

Series: King of Kings  
**Manasseh, the Wicked King**

Second Kings 20:1-9

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, August 24, 2025

Charlotte: Good morning. “Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-five years. His mother’s name was Hepzibah. 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 destroyed, and he also erected altars to Baal and made an Ashera pole, as Ahab, King of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts, and he worshipped them. He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, ‘In Jerusalem I will put my name,’ and in the two courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to the starry hosts. He even sacrificed his own son in the fire. He practiced divination, he sought omens, and he consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger. He took the carved Ashera poll he had made and put it in the temple, of which the Lord had said to David and to his son Solomon, ‘In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever. I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land that I gave their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them, and will keep the whole law that my servant Moses gave them,’ but the people did not listen. Manasseh led them astray so that they did more evil than the nations that the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites,” the word of the Lord.

Paul: Thanks, Charlotte. Does anyone have some fun things they wanted to do when they were a kid growing up? If you want, you can just shout it out, if you feel like sharing. I heard someone. “Ice cream truck driver.” That is amazing. Who is upset when they see the ice cream truck driver? Like, that is phenomenal, and I wish I had that thought of that. That is great, and I heard someone say “astronaut” over here. Any others? No, all right, we are all boring people. That is fine. I wanted to be a cowboy, and I became a pastor, which is like the same but different, and yeah, as we jump into today, I actually have two announcements before we get going with today’s message, and here is the thing. I know oftentimes when announcements come up, and the pastor says, “Hey, I need you to listen because we have a couple of announcements,” that is the point where, like, “Oh, I am going to see if my fantasy football team is doing all right,” and that is where we check in on other things going on in the world, but I really want you to listen to these two things that I am about to say.

The first is many of you, like we just talked about, are back to school, and that means fall is starting, which means we are kicking off Wednesdays at Waterstone starting on September 17. Wednesdays at Waterstone is back this year, and we are so excited for it. How many of you have done a class on Wednesdays at Waterstone or in small groups? Okay, a lot of people in the room. It is a great night, a great opportunity for you to make connections with other people. If you have not done the Wednesdays at Waterstone, it basically looks like this. At 5:45 p.m. we open the doors, we feed you salad and pizza, so if you are coming from picking up your kids from school or practice, if you have just gotten off work, we want to make sure you have something to eat, and so you can come here and eat. There are tables. We

gather together in community, and then we split off, and we do different classes, and we have three classes available to you this year, and I am really excited about all three of them.

The first is financial peace university, where this class is designed to help you find financial freedom through Biblical principles. We have not offered this class in about five years or so. It was actually before Covid the last time we offered this class, and here is what you need to know. People who have taken this class said that they have gotten out of credit card debt, they have gotten out of student loan debt, and they have been able to buy houses just based on some of the principles from this class, so we believe in this class so much actually that the elders decided that they were going to pay for the class, and so we actually put a couple of thousand dollars down to get a site license, so that you can have free access to all of the material that is available just by signing up in this class. So, if you sign up for financial peace, all you have to pay for is childcare or pizza if you need it. The class itself, which is usually like seventy-five to a hundred dollars, is absolutely free for you, so we really want you to sign up for that class.

We also have another class on Wednesday nights that is called divorce care, and here at Waterstone, we know that different people have been through seasons of divorce, and we are not a church that wants to shame people for those seasons, but come alongside them and offer hope and healing, and so that class will be offered on Wednesday nights as well. It will be a great space for you to walk alongside other people who have been on that journey. We will have a couple of people who are there to help facilitate a conversation around hope and healing, and then finally, the class I will be teaching is called “A Kingdom like No Other,” and y’all I am so excited for this fall, because we are going to be preaching. Did I just say you all? Man, the Texas just came out. That is how excited I am about this fall. I just reverted back to Texas. Like it took me a couple of seconds to catch that. I am so sorry for those of you who are offended, like, “This church is not for me,” A Kingdom like No Other. This fall, we are going to be preaching through Jesus’ teaching from the Sermon on the Mount, and it is the most important teaching Jesus ever gave. When we say we want to become like Jesus and live for others, this is how we do that, how we live out that mission, so this series is going to be a vision series for our church, and then the class on Wednesday night is going to be supplemental to that. So small groups, if you are in a small group, are going to be following along with the sermon series, and then on Wednesday nights, we are going to be doing a deeper dive into the Sermon on the Mount together in community, and so it will not just be like me regurgitating everything I just preached on Sunday. So, you do not have to worry about that, but we are going to do some great conversation, diving into Jesus’ most important teaching.

