

A Great Sinner Saved

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] 2 Chronicles 33. Are there any 12-year-olds here today? Could I see your hands?! He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished.

He also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshipped them. He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, My name will remain in Jerusalem forever.

In both courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination, and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists.

He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger. He took the carved image he had made and put it in God's temple, of which God had said to David and to his son Solomon, In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever.

I will not again make the feet of the Israelites leave the land I assigned to your forefathers. If only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them concerning all the laws, decrees, and ordinances given through Moses.

[1:54] But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites. The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention.

So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles, and took him to Babylon.

In his distress, he sought the favor of the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty, and listened to his plea.

So he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God. Afterwards, he rebuilt the outer wall of the city of David, west of the Gihon Spring in the valley.

As far as the entrance of the fish gate and encircling the hill of Ophel, he also made it much higher. He stationed military commanders in all the fortified cities in Judah.

[3:05] He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the Lord, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem.

And he threw them out of the city. Then he restored the altar of the Lord and sacrificed fellowship offerings and thank offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel.

The people, however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the Lord, their God. The other events of Manasseh's reign, including his prayer to his God and the words the seers spoke to him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, are written in the annals of the kings of Israel.

His prayer and how God was moved by his entreaty, as well as all his sins and unfaithfulness in the sites where he built high places and set up Asherah poles and idols before he humbled himself, all are written in the records of the seers.

Manasseh rested with his fathers and was buried in his palace, and Ammon, his son, succeeded him as king.

[4 : 19] Pastor Jason, come and preach God's word to us. Well, this morning we begin with a tour of the Museum of God's Grace.

And in every room there is a monument to God where he saved a sinner. Great sinners and small sinners.

Everywhere a monument, a statue, an exhibit. And so we go into the first room and there is a slave trader.

And his mother told him about Jesus. When he was very young, when he was growing up, he sat on his own mother's lap, and she told him about the gospel, and she prayed with him, and she prayed for him.

But he's now, he's sunk very low. And he's taking to being a slave trader. He used to curse so badly, the other sailors would be offended.

[5 : 25] He delighted in evil. He delighted in making up new ways of cursing. And so now here he is. He's buying up blacks, and he's sending them down into the dark hold of his ship where there's no air, no place to go to the bathroom, separating them from their families to be sold, to be owned.

But the God of grace sought out, and he forgave John Newton. And years later, John Newton wrote, Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

We go into the next exhibit, and there is King David. And for the most part, King David was a good king, but there was one point where he sunk very low.

He was an adulterer, a murderer. He even became a lying, deceitful tyrant, serving his own ends and against the good of his people.

God had taken him out of the field. God had taken him from being this boy king of little sheep, and he had raised him to the place of being the king of God's people.

[6 : 35] What a privilege. And yet David had forgotten all that, had scorned all of that, and he took Bathsheba for himself, and then he murdered her faithful husband, one of his most loyal men, one of the men who loved him the most, sent him forward to die.

But the God of grace, Jesus forgave David. And so we go from room to room, and here's self-righteous, very righteous in his own eyes, but very violent, Saul of Tarsus, forgiven.

And here's a thief who his whole life, he had been a robber, a brigand, a murderer, and now he is dying for his sins, and he looks over to Jesus and asks for mercy, and Jesus forgives him.

A sinner saved. And if you are a Christian here this morning, you know what? The exciting thing is, is you have your place in this museum of God's grace.

And your story is different, but it's still a story, a monument of God's goodness. And then we turn a corner in the museum.

[7 : 48] And sometimes in museums, it is like this, where they tell you, the things that you are about to see are hard. They're not easy.

And so we turn a corner in the museum and we see a sign that says, warning, this is going to be hard to look at. Warning, what you are about to see is going to be hard to believe.

And then we walk into Manasseh's exhibit in the museum of God's grace. And as you look at it, if you really look at it, all kinds of emotions and even wild thoughts will fill your head.

How could God save him? How is that fair? How is that right? How could God forgive him? But then the more you look at it, it does fill you with this desperate hopefulness because if God could save him, if God could forgive him, then maybe there's a hope for me.

Maybe there's a chance for me. If God forgave him, could he forgive me? If God saved him, could he save me? And so that's what we want to look at this morning, this exhibit, this monument, this glorious picture of God's grace, of God's heart, of God's saving love.

[9 :10] And so we're going to look at it in two parts. We're going to first look at the depth of Manasseh's sin. And then we're going to look at the glory of God's grace. So we look at the depth of Manasseh's sin.

And we are going to be going down, down, down, a spiral staircase until the very flames of hell are going to be gathered around us.

