

## **Are there any too wicked to save?**

**2 Chronicles 33:10-17**

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There is a great divide in the minds and hearts of men. On one side of the divide are those people and events that we look up to, strive to be like, or feel an affection for as they bring to mind the most wonderful of memories from our pasts. We simply cannot fathom people like John Newton, Mother Theresa, or even the sweet little 90-year-old grandmother, who is always just so nice to everyone, doing anything wrong, much less worthy of condemnation. But, on the other side of this divide are the names of men and dates in history that ring with infamy in our ears. Names like Hitler, Bundy, Stalin, Dahmer, and Mao are not names that we can say, or even think, without feeling revulsion and even a hatred rising up in our hearts. The evils that they committed are so atrocious, the numbers of people killed for their ideologies, or simply to satisfy their twisted desire, are so enormous that it is difficult for us to fathom. And for that greatest generation, when they hear the date December 7, 1941, or for my generation, September 11, 2001, or maybe one day for those still in High School or College it will even be February 14, 2018, we are immediately transported back in time to where we were when we first heard of the horrific events that took place on that day. But, now those are things long past, those are men long dead and buried. And so, we can feel our justified anger at the evil that was committed and then move on with our lives. Now it only affects us for a moment, and it makes us really uncomfortable by the way (and we certainly don't want to be uncomfortable), so we quickly move on...until the next event takes place. So, let's make this thought experiment a little more real, let's make it more personal. How do you react when you're sitting with your spouse, watching the evening news and you hear about the man who has been arrested for abusing his wife or children? The female teacher who has been arrested for abusing a male student at school? The juveniles who attacked and killed an elderly man on the street, just to see what it feels like? Or the man who kidnaps and then does unspeakable things to a child before dumping them off like trash in some field. How do you respond when the reality of evil is staring at you from a mugshot on the TV screen and you can no longer run from the discomfort that has become so evident in the fact that EVIL exists in this

world and resides in the hearts of men? Well, from what I've seen, whether in the midst of a tragedy on a national or even global scale while watching the news, or something that has affected you very directly and personally, the response is always the same. The outcry is so predictable. "Why did this happen? ", or, "Where was God in all of this?" Become questions that roll off the lips of many a man on the street, as he shakes his fist at the God who, just two minutes before he heard the news, was calmly saying didn't exist. Or suddenly, the liberal Christian who is feeling overwhelmed by the tragedies unfolding around them, in the midst of their anger and heartbreak, will proclaim to their husband sitting next to them on the couch. "There is a **special** place in hell for somebody who can do **that!**" This hell that, over countless debates and conversations with friends and family, they would say that, God is certainly too **loving** to send anybody to, **especially** for an eternity. "That's just so unfair!" they cried. But **NOW**, as they peer into this situation through tear stained eyes, it only seems **right**, it only seems **just**. And they're exactly right, whether they understand why or not. The actions of these men and women do deserve punishment. The sins that they have committed cry out to God for **JUSTICE**. But, are they beyond salvation? Are they beyond redemption? Are there any too wicked to save? Many, even many Christians, would say that they must be. After all, how can God forgive such evil and wickedness? But, we forget that we all, every single one of us, "have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Yes, even John Newton and Mother Theresa, and even the sweet old grandmother down the street deserve the wrath of a Holy God, because each of them has sinned. But, now it gets really uncomfortable, Beloved. Do **you** think you are any better? Are my sins any less heinous than Hitler, or Bundy? These are difficult questions. But, if we are honest, as we look in the mirror of God's Word, and remember the things that **we** have done, the words that **we** have said in anger, the white lies that **we** have told, the thoughts that **we** have every single day; can we honestly say that we are any more deserving of mercy? I know I can't. After all, is it not in the Standards of our own Church and the Reformed tradition that also say, "there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation"? (WCF Ch. 15 Para 4) To be clear, I am not saying that all types of sins are equally heinous. It is made clear to us throughout the Word of God that there are sins that are worthy of greater condemnation than others. But, you often hear in

debate (whether on tv, or social media, or face to face) concerning, for example, the issue of homosexuality, that “sin is sin”. And the implication is that “well I’m a sinner, just like they’re a sinner, so, I can’t judge what they’re doing because I’m JUST as guilty”, thereby exonerating themselves from holding TOO firmly to what the Bible teaches. But isn’t it funny how that argumentation is only used to justify a sinful behavior and NOT to correct it? Isn’t it convenient how you never hear this flattening out of sin used to make the argument in the other direction? For example, you never hear someone say, “well all sin is the same, sin is sin after all.....so God should just wipe out San Francisco, or New York, or Abilene just as He did Sodom and Gomorrah.”