So, here is what you need to know. This is the reason we have done Wednesdays at Waterstone in the past. Sometimes if you are new to a church, showing up at a person’s house for a small group can feel a little intimidating. You do not know the people. You do not know what you are walking into. You have already been to church, and I know that because you are here right now, and so you can come back on Wednesday, and it does not have to feel awkward. It does not have to feel new, and so we would love for you to join us, sign up for a class, and here is the last thing, and this is a downer, but this might be the last Wednesdays at Waterstone we offer for a while, so if you haven’t tried it, or if you want to try it, this might be the last chance you have for a little bit, so I do not say that to put a downer, but yeah, this might be the last one for a little while, and so sign up, join us. It is going to be an awesome, awesome fall. It starts September 17, ends November 12. It is ten weeks. You can commit to that. So that is that announcement.

The last thing we want to do before we dive into the message, and I promise my sermon is shorter than my announcements today. We are going to take a moment and pray for kids and teachers and parents who went back to school this week and last week. So, we know a lot of you have been adjusting schedules and routines and the earlier wake up times and trying to get kids to go to bed earlier, and teachers, you are trying to figure out lesson plans and all the back-to-school activities that you have to orchestrate and get on top of, and we just know it is a little bit of a chaos time, but it is a time of opportunity and excitement, and then there are also some added stresses, and so we just want to take a moment to pray.

I would like to do this a little bit differently this year. We always try to pray for students and for teachers. I am actually going to ask if you are a student, so maybe you are a little kid, and your backpack is bigger than you, or maybe you are a high school kid that is going back and trying to navigate what it means to be in high school and follow Jesus. If you are a teacher, or if you are a parent who just became an empty nester, maybe all your kids are gone, and it is a new season for you, we want to pray for you this morning. So, I am actually going to ask if you are in one of those categories, teacher, student, parent, or empty nester, that you actually stand up, and that the people around you are going to reach out, not in a weird way. They are just going to extend hands to pray for you, and we are going to lift you up now. So, all right, students are already up, so if you are in the back, and you're like, "I don't know if I want to stand up," you can. You do not have to be nervous about that. Look at how many families and kids we've got going back to school and teachers, and that is awesome. Love that. Let's pray, pray over that.

Heavenly Father, God, we come before you, and we know that for many families, this week just felt like a whirlwind. It felt like a tornado came through our home as we adjusted to new schedules and new routines and making sure everybody got where they needed to go. God, we know students are meeting new teachers and new friends. Some are starting new schools. God, we know that there are parents in this room who for the first time in their lives do not have kids at home anymore for a very long time, and God, we know that there are teachers in the room as well, and we are so grateful for our teachers, Lord, the people who are committed to investing in the next generation, who are standing in the gap between the home and things that are going on in school, the ways that they are discipling their students and pouring into them, the way that they are representing the faith in the classroom. God, we just pray over all of those situations. God, we know that as we go into this school year, that you go before us. God, we pray that you would use us as we engage with those around us. You have given us these spheres of influence, these classrooms, these teams, these friends, and so we just pray that we would be able to use our gifts and our talents and our personalities to reach those around us with the gospel. God, we give this year to you. We are thankful for the opportunity ahead, and we pray for sleep for those who are a little bit deprived this morning, and it is in Christ's name we pray, amen.

All right, you guys can have a seat. Thank you for doing that. All right, so today we are wrapping up our King of Kings series. All summer long we have been in the King of Kings series, and we have been looking at different kings of the Old Testament, and we have been walking through their stories and examining this question, this idea that the king of your heart will dictate the direction of your life. The king of your heart will dictate the direction of your life, and what we have seen throughout this series is that different kings at different points placed something other than God as king of their life, and it dictated the direction of their life, and it took them down different paths that maybe they did not expect or that they

did not intend to go down, but because God was not placed on the throne of their life, it had disastrous consequences for them.

As we come to the close of the series, we are actually going to look at a king who is in many ways the most evil king in the entire history of the Jewish or Israelite kingdom, and this king, Manasseh, is someone who, when you look at his heart, and when you examine the actions of his life, it is hard to name another king, and there were a lot of bad kings in Israel's history. It is hard to name a king who is more evil than Manasseh, and so it might feel a little bit like a downer to end the series on Manasseh's life, but there is a really important thing that takes place in Manasseh's life that is the reason we want to land this series with his story.

