

A WONDER OF GRACE

1. *Manasseh* *The Outrageous Rebel*

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2 Chronicles 33:12, 13.

By C. H. Spurgeon

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When we wish to recommend a physician to a friend who is very ill we are in the habit of mentioning certain cures which he has wrought; and when we can produce several astonishing instances we feel that we are going the right way to work to convince the judgment of our friend, and to win his confidence in the doctor. Now, it is our impression that very many are anxious to be saved by the grace of God, who, nevertheless, have not dared to trust the great Healer of souls: they know that they are in great danger, but they are reluctant to go to “the Beloved physician.” They are grievously afraid because of the greatness of their sins, and they are filled with doubt and unbelief as to the possibility of their salvation on account of their singular sinfulness. Therefore, it struck me that if I could set before them a number of Scriptural instances of wonderful conversions, it might tend to encourage hope in Christ in their hearts, and, under the Blessing of the Holy Spirit, it might be the means of leading them to trust and try our Lord Jesus, out of whose very garment virtue flows. Perhaps, dear friends, as you shall see how the Lord, the Healer, has looked on one and another, and restored them from the horrible disease of sin, you, too, who feel yourselves far gone, may pluck up courage and say, “If he healed others, why should he not also heal me I, too, will touch his garment’s hem and see if he will not make

me perfectly whole.” How I wish that poor souls knew how ready my Lord Jesus is to save them: they would not keep back if they knew how eager he is to have mercy on the guilty. I pine within my soul to lead you to Jesus that you may be blest. That is the desire of my heart in introducing to you the case of Manasseh, whom I select from the Old Testament as a very prominent instance of glaring sin and of amazing grace.

We do not find many of what we can accurately call conversions in the Old Testament. It is a record of a dim dispensation in which we rather see the types of things than the things themselves, but I should suppose that the priests, if they had been inspired to write what they often heard, would have been able to tell of many instances of deep conviction which would be made known in connection with the sin offerings and the trespass offerings, and they probably saw many instances of persons who henceforth led a new life and ceased from the sin which they had confessed over the victim’s head. Of conviction, confession, and conversion, they must have seen a great deal, but records we have none. On this account the story of the madly wicked king who was led to humble himself greatly before God is all the more valuable, and it is matter for thankfulness that it is so remarkable. Every item of it reflects glory upon the amazing grace of God, and, indeed, compels us to exclaim, “Who is a God like unto thee, passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin?”

We will waste no time on a preface, but come at once to the life-story of Manasseh, and look, first, at *his circumstances*; then consider him as *a great sinner*; and afterwards, with greater comfort, view him *as a remarkable convert*.

First, let us notice; HIS CIRCUMSTANCES; because a man’s sin may be heightened by his position, or, on the other hand, the condition in which he is placed may suggest some alleviating considerations, which, in all fairness, should be remembered. Now, with regard to Manasseh, we find that *he*

was the child of an eminently godly father: the son of a king who, with all his mistakes, was sound in heart towards God. Hezekiah “*wrought* that which was good, and right, and truth before the Lord his God.” He was a man mighty in prayer, and found deliverance thereby in the hour of great peril through the invasion of Sennacherib, a man whose life was so precious in the sight of the Lord that, in answer to his cries, he gave him a new lease of life, and spared him yet another fifteen years. It is a great thing for a youth to have a godly father to train his tender mind; and, even though such a parent should be early taken away, yet the privilege is an eminent one. As for Manasseh’s mother, we cannot say with certainty that she was a godly woman, but let us hope that as her name was Hephzibah — “My delight is in her” — she, too, was delightful for grace and piety. Isaiah seems to have taken her name and to have applied it to the church: “*thou* shalt be called Hephzibah, for the Lord delighteth in thee,” and we may suppose that he would hardly have done so unless there had been some sweet associations therewith. Let us trust that Queen Hephzibah was, indeed, God’s delight; and, if so, Manasseh had the special favour of having two parents who would train him up in the way he should go. Such a happy start in life renders his after sin the more heinous.

