

MANASSEH: NEVER TOO LATE, 2CHRON.33

Return of the Kings #3

◆**Intro:** Can you finish this song lyric? "This is for all the lonely people... thinking that life has passed them by." (Dan Peek of the band America, *Lonely People*, 1975) Well, this is for all the lonely people. And the ultimate root of human loneliness is our separation from our Maker. And our separation from him is rooted in our sin. (Isa59:2) So this is for all the guilty people. And this is for all the despairing people.

◆During the first half of 2006, two performing artists named Laura Barnett and Sandra Spannan created an exhibit in a storefront in Manhattan that allowed passers-by to alleviate their guilt. The two women dressed as 19th century washerwomen and sat in the storefront, one of them underlining the words on the glass—"Air your dirty laundry. 100 percent confidential. Anonymous. Free."—the other painting. Onlookers were encouraged to write their deepest secrets on pieces of paper. When they had disappeared from sight, the women would collect their confession and display it in the window for all to see. The sins and secrets ranged from slightly humorous to sordid:

◆"The hermit crab was still alive when I threw it down the trash shoot."

◆"I want to see SUVs explode. Those people are so selfish."

◆"I make fun of this one friend behind her back all the time. She just enrages me! But I get freaked out when I think of what she might say about me—I worry this means we're not really friends? Human relationships are infinitely confusing!"

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- ◆ "I haven't slept with my husband in a year and I am about to start an affair with _____."
- ◆ "I haven't yet visited my dead parents' grave."
- ◆ "I am dating a married man and getting financial compensation in exchange for the guilt. I'm 25 and he's a millionaire. It pays to be young."
- ◆ "New York makes me feel lonely."
- ◆ Barnett told the *New York Times* that the women are often overwhelmed by the weight of others' sins: "We go there, and the window is empty, and we're wearing all white. And at the end, the window is full, and we're covered with paint. It's exhausting. Some of those things are really, really sad. And afterwards, I need to take a bath."
- ◆ What would you write? Is there a bath that can wash that stuff away? And is it even possible? We're going to look at another ancient king today, Manasseh, and what his story has to tell us about guilt, evil, returning to hope, and finding your way back home. We have to start with a darker topic because nobody wants a doctor if they aren't sick. And God wants Israel and you and me to want a doctor!
- ◆ **1. If I'm honest, I've got a sin problem.** Manasseh's story is an ugly one. He was the longest reigning King of either Israel in the north, or Judah in the south. And he made the culture worse than the pagans that Israel had displaced from the land of Canaan! It wasn't, as we like to say, that "mistakes were made." There's a difference between mistakes and sin.

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◆A. Manasseh shows us the part of ourselves that is the real problem: mistakes are unintended, but we often sin on purpose rather than on accident. We are capable of delighting in doing wrong things! But because it is “the way we are” or “the way we were born” we pretend that makes it right or good. Manasseh was no exception. His father, Hezekiah, was the most godly, on-fire king since great King David. But (as writer Larry Libby reminds us) when Manasseh inherited his dad’s chair, his first order of business was to reverse everything Hezekiah had accomplished in 29 years of righteous rule. Had the good king pursued the God of Israel? Manasseh made a direct choice for the gods Yhwh had driven out of Israel, the Baals, the starry host. (v2) Had his father removed the idolatrous high places? Fine. Manasseh would locate everyone of them and rebuild! (v3) Had his predecessor mowed down the sex-worship asherah poles? (a phallic symbol erected in worship of fertility.) Well, Manasseh commissioned an army of artisans to carve a forest of new ones! (v3) Had Hezekiah purified the temple, and reinstated worship of God? Manasseh would haul a freshly varnished asherah pole right into the temple! (v4,7) Lets see. Baal. Asherah. Starry hosts. Anyone left out? Oh yeah, Molech! Manasseh set up a massive idol in the Valley of Ben Himmon, also known as the local dump. The greek name is Gehenna which is consistently translated in the New Testament as “hell”. If Dad has aspired to the beauties of heaven, Manasseh would head for hell itself.

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- ◆(Archeologists describe Molech as a towering, hollow-bellied bronze statue of a human with the head of an ox. When the metal body was glowing cherry-red, the drum beats reached a savage crescendo, the worshipers would grasp their babies, toddlers and young children and pitch them bodily into the hollow center to burn alive. Manasseh thought it was such a progressive idea that he took his own wide-eyed little boys with him to the Ben Himmon festival and came home alone.
- ◆Just a minute pastor, you don't think they really did that do you? Excavators have uncovered a large, sacred cemetery, dating to 400–200 B.C., in the Phoenician city of Carthage in North Africa. They estimate that the Carthaginians buried more than 20,000 urns here, each holding the remains of one or two children, most of them aged four years or younger. Inscriptions on the urns indicate that all of these infants and toddlers were sacrificed to a Phoenician deity.
- ◆2Kings 21:6 says Manasseh shed so much innocent blood that Jerusalem was filled with it from end to end. Jewish tradition also tells us that when Manasseh found the prophet Isaiah hiding in a tree he told his soldiers to saw both of them in half.(v9) What really culminates the ugly picture of Manasseh's sin is verse 10!
 - ◆"The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention." 2 Chronicles 33:10, NIV.

