

An Amazing Royal Conversion

by Peter Masters

The sermon explores the remarkable conversion of King Manasseh, illustrating God's mercy and the hope of forgiveness for all sinners.

Duration: 36:06

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 33:1

Topics: "Repentance And Restoration", "Gods Mercy"

Description

This sermon delves into the incredible royal conversion story of King Manasseh, highlighting his journey from extreme evil to repentance and restoration by God's mercy. It draws parallels to the hope for transformation in our own lives, emphasizing the need for sincere repentance, belief in Jesus Christ, and surrendering our lives to God. The narrative showcases how even the most sinful and arrogant hearts can be humbled and changed by God's grace, leading to a life of obedience and service to Him.

Transcript

The subject before us is an amazing royal conversion, Manasseh. Well, in the New Testament, we have Saul, the persecutor of the Christian church, wonderfully, astonishingly converted by the power of God, and so he became Paul the Apostle. But perhaps the greatest conversion recorded in the Old Testament is that of King Manasseh, the 13th king of Judah in olden times.

Now, this is so remarkable that it's surely a help to us. If somebody who had gone so far from God as this particular arrogant king can know his mercy and his forgiveness, and such a work of power in his heart and in his nature that he becomes dramatically and lastingly changed, well, there is so much hope for us no matter what we've been, no matter what we've done. Now, Manasseh was the longest reigning king either in Judah or Israel, and so far as Judah was concerned, the kingdom of Judah, he was certainly the most evil king they ever had.

He actually started to reign at the age of 12, but that was not a full reign. He was co-regent with his father for 11 years, but that's important to observe as I'll show a little later. And then at the age of 23, he became, on his father Hezekiah's death, the sole king of Judah, and he reigned for a further 44 years, and for pretty well most of that time, except the last six years, he did the most astonishingly evil things.

His father, King Hezekiah, was the very opposite. He didn't follow his father in this at all. His father was one of the best kings of Judah, and a very godly man.

And he was the man who built, or under his direction at any rate, that very famous Siloam Tunnel, so deep in the ground that conducted water from a spring, the Gion Spring, outside Jerusalem, far outside, deep beneath the surface, under the walls of Jerusalem, into the city, feeding what later became called the Pool of Siloam. And that was done because there was a threatened invasion, a threatened siege to be laid by Hezekiah, 701 BC, then emperor of Assyria, and it was to thwart him, though the siege never in the end took place. But I won't go into that right now, and you can see the most absorbing evidences of this period of the history of Judah in the British Museum, the Lakeish Room, a whole saloon dedicated to those great stone reliefs on the walls showing the sacking of Lakeish nearby Jerusalem by emperor Sennacherib and various other things also.

Well, Hezekiah was the king at the time who built that tunnel, a king with a tremendously good rule and reign. But his son was the very opposite, one of those tragedies of life. Another person who was around at that time was the prophet Isaiah.

Now, Isaiah died just two years before Manasseh became sole king. Isaiah died when Manasseh was 20, 21, and he became sole ruler at 23. So, he heard the prophet Isaiah.

I mustn't spend time with this, but to hear the prophet Isaiah speak and preach must have been amazing. Now, scripture, of course, is given under the inspiration of God. God steers everything and guides everything.

But it's remarkable how God uses the actual native abilities of the scriptural writers. So, all the styles of the books are different. And when you read the book of the prophet Isaiah, you're amazed at the literary power he has and the structure of the language.

It is glorious language. Compelling language. What it must have been like to hear him preach.

Just astonishing, amazing. However, it didn't mean very much to Manasseh. And as we read these verses, just very briefly, Manasseh was 12 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 50 and 5 years in Jerusalem.

That includes his co-regency. But in verse 2, he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He was ultra-heathen.

And verse 3, for he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and reared up altars for Balaam, and made groves and worshipped all the hosts of heaven. So, he reversed all Hezekiah's reforms to bring the nation back to the forms of worship which God had given to them. And he made Baal, pagan god, the official religion in Judah.

