

God Forgives Manasseh

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[0 : 0 0] Now, we're continuing with our study of conversions that we find mentioned, described in the Bible. And we're going back tonight, many hundreds of years from Philippi, where we looked at three particular conversions there over the past few weeks.

And now we've come back to the Old Testament days where Manasseh, who succeeded the great king Hezekiah in Judah, is before us in these verses.

Second Chronicles, along with First Chronicles, was written to encourage those who had come back from Babylon. As you remember, the people of Judah were taken under the Babylonians to Babylon and were there for 70 years.

And in coming back, they faced many trials and challenges as they sought again to reestablish the cause of God in Jerusalem. And you'll find books in the Bible, of course, that are specific to that, such as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and certain of the prophecies that you find there, like Zechariah.

They are all geared into that particular time when the people were being encouraged by these prophets and by these writings to actually engage again in the rebuilding exercise that needed to take place, both of the people as a community of God and the temple and all that's associated with the temple as God's dwelling place.

[1 : 3 9] And that's why you find in the book of First and Second Chronicles, these two books that really form one unit, that's why you find such an emphasis in them on the temple of God, on the people of God, and the theological focus or shape of these books is not just dealing with history, but history as it was designed to encourage people to rebuild the cause of God after long years of absence.

And therefore, the king and the temple are so prominent in these books. And it reminds us, too, that these books are for our age, for our generation, for our circumstances as well.

Every rebuilding process, whether it's a congregational rebuilding or a rebuilding of one's personal life, must actually go over certain things that are foundational to the Christian life, to God's specifications for the Christian life, and the likes of these books are so important, particularly so to the church at times of great challenge when we're seeking to rebuild or seeking to add to what's already there and see increase and growth in the cause of God.

These are great books to encourage us. And that's why you find such emphases as the long chapters about Hezekiah, the father of Manasseh, and Josiah, who came after him, who were so instrumental in, again, building together things so that their history is really put to the people of a later age to encourage them in their rebuilding as well.

Now, of course, we find in the list that you find in these books of these kings, this gallery, if you like, of these kings, you'll find that some of them are very flawed indeed.

[3 : 4 2] And indeed, the book of 2 Chronicles is actually the last book in the Hebrew Old Testament. And that, too, is significant because, as you know, there's a gap of 400 years from the days of the Old Testament until you find the beginnings of the New Testament age, dawning with the coming of, firstly, John the Baptist, and then, of course, Jesus Christ himself.

And so the last words of 2 Chronicles, as the last words of the Hebrew Old Testament, of the Hebrew Bible as it was then, it's almost, if you like, like somebody playing a piece on a piano and just for the final note, holding down the key and just keeping it down to let that note keep on sounding forth until some other piece of music takes its place.

And that's the note of the Old Testament, anticipating the coming of the king. Because all the kings that you find in 2 Chronicles, even the best of them are flawed.

And it was itself a reminder to the Old Testament church that the perfect king had not yet arrived, that the Lord's king, the Messiah, had not yet come as the deliverer and head of his people.

And amongst that list, you find Manasseh, one of the worst of them. One of the worst kings who ever lived over a people and reigned over a people.

[5 : 19] The Bible itself tells us that. And as we'll see tonight, there's a reason why the Bible here in 2 Chronicles tells us that. Because in the account you have of his conversion and his coming to know the Lord, it's set against this dark background of his previous deeds.

And the terror of his reign. There is nothing in this world tonight, whether you look at North Korea or wherever else you see a despot or a tyrant, there is nothing there actually any worse than what you read about this man, Manasseh.

He is a man who did more evil, as you find there in this chapter in verse 9. He did more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel.

And that's really saying something. He even went so far as to offer child sacrifice in the valley of the son of Hinnom.

You might say there are no depths of depravity, of ungodliness, that this man did not plumb and actually impose upon his people.

[6 : 30] And yet that's the Manasseh that came to know the Lord when he was bound in chains and brought to Babylon.

And you know, that's telling us something very important about all of these conversions that we're looking at in the Bible. For all that they're full of detail about human lives and interesting details at that.

People like we've seen in that city of Philippi, so different one to the other and yet the Lord came into their lives. And although you find all these details about these people and any others that God willing we will study in days to come, the main thing that you and I should bring from all of these passages, yes, of course, they're there so that we will apply them and make sure that we are converted, that we know the Lord.