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◆**B.** "What a wicked man this guy was!", we think. He deserved to rot in prison. He was the "worst"! I would never do anything like that. But isn't he just like us? Or aren't we just like him? Don't we step willingly into sin saying "Nobody is the boss of me."?

◆*Rom 3:23 quotes Psalms 14:2-3 The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*

◆Let's face it. You don't have a fight with your friend on accident. You don't say that little jabbing comment without an intended purpose. Nobody accidentally takes someone else's things home. Now granted, there are evil powers in the world that do seek to influence us, just like companies and Big Tech try to manipulate public opinion. They can flash glittering images in front of your eyes until "you can't help yourself" and before you know it you've bought the last Chea Pet left over from the 70's. But ultimately, you chose. No one holds a gun to your head and says, "Drink more booze now, or else. Tell a little lie right now, or else!" The world tells you you're a victim, but it's not so. There are lots folks in our same kind of positions that don't choose exactly as we choose. So the first thing Manasseh tells us is we have a problem. The human race likes and intentionally chooses wrong and sinful things. (Even when taught the right things!). And I'm in the human race. None of us are exceptions. And if ...

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we are repulsed at people in power who walk on the rest (Hitler, Stalin, Manasseh), then how are we to think about our own choices? Sin is always easier to see on the other person, but it is a universal condition. And justice always seems right when it's the other guy getting it. But what about us?

◆ Here's another piece.

◆ **2. My sin will always bite me.** Most people ignore this truth. They think, "Oh, I got away with that. I had no immediate consequence." But sin always has consequence whether now or later. Sin builds up on the soul, just like childhood trauma or abuse. If not dealt with, it affects your emotional and spiritual stability even in our adult years.

◆ Theologically speaking, no sin is ever gotten away with. Justice of God necessitates that someone pays. Scriptures indicate that sin is a runaway train heading for a missing bridge over a canyon. In verse 11 the writer spells out the consequences for Manasseh. It's a spiritual law. You can't hide from an all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful, all-just God.

◆ Numbers 32:23 "...you may be sure that your sin will find you out."

◆ James 3:14-15 "but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

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◆ *Galatians 6:8 "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction;"*

◆ Bad news, but not without good news!

◆ **3. My sin need not be the last word.** Manasseh's story also shows us this. Now we run into a serious plot twist we didn't see coming. We like our movies to end with the bad guy getting blown to perdition, or being flattened by a falling ship. He can be sorry all he wants but he's getting what he has coming. Then we read v12.

◆ "In his distress he sought the favour of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers."

◆ That's good. He's coming around, realizing what a mess-up he is. I hope he wallows in it. Wait... What?

◆ v13. 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. (Read through v20...)

◆ Now hang on just a minute here! He's sorry and he gets full restoration? That's not fair now is it? Make him a lowly shepherd or something. Maybe a beggar in the gutter of the royal city. How about a stable hand? A latrine technician? Isn't this like resurrecting Osama Bin Laden and naming him Secretary General of the United Nations on account of his apologizing for terrorizing the free world?

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◆The answer is yes. It's a bit like that. And it's a bit like that for everyone in the room. The question has never been "Is it fair?" If God were merely fair, not a one of us would see the light of heaven. Fairness for sin, remember, means eternal death. Let's keep in mind that our sinning will be the last word if something is not done about it.

◆What God does with Manasseh, is the same thing he promised to do with the nation of Israel, and what he promises to do with all who humble themselves and ask for his mercy. Israel would go in exile to Babylon eventually. And God would bring them back to the Promised Land eventually, when they had learned more deeply that he was their only hope.

◆Manasseh's story is hope for every despairing person who takes a look in the mirror and see flaws, and wrong done, and regret and mistakes. With God there is restoration for the humble.

Manasseh's story tells us that nobody is ever too far gone, this side of death. That includes you.

◆You say to yourself, "I've been addicted to ___ for far too long." or "I've spit in the face of my church." or "I did the opposite of what I was taught. How could I ever go back? How could they love me now?" or "I've broken God's commands, and promised, and broken, and promised, and broken. It's no use." or "You would never believe the things I've done. No, there's just no place for me in the Church." But I tell you, it isn't so.

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◆ *he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, Titus 3:5*

◆ **Conclusion:** Listen, **Moses**, the humblest man on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:13), had a very serious problem with his temper. **David**, the “man after God’s own heart” murdered his friend and took his wife. **Paul**, the apostle who wrote most of what is now our New Testament called himself the “worst of sinners” and for good reasons. He formerly killed followers of Jesus. So take heart. You are not alone in your issues, nor in your hope!

◆ All it takes is the genuine act of repentance in your heart because there was another King to come. This one was sinless yet took our consequences on himself. This one is the reason a rebellious Jewish king could find any sort of restoration at all.

◆ Do you have a jail holding you prisoner? Do you have a hook in your nose? Are you in any exile in this life? Have you gotten your hands dirty, or maybe your heart? Do what Manasseh did.

Humble yourself in prayer and ask for forgiveness through Jesus.

◆ So Manasseh’s story “is for all the [guilty] people, thinking that life has passed them by.” Did you know that Dan Peek left the band America in 1977 to focus on his faith; after leaving, he performed that song live, altering the lyric to leave no doubt of his intention, singing "Don't give up until you drink from the silver cup and give your heart to Jesus

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Christ.” When you do, you’re “on your way, you’re on your way, well you’re on your way back home.”