

“Manasseh: The Scale-Tipping King”

Who’s the Boss? – A series on the Kings

2 Kings 21

Introduction: Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Kings 21, 2 Kings chapter 21.

As we begin this morning let me just take a moment and fill you in on the plan for our upcoming pulpit ministry. We have this week on Manasseh and then next week we will consider Josiah, then we have the Spring Bible Conference and then one message on the final demise of Judah and then I plan to preach one last message on the kings trying to tie together all of the themes that we have seen throughout our study and pointing our hearts to the King of Kings. So, we plan to finish with this series on the kings at the end of March, and then the plan is to do a 3 part series entitled “Marriage: What’s the point?” The goal of this series is to address from the Scriptures some of the prevalent attacks on marriage in our culture, and also to point us to God’s overall design for marriage and why that is important to understand as we seek to honor him in our day to day lives. After this mini-series on Marriage we will have Easter Sunday and then the next Sunday we will begin a series on the Gospel of Mark. So, I wanted to share that with you. I am excited about what is ahead and I am praying for God to teach us much from His Word and shape our hearts to love Him more as we see Him clearly in the Scriptures together.

So, this morning we are considering the life of Manasseh. Manasseh was the most wicked king of Judah, and also the most wicked king that ever ruled over God’s people – whether Israel or Judah. He is also the king who reigned the longest of any of the kings, which creates quite the paradox in our thinking. Why would God allow the most wicked king to rule the longest? I think we will see at least one possible answer to this during our study this morning, but in some ways this will remain a paradox for us. And so this king who was the most wicked and who also reigned the longest is accounted to us in 2 Kings 21 and in 2 Chronicles 33. We will start this morning in 2 Kings 21 and we will end up in 2 Chronicles 33. Before we read 2 Kings 21 let me just state plainly at the beginning that we are going to see two main points in the text this morning – Manasseh was wicked and God was faithful. Let’s read 2 Kings 21.

I. Manasseh was Wicked – 2 Kings 21:1-9, 16

- a. Did you notice how wicked Manasseh was? His rap sheet is quite the accomplishment. One that he probably wouldn’t have been able to accomplish unless he had the longest reign to do it in. You remember that Manasseh’s grandfather, Ahaz, was a wicked king who desecrated the Temple by removing the altar to the Lord and replacing it with an altar fashioned after the one Ahaz had seen in Damascus. You will also remember that he was promiscuously idolatrous in that he worshiped on every high place and under every green tree. But then came Hezekiah, Manasseh’s father. He trusted the Lord like no other king had ever trusted in the Lord and he cleaned house. He restored the Temple and the right worship that was to happen there. He removed all of the high places and did what he could to expunge idolatry from the land. But then here comes Manasseh. All the reforms of his father are reversed and idols once again permeate the land. So, let’s just run through his rap sheet as it is presented here in the text. Manasseh was the most wicked of kings in that:
 - i. He rebuilt the high places.
 - ii. He erected altars for Baal.
 - iii. He made an Asherah, just like Ahab, the most wicked king of Israel, had done.

- iv. He worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.
 - v. He built altars in the house of the Lord, specifically altars for all the host of heaven, and he had them placed in the two courts of the house of the Lord.
 - vi. He burned his son as an offering.
 - vii. He used fortune-telling, omens, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. (which just on a side note here – it is not cute or okay or germane to play around with fortune telling or omens or Ouija boards or such things like this – be on guard here – the Lord obviously condemns these things as being evil and from the Devil.)
 - viii. He took the Asherah that he had built and he set it in the House of the Lord, the Temple.
 - ix. He refused to listen to the Prophets as they reminded Manasseh of the promises of God, both the promises of blessing and the promise of judgment, but he refused to listen.
 - x. In fact, he shed their blood all throughout Jerusalem as we are told in verse 16. We aren't told specifically in this verse whose blood Manasseh shed, but Jewish historians tell us of the martyrdom of many of the prophets of God under the hand of Manasseh. Tradition tells us that it was during Manasseh's wicked reign that Isaiah met his end by being sawn in two.
 - xi. This rap sheet of wrongs is summarized in verse 9 where it says that Manasseh led the people astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel. So, all the wickedness that we have seen throughout our study in the different kings is here culminated in Manasseh. Not only that, but also the abundant wickedness of the pagans who possessed Palestine before God led His Promised people out of Egypt to possess this land was also exceeded in Manasseh's reign. There had never been a leader, either Jewish or pagan, who had led his people to such acts of evil against the Lord.
 - xii. While we could say more about all of these acts of evil listed here in the text, I think one is worthy of special notice. We will look in a minute at the promised judgment of God that came because of these abundant wicked acts in Jerusalem, and we will see that under Manasseh's reign the scale was tipped towards judgment. The pervading and surpassing wickedness finally guaranteed the judgment that Judah had long been deserving, and the exile to other lands that had long ago been promised to God's people who went astray like this.
- b. As I read the text I think there is one thing in particular that tips this scale and that is the defamation of the Temple. So we are told in verse 4 that he built altars in the two courts of the Temple to all the host of Heaven, and then we are told in verse 7 that he took the Asherah that he had built and he placed it in the Temple. Then the text goes on to make clear that this was the house that was to be known by the name of Yahweh. This was His physical representation on Earth. It was here, at the Temple, in the OT economy of worship where God had rested the physical representation of His presence. Idolatry is never okay, but it is especially profaning when it is done in the Temple that is to be known to be Yahweh God's. Ahaz, Manasseh's grandfather, had gotten eerily close to this line when he brought in a new altar fashioned after the one he had seen in Damascus to replace the bronze altar. He also shut the doors of the main sanctuary and the daily and yearly acts of worship were not performed. But Manasseh does not hold back. He doesn't just put new altars around the Temple courts, he takes the Asherah that he made and puts it in the Temple itself, thus completely profaning the Lord's dwelling place. He takes what was created for the glory of God and uses it for the worship of another man-made