One of the things that we have seen as we have looked at different kings is that this question, "Who is the king of your heart?" impacts everything, and many of us can say that Jesus is king of our heart or that God is king of our heart, and we can proclaim that with our lips, but when it comes to how we actually live our lives, it can feel like there is a false narrative at play, and that is something that we see a little bit in Manasseh's story, because we can say that we believe Jesus is king in our hearts, but then when it comes down to it, when we actually examine our lives, and we look at, "Who do I actually trust? Where am I placing my hope? Who defines my identity?" These are all things that flow out, implications that flow out of this idea of who is king of your heart, and so as we wrap up the series today, we are going to examine this question, "Who is king in your heart?" when I tell you about Manasseh, and we are about to read some of his story, and we are going to walk through his life, it is so easy to look at his story and to think, "Man, I do not think there is a person that is more evil in scripture," and honestly, and you can look at him, and you can think he is so far gone, like he is just so evil. He is so far gone.

I wonder if you have ever come to a point in your life where you have looked at someone else's life, or maybe you have seen something in headlines, a celebrity or a politician, and they just, like their whole life fell apart. They blew and imploded themselves, and you look at their story, and you think, "Man, they are just too far gone. There is nothing that can redeem this situation or this person." You have probably seen that. I often feel that when I see Dallas Cowboys headlines as a Cowboys fan, and it is just like, "Man, there, Jerry Jones is too far gone. There is no hope for us again this year, and they stink," and we are not going to go into a lot of detail on that, because this is about Jesus, not Jerry Jones, but we can feel this feeling of too far gone when we look at others. Sometimes it hits closer to home, though, right? You might have a family member or close friend that you look at their life, and they are just making choice after choice after choice that just seems to be unwise, that seems to be foolish, and it seems like they are blowing up their life, and you have tried to help them over the years. You have tried to bring them back. You have tried to help them understand the error of their ways. You keep throwing out the lifeline when they are drowning, and they just will not take it, and you get to the point where you just think, "They are too far gone. Like, I don't know what else I could do. I do not know what else could save them."

Sometimes it hits even closer to home than that, because we can feel that way about ourselves, and we can think about our past. We can think about the things that we have done, the things that have happened to us, the choices we have made, and we can think, "I have come to church, and they sing the songs about grace, and I believe God is gracious, I believe God is kind, and I am sure that is true for everyone else in the room, but I am not sure if it is true for me," and we can live in this place of tension,

of understanding God's goodness, but thinking, "I might be too far gone because of the sin in my life, because of the things that I struggle with, because of the choices that I have made," and that is what we see in the story and the life of Manasseh, is someone that looks like they are too far gone. They have made too many bad choices. They have gone too far.

Manasseh's story starts in chapter 21, verse one of Second Kings, and so if you want to follow along in your Bibles, you can turn there, but this is how his story starts: "Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king." All right, time out for a second. Did anyone want to be president when they were a kid? Was that the job that you wanted, like we talked about earlier? Let's say you were like in a classroom, and you were a sixth grader. You were like, "I want to be president someday." How many teachers would be like, "You know what? Done. We are going to do that. We are going to make you the ruler of the free world at twelve years old," but that was Manasseh's story. He started out right away as a child, ruling the throne in Judah. At twelve years old he came to the throne, and he reigned in Jerusalem for 55 years, a long time. This is the longest reign of any king in Judah's history, and it tells us his mother's name, and then it says this: "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites." What this is saying, this is really important that we understand this idea, is that if you go back to the very beginning of this series, we talked through the story in Judges, that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. They did what they thought was right, to the neglect of what God had said was right. That is Manasseh as he is doing evil in the eyes of the Lord. Everything he is doing is about what he wants to do, to the neglect of what God has commanded him to do, and he is so evil, in fact, that he is compared to the nations that preceded Israel in the Promised Land, the people that were so vile, so violent, and so evil that they did all sorts of practices that were detestable and that were just violent and evil, and God said, "we have to rid this land of them." Now Israel has gone back to that place. They are just like the nations that were before them.

