

"Repentance"

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, church. It's good to be with you all this morning. Would you turn with me to 2 Chronicles, chapter 33. 2 Chronicles 33, that's page 357 in the Pew Bible. As we continue our series in this Old Testament book of Chronicles this summer, we're in chapter 33.

So as we turn there, I wonder, if you were to sum up the Christian life in one word, which word would you choose?

Well, on the one hand, you would be correct if you chose the word Christ, right? Jesus Himself. Christianity is all about the person and work of the Lord Jesus. But let's say you had to choose one more word in addition to that one.

Which one would you pick to sum up the Christian life? What did you say, Dorothy? Evangelism. Let's do it. What else? Anybody else?

Forgiveness. That's a good one. Faith, love, hope, obedience, good works, suffering, family, is that what you said, Danny?

[1 : 0 9] Failure, yeah. Well, you know, it's interesting that Martin Luther, when he wrote his 95 Theses, he wrote this. He said, this is his first of his 95 Theses.

He says, when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, repent, he willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance. Repentance. Now, there's a word that sums up the Christian life, at least according to Luther and to many saints before him.

Repentance. Now, I imagine you could attend many religious gatherings, many church services even, and never even hear the word repentance. You know, we can shy away from language of repentance because the word sort of sounds stuffy and grim and loaded with false guilt and empty religion.

And I think that's a real shame, and it's a loss. Because the biblical concept of repentance is just brimming with hope.

If we really understood repentance, we'd see that it's like a prison sentence being lifted. It's like windows being opened and the fresh breeze filling the room.

[2 : 2 7] It's like a new chapter. It's like a fresh start. So I wonder, friends, are you in need of a new chapter today, a fresh start? And perhaps we need to consider afresh the biblical concept of repentance.

Do you know what this word means? Does it fill you with hope? Well, that's what our text today is all about. It's a window into this rich biblical reality of repentance.

Second Chronicles chapter 33 is the story of Manasseh. And as we'll see, Manasseh is notorious in the story of the Old Testament and not in a good way.

So as we turn to this chapter, let's pray and then we'll dive in. Would you pray with me? Father, help us to understand what it is your Spirit is inviting us into through this passage, these great and deep spiritual truths that lead us into your very heart.

God, thank you that your Word is living and active and abundant and overflowing with the revelation of yourself so that we might know you and be who you've created us and redeemed us to be.

[3 : 38] So do that work now, we pray, by your Spirit. For Christ's sake, amen. So the first thing we see in 2 Chronicles 33 is our need for repentance, the need for repentance.

Let me read verses 1 through 11. We'll set things up. Manasseh was 12 years old when he began to reign and he reigned 55 years in Jerusalem. And 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.

For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down. And he erected altars to the Baals and made Ashteroth and worshipped all the hosts of heaven and served them.

And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be forever. And he built altars for all the hosts of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord.

And he burned his sons as an offering in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery and dealt with mediums and with necromancers.

[4 : 42] He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. And the carved image of the idol that he had made, he set in the house of God, of which God said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever, and I will no more remove the foot of Israel from the land that I appointed for your fathers, if only they will be careful to do all that I have commanded them, all the law, the statutes, and the rules given through Moses.

Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Israel, of Jerusalem, astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel. 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.

Well, as you might have guessed from these verses, Manasseh is remembered as one of the worst kings in the history of Israel. He has one of the longest reigns, 55 years, and for most of that long reign, he undoes nearly all of the good that his father Hezekiah had done.

And now when we look at a figure like Manasseh, it's easy to think, right, that we are so not like him. We read about his evil and his idolatry, and we can think that we're doing pretty good in comparison, right?

[6 : 17] But you know, rather than comparing our outward deeds to Manasseh's outward deeds, let's press a little deeper into the heart. And when we do that, I think we see two heart dynamics in Manasseh that are actually true of everyone.

And so through Manasseh, we see why you and I and all of us have a deep need for this thing we call repentance. And that first heart dynamic is this. It's that our idolatry leads to the Lord's anger.

The end of verse 6 says, Manasseh did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. That is, provoking the Lord to anger. Manasseh, you see, chose to worship things that were not the one true God.

He chose created things, gods of human invention, and worshipped them instead. And now on the surface, it's easy to think that we're not so silly, right, as to worship statues, literally idols anymore.