god. Not only that, but he completely disregarded the physical representation of God on earth and replaced it with the worship of another. In other words, he is saying by his actions that Yahweh God didn't matter as much as these other gods. Through his actions towards God's Temple we can clearly know his thoughts about God. So, in other words, since he replaced God's altars with other altars and since he put an Asherah in God's very Temple we can know that he thought very little of God. His actions towards the Temple make known his relationship to Yahweh God.

- c. This has been true throughout our study of the kings. You can look at any one generation of leadership and people during the reign of the kings and know what their heart toward the Lord was like by observing how they treated His Temple.
 - i. So, way back in Samuel's day the people viewed the Ark of the Covenant as a good luck charm and they took it into battle with them against the Philistines and the Lord condemned their actions and the Ark was captured. Their view of God was betrayed in their actions towards God's physical representation on Earth.
 - ii. Then think of David. Here was a man after God's own heart and how did he act towards the physical representation of God's presence on Earth? Well, in great pomp and circumstance he led the way for the Ark of the Covenant to be returned to Jerusalem. He also longed to build the Lord a dwelling place and he planned to do so, until the Lord said that it would be his son who would do it. So David's response was to get everything ready he could for the building of this great Temple for the Lord. He loved the Lord and this can be seen in his actions toward the physical representation of God on Earth.
 - iii. Then there is Solomon. Early in his reign he honored the Lord in his heart and in his actions by completing and dedicating the Temple building to the Lord which brought great honor and glory to God. But by the end of his reign the Temple worship of God was one option among many. His divided heart of worship was made known through his outward actions toward the Temple.
 - iv. Then there was Jeroboam, the first king of the rival kingdom in the north. He viewed the singular worship of God as a threat to his own power so he established a rival worship of the same God, but not according to God's way and especially not at the Temple in Jerusalem. His aberrant view of Yahweh was made known through his setting up a rival place of worship.
 - v. Then think of all of the generations of kings that have come between Solomon and Manasseh. How many times are we told that this king or that king emptied the Temple of all that was valuable and sent it to an enemy kingdom to ensure their own safety? They were willing to plunder the treasury of their own God so as to pay off the imposing threat of another nation and its gods. Their view of the inability of Yahweh to protect them and their lack of trust in His power is displayed in their outward actions toward the Temple.
 - vi. Then think back to Hezekiah. God was at the center of his view. He obeyed him and trusted him, and hence this came out in his actions towards the Temple. He cleaned house and restored and renovated and reoriented the people to worship Yahweh alone as they ought to. His heart of singular worship was made known through his actions towards the visible expression of God's presence on Earth.
 - vii. And then we come to Manasseh. How did he view God? What were his thoughts about God? Well, look at how he treated the Temple. He established rival worship to other gods throughout the land. He set up altars to every possible god and ultimately he set an

idol in the very Temple of God! His lack of true worship of God and his lack of love for God was made very obvious by his treatment of the physical representation of God.