But, in all truthfulness, we have to mention next that *he was a child born to his father in his later years*, after his life had been lengthened by special license from above. He was the child of his parent’s desire, an heir born after the father had expected to die childless, and, therefore, it is not at all unlikely that he was a spoiled child. It is very possible that, being highly prized, he was also greatly indulged, and, if so, he was in special danger. Those children who are doted upon by their parents are greatly to be pitied, for they are apt to be allowed to have their own way, and a youth’s own way is sure to be a wrong one. Fathers, in such cases, are apt to play the part of

Eli, of whom we read that his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. It was no wonder that Adonijah disturbed the dying moments of David when we read that “his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, why hast thou done so?” Nor need we marvel that Absalom almost broke his father’s heart, if this was the manner of his bringing up. Even though at twelve years of age Manasseh could not have fully developed his character, yet it may have been warped by those early days of admiration and indulgence. Parents take note of this, and you petted children do the same.

Recollect that *Manasseh lost his father at twelve years of age*. I do not know a greater trial for a family than for the head of the house to be taken away while the children are young. Just when the guiding, encouraging, and restraining power of the father is wanted, it is mournful to see it removed. How mysterious it seems to us when a large family loses the wise guide of the household at the very time when his influence is most needed by the up-growing boys and girls. Too often in such a case the young people have broken away from all restraint, and the loss of their father has been the loss of everything. Manasseh, the prince who seemed born under such favourable circumstances for the production of a gracious character, was much to be pitied when the good king, his father, was called away, and his tender son was left alone amid flatterers and idolaters.

Remember, too, that *Manasseh was placed in a giddy position as a child*, for he mounted the throne at twelve years of age. A child upon a throne is a child out of its natural place. Such high and hard places are not for boys. Now and then such a child turns out to be a Josiah, the very delight of mankind; but the probabilities are very much against its being so. “Woe unto thee, O land, when thy king is a child.” It is ill for a child to sway a sceptre, but “it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.” A fierce fire of temptation blazes around a

youthful throne. Sycophants and flatterers are sure to surround a boy prince, pandering to his worst desires, and arousing that part of his nature which most needs to be repressed. No doubt there were good people whom Hezekiah had gathered in his courts, but then they could not flatter so well as the evil party which had been repressed for awhile, but still remained strong in the land. Though Hezekiah had set up the worship of God everywhere, and had done his best to root out idols, yet the idolatrous party was far from being extinct, and the common people were sadly careless and irreligious. Isaiah, in his opening chapter, describes the condition of the land by saying, "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." The nation was not steadfast like King Hezekiah: it worshipped Jehovah when compelled by royal authority, but it was ready enough to turn aside to its idols. The idolatrous party — which I might liken to the papists; and the people who worshipped on the high places — who were the ritualistic party of the day, came around the young king, fawning, flattering, and cajoling. By pleasing the taste of the boy-king, and indulging his vices, they undermined in his esteem the orthodox worshippers of God, whom I may call the evangelical school. He yielded himself up readily to their influence, and when he was old enough became the head of the idolatrous party, throwing his whole soul into it, and, with all the might of his nature, and the force of his authority, labouring to stamp out the pure worship of the most high God, and to set up those debasing idolatries which his father Hezekiah had so much abhorred. Look at *him*, then, as a mere child placed in a condition of great danger, led astray at first, and afterwards becoming a ringleader in iniquity.

If I should address any young person who finds himself, too early for his good, set free from the restraint of parents and

placed in a position of considerable power and influence over others, I pray him to flee to the Lord for help, or his ruin will be certain. The Lord can teach the young men wisdom, the babe's knowledge and discretion. Look to your Bible, the mercy seat, and your God, or you will make shipwreck of the life which God has entrusted to you. There are responsibilities upon you too heavy for you to carry alone: because your burdens are heavier seek for yourself more power from on high: because your restraints are fewer put yourself under the restraints of divine love. The youth who is so much trusted by providence as to be left alone without a guardian, and to have power confided to him which usually needs the wisdom of age, ought to be the more careful and the more guarded, and cry the more earnestly to God that he may have grace given to him, lest of him it should be said, as it was said of Manasseh, he "did evil in the sight of the Lord."

These are some of the circumstances of Manasseh's life.

Now, secondly, I have a heavy task, and one which saddens me, though it is concerning one who lived so many hundreds of years ago: I have mournfully to describe Manasseh as A GREAT SINNER. If you will turn to the Second of Chronicles, chapter 33, and will follow the verses, you will get a view of this atrocious offender. In the second verse we read, "*He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*" That is a description of his life as a whole. Take his fifty five years' reign in the bulk, notwithstanding the repentance of his later years; it is a true estimate of it all to say that "*he did evil in the sight of the Lord.*" He was a son of David, but he was the very reverse of that king, who was always faithful in his loyalty to the one only God of Israel. David's blood was in his veins, but David's ways were not in his heart. He was a wild, degenerate shoot of a noble vine.