But above that, what you and I should be taking with us and what you and I have to bring into this passage tonight and take from this passage tonight is how great is the Lord.

How magnificent is that grace of God when against the dark background of Manasseh's life you find that grace of God reaching out to him and listening to him in his cries of distress as he prayed to God.

[7 : 53] and God was moved by his entreaty and brought him back again to his own land. His sin was immensely great but this covenant God was far greater.

however great our sin may be and it is no reason why we should go on and sin or think that somehow or other that makes it okay but however great our sin may be our saviour is much, much greater.

The grace of God is far higher and far more potent and effective and powerful and anything that you find in our sin.

Let's look at this conversion of Manasseh. It's two things. It's first of all an unexpected conversion and secondly it's an unmistakable conversion.

We're looking at that very briefly. The first one an unexpected conversion because there's a sense of caution which every conversion you might say is unexpected but as we said it's unexpected here because this man was such an ungodly man.

[9 : 11] This man did such an amount of evil. The description of this man of his reign of terror is really one that is spoken about as provoking the Lord to such anger that he eventually intervened and took this man and others to Babylon under the Assyrians who came and took him away.

And you see that's the thing. When you read that that he provoked the Lord to anger you expect that the next words or the next passage will just say well surely the Lord's not going to bother with him anymore.

Surely the Lord is just going to leave him in Babylon and put somebody else in his place that's more worthy of being a king of Judah. Surely the Lord is not going to pursue this particular individual after all that he has done against this God.

After all the evil that he's done dismissing all of the commands of God and the regulations for worship and filling the very temple of God with idols and with abominations.

The things the Lord has specified to be abominations to him. But wherever you find the greatest darkness friends the jewel of God's grace shines all the more brightly for it when you see it operating there.

[10 : 37] Now tonight I'm not suggesting that there's anyone here anything like Manasseh but every sinner has a dark background to their lives mine and yours.

You don't have to go as far as Manasseh or anything like it to draw the disfavor of God towards you. But the point of the passage is that you see the sparkle of grace against this dark background of sin.

That's why we're saying what we take from the passage is actually more to do with God than anything else. The wonder of his grace the wonder of his patience the wonder of his forbearance that he could actually leave this man and still come back to him and not destroy him as he deserved to be destroyed.

What is that saying about this God? God that's as we'll see later being so readily dismissed from the thoughts of our society. No it doesn't make sin good just because this is the case but it makes forgiveness glorious.

it makes grace so wonderful as you see it shining there. And it reminds us too that we should never dismiss anyone as being too far gone beyond recovery.

[12 : 09] If the grace of God could reach out and if the patience of God could wait until Manasseh was in Babylon until he was bound in chains and in misery in Babylon there is no one in the town of Stornoway that can be dismissed tonight as beyond the reach of that grace, the power of that grace, the love of this God.

And that's why in our Christian service whatever type of service that is we are dealing with people and whenever we're dealing with people we're dealing with people like ourselves who are sinful people.

and that's why it's so important to remember that the grace of God that saved Manasseh that came into Manasseh's life is the very same grace exactly that can transform lives throughout this community throughout this town, throughout this island, throughout this land.

And what we have to bear in mind too friends is this that nothing less than the grace of God will do it. Not all our ingenuity or all our policies, not all that we do, good though it might be, in terms of strategy and committee, all of these things are so, so important in their own way.

But what changes lives is the power of God. What brings wicked Manasseh to be a believer and to know that the Lord is God, is this God at work.

[13 : 37] And if we're not praying earnestly, as surely we are, for this God to be at work, this is very kind of old fashioned thought, I know, in today's world. It's something that you may feel goes back to the Victorian age where people believed in prayer and that God responded to prayer.

Has God changed? Have the terms of his kingdom changed? Of course not. That's why this is so up to date.

And that we must look to this God and to the power of this God. simplistic though it may sound in the eyes of the world. That's why we must look to this God to bring transformation because the kind of transformation that my life and your life and this congregational life and the life of this town and the life of people in this society we belong to in Scotland.

