

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*A Black Velvet Background Life.*"

We're going to look at one of the evilest men who ever lived. I can't think of anyone, Jew or Gentile, who approached the wickedness Manasseh engaged in throughout his lifetime.

Look at **2 Chr 33:1**...

2 Chr 33:1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem.

That's the longest reign of any king in the OT. Just to put this in perspective, Saul, David, and Solomon each reigned 40 yrs.

2 Chr 33:2 But he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. 3 For he (Manasseh) rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped ALL THE HOST OF HEAVEN and served them.

He worshipped everything you could worship EXCEPT God.

Let me share one more other thing that reveals just how terrible Manasseh's actions were...

When you're reading about kings in the OT, it will often say, "The king was good, BUUUUUUT the high places were not removed." Manasseh's father was Hezekiah, and he has the unique distinction of being one of the few kings great enough to remove even the high places.

I mention all this, b/c if you look at the beginning of **verse 3** it says **[Manasseh] rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down.**

Manasseh reversed all the great things his father did.

One more thing that makes Manasseh so terrible...

He rejected one of the godliest heritages anyone ever had. Everything he did would've been bad even if he came from an evil father, but considering Hezekiah was his father makes his actions even worse.

I think there's application for children and parents:

- The application for children is, your accountability is higher if you're raised in a Christian family. If you're a child and you're sitting here right now b/c your parents bring you to church each week, that's a blessing, but it also makes you more responsible.
- The application for parents is, I think Manasseh can be an encouragement to godly parents whose children turn from the Lord. I imagine this must be very hard for parents, but Manasseh shows that even children raised by Hezekiah can rebel against the Lord.

Look at **verse 4**...

2 Chr 33:4 He also built altars in the house of the LORD (notice he put these altars in God's temple!), of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem shall My name be forever." **5** And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD (notice he also put these altars in God's temple). **6** Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.

It seems like he filled the temple w/ as many idols he could fit.

According to God's Law, everything Manasseh did was punishable by death, but the worst sin has to be sacrificing his sons – plural – to the false god Molech. I can't think of anything wickedder than that. The parallel account in **2 Kin 21:16** says **Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.** This refers to all the children he sacrificed.

The end of **verse 6** says Manasseh's actions [**provoked God**] to anger. His sins include **soothsaying, mediums, and spiritists.** The modern-day equivalents are astrology, horoscopes, and fortune-tellers.

We might not think these actions are as bad as murder and adultery, but they **provoked God to anger** in Manasseh's day and they do the same to God in our day. If you're a Christian you have no business being involved in these practices.

Look at **verse 7**...

2 Chr 33:7 He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had 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;

Notice this was an idol HE MADE! There were countless idols in the land, but that wasn't enough for him. He needed to make it his own.

Second, where did he put it? He put it in the temple! The parallel account in **2 Kin 21:7** says the idol was of Asherah, the Canaanite goddess of fertility. She was worshipped through ritual prostitution. Manasseh turned God's temple into a place of immorality.

Take a look at **verse 8**...

8 and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses." **9** So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do **MORE EVIL THAN THE NATIONS WHOM THE LORD HAD DESTROYED BEFORE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.**

In other words, Manasseh led Judah to act WORSE than the Canaanites that Israel drove out of the land.

This means Manasseh introduced evil that was literally unheard of up to this point. When you think of the vilest people in the OT, you think of the Canaanites. Manasseh led Israel to be worse than that. It was as though he sought unusual and outlandish sins.

Look at **verse 10**...

2 Chr 33:10 And the LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen.

God graciously warned **Manasseh and his people**, referring to the Jews.

It's easy to look at this verse and NOT see ourselves in it, but I would ask...

- Do we read God's Word, and disregard what He's saying to us through it?
- Do we hear God through Scripture, and then ignore what He's saying to us?

If so, we're doing the same thing as the Jews.

Jam 1:22 says we must be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

Look at **verse 11**...

2 Chr 33:11 Therefore the LORD brought upon them (the people of Judah) **the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters** (these are just shackles or chains like inmates or prisoners wear), **and carried him off to Babylon.**

The reason God warned Judah, and the reason He warns us, is He wants us to repent so He doesn't have to judge us. Since Manasseh and Judah wouldn't repent, He was forced to judge them. If He didn't judge them, He'd be unjust.

The **hooks** were actually hooks that went through the people's noses and then were attached to a long rope to keep everyone walking in line while they were carted off.

Manasseh is really suffering. He was king. He was wealthy. He was powerful. But now he's lost everything. He's got chains on his feet, a hook in his nose, and he's being carted off to Babylon.

And this brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: IN AFFLICTION YOU CAN HARDEN OR HUMBLE YOURSELF.

When we're suffering b/c of our sins we face two choices:

- We can harden ourselves toward God and become angry that we're being disciplined.
- Or we can humble ourselves and repent.