No, there ARE sins that are worse than others in the eyes of God. That’s why some sins in the Law were punishable by death and others were not. That’s why Jesus said in Matthew 11:21-24, “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

Now, very quickly, you will also hear people say that while they like the God of the New Testament, because Jesus is so LOVING, they don’t really like the God of the Old Testament, because he’s just so WRATHFUL. Beloved, when Jesus reminds us here that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins, the Son and the Holy Spirit were NOT absent, NOR were they in disagreement. The Triune God was, is, and will always be perfectly united, and to try to divide this unity by pitting Scripture against Scripture, often VERY out of context, destroys our understanding of who God has clearly revealed Himself to be in His Word.

But, back to the point at hand, you never hear this argumentation used in the opposite direction because it does not allow us to be comfortable in and continue justifying our sin. What I AM saying, on the other hand, is that ALL sins are equally worthy of condemnation. Each sin, no matter it’s level of depravity, is worthy of the wrath of God because each sin has been committed against the infinitely holy God, and ultimately against Him alone. As David cried out to God, in Psalm 51:4, after the Prophet Nathan has come to him

and revealed to him the depravity of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and then the subsequent murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in YOUR sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.” So, while all sins may be not be equally heinous, all sins are equally condemnable in the eyes of a Holy God.

Keeping these things in mind, let us reflect for a moment on the history of Manasseh. As his is one of those names that typically rings with infamy in the Old Testament. To see the wonder of God’s mercy shown to Manasseh, that is so evident in our text today, we must first understand the fullness of his depravity, and through his influence and leadership, the depravity of the people. Beginning in 2 Chronicles 33:1 we are told that “Manasseh was 12 years old when he began to reign”, this is after his father Hezekiah (a man who had initiated substantial spiritual reforms in Judah, died, “and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem.” This was a period longer than any of the other Kings from the line of David and extended from 696 – 642 B.C. While this should have been a wonderful blessing for the people of Judah, as God was keeping his promise to David that he would always have a man upon the throne, as we will see shortly it was instead a curse to them as Manasseh led the people into grievous sin of idolatry and paganism. Look at V. 2. “And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.” By the way, there are many today who look at God commanding Israel to slay every man, woman, and child in the Promised Land (placing them under the ban) and conclude that God MUST be unjust and cruel to command the slaying of “innocent” people in a Holy War in this way. REALLY? Let’s see just what these “innocent” people were doing...shall we. Returning to our text now...V. 3. “For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down, and he erected altars to the Baals, and made Ashteroth, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. V. 4 And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, ‘In Jerusalem shall my name be forever.’ V. 5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. V. 6 And he burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with

mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. V. 7 And the carved image of the idol that he had made he set in the house of God, of which God said to David and to Solomon his son, 'In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever, v. 8 and I will no more remove the foot of Israel from the land that I appointed for your fathers, if only they will be careful to do all that I have commanded them, all the law, the statutes, and the rules given through Moses.' V. 9 Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel."

So here we see two very significant points of emphasis by the Chronicler. **First**, all of the idolatry and false worship that was being followed by Judah in these days were NOT things that the Israelites had made up themselves as they entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. No, these blasphemies had been in existence for centuries, and it was for this reason that God told Abraham that his descendants would be in Egypt for 400 years. As He said in Genesis 15:16 "And they (meaning his descendants) shall come back here in the fourth generation, for *the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.*" (The Amorites here are representative of all the peoples of the land that Israel would eventually inhabit.) But, here is the point. It was BECAUSE of these sins listed from verses 3 through 6, INCLUDING the burning of their sons in the fire to the god Molech, and ALL of which are condemned in the Law of God that is written upon the hearts of every man (Romans 2:15), that God would use Israel as the MEANS to punish their sins. Every single one of these sins deserved the wrath of a Holy and Just God to be poured out upon those peoples, and God CHOSE to use HIS people as the hammer in His hand with which to smash them and their idols. But that leads us to the second and primary point of the Chronicler. If God had punished the peoples of the land for these same sins, or abominations as the text calls them in verse 2, then how much more deserving are Manasseh and the people of Judah who have taken these sins and added unto them immeasurably and did "**more evil** than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel"?! (v. 9)