Because that is where you find Manasseh's sin. And I can't imagine any of you, I can't imagine any of you to be as great of sinners as Manasseh was.

And so I'm not going to draw parallels between your life and his life, but maybe you will see some parallels. Maybe you'll see some comparisons.

Maybe you'll see something of yourself in Manasseh. And if you do, I hope you do what Manasseh did and cry out for mercy and find forgiveness.

[10 :10] So we're going step by step down. And we begin with the first step. And it says that Manasseh threw away his godly heritage. He threw away his godly heritage.

He despised his godly father. It says he was 12 years old when he became king. Most people, most scholars, think that it was probably at 12 years old that he became co-regent or co-king with his father Hezekiah.

And so he became this king in training. And probably for about 10 years, he was a king sitting alongside of his father. And his father is teaching him how to be a good king.

And Hezekiah was a godly king. We don't have time to talk about how godly he was, but he was a man of prayer. He was a man of faith. He took God seriously.

And so for 10 years, godly king Hezekiah trained his son. And I'm sure Hezekiah did everything that he could to pass on his godliness to his own son.

[11 :14] But Hezekiah died. And what did Manasseh do with that heritage and that training and all those prayers? He just threw it all away.

He scorned it all. So his father had torn down the altars and he rebuilt them. So his father does something and he's going to do the exact opposite. He despised his father's faith.

He despised his father's godliness. He despised his father's life. He despised his father's ministry. He hated it. George Whitefield told of a story of a son who inherited his father's house.

And he hated going in that house because he was an ungodly man and his father was godly and he said the house stunk of my father's religion and I didn't want any part of it.

That's how Manasseh must have felt about King Hezekiah. He despised his father. Now, it's one thing to sin when that's what your parents have taught you.

[12 :16] It's one thing to do that when that's all that your parents taught you. And maybe you never had godly parents. But can I say, it's a whole other thing to sin when your parents were godly and they had taught you and they had prayed for you.

There is sinning and ignorance when you just don't know any better to some degree. But then there is sinning against the light.

There is sinning against what you know to be true. And some of you have grown up in the light. From infancy, you have known the scriptures that are able to make you wise unto salvation.

You knew it. And so day after day, week after week, God has instructed you and taught you and corrected you and He has His hooks in you and you can't go very far without running into Him.

He hasn't let you go. He hasn't left you in the dark. And so what are you doing with that? Manasseh received all that and He threw it away. He hated it all.

[13:18] He cleared His throat. He cleared His nose and He spit on His heritage, His family, what He was taught.

And then we see, we're going down further. He sinned right in God's face. That's what we saw in verses 3 and 4. It says, He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them.

He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, My name will remain in Jerusalem forever. And so in both courts of the temple, He built altars to all the starry hosts.

So where did Manasseh build his altars? Right where God said, This is where I'm going to live. This is where I'm going to dwell. Here's where my name will be. And so Manasseh could have picked a thousand hills.

There's no shortages of hills in Israel. But there was one hill he wanted to build an altar on. There was one place that he really wanted to build the altar to a false god on.

[14:20] And he wanted to do it right in God's face. And so he would stick it to God. And he wanted God to see it. And so he wasn't just happy to sin. He wanted to parade it. He wanted to delight in it.

He loved the taste of rebellion. So it wasn't enough to spit on his father's grave. He had to do it right in God's house, right in God's face.

So we're going down more. He despised God's word. Manasseh knew what the Lord had said. Doesn't say it, but I'm sure Hezekiah told him.

And I'm sure part of Manasseh's training was to write out the scriptures, the law. And so he knew God's word. And earlier, when Solomon had built the temple years and years earlier, God had told him, I'm going to put my name here forever.

And if you will obey me, if your people will obey me, I'll never make you wander. You'll stay here. If you're just careful to do everything, I command them. So if Israel obeyed, no more wandering, no more exile.

[15:33] They would get to live in their land under the blessing of God. But if they despised the word, if they disobeyed the word, then God would make them wander. So it's the word of God, and it has two parts.

There's a blessing, and then there's a curse, a promise, and a threat. And so there it was, with God's word hanging over them, a blessing if he did it, a curse if he disobeyed, and did Manasseh care?

Not at all. Manasseh said, I'll do whatever I want. God said, obey me or else, and he said, I don't care. I'm going to do whatever I want. Manasseh put his fingers in his ears, and he told God to shut up.

In 2 Kings, in the parallel passage, it says that Manasseh filled the streets of Jerusalem with blood. And Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, he tells us what that meant.

Josephus says, Manasseh slew all the righteous men that were among the Hebrews, and nor would he spare the prophets, for every day he slew some of them until Jerusalem overflowed with blood.