Before we look at Manasseh's response, let me show you another king. Briefly turn to the left to **2 Chr 16...**

Here's the context...

Asa faced an enemy, but instead of turning to God for help, he turned to the ungodly Syrians. So God rebuked him through the prophet, Hanani. Look at **verse 7...**

In **verse 7** Hanani said to Asa, **"Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped your hand."**

He was rebuked and look at **verse 10** to see if he hardened himself or humbled himself...

2 Chr 16:10 Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for *he was* enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed *some* of the people at that time.

He hardened himself so much he punished the prophet that rebuked him...AND his own people!

It got even worse. Look at **verse 12...**

2 Chr 16:12 And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians.

Although this might sound hard to believe, when God gave Asa this disease in his feet, it was actually gracious! Why? Because it was another chance to humble himself and turn to God.

But he continued to be hardened toward God. There's nothing wrong with going to the doctors, but the verse is written in such a way so as to imply he **ONLY** went to the doctors and would **NOT** seek God.

There are many people in Scripture who responded poorly when suffering, but I chose Asa b/c there's something that makes him different: he's one of the best kings in the OT. The fact that this can happen to him should cause all of us to be on guard against becoming hardened toward God when we suffer.

Go ahead and turn back to **2 Chr 33:12...**

Just as much as Asa is considered one of the best kings, Manasseh is considered the worst.

And believe it or not, Manasseh is about to put Asa to shame.

2 Chr 33:12 Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and HUMBLED HIMSELF GREATLY before the God of his fathers,

This is how we should respond when we're afflicted.

There are many wonderful examples of repentance in Scripture:

- David after he was confronted by Nathan
- The people of Nineveh when they repented under Jonah's preaching
- The Prodigal Son when he returned to his father
- The thief on the cross when he confessed Jesus as Lord

But I don't think any of them are as dramatic as Manasseh's repentance, b/c I don't think any of these people approached his wickedness.

Look at **verse 13** to see how the Lord responds...

13 [Manasseh] prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

The end of **verse 13** says **Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.** This is an OT way to refer to saved people! We're going to see Manasseh in heaven someday!

After we become Christians, we're children of God, so we can recognize Him as our Father.

Since God becomes a Father to us, we tend to see God the Father the way we see our earthly father, or in other words, we think our Heavenly Father is like our earthly father.

If you had a cruel earthly father, then you might think your Heavenly Father is the same. If your earthly father was unforgiving, then when you think of repenting and turning toward God, you might expect Him to respond angrily, saying something, "You did all these terrible things and now you need to pay for all of them before I even think of forgiving you or hearing your prayers again. You're looking at years and years of penance for your sins."

But that's not the God of the Bible:

- The NT account that makes this clear is the Story of the Prodigal son. The son returned to the father, and the father immediately received him.
- The OT account that makes this clear is right here w/ Manasseh.

Manasseh humbled himself, repented, and God received him despite all the terrible things he had done.

Now here's a good question you should ask...

"How do we know Manasseh is really repentant? It's easy to sound repentant, but it's another thing to actually be repentant."

That's completely true!

So how do we know if repentance is genuine?

This brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: GENUINE REPENTANCE BEARS FRUIT

John the Baptist knew how to encourage repentance. It didn't matter who he was speaking to – heathens, tax collectors, prostitutes, or the religious leaders – he had the same message for all of them...

Matt 3:8 and **Luke 3:8** he said, “**Bear fruits worth of repentance.**”

These words tell us something about repentance that we don't often consider. I would go so far as to say these words reveal WHY many people fail when it comes to repentance: our repentance must produce fruit.

When I say the word, “repent,” my suspicion is the first thing that comes to mind is stopping. That's good, but that's only half of what it means to repent. The other half is we also have to start something.

In Scripture this is known as:

- Putting off and putting on...
- Severing and replacing...

The clearest teaching on this is **Eph 4**. Please mark your spot in **2 Chr 33** and turn there...

Let's say some of us struggle w/ lying. Look at **verse 25** to see how to repent of this sin...

- **25 Therefore, putting away lying** – so here's what you repent of:
 - Here's what you stop...
 - Here's what you put off...
- Then it says **Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor.** Here's the fruit you produce:
 - This is what you start...
 - This is what you put on...

So if you have a problem w/ lying, it's not enough to simply stop lying: you have to make a conscious effort to start telling the truth. This probably means concentrating on your speech and making sure what you say is accurate.

Next, let's say you struggle w/ stealing. Look at **verse 28**...

- **Let him who stole steal no longer** – this is what you repent of. This is what you stop or put off...
- Then it says **but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.**
 - This is the fruit that's produced:

- This is what you start or put on.

Let's say you have a problem w/ the way you talk. Look at **verse 29**...