But, before we move on to our text for today, I want to also briefly explain why it is that God says that Judah has done "more evil" than the nations that were before them. And, I hope,

that with this brief explanation, not only will our introduction be complete, but we just may begin to see why it is that we should FEAR the Lord our God, in THIS nation, in THIS day and age, and yes, even in THIS Church. To put it simply, they KNEW God. He was their God and they were His people. While the peoples that lived in the land prior to Israel sinned greatly against God and were rightly held accountable for their sins, Manasseh and Judah had the very Word of God, ALL that he required of them codified in the Law of Moses. AND they had the Temple of God where they could follow that Law and have their sins atoned for....and they desecrated that Temple and the Law by worshipping idols in the very heart of the Temple. And it is for this reason that God has determined to destroy it all. In just a few short years, the Temple will be razed to the ground by the Babylonians, and the remnant of the people of God will spend 70 years in exile. Now, what does this have to do with today? Well, if God would destroy His Temple and punish His chosen people for their idolatry should we not also expect that He, the immutable God, the God that does not change (Malachi 3:6), will also hold those of us who have had the fullness of the revelation of God in the God-Man Jesus Christ, accountable for how we sin greatly against Him? As we boldly proclaim that WE are a law unto ourselves and laugh at the very idea that God is righteous and holy, should we not suppose the same destruction of our nation? As we trample His courts by waltzing into His presence every Lord's day and demand that we worship Him in the way that makes us FEEL more spiritual, or whatever other excuse we use, and NOT the way that He has commanded, should we not ALSO expect that WE WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE?! For all of these things, all of the judgments that God inflicts upon his people and the nations of Canaan, are written for our instruction.

This is a stark picture, I know. But, Beloved, do not loose heart. For, this immutable, holy God is also a God of abundant mercy and amazing grace. Look now at our text for today, in V. 10. "The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention. V. 11 Therefore the LORD brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon. V. 12 And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and

humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. V. 13 He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.”           What we see hear, Beloved, is the assurance that NOBODY is beyond the ability of God to save. His hand is not shortened. No matter how far you have strayed, no matter how DEEP the hole you have dug, our God is mighty to save. There is none too far gone, there is no sin so heinous that it cannot be atoned for. But, how do we see that? Is God, as many in our nation and in the Church today believe, just some grandfatherly figure who sits in heaven dotting on everybody and “forgiving” sins without any thought to justice? Is it really, as it has been said many times before, our job to sin and God’s job to forgive without any consideration to what is right? Is the great equalizer of all men DEATH? Is it really the case that everyone who dies is “in a better place” as you hear at every funeral in America today?! No. That would be a God who is not worthy of worship. If that was the case, then every time the question was asked “Where was God in all of this?” they would have a legitimate grievance, for God would not be JUST. Why does hell exist, and why are sinners sent there for an eternity? Because God is a God of RIGHTEOUSNESS! Beloved, we must remember that God is HOLY! While it is often quoted from 1 John 4 that “God is love”, and He is, He is the fountain of all love, we must be sure not to take the love of God and turn Him into some sort of ridiculous caricature. God’s love is not out of proportion with His other attributes. His love does not outweigh his justice, or his righteousness. And while He certainly is love, we must NOT forget that it is his HOLINESS that is given the extraordinary emphasis in Scripture. It is His HOLINESS that is given that trifold cry (that repetition that shows the superlative in Hebrew literature) from the lips of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6 when one cries to the other “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And so, we can see in that short statement that it is not your comfort that is ultimately God’s concern, whether in this life or the next. No, it is the holiness of God, it is His GLORY that He is jealous to defend. And, therefore, He MUST punish sin.

