

The Old Testament Prodigal

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to 2nd Chronicles chapter 33 and we'll take up the reading again at verse 10.

2nd Chronicles chapter 33 and verse 10, page 459. The Lord spoke to Manasseh 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 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 again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.

If you're familiar with these history books in the Bible, both the books of Kings and Chronicles, you'll know that they are about the kings that reigned in Israel and Judah at that time.

[1 : 17] At least they are in the book of Kings. And as far as Chronicles is concerned, they are about the kings that reigned in Judah. And you might wonder why should a history book focus particularly on kings and particularly on whether that king was good or bad.

You'll probably notice that unlike other history books, the focus of these kings was not on whether they were successful or not, whether they were good traders, not even on how strong their armies were, but principally whether these kings were good or bad.

And that is simply two things. First of all, because what a king was, the nation tended to be also. The king was the greatest influence on that nation.

So if he did something, the people did the same thing. They tended to do the same thing. He was the celebrity. And I'm sure that that's not surprising to you.

He was the celebrity. He was the most important person, the focal point of the kingdom. And so he was the commander. He commanded their affection and their respect and their love if he was a good king.

[2 : 29] So what the king was, the people were. But also, God's concern is not whether we're successful or not, or not whether we're strong or not, or good looking or whatever.

God's concern is not the kind of things that we place value on in our 21st century Western world. God's concern is simply this.

Do we love him or not? Because his command is, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And so the history of Israel is concerned with whether those kings loved God.

And if they did love God, the people tended to love God also. And if the king didn't love God, then the people tended not to love God either.

And so a great emphasis is placed on the kings, and that's why their lives are recorded for us in these books. Now, again, if you're familiar with these books, and again, I would encourage you to be familiar, they're very easy to read.

[3 : 37] The books of Kings and Chronicles, very easy to read, and they come in fairly short sections. So you can read a section every day. You can read a king very often in just one reading. They tend to say that either a king is a good king, an obedient, a faithful king to the Lord, like David, for example, and Hezekiah.

Or they tend to say that a king is evil, someone who doesn't obey and who's not faithful to the Lord. And the king that was faithful to the Lord was one who worshipped the Lord exclusively.

In other words, he did not worship or recognize any other god. It was vitally important that God not only be worshipped, but that He be worshipped exclusively.

That there be no other god, no rival god. First commandment tells us, you shall have no other gods except me. And so the good king began by worshipping and recognizing God alone. And following on with that, he would obey Him as a result. But when a king was evil, it always involved the worship of other gods. The giving in to what he saw was the kind of religion that he saw around him.

[4 : 58] And so it was only a matter of time after he began to do that, that the nation itself, the country itself, people would begin to drift after other gods. And so that tends to be the pattern.

Either a king was a good king or a king was an evil king. The good king was the one who recognized and loved and put God first. And the evil king was the one who put other gods on a par with the Lord.

See, we've got this mistaken belief that the evil kings in the Bible didn't believe in God. They did. They believed in the God of Israel. But they believed in other gods as well.

And so that's what made them wicked and sinful. In that they put other gods and other deities on the same par as the Lord of Israel. They completely lost sight of the first and the second commandments.

They completely did away with them. And when you think you can do away with some of God's word and just choose the bits that you want, that's where you start to go wrong. And so that's where these kings started to go wrong as well.

[5 : 58] Now, Manasseh is one of the exceptions. Let me explain what I mean. He's not an exception in that he was both good and bad at the same time. You can't be both good and bad at the same time.

You can't both love God and love other gods or other religions at the same time. It's either one or the other. So that's not what makes him the exception. What makes him the exception is that he was quite the worst.

He began as quite the worst king that ever walked the face of Judah. Of all the kings that you read about in Judah, he is the most notorious, wicked, bloodthirsty, violent, awful king that ever walked the face of Judah.

And yet, right in the middle of his reign or somewhere along his reign, God brings him to a halt and forces him to completely turn around and to begin to reign as God wanted him to reign.