But the reality is today, we still worship created things rather than our Creator. We take finite things and make them ultimate things in our lives. Here's maybe a diagnostic question for you and for me.

[7 : 25] Is there something in your life other than God that if you lost it, you wouldn't be just sad or heartbroken, but you'd be devastated? You wouldn't be able to get out of bed in the morning.

Or maybe a slightly different way of asking that question. Is there something that so shapes your identity, your sense of self, that if you lost it or if it was threatened, you'd be completely disoriented, completely wrecked?

What's the thing that kind of props you up as you? Maybe it's your profession. You know, you've worked a lot of years to get where you are, and now you kind of can't imagine yourself without it.

Or maybe it's a relationship. Or maybe it's just the approval of others, your family, your children, your co-workers, your peers. Maybe it's even your sense of being a good person.

You've labored long in your life to be a person of character, of moral worth. And that is the thing that sort of establishes your sense of self. Whatever your identity is, whatever it is, that if you lost it, you'd lose yourself, that's your God.

[8 : 41] You know, in these modern-day idols of our hearts, they not only kind of shape our identity, they also dictate our actions. You know, much like previous kings that we've seen in the book of 2 Chronicles, Manasseh probably didn't wake up one morning and say, you know, I think I'm going to do all the things that are listed in verse 6.

What am I going to do today? I think I'll sacrifice my children to the Baals. I think I'll go out and perform some sorcery and start engaging in necromancy. You know, that's not where it starts, but that's where it leads.

Most of us start by saying, I want to work hard and get ahead. I want to do what it takes to be successful in my career. I want to make a difference. I want to make my mark. But when the career or the relationship at last becomes Lord in our life, when it becomes our identity, then we find that we're doing all sorts of things to serve it and to uphold it.

Then we find that we're doing all sorts of things to serve it and to uphold it that we would never have dreamed doing before. We start out thinking that, you know, well, maybe I'd have to fudge these reports.

You know, that's not where we started, but that's where we end up. You don't start out thinking, oh, I'm going to compromise on all of my boundaries and personal integrity. But three, four, five years in, we find we're doing things we wouldn't have considered possible.

[10 : 10] And, you know, not only does that place we end up in, not only does that wound our souls very deeply, it also alienates us from God.

By turning away from the true God to idols, the Bible is very clear that we put ourselves at enmity with God. We place ourselves under what the Bible calls God's anger or God's wrath.

Again, verse 6 says that the Lord was provoked to anger at Manasseh. Now, remember, God's anger is not like human anger.

Human anger is what? It's uncontrolled, it's fickle, it's self-centered, it's destructive. Human anger rarely does anything good. But God's wrath, God's anger is nothing like that.

God's anger is His perfectly just, perfectly controlled opposition to all that dishonors Him and all that defaces the good world that He's made.

[11 : 22] God's anger, God's wrath is God's perfect no to evil and wrong. You see, the great tragedy of idolatry, it's not just the kind of horizontal consequences it creates between us and the things around us, but it's the vertical enmity it creates between us and God.

In other words, idolatry doesn't just put us out of joint with creation much more tragically and much more seriously, it puts us at a joint with our Creator. And that's the first heart dynamic we see in Manasseh is that idolatry leads to this enmity with God.

It leads to God's anger. The second dynamic that we see, we see in verses 10 and verse 11. And it's this, it's that there's a refusal to heed God's warnings, which leads to God giving us over to our sin.

Verse 10 reads, The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to His people, but they paid no attention. God, in His great kindness towards Manasseh as He's performing all this evil and leading the people astray, God, in His great kindness, calls out to them through the prophets, warns them that they're rushing headlong towards a cliff's edge, but they turn a deaf ear.

They ignored God. And then after that patient calling and beckoning and entreating, after the many years of God pursuing them, at last God, in His justice, gives them over to the very gods that they had chosen to worship.

[13 : 03] And that's what we see in verse 11. Manasseh and the people, they took to themselves the gods of the nations, and so God gives them over to those very nations.

Manasseh is defeated by the Assyrians and taken away as a captive to one of the Assyrian outposts in the city of Babylon, which at this point in history, the kingdom of Assyria controlled.

You know, perhaps one of the most terrifying things that could happen to us as human beings is for God to give us exactly what we want when what we want is something apart from Him.