- **Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth** – this is what you repent of, stop, put off...
- Then it says **but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.**
 - This is the fruit to produce. This is what you start or put on.
 - It's not enough to simply stop saying unwholesome things. You must consciously speak words that edify and build up.

Finally skip to verse **31** where Paul sums it up:

- **Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice** – repent of all this:
 - Stop all this...
 - Put off all this...
- **32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.** This is what we start, put on, and replace the sins of verse 31 with. If someone has genuinely repented of the sins in **verse 31**, they'll produce the fruit of **verse 32**.

You probably noticed the verses are presented as opposites or opposing pairs:

- Whatever you repent of, you produce the opposite as fruit.
- If there's a sin in your life that's not covered in the verses we discussed, then think about the opposite of that sin. More than likely that's the fruit you need to produce if you want to repent of that sin.

We're looking at one of the main reasons people say, "*I stopped doing this. Why do I keep struggling?*"

The question is:

- *Okay, you stopped, but what did you start doing?*
- *What did you replace that sin with?*
- *What fruit accompanied your repentance?*

To be practical:

- *You stopped going to bars, but what did you start doing instead?*
- *You stopped yelling at your kids, but what did you start saying to them instead?*
- *You stopped watching things you shouldn't, but did you start reading your Bible more?*
- *You tried to stop coveting, but did you start giving?*

So let me give you an encouragement...

When there's sin in your life, make sure your prayers are two-fold:

- *Father, what do you want me to change?*
- *What do you want me to stop doing?*

- *What should I repent of?*

But then also pray:

- *What do you want me to start doing?*
- *What do you want me to replace that sin with?*
- *What fruit do you want to see accompanying my repentance?*

With this in mind, go ahead and turn back to **2 Chr 33**...

So here's the question...

- Was Manasseh really repentant?
- Did he put off and put on?

Look at **verse 14**...

2 Chr 33:14 After this he built a wall outside the City of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate; and *it* enclosed Ophel, and he raised it to a very great height. Then he put military captains in all the fortified cities of Judah. **15** (Here's where it gets good...listen to what he put off) He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem; and he cast *them* out of the city. (Now look what he put on...) **16** 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.

Along with Zacchaeus, Manasseh is probably the best example in all of Scripture of:

- Repentance that bears fruit.
- Stopping and starting.
- Putting off and putting on.

I don't think it's too much to say that as much effort as he previously put toward wickedness, after his repentance he put as much effort toward pleasing and serving God.

Look at **verse 17**...

2 Chr 33:17 Nevertheless the people still sacrificed on the high places, *but* only to the LORD their God.

The verse starts w/ the word **Nevertheless** or some Bibles say **However**, which tells us everything isn't perfect!

This brings us to Lesson 3, and it will have 3 parts...

LESSON 3: FORGIVENESS DOESN'T MEAN NO CONSEQUENCES (PART I) WE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO UNDO WHAT WE DID.

Back in **verse 13** it says God heard Manasseh's prayer and restored him as king. That was very gracious of God, and it would be easy to say, "Wow, I can't believe it; there must be no consequences!"

There were definitely consequences, and it's important to keep this in mind, b/c sometimes we equate forgiveness w/ the absence of consequences...but the church is FILLED w/ people who are forgiven, but still live w/ the consequences of some of their actions.

Manasseh is a good example, b/c there were definitely consequences...

Look back at **verse 17**. Ironically, the **high places** are mentioned again. Yes, they're being used for God, but you can tell this still isn't a good thing. The people were supposed to worship at the temple, not at these manmade inventions. They were worshipping God, but not the way He commanded.

No matter how sincerely Manasseh repented, and no matter how hard he worked to remove the sin he introduced, he couldn't get rid of all of it. This must've been a constant reminder to him of what he'd done.

The next part of Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: FORGIVENESS DOESN'T MEAN NO CONSEQUENCES (PART II) FOR OTHERS.

God is repetitive when He wants to make sure we don't miss something, and twice we're told Manasseh led Judah to act worse than the Canaanites whom God drove out of the land,

- **2 But he did evil in the sight of the LORD, ACCORDING TO THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE NATIONS WHOM THE LORD HAD CAST OUT BEFORE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.**
- **9 So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do MORE EVIL THAN THE NATIONS WHOM THE LORD HAD DESTROYED BEFORE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.**

If God drove the Canaanites out of the land for the way they acted, then what would we expect God to do w/ the Jews if they acted WORSE than them? Drive them out too...and that's what He did! Within 50 years God used Babylon to conquer the Jews and bring them into exile.

And listen to this...