- viii. Carry this thought through to the New Testament and you find the same thing. So think of Jesus' day. The Pharisees and Scribes viewed the Temple as their way to manipulate the people of God to have power over them. So they took the commands of God and added to them so as to attain to some form of outward righteousness. Then think about the Sadducees who owned the bulk of the authority over the Temple in the first century. They viewed the sacrificial system as a great way to make a lot of money and manipulate the people into giving them ever more authority. And so they set up tables to exchange money and sell sacrificial animals at exorbitant rates to the pilgrim worshipers. Their view of God was made known through their treatment of the Temple. They viewed God as a pathway to power and manipulation of others.
- ix. And then we are told in Ephesians that there is a new Temple, a new dwelling place of God being made on Earth right now through the power of the glorious Gospel. Each person redeemed through the precious blood of Jesus Christ is a stone that is being added to the living Temple of God. So that this new body of believers becomes now the dwelling place of God on Earth. So, what we see to be true of the OT Temple is also true of the NT Temple. One's attitude to and relationship with God can often be discerned by one's actions and attitudes towards God's dwelling place on Earth. So, Paul writes to warn churches of leaders who are simply using the church and hence the Gospel that is the foundation of the church as a means for personal gain. He speaks of false teachers who are Gospel hucksters, using the church to meet their own personal lusts for power and prestige. We also see in the church in Corinth that they were abusing the Lord's Table as a way to gorge themselves to the exclusion of others and hence they were guilty of profaning the Lord by profaning a sacrament of His Church. And also the churches of Asia Minor that were addressed in Revelation 2 and 3 had several of them putting up with wicked practices in their midst that were profaning the dwelling place of God and thereby displaying their attitude toward the Lord of the Church. So, how one thinks of and acts toward the dwelling place of God on Earth, the Church, puts on display how one thinks about and relates to God. So, in other words, this profaning of the Temple of God that we see in 2 Kings 21 is not just a problem for Manasseh, but this is a problem for every generation of God's people. There is obvious instruction here for our own hearts about how we view and act towards and within God's dwelling place on Earth, the Church.
- x. Manasseh was exceedingly wicked, and this is unmistakably evident by his profaning of the Lord's Temple.

II. God was Faithful

- a. And yet, though Manasseh was exceedingly wicked, God was faithful. This is vintage Yahweh here. He is not changed by the vile actions of men. He is not altered by their ever increasing wickedness. God was still on His Heavenly throne and His plan was still going to come to pass. And part of that plan was the judgment that would fall upon the Israelites, His very own covenant people, if they did not worship Him singularly and obey Him completely. The 10 Northern Tribes have already been dealt the final blow of God's judgment, and now the wickedness of Manasseh guaranteed that this same severe judgment would fall upon them. So, God is unchanged by the amazing sinfulness of His people. But he is not unmoved. In fact, it is a part of his very faithfulness to His own character that He be moved to action against the sins of

His people. Though He has been patient and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, now the time for judgment has been guaranteed to come because of the surpassing wickedness practiced under Manasseh's leadership. God's faithful character in the face of this surpassing wickedness demanded action against this sin, and so the text makes clear that God will be faithful to judge.

b. Faithful to Judge – 2 Kgs. 21:10-15

- i. The righteous anger of God was now guaranteeing that judgment was soon coming. The prophets made known to Manasseh that this judgment would be severe, calculated and complete. So God said that he would bring upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. In other words, the judgment that was coming in light of their vast wickedness would be so terrible and severe that when people would hear of it they would cringe because it would figuratively hurt their ears.
- ii. God had also said that he will stretch out the measuring line of Samaria over Judah and the plumb line of Ahab over Jerusalem. This is a building analogy that points to the measured nature of God's judgment. Just like Samaria and the house of Ahab received what they deserved, so Jerusalem would also receive the measured and rightly calculated judgment of God.
- iii. God also said that he will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish – wiping it and then turning it over. This signified complete judgment. This would be no partial or localized judgment. All of Jerusalem and Judah would be under the righteously angry judgment of God. And the end result of this would be that they would be forsaken by God in the sense that he would no longer protect them. They would be turned over to their enemies and become easy prey and spoil to the much stronger nations around them.
- iv. Because of their surpassing wickedness God would be faithful to judge them. Notice the statement made in verse 15. While the wickedness that abounded in the land happened under the watch of Manasseh, and though he led the way in this exceeding wickedness that tipped the scales and guaranteed God's faithful judgment – it was not just his sin that brought this judgment. It is the people's sin that provoked the Lord to anger, and it is sin that has been happening since the very first generation of Israelites that were led out of bondage in Egypt. Every generation since that first generation out of Egypt had provoked the Lord to anger by their sin, and now the wickedness in the land has exceeded even the people's that were originally driven out – and so judgment is guaranteed. So verse 15 is here to make it clear to following generations that the problem was not only Manasseh. He was the culmination of the problem and he was the grandest expression of the problem, but the problem was not unique to him. No – it has pervaded every generation! And so, God is faithful to bring the judgment that is due.