In other words, here is a man who lives for many years of his life, not only disobeying God, but deliberately rebelling and doing everything he can to whatever God says, he's going to say the opposite.

[7 : 19] Whatever God tells him to do, he's going to do the opposite. Whatever God tells him to believe, he's going to believe the opposite. And it doesn't matter what area it is, this is a man who is determined to defy God.

It's quite incredible when you read this chapter. We'll go over it in a few moments time. We'll talk about the lengths to which this man was prepared to go to, to shake his fist at God and to do everything in his power to defy God and to put God to the test to see how far he could go before he was struck by lightning.

It's the kind of way people think. We'll see that in a few moments time. I won't preempt that anymore. And yet, the time came when God put a stop to him and he brought him so low that he ran to the Lord.

It's like a, if you, I'm sure you're familiar with in the New Testament, of course you are, the parable of the prodigal son. Well, here is the Old Testament prodigal son.

You remember the story that Jesus told of the man who had two sons and one of them said to his father, I want my inheritance now. So the father gave him his share of the inheritance and off he went.

[8 : 38] He was suddenly a rich man, decided to leave home and go to a far country and squander everything he had on riotous living. He was going to have a ball for as many years of his life as he possibly could.

And then the going got tough. Somehow or other, circumstances changed and all the money that he had ran out and he was reduced to feeding pigs in the foreign country until it was only in that state of isolation and poverty that he decided at last, I must return and go to my father.

Well, this is exactly the same thing. Here is a man who not only has money, not only has power, but he's going to use it to the, he's going to use it to the limit of his ability to make sure that he defies

God until God put a stop to him.

Let's look then at his life, first of all, at the beginning. He was a son. I want us to look, first of all, at the kind of life that he had, particularly in reference to the way in which he was brought up.

Particularly in reference to the way in which he was brought up. Manasseh was the son of a man called Hezekiah. He also was a king of Judah. You read about his life in the preceding chapters 32 backwards.

[10:03] Hezekiah was one of the most exemplary. He was one of the greatest kings that ever ruled in Judah. He was one of the men you can go back to and I know that he failed on one or two occasions.

He sinned on one or two occasions and these things are noted for us for our example and for our warning. But yet, Hezekiah, like David before him, he was a man who was an example of what it is to serve and to love from his heart.

Not just lip service. He didn't just do the right things from the outside, but he was a man whose heart longed after God and he loved God with all his heart. That's what it means to be a Christian. To love God with all your heart. And Hezekiah is a fantastic example of an Old Testament man of God. Isn't it strange, therefore?

Isn't it ironic that the son of this man, you would expect, if a father has any influence as a son at all, that this man Manasseh would grow up in the same kind of way.

[11:10] And yet, not only does he fail, he does the entire opposite to what he was taught. Now that's, to me, that shows the lie, the complete folly of the kind of person that says, you're only a Christian because you were brought up in a Christian home.

If you were a Muslim, you would be, if you were brought up in a Muslim home, you would be a Muslim today. I can see the logic of that argument. It just doesn't work.

Because today, there are people who were brought up in Christian homes who aren't Christians.

Not only so, who have spent their lives showing and demonstrating and proving to the world and to themselves that they want nothing to do with the Christian gospel.

There are other people who never grew up in Christian homes and who hardly even heard, if anything, the name of Jesus. Who are today sitting in church tonight, loving every moment, listening to God's word and wanting to go out tomorrow to serve him and to win as many people for Christ as they possibly can.

And they never, they were never brought up in Christian homes. But yet, this man, you would expect, wouldn't you, for him to have adopted his father's example.

[12:34] I mean, that's what we all hope for our children. In fact, the Bible even tells us that. Train up a child in the way he shall go and he will not depart from it. And hopefully, by the grace of God, as parents and as Christian parents, that is what we long for and what we pray for as we bring up our children in the Lord and we lay hold upon that promise.