It led Manasseh to total slavery. He thought he was choosing to worship the gods of the nations, and for a while it worked, or so he thought, but after refusing God's gracious warnings, God eventually gave him over to those gods, and now he had no choice.

Now he was captive to them. So why do we need repentance?

[14 : 15] We need repentance because the fallen human heart is at enmity with God. We worship idols of our own choosing, and this not only puts us on a direct path to spiritual slavery and self-destruction, it also puts us under God's just and eternal no, which is a darkness of separation from God Himself, who is the only source of lasting joy.

So is there hope for us? You know, you can live for a long time, and you can kind of believe in your head and say things like, ah, I'm not perfect, I'm not a good person, and you know, what we mean by that a lot of the times is, ah, I'm just like everybody else, right?

Nobody's perfect. But you know, we can say things like that without ever realizing yet the real gravity of our sin, the real gravity of our spiritual condition.

But what happens when the curtain is drawn back and you see yourself for the first time really, you know, when the lights in the basement of your heart are flipped on and you kind of see all that's been harboring there and scuttling around in there, when you see the depth of your sin and selfishness, what then?

What then when you realize that you've completely blown it and that in the face of God's holiness and justice, you simply don't stand a chance? When you come to yourself one day and realize that you've actually gotten everything you wanted, but you're actually not free, you're empty, and you're enslaved.

[16 : 05] Is there any hope for us then? And this is where 2 Chronicles chapter 33 becomes a chapter of great hope for us.

For those of us who know how dark our hearts can really be, because at this moment, repentance becomes the window that opens up to the sun.

Repentance presents itself as the fresh start in the new chapter. So we've seen in our chapter the need for repentance.

We now come to the second point, which is the nature of repentance. The nature of repentance. Let's read just the next two verses, verses 12 and 13. Verse 12, Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.

What exactly is repentance? Well, according to verse 12, it has two aspects. On the one hand, the text says, Manasseh humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.

[17 : 37] You see, Manasseh came to admit that he had made a ruin of things, and he let go of his self-justification and his excuses. He let go of all the ways he might have tried to minimize what he had done.

He confessed that he was guilty and deserved nothing from God. He humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.

And then secondly, it says, He entreated the favor of the Lord his God. You know, it's one thing to admit that you've blown it. It's another thing to cry out for help. Simply wallowing in the mess of our own making, that can be just another form of self-centeredness, can't it?

But calling out to another, calling out to God for rescue, that's what genuine repentance is. It's turning from ourselves to God.

That's the nature of repentance. And there are plenty of prayers in Scripture that show us what this looks like. Psalm 51 being one of the most well-known.

[18 : 43] In Psalm 51, David prays, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. You know, friends, the beauty of Scripture, the beauty of this Word that God has inspired and preserved for us is that you can take these words, like the words of Psalm 51, and you can pray them as your own.

God's giving you, as it were, the very path to walk on back to Himself. How kind of God to give us this Word. So you can take these words and pray them as your own.

You know, repentance isn't some mysterious spiritual practice for the religious elite, right? It's simply the cry of a heart that knows it needs God's forgiveness and God's freedom.

But you know, we wouldn't really understand the nature of repentance without seeing the very next point that 2 Chronicles 33 makes. 2 Chronicles begins by showing us the need for repentance and then the nature of repentance, but at the heart of this passage is the God of repentance.

[20 : 15] The God of repentance. Look again at verse 13. Manasseh prayed to God and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem and into his kingdom.

Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God. Friends, the God who steps forth from this chapter is a God who is rich in mercy, who hears the prayer of every sinner who repents.

Did you come here this morning thinking that God only hears the prayers of so-called good people or righteous people? I have news for you. There are no good people.

There are no righteous people. Listen to what Isaiah 57, 15 says. The prophet Isaiah says, For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

That's God. God says, I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

[21 : 34] God doesn't dwell in the midst of the righteous. He dwells in the midst of the repentant and the humble and the contrite. God is an ocean of mercy towards those who turn to him in humble repentance.

Do you think this morning that he would not accept you? Do you think because of what you've done or who you've been that God would turn you away?

And the truth is, friend, God knows everything about you. He knows your good deeds and your triumphs and your successes, but he also knows the dark thoughts and the selfishness and the cursing and the jealousy and the pride.

