
2 Chronicles 33:1-6, 10-18. Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. ² He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. ³ 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 worshiped them. ⁴ He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "My Name will remain in Jerusalem forever." ⁵ In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. ⁶ He sacrificed his sons in^u 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. ¹⁰ The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. ¹¹ 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. ¹² In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Afterward 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ The people, however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the LORD their God. ¹⁸ 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.

Rejoice together in the power of God's Word.

God's Word is powerful in its ability to save.

God's Word is powerful in its ability to change hearts and minds

It doesn't get much worse than what King Manasseh of Judah was in his younger days. That's what we might think as we read through the account of King Manasseh of Judah. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD. Starting from the time that he was 12, we are told that he did much evil in the eyes of the LORD. He followed the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had faithfully worked to tear down. As he sullied the family name he even more disturbingly desecrated the temple with idols and with the worship of these false gods in the LORD's own house. He more than dabbled in sorcery and witchcraft, therefore calling on Satan rather than calling on the LORD as he consulted with mediums and spiritists. If there could be a low point, a nadir of evil, that is described in this account it would be that he even sacrificed his own sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. It didn't get much worse than King Manessah of Judah.

We might watch the news today and shake our heads in a smiliar disgust. Night after night, day after day, we hear about another crime that is more shocking than the next. Crimes of violence and brutality, perversion and unbelief. Crimes against innocent people. Even crimes committed against families and children. Sometimes with the parents being the aggressor and their own children being the victims. And in anger and frustration and outrage we label those who committed these crimes as the worst of the worst. Sometimes as we recoil

in response to their wicked deeds we might find ourselves thinking, or in our attitude towards them saying that they are the worst of the worst. In our frustration, in our disgust, we might even find ourselves thinking that they are beyond saving. And that sort of attitude becomes even more dangerous and destructive if it is left to trickle down into our everyday lives. We might even begin to make that sort of distinction as we deal with people around us. We look at those in our neighborhood or among us, or maybe treat those in our own families as beyond hope, beyond saving.

For example, instead of speaking words of rebuke and encouragement to that family member or praying for that niece or nephew that is getting into all kinds of trouble or has forsaken the faith we talk about them with friends and family members and our tone is sheer disgust. Instead of inviting that co-worker to church or speaking to them about God we join in with those gathered around the watercooler to hear about the latest misdeeds of this particular coworker and these other fellow employees. We may even let a feeling of judgment and superiority effect the way we share our faith. We might be eager to share the message of Jesus with the nice young couple that moves into next door, but we let feelings of suspicion and even hate fester for that young man who moved in across the street because the word is out that he had spent some time in jail a few years back. As we look at our lesson for today let us remember that our God is so rich in grace that he reaches out to all.

God's grace extends to all, it is rich and abundant enough to forgive and pay the debt of any sinner. That becomes clear in the case of Manasseh. God sent his word to King Manasseh. Even when it seemed that Manasseh was the worst of the worst, God sent his word to him, spoke to him, rebuked him, and eventually forgave him. the LORD did not give up on him. Even when Manasseh, and the people of Judah with him, refused to listen to God but kept on in their evil and despicable ways God did not give up on them. He did not forget about them. For God would use something that seemed so terrible to work out for the good of his servant and for his kingdom. When Manasseh was taken prisoner and made a slave of the King of Babylon. When Manasseh was humiliated and mistreated, dragged around by a hook in his nose and shackles that bound him, God would use that experience to humble his servant and bring him to faith and lead him to remarkable repentance.

This is the power of God's grace. That a man who did so many things that were wicked in so many different ways was changed by the presence of God in his life. God reached out and paid the debt of his sin. The Savior that would come through the house of David, through the kings of Judah, that Savior would come from Manasseh himself to pay for all the sins of this and every other sinner. The debts of all those horrible sins paid for in full in Christ Jesus. God is indeed rich in mercy. His grace is so wonderfully abundant for all.

To read about this real life that was so obviously changed by the word of God is a testament to God's saving power. And that type of testimony lives on in the real life stories of today, to hear testimony of fellow believers who were so obviously changed by the gospel is encouraging to all Christians. It has been awhile since he was here, but to hear the personal testimony of Chris Dreisbach is to hear a man speak of the power of the gospel. Chris would be the first to tell you that he was an atheist running in the opposite direction of the LORD, and now he has been turned around by God's grace to serve the LORD as he sings his praises to his God. Some of you may heard of Scott Barefoot and his story. Scott is an another example of a life so obviously changed by the message of Christ. Scott is a Christian man who

struggles with the sin of homosexuality and who for a number of years gave himself over to that lifestyle, and now by the grace of God he has been brought out of that sinful lifestyle and talks regularly at difference WELS conferences and conventions and churches and has co-authored a book entitled, "Forgive us our Sins, Homosexuality in the Light of God's Truth". If you listen to both of these men speak, they will be the first to admit, they were in a way the "worst" and God's grace was poured out on them abundantly. Even in their sin and their rebellion against God, His Word were spoken to them. God reached out to them, and through the power of the Spirit working through the powerful Word these men were made new creations, faith was created, restored, and strengthened, and now they stand as a testimony of God's grace. They were not beyond saving for now they are covered and cleansed and changed by God's abundant grace.