And we don't want to, we don't want to lose sight of it at all because we believe in that promise.

Train up a child in the way he shall go and he shall not depart from it. But, that doesn't mean that every child that grows up in a Christian home is going to follow his parents' example and is going to listen to the parents and is going to live the way the parents have set for him or her and is going to embrace Jesus Christ as his or her saviour.

It just doesn't follow. because there are many people tonight who were brought up in Christian homes and who have decided that they want none of it.

They don't want any of it for whatever reason. Now, there are all kinds of issues here. And I want to, I want to, first of all, encourage Christian parents to keep on praying for their children and keep on showing their children an example and to remain steadfast in the Lord and in the things they know to be right and believing that as time goes on that the seeds of the gospel are sown in the hearts of our children.

And even if there may be a time when our children appear not to have any interest in it, that may only be for a time and many as a person has come later on. Some people come right now and some people depart later on.

[14:26] they give up later on. Some people appear to have no interest now and then they come back later on. And yet we've got to just be steadfast as parents and continue to pray for our children and continue to set them a loving example of what it means to be a Christian and to show by the way in which we live our lives the quality of the Christian life and pray that the Lord will bless that example and bless the influence of our homes.

That is what we pray for isn't it? We all pray for that as Christians. And yet it doesn't always follow that a person who's brought up in a Christian home you can get the finest Christian home that there is and a person may grow up and may decide I'm having none of this.

And the more he hears or the more she hears the more determined they become that they will not listen to the gospel and that they will and it doesn't matter what you say to them and how lovingly you say to them and how sincerely you say to them that they have decided in their own heart like Manasseh that they're going to do the opposite.

Spurgeon says that a person who has grown up in a Christian environment and who decides like this turns out to be worse than a person who hasn't grown up in a Christian environment and who lives like a pagan.

Spurgeon says a person who grows up in a Christian home and decides to go down this road is actually worse. It's quite a solemn thought that isn't it? It's really solemn.

[16:09] And I want to at the risk of falling out with some of you ask some of those of you who have been brought up we won't fall out I'm only saying that we're not going to fall out because you know that if I'm preaching the gospel right I'm going to be straight and we have to say things that may even hurt at the beginning but I want to ask those of you who have grown up in Christian homes are you following the Lord?

You know that what you know what the truth is of the gospel you know it from the time you were small from the Bible that your parents read with you and from the church that you went to the Sunday school that you went to and you know from the lives of the people that you once knew as Christians maybe you were a child and you know the truth of God in that person's life and many people will say well you don't know how I was brought up I was brought up in a strict Christian home and I was put off the gospel by my parents they completely put me off the gospel because they were so severe let me first of all say that may be true that may be true I'm sure that there are people in the world who are not the best parents and who maybe didn't show the kind of example perhaps of the odd all of us who are parents we are acutely aware of our own deficiencies let me tell you that I don't think a week goes past without me conscious of a huge mistake or other in the bringing up of our children we're all acutely aware and we're all aware of the danger of our kids growing up and saying well my parents they really didn't show a good example sometimes we're not very good examples of what it is to be a Christian we act the wrong way we're at our worst in our own homes aren't we that's where we lose our temper that's where we lose the head that's where we say things that we shouldn't say and we end up showing our children things and demonstrating things that are the opposite to what it should be I think that's true in any home and some people are rubbish parents some people are just not good parents at all when it comes to this that does not give you an excuse it doesn't because what I would be asking you right now is not what like my parents were and not to what extent they were effectively showing me the way to the Lord and what influence they had I would like you to ask the question is this the truth or is it not and you know that whatever you thought of your parents example and however much they may have irritated you in some way or another that may be their difficulty or their wrongness that doesn't make the gospel untrue it doesn't and if I was a reasonable rational person in your position I would be going back to the Bible and I'd be searching the Bible and I'd be asking well at least I should give it a fair hearing at least I should read my Bible and ask the Lord himself ask God himself to show himself to me and to show me how he can change someone and to make me into the kind of person that he wants me to be