Nay, the description of his life is more intensely black than the summary might suggest, for it is said that "*he did evil in the*

sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.” He seemed to have taken for his models the men whom God condemned to die for capital offenses against his law. How deplorable that one who was cradled in piety must, notwithstanding, not be satisfied until the very scum of society, which God had skimmed off as from the pot and thrown away with detestation, should be his models and his tutors. Yet we have known young men to be doubly perverse, possessed as it were by the devil, if not by seven devils at once. We are all depraved, but in some that depravity manifests itself in an extraordinary love of low, coarse society, and of everything that is irreligious and unlovely. I have in my mind’s eye now — and it makes my heart melt as I remember it — sons of men with whom I have been glad to associate, and who were always happy to aid me in the Lord’s work, but now their sons find their most congenial company amongst the drunken and profane, the gamblers and debauches; and if, perchance, they see their father’s friend, they look aside or slink away, anxious to be unobserved by him, scarcely brooking to have it known that they know the man. This is the unhappiest thing that can occur to us parents. You who have buried your little children, you who have wept so bitterly when your dear babes were snatched from your bosoms, may far prefer that sorrow to having your sons and your daughters live to dishonour your name by plunging into glaring sin. Manasseh was a son of this character, and could his father have foreseen what he would live to do, he would have preferred death rather than have lived to be the sire of such a monster of iniquity.

It is noted concerning him, in the next place, that *he undid what his father had done*. In the third verse we read, “He built again the high places which Hezekiah, his father, had broken down.” I have known many a man who has had no respect for God who, nevertheless, has had such a regard for his father’s

memory that he would not scoff at things which his father held sacred. But this man had cast off all filial reverence. He cared not what his godly parent might have thought; he gloried in building up what his father had thrown down, and throwing down what his father had built up.

This is a great evil; for a man, in order to be guilty of it, has to do violence to some of the strongest and best instincts of his nature. Is that your case, my friend, are you doing exactly that which you know would have broken your father's heart? Is your conduct such that your mother would have been brought to her grave by it had she been here? Are you fighting against the Lord God of your father? May the Lord in mercy stay your guilty hand lest the curse of Absalom come upon you? Turn not aside from your father's God, follow in the godly footsteps of your mother, and set not yourself to act contemptuously against that which was your parent's reverence.

Manasseh next sinned in a great variety of ways, for, according to the third verse, he seemed eager to be meddling with all forms of idolatry. He was not satisfied with one false god, or one set of idolatrous rites, but he reared up altars for Baalim and made groves, and worshipped the host of heaven; nor yet content with all this, he adored Moloch, and passed his children through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. He heaped up vile idolatries, not only sending far and wide to find out what were the gods of the different nations, but reviving the old cast off gods of the Canaanites, whom God had destroyed for their crimes. One form of insult to the living God was not enough for him; he heaped together his rebellions. There are men to whom to sin with one hand is not sufficient: they must transgress with greediness. One vice does not content them; they cannot be satisfied to go to hell except with four steeds to their chariot, and these they drive like Jehu the furious. They never seem content, except with all their might they are fighting again the Lord, and pulling down his wrath upon their

heads.

These sins of Manasseh were not merely various, but *some of them were peculiarly foul*. The worship of Baalim and Ashtaroth was associated with such abominations that one is sorry even to have known of them, and especially the *asherah*, or symbols, wrongly translated “groves,” were so lascivious that I shall not so much as hint at what they were. Such worship must have unutterably defiled the mind of the worshipper, and rendered him fit for vice of the most degrading kind. Think of obscenity made into a religion: vice an ingredient of adoration. O God! that ever man should have come down to this! Worse still that a king of Judah and a son of Hezekiah should patronize and ordain orgies which polluted the mind beyond conception. It sufficed not that he adored the sun when it shined, and kissed his hand to the moon walking in her brightness; the sin of star worship was not, enough, but he must needs set up graven images and worship the idols of the Philistines, of Egypt, Assyria, and Tyre. The calves of Bethel did not sufficiently provoke the Lord, but the idols of Baal and the lewdness of Ashtaroth must defile the whole land from end to end. Instead of the holy worship of Jehovah, the worship of devils was ordained by the king’s authority, and Judah’s land became a den of abominations.