[16:52] There is a long-standing Jewish tradition that says that Manasseh put his old teacher, Isaiah, into a log, and then sawed the log in half.

And that's almost certainly what Hebrews is talking about in Hebrews 11, where it says, one of those Old Testament saints was Sonnen 2. Do you feel Manasseh's fury?

It's not just indifference to God's word. It's a positive, bloodthirsty hatred. He hated it. He doesn't just want to not hear it. He wants to silence it.

I just want you to think for a second, what kind of dark soul is in a man to take a prophet put him in a log and saw him in half.

Well, we go, we're still going deeper. He institutionalized witchcraft. verse 6 says, he practiced sorcery, divination, witchcraft.

[17 : 56] He consulted mediums and spiritists. You notice he practiced it, and then he also consulted those who had dealings with the dead. It's not just that he went down to the county fair every once in a while and went in a little tent and had some little lady read his poem every now and then.

No, this is what he did, and this was part of the government that he had set up. So he brought these in. He had a staff of these people who did this. So in the ancient world, divination took all sorts of forms.

You can look it up on Wikipedia, and there's a huge list of all the ways that people tried to tell the future or tried to manipulate events. Some of them were pretty, I don't know, nice.

For lack of a better word, you throw some arrows up in the air and you look at how the arrows land and you tell the future by that. But most of them, many of them, were gruesome, cutting animals open and looking at their livers, cutting animals open and throwing their intestines on the ground and seeing how it falls out.

And I'm not trying to gross anyone out. I just want you to, this is not ordinary evil. It was demonic.

[19 : 14] Manasseh was not happy being a demon himself. He wanted to be led by demons. He wanted to be involved with them. He wanted them to show him what to do. Verse 6, he sacrificed his sons in the fire in the valley of Ben-Hinnom.

In the valley of Ben-Hinnom, later, it was turned into a garbage dump. And there was fire there all the time. Jesus used the word, later it was called Gehenna, and Jesus used that word for hell.

Because it had this long history of fire and death and destruction. Well, before it was Gehenna, it was where Molech was worshipped.

Molech was a god of one of the nations and Manasseh brought him in and the idol of Molech was the head of a bull on the body of a man and it was hollow, it was metal, and the hands, the human hands were sticking out like this.

And they lit a fire inside of the statue and waited until it got red hot. And then they put a live baby or maybe even a murdered baby already, not sure which, and they put the baby in the hands and waited for the baby to burn to death.

[20 : 45] Now, it was an offering to ensure prosperity, to get blessing. It was an offering to have your sins forgiven. But, our culture knows something about killing babies to make life easier and covering up our sins, don't we?

Well, it goes down further. Verse 9 says, He led Judah and all the people of Jerusalem astray so that they did more evil than the nations that God had driven out before them. Manasseh sunk his whole nation into sin.

How evil was he? He drug a whole nation down into the most evil. And so, he was this disease at the very heart of things.

He was a disgusting spider in the middle of a web, throwing out, belching out his pollution, contaminating everyone. So, think about Manasseh's soul again.

Was there anything in there, anything in there that God would say, I'll have mercy on him?
Was there anything in there that would commend him to God?

[22 : 02] He'd say, no, he's wicked. He's foul. He's evil. A nightmare. A monster. Again, I'm not going to compare any of you to him, but have you lived up to your spiritual blessings?

Have you never sinned in God's face? Have you never heard God's word and said, I'm going to do whatever I want anyway? Have you never been so unfeeling and callous that you're just going to do something bad because you want to?

Have you never helped anyone along in their sin? Well, Manasseh's sin is amazing. I have your attention because it's gruesome.

It's amazing. But I want to draw your attention to something even more amazing and it's the glory of God's grace. Because there is something amazing about Manasseh's sin but there's something even more amazing about God's grace because when we get to the bottom of the depth of Manasseh's sin, that's when the glory of God's grace begins to shine, the majesty, the beauty, the stunning amazingness, for lack of any other words, of how good God is, how merciful he is.

So just look at God's grace to Manasseh. You see it first in that he didn't just kill Manasseh right out, straight away. He didn't just kill him.

[23 : 42] It was God's mercy to let him live. So what does manasseh So can anyone in heaven, can anyone on earth disagree?

Manasseh deserved to die. God owed Manasseh nothing. But it was grace, it was great grace to let him live, to go on.

Any life we get after sinning is not justice, it is mercy, it's pity. And so is God letting you live in your rebellion, going your own way, meaning I'm going to be the king and God will fit in if God fits in, but otherwise I'm in charge.