I would challenge you that in that respect this evening I would ask you not to spend your life blaming your parents because you know what you're never going to be able to stand before God and say I never followed the Lord because of my parents even although your parents may have irritated you and which parent doesn't irritate their children and which parent doesn't make huge mistakes catastrophic mistakes sometimes and you may have gone through something like that and you may say well I'm just washing my hands of the whole thing that's not the answer at all the answer is to recognize okay my parents may have gone wrong they may have been too severe or may have been too strict or they may have shown me a bad example or whatever that doesn't make the gospel false the answer is still found in the Lord Jesus Christ I challenge you tonight in that respect to stop blaming your parents because right now if your parents belong to the

[20:55] Lord you know what they're crying out to the Lord for you and recognize they recognize I guess more than you do how much they failed and they're praying for you day and night and if you

died without coming to the Lord they would be utterly devastated that's how much a Christian parent wants their child to come to the Lord I can tell you as a parent I don't care about how successful my kids are I don't know what they're going to do I don't know how rich they're going to be I don't know how successful they're going to be all I care about is whether they follow the Lord that's all I care about even if they're poor and your parents if they've brought you up in the

Lord that's all they care about Manasseh must have broken his father's heart as soon as his father saw him I don't know whether we read there that he was 12 years old when he began to reign we have to be careful there that doesn't necessarily mean that he was that that that hezekiah died when Manasseh was 12 there could have been what they call a co-regency in other words sometimes a father king would take on his son king to be a kind of apprentice and they would work together and reign together for say 12 for say 10 years now there may have been a co-regency here so it doesn't necessarily there was 12 years old when he alone began to be king but I don't know when he began to show the kind of signs of rebellion that he showed I want you to also notice the lengths not only the fact that he rebelled so determinedly but the length to which Manasseh went and I can't help thinking when you read this list of stuff that's on I can't help thinking that first of all that Manasseh started with the wee things he knew God's law it would have been taught to him from the time he was knee high he knew the ten commandments he knew what it was to have a nation that followed the Lord and that there mustn't be any other gods or idols or altars for the host of heaven as it was here or fortune telling sorcery omens he knew that all of these things were banned you know there's something in us isn't there that wants to try out what's forbidden isn't there is that not what sin is a failure a refusal to take God at his word what

Manasseh should have done as he was growing up was to say well this is what God has commanded it must be right because God only wants what is right for us because God loves us with his own extraordinary love and I want to love him because of who he is but instead of that there's a voice within you that says wonder what it's like to consult omens and sorcery what it's like to go into fortune telling is that what you've done today we live in a world where we're faced with exactly the same that's where the interest of much of our people is in the occult and fortune telling you can call it what you want sorcery there's a massive interest a massive hunger for something else and for something extra other than the mundane of everyday life fortune telling you see it all the time people who are fascinated by the future and they would love to know they want to know they're curious about what might be in front of them next week or who they might marry or who they might meet or what kind of experiences they might have or what kind of fortune they might have whether it's good fortune or bad fortune of course there's a voice that says come on it's not that harmful is it yes it is because what it is is a seeking after what God has forbidden fortune telling why is it so so bad it's bad because the future belongs to

God and he has determined what the future is and a person who loves and listens to God will first of all say well the future is in God's hands it's not for me to find out what's happening in the future or what might happen in the future or speculate about that it's for me to trust myself in the hands of God and to love him with all my heart but you get this impression don't you with this huge list of sins that Manasseh committed he rebuilt the high places that his father had removed when his father came to the throne his father beforehand had worshipped on high places he had worshipped other gods and so Hezekiah brought about a revival it was a kind of it was a reformation where he pushed out all the high places and he restored the worship of Judah to the Lord alone but then he reared up altars for Baal Baal was a fertility cult god that was a historic