And he adopted all kinds of astral gods, sun gods, moon gods, star gods. We know all about them. We're told it in the Bible.

We're told it in secular history. And the sex orgies, and everything that was associated with them. And he brought it all in, with all the sensual living and the cruelty.

He desecrated the temple. We read that in verse 4. Also, he built altars in the house of the Lord, whereof the Lord had said in Jerusalem, Shall my name be forever. He shook his fist at God in every conceivable way.

I won't read all the verses. And his cruelty, and his... Well, verse 6. He caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. Also, he observed times, enchantments, used witchcraft, dealt with a familiar spirit, and so on, and so on.

And in 2nd Kings, we read the same. That his son was actually murdered and sacrificed to pagan gods. So, the depravity of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, was unbounded.

Well, he was desperately violent too. And in 2nd Kings, we learn of the murders that were carried out and the blood that was shed in the city of Jerusalem throughout most of his reign. So, like some other despots we hear about, to buttress his reign and to keep himself in power.

He obviously had some kind of a secret service which silenced people and took them. But he was noted for his cruelty and his large-scale murder. He spurned moral law.

We read down here in verses 8 and 9, the influence he had on the country. He obviously altered the education system and things like that in order to teach the opposite of the moral standards that were taught in the Scripture. He was cynical, he was contemptuous, he was proud, he was indifferent to everything high and moral and decent.

And this was a campaign with him. As you read 2nd Kings and 2nd Chronicles, the force of it comes through. That this man wasn't just godless, he was aiming at rooting out everything he'd ever been taught as a young man and everything he'd ever heard.

Now, he received warnings in verse 10 of this chapter. And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they would not hearken. And the way in which it appears he spoke was not only through the prophets warning him, but by some severe military setbacks and incursions of enemy.

And these things warned him of his conduct. But they didn't warn him, nothing touched him. So, that's enough to see the scale of the evil doing of the person who we're dealing with in 2nd Chronicles chapter 33.

And how it reminds you in a way of today's society. Even our society without the officially orchestrated murders. But we've abandoned as a society, speaking generally, we've abandoned the worship of God.

In fact, we do our utmost to ridicule God, even as creator. The theory of evolution is wildly and extravagantly taught and exclusively taught in our education system. People are brainwashed to ridicule God.

We seem to be reaching for the opposite. And we look at the public media and the world of entertainment and it's as immoral and as crude and as coarse as it could possibly be. It's like a great campaign to get rid of anything reserved and decent and moral and spiritual, godly.

And shock is used and the young people are seduced intellectually by being taught their supposed sexual liberty and urged to express themselves and experiment. So we reflect as a society increasingly the kind of thing that went on in the kingdom all those years ago. We're talking about between 700 and 600 BC.

This campaign against the standards of God. So Manasseh was intensely audacious, even violent, brazen and arrogant. But there's a question it's useful to ask.

Why did he sin like that? Why did he become so extreme? What pressed him? Now today we might try to find excuses for someone. Well maybe it was this, maybe it was that. We don't like to blame people.

Perhaps it was inexperience. Soul king at 23, surely that's going to go to somebody's head. That's going to turn them upside down.

We read enough about rock stars who while teenagers might suddenly achieve fantastic fame and notice and it goes to their heads and in no time they're on drugs and every kind of scandal they're involved in. And we say well they couldn't take it, they were too young. Perhaps something like that happened to Manasseh.

But it doesn't seem like it because he wasn't launched into anything. He was co-regent, functioning as under king if you like, to his father from the age of 11. This wasn't anything sudden.

This was a very gradual training and preparation that he had. It wasn't the stunning shock of sudden fame or power surely. And then you might say well sometimes these things are learned behaviour.

People pick it up from their family. If their mother or their father has a violent temper maybe they'll be pretty rough and violent too and so on. People just absorb behaviour from their background we say.

Maybe it was so with him but it patently wasn't because Hezekiah his father was a very godly man and it was a reforming period. And there was the prophet Isaiah who was virtually the court chaplain as well as the nation's prophet and leading man of God and it was a time of great purity and earnestness and seeking after rights. So he didn't have a background in a terrible household that would have taught him nothing but self-seeking and pride and violence.