Is God letting you live in that situation where you're calling the shots and he's playing second fiddle? Then you just have to realize that it's not your goodness that's holding him back, it's his patience, holding back his justice.

It's his patience that has his hand on the sword. It's not for lack of power, it's not for lack of a reason, it's his patience, it's his mercy, it's his grace to let you live.

[25 : 25] It was grace to humble him, it was great grace to humble him. We read what happened, the king of Assyria's commanders came, and at that time Manasseh was a vassal, he was a king who had pledged his allegiance to the king of Assyria, and apparently King Manasseh was suspected of treason or disloyalty, or maybe he had begun to revolt, we're not sure exactly what happened, but the king of Assyria reacted and shipped him off to Babylon, to one of those provinces of Assyria, and he put a hook in his nose, and he banded his arms, tied his arms with bronze shackles, and he drug him like a cow to Assyria.

And so this proud king is humbled, humbled. So imagine him there on his knees with a hook in his nose, and a chain around that hook, and his hands tied, and now he's bowing before this king of Assyria, Assyria.

And that is God's grace. God's grace takes very strange forms. God's mercy takes very strange forms.

Because that's what it took. That's what it took for Manasseh to get to the heart of things. That's what it took for Manasseh to see himself. That's what it took for Manasseh to come to his senses.

See, he had been playing and pretending for so long, he probably didn't realize what was going on. But now, here, in a prison, with a hook in his nose, he sees things, he sees himself clearly.

[27:06] He sees God is up here, I am down here, and I have sinned against God. And oh, how he had sinned, and how it must have come before him.

The babies crying, blood on the saw, all that, not listening, all the altars, and he saw his people, his own people sunk into sin because of what he had done, because of him, and he saw it all.

And that is God's grace. Some people go their whole lives without seeing themselves the way God sees them. And they show up on the day of judgment, they show up after death, and then they see, and it's too late.

But here is Manasseh, he finally sees himself like God sees him. And it says he humbled himself greatly before the Lord, before God, because what else can you do?

When you see yourself the way God sees you, what else can you do? And he humbled himself, and I want to show you something incredibly audacious. righteous. And it says he sought the favor of the Lord.

[28:27] He sought the favor of the Lord. What? He dared to ask for God's smile. He dared to ask for God's mercy.

He dared to ask, what right does he have? What right does he have? And see, but we're not talking about rights now.

We're talking about mercy. We're not talking about what he deserves. We're talking about mercy. See, he has no right, but faith says, oh, but God has mercy. There's mercy in him for sinners. And I don't want my rights.

I want mercy. And so Manasseh sought God's favor. Oh, more than anything, Lord, give me your smile. I want to be right with you. I want your blessing.

I'm a terrible sinner, but mercy. I need your smile. I need forgiven. I need your pity. I need to be right with you. So it says he was shut up to God.

[29:23] He was hemmed in. In his distress, the idea is when he was pressed into a corner and there was nowhere else to turn, that's when he calls out to the Lord. He was desperate for God and he had nowhere else to go.

So think about what Satan was saying that whole time when Manasseh is hemmed in and now he's beginning to think, I will cry out for mercy. I will cry out for forgiveness. Think about what Satan is saying to him because maybe you've heard these words in your ears.

There's no use praying Manasseh. There's no use praying. You've defied God to his face. You've thrown away your heritage.

You built altars right there in his temple. You killed his prophets. manasseh. You killed manasseh. God's going to tell you to go get help from those idols.

You love them so much. Let them help you. Quit praying manasseh. There's no point. But inside manasseh's heart, God was at work.

[30:33] And there was grace that was stronger than Satan's lie saying, pray manasseh. Pray. Pray for mercy. There's mercy manasseh.

There's mercy for sinners. And I'm sure manasseh's first prayer was, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And did God hear him?

Did God hear him? Well, let all the trumpets in heaven sound and shout for joy. Because God was moved by his entreaty. He was moved. And he listened to his plea.

And God brought him back to Jerusalem. He brought him back to his kingdom. And he changed him. He's a new man. He's a new king. The old manasseh's gone. And the new manasseh is here.

And so what does he do first? What do we hear about first? Well, he builds these walls. And the important thing is those are the walls that his father had built. And they had gone in to disrebear. Well, now he's going to build on my father did this.

[31:32] I'm going to do this. And he got rid of the idols. And he restored the altar of God. And he said to Judah, worship the Lord, the God of Israel. Don't worship anyone else. Worship God. Well, why all that?

Why? Because Manasseh knew that the Lord is God. What a change. It wasn't just cognitive in your brain knowledge. He knew in his heart, the Lord is God and I am down here and I'm going to obey him.

