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Manasseh's Conversion - 2 Kings 25

Steve Christian

○ In times of great blessing, it's easy to become complacent. When things are going well, we may inadvertently become less dependent upon God, and more confident in self. And although Covid has been so limiting for us, we still live very comfortable lives. In Australia we are very, very blessed. And so I thought we might take a little journey this term through the book of Jeremiah, to be challenged by some of the pitfalls around us, and be reminded of the serious nature of sin, and God's attitude toward it.

So this morning we need to set the background as to why God sent his prophet Jeremiah to speak to the nation. So, a little history...

○ The twelve Hebrew tribes settled into the Promised Land and after some time demanded an earthly king just like the surrounding nations had. A King was given, and it was in 975 B.C. that the nation was then divided into two kingdoms, when Jeroboam 1st led the ten northern tribes to rebel against King Rehoboam, the son of Solomon.

The Northern Kingdom became known as Israel, and all of the kings who ruled over the Northern Kingdom were not God fearing men. Assyria, from the north, conquered Israel in 721 B.C. and most of their people were taken into captivity.

The Southern Kingdom was known as Judah. It was made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. And although a few of its leaders were faithful to God, Judah too was on a downhill trajectory. Subsequently, God allowed Babylon to conquer it in 606 B.C. Some of their leading citizens, including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, were taken to Babylon at this time.

Ten years later, when Judah rebelled against Babylon in 596 B.C. others, including Ezekiel, were taken as captives to Babylon. Finally, in 586 B.C. the army of Babylon returned to destroy Jerusalem. Solomon's temple was torn down. Most of the remaining people were taken to Babylon. It was during Judah's last days, that Jeremiah served as God's spokesman to them.

Although the Hebrew people and their kings were determined to go their own way, God kept calling them back to Himself through His prophets. ○ Have you experienced that from your God? Determined to go your own way, yet time and time again you have known and sensed God's prompting; He has spoken to you through His Word, or another book, or Sunday message, or you have heard the Holy Spirit prompting you? We ignore His voice at our own peril. But God remains faithful.

Can you also see how God has had His hand upon you over the years and even before you were aware of Him?

○ Jeremiah was born around 650 B.C. His father was Hilkiah, a priest (Jer 1:1). His home; a village about seven kms north of Jerusalem. He was very young when called by God to be a prophet (Jer 1:1-10). He was not a poor man in later life for he owned property and had a personal secretary (Jer 32:6-15; 36:4). God told Jeremiah not to marry or have a family (Jer 16:1-4). Jeremiah's name shows he was chosen by God. It means "Jehovah has appointed." Jeremiah knew he was called or appointed by God.

Now, although he was called by God to be His spokesman, from an earthly perspective his life was not a very good one, and he wasn't successful in turning the people back to God. His own family rejected him. He was beaten and put in prison on several occasions (Jer 26:8-11; 32:1-3; 33:1; 37:13-15; 38:6-13). He was exiled to Egypt by Johanan the son of Kareah after he defeated

the people who killed Gedaliah, Babylon's governor over Judah (Jer 41- 43). And when he continued to preach God's Word, according to Jewish history, he was stoned to death by his fellow Jews.

○ Although a child of God; and even when called into a special and specific ministry, this does not guarantee that our earthly lives will all go well. God does have plans for us, as Jeremiah will later declare, but His plans may not always align with ours. They will however, always include His powerful and peaceful presence with us, in spite of our circumstances. Although we may desire heaven on earth, this earth is sin filled and suffers as a consequence. Heaven will be "heaven." But following Jesus is no guarantee for a life of ease and comfort.

We need to remember too, that our personal circumstances are always within the context of much bigger picture involving our nation and our world. Our world does not revolve around us.

Jeremiah was born during troubled times in world history. ○ Great nations were struggling for control of the world. The powerful Assyrian Empire was slowly dying. Babylon became a superpower when its army conquered Nineveh, capital of Assyria, in 612 B.C. Egypt had been a world power for more than one thousand years. It was striving to maintain its power against the threats from Babylon.

The little kingdom of Judah was located between these two superpowers. And on numerous occasions these two superpowers came to war on Judah's territory. The people suffered greatly as a result, and at times the Kings of Judah were tempted to make alliances with either Babylon or Egypt as protection against the other. Life was unpredictable and insecure; uncertainty and fear ran rampant.

○ In such times there is only one place for peace and security. In the midst of Covid; in a world of turmoil; in a world where some nations appear to be stretching their military might, or economic domination; in a world filled with differing political and philosophical positions – where tolerance is called for but often not given. In a world where job security is wavering. In a world where cancer is affecting more and more people. There is only one place for peace and security; assurance and hope – in the safety of our God. Are you safely resting in the embrace of God your Father? Is the centre of your world, God?

