

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 5 Prayers That Rocked the World

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Message Title: A Prayer from an Evil Man Pt. 2

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Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he also erected altars for the Baals and made Asherim and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He built altars in the house of the LORD of which the LORD had said, “My name shall be in Jerusalem forever.” For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. (*NASB, Ch. 33, Vs. 1-5)

Basically, he did the polar opposite of his godly father. He did everything to resurrect pagan worship throughout the land. He rebuilt the pagan temples; he rebuilt the pagan altars; he established all these pagan ways. He even put the pagan altars in the courtyard of the temple, just to stick it to God.

Verse 6:

He made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft...

It's talking about putting his sons through the fire in the valley. How do you do that? How do you have that level of depravity to throw your child into the flame in the name of pagan gods? But that's what he did.

...he was involved with witchcraft, and used divination, practiced sorcery, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger. Then he put the carved image of 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 from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will observe to do all that I have commanded them according to all the law, the statutes, and the ordinances given through Moses.” Thus, Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the sons of Israel. (Vs. 6b-9)

What the text is saying is, as bad as those pagan, idolatrous, Satanist religions were, King Manasseh surpassed them all in terms of his depth of evil. This is one bad dude.

Then the LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention.” (Vs. 10)

It doesn't say they didn't hear Him; they just didn't pay attention. They couldn't care less what God has to say. “We're sticking it to Him.”

So, the next verse says:

Therefore, the LORD brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze chains, and took him to Babylon. (Vs. 11)

So not many details: the Assyrians come in; they take Manasseh; they totally humiliate him. They put a ring in his nose like he's a wild bull; they put chains on him; they lead him off to a Babylonian prison.

Verse 12:

When he was in distress... [Okay, he's in a prison; he's backed into a corner, nowhere to turn—Mr. Big Shot.] When he was in distress, he entreated... [That's a Hebrew word: he cried out to] ...the LORD his God...

I only get that far into the text and I'm already offended by that statement. What do you mean the LORD his God? Since when? This guy—for fifty years—has done everything in his power to provoke and anger God, set up every form of pagan idolatrous worship possible. He threw his own children into the fire! So now he's stuck in jail; there is nowhere to turn. He's totally humiliated and now, suddenly, he has a religious experience and cries out to God. And I say, "Nice try fella; should have thought of that fifty years ago."

When he was in distress, he entreated to the LORD [he cried out to the Lord] his God and he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.

Verse 13:

When he prayed to Him, He [God] was moved...

It's a Hebrew word filled with emotion. God was moved with compassion; God was moved with mercy and grace. And I find myself thinking, "You've got to be kidding me." I mean you're talking about hundreds of thousands of people massacred. This was a horrible man and now he gets stuck in prison, nowhere to turn, and he throws up a prayer to God! And you're telling me God's going to have compassion? God's going to have kindness. God's going to have grace and mercy on this guy? Imagine you're a family member of somebody who was slain. This all seems so wrong!

...He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

This verse uses a Hebrew technique where it doesn't give you any details. It's just: Boom, Boom, Boom, and Manasseh's back on the throne. The intent of the technique is to cause the reader great shock. This guy's finally in prison in Babylon. He throws up a prayer to God and the next thing you know God delivers him and he's back in Judah and he's back on the throne. And we as readers find ourselves saying, "You have got to be kidding me...you have got to be kidding me! I am shocked at what I just read!"

Scholars would say, by an overwhelming margin, the conversion of King Manasseh is the

most radical conversion in the Old Testament. The only one in the New Testament that even comes close would be the conversion of the Apostle Paul. I mean this is a big deal! There isn't a single person that would even come close to the depth of evil that this man has perpetrated. You would have to be the king of a nation to do the level of evil he has done. Jeffrey Dahmer is a lightweight by comparison. And God hears his prayer and puts him back on the throne.

Now after he built the outer wall of the city of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entrance of the Fish Gate; and he encircled the Ophel with it and made it very high. Then he put army commanders in all the fortified cities of Judah. He also removed the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, as well as all the altars which he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw them outside the city. He set up the altar of the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it; and he ordered Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel. Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed in the high places, although only to the LORD their God. (Vs. 14-17)

What Manasseh did, when he returned to the throne, was absolutely everything in his power to reverse the damage he had done. He tried to clear all the idolatry; he tried to clear out all the pagan worship; he tried to clear out the altars out of the temple. He did everything in his power to try to make right what he had done so wrong.

Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, even his prayer to his God and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are among the records of the kings of Israel. His prayer also and how God was entreated by him, and all his sin, his unfaithfulness, and the sites on which he built high places and erected the Asherim and the carved images, before he humbled himself, behold, they are written in the records of the Hozai. So, Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house. And Amon his son became king in his place. (Vs.18-19)

It's interesting to notice in that last paragraph that the chronicler makes such an effort to tell us that Manasseh's prayer—he tells us twice—that, yes, his unfaithfulness, his sin, his evil, it's all in the records of the kings, but twice he tells us, so is his prayer: when he cried out to God, God answered him. It's a remarkable story of an evil, wicked king who, in his prayer, moved the hand of a sovereign God.

What caused God to respond? We have a hint of it in the text, when he tells us that when Manasseh prayed, he ...humbled himself greatly. He was a broken man. His heart was characterized by repentance, which is evident by what happened when he went back on the throne. He did everything humanly possible to reverse the damage he had done. No question he was a radically changed man.

There is a huge difference between being sorry and repentance. Being sorry is about emotion—I feel it. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry I got caught. I'm sorry about how it makes me look. I'm sorry for the consequences. I'm sorry about how it makes me feel—I'm sorry. It's very different from the brokenness of repentance.

Over the years I have found that sorry usually looks something like this. "I'm sorry, but..."

There's always a "but" to it. "I'm sorry, but..." Sorry makes excuses; sorry has rationalizations; sorry is about me. I'm the victim. Sorry is about trying to control things; sorry is about trying to manage how this is going to affect my reputation. "Sorry...but it's not my fault."

Repentance isn't like that at all. Repentance is brokenness; repentance is humility. Repentance, by the very definition of the word, means to turn and go the other way—180 degrees. Repentance has a sense of how offensive this is to God and it absolutely must stop! Sorry looks like this. "Sorry..." ...more sin. "Sorry..." ...more sin. "Sorry..." ...more sin. Repentance isn't like that at all. Repentance understands how offensive this is to God and, in your heart, there is a commitment that this is wrong. This is evil in the sight of God—and it must stop, and it must stop now! Repentance isn't about me. It isn't about me being the victim. It doesn't have any "buts". It doesn't have any excuses; it doesn't have any rationalizations. It doesn't try to control the environment; it doesn't try and manage how this is going to affect my reputation. It's just brokenness; it's just humility; it's just open, broken hearts before God. Do I believe that a sorry heart moves the hand of a sovereign God? I sincerely doubt it. But do I believe that a broken, repentant, humble heart is heard by God and God responds with compassion and with grace and with mercy? Absolutely yes!

I don't know what you've done. I don't know what your story is. I don't know what's been done to you. But if you have convinced yourself there is no way God would listen to my prayer—"I mean He might listen to the prayer of the really nice Christians, but He's never going to listen to the prayer of a loser like me" —you have totally misunderstood this God. Just because you hold a grudge, just because you can't forgive, just because you can't get over it, doesn't mean God is that way. Thankfully, God is not like you—and He is not like me. This God is unbelievable in His compassion and His grace and His mercy. He just wants to see a heart that's broken and repentant before Him.

You say, "You mean if I pray and ask God with a broken heart that everything will be okay?" No, I never said that. There are always consequences to sin. They don't just go away. They didn't go away for Manasseh. He tried. In the last couple of years of his reign he tried—but he could not turn the nation back. When he died, his son Amon took over and Amon was a chip off the old block. As a matter of fact, the text even says that Amon was evil just like his father was. Amon had learned from his father how to be evil to the core and took the nation back down that path. As a matter of fact, about two years into it, the servants of the king figured out, "We know where this is going. It's going the same place that his father took us," and they assassinated him to stop it. And the next king came on the throne.

There are always consequences to sin. But when you come before God with a broken, humble, repentant heart, I guarantee you God listens and responds with unimaginable compassion and grace and mercy. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, nobody comes close to King Manasseh. So, you must believe, by faith, that if I come in brokenness before this God and I cry out to Him, I have every reason to believe that it's just possible that my prayer may move the hand of almighty God.

Our Father we are thankful that You are a God who loves us. Lord, I know those words are easy to say, but what we're saying is that You are the God that knows everything about us and still You love us. Lord, there is no one in this world that knows everything about me

except You, and there's no one who loves me more. But that's hard to even comprehend. God, I know that many people who feel like, because of what they've done, because of the ugliness, because of the evil, perhaps because of what's been done to them, that there's just no way You'd listen. Lord, give us the courage to believe that with a broken, repentant, contrite heart, you will respond with unimaginable compassion and grace and mercy. Lord, help us to believe that. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Arnie: Bryan, thank you so much for the reminder that when we come to God with a humble heart, there are no barriers to His grace.

Bryan: Yeah, I would say there is no more hope filled message possible. No matter what you've done, no matter what's been done to you, in a moment, all that can change, and you experience the grace of God. I can't imagine a more hope filled message than that.

Cara: There are consequences to any sin, but it seems that sometimes those consequences are actually the things that humble us, and they can cause us to look to God for help.

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely, for sure. Often asking God to do what he needs to do, but asking God to have His way, and not just clean up the mess. [Right.] So, it's like sometimes we need the mess. It's part of what's necessary for us to learn.

Cara: When you look at the life of Manasseh, his father actually honored God, but Manasseh did not obviously do that. So, there are people listening who are experiencing that problem. Not saying that your kid's Manasseh or anything, but look at what finally happened to Manasseh, so we should be praying for our kids and hoping for the same thing.

Bryan: Yeah, so there's always hope. That's the beauty of that message. The world's confusing. You can be the best parent in the world and your kids lose their way and go astray, but it's never too late. There's always reason for hope.

Arnie: You know, my ears really perked up when I heard you talking about the difference between being sorry and being repentant. And those of us that have struggled with a lot of spiritual things in our past, whether it's drug addiction or alcoholism or whatever, you really feel sorry. Sometimes you repent. Can you review that whole process? Like what's the difference?

Bryan: Yeah, so "sorry" to me is primarily emotional, in my experience. Almost everybody when they get caught is sorry, and so I'll hear that from maybe a spouse. I think they're really sorry. And then I'm usually the one that says, I just got to tell you, everybody's sorry when they get caught. But you get in this "Sorry", Sin, "Sorry", Sin, "Sorry", Sin cycle. Repentance is so different from that. Repentance has a true brokenness. There's a realization this is offensive to God. There's a seriousness about putting a stake in the ground. This has got to stop. It cannot happen again. And I would say over the years, probably like most pastors, I've gotten pretty good at figuring out when someone's sorry and when they're truly repentant. It looks very different.

Arnie: So, what you're really saying is getting out of this cycle seems like a key to overcoming temptation.

Bryan: Right. And that requires true brokenness. So, it has to start with really seriously wanting change. The whatever-the-behavior-is, it must stop. And like I said, when I'm talking to somebody and they're trying to do damage control, and secrets, and who knows, and who doesn't

know, and it's this person's fault, and that person's fault. You know, it's like I can write in my calendar, you'll be back in six months. because I know you're not repentant. When somebody is truly broken, there's just a sense of, this is all different. And it's the beginning of a different story.

Arnie: For anyone listening right now who is caught in this Sin-Sorry circle, what can they do to take a step forward?

Bryan: I think there has to be true brokenness. And what I would look for in that is, no excuses, no rationalizations, no damage control, no minimization, no deciding what you're going to do. It's like there's just a brokenness that says whatever I need to do, tell me what I need to do. You have to be willing to face it, no excuses, no secrets, and then get help. Very few people actually get out of the cycle on their own. So, somebody at your local church, a pastor friend, but somehow you have to figure out what's necessary for this to stop and a new story to begin.

Cara: You see Manasseh do that though. He worked really hard to try to right the things he did wrong. I mean, he's not going to get it all, but he tried really hard, and that's another important aspect then of repentance.

Bryan: It is really important. It's someone's willingness to do whatever it takes, whatever they can. You know, true repentance is letting go of control and doing what's necessary to make it right.