

The Way of the Prodigal Son

Sermon March 27, 2022

Scripture reading: 2 Chronicles 33:1-20

Golden verse: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."* John 3:16

The title of this sermon is "The Way of the Prodigal Son". However, I did not read the well-known story from the New Testament. The Bible describes many journeys of many sons. Our main character, King Manasseh, was a prodigal son as well. His life shows many similarities with the prodigal son from Jesus's story. We just heard about Manasseh's life from birth to death, not from the perspective of the historian, but from the perspective of God.

It is very important to see things with God's eyes, because we humans try to see only the nice things in our lives, but God can see everything. So, let's see Manasseh and ourselves with God's eyes today.

What kind of man was Manasseh? His father was King Hezekiah, one of the most godly people in the Old Testament. He was a reformer like Jean Calvin or Martin Luther or John Knox in the life of Christianity. He carried out a great religious reform when the faith of the gods of the ancestors was quite mixed with the faith of the gods of the surrounding pagans. He saved the original five books of Moses, which are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These are the first five books of the Old Testament. Manasseh's father, King Hezekiah, was God's brave warrior. He raised his son, Manasseh, in the knowledge and in the fear of God. However, it was later revealed that piety and godliness are not things that can be inherited like other goods of life.

Often, we can hear people gladly refer with a great pride to how many faithful Christians there were amongst their ancestors, with the hope that God would count that in their favour.

- In my family, there were many priests or ministers, or,
- My father was a minister and a missionary in Africa, or
- Both my parents and grandparents were elders in this church.

Some people are thinking that, if they had faithful ancestors, then they have priority in the presence of God, and they don't have to have a living faith, just because their forefathers were believers.

Unfortunately, I have seen children of very believing parents and grandparents who have drifted very far away from God. So was Manasseh. His father was a very faithful man.

But about Manasseh, the Bible says that *“He did evil in the eyes of the LORD”* 2 Chronicles 33:2. When the godly father barely closed his eyes, the son had already deviated from the path his father had set him on. The example of his life had an impact on all who looked up to him or depended on him. He slowly ruined the entire work of his God-fearing father.

How sad it is that even those whose parents were so faithful to the Lord, and who raised their children with prayer, can turn their backs on God. They can receive the best education, and can be raised in and around the church, but they can turn away from God, and can turn into unbelievers. Maybe they would say they are believers because they believe in God, but their actions show that they don't care about God.

Manasseh maybe said about himself that he was still a believer, and maybe people who saw his actions would say about him that he was a great person, but it is more important how God saw his life.

Maybe it was not difficult for him to do well in front of people. I can imagine that Manasseh was a good diplomat, an educated and talented man, a life artist, but in the eyes of God he failed, because *“He did evil in the eyes of the LORD”* 2 Chronicles 33:2.

People might see and say that we are excellent persons, blameless and kind-hearted. They may see our real great qualities and they would like us, praise us and appreciate us. It is important what people say about us, but in the presence of God and at His judgement seat, it won't matter what people said about us. It will only matter what God says about us.

Dear beloved, we all try to do our very best. We make a real strong effort to act as God's faithful children, but often we, too, fail. We are constantly under huge pressure. We have to prove that we are faithful children of God. People are watching us constantly. God, also, is constantly watching how we behave: in the morning, in the evening, at home, on the street, at work, when we are alone in a room or outside in nature, and when we are surrounded by people. We took life-exams about subjects such as goodness, patience, fidelity, peace, gentleness, love, temper and actions. Praise the Lord when we succeed, but oh how often we fail.

Spiritually, we are not blind. We know when we do something wrong, but consciously or subconsciously we say or do wrong things, like God does not exist.

God, often, is warning me and warning us, as He was warning Manasseh. The question is: am I listening? Are we listening to God when He talks to us?

Our Heavenly Father always wants to warn us when we are tempted to shift from the narrow road. This is always His first rescue attempt. He talks to us in a gentle way, then maybe He has to raise His voice or He has to shout to us. Then He might use different special ways to talk to us. He spoke to Moses from a burning bush. He talked to Martin Luther in a shocking way when lightning struck his friend as they were walking together through the woods.

