

Sermon on **2 Chronicles 33:1-6, 10-18** – 4th Sunday after Pentecost
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church – 7.7.19 – Pastor Nate Scharf

Turn and Trust!

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshipped them. He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "My name will remain in Jerusalem forever." In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his children 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...The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. So the LORD brought against them 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. In his distress he sought the favor 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. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God. Afterward he rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David, west of the Gihon spring in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate and encircling the hill of Ophel; he also made it much higher. He stationed military commanders in all the fortified cities in Judah. He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the LORD, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill in Jerusalem; and he threw them out of the city. Then he restored the altar of the LORD and sacrificed fellowship offerings and thank offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel. The people however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the LORD their God. The other events of Manasseh's reign, including his prayer to his God and the words the seers spoke to him in the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, are written in the annals of the kings of Israel. (NIV 2011).

Are you a good influence? Was King Hezekiah a good dad? Hezekiah followed the LORD, made great reforms and wanted the people to worship only the LORD and make their sacrifices to him. His son, Manasseh, must have heard and learned something from him, but Manasseh did not follow the LORD, in fact he led the people of Judah horribly astray. It was spiritually worse in Judah than it had been when the ungodly and vile nations controlled that land. And Manasseh reigned 55 years!

How do we feel when the children of our church stray or our own children and grandchildren? Disappointed? Guilt-ridden? Worried? I should have done this differently. I should have said "no" to this and "yes" to that. Well, I blame those people, or that school, the church, or their friends, maybe even God, maybe ourselves - I should have spent more time. I should have...

Is this just Manasseh though? Ultimately, he was responsible for his own soul. But Hezekiah wasn't innocent either. Towards the end of his life King Hezekiah became rich and proud, even pursuing a relationship with the country of Babylon, even greed. What did Manasseh learn from his dad and his actions? What about you? What decisions have you

made along the way, or concessions and compromises to your faith in the pursuit of greed? What example did you set for friends, spouse, co-workers, children? We too seek what we want and ignore God's, "Thou shalt not." Manasseh spared no expense in his endless sinful pursuit. How many people did he lead astray? How many people lost their souls following his evil path? How many people ended up in hell, and humanly speaking, he was the trailblazer.

Left to himself Manasseh was on a bullet train to eternal separation from God in the fires of hell. Left to ourselves, sadly it's the same. We may not commit the atrocities that a Manasseh or a Hitler or another awful example (too many out there) commit outwardly. But our sinful heart daily tries to take us away from the LORD whether by bold sin or simply giving in in weakness or apathy and lead others away by our example. Left to himself. Left to ourselves. What a sad plight!

What about the LORD? Is God a good dad? We sin and no lightning strikes us, and no one catches us. We may feel we got away with it. When trouble comes and we deserved it because we brought it on ourselves, we may feel God hates us. When trouble comes and we don't feel we deserve it, we may feel God doesn't even know or care about us. We ask God for direct signs and so often he's silent. Today God lets us see how much he cares, even about the worst people.

Manasseh ignored the good in his Father's example. Manasseh ignored his perfect Heavenly Father's calls to him and the people through his prophets. For years this went on. *"The LORD God spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. So the LORD brought against them 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."* Served him right. Actually, he deserved much worse, didn't he?

Manasseh probably thought it was the worst day of his life when the commander of the army of Assyria put a hook through his nose, like a hook securely set in a Musky's mouth – where they can't get away or throw it though they might thrash and writhe. The commander put bronze shackles on Manasseh and led him to Babylon, a fish in the net. How embarrassing for this self-assured "nothing can stop me, not even God" king! The joyride was over. God sent reality. He was headed straight for hell, so God gave him a small taste of it. It was no party. But God would reel in Manasseh.

God in his mercy deals with us. Sometimes he lets us suffer some of the earthly consequences of our sin so we learn and see. Whether it is a spanking or time out from mom or dad or it's hurt and failed relationships and embarrassment to even time in jail or prison. God cares enough to curb us. And he uses crosses which bring with them suffering or pain or depression which force us to deny ourselves, turn from ourselves or the trap of trying to make this place heaven on earth. He turns us back to himself in sorrow over ourselves, our sinful state and looking to the only Savior.

Jesus came to pay the punishment of our sin. Jesus suffered hell so we will escape it. On the cross he knew the punishment we should have known. He paid for all sin and sinners, even this Manasseh, even Hezekiah's pride, even you and me. His love didn't stop there. He died in our place and then rose from the grave. He made proofs of his resurrection to all who doubted. Then he ascended and in love and mercy and godly wisdom he rules all things for our good – even using crosses and trials to discipline us, to make us wiser, to show us our

dependence on him and his love and forgiveness, so that we are useful to him and to our fellow mankind. Just look at Manasseh.

“In his distress he (Manasseh) sought the favor 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. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.” Sometimes it takes a while for a kid to learn a lesson. It took Manasseh decades, but God in his mercy taught him. He had been extremely humbled already by the looks of it, but God cares about the heart most of all. God did his work on Manasseh’s heart and he was humbled. He turned and trusted *“the LORD his God.”* Never stop praying for your leaders, for your family members who have gone astray, for yourselves and for those God may use you to reach, that we all **Turn and Trust**.

Forgiven people get to work. *“Afterward he rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David, west of the Gihon spring in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate and encircling the hill of Ophel; he also made it much higher. He stationed military commanders in all the fortified cities in Judah.”* God had brought Manasseh to **turn and trust**. He quit wasting so much time with devising new ways to sin and carrying it out. He spent time doing what a godly king should do – being concerned about the people, the palace and most importantly the place of worship of the true God. He built up the walls and went about securing the kingdom.

“He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the LORD, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem; and he threw them out of the city. Then he restored the altar of the LORD and sacrificed fellowship offerings and thank offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel. The people, however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the LORD their God.” God brought Manasseh to **turn and trust**. He realized who the true God is and trusted in him. He got rid of all that would lead him astray and what would lead the people astray. This must have been unbelievable to the people in Judah, but God worked through it and brought the people to **turn and trust** as well.

God in his mercy brings you to **turn** from your sin and sinfulness, from the things that lead you astray and waste so much time in pursuit of this world’s lies and false hopes. He **turns** you to himself and gives you faith that **trusts** in him alone. And there you find contentment, forgiveness and freedom. Freedom is not to dive headfirst into the slavery of sin and its control and devastation. No this freedom is to realize our relationship that God has forged with us and that we have heaven as our home so we can serve while here. We can care about others, forgive them, dedicate ourselves to our different callings in this life, to the relationships God has given us, to the work he’s given our hands and minds to do, and just simply to have joy in service and peace at all times.

In heaven we will have rest and such great joy that Luther once said, “On the Last Day we shall accuse and reprove ourselves because of our impatience and say: If I were still living my former life on earth, I would not refuse to suffer a thousand deaths and crosses. But now is the time to arouse our hearts to patience and obedience.” (What Luther Says 1454). God grants us eyes to see it, ears to hear it from his Word, and hearts that daily **turn and trust in Him**. God did it for a sinner like Manasseh. God has done it for sinners like us. Amen.