Everything you've tried to hide, your creator sees it all. But still, do you think that he won't accept you if you turn to him?

Do you think that there's no fresh start for you, no new chapter, no beginning again, no healing, no hope? Friends, if that is you, look again at Manasseh. What did God do with this notorious moral failure?

[22 : 52] When Manasseh humbled himself and turned to God, did he crash upon the rocks of God's justice? Was his soul turned back and refused entry?

No. In mercy, God received him home. God welcomed him into the safe harbor of his love.

The Father embraced him and reinstated him as his child. Friend, there is room for you around the table of God no matter how great your sins may be.

He has a seat for you and for everyone who repents. I think the most powerful part of this whole passage is found at the end of verse 13 where the chronicler says, then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.

Then, then, when he had experienced God's radical, scandalous, prodigal grace, then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.

[24 : 04] That's, when you really see who God is, that's where the godness of God burns the brightest in the radical forgiveness of sinners through his own sheer mercy.

So, friend, if you have not experienced that radical mercy in repentance, you do not yet know this great God of the Bible.

He is greater and more merciful and more kind than you could ever imagine. Now, as we consider this Old Testament text, as we consider Manasseh receiving this radical grace and forgiveness, you know, it's true for Manasseh, living as he was under the Old Covenant, that, you know, he only knew at that time in redemptive history that God had forgiven him.

But the saints of the Old Testament could only see in the faintest, dimmest way how God would accomplish that forgiveness. But from the perspective of the New Testament today, we see just how radical God's mercy truly is, just how central it is to his own being.

After all, you know, you read an Old Testament text like this and you think, well, what became of God's just anger against Manasseh's idolatry and evil?

[25 : 48] Right? Did God just decide to stop being just and righteous and holy? Did God just sort of stop being God in order to be merciful? And that, of course, is a great tension that runs throughout the whole Old Testament.

How can God be both holy and merciful? How can God be both just and the one who justifies, who forgives sinners? And friends, that great dilemma that runs through the Old Testament and sits there like a great question, begging for an answer, answer.

Friends, the answer finally comes to light when in the fullness of time, God became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. Because in human flesh, God, in Jesus, would bear human sin and He would bear the wrath that human sin deserved on the cross.

God's justice would be fully displayed in wrath against sin, wrath against human sin. All the punishment that sin deserved was poured out so that in exchange, God, while still being just, could extend utter free forgiveness to everyone who humbles themselves and turns to God in repentance and faith and receives Christ as their own.

In other words, Manasseh's sin and all the sins of the Old Testament and your sins and mine and the sins of everyone who repents, they were paid by another. They were laid on Christ at the cross and all that remained for Manasseh and all that remains for you and for me is God's mercy.

[27 : 49] And so repentance really is a fresh start. It really is a new chapter. It really is a curtain being torn open to the sun. And because of who God is, because of what God has accomplished through Jesus, this fresh start, this new chapter, this curtain thrown open, it's never going to be closed.

I mean, how many times have you kind of tried to make a good start only to fall down again, right? But you see, this clean slate, this perfect righteousness isn't something you're trying to achieve.

It's something that's given to you out of God's mercy. So you see, when God forgives, when God hears and accepts us in His Son, in Jesus Christ, it's permanent and it's final and there's no going back.

Christ died not just for your past sin or your present sin, but for all your future sins as well, they're all covered and that ocean of God's mercy never runs dry.

You can never hit the bottom of it. However deep you think your sins have carried you, His mercy is deeper still. This is the God of repentance.

[29 : 05] repentance. This is the God of the Bible. Now before we go to the Lord's Supper in just a minute and receive the bread and cup as signs and seals of God's mercy in Christ, why don't we apply this message about repentance in two ways?

And we actually see these two ways in the rest of our passage. First one is this. If you've turned from sin and trusted in God's mercy in Christ, then what this passage invites us to do is to bear the fruit of repentance.

The fruit of repentance. This is what we see in verses 14 through 17. I won't read those verses, but you can scan over them in that paragraph in the Pew Bible. And what you do, what you see there is that Manasseh returns to Jerusalem and having been put right with God, he begins to put things right.

He starts rebuilding the city, he starts serving and protecting the people the way he should have been, and most importantly, he starts restoring the proper worship of God in the temple. He gets rid of the idols and worships God alone.