It's this grace of God that will bring that transformation. transformation. So let's keep on knocking at heaven's door. Let's give him as Isaiah puts it in chapter 62 let's give him no rest until he establishes and makes Jerusalem his cause a praise in the earth.

It's an unexpected conversion but then that's what God does. That's what God is like. He is the God of the unexpected as far as we're concerned and as far as the world is concerned.

[15 : 11] But it's an unmistakable conversion too because what we mean by that of course is that it's a real conversion. It's a genuine conversion. In fact if we didn't have the book of 2nd Chronicles and just relied on the account you have in 2nd Kings you would think that Manasseh died an ungodly man in Babylon because it's only in 2nd Chronicles that you have this account.

of the change in his life and outlook. And what a great change it is. You know first of all it says when he was in distress he entreated the Lord.

The one thing Manasseh could not control and the one thing that people today cannot control even the great despots of the world the great dictators of the world the one thing they cannot control is the providence of God.

Because it is Jesus tonight as Revelation tells us who has the scroll in his hand that contains all the events of human history. And however much people will try and dismiss the facts of the matter as they are in the Bible however much they will close out the idea of a superior power to themselves God God will come in his own way in his own time and do what he did with Manasseh not only will he turn the tables on him but he'll turn his life upside down or perhaps we should say the right way up.

It's when he was in distress. You see the difference between verse 10 and verse 12 the Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people but they paid no attention. And then verse 12 when the Lord actually placed him in that circumstance in Babylon he was in distress when he was there in distress he then entreated he besought the Lord he sought him he prayed to him he pleaded with him.

[17 : 09] Sometimes it takes that sort of thing that sort of circumstance to bring us to ourselves to make us realize that we need God that we cannot live without him in any way that will be spiritually or morally successful in his sight.

now that doesn't mean that there are two things that we actually must learn from that that we must be careful in application that we give attention to these points.

The first point is that it is not just people who are really low in mind or in physical circumstances or conditions that seek out to the Lord and are converted.

Some people have that idea that it's only people who have really reached a very low point in life that use God and come to God and make a sort of crutch or basis out of God for themselves in order to try somehow and support and give themselves some therapy at that time.

God is for everyone and remember when you read the parable of the prodigal son it's actually the parable of the two sons and there was a son at home who never left his father's house who didn't abuse his life in the way that the younger son did in a far country and wasted his life there until he came to know himself.

[18 : 43] Here was the elder brother and here he was at home and he was just as lost and just as far from God and just as needy of forgiveness as the younger brother was. The outward circumstances are not what really dictate as to how needy a person is.

It's the state of their soul isn't it? And you can have somebody that lives such a civil decent outwardly upright life as a good job as well thought of in society as places of position in society just as far from God as the person that's lying in the gutter drunk.

indeed possibly even more so. So it's not just when we are down that we need God and it's not true that conversion is just about people who have reached such a low point and then they reach out to God.

Don't say about yourself I'm not yet in a position where I need God to that extent. To what extent? God every one of us needs God however much we may be decent and upright in our lives we all need him absolutely foundationally.

The second point is that not every case of distress leads to conversion. We're reading here about Manasseh in these circumstances he prayed to God God was moved by his entreaty God brought him back again to his kingdom.

[20 : 17] There are millions of people tonight in our own land who are in distress they don't have a thought about God. They will not use their distress to think about God but rather sometimes to dismiss him even more and to cast all sorts of accusations against him if he exists at all.

Remember that not every case of distress leads to repentance to conversion to coming to know the Lord. that's why tonight we have the most privileged position whatever our circumstances here tonight are in life we are under the gospel of God's salvation and God's grace and it's to those circumstances to us in all these circumstances that God is saying you need me and you will only be able to glorify my name as you must by coming to me and seeking me and finding me and knowing me.

So it was when he was in distress but then there's evidence here further than that that he actually had a very genuine conversion. First of all he entreated the favor of God and prayed to him.