c. Faithful to Afflict – 2 Chronicles 33:10-11

- i. But God is also faithful to afflict. Turn with me to 2 Chronicles 33, 2 Chronicles 33. In this parallel passage we are given more details about what God brings to Manasseh in the short term. The account in 2 Kings is intent on showing us that the nation is marching toward exile, but the Chronicler gives us a few more details about God's working in Manasseh's life personally. We've already seen that God promised the judgment that would soon come upon Judah, but it doesn't come in Manasseh's lifetime. Rather, God chooses to afflict Manasseh and send him into his own personal exile in the land of Babylon. And so we read this in verses 10-11.

- ii. *Read 33:10-11.*
- iii. We don't know when this exactly happened in Manasseh's reign, but we do know why. God is faithful to afflict his people when they are encumbered by sin and sinking in the slough of idolatry. And so God's response to Manasseh's exceeding wickedness is to send affliction upon Manasseh. This is separate from the righteous judgment that was promised. That will still come, no matter what happens to Manasseh. These verses are about Manasseh and God. And it isn't about God giving Manasseh what he deserves, but rather it is all about God giving to Manasseh what he doesn't deserve. So, notice that though Manasseh finds himself sitting in a Babylonian prison under the control of the Assyrians, the text makes it clear that it was the Lord who did this. God was at work in these verses to bring about a heart transformation that is virtually unparalleled in the rest of the Scriptures. Through affliction God is going to take the chief of sinners in OT Israel and make him a trophy of his grace. And so we read about Manasseh's response to this affliction in verses 12-16.

d. Faithful to Save – 2 Chronicles 33:12-16

- i. What kind of God is this? What kind of God can promise the judgment that is deserved upon a most wicked people, but then intervene with his grace and send affliction to get the king's attention so that he can return to the land and bring about reformation among the very people that he had led to exceeding wickedness? Yahweh God does this. He is faithful to save! This is like taking the most vocal and influential opponent of the early church and saving him and calling him to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. This is one of those unique expressions of God's grace in the Scriptures that makes it known to all that God is faithful to save those who will humble themselves before Him. If the chief of sinners in the Old Testament and the chief of sinners in the New Testament can be saved by God's grace from their sin, then certainly the worst of sinners in any generation has hope. God is faithful to save those who will call upon His name.
- ii. But let me remind you how we got to this point of Manasseh turning to the Lord in humility. We got here through affliction. It was only when he was afflicted that he was willing to turn and cry out to Yahweh God to save him. Most certainly he couldn't cry out to Molech or Baal or Asherah because here he was, thousands of miles away from his idols, sitting in a jail cell most certainly awaiting his soon execution at the hand of a ruthless Assyrian king. And so in the midst of his distress he determines to seek the Lord. Did you notice how many different words are used in verses 12-13 for Manasseh's praying to the Lord? The narrator uses multiple words for prayer and crams them all together to make the point that Manasseh truly humbled himself before the Lord and entreated the Lord through prayer for help. And this humble prayer was heard by the Lord and he was moved by the entreaty of Manasseh and he sent salvation and returned him to Jerusalem. And it was then that Manasseh was convinced that Yahweh was God.
- iii. See how key affliction was in bringing Manasseh to this point of humbly seeking after the Lord. Before the affliction and the distress he was happily worshiping any god he chose on Jerusalem. He was just fine desecrating the Temple and leading the nation to be more wicked than even the pagans of yesteryear. And then he is afflicted – carried off into personal exile in Babylon and humiliated there. Now he is ready to seek the one true God for help and salvation. What changed? Well, affliction has a unique ability to show the one being afflicted that they are not in control. It is when we are in a circumstance

that is especially difficult and hurtful to us and we have no power to change it that we begin to realize our lack of control. But this is the very thing that idolatry offers – control. An idol lies to you and deceives you into thinking that through your act of worship you can control some aspect of your life. While times are good and things are going your way you will be prone to believe that the worship of this idol must be working. And so here God faithfully sends affliction to awaken us to the reality that we are not and cannot be in control and that there is but one true God. You see, even as believers in Jesus Christ it is very easy to pay lip service to truth that there is no God but God and that my life should be lived in humble service to Him for his glory. And yet, we all know the tendency of our hearts. We all know how easy it is for us to presume control and go our own way. And so God is faithful to afflict us so that we can have the joy of seeing in living color the reality of His sovereign control over all things which should re-orient our hearts to worship Him alone.

- iv. This is what Manasseh needed to bring him to humble repentance. He needed to be put in a situation where he had nowhere else to turn, where none of the other gods could be turned to – where his kingly authority had no power – where it became impossible for him to control anything. Here in the depths he finally realized what had been true all along – there is but one God – Yahweh God of Israel. And so, in great humility he turned to this God and called upon His name for salvation, and these are the kinds of prayers that Yahweh God answers. These prayers that recognize His position as the one true God and realize my position as being in great need of His salvation – this is a prayer that God answers. And so, God is faithful to afflict and faithful to save!
- v. And maybe this is one of the reasons for the long reign of this most wicked king. Most certainly God is bringing glory to himself as the God of all patience and longsuffering as He endures the grievous wickedness of Manasseh for so long so that he can bring him to humble repentance through affliction and allow him time to return to Judah and bring reforms that are especially astounding. God's patience coupled with God's sovereign control of all things which eventually brought Manasseh to his knees so that God could pour out His astounding grace – all of this – brings great glory to the God of Heaven!
- vi. Before we move to two points of application, I must show you that though Manasseh had a late in life reversal where he now worshiped the one true God – the reputation of his life was already set. So, the text makes clear in verse 19 that while his great humbling and seeking after God are noteworthy about his life, so is his great sin in which he acted faithlessly against the Lord. So, while a late in life turning to the Lord is a glorious thing, it is also a tragic thing because so much of a life was wasted in sin and idolatry. In other words, your legacy cannot be changed by a few short years of faithful service to the Lord at the end of life. Now is the time to worship Him alone!

So, as we look at Manasseh's life, let me point you to two applications for your life.

Therefore:

I. Evaluate Your Relationship with God's Temple

- a. We saw early in Manasseh's life that his view of God was clearly displayed through his actions toward the Temple of God. The same is true for us. We can evaluate our relationship with God by examining our relationship with God's Temple – the Church. This isn't the end all of evaluations for your love of God, but it is one of many. And so, I would encourage you to examine your relationship to God's dwelling place on Earth today – the Church. And when I say

the Church, I hope you realize that the Church is not a building or a program or an idea, but rather it is a group of people united together by the grace of God for the glory of God.

- b. So, what does your relationship with the church tell you about your relationship with God? Do you maintain a safe distance so that you can receive the benefit without having to get too involved in the lives of others? Do you view the church with a “what have you done for me lately” attitude? Do you view the church as your arena in life to receive glory and honor and power by maintaining a good reputation and climbing the ranks of influence? Do you view the church as your place to do the ministry thing so as to salve your conscience before God? Do you view the church as a necessary annoyance to get the spiritual nourishment you need?
- c. All of these betray a wrong view of God and a wrong relationship with Him. So, I call you to evaluate your relationship with God’s dwelling place on Earth – the Church.

II. Respond Rightly to Affliction

- a. Manasseh’s life also puts on display the glory of affliction. How marvelous the grace of God that was made known in the life of Manasseh through the affliction that God sovereignly brought! How merciful of God to send the Assyrians to carry off Manasseh and humiliate him through exile and imprisonment so that he would turn to Yahweh God!
- b. And, how glorious and gracious and faithful of God to send the Assyrians into your life to afflict you so that you will be turned to Him. Affliction isn’t the only thing that God uses to turn men’s hearts back to Him, but it is a powerful tool. Affliction has the unique power of putting our weakness on display to our own hearts so as to point us to the divine power of God. Through affliction we are shown the folly of our idols and our hearts are drawn to the only God who can save us. And yet we buck against it and cry out to God to remove it. We only want so much of God and we want him on our terms and so when affliction comes and our terms are torn up and thrown out the window we struggle to see the good in it all. And yet, the text of Scripture is clear here. Affliction is an act of the faithfulness of God.
- c. And so, we must respond rightly to it. We must not kick against the pricks, but we must submit humbly to whatever God is doing in our hearts through affliction. We must respond like the psalmist who in Psalm 119 says things like this:
 - i. ⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. (Psa 119:67 ESV)
 - ii. ⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. (Psa 119:71 ESV)
 - iii. ⁷⁵ I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. (Psa 119:75 ESV)
- d. You see isn’t it better that you would have a heart that rightly worships God alone than that you would have a life free from affliction? Isn’t it better that you would know God better and love Him more than that you would have no affliction ever in your life? My friends, we must respond rightly to affliction!

Conclusion: Let’s pray.

Benediction:

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. – 2 Tim. 4:22