Manasseh is actually singled out as THE REASON God took Judah into exile:

- **2 Kings 24:3 Surely at the commandment of the LORD [the Babylonians] came...to remove [Judah] from [God's] sight BECAUSE OF THE SINS OF MANASSEH, ACCORDING TO ALL THAT HE HAD DONE.**
- **Jer 15:4 God said, "I will hand Judah over to [Babylon]...BECAUSE OF MANASSEH THE SON OF HEZEKIAH, king of Judah, FOR WHAT HE DID in Jerusalem.**

The people of Judah suffered terribly b/c of Manasseh's sins, and you could look at this and say, "Manasseh repented, so why was Judah punished?"

Our sins have consequences for others...EVEN IF we repent and are forgiven.

This is why there's such a selfishness to sinning, b/c we're doing something that we know will cause others to suffer too.

Sin never affects just the sinner.

The last part of Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: FORGIVENESS DOESN'T MEAN NO CONSEQUENCES (PART III) OUR KIDS MIGHT CARRY ON OUR SINS.

Manasseh's son was **Amon**. Look at **verse 21**...

2 Chr 33:21 Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. 22 But he did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done; for Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made, and served them. 23 And he did not humble himself before the LORD, as his father Manasseh had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more.

Amon became king after his father, Manasseh. He learned from his father and was already so entrenched in his own wickedness that his father's repentance had little effect on him.

Even though Manasseh repented, notice that twice Amon's wickedness is attributed to his father. It says [**Amon**] **did evil in the sight of the LORD, AS HIS FATHER MANASSEH HAD DONE; for Amon sacrificed to all the carved images WHICH HIS FATHER MANASSEH HAD MADE**

The biggest casualty of Manasseh's wickedness was his son, Amon. If Manasseh would've been alive to see his son reign, he would've felt like his father, Hezekiah, would've felt if he had been alive to see Manasseh reign.

One of the ironies of Manasseh's life is this: he reversed the great things his father, Hezekiah, did. Then he had a son, who acted like him and reversed the great things he did at the end of his life.

There are a lot of great reasons NOT to sin, and one of the greatest is so we don't have to see our sins show up in our children.

Although this chapter seems tragic and challenging, it's also one of the most encouraging in all of Scripture, and this brings us to Lesson 4...

LESSON 4: MANASSEH SHOWS GOD'S MERCY KNOWS NO BOUNDS.

While some people have addictions to alcohol, anger, pornography, or drugs, Manasseh literally seemed addicted to evil. You'd be hard-pressed to find anyone in Scripture who could compete w/ his wickedness.

He seemed to hate God. He's almost a satanic figure through the first half of the chapter. It wasn't enough for him to sin, he had to sin the worst ways imaginable. Some people are rebellious, but Manasseh lived like his greatest desire each day was to carry out his own personal vendetta against God.

His life was evil and disturbing. BUT...

- As unbelievable as Manasseh's actions are in these verses, God's actions are even more unbelievable.
- We marvel at what Manasseh did, but we must marvel even more at what God did in forgiving Him.

Think of it like this:

- Manasseh's wickedness is unimaginable, but God's mercy is more unimaginable.
- As great as Manasseh's evil was, God's grace is even greater.

If only people who committed a certain amount of sin could be forgiven that would teach something terrible: it would teach there's a limit to Christ's sacrifice.

Let me get you to think about something...

There are no wasted words in Scripture. Whenever God takes up some of the precious space, there's a reason.

So why did God take up so much room describing Manasseh's wickedness?

- Why not just one verse saying, "**He was really, really evil.**"
- Why go into so much detail?

So we can see what God is willing to forgive.

If it simply said, "Manasseh was evil," we'd be left to wonder how much God forgave. But with all this detail, you don't have to wonder how much God will forgive. You can see it with your own eyes!

Let me give you an illustration...

Katie's never really been into expensive jewelry...which is why I married her...j/k.

Even though I've never taken Katie to any fancy jewelry stores, I know what they do...

They take out the diamonds and lay them on a black velvet background.

Why do they do that? It brings out the beauty of the diamonds.

Do you see how God did that in this account?

Manasseh's life is the black velvet background that brings out the beauty of God's grace and mercy:

- If God forgave someone like Noah, Daniel, or Samuel, that wouldn't be very meaningful, would it?
- But we can really appreciate the greatness of God's grace and mercy when it's against the backdrop of a life like Manasseh's.

We see nobody, not even a Manasseh is beyond being forgiven.

Let me ask you this...

If Manasseh couldn't be forgiven:

- What would that say about God?
- What would that say about Christ's sacrifice?

Something terrible!

But as encouraging as this account is, it also carries a heavy burden, and the burden is this...

We're left w/o excuse!

This account prevents you from saying:

- *"God could never forgive me."*
- *"I have done too much for God to ever be merciful to me."*
- *"God could never love me after what I've done."*

When God can forgive a man like Manasseh, we know He can forgive people like us.

And what did Manasseh do to be forgiven? He repented. Genuine, sincere repentance that produced fruit.

If you do that you see that nobody – not even a Manasseh – is beyond being forgiven.

Let's pray.