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Pastor Jonathan Falwell

Best Supporting Actor – Manasseh

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 33

Summary: In this sermon based on 2 Chronicles 33, Pastor Jonathan Falwell examines the