In a world of insecurity, we may be tempted to put our faith in other things. Josiah was the king of Judah at the time when Jeremiah began calling the nation back to God and to trust in Him. Josiah sought to follow God's way. Josiah's father Amon and his grandfather Manasseh were not faithful to God. The leaders of the nation flip flopped time and time again from seeking God to ignoring Him and chasing after other gods.

○ I want to go back to Manasseh to see just how far from God the kingdom of Judah had fallen. And there is little wonder as to why God calls upon Babylon to come and carry the Hebrew people away into exile. But even in the midst of this we see too just how gracious our God is!

Manasseh became king at the age of 12 and ruled for 55 years, the longest reigning king of either Judah or Israel. Even though he came from a godly home Manasseh rebelled against God, to the point of hatred toward Him. Maybe it was the loss of his father at such a young age, and maybe it was being placed in the position of king at that age that embittered him, but whatever his "father built up for God" he not only pulled it down but became so wicked that the Canaanite nations before him, had nothing on Manasseh, he far surpassed their evil. Although the first of the Ten Commandments was to have no other god but YHWH, Manasseh decided to "insult God to His face" (2 Chron 33, 2 Kings 21)

○ **“He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. He built altars in the temple of the LORD, ... to all the starry hosts.”** (2 Kings 25:3-4)

○ **“He sacrificed his children (to the god Molech) in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced divination and witchcraft, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.”** (2 Chron 33:6)

○ **“He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple. Manasseh led the people astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.”** (2 Kings 25:7-9)

He not only sought and worshipped other gods, but made a mockery of the One true God. He desecrated the Temple with false gods; enacting the abomination that causes desolation. And v.16 of 2 Kings 25 ○ says that he forced people to follow his practices as **“he made Jerusalem swim in the blood of those he executed who would not participate in his evil ways”** (tradition says that this included the prophet Isaiah.) He was an angry, blood thirsty, evil and wicked man.

And this was the last straw for God. From 2 Kings again, ○ **“The Lord said through his servants the prophets: “Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. Therefore, I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and give them into the hands of enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their enemies.”** (2 Kings 25:10-15)

Prior to the time when this occurred, God sends Jeremiah and still appeals to the people through him. And we'll look at God's appeal through Jeremiah over the coming weeks.

But for Manasseh, God is serious about sin. ○ **“The LORD brought against him 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.”** (2 Chron 33:11) And we say, “Yes! He got his just desserts. The Lord humbled him and punished him. He got what he deserved.” Our natural bent for justice comes to the fore. We want to see those who hurt others suffer for their wrong doing.

God on the other hand doesn't want anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. And he may orchestrate our circumstances to bring us to our knees and seek His forgiveness. God is serious about sin. As you pray for your lost loved ones, are you praying that the Lord will do whatever is necessary for them to turn back to Him?

And so, whilst Manasseh is held in captivity with barely enough food to stay alive, ○ **“In his distress he sought the favour of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. 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.”** (12-13) God in His mercy and grace, forgives Manasseh his sin, and restores him back to his throne in Judah. Manasseh is now a God-fearing king who determined to return Judah to following God's ways.

You see, the Lord was moved by the genuine and sincere remorse that Manasseh displayed as he cried out to God. Such is the mercy of God. He saw the guilt, shame and sorrow in Manasseh's heart, and freely forgave him. If God can forgive an evil, wicked, sinful, rebellious man like him, He can forgive you. ☉ No sin is too great. There is no sin that the blood of Christ cannot wash clean and make us whiter than snow.

But the only way to know freedom from guilt, and forgiveness and peace in your heart, is through repentance. True repentance unlocks the floodgates of God's mercy and forgiveness. God is serious about sin; about your sin! There is a price to be paid for our sin and rebellion, and Jesus has already paid that price for us. For the wages of sin is death. And Jesus died the sinners death, although He had never sinned, so that you and I wouldn't have to die, but rather receive eternal life. Praise God? Praise God!

I encourage you today to seek the Lord for forgiveness and for salvation. Manasseh's story is an Old Testament story of conversion; of a man bent on hatred toward God and rebellious through and through, to being a child of God following His ways. As we study Jeremiah, we'll see a faithful and loving God appealing to His people to return to Him.

Song: TN

(Footnote: Jeremiah would have been around 8 years old when Manasseh died. Jeremiah's father was a priest, and no doubt would have told his son about the conversion of the King. How did that impact Jeremiah?)