That is where Manasseh has led them, and then, I am not going to read it, but we have a list for you. It is this laundry list of things that Manasseh did that were evil in his day. Some of the things that it says, we just talked about, the detestable practices, those were all the things that the people before Israel did. He also rebuilt the high places, which if you were here last week, and you heard Billy preach on Hezekiah, he was Manasseh's father, and he led Israel and Judah through reform. He brought them back to the heart of what it meant to worship Yahweh. He brought worship back to the temple, and he got rid of the high places, the mountaintop worship experiences that Israel was doing towards other gods. He tore them down. Then Manasseh comes back, and he undoes the work of his father. All the reform, all of the revival that his father has brought, he is like, "Nope, I am going to go the other way. I want to do the opposite of what he did," and so then he raises altars of Baal, and he made an Ashera pole, which was a fertility goddess of the Canaanites. He is bringing worship of other nations into the nation of Israel, and he bowed down to the starry host, and what this essentially means is that when he was trying to come up with battle plans, when he was trying to figure out what to do and how to fight whom, he would ask the stars, as if they were divine generals. Instead of going to God, he would just go to the stars and look for basically, like astrology, trying to figure out what he should do. Then he built pagan altars inside the temple of the Lord, the place where God said his presence would dwell forever, the place where he said his name

would rest. Manasseh raises altars to other deities, other gods, other idols in the very place where God said his presence was supposed to dwell with the people.

Then it gets worse. He sacrificed his own son in the fire. This is a ritualistic idea. It is not a mistake. He essentially decided that he was going to take his son and burn him alive in order to try to appease the gods or the deities or the things that he thought he was supposed to worship, and I want you to pause for a moment, because you could read something like that, and I want you to think if you are a parent about what must be going on in someone's heart for that to be the action that they are willing to carry out. I mean, it is pure evil, and he practiced all sorts of sorcery, divination, and consulted mediums. He shed so much innocent blood, this is a quote: "He shed so much innocent blood that he filled the city of Jerusalem from end to end." The metaphor that is going on in the Hebrew there is that if everyone in the city tried to drink the blood that was in the city, no one could consume it all. It had consumed and saturated everything. He was absolutely evil, and now you read a list like this, and you hear what Manasseh has done, and it is this laundry list of evil things. In fact, it is actually fascinating. If you go back into Deuteronomy, where when God told the kings what they were supposed to do as kings, what their reign was supposed to look like, how they were supposed to lead the people, He gave a bunch of statutes and commands that basically Manasseh took those commands of all the things you are not supposed to do, and he inverted them, and he turned them into a to-do list. He was like, "Hey, God said, do not do that. I am going to do that. God said, do not do that. I am going to do that." He inverted the whole thing. It is this direct rebellion to what God said a king is supposed to be. He is like the anti-king of what God said the kings were supposed to look like. It is absolutely a heart of rebellion against what God has said the people of Israel are supposed to be like and what their kings are supposed to look like.

You can look at that list, and you can say, "Paul, man, he sounds like a bad dude, but I can't relate to that at all. I have never bowed down to the stars. I think they are pretty when I go on hikes at night or something, and I have never shed innocent blood. I have never sacrificed someone I love. I thought about it once with my mother-in-law, but I did not do it. I did not go there. I stopped myself," and we can look at this list, and you can think, "It is so out there." His behavior is nothing that you and I have probably practiced or experienced in our lives. None of us have torn down a church and raised an altar to some other deity right here in the front of the stage, and here is the thing. It is sometimes we look at a list of sin, and that is what sin is in our own life. It is the list of the things that we are supposed to do, and the list of things that we are not supposed to do, and that's all sin is. It is the good and bad behavior. In scripture, sin is actually much more complicated than that. Manasseh is absolutely doing the list of things that he is not supposed to do, but that is not actually the problem at the core of the issue.

Oftentimes as a pastor at different points in time, I will have people come to me, and they will tell me, "Hey, I feel like I am struggling with this sin, and I need some help," and the sin that they list is almost always a behavior, that they are struggling with greed, and they do not know what to do about it, or they're struggling with lust and have been battling pornography, or maybe they have been struggling with anger, and they list the behavior, and almost immediately, in all of those conversations I hear about the behavior, I ask them to tell me what it is like, and then immediately the conversation has to shift as a pastor, because it is not actually about the behavior. It is what is going on in your heart, and so when someone comes to me, and they say, "I am struggling with pornography, and I do not know what to do," I

immediately set up the conversation with, “Tell me about what is going on in your heart. What are you looking for? What are you longing for? What are the things that you feel deficient in? Are you bored?” and we start talking about the issues of the heart, because sin can take a lot of different forms of behavior, but it is always the motivation beneath the behavior that is the thing that scripture and Jesus is concerned about. So, the question for Manasseh, we may not be able to relate to all of this stuff about the things that he was doing, but the question is, “What was going on in his heart?” and his heart, from the time he was twelve years old to the end of his reign 55 years later, his heart was a heart of rebellion. It was a heart that said, “I want to be king of my life, and I do not want God to be king of my life,” and he made choice after choice after choice to live that reality out, and so all the behaviors followed that decision to say, “I want to be king. I am literally going to reject all of the things that God has said are good for me, that will help me be healthy, that will help me be whole, that will help lead the people to prosperity. I am going to reject all of that for what I want, and I will be the king of my own heart,” and that is something I think many of us can relate to. Maybe the behaviors and the implications look different, but that choice, “I want to be king of my own heart. I do not want to follow what Jesus has told me. I do not want Jesus to be the ruler of my life,” that is something that many of us have experienced.