So, how then, is Manasseh looked upon with favor by the LORD in our text? Look again to verse 12. “And when he was in distress”. By the way, this distress was no small thing. When the Chronicler tells us in verse 11 that the Assyrians took him away with “hooks and bound him

with chains of bronze” that’s exactly what he means. The Assyrians were a brutal people. And when they captured prisoners they would literally put hooks into the nostrils of their captives (like a bull, like a beast of burden...defiling and degrading the image of God that we are made in) and lead them by chains attached to those hooks to wherever they would be exiled. It was incredibly painful and utterly humiliating. And, so, it was when Manasseh was in THIS distress that “he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.” Why did God look favorably upon Manasseh? Because our God is a God of Amazing Grace. And when He brings him to repentance, when he cries out to Him in humility and brokenness, He is gracious and merciful to him. As it is written in Exodus 34:6-7, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty”. But, do not be deceived Beloved, this was not just some flippant cry as he regrets being caught, and is having to deal with the consequences of his sin, regardless of how terrible it was. Regret is something we all feel as we come face to face with the consequences of the “bad choices” we’ve made. If regret were all that was necessary for forgiveness... then there would have been no need for Christ, the only begotten Son of God, to die upon the Cross. If regret were sufficient for salvation, then just feeling badly enough about something we have done would cause the dotting grandfather to feel sorry for us and allow us to get away with whatever it is that we have done wrong, whatever sin we have committed against Him. No, Beloved, this was no mere regret, but repentance. Manasseh was brought low, and in his darkest hour, confessed his sins before the Triune God. But, what does it mean to repent? How can we know if we are truly repentant of our sins and not simply regretful of a bad decision due to the unseemly consequences we are now experiencing? Well, there is a nice adaptation from Thomas Watson’s *The Doctrine of Repentance* that I came across this week while preparing for this morning, and I would like to run through six essentials, or as the author calls them, ‘ingredients from which a spiritual medicine is composed’, that will show us that “Repentance is a grace of God’s Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.”



- 1) Repentance involves a **sight of sin**, wherein a man comes to himself, recognizing what his sin is and what he himself is before a holy God. This causes him to cry with the prophet, "Woe is me! For I am undone." (Isaiah 6:5)
- 2) Repentance consists of **sorrow for sin**. This is the embittering of the soul to the extent that it is crucified in sorrow. Such sorrow of the heart runs out of the eyes with bitter tears of holy agony. In such tears sin must drown or the soul will burn. Those who mourn after a godly manner are then comforted.
- 3) Repentance includes **confession of sin**. This confession is self-accusing, voluntary, with compunction, is sincere, and includes a resolution not to act in sin again. This confession purges out sin and endears Christ to the soul. Thereby is the way made clear for pardon.
- 4) Repentance includes **shame for sin**. When the heart has been made black by sin, grace makes the face red from blushing. This holy embarrassment is due to the recognition of sin's many distresses, among them its guiltiness, its abuse of Christ, and its corrupting power, its folly, and its extent.
- 5) Repentance necessitates a **hatred of sin**. A true penitent is a sin-loather. Further, he hates not just one sin but ALL sin; indeed, he spurns sin in any form. He hates sin not only *for* hell but *as* hell.
- 6) Repentance works a **turning from sin**. This turning is **from ALL sin fully unto God**. As a ship going east is turned west by the wind, a man who was bent hellward before the contrary wind of the Spirit began to blow on him turns his course in repentance and is caused to sail heavenward. This turning is called a forsaking of sin (Isa. 55:7), a putting of sin far away (Job 11:14), and a dying to sin (Rom. 6:2). This is a whole-souled turning: the eye turns from impure glances, the ear from hearing slanders, the tongue from abusive speech, the hands from all evil, the feet from the path of the prostitute, and the soul from the love of wickedness.

Beloved, Manasseh repented of his sins and God, in His Amazing Grace, poured out forgiveness upon the wretched sinner that he was, bringing him from spiritual death unto life. But, how can we be certain of this? Look again to our text and the end of Verse 13. “Then Manasseh KNEW that the LORD was God.” That’s it. That’s enough. But, in his mercy, God has also given us far more with which we can praise his Holy Name in the salvation of sinners.

