

ILLOGICAL, UNEXPLAINABLE GRACE

2 Kings 21:1-16; 2 Chronicles 33:10-17.

Please marinate in this awesome Biblical true story. I thought that after looking at two of the minor prophets – we would appreciate this story.

Imagine that you are a spectator in a courtroom somewhere up in a stormy sky. The clouds all around you are black with occasional flashes of lightning. The wind causes the clouds to seethe and surge this way and that. It feels that wrath, is all around and is just hanging in the air, waiting to get someone. Then you hear a voice that is both part of the storm and also rising above it, speaking, "Will the defendant rise for the reading of the charges."

A middle aged, weather beaten, cowering, disheveled man, garbed in prison clothes, his arms and legs shackled, smelling like a prison, gets slowly and painfully to his feet. His hair and beard, full of gray, blows in the wind. His face looks old and used, full of wrinkles and hard living. His eyes barely peak out of the sickly skin, bright with terror.

"Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, King of Judah, you are charged with the following crimes against Almighty Jehovah God and against the Kingdom of Judah, and against humanity.

1. You rebuilt the worship places to other gods that your father Hezekiah tore down.
2. You erected altars to the gods of Baal.
3. You built sacred poles to the goddess Asherah.
4. You bowed down to the starry hosts and worshipped them.
5. You built altars to other gods in the House of the Lord.
6. You even put a newly made Asherah pole in the Temple courtyard.
7. You led the people in worship of other gods instead of worshipping the Lord Jehovah God.

8. You defiled God's Temple in Jerusalem.

9. You deliberately went about redoing every thing your father undid. He tore down the old worship places to all kinds of gods. You deliberately rebuilt them with state funds. You led the people of Judah in worship of false gods after your father tried to teach them to worship only Jehovah God. Your father purified the Temple so you deliberately filled the Temple with worship images and altars to other gods.

10. You made religious tolerance and diversity the order of the day in defiance of Jehovah God's law.

11. You offered your own son as a sacrifice to the fire of the god Molech.

12. You built altars to the gods of the sky in God's house.

13. You practiced witchcraft, sorcery, and divination. You consulted mediums and spiritists.

14. You shed so much innocent blood that it filled Jerusalem from one end to the other.

15. You misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem & led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the people of Israel took over the land.

16. You and the people of Judah have gone so far that you don't listen at all to Jehovah God.

17. In conclusion: You have done evil in the sight of the Lord God Almighty, King of Heaven and Earth, Creator of the Universe.

How do you plead Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, King of Judah?"

The prisoner's lips move but no voice emerges. His head hangs down. His whole body seems to shrink. The storm is suddenly silent waiting for the prisoner's response. And then, barely getting past his lips, we hear the response, "I am guilty."

The whole world is silent. The silence seems to drag on and on and on. Then you barely hear the

prisoner speak again. "Your Honor, God, Jehovah, please have mercy on me."

We read 2 Kings 21:1-16 which is the story of Manasseh's reign and as we read it you saw that the charges you heard are true. Not only are they recorded here in 2 Kings, but they are recorded in 2 Chronicles.

So what happened to Manassah? Most of us probably would be happy if Manassah really got it. Some of us would be happy if he was executed. Most of us would be happy if Manassah was thrown in the deepest darkest dungeon and the key thrown away. This guy wasn't just bad. He was evil. He out did the debauchery of the Canaanites whose land Israel took over. We like to see speeders fined. We like to see rapists, pornographers, and murderers sent up for a long time. We want robbers to get caught. We look down on people who are anti God. Manasseh was really a bad guy. He led a whole nation in sin.

Well, you & I are not God. God is God. God led the nation Assyria to invade Judah. Something happened when Manasseh was taken prisoner by the king of Assyria. He was taken to Nineveh in chains and put in jail. And something happened. We read in 2 Chronicles 33:12 that Manasseh repented. "While he was in distress he entreated the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors."

Well, I guess I kind of believe that this is all right, even though I want Manasseh to really get it. I don't like it but you know, if someone sees that they have done wrong and repents, that's good. Jail house confessions have their place. But what God did is really weird. It's nice for Manasseh to recognize he did wrong and for God to listen to this. But God went too far. God heard him, broke him out of that foreign jail, took him home to Jerusalem, and put him back on his throne! The Bible says, "He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God. (2 Chronicles 33:13)

This is incredible! It would be like bringing Hitler out of the bunker in Berlin and making him

Chancellor of Germany. Or calling Stalin from the dead and naming him Secretary General of the United Nations. Or appointing Sadaam Hussein as the head deacon of this church. Or voting Timothy McVey mayor of Oklahoma City. But this is what God did with Manasseh! And he didn't bother to consult with me! Or you! Manasseh was restored to the throne of David, and allowed to finish his reign with dignity and honor.

Let's read 2 Chronicles 33:10-17.

If we didn't know God better, we might imagine Manasseh had somehow pulled the wool over His eyes. The evil sinful creature, faced up to his guilt, when he got put in jail. It might even be all right if he was put on probation, or had to work in a prison factory, or had to work the rest of his life helping society. But he was restored to being king.

But Manasseh's repentance was not a cynical ploy or slick political maneuvering. It was real. Something happened. Something touched his soul. The tears were hot and genuine. The whispered confession rang true. The tentative look and hand reaching up to heaven, got an answer that you and I would not give. God gave mercy. God heard the apology.

Instead of God recoiling in disgust and revulsion, He let his heart be moved. It would have been mercy - better than Manasseh deserved - if God had allowed him to live out his days in the dungeon. It would have been mercy if he had been allowed to return home to the country-side of Judah as a shepherd. It would have been mercy if he had been given permission to return to Jerusalem as a beggar. It would have been mercy if he had actually been permitted back into the palace as a stable hand or latrine attendant.

But God went beyond mercy. Something unbelievable happened in that jail. Something more powerful than a nuclear reactor splitting atoms occurred. Manasseh tapped into an unlimited, shoreless reservoir, vast beyond understanding, deep beyond knowing. Manasseh ran into the grace of God.

Mercy means he didn't receive the punishment he so richly deserved. Grace means he did receive the favor, kindness & brimming over blessing - he by no means deserved! Notice the difference between mercy & grace. Notice the movement from mercy to grace. Mercy means he didn't receive the punishment he so richly deserved. Grace means he did receive the favor, kindness, & brimming over blessing - he did not deserve!

How did Manasseh respond? He responded by undoing what he had done. He got rid of the foreign gods and worship places. He restored Jehovah God worship in Judah and Jerusalem and the Temple. He began reforms like his father had. It may have been too little too late to save the nation from future disaster, but he ended up his life as a servant of the living God.

But I think we wonder. In know I do. Is this fair? Was justice done? It may be great for Manasseh to get back his throne, sleep in a comfortable bed, have the best doctors money can buy, and eat tasteful food.

But what about his victims? What about the children killed in the fiery furnace? What about the desolate widows, grieving parents, and abandoned orphans? What about the nation of Judah itself? Don't they rate a voice in the decision to acquit this person who did so much evil? Was it right for Manasseh to be let off the hook for his deeds? Is it really ok for Manasseh to live out his years in comfort and safety? Shouldn't God have let Manasseh stay in his dungeon? Shouldn't God have required restitution?

Well, in fact he did. A heavy price was required and a heavy price was paid. Heavy beyond our comprehension. Some years later and a few short miles from where Manasseh sacrificed his own son in the fire, another innocent was killed. This innocent was made fun of, was rail-roaded, and died in pain. And even more, this innocent went willingly. God sent his Son Jesus Christ to die for every ones sins. Jesus' death was not to appease a demon god but to pay the price for your and my reconciliation to a holy God. And part of the tab that dark Friday on a little hill called Calvary was run up by a king named Manasseh.

But it wasn't the whole tab. I have my own charges on that bill. I can't even tell you how many. I add to them each day. Someone has paid in full and it was not me. Someone picked up a tab, light years beyond my credit limit. That's mercy. The English word "mercy" comes from a Latin root that means "price paid." Jesus was merciful in dying for my sins.

At some point, often actually, in my own dungeon, when I am in distress, I look up and see a God, that I hardly know. As I cry out, I fall headlong into a golden ocean of mercy. God forgives. God restores. God makes it come out all right somehow.

In forgiving me, God allows me to live out my days here on earth. In forgiving me, God provides for me a place in heaven. Like the prodigal son, I would have been content to enter my Father's house as a hired hand. Just hand me a broom and let me sweep those golden sidewalks!

But we are talking about a God who goes beyond mercy. He made me a son! He makes all of us sons and daughters! He adopts us into his family. In a sense we become brothers and sisters to Jesus! We can call Almighty God the intimate term, Father! We become heirs of God! This is grace! This wonderful, awesome, marvelous, miraculous, unfathomable, powerful, grace - is for you and me.

Reach out, accept it, take it in and soak in it like we do a Manitou Beach. But ask for more. Let God's grace penetrate your skin and go into the depths of your soul. For what do you need grace?

God fills our time on earth with provision, daily cleansing, lots of wisdom in his Word, the smile of His favor, the touch of His hand, the endless delight of his companionship, the help of the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship of the Saints! This is more than mercy. It's grace! Fantastic, magnificent, incredible grace! Illogical, unexplainable grace!

(taken from a Discipleship Journal article)