Sometimes that experience looks like Manasseh, open rebellion, “I am just going to do what I want, and I am going to choose to live however I want, and I am going to engage in whatever behavior I want, because Jesus is not king. I am king, and what I want goes, and so I am just going to chase after all the things that I think will satisfy and fulfill me and bring me the happiness that I am looking for.” It is just this open rebellion and rejection of God’s truth. For some of us, it is a little more subtle than that, isn’t it? I mean what it actually looks like is coming to church on Sunday and singing, “I surrender all,” and then living your life the rest of the week, Monday through Saturday, surrendering to things like comfort or ambition. It comes from saying things or hearing Jesus say, “love your enemies,” and you nod along when Jesus says, “love your enemies,” but then you are harboring bitterness and hatred in your heart towards your co-worker or your boss or your spouse. Sometimes it looks like this idea that “Man, I know my hope is in Jesus,” but really, when it comes down to it, what your actual hope is in is your paycheck or the next political election. We can live with this subtle way of taking Jesus and his rightful place in the throne of our life, and we can even say with our lips that he is king, and then live with our lives like we are king. “I know that it is about, you know, your kingdom come, your will be done, and I know I’m supposed to seek first the kingdom of heaven.” Then when it comes down to how we live, it is very clear that the thing we are seeking first in our life is our own kingdom, our own desires, our own wants. For many of us, our sin and our behavior are not nearly as grotesque as what Manasseh did in this story, but the heart posture is almost the exact same: “I want to be king of my life. I want to rule. I want to reign. I want to do what I want.” We are willing to reject God to get what we want.

Manasseh’s story shows us, the challenge of his story is he lived that way for 55 years, which could feel like a very long time, and it could seem like he made his entire life goal to reject God’s will, God’s truth, God’s way, and God just let him get away with it, and he lived 55 years chasing after this stuff, and if you actually read the story, it looks like some of his reign was actually successful. He got some of the things that his heart desired, even as he was rejecting God’s will for his rule and for his reign,

but there always comes a point where sin leads to ruin, and it may look like you are getting away with it for a while.

There always comes a point where the bill comes due. Sin is a lot like a credit card. You can swipe that thing, and you remember the first time you got a credit card, and you were like, “Oh my gosh. This is awesome. I can get whatever I want whenever I want,” and you go through the line, you swipe that card, you get new clothes, you get whatever you want, and you are doing your thing, and then you are like, “I have all of this stuff. This is amazing,” and then at the end of the month, the credit card bill comes, and you are like, “This is awful. I do not have the money to pay for that. I got all the stuff,” but the bill comes due later, and by the way, if that is not a metaphor for you, if that is a real-life situation, take Financial Peace University. It is a great plug. It is a great plug, but the bill always comes due. Scripture says the wages of sin is death, and what we often like to think about that is that that is a someday reality, that sin, someday the bill will come due, and that means that someday those who live in sin will die, and there is truth to that, but what is happening in scripture when it says the wages of sin is death, it is not just a future reality, it is actually a present reality too. Sin has this way of promising something that looks good, that looks appealing, that looks like it will give you the life you are looking for, and then the bill comes due, and what you have realized is that it has been sucking the life out of you. It has been draining the life out of you, and what you thought would lead to the life you were looking for has actually left you more broken than you could possibly imagine.

I think we intrinsically know this in our bones. I want you to think about, some of you might be harboring the sin of bitterness in your heart, and you think, “Man, I just want to get back at those people. They have hurt me, and I just need to make sure that I can stick it to them,” but the only thing that it is accomplishing is actually draining your life of joy that God intended you to have. We know the same thing about lust, right? It can look so appealing. It can look like the thing that I want, and then when you live it out, you realize that it hollows out intimacy, which is the thing that you were actually looking for all along. So many times, the promise of sin, it looks appealing, but the bill always comes due, and it always, always, not sometimes, it always leads to ruin eventually, and that is what we see in the life of Manasseh. For 55 years he was able to live however he wanted, do whatever he wanted to do, pursue all the things that he wanted to pursue, but then the bill came due.