Look at V. 15. “And he took away the foreign gods and the Idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw them out side of the city. V. 16 He also restored the altar of the LORD and offered on it sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving, and he commanded Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel. V. 17 Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the LORD their God.” How do we know that Manasseh was of the elect? How do we know that he was redeemed? How do we know that he truly repented of his sins and was bought by the precious blood of Christ? Because he was **changed!** Beloved, it has become the norm amongst the Church today to say that one can be born again and yet NOT be changed! That one can be redeemed and yet NOT be made new! Dear ones, do not be deceived! You cannot simply profess with your mouth by saying a sinner’s prayer, because the evangelist’s sermon made you feel really guilty for about an hour one Saturday afternoon, and yet NOT show evidence that you possess the seal of the Holy Spirit! Can a fire come upon wood and the wood not be burned up?! Or a hurricane make landfall and not destroy what is in its path? Even so, as we are touched by the One who is a purifying and refining fire, and the One who moves as a mighty unseen wind, will we NOT likewise be radically and permanently changed? And here we see in the life of Manasseh the evidence that there is indeed NONE who is beyond redemption. There is NONE too wicked to save. For our Lord Jesus Christ, told us in the Gospel according to John 6:37-40, “ALL that the Father gives me will come to me, (Manasseh was the Lord’s, chosen from before the foundation of the world) and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose **nothing** of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my

Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and Believes in him should have eternal life, and I **will** raise him up on the last day.” Beloved, if you are the Lord’s then you WILL be drawn by that irresistible grace by the sweet aroma of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You WILL hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and come running unto the One who gives life everlasting. For it is Jesus Christ who cries out “Come to me, ALL who labor and are heavy laden, and I WILL give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you WILL find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Earlier I quoted to you from the WCF Ch. 15 Para. 4. Now, I don’t know how many of you may have noticed it, but I didn’t finish that paragraph. But, I would like to do so now. “As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is NO sin so GREAT, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.” Dear Christian, do you see the beauty of the Gospel? As Manasseh repented of his sins, prayed to God, and was forgiven of his sins as he trusted in the God of his fathers, so you need only repent of your sins (trusting in the mediating work of the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ), pray to God the Father, and be forgiven as you look unto Christ, the One who has born the wrath of the Father in our stead upon the Cross. But, lest we become confident in our own ability, Beloved, we must remember this as well. That though Manasseh repented of his sins and bore fruit worthy of repentance, we must never imagine that he did this in his own strength. Or that he did this of his own accord. Oh, how foolish we are if we believe that there is anything within US that will bring us to repentance. No Beloved. Manasseh did not save himself. He did not, one day, wake up and decide to give himself a new heart. No, he was brought to repentance and redeemed by a merciful God who will not loose ONE of those He has chosen to make his own. But, where do we see that in our text? Some may be inclined to question if I am not reading into this Old Testament story, erroneously, something I want to see from the New Testament. But, I would respond that we must remember that what we have before us, in the Bible, is the progressive revelation of God. From Genesis to Revelation we see one continuously unfolding glorious story of redemption. And, therefore, we MUST use the end of the book to interpret that which comes before. Just as you use the unexpected ending of a great mystery novel to interpret all those seemingly random or inconsequential events throughout the narrative, so must we view all events in

Scripture through the lens of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, as it is He that is the climax (the CULMINATION) of all that God is working throughout history.

Look again at verse 16. "He also restored the altar of the LORD and offered on it sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving". Do you see the wonder of God's Word, Beloved? It was in the Law of God that Manasseh had led Israel to desecrate in his 55 years of rule. That Law which he now, in repentance restores to the Temple, that required sacrifices to be given so that they could have peace with God. In Leviticus 16 we see that on the Day of Atonement, which took place once a year, the High Priest would sacrifice a bull and a goat. One for his own sins and the other for the sins of the people. In this ceremony, that the Priests performed, the sins of the people, by the placing of the Priests hands upon the sacrifice, would be passed from themselves and onto the goat before it was killed, thus atoning for their sins for the year. But, this sacrifice was only a foretaste of the things to come in Christ, "For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:1-6) In Christ we have a complete and final propitiation of our sins. Now we no longer need an Aaronic Priest to place our sins upon a goat year after year after year. No Beloved, for our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, took our sins upon Himself on the Cross, ONCE FOR ALL, and in return imputed unto us His perfect righteousness. And no matter what sins you have committed, if you repent and confess your sins, God is faithful AND just to forgive you of ALL of your sins, because they have been perfectly atoned for by the Son of God. The One who has been raised from the grave and is, AT THIS VERY MOMENT, seated at the right hand of God the Father.

Oh, dear Christian. Do you see what love the Father has for you? "In **this** the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In **this** is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his

Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Beloved, in THIS God showed his love for Manasseh  
and in THIS God shows his love for you.

LET US PRAY