Now this is much much more than somebody in distress just crying out to God due to the pain of his circumstances and actually seeking that God would somehow intervene in his life and just please take me back to Jerusalem take me away from Babylon take me out of these circumstances this is a man whose concern is not his immediate circumstances but the fact that he doesn't have the approval of God that's what it's saying he entreated the favor of the Lord as God he didn't just beg God to take him out of these difficulties out of the pain that he was in he now realizes how God sees him how God has been looking in and assessing and analyzing and passing judgment on his life and every conversion at some point and to some degree or other comes to know that for themselves every convert and conversion really comes to realize that it is

God's approval that matters most of all not outward circumstances not that the situation might be made easier for us but that we will have our life right with God that's the first thing he entreated the favor of God and prayed to him in that respect have you come to do that for yourself is it your concern has it been your concern to really engage with what God sees of you and what God thinks of you and seeking the favor of God which is so available to us in Jesus Christ rather than anything less than that and to depend on anything less than on having Christ to cover you in God's sight to give you that approval that righteousness with which he's pleased and then you read secondly he humbled himself greatly and humbled himself greatly before the

[23 : 41] God of his fathers that's a big step for Manasseh you wouldn't have found Manasseh before he was brought to Babylon humbling himself before the God of his fathers the God of his fathers didn't mean much to him if he had meant much to him he wouldn't have introduced all of these deviations and all of these abominations that he brought into the worship into the temple of God if God had meant anything at all to him he would actually not have thought of doing that but he did that and now that same God of his fathers is the God that he has in his focus is the God that he now has to do business with to deal with and so that's what you see as this change of outlook in our conversion as well we all know the

God of our fathers the God our fathers worshipped the God our fathers commended the God our father suffered for if you go back far enough and it's a sad day that's come upon us as a nation that the God of our fathers is not the God that people want oh I know some people will say although there are many people of course that will say we don't want God in any sense we want God clean out of public life even out of private life well others will say come to reject God altogether but we don't want the God of our fathers the God of the Old Testament the God of people like Paul to do with subjects like marriage and other things where other aspects of human relationships where the Bible is definite about its description of what is and isn't acceptable to God we don't want that

God we don't want that God of those days we want a God who fits with things as they are in human thinking now well Manasseh thought that Manasseh thought the God of his fathers was not the God that he should worship or certainly not deal with these things in the way that they once did his father Ezekiah was a godly man and that too is a solemn point that one generation under wise and godly leadership can be overturned by the next generation following ungodly and evil ways and again it brings us back to this point our only hope is in the God of our fathers the God of Abraham of Isaac of Jacob of Israel of Jeremiah of Isaiah of

Hosea of John the Baptist of Jesus Christ of Paul of John of all that you find in New Testament of that New Testament church the God of Athanasius the God of Luther the God of Calvin the God of John Knox the God of Thomas Chalmers the God of Martin Lloyd Jones to bring it all the way down near our own age and generation the God of our fathers God of the gospel the God of grace the God who saved Manasseh what hope do we have if we turn to any other God or any version of God than the God of our fathers that's why you and I must see to it that our life is a life that shows that this is our God and not any modern or past version of him so when you put these two together that he entreated the favor of

God and prayed to him that he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers what do you have A plus B equals what A plus B equals repentance we've been looking pretty much at faith in the Philippian jailer and his conversion but here is something that is equally important and significant and necessary towards conversion and involved in conversion and that is repentance a turning from sin to God and not just a turning to it but a turning away from sin to God as the catechism puts it with full purpose and endeavor after new obedience that's why repentance is a daily business because our obedience has to be a daily obedience not just obedience we did once when we came to know the

[28 : 56] Lord first of all at what we might call our conversion then but every single day is a day when I must come and face that day asking myself the question am I willing today to repent of what I know has been sin in my life and at the end of every day to ask myself where have I sinned today that I have against God that I maybe haven't taken into account thus far I cannot leave this day without repenting without expressing to God that I want to put this sin behind me and to serve him more acceptably that's you see what you find here in Manasseh he is a repentant man a man who comes humbled before God and prays earnestly and entreats him he is a repentant man so the next point is this and God was moved by his entreat to stop look down and read those words or listen to them again

God was moved by his entreaty whose entreaty the entreaty of this previously evil wicked man and what do you read there this holy God this awesome God this just God this God against whom he had committed these atrocities and this evil God was moved by his entreaty is there anything elsewhere in the Bible that more clearly shows the grace of God the nature of God as our saviour than these words God was moved by his entreaty God that's not bad theology at all that's absolutely crucial to remember that that's itself a definition of what grace is as it operates it's God moved by the entreaty of a poor sinner who is coming to him for forgiveness and it reminds you of another incident in the ministry of