What we are told, this is how hard Manasseh’s heart was, is that throughout the 55-year reign, God sent prophet after prophet after prophet to try to bring him back, to give him room to repent, to help him turn around and turn back to the way of Yahweh, and he refused to listen to any of the prophets. In fact, if Jewish tradition is to be believed, the prophet Isaiah, who wrote one of the most important books in the Old Testament, he was a prophet during Manasseh’s reign, and tradition says that when he went and confronted Manasseh about his sin, Manasseh had him killed by sawing him in two. There is a verse in Hebrews that talks about the prophets of old, whom the world was not worthy of, and they were sawn in two. We think that verse is talking about the prophet Isaiah under Manasseh’s rule. That is how hard his heart was, and again, we have that relationship to sin, don’t we? Maybe you have never sawn anyone in two, unless it was like a magic trick or something in your past when you were a magician, but we have had those moments when we know God has said something to us. He has confronted us about the sin in our life. Maybe it was a preacher who is who was preaching on something or someone in your life who

called the sin out in you, and they had that prophetic voice, and they said, “You need to give this sin up. It is not doing what you hoped it would do,” and we just continue down the same path, and we do not give it up. We do not let it go. We do not repent. We do not turn.

When I was a student pastor, there was one summer we did a mission trip in Alaska, and it could sound like it was awesome, like it was a vacation. We were roughing it. We were out in the middle of nowhere. You had to take this little propeller plane that landed on a dirt road. To be honest, I can’t believe parents let me take fourteen-year-olds into this part of the world, because there were bears, and then there was Russia over there, and that was where we were. It was intense, but I had never had this experience before, when we were going out for a hike one day, and if you go on a hike in Colorado, the dirt is pretty dry, and we live in a pretty arid climate, so you hike. In Alaska, in that part of the wilderness, it never really thaws out, and so as you are doing this hike, there are places along where you feel like you are just walking in the meadow, and suddenly you are walking on a waterbed, and it is just like everything is soggy and wet, and everything is unstable, and if you are not paying attention, you can actually get to a point where you step through the ground, and you get stuck in what essentially is a bog. We had a few students that, surprise, surprise, were not paying attention, and they lost some shoes, because when you get stuck, it does not really matter how strong you are. You just feel like you cannot get out, and I think so many times, that is what sin does in our lives.

It looks honestly fun, like you could be bouncing on the ground, and like, wow, the Earth is a waterbed, this is really cool. This is fun, and suddenly you slip through, and you can’t escape, and you can’t get out, and you feel like you want freedom from this thing, and you just do not know how to let go. God might send voices into your life to say, “You need to turn. You need to repent” and you just keep thinking, “I might even want to, but I do not know how. It is just this thing that I have been living with for years and years and years,” and this is the thing that I really want us to take a moment and to be honest about and explicit in. It is that there are some of you who are here today in this room, and you have been carrying the weight of a certain sin in your heart for years, and there have been pastors or preachers or friends or people who have come to you and said “you need to repent,” and maybe they do not even know what is going on in your heart, but you do, and every time a sermon like this comes up, or every time you are reading scripture and that sin is listed, and you are not willing to turn and repent and to give it up, and it is leaving you miserable. You feel like you are living a life where the spotlight is always on that thing, and you feel like everyone knows about it, and you are terrified that someday they might find out about it. It is an exhausting place to live, and here is what you need to hear this morning. It is you do not have to carry that weight anymore. You do not have to live under the weight of that sin, because this is what happens in Manasseh’s life.

We have already established that if we want to compare a list of sins, he probably has us all beaten, and this is his response, because after prophet after prophet after prophet comes to try to get him to repent and turn around, and he refuses, the Lord finally sends Assyria to take him away into exile, and when he is in exile, what they do is they put a hook through his nose, and they drag him through the city, an act of complete humiliation. This person who has been so prideful, that says, “I am God. God is not God,” is just led through the city with a hook in his nose like a cow in shackles, and when this happens, this is Manasseh’s response: “In his distress, he sought the favor of the Lord his God, and he humbled himself

greatly.” This is a really important phrase that is going on in the Hebrew there. It is not just that he kind of repented or was sort of humble. It means he literally lowered himself to the lowest place imaginable. It is this emotional language of how he just recognized the error of his ways. He had hit rock bottom, and at rock bottom he turned to the Lord, and he asked for forgiveness and repentance, and he humbled himself. “He humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors, and when he prayed to Him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty.” That word, “entreaty,” there is literally that he was begging God, “and God listened to his pleas, so he brought him back to Jerusalem, to his kingdom, and then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.”

