Sin. Sin takes many forms. And you can have people.

[ 25 : 22 ] With all the best things. In life. And. In a very sophisticated. Lifestyle. They're still slaves. To sin. When they've rebelled.

Against God. That's what we are. Doesn't matter. What our life is like. In terms of social status. Or other qualities. That's what sin. Makes us.

Slaves. Of sin. In itself. You only have to read. Romans. Chapter 6. Verses 16 to 21. I'm going to read it just now. I commend it to you.

In the light of the study today. Compare it. To what you find here. Described of Manasseh. In his chains. Dragged off to Babylon. Made an example of. As you read through.

That passage. In Romans. Chapter 6. That's what Paul. Is really saying. You were. Slaves. Of sin. But by the grace of God.

[ 26 : 16 ] You have been made free. From sin. And you've become. Servants of God. Everybody in here. As we begin life. As a slave of sin.

You don't have to live. An openly hostile. Sinful lifestyle. Sinful. Sinful. Sinful. Sinful. Sinful. Sinful. Sinful. But our heart is enslaved.

We are in chains. In bondage to sin. And we're thankful today. To have a Bible. Where that. Is taught. Because otherwise.

We would think better. Of ourselves. Than we really are. and God has given us this picture of ourselves in this picture of Manasseh a slave as we are slaves of sin so that we can turn to Jesus who breaks the chains, who sets us free who brings us into the wonderful liberty that belongs to those who are Christians well look at Manasseh's humiliation there but that's why we mention sin so often a lot of people wouldn't agree with the frequency with which someone like myself mentions sin either in prayer or in preaching especially, why do we bring sin into virtually every sermon why is sin such a prominent feature of our preaching, why is sin something that we mention, isn't it really rather outdated to speak about sin, to use the word sin isn't sin something that really belongs to a past age when people thought about things in those terms but nowadays with all the advancements we've made surely it's time we actually gave up on that idea that human beings are really like the Bible actually describes as slaves to sin well that's what the devil would like us to think but if we are true to God and to God's word as we said to the children earlier what rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy the word of God is the only rule to direct us and in the word of God we have a lot about sin we have so much about sin as to convince us that we are great sinners but more than that that for great sinners

God has provided an even greater saviour that's why he came to die the death he died so when he was in his illness he cried out in distress sorry when he was in distress he cried out to God and he humbled himself greatly before the God of his father he prayed to him and God was moved by his entreaty now it's interesting it says that when he was in distress isn't that often how it is when we're in distress when people are in distress they begin to think more clearly and more seriously about the issues of life God brings them in his providence into not necessarily their own personal illness or distress but something happens that causes them distress and it figures off certain thoughts in the mind you see it says there the Lord spoke to him and to his people in verse 10 but they paid no attention but he started paying attention in Babylon you know what it's like when you get a call from the kitchen they say food's ready and you're watching telly or playing your Xbox whatever it is you're doing you hear the call from the kitchen the food's ready and you say yeah coming five minutes later he will sign a few another call comes from the kitchen food's ready still nobody comes well that's what it was for Manasseh he heard the call many times but he paid no attention then the call comes if you don't come this time it's going to the dog and then you move that's what it was for Manasseh the distress caused him to hear the voice of God sometimes it takes that to bring us to our senses too now it doesn't mean that distress inevitably means you're going to find

[ 31 : 06 ] God through it don't think that way there are many people that come to times of distress and they rebel even more against God so don't think in yourself that being in a time of distress inevitably means that's when I'm going to find God I leave it until something happens until my life comes into some sort of crisis and then I know God will hear me don't presume that you'll even cry to him distress can sometimes be so overwhelming that the last thing you think about is seeking God however for Manasseh that's what it was like he sought God he prayed to God he humbled himself and then the amazing thing you actually read here and it's the most amazing it's the brightest spot in the whole portrait indeed I would say it's the brightest spot in the whole gallery of portraits that you find in this gallery in Chronicles what is it what is this bright spot the Lord was moved by his plea the Lord was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea now you've read there about

Manasseh you've read the extent to which he led the people into evil the incredible darkness in which he embroiled himself deliberately and defiantly against God surely you expect that when he cries to God God is going to say you Manasseh you think I'm going to hear you you think I'm going to listen to you after all you've done after all the the darkness you've introduced after all the rebellion after all the defiance you've shown against me after all you've done to my people do you think I'm going to listen to you am I going to hear your voice now that you're in a crisis yes Manasseh I hear you I pity you indeed I love you that's the kind of God we have that's the biggest feature of all of these portraits the magnificence of God's grace the wonder of his love of his favour

to people who don't deserve it if anybody in all of these portraits did not deserve the favour of God it was Manasseh yet when he humbled himself and prayed to God

God was moved at his prayer you see nobody is ever too sinful to cry out to God and it's never too late just as it's never too early to cry out to God just look at this man just think of what he was like just think of the lifestyle he had lived and yet when he prayed God purely and simply accepted him he heard his prayer it was a genuine prayer of repentance how do you know it was genuine repentance how do you know it wasn't a flash in the pan how do you know it wasn't like many other people in distress and crisis who cry to God or who start praying and who make resolutions to themselves and when I get out of this I'm going to go to church and I'm going to be a believer and I'm going to follow the Lord and then when the crisis is over the resolution is over it all falls to bits and is forgotten how do you know

Manasseh it wasn't like that well read the rest of the chapter the rest of the account you have there what did he do when he got back home he cleaned up the temple again he chucked out he threw out all of the idols that he himself had introduced he re-established the altar of the Lord he re-established the sacrifices of peace offerings and so on on the Lord's altar that he himself had actually destroyed before he went to Babylon there's a man whose turnaround was really genuine and true because his lifestyle then showed it and that's what repentance really is about it's not just something of as we saw with the prodigal son in Luke it's not a thing in the mind only it's something that turns around the whole life and re-establishes a person the way they should be established in relation to God and to other people and that's of course the brightest spot is God himself and was moved this is a great masterpiece this portrait it's a masterpiece because not only is God the author of it the painter of it but he is the main subject of it the wonder of his grace the magnificence of his forgiveness let me finish with a story about a missionary who lived in the Philippines

Philippines is in the news it's now because of course of the devastation there recently but this missionary had a secret sin which he carried about which he never told anyone about which he prayed over and asked God to forgive of course but he still had no peace and no sense in his own mind that God had really forgiven him over this sin and in the village lived a deeply religious woman and she kept coming to the missionary saying that she had visions regularly where she saw Jesus and where she spoke to him and he spoke back to her and the missionary wasn't really at all much in favour of this he was rather sceptical about it so he said to her well the next time you speak with Jesus tell him ask him what sin did I commit when I was in seminary and see if he knows see if he tells you and then a few days later he met her and asked her do you have another vision yes she said and did you ask

[ 37 : 52 ] Jesus what I told you to ask him yes you asked him what sin I committed in seminary yes and what did he say he said I don't remember I don't remember that's our Lord when it's forgiven it's forgiven it's forgotten it's not remembered even Manasseh have their sins forgiven let's pray Lord our God we thank you that you are the great forgiver of sin that we can come to you and open our heart to you and know that you will receive us graciously we thank you Lord for that grace for the wonder and for the abundance of your forgiveness and we pray now that you would help us this day to come to you openly to pour out our heart to you and to come more and more into a relationship with you as a child to our heavenly father hear us we pray for your name's sake

Amen O offices and see you enter the?!

you enter into a environment and what about this is so baptism to help us show you into a