And you see, friends, that's the pattern for everyone who experiences genuine repentance and the mercy of God. Your life will begin to bear the fruit of that repentance.

[30 : 22] When you turn to God and receive His mercy, your life will begin to change. Now notice, God's free mercy comes to Manasseh before Manasseh changes his life.

God's heart is changed by God's grace and then his life is changed. In other words, Manasseh doesn't earn God's forgiveness by his good works. He never could.

Before experiencing God's mercy, right, he didn't even want to listen to God, let alone serve and obey Him, but now, having come to know God through God's mercy, Manasseh's life changes.

And so will yours, friend. God will take your life and begin to remake it and restore it. It won't be all at once.

It will be a process of growth and change. Not everything will get better overnight. Verse 17 of our passage actually acknowledges this when it says that the people still sacrificed at the high places even though they were sacrificing now to the Lord only.

- [31 : 32] You see, there were lingering consequences of Manasseh's old life that he still had to contend with. It didn't all magically get better, but all the same, Manasseh, for the few years that he had left, was a new person in a living relationship with a living God and his life was bearing fruit.

It was not too late for Manasseh to begin a new life with God and it's not too late for you or I either. So I think this paragraph of our text begins to ask us some questions.

The Holy Spirit begins to invite us to ask, how is God calling you and me to bear the fruit of repentance? How is he calling you to live your life in response to God's free mercy?

Is there an idol that you need to get rid of? Is there an act of love that you need to begin? Which of the virtues is God forming in you at the present?

How is he making you more like Christ? How is your life becoming more and more of a living offering to him, to God, in service to others? That's the first application.

- [32 : 51] For those who have turned to God in repentance, bear the fruit of repentance. Not to earn God's mercy, but in glad response to it. Now we see the second application in the final part of our passage to the end of the chapter, verses 18 through 25.

And again, we won't read those verses, but you can scan over them in the passage in front of you. And these final verses speak to those who have not yet turned to God in repentance.

And what these verses are all about is the urgency of repentance, the urgency of it. These last couple paragraphs tell us about Manasseh's son, his son named Ammon.

And they tell us how Ammon followed in his father's evil and sin, but then refused to follow in his father's example of humble repentance. repentance. And the end for Ammon is very tragic.

After reigning for only two years, the kingdom slips from his grasp, his servants conspire against him, and his reign and even his life is cut short. Now friend, unlike Ammon, you may live for many, many, many, many more years, but that does not change at all the urgency of spiritual things.

- [34 : 17] Don't let another day go by without heeding this invitation, this call to turn to God and receive his mercy and his fresh start.

Think about it. what will your idols ultimately give you? Where will they lead? Only farther away from the God who made you, from the God in whom is the only source of lasting peace and purpose and joy.

So humble yourself before him. Admit that you've sinned against him, you've turned away, and you've turned a deaf ear to him. Confess your helplessness and entrust yourself wholly to the mercy of God displayed in Jesus Christ for you.

What exactly do you wait for to take such an amazing offer to come with nothing and receive everything for eternity? Why not let your fresh start, your new chapter, begin today?

Jesus says to everyone who comes to me, I will in no way cast out. No matter how far you've been running, no matter how deep you've fallen, the Lord Jesus is ready to receive you.

- [35 : 45] He's ready to magnify the glory of his mercy in your life and establish and restore you. This is the urgency of repentance. Entrust yourself to him.

Let's pray. Let's pray. In our busy, noisy, distracted lives, we have a rare moment now to be quiet and to reflect in the presence of God.

So let's take a moment of quiet and reflection in God's presence. If you're a Christian, if you've turned to God in Christ, if you've received his mercy, how is God calling you to bear fruit?

Let's ask him now to show us, ask him now to show you and to give you the strength by his Spirit to live out of this mercy you've been given.

If you're not a Christian, then, friend, the door stands open to you. God's abundant mercy is ready to receive all who repent. If you're ready to hear that call, you might pray something like this, Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I'm weaker and more sinful than I could ever admit.

[37 : 25] But through you, I'm more loved and accepted than I could ever dream. Thank you for paying my debt on the cross, taking what I deserved in order to offer me complete forgiveness.

Knowing that you've been raised from the dead, I turn from my sins and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Amen. Amen.