But Manasseh went to the utmost in evil, and *added gross impudence and insult to his crimes*, so as to defy the Lord to his face, for “*he* built altars in the house of the Lord, whereof the Lord had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord.” Oh, the infinite patience of the Most High, that he bore with such a daring insult as this! There were all the hills of Judah and the valleys thereof. Were they not enough for Manasseh’s idols and their altars? Must the hill of Zion also be profaned? Was there no spot but that which the Lord had set apart for himself, and of which it had been said, “The Lord is

there?" Must Jehovah's own courts be desecrated with the image of jealousy? Must the altars to the hosts of heaven be set up where only the Lord of hosts should have been adored? Yet Manasseh dared to do this, carrying rebellion against the Lord to its utmost extent.

Another proof of his inveterate sinfulness is found *in his treatment of his children*: he was not satisfied with sinning in his own person; his offspring must be handed over to the evil one. "*He caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom.*" Moloch is said to have been represented by a great hollow image made of brass, which was heated red hot and filled with fire till the flames came pouring forth from its mouth. Into the red-hot arms of this image some parents placed their babes, so that they were consumed alive; but others, like Manasseh, passed their children between these burning arms, so that they received "a baptism of fire."

Nor is this all. *Manasseh went to extremes in personal, deliberate sin*, for it is said of him that for himself, and on his own account, he "*observed times*" — that is, "*lucky*" and "*unlucky*" days, and he "*used enchantments*" — those different devices by which men think they can produce certain events or foretell them. "*And he used witchcraft, and dealt, with a familiar spirit, and with wizards.*" It matters nothing whether these things were deceits by which he was duped, or were real dealings with demons — the sin is the same, because in the man's intent forbidden intercourse was carried on, such intercourse as is abominable in the sight of the Most High, and to be abhorred by every believer. Whether true or pretended, attempts at necromancy, and witchcraft, and communion with spirits mark a mind far gone astray from God. Remember that such persons cannot enter heaven, "for without are dogs and sorcerers," and they are placed with whoremongers and liars, who are declared to be shut out of the holy city. Manasseh was eager and greedy in these detestable pursuits; he could never

have enough of them. Witches, wizards, familiar spirits, enchantments, all sorts of cheats he trusted in: he who would not believe in God could freely yield his faith to lying wonders. How sad to see a mind capable of thought and reason bowed down at the feet of witches and mutterers of spells! How horrible to see a man making a league with death, and a covenant with hell! Still, if a man should have gone this length, he may yet be recovered out of the snare of the devil by almighty grace. Friend, if you have even wandered into this infamous wickedness, you need not despair, for Jesus lives to save the vilest of the vile.

The picture is awful enough already, surely, say you. Ay, but we have other strokes to add, for Manasseh *repeated these sins and exaggerated them each time*. After one forbidden idol had been enshrined, he set up another yet more foul, and after building altars in the courts of the temple, he ventured further, and “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 before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever.” Thus he piled up his transgressions and multiplied his provocations.

All this while *he was leading thousands with him in his desperate course*: both by his influence and authority he was compelling the nation to blaspheme. The whole land followed its king, save only a remnant according to the election of grace, and these bore all the fury of his wrath. The nation was prone to fall into idolatry, and willingly went with the court; when the king bade them worship Baalim, they joyfully replied, “So would we have it;” and even when the most polluted emblems were set up for worship, the mass of the people greedily went after the abominations. A few wept and sighed in secret, and spoke often one to another, but they had no power to alter the sad state of things, for the king was too strong for them. How

sad to see a royal personage become a ringleader of iniquity! For princely example is infectious, and its power for evil is boundless. Do I speak to one whose life leads others astray? Are you a man of mark? Are you placed in a position of influence? Are you a parent with children about you who will inevitably copy you? Are you the foreman in the workshop, or the head of a club, so that what you say and do becomes law to feebler minds than your own? Ah, you have the power to sin a hundred times at once, for you make others commit the sin in which you indulge. Your sin brings forth many at a birth, and as by means of mirrors the image of an object can be multiplied, so is your sin reflected in scores of others. The voice of your evil life is repeated by a thousand echoes. Think of this and beware. Why should you destroy others as well as yourself? Do not be guilty of the blood of your neighbours. Do not murder your own children's souls. Consent not to be a jackal for the lion of the pit, or a net in the devil's hand, for if you are such, your sin is infinite.