We are to keep God's incredible mercy in sight as we look at others, but that is not often the direction or the position that we take. Our sinful nature leans another way, and it certainly doesn't help that looking down on others in order to make yourself look better has become sort of a spectator sport these days with the recent political debates and campaigns. There has been the awful tradition of "mudslinging" that has somehow been ratcheted up to a whole new level. Old stories of transgression and the accounts of recent missteps are drug out and repeated to make the other candidate look worse. And when a valid misdeed is exposed the guilty is less likely to confess and repent and more likely to try to find something that is worse about the other person. And as much as we try to distance ourselves from what is going on in our world, it is around us so constantly. It is on the news, in the paper, on the radio, it is around us and it affects us.

Dear friends, don't let this attitude that we see so often in the world around us have a negative effect on how you live out your life of faith. But look to Christ and to his abundant grace. It is not to be our purpose as Christians to compare ourselves with others and figure out who is the best and who is the worst of sinners for we all fall short of the glory of God. Therefore, instead of looking for someone worse look to the one who was perfect for you. Look to the LORD's amazing grace. Know that your sins deserve punishment and were paid for in Christ. Repent of your sins. Confess and by God's power turn away from those sins. Our sins might not be recorded in the chronicles of God's kingdom, they may not be written in the annals of Bible history, they might not be analyzed and debated over on CNN or Fox News, but make no mistake about it, we have sinned in many, many, ways. We know what we have done and God knows even better. The sins that we commit, the rebellion against God, the mistakes that we make they all are worthy of punishment and death in hell, but Jesus paid your debt and mine. Sinners made filthy by sins too numerous to count we have been washed and cleansed, justified and sanctified. We are saved our faithful LORD, who has now set us apart to shine in his forgiveness and his love.

And do not underestimate the presence of God in your life and the change that this gospel can make in your life. You can and will leave sins behind, change wicked ways, and serve the LORD in thankfulness. You have been set free to serve your LORD with a grateful heart.

And then we are to rejoice when others are led to faith and proper fruits of repentance. Act in grace rather than in judgment. Pray for those who enslaved by sin, reach out to them when you have opportunity, so that they might be set free by Christ and his Word; that they

might be saved for eternity; and that God might even use them and their personal story to advance the work of his kingdom. For Christ is a master that we gladly serve. Being a Christian does not mean that we are tugged around and forced to do things by an almighty master. But our LORD Jesus is a master that we willingly want to follow. He is almighty so we trust him, but he is also rich in grace and mercy, and so in thankfulness we live for him who loves us. Christ washes us, cleanses us from our sin and makes us a new creation. He who lived and died and rose again for us makes us new but still rebukes and corrects, but not like a slave master who tugs cruelly on hook in our nose, but he tugs on our hearts and minds as he guides in wisdom and truth. Like a shepherd who lovingly guides us away from evil and toward that which is good or a perfect Father who patiently instructs and teaches his son right from wrong. And his word is powerful not only in its saving power, but in its ability to change our hearts and minds.

Again we can take Manasseh's life for example. His life was a river of wickedness that was not only just slowed or stopped up, but he was change. His life was turned around, it was a like river that was made to flow in the complete opposite direction, as he was changed from a wicked king into a believer whose life became a stream of thankful service to God. *Manasseh prayed to the LORD and the LORD brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.* ¹⁴ *Afterward he rebuilt the outer wall of the City, a good long portion of it, he also made it much higher, and stationed guards to protect the city.* ¹⁵ *He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the LORD, and all others throughout Jerusalem, he tore them down and threw them out of the city.* ¹⁶ *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.* What a difference God's presence and his Word made in his life. To be restored and forgiven and led by God's undeserved love to live in a generous flow of fruits of faith.

God's Word is word is powerful not only in its saving power, but in its ability to change our hearts and minds and lead us as we live lives of service to God. Our debt has been paid in full. All our grievous sins have been paid for completely. God's Word is powerful in its saving power that a wretch like me could be saved at all. And we also rejoice that God's abundant grace, his undeserved love for us in Christ, also serves as powerful motivation for our lives of faith. We are turned from a selfish life of sinfulness and anger and hatred to a selfless life of service and love. Sins that have troubled us, with God's help can be held back and resisted. We are then led by his love to serve him in many different ways. Rather than being filled with only the desires of the sinful flesh and to have our lives be a constant flow of evil or indifference, we are filled with his grace and gratefully serve our LORD.

It is not really about who is worse or who is best or even whose debt of sin was bigger or smaller. Jesus paid it all, and no one has been forgiven little, but we all have been forgiven much. So let us love Jesus much! Let us rejoice that our Savior has for all sin, and his grace and mercy extends to us all. Let us all rejoice together in his love and the power of his Word. God's Word is powerful in its ability to save. God's Word is powerful in its ability to change hearts and minds and lead all sorts of people in lives of thankful service to God! May our lives be touched by God's grace and be a constant flow of fruits of faith and acts of love done by hearts made grateful by Christ and his work of salvation. Amen.