

God's Rich Mercy: Manasseh

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2 Kings 21:1-18 presents us with the sad history of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah. He became king at the age of twelve, and he departed from every moral instruction his father ever gave him. He offered his son as a burnt offering to a foreign god (verse 6), he put an idol in the house of God (verse 7), and he seduced the children of Israel to “worship” as he did (verse 9). Manasseh’s rule drove God to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem (verse 14). Manasseh shed the blood of anyone who chose to serve God (verse 16). Josephus noted, “he barbarously slew all the righteous men that were among the Hebrews; nor would he spare the prophets, for he every day slew some of them, till Jerusalem was overflowed with blood” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, X.III.1). God responded to Manasseh’s refusal to listen. In **2 Chronicles 33:11**, we read, “*Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon.*”

Finally, when life hit bottom, Manasseh prayed (**2 Chronicles 33:12-13**). God responded favorably, “*and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom.*” Manasseh’s heart changed, God offered mercy, and Manasseh responded with sincerity:

*He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem; and he cast them out of the city. He also repaired the altar of the Lord, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel (**2 Chronicles 33:15-16**).*

In **2 Peter 3:9** we read, “*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*” Peter reminds us that God never wanted to see Manasseh perish in captivity. Instead, God desired that Manasseh bring before him a broken and contrite spirit (**Psalms 51:17**). When Manasseh presented himself broken, God willingly heard and restored.

Manasseh’s repentance is a bit jarring. How could someone so wicked change and God receive him so willingly? Few among the kings of Israel or Judah are described as having such an evil character as Manasseh. However, God received him back favorably. He accepted Manasseh even before worship was restored. God could see the changed heart. Repentance begins in the heart and flows from there into action. No action we do can be worthy of God’s mercy (**Psalms 51:16**). God is waiting for the heart of man to turn humbly toward him.

If you are breathing, God wants you to receive his mercy. He is rich in it (**Ephesians 2:4**). He does not exclude anyone coming contritely. “*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow*” (**Isaiah 1:18**). Come to him sorrowfully and humbly, and he will mercifully restore you as he did Manasseh (**2 Corinthians 7:10**).

In **Luke 15:11-32**, Jesus told us about a son who lost his way. When he came to himself (verse 17), he went to his father and was welcomed with open arms. This was God’s response to Manasseh.

There was another brother in the aforementioned parable who was not pleased seeing his father’s favor bestowed on his wayward brother (**Luke 15:28-32**). God extends mercy to the murderer, child molester, thief, and adulterer (e.g. **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**). These individuals cause great pain to their fellow man. In a sense, they cause blood to flow through the streets as in the days of Manasseh. God reminds us, “*the dead can live again*” (**Luke 15:32**). And He charges us with saying, “amen.” As our sins of scarlet were made as white as snow, so the rich mercy of God may reach any man.

The record does not share with us how the prophets initially felt about God’s restoration of Manasseh. One wonders if they had concerns about Manasseh’s sincerity. Like the older brother, it would only be natural to question genuineness in another’s repentance. However, Christ reminded us through this parable that our natural tendency to question is not good. Love believes all things (**1 Corinthians 13:7**).

God desires our response to the repentant to mirror his response. No condescension. No trepidation. Instead, open arms lifting the humble hearted!

“...For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Before God saw the change in Manasseh’s actions, he saw change in his heart. God’s richness can and does work transformation, even for the foremost sinners (**1 Timothy 1:15**).

We who do not see the hearts of men ought to accept repentance in our fellow men. They came before God, and God will be their ultimate judge—he alone tests the heart (**Jeremiah 17:10**). It is not our place to determine the adequacy of another’s sincerity. Instead, God calls us to embrace, forgive, and uplift our repentant brethren toward righteousness once more.

*For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust (**Psalms 103:11-14**).*