He had every opportunity. Sometimes people blame sinful behaviour onto poverty and need. Well he certainly didn't have that.

He had a very comfortable upbringing. He would never have wanted for anything. He would never have been bitter or embittered by burning need or anything of that kind.

And then people say well some people they go wrong because they're ignorant. They don't know and they don't know perhaps the things of God and they've got no training in religious things and in the Bible and in the promises of God. They never learned about the character of God and human need and God's grace and kindness.

They've never seen the reasoning behind his laws. But he had all that. He had the best education imaginable and the best spiritual education at the same time.

So what went wrong? Well the blunt truth is it was all his own initiative. It was what he wanted to do. He went totally off the rails and in the opposite direction and campaigned against everything that was good and refined and gracious and godly.

It was him. He did it himself and this is something for us to grasp. All our problems, all our sins, dear friends, me as well as you, they're nobody else's fault.

There are faults. Sometimes you can draw little connections between a brutal father and a brutal son or something like that. You might be able to find links here and there but it doesn't answer for everything.

The truth is if we're sinful in our acts, in our thoughts, words and deeds, and we're proud in our hearts or deceitfulness is buried in us and things are wrong with it, it's us. It's not anybody else. Of course there are bad examples everywhere but in every family where there's a bad example there are good children as well as bad children or so very often.

You can't necessarily blame anyone other than number one. Our conduct is willful. Well there's an interesting observation made about Manasseh and that is his name.

His name of course didn't cause his bad behaviour, his appalling lifestyle, his sinfulness. He wasn't named because of this. It's actually a noble name but there's a strange twist for Manasseh.

It was a historic name. Had a great ancestor who bore this name but the name of Manasseh actually means cause to forget. That's what the Hebrew means and that's certainly strangely applied to him.

The name strangely fits in a bad sense. He was a willful forgetter, a willful forgetter. He forgot his debts.

Here I am born into this life. What does that mean? I have a debt to God, the creator of all things. I'm a living soul, I'm not an animal.

I'm a higher being. I have a conscience and a soul within me and I have a debt to almighty God but I choose to forget that and never think of that by nature and put that out of all consideration and he forgot, Manasseh, his obligations. He didn't care about any obligations.

He only cared about himself, what I can have, how things work out for me, how they influence me. He was the ultimate number one person. He had no obligations.

He made no promises, no promises to God as to how he would behave, no promises to the nation as to what he would do for them and how he'd defend them and how he'd look after them. He let things go to wreck and ruin. He let the wars fall down.

This is all history. He forgot every reasonable obligation. He put out of his mind his father Hezekiah and his life and his example.

He deliberately put it out of his mind. He put out of his mind everything he'd heard from Isaiah. All those tremendous discourses, moving discourses, God's call to human hearts, God's way of forgiveness, the service of the Lord, put them all out of his head.

Put out of his head the history of his people. He brained himself. I am the 13th king of Judah and so far as I'm concerned, there have been no other kings of Judah.

The 12 who came before me and the judges before them, all whoever preceded me as far as I'm concerned, they're fools, they're idiots. They did all the wrong things because I'm going to take the whole history of my nation, all the clear evidences of God's helping it and blessing it and delivering it and dealing with it. I'm going to trash it all and I'm going to start afresh with me.

Anti-moral standards, anti-everything. That was the extent of his arrogance and his campaign. He deliberately chose to put out of his mind all these things and live an utterly ruthless, selfish life.

Well, that's enough of miserable observations about Manasseh. But it may be the same with you. It certainly was with me for years as I grew up.

We keep things vague, deliberately forget about God and our obligation to him, our creator. Pounce upon everything which might suggest foolishly that he isn't there or that he doesn't exist. Put the facts of the soul far out of mind.

We should be called Manasseh, cause to forget what I'm here for, the purpose of life. Just focus on me, my desires, my lusts, my reputation, what I want, what I enjoy. Is that your philosophy of life? Are you really in the same family as Manasseh? You may not have done quite the same deeds, but you're very similar.

