

THANK GOD FOR SECOND CHANCES!

Imagine that you are 16 and going to take your driver's license test. The instructor gets in your car and says to you, "There's a new law that states you get one chance to pass your driver's test. You fail and you don't get a second chance and won't ever be able to get a driver's license." Talk about pressure. For those of you who did fail the test the first time, aren't you thankful for a second chance?

Aren't you glad that God doesn't say to us? "If you mess up just once, I will immediately strike you down and send you to hell." If he did, this world wouldn't exist because there would be no people. Yet he would have every right to do so. Thankfully, our God gives second chances that turn into third chances, fourth chances and the number goes up and up. We have a great example of that in our text for today. As we look at how God dealt with Manasseh the king, we say with joy in our hearts. **Thank God for second chances!** Why? We fail God miserably time and time again, but God graciously forgives time and time again.

Manasseh's father was a king who had served God faithfully. When Manasseh took over the throne, he had the opportunity to continue what his father had started for the next 55 years. Sad to say, he was completely the opposite of his father. If someone wanted to make a top ten list of the wicked kings in Israel's history, Manasseh would have been right up there in the voting for the number one spot. Listen to the summary of his disgusting actions as king. **He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "My Name will remain in Jerusalem forever." In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.** Not only did he establish idol worship even inside the temple of God that Solomon had built; not only did he sacrifice even some of his own sons to his false gods; not only did he have contact with the occult and witchcraft along with attempts to contact the dead through mediums and spiritists that God called detestable, Manasseh also put to death anyone who questioned or challenged his actions. Tradition also says he had the prophet Isaiah sawed in half. What a wicked and evil ruler he was, a ruler God summarized in this way! **But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.**

In spite of his wickedness, God sent prophets again and again to warn him and the Israelites but our text says that they paid no attention. So how did God handle this unbelieving defiance? Did he strike Manasseh and the Israelites down with a deadly and painful disease? Did he open up the ground to swallow them and then send them directly to hell? Who could have blamed him if he did, and yet, that's not what he did. Instead, God took this action. **So the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.** As Manasseh sat in shackles with a hook in his nose, the Holy Spirit led him to realize his sin and turn to the Lord for forgiveness. When that happened, our text tells us **And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.** God looked into Manasseh's heart, saw that his repentance was genuine and came to his rescue. He brought him back to Jerusalem and restored him as king. As king, Manasseh showed the fruits of repentance as mentioned in our text. **He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the LORD, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem; and he threw them out of the city. Then he restored the altar of the LORD and sacrificed fellowship offerings and thank offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel.**

Does anything that happened here kind of bother you? Think about it. How could God forgive a person like Manasseh, a king who executed God's prophets; who sacrificed his own sons; who led thousands and thousands of people down the road that led them straight to hell? Why in the world would God give a man like this a second chance? He did it for the same reason he gave Adam and Eve a second chance along with people like the liar and deceiver Jacob, the adulterous and murderer David, the runaway Job, the denying Peter and the doubting Thomas, the persecutor Paul and the list of Biblical names could go on and on. The reason for the second chance is grace, God's undeserved love that wanted sinners like them to be in heaven with him. God gives second chances that end up to be 3rd, 4th, 5th and the count keeps going on and on in order to give people a chance to repent; to come back into his loving arms; to find joy in his forgiveness and salvation through their Savior Jesus.

So, my friends, instead of questioning how God could forgive a sinner like Manasseh, find comfort in that because if you think you deserve forgiveness more than he did, you are sadly mistaken. When you look at the condition that Manasseh and the nation of Israel were in, are we as a nation any better? Let's compare for a few moments. Israel was guilty of worshiping false gods, the sacrificing of children, immorality and corruption; supporting witchcraft and all kinds of things like mediums and spiritists; disregard and disrespect toward God's Word and his messengers; just a general "I don't really care" attitude about sin. Compare that to America in 2016. We have the worship of false gods like Allah, Buddha, materialism and money; the butchering of babies through legalized abortion; immorality involving pornography, pre-marital sex and homosexuality; corruption, greed and selfishness in politics, business and our every day lives; mediums and fortune tellers that take in over a billion dollars each year; disrespect and a lack of interest in God's Word as evident by poor church attendance and the adding and subtracting that goes on when it comes to God's Word. When it comes to sin in general, people don't really care. What the Bible calls sin is now considered to a matter of opinion that you can disagree with. Even when people admit that something is wrong, they often think, "I can't do anything about it. That's just the way the world is today so we might as well go with the flow."

In a few weeks we will be celebrating our nation's independence day, remembering how we fought to win our independence from the rules and reign of England. What a blessing our freedoms truly are! I'm afraid though that many people have declared their independence from the reign and rule of the only true God, the Triune God. Many have decided that what God says and how he rules does not fit their lifestyles or the social norm today; that it infringes on peoples' rights and is outdated and unloving. Everyone has the right to live or believe as they choose without any consequences; that no one had the right to condemn what someone is doing or how someone chooses to live.

How often don't we get caught up in the wicked ways and attitudes of our society? How often don't we take a tolerant attitude toward the sinful actions and lifestyles that our country deems acceptable? How often don't we decide to declare our independence from God and live by our own set of rules? How often don't we close our eyes to our own sins or our relative's sins and downplay them as "not really that bad?" We should also keep something else in mind. When we look at the unloving and disrespectful way we so often treat God and our neighbor; when we look at ourselves in the mirror of God's Law and hear God's command for us to be absolutely perfect in every thought, word and deed; when we are honest with ourselves and see how we fail God miserably time and time again, why would God give any of us a second chance? Why doesn't he throw up his arms in disgust and say? "Enough is enough. I have given you enough chances and you keep on sinning. No more chances. One more sin and to hell with you." The answer is not because we are better than others or that we don't deserve that treatment from God. The answer is his grace as shown in the gift of his Son Jesus. God sent Jesus so that we would have the chance of spending our eternity in heaven. When Jesus obeyed God's command of perfection in our place, he then carried all our wicked, all our evil, all our sins to the cross and took the punishment of hell that we deserved so that God wouldn't punish us with hell for all eternity.

God knew we were hopelessly and helplessly lost in our sin so he came to our rescue. As miserably as we fail God time and time again, so God graciously forgives our sins time and time again through the precious and holy blood of his Son Jesus. He doesn't do this to give us a license to sin all we want without worrying about any

consequences. He does this to lead us to repentance and to find joy in our Savior's forgiveness and then live lives of service out of love and gratitude for what He has graciously done for us.

Remember when Jesus told the Pharisees who were about to stone the prostitute **“He who is without sin throw the first stone.”** When all of them left after dropping their stones, he said to the woman, **Go and leave your life of sin.** That woman was so thankful that Jesus gave her a second chance, her entire life changed. Manasseh was thankful God gave him a second chance and it showed in his fruits of repentance. How thankful we are that God gives us second chances again and again and again! How thankful we are that he is always ready to open up his loving arms and graciously forgive us for Jesus' sake! What is our response? The apostle Paul gives us a beautiful answer. **He died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.** Amen.