[26 : 38] Canaanite god all the other villages and towns surrounding them in Canaan they were all Baal worshippers and the attraction there I think I've said this before it was all tied up with sex there was promiscuity amongst the Baal worshippers widespread promiscuity it was part of your worship to engage in sexual union as part and parcel of the same thing a devout Baal worshipper had a ball and there over there on the other hand God saying you shall not commit adultery how boring is that and when you come when you really think about it you take everything that is here apart from perhaps the burning of his sons in the fire you take all of that list that you find here he built altars for the host of heaven the two courts of the house of the lord and he used fortune telling and omens and sorcery and dealt with mediums and wizards and much evil in the sight of the lord provoking him to anger the carved image of the idol and so on and so forth then you get this impression of quite an exciting way of life don't you an interesting way of life in which you can do what you feel like doing create what you want to create and be creative on the other hand

God has the same things to say to every generation you shall not have any other gods before me you shall not make any image or likeness of anything that is in heaven above or the earth below or the water in this you shall not blaspheme the name of the lord remember the sabbath day to keep it holy honour your father and mother you shall not kill you shall not commit adultery you shall not steal that was God's will God's way and it was all restriction if you really wanted to break out and to break free and to try different things and to experiment and to be adventurous then the last thing you wanted to do was to remain within the confines of the ten commandments you wanted to get away from them because the ten commandments were for you everything that wasn't exciting and you know it's always like that faith is not creative it doesn't revolve around me and what I want and what the way I want to live and the way in which I want to experiment with different things faith is faith in the living and the true God and the God who what he says to me tonight he said two thousand years ago and he'll never say anything different it doesn't revolve around what I want have you ever noticed why you come in the door of this church for example and there are no leaflets like saying give us your ideas give us your suggestions is there anything we could do to make things more colourful or lively you don't get that in Christian worship at all you get the same old book and the same old Jesus Christ the same message has been presented for two thousand years and it will continue to be but I'll tell you there's nothing greater than the gospel because you can be as adventurous as you want and if you're not saved and if you're not right with God then it's only going to lead to a lost eternity to darkness for all eternity that's what's important doesn't revolve around me and what excites me and what entertains me this is about God the moment you walk in that door this is about

God and if it's not then we're doing something wrong the focus is on God and what he has said to us he's not asking us tonight how can I improve he's not asking us let's negotiate let's come to some kind of understanding I'll give you some of the things that you want and you do some of the things that I want that's not what he says to us at all God says it's all or nothing I am the way the truth and the life no man comes to the father except through me but what he says is this that those who come to Jesus and accept him as their saviour will be saved it doesn't matter how colourful a rival religion is it doesn't matter how sincerely you can follow the course of whatever you think is the most colourful religion or way of life if it doesn't save you it does nothing if it doesn't bring you into heaven it's completely useless if it doesn't forgive your sins then that means you stand before God tonight and you're guilty and you're unwashed only he can take away that guilt and the only way in which he will do it is through Jesus Christ and by faith in him and that's why tonight it's the most dangerous thing in the world to get distracted into other forms of beliefs and all kinds of systems and religions even if they appear to be the most exciting and thrilling things in the world God calls us back and he tells us there is only one way to be saved and he did that by operating in Manasseh's heart he did that by taking away first of all everything that Manasseh had see it's one thing to live the kind of life that you live when everything is going well for you just like the prodigal in Luke chapter 15 as long as he had his money as long as he had means then he could afford to do everything he wanted to but God had a different plan for him and he had a different plan for [33 : 03] Manasseh and the first thing that happened was in verse 11 therefore the Lord brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria took away his goods and all the things that he relied on then he took away his freedom and bound him with hooks and that meant a hook in your nose by the way it's the most painful experience these people were massively cruel in those days but that was God's way of bringing this man to repentance and it was in that solitude of the prison cell when he had time to think of all that he had done the way in which he had been so determined to depart from God and he had gone down a path when he had just tried to please himself and to satisfy his own determination to rebel against God even when it involved the death of his own sons that actually really means what it says by the way verse 6 he burned his sons that doesn't mean to say he burned their arm or something that means that he burned them alive as a sacrifice to his