That's an awful thing, but that's how we all are before we're converted. Look at this 10th verse, I'll just read it to you. The Lord spake to Manasseh and to his people, but they would not hearken, nor will we.

You do something and it's against God's holy law, against the commandments and your conscience moves and what do you do? Suppress it. Silence it. Rush to the television or something to wash it all away.

Go phone a friend, anything, get into conversation. Don't take any notice of the conscience. You're never doing anything wrong.

Ignore eternity. Well, there was a disaster took place because eventually God moved without doubts and this is how it happened. Verse 11, Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns and bound him with fetters and carried him to Babylon.

So there was invasion 648 BC, we know all about it. It's written in all the records, the records of Assyria as well as in the Bible. A punitive invasion.

Manasseh was humiliated. He was arrested. He had a hook put through his nose.

He was dragged through the streets like a captive animal. He was tortured and he was imprisoned in Babylon. Well, that seems to have been the end of Manasseh's evil reign.

What hope for him? But while he was shut in to a Babylonian prison, undoubtedly, though the record doesn't specifically say this, but undoubtedly under sentence of death, suddenly his eyes were opened and he saw how offensive he was before the true and living God. And he was crushed and he was humbled to the dust. And we can read about it here in verse 12.

And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He saw himself as the prince of evil. He went to God with no excuses.

He confessed his pride and his lust and his self-deceit, the sins he'd committed, the state of his heart, his terrible, terrible record, his sins against all the light and understanding that he'd been given as a youth. He saw his worthlessness stretching across the years and his crimes and his evil deeds toward others. And now in that prison cell, it's as though he could hear the voices of his father.

He couldn't, of course, but he remembered the counsels of his father. And in his mind, he could hear the ringing tones of Isaiah. And he was crushed and repented before God.

But what hope was there for him? What hope was there for him that God would forgive him, that God would show him the wickedest king of Judah for so long? Any mercy, any help? Well, he may have had

this scroll in writing from the prophet Isaiah who died when he was about 21. Or he may have remembered some of these messages and some of these sermons. But listen to these words.

I read from Isaiah chapter 55 and verse 6. You can almost imagine Isaiah preaching this. Listen to these words. As King Manasseh thought, what hope is there for me? How can I be forgiven? Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.

Call ye upon him while he is near. This is Isaiah speaking. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

And let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him. And to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. But I must be the exception, Manasseh would think.

This applies to people, yes, even wicked people. But not to me, with all my advantages, all my training and my willful opposition to these things. I couldn't forgive a person like me.

And then he would hear the voice of Isaiah. I'd rather think. My thoughts are not your thoughts.

Neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways. And my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isn't that tremendous? But how can people be forgiven? How can they be forgiven? Surely he would have wrestled with this. How can I be forgiven with my record, he thought, and my evil ways and my dismissing of God? Oh, said Isaiah, there's one coming who is going to suffer and die in our place. There's the Messiah coming.

That's Jesus Christ who in due course came exactly in accordance with prophecy. God will come himself and enter into human form and assume a human personality. And he will suffer and die to pay the penalty of sin for us.

Manasseh knew that God had said that he would by no means spare the guilty. God had said sin cannot be just dismissed. People cannot be just let go.

But here was God also saying so he would come himself. And he would personally in Jesus Christ take the punishment of sin on behalf of sinful men and women who repent. And so we read in Isaiah chapter 53.

Listen to these words. This Messiah would come. He is despised and rejected of men.

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from him. He was despised and we esteemed him not.

It's exactly Christ, isn't it? Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him. And with his stripes, his punishment, we are healed.

Amazing words, wonderful words. Can I just read to you Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 4. I think these words may have come to mind when Isaiah preached along these lines. Our sinful nation, a people laden with

iniquity.

A seed of evildoers, children that are corruptors. They have forsaken the Lord. They have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger.

They have gone away backward. And then there's this tremendous appeal. Come now and let us reason together, said the Lord.

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. He knew the calls to mercy.