Jesus in Mark chapter 10 and other passages in the gospels you find there an account of Bartimaeus as he cried out after Jesus Jesus son of David have mercy upon me you see he recognised him as the Messiah as the promised king and those who were following with Jesus his immediate companions there the disciples wanted to actually put this man away and to close him up and to shut him up and to actually not have him cry after him but he cried out all the more Jesus son of David have mercy upon me and then you read these amazing words Jesus stopped incredible though it seems and we say it with all reverence to God you and I have a way tonight of stopping this creator God in his tracks when you plead for mercy he stops over you he is moved by your entreaty even when you wouldn't expect it in a case like

Manasseh the Lord was moved by his entreaty and then you read something else he brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom what does that tell you about God that his work of grace is a work of restoration you see it's not enough for God that he changes Manasseh's life in Babylon and leaves him there he brought him back again into his kingdom back to Jerusalem God is the great restorer isn't that what we sing about in that great Psalm Psalm 23 the Lord's my shepherd he restores my soul it didn't matter how far the prodigal had gone away from the house of his father his father never lost sight of him and when he came back to his father ready and beginning to pray or you might say say the words that he had practiced his father cut him off and he cut him off with something remarkable he didn't say to be quiet he cut him off with an embrace he cut him off with a great hug back into fellowship and love that he had left behind he restores my soul maybe tonight you've been away from

God maybe it's not been a long time maybe it has been a long time maybe you're strayed in your life maybe you know people in this town who no longer come to church please please tell them that this God is still for them that this God is the restorer of their souls that this God not only did he come to Manasseh in Babylon and listened to him and was moved by his entreaty he brought him back again to Jerusalem into his kingdom that is God's great concern in changing people's lives to bring you back to what you should be and to where you should be in relation to himself and to his church and to his kingdom and then you read this and then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God he knew about

[35 : 05] God he knew a lot about God he was brought up to know about God his father had taught him God's ways but it's only now that he knew God that he knew that the Lord was God and that brings you into a whole strand of the Bible that we're just really not going to touch on right now in closing and that is as Hosea put it in the passage we saw recently at the prayer meeting in chapter 2 the engagement ring as we called it with all these precious jewels in it that God was giving to his restored people then they shall know the Lord is how he I will betroth them to me in righteousness in justice in steadfast love in faithfulness and they shall know the

Lord they shall come into an intimate personal relationship with God now tonight I have to leave this building with questions the same as yourself and this one is at the very top do I know the Lord and if the answer to that is no not yet well take all the encouragement you can from Manassas conversion and be assured of this that here and now God is waiting for your entreaty and will welcome you as he welcomed Manasseh let's pray Lord our God we thank you for the beauty and for the power of your grace for the way that it is so efficacious in the life of those that you bring to know yourself we pray that your grace will continue

Lord in our lives and we pray that whoever even in this building tonight may have thoughts of coming to know you and coming to seek you coming to bow humbly in your presence and plead with you to be accepted by you Lord we pray that you would indeed hear their entreaty and respond to their cry as you promised to do hear us now we pray for Jesus sake Amen let's conclude now to singing to God's praise in Psalm 25 Psalm number 25 that's also from the Scottish Psalter and it's on page 231 we're singing verses 7 to 11 my sins and faults of youth do thou O Lord forget after thy mercy think on me and for thy goodness great God good and upright is the way he'll sinners show the make and judgment he will guide and make his path to know verses 7 to 11 to his praise

Context of folks Sins and faults of you Till the Lord forget After thy mercy King for me And for thy goodness Great God who doubt The brightest The way Till sinners show The weak In charge And deep Will guide

And make His path To know The home That's off the door Our truth And mercy Sure To those That hear This Come Not He And rest Till All He's You Now For Thy Own In Sick O Lord I need And Treat To Pardon Pardon My

[40 : 22] In Liberty For It Is There Be If you Allow me please to get to the main door this evening I'll greet you on the way out Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore amen ■ffe Number 4 In Now Stay Step Step Should Sit And From E Term And Milton Ap Step algorithm chapter ■UFF tenido Tr vegetables■ Chapter christ equ Pr cubes Verse Ec entrepreneurs vessel maturity Af■ ■■■