It wasn't Manasseh doing whatever he wanted anymore. He's a humble man, an obedient man, and a good king. So look at God's grace.

He took Manasseh out of the pit of hell and he gave him the longest reign of any king in Judah. That's grace.

That's mercy. That's our God. Now, I only have one lesson that I want you to learn and I want you to have ringing in your ears as you leave and it's this.

[32:38] If God had mercy on Manasseh, won't he have mercy on you? Couldn't he have mercy on you? If he heard Manasseh when he cried, with Manasseh's long train of sins coming behind him and all over him, if God heard Manasseh, won't he hear you?

So how can you say that the way of heaven is blocked to you when the gates of heaven swing open for Manasseh? So put all your sins, take them all out, from first to last, from least to greatest, were they as bad as Manasseh's sins?

A murderer, a rebel, a demon worshiper, and yet he repents, he believes, and God saves him, and God changes him, and God forgives him. So is it really, this is my question, is it really your sin that is keeping you out of heaven?

Or is it your stubbornness? Is it your pride? Is it your determination, I'm going to do what I want to do, and God's just going to have to deal with it?

That's probably what's keeping you out of heaven. God says, let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, and he will freely pardon.

[34:02] God says, I'll remember your sins no more. Manasseh's name means to forget, forgotten, and God remembers his sins no more.

So how can that be? How can God pardon sinners? How can Manasseh find grace? And the answer is Jesus Christ took the sins of his people.

Manasseh's sins were counted to Jesus, and all the idolatry, and the child sacrifice, and the rebellion. He put it on Jesus.

So when Jesus goes to the cross, he goes bearing Manasseh's sins, and in God's sight now, Jesus is the child sacrificer.

Jesus is the rebel. Paul says, Jesus became sin. He was counted as sin. He was filled up with the sin of his people, so to speak, and God punished his son, and God punished our sin in his son.

[35:19] And so where is the wrath now? It's not hanging over Manasseh's head. It's not hanging over any of God's people's heads. It's on the tree. There's no more left for me.

So what did Manasseh deserve? Well, Manasseh deserved to cry out, and then God to reject him. Manasseh should have been there in prison crying out for God's favor, and God said, no!

But what Manasseh deserved, Jesus got, and Jesus cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? What did Manasseh deserve? He deserved to be cut down in his young age.

He was probably about 33, 34 or so when he was drug off to Babylon and he found mercy there. Jesus was 33 when he was cut down for the sins of his people.

What did Manasseh deserve? He deserved to be shamed. He deserved to be mocked. He deserved to be stripped and ridiculed.

[36 : 22] That's what he deserved. But everything Manasseh deserved went to Jesus instead. And Jesus bore the sin.

Now Jesus' cross was strong enough to soak up all of Manasseh's sins as evil as they were till not a one of them was left unpaid, uncovered, and his cross is strong enough to bear all of your sin.

sin. So what should you do? Well, you have to do what Manasseh did. Greatly humble yourself before the Lord.

That means bring all your sin to the Lord. No excuses. Bring all your sin, all your guilt to Jesus, and lay it down at Jesus' feet.

Give it to him and let him take care of it. Say, these are no longer mine. I give them to you. They're too much for me.

[37 : 29] I give them to you. Saving faith is letting your sins be Jesus' problem. And believing that he'll take them and he'll deal with them.

That he'll forgive you. That his cross was enough. And if you do that, you will find what Manasseh found. You'll find mercy. You'll find grace.

You'll find forgiveness. You'll find the smile of God. You'll find a new life. You'll find a new you. And so my question is, if God would save Manasseh, wouldn't he save you?

Let's pray. Oh God, what a glorious God you are, so full of grace and mercy. For millions of years to come, we will be singing how good you are.

What a Savior. What a Savior. Thank you that there is room still under the cross for any sinner here to bring their sin and to be saved.

[38 : 34] Thank you that there is room under the cross for all of your people who will come and give you their sin. There is forgiveness and there is mercy.

Thank you God for this picture of your heart, this uncovering of your heart, of your anger, but also of your grace.

Thank you for saving Manasseh. What a Savior. Thank you for saving all who have called on your name. You are a great and glorious Savior.

I pray, Holy Spirit, that you would make your grace shine in every heart here. May the grace of our Lord Jesus to shine in every heart so that we will be glad and rejoice and believe and repent.

Pray this in Jesus' mighty matchless name. Amen. Amen. Well, we worship the God of grace in hymn 702.

[39 : 45] Hymn 702. Let's stand as we sing and even as we sung, believe and be saved. Hymn 702.

Amen. Amen.