Now there is another thing we need to talk about around this idea of repentance, because I think there are some of us that have been living under the weight of sin. We have not been able to let it go. We have been carrying this burden for years and years and years, and we want freedom, but we do not know how, and we have been rejecting different opportunities. There are other people here today who have had a completely different posture and relationship to sin in their life, and rather than feeling the weight and the burden of sin, you just shrug it off. You have been living with a particular sin in your life, and you think, “You know what? It is not actually that big a deal. It is not actually hurting anybody else. It is just my thing, and maybe it is not really the best thing, but I just, it is not. I do not care. I know God does not want me to do it, but who cares? It helps me, and I think it is okay,” and we can have this relationship with God where we have this expectation of his grace and his mercy. We can live from this place of, “God is just a vending machine, and sure, I keep doing the thing that He says I am not supposed to do, but he will forgive me. He did that for Manasseh. He will just forgive me,” and that is absolutely true, but that is not repentance. That is entitlement, because it is still living in rebellion against God.

The truth of scripture, what scripture tries to point out again and again and again, is that the people who are closest to God are not the people who are the most holy. The people who are closest to God are the people who recognize how unholy they are and choose to give that over to God. There is a place we can live where we think, “If I just have this relationship with God, and I just deal with my sin, and it is like it is not that big a deal,” you are actually further from God than the person who is having an affair and trying to turn around and repent and seeking counseling and restoration and doing all of the things that they are supposed to do. There is a place we can live where rebellion looks like, “It is not that big a deal,” and for those of us who are in that place, the call is the exact same as it was for Manasseh. That is where he lived for 55 years, “Not that big a deal. Nothing is going to happen,” and it led to his ruin, and yes, the Lord restored him, but how much better would it have been if he had listened to Isaiah and turned and repented before he had to have a hook put through his nose and be dragged through the streets and humiliated? Some of us live in that place where we think, “It is not going to catch up to me,” and then it does, and then we look back, and we realize time and time and time again, God had been calling out to us and saying, “This way is so much easier. Just turn around now.” Will we listen, or will it take us down the road of Manasseh?

So, he repents, he humbles himself, and then he turns around, and he is restored to his throne, and this is how his story ends in Second Chronicles 33:15 through 17, “He got rid of the foreign gods,” so all of the foreign gods that he had established, he got rid of them. “All of the images and idols that he had placed in the temple, he removed, 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, and he told Judah,” his people that he was supposed to rule over, “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.”

There are three things that I want to pull out from this story as we close. One is it is so clear from this story, no matter what your story is, no matter what you have done, no matter what sins you have committed, no matter what the motivations of your heart have been, no one is beyond the grace and mercy of God, because if Manasseh can repent and receive forgiveness and receive restoration, then there is not a single person in this room, no matter what sin you have been struggling with, no matter how long you have been struggling with it, that you cannot turn around and receive the grace of God. No one is beyond God’s forgiveness.

The second thing that we can see from this story is that repentance is actually active. It takes work. Repentance is sometimes like this thought or this feeling that, “I just feel bad about what I have done. I just feel like it is wrong. I know I was doing the wrong thing, and I feel really bad about that.” That is not actually repentance. The image we get in scripture is actually one, and you are probably familiar with it, but it is you have been going one direction, and repentance is realizing you are going in the wrong direction, and you turn around and go back the way that you are supposed to go. We often have this idea of repentance of it is like turning yourself in. It is like, “I did something wrong, and I need to turn myself in to the police officers and need to turn myself in to God, and then they will decide what to do with me.” That is not repentance at all. It is not turning yourself in. Turning yourself in is because of guilt or shame or feeling like there is something wrong with you, but repentance is actually just turning around, and it is not because of anything you have done or anything you have not done. It is because of who God is. Repentance is simply recognizing that God’s way is better, that He is good, that He is kind, that He is merciful, and I no longer have to be walking down the path that leads to destruction and ruin, and I can turn around and enjoy and live the life that God has promised me, and that is not like self-help. Bad stuff.