God can talk to us in many ways. Maybe he calls you through a friend to come to the church, which is open now after a long pandemic. God does everything to save you and me.

God did not let Manasseh sink and disconnect from Him. God was fighting for Manasseh.

Christ Jesus was fighting on the cross for you and me to save us. Let's take a look at Calvary, where Jesus suffered so miserably on the cross, where His holy blood flowed into the dust of the earth. Jesus has fought so bloodily for your life, and for my life. He wanted to save us, to make us happy, and to adopt us as children of God.

We read here that the LORD talked to Manasseh, but he did not pay attention to the LORD. This is such a sad situation when God wants to talk to us and we don't pay attention and listen to our caring Heavenly Father.

Manasseh did not listen to God; for this, the LORD did something unexpected: The LORD brought the king of Assyria against Manasseh and carried him to Babylon. He was locked down in a dungeon as a prisoner.

It looks like it could have been written over the door of his dungeon that:

- this is King Manasseh who rejected God and remained disobedient, or
- this is Manasseh whom God has chosen and loved but he did not choose God and did not care about God's love.

We have to learn that God cannot be ignored. If we ignore Him, He will come against us and we might feel punished because of not listening.

Please reconsider that Jesus was hanging, abandoned and crucified on the cross, for your sin and my sin. No matter where we are right now, or how far we drifted from God, caring only about our daily life, no matter how much evil a person committed before God, God has chosen to love us, to love you and me. He is looking at us through the cross of Jesus, through His sacrifice, and God is not judging you and me anymore. Because of Jesus, you are not rejected but you are loved. And now God is

calling you and me and our children, who we raised in faith, to come back to Him, to listen to Him and to love Him, obeying His guidance. He is not judging us, but He is offering His grace. When God lays His heavy hands on people's shoulders, it is not a sign that God has rejected them, but it is a sign that God is searching for them. They did not listen to God's soft and gentle words and now they have to face God's harsher words in actions. Every judgment of God is for salvation. Every problem we might experience might be a great reminder: God is searching for you because God does not want to lose you. He wants you to come back to Him. God wants to embrace you with love. God wants to be your Heavenly Father.

As Jesus said: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"* Matthew 11:28. God wants to shower you with His grace.

Sometimes, for our own benefit, God wants to break our pride and our resistance, or He forces us on our knees before Him. God does all these things out of His infinite love so that He would not lose us; we would not perish but return to Him.

In 2 Chronicles, we read something very interesting about Manasseh. *"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 books of the kings of Israel. His prayer and how God was moved by his entreaty... are written in the records"* 2 Chronicles 33:18-19.

But whether God's judgment will be a blessing in someone's life or he will fall apart, being destroyed, depends on how the person responds to it. The grace of God won in the prison of Manasseh. Right there, under the weight of the punishments that fell upon him, he prayed from the bottom of his heart, and God was listening to those prayers.

He prayed the prayers of supplication, of repentance and apology, as we read: *"And when he was in great tribulation, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself utterly to his fathers"* 2 Chronicles 33:12. Before God. So he humbled himself before God.

I met people who repented from all that they had corrupted, and became a caring, loving, godly person, a blessed father of their family. This is the miracle of grace.

God offers us the same grace today. Everyone should embrace this gift. Nobody is rejected because of his or her past. God doesn't ask who you were. We have no advantage nor disadvantage because of our ancestors. It doesn't matter who you were, just who you are now. If you now humble yourself before God, then you can come to God with the awareness of sin and the need for forgiveness. God is here to

accept you and to forgive you – and me. The great good news for us in this story is that even Manasseh received grace to start again with the gracious God.

It's a great opportunity to start over. Jesus paid our ransom. That is why we can all come back to God. That is why there is a new life for us too.

At this moment, the eye of God is upon you. Have you decided to surrender to Jesus for the grace of forgiveness and a new beginning? If so, testify of it here, now, to the words of this old Hungarian song:

*Broken and empty I give myself to Him,
For Him to recreate me, to fill the gap in me.
All my worries, bitterness, I give it to the Lord.
He bears all my burdens,
He wipes away my grief and sin,
He will make me free.*

Amen