Isaiah had died when he was 21 in a Babylonian jail prison. He was now 61. He'd had 40 years of evil rebellion.

And yet he sometimes surely remembered some of these things. And as he thought, can God forgive me? The answer was there. Yes, he can.

God will forgive every true repentant sinner who trusts in that Messiah who suffered and died on Calvary's cross. And he will pardon and forgive him. Well, he wept his heart out.

This strong man, this violent man, repented of his sin and yielded his life wholly to Jesus Christ. And then we read in verse 13 of 2 Chronicles 33. He prayed unto him and he was entreated of him and heard his supplication and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom.

Then Manasseh knew that the Lord, he was God. He knew it. Have you sought him? Have you felt your need of his forgiving love? Have you desired conversion, change, a walk with God or to pray to him and know him and love him? And have him in your life and have him blessing you and guiding you.

Grasp what Christ has done. See it's only because of him that anyone can be forgiven. Approach him very sincerely.

Repent of all your sin. Remember, you can't make an inventory, a list of all your sins. It's impossible.

But you can remember the broad things that you've done. Your sins of thought and word and deed. The sins that rule your heart like selfishness and pride.

And the sins of temper and so on. And just lay them before the Lord. Say, Lord, I repent of all these things and I deserve to be shut out of heaven.

But in great mercy, God will forgive even the worst of sinners. Come and repent and ask for his forgiveness. And as you do so, trust in Jesus Christ, believe in him with all your heart that because he's died for sinners who repent, he will receive you and hear you and bless you.

And don't forget this, even as you repent and even as you tell him you believe in him with all your heart, give him your life. Don't do one and not the other. Don't say, I repent, Lord, but secretly in your heart say, but I'm going to have my own way.

I'm going to keep the things I want to do. I'm going to be captain of this ship and charge of my life. No, as you repent, as you believe, give him your life.

At the same time, come under his government, under his rule, and then you'll surely enter into his kingdom. Have I got time? I hope I have to just tell you what happened. Verse 14, it was remarkable that Manasseh should be released.

It was amazing. It was obviously of God that a tyrant emperor should release him. And he did.

And he sent him home. And for the last few years, five years of his reign, five, maybe six. Verse 14, after this, he built a wall without the city of David.

Suddenly he got down to protecting the country and thinking of the people and safety and security. And you know, part of Manasseh's wall is still there even to this day. I've not seen it.

I've never been. But I've seen all the photographs. And part of Manasseh's wall is still there, excavated to be seen.

He built a wall on the west side of Gion in the valley, evening to the entering in of the fish gate. There were all the details. Verse 15, he smashed the idols and cleared them out of the temple and reformed the worship.

Says the same in verse 16. He repaired the temple. And then in verse 17, it's how he influenced others, all the way down to verse 19.

And this was all put on record in the annals of Judah. Listen to this. His prayer also and how God was entreated of him and all his sins and his trespass and the places wherein he built high places and set up groves before he was humbled.

Behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers. Manasseh said, I have been a proud rebel against God all my life. I don't mind how bad it makes me look.

I don't mind how humble I have to be. But I'm going to acknowledge my life and record and write down my prayer to God and tell the people how I needed him and sought him and found him and what he did for me. And I'm going to put it in the records in the historic annals of Israel.

And so it was written in the official records. Don't bury me, he said to the people, in the place where the kings are buried. I don't deserve it.

Let me be buried in the garden of my own house. And his reform and his kindness and his godliness and his good deeds went on for six years. How such a wretched man can be turned around and the evidence can be there that God changed his heart and changed his life.

That's what we need, friends, for God to come in and bless us. And we need to believe in Christ and what he's done and repent of our sin and yield to him. And then that experience beyond all others to know God will be ours.

Let's pray together. Oh God, our gracious heavenly father, look upon us all this night. Work in our hearts.

Oh Lord, may none be too proud, too foolish, too resistant to hear thy voice. Such a voice of mercy, such a call of kindness. Lord, draw us, we pray, and bless us and save us all.

We ask it in the name of our saviour for his sake. Amen.

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