God you see once we go down the road of being determined to defy God there's no limits to what a person can do and life becomes cheap and I very often think of that when it comes to a country like the one we live in that once knew the gospel a country that knows the gospel respects human life life is at a premium in a country that worships God but when a country departs from that like Manasseh did then life becomes cheap and that's why we're debating about assisted suicide and the various attempts that are made to cheapen and to treat people as if they were simply molecules

and atoms having been having lived for a time in which they can find what they call quality of life after which the time comes for them to be disposed of just like throwing something in a bin when it's passed its sell by date that's what human life is but God says that human life is precious and whether it's the unborn or whether it's the sick or whether it's the old people at old age we must have the highest respect for human life there is no telling what we might do if we depart from God and his way but God's plan of course is will for Manasseh not everyone is converted and by the way by that I don't mean that any of you should say well I'm not going to be converted that's not for you to decide that's for God to decide it's for you to listen to the Bible and what God is saying to you and to respond it's for each one of us to make sure that we listen to what God is saying but it was obviously within the plan of the Lord to bring this man to repentance and he did so in a very painful way and sometimes he does that by taking away all the props and things that we rely on so much and he brought him to a place in which he could realize he realized the extent of his own wickedness and his sinfulness and he realized that it had not brought him the kind of satisfaction and joy and pleasure that he had at one time hoped for but he also realized that there was another way some people despair at the kind of life they live and I want to perhaps say a word perhaps to anyone here this evening who has written themselves off and decided that whatever else there can be no hope for your salvation some people are like that because they're so conscious of the kind of life they've lived and the number of opportunities they've had when they've heard the gospel and the number of opportunities they've missed by not listening to the gospel and going home and doing something else and perhaps tonight you can look through a whole years decades of abuse and rebellion and sinfulness in your own heart and openly and even having influenced other people and you've given up you say there can't be any possibility of my being saved well Manasseh tells us that nobody is in that position if someone like Manasseh can be saved then God can work in your life also and that is an encouragement to believers this evening to continue to pray for those who we know who are on the wrong road don't give up praying for them even if they're showing no sign whatsoever of coming to the

Lord even if they're showing the very sight the opposite I remember hearing a person giving his testimony once and he said that at the time when he was at his worst giving no indication whatsoever to anyone that he was interested in the gospel and trying his best to display rebellion nothing but rebellion against God that was a time when he was most conscious of the state in which he was in don't give up praying for anyone not you know sometimes we make a grave mistake and we look at some person because of that person's nature because of that person's character we think oh well one day that person will be a Christian and you look at another person's character and you say oh there's no way that person is ever going to be a Christian that's a big mistake God can change anyone and very often it's the last person we ever expect to be converted is the person who is converted so I hope tonight that we are in prayer for those we know the manassas that we know the people that we know who have made a point to show the world that they are not going to listen to the Bible and listen to the gospel I hope that we will pray and continue to pray for those we know who are in that condition and if you are in that position and if you are sitting tonight and you're saying I will not believe then maybe the Lord will have to do something similar in your life in order to get your attention once and for all and if it involves a hook in your nose so be it but why let it get to that stage why why don't you listen to him now why don't you before you go any further and before before you take any further steps away from the path that you know is the right one why don't you turn just like

[40 : 52] Manasseh did because you know the kind of life that you're seeking tonight you're not going to find it's not going to give you the lasting pleasure and the satisfaction that you hope for it's only going to lead to further darkness further despair and a Christless eternity the Bible tells us now there's no guarantee of what lies in the future but there's a guarantee only that those who trust in Jesus Christ God will give them a new beginning and a new life let's pray father in heaven once again we pray that you will speak to us each one of us particularly those this evening who haven't you haven't come to the Lord and begun to follow him we ask that you will bring your word home to each one of us here this evening we pray that you will make it speak to us powerfully to us and move us to where we should be in Jesus name amen