I was about to go someplace. Sorry, it is not self-help. It is the truth of the gospel that we simply have to turn around, and what we find is that no matter how far we have run away from God, as soon as we turn around, He is right there, and we have seen that story played out in scripture over and over and over again. If Manasseh can turn around and repent and be received by God and receive his forgiveness, then what is holding you back from doing the exact same thing? But it is active when we do that. He uproots the old idols. He gets rid of the sin that was in his life. He tries to turn the people around him and bring Judah back to worshipping God the way they were supposed to do. It is active and action oriented. It is not just this emotional “I feel really bad. I should not have done that thing.” It is turning around and then getting rid of those things that had led him to the path of destruction and ruin in the first place.

As we close today, I think there is an invitation before each and every single one of us, and that is no matter what sin has been in our life, no matter what places we feel like we have been holding on to sin, no matter what places we feel like we have not been able to let go of, not a single person here today is beyond the grace and the mercy of God, and so that weight that you have been carrying, Jesus is saying, “You do not have to carry it anymore. Let me take that burden from you.” There are some of us, we have just been shrugging our shoulders at the sin in our life like, “It is no big deal. Nothing bad is going to

happen. It is fine. I will just keep doing what I am doing, because I am king, and God is not,” and today is a warning for you. It is an opportunity for you to turn and to repent and not have to go to a place of ruin and destruction that sin always leads to, and for all of us, today’s story of Manasseh’s life is an opportunity for us to remember the goodness and the grace of God, that He is a Heavenly Father, that no matter how many times we spit in his face, no matter how many times we reject his truth, no matter how many times we choose to go our own way, He is gracious and kind and merciful, and He is always there to receive us when we turn around.

So, as we close today, I want to invite you to stand for worship for these last two songs, and we are going to actually as we close with these last two songs, we are going to have some elders and some Steven Ministers who are available to you today for prayer, and they are going to be up in this area right over here and underneath the cross right here, and if you feel like you are in that place where you were struggling with sin, and you want prayer, if you feel like you are in a place where you want prayer for someone you know, a prodigal son or a prodigal daughter who has run away from the Lord, and you want freedom for them, and you just want someone to know their name and pray for them, we are happy to pray for you this morning. Here is the thing. If you are carrying that weight, if you understand the burden that sin is, this is an invitation for you to not have to carry it anymore, and there is someone here willing to pray on your behalf today, that you could give that up and experience the goodness and the grace and the mercy of God this morning and no longer have to live under the weight of sin. Let me pray for us, and then you can come forward as you are ready.

Heavenly Father, God, some stories in scripture serve as an encouragement to us, as a reminder of your goodness and mercy, and there are other stories in scripture that serve as a mirror to our lives, that expose the parts of our heart that we want to leave buried, that expose the parts of our heart that we think no one else sees, and God, today’s story is one that is both. It is a story that serves as a mirror. It is a story that shows us the places in our heart where we have run far from you, where we have sin that is reigning in our hearts, where we have said, “I am ruler of my life. You are not,” but it is also a reminder of how deep the Father’s love for us can go, that no one is beyond mercy, that no one is beyond grace, that no one is beyond forgiveness. God, I pray that we would believe that today and that we would walk in the freedom you offer us, and it is in Christ’s name that we pray, amen.

As we close today, if anyone would still like prayer, the prayer ministers will be available after service. I just pray that you would be respectful of people who might want to stick around for that. We also have a meet-and-greet right after service, so if you are newer to Waterstone, and you would like to get to know us a little bit better, we would love to get to know you a little better, and so you can walk right through these doors into what we call the Hub. It is the open area out there, and then to the left, there’s a green door, and you go through that room, and we would love to feed you a little bit of snacks, hear a little bit of your story, and share a little bit of our story with you, so I would encourage you to come to that.

Now, let me pray over you the benediction. There is this key line in the story of Manasseh, where when he was brought back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom, where he was restored, it says this: “Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God,” and the relationship he had had with God was this belief that it did not matter who God was, he was God of his own life. The end of his story is this recognition that there is only one God, and that if He is God, that means you are not, and I am not, and that is the challenge before

us this week as we go to live for Him. It is to believe that God is the God of your life, which means that you can give it up and that you do not have to be anymore. So let me pray a quick benediction over you as we leave.

Heavenly Father, as we go from this place, God, if there is anyone still struggling with the weight of sin in their life, I pray that this week would be the week that they would turn back to you in repentance. God, if there is anyone in this room that is still wondering whether or not your grace was big enough for them, I pray that they would reach out to receive it, and God, I pray for all of us, that this week we would recognize the truth that Manasseh found, that we would experience the truth that Manasseh knew, that you alone are God, and it is in the name of Jesus we pray these things, amen. You can go in peace.

49:46 minutes

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Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #874