

The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles

Lesson 21: Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah -- 2 Chronicles 32:1–35:27

Sennacherib's army was the most fearsome thing in the world, and now it was camped outside Jerusalem. The Assyrian king sent letters and shouted threats designed to melt the courage of the city, mocking the God of Judah as if He were no different from the powerless idols of the nations Assyria had already crushed. And what did Hezekiah do? He went up to the house of the LORD, and he and the prophet Isaiah prayed to heaven (32:20). They did not negotiate, they did not panic, they cried out to God. That single picture, a king on his knees beside a prophet while an empire howls at the gates, is the doorway into this lesson.

God answered. He sent an angel who cut off the mighty men of the Assyrian camp, and Sennacherib went home in shame, where he was struck down by his own sons in the house of his god (32:21). The deliverance was complete and it was God's. But the chapter does not end in pure triumph, because Hezekiah's heart was lifted up with pride, and judgment threatened until he humbled himself (32:25–26). Even a good king must guard his heart in the season of blessing. Pride is the temptation that ambushes us not in defeat but in success.

Then the camera turns to Manasseh, and the story takes a turn that should stop us cold. Manasseh was arguably the worst king Judah ever had: he rebuilt the high places, raised altars to Baal, set a carved image in the house of God, burned his children in the fire, and practiced sorcery, seducing the nation into evil worse than the heathen (33:1–9). Yet when Assyria dragged him away with hooks and bronze chains to Babylon, in his distress he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers and prayed, and the LORD was moved by his entreaty and brought him home (33:12–13). The worst king became, in the end, a monument to mercy.

And finally there is Josiah, who came to the throne as a child and sought God as a young man, who tore down the idols and, while repairing the temple, rediscovered the Book of the Law. When the long-neglected word of God was read aloud, the young king tore his clothes, for he saw how far the nation had strayed, and he led a great covenant renewal and a Passover unlike any in generations (34:14–35:19). Here are the two pillars of this lesson, woven together: the depth of God's mercy to the genuinely penitent, even a Manasseh, and the authority of God's word, which alone can show a nation how far it has fallen and call it home. As we walk through these chapters, watch for both, and let them search you.

Group Discussion: Manasseh was perhaps the most wicked king Judah ever had, yet God received him when he humbled himself in captivity. What does his story teach us about the reach of God's mercy, and about the danger of deciding anyone is beyond hope?

Personal Reflection: When the lost Book of the Law was read aloud, Josiah tore his clothes because he finally saw how far the nation had drifted. When was the last time God's word stopped you in your tracks and showed you something you needed to change?

Read 2 Chronicles 32:1–35:27

Study Questions

1. What does Hezekiah's response to Sennacherib's invasion, going up to the house of the LORD to pray with Isaiah, teach us about where God's people are to turn when threatened by overwhelming forces?
2. What is the 'Sennacherib' currently shouting threats at your faith, and what would it look like to take it to God in prayer rather than facing it on your own?
3. Hezekiah's heart was lifted up in pride after his great deliverance (32:25); what does this warn us about the spiritual dangers that come with success and blessing rather than hardship?
4. In what season of blessing or success are you most tempted toward pride or self-reliance, and how can you, like Hezekiah, humble yourself before judgment becomes necessary?
5. Manasseh led Judah into terrible evil, yet in captivity he humbled himself greatly and God was moved by his entreaty (33:12–13); what does this reveal about the conditions on which God extends mercy and the genuineness He looks for in repentance?
6. Is there a sin or season in your past that you secretly believe places you beyond God's forgiveness, and how does Manasseh's restoration speak to that fear?

7. When the rediscovered Book of the Law was read, Josiah tore his clothes and led the nation back to covenant (34:19–33); what does this teach about the authority and power of God's word to expose sin and direct genuine reform?
8. How regularly do you place yourself under the reading of God's word in a way that can actually confront and reshape you, rather than merely confirm what you already think?
9. Holding together Manasseh's restoration and Josiah's reform, what do these chapters teach about the depth of God's mercy to the truly penitent and the supreme authority of God's word in directing His people, and how do both find their fullness in Christ, in whom God shows mercy to the worst of sinners and through whose word the church is called to genuine reform?
10. Looking back across the prayers of Hezekiah, the repentance of Manasseh, and the reforms of Josiah, name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to humble you, to assure you of mercy, or to bring you back under His word.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Acts 9:1–19, Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the apostle, mercy reaching the seemingly unreachable like Manasseh; 1 Timothy 1:15–16, Christ came to save sinners of whom Paul calls himself foremost, a pattern for God's patience; 2 Timothy 3:16–17, all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable to make us complete, the authority Josiah honored; James 4:6–10, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble, the principle behind Hezekiah and Manasseh alike; Hebrews 4:12, the word of God is living and active, piercing the heart as it pierced Josiah's.

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