Nor was this all, for though it is not recorded in the Chronicles, yet you will find in the second book of Kings, at the twenty first chapter, that *he persecuted the people of God very furiously*, “Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end of it to another.” He was so zealous in carrying out his idolatries that he could not endure the sight of a man Who would not bow before his images, he hated those ancient Nonconformists, those Protestants, those separatists, those Puritans, and he made laws to put them down, so that the worshippers of Jehovah were “*stoned* and were sawn asunder, they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented.” We cannot vouch for the tradition that the prophet Isaiah was put to death by him by being sawn in sunder, but terrible as is the legend, it is not at all improbable. Manasseh had his Bartholomew Massacre and his unholy Inquisition. He was a

bloody persecutor during much of his long life, and left marks of his reign of terror all over the land. Persecution is one of the most heinous of sins, and greatly provokes the Most High, for the Lord has said concerning his people, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye." Manasseh did, as it were, thrust his finger into the eye of God. This was a heaven-provoking crime! In these days the law does not allow the shedding of innocent blood, but there are people in the world who go as far as they can in persecution. There are modes of torture which can be used against a believing wife, such as will hardly be imagined. Children can be provoked and grievously afflicted by un-Christian parents. "Trials of cruel mockings," are mentioned by the apostle, and they are very cruel and trying, too. We have known persons use towards brothers and sisters, and even towards children, such threats and modes of abuse, and such taunts and jeers, that they have made their lives bitter as with heavy bondage. This is against God a very high offense. You cannot anger a man more than by ill-using his little ones. Touch his children, and you bring the colour into his face directly, and the man's temper is up; and he who insults, and mocks, and grieves God's children will one day find that the Lord will avenge his own elect, though he bear long with them.

Only one more touch to finish this dark picture — was there ever a blacker? — and it is this which is contained in the tenth verse: "*And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people, but they would not hearken.*" *Manasseh refused warning.* He did not sin without being rebuked. God did try the bit and bridle upon him but they were of no use, for this wild horse took the bit between his teeth and dashed on in utter madness. He could not, he would not, bow before the loving admonition of the Most High. This makes sin to be exceedingly sinful, for, "*He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*" Without rebuke a man's sin may be far less than it must be after the rejection of

admonitions from the mouth of God. To stifle conscience and refuse loving warning is to incur fearful guilt.

Such was this Manasseh — the very chief of sinners. I feel certain that among those whom I address there is not a grosser sinner than he was, and I might almost say there never lived a worse; he has an evil eminence among the lovers of iniquity, *and yet he was saved by divine grace!* O you who hear these words or read them, never dare to doubt the possibility of your being forgiven. If such a wretch as Manasseh was brought to repentance, surely no one need despair.

Now listen, lastly, to what almighty grace, nevertheless, did for Manasseh, whom we will now think of as A REMARKABLE CONVERT. His conversion began, or *was wrought at its commencement, instrumentally, by his afflictions.* The king of Assyria came against him, and he was unable to resist his assault. Sennacherib, a former king of Assyria, had invaded the land in the days of Hezekiah, and the Lord had delivered his people, but there was no God to deliver Manasseh, and so the armies of Assyria overran the land, and the royal idolater found his idols fail him. For fear of being captured in Jerusalem, he fled and concealed himself in a thornbrake, but was soon captured, or “taken among the thorns,” and led in chains to Babylon. He seems to have been very severely handled by the king, who was, probably, Esarhaddon, king of united Assyria and Babylon, for he is spoken of as taken with hooks, such as large fish are taken with, or held by a ring such as is often passed through the noses of wild beasts. If this be only a figure, it represents Manasseh as regarded by the Assyrian king as an unmanageable beast, to be subdued by rigour, even as a bull is managed by a ring in his nose. We are also told that he was loaded with double fetters of brass, and was taken down to Babylon, to be kept in a close dungeon. The Assyrians were notoriously a fierce people, and Manasseh, having provoked them, felt all the degradation,

scorn, and cruelty which anger could invent. He who had trusted idols was made a slave to an idolatrous people; he who had shed blood very much was now in daily jeopardy of the shedding of his own; he who had insulted the Lord must now be continually insulted himself. That which he had meted out was measured into his own bosom. He was the prodigal in actual life, in a far country, where he fain would have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. Whilst fast chained in prison, the iron entered into his soul, and his thoughts troubled him. How vain now to cry to Baal or Ashtaroth. The stars that peered through the grated bars of his dungeon upbraided him for his foolish worship, and the sun and moon took up the tale of rebuke. Familiar spirits were familiar no longer, and magic with its lying wonders could not release him; no, nor the witches and wizards with their enchantments. There he lies, and fears that there he will lie and rot; but in his extremity infinite mercy visits him, and *his soul finds vent for its misery in prayer*. “He besought, the Lord God of his fathers.” I admire the historian’s words, he had dishonoured his father as well as his God, but now he bethinks him of his godly ancestors and their holy faith. Surely his desire to return to his father’s faith bore some likeness to that more spiritual resolve of the prodigal, “I will arise and go unto my father.” It has often happened that men have been by grace the more readily led to God because he was their father’s or their mother’s God; human love is thus dissolved in the nobler passion. Manasseh thinks, meditates, considers, reviews his life, and loathes himself; he remembers how his father prospered by Jehovah’s aid, and perhaps also recollects the marvellous story of how Jehovah heard his father’s prayer when he was near to die, and raised him to life again. At any rate, in the dungeon he imitated his father, turned his face to the wall and wept sore and prayed. “If,” said he, “God saved my father’s life, peradventure he may forgive my sin and bring me

out of this horrible captivity.” Thus hopefully he cried unto the Lord. O friend, will not you also cry unto the God whom you have offended? Will not you say, “God be merciful to me a sinner?” Try, I beseech thee, the power of prayer.

But notice what went with his prayer; for, O sinner, if thou wouldst have mercy of God, it must go with thine: “he *humbled himself greatly*.” All, he had been a great man before: he was high and mighty Manasseh, who would have his own way, and dared defy the Lord to his face; but now he sings another song, he lies low as a penitent, and begs as a sinner. How would he now use the language of his forefather David — “Have mercy upon me, O God, and blot out my transgressions.” There is in the Apocrypha a book entitled “*The Prayer of Manasseh*,” which was probably composed to gratify the curiosity of those which would like to know how so great a transgressor prayed. Of course, it is spurious, but it contains some good and humble language almost meet for the lips of so great a penitent, though far more coherent and oratorical than his words are likely to have been.

What a broken prayer Manasseh’s must have been, and what groans, and sobs, and sighs were heard and seen by the great Father of spirits, as his erring child sought his face in the gloomy cells of Babylon! Let such be your frame of mind, O sinner. Be ashamed at your sin and folly. Confess it with mourning, and abhor yourself on account of it. May the Holy Spirit bring you to this mind?

Brethren, *the Lord heard Manasseh!* Glory be to infinite grace, the Lord heard him. Blood-stained hands were lifted to heaven, and yet the Lord accepted the prayer. A heart that had been the palace of Satan, a heart which had conceived mischief and brought forth cruelty, a proud rebellious heart humbled itself before God, and the Lord pardoned and smiled upon the penitent, and, as a testimony of his infinite mercy, he moved the king of Assyria to take Manasseh out of prison and restore

him to his throne. The Lord doeth great marvels, and showeth great mercy unto the very chief of sinners. O that this might persuade some to test and try this gracious God. Manasseh had not such a clear revelation as you have; you have heard of God in Christ Jesus reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Let the wounds of Jesus encourage you, let his intercession for sinners cheer you. God is ready to pardon, and his bowels yearn towards you. Come even now and seek his face, ye vilest among men.

Now, can you picture Manasseh going back from Babylon attended by a cohort of Assyrian soldiery? The poor believers in Jerusalem have had a little respite while he has been in durance. Perhaps they even ventured to the temple, and restored the worship of Jehovah; at any rate, they crept out of the holes and corners in which they had laid hid and breathed more freely. But now it is rumoured that the persecuting king is coming back — that the hunter of the souls of men is again abroad. What dread seized the minds of the timid among the godly, and how earnestly the brave-spirited steeled their hearts for the conflict? More stonings, more sawings asunder! Can it be that these horrors are to be renewed? The righteous meet and sorrowfully plead with God that he would not permit the light to be quite quenched, nor give over his people like sheep to the slaughter. What a day of foreboding it must have been when the king came through the city gates. But, perhaps, some of them watched him, and when he passed by a shrine of Baal, they noticed that he did not bow. The image of Ashtaroth stood in the high place, but they observed that he turned away his head as though he would not look in that direction; and what was their joy when they afterwards read his proclamation, that, from henceforth, Judah should worship Jehovah alone. What hanging down of the heads for the ritualistic, idolatrous party, and what joy among the evangelicals that the king himself had come over to their side — for now the truth and the true-

hearted would have the upper hand. What triumph was felt by the saints when the king sent the cleansers to the temple to pull down the carved image? Then went up their hymns, and they blessed the Lord with all their hearts, singing, "In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle." O that such songs might be sung in the church of Christ because of some of you.

Manasseh also *did his best to undo what he had done*, and to restore what he had damaged; for those who are really converted show it practically. Restitution must be made for wrong done, or repentance is a sham. All the evil we have done we must labour to remedy, or our penitence is only skin deep. That conversion which does not convert or turn the life is no conversion at all.

One or two things remain to be said by way of practical address. First, dear friend, *adore divine grace*. Never limit its power, but believe it able to convert the most abandoned; believe that it can save you. Since our Lord Jesus ever liveth to intercede for those who come unto God by him, he is able also to save them unto the uttermost. You cannot have too large ideas of divine grace, for where sin abounded grace does much more abound.

But, secondly, *never turn it into an excuse for continuing in sin*, for this case of Manasseh, with all its mercy, is still a sad one. Though we have seen how grace gave it a good ending, yet, take it for all in all, it is a sad case, and as a life Manasseh's was wasted, misspent, and full of wretchedness. Although he sought to mend matters, he could not fully undo what he had done. The people were nothing like as eager to follow the right as they were the wrong; and after many years of royal patronage of idolatry it was not easy for the masses to turn round on a sudden, and so the people sacrificed on their high places, though only to Jehovah, and their hearts went after

their idols still. The polluting idolatries had degraded the people; licentiousness had taken possession of them, and from this evil there was no drawing them back. Indeed, their sin was so great that God resolved that the sin of Judah under Manasseh should never be forgiven, and it never was. A respite was given, for Josiah reigned a little time, but it was God's mind and purpose that the sin should never be put away. If you read in the twenty third chapter of the Second Book of Kings, and the twenty sixth verse, you will see that though Manasseh himself was saved as a penitent yet the transgression of Judah in having followed him in all that sin still remained. "Notwithstanding, the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal." And so in the twenty fourth, at the third verse, "Surely, at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he shed (for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood), which the Lord would not pardon." So, though a man may be pardoned, yet he may have been the occasion of sin in others, which never will be blotted out. How strange is this! A man may lead others into such evil that in it they will abide and perish, although through mighty grace he may himself be forgiven. Will any of you venture upon such a hazardous business? Even if you knew that your own house would be saved, would you burn other men's houses? Would you wish to be the cause of other men's ruin even if you were sure that in the end you would repent? No, be not so base. Lay hold on Jesus and eternal life even now, that you may not have a misspent life to mourn over.

Note well that Manasseh after death had no honour. It does not say of him as of Hezekiah, that they buried him in the sepulchres of the kings, but they buried him in the palace garden. As Matthew Henry very well says, "A pardoned sinner

may get back his comfort, but he can never get back his credit.” It is hard to live an ill life for years, and yet die in honourable repute, because of late repentance. Even if grace comes in to make the conclusion of your career to be bright with salvation, it is an awful thing to have led a life which, taken as a whole is rather a curse to mankind than a blessing. So when I tell you what divine grace can do, do not continue in sin to try that grace. You have sinned enough already. Do pray God to do more for you than for Manasseh, — namely, save you from Manasseh’s sins, and make you to lead a life which from this moment to its end shall glow with the grace of God. How much better to live like Josiah than like Manasseh! Who would not infinitely prefer to lead the life of Moses, perpetually serving God, than that of a hoary sinner who is saved at last “so as by fire”

The last word is, *seek for mercy, all of you*: do not neglect it because of its greatness, but rather hasten to receive it. Since we all need more mercy than we imagine, let us cry for it at once in hearty earnest. Let us come to the fountain which is opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and wash therein. Let us, by faith in Jesus blood, wash and be clean. The Lord make us to do so, for Jesus sake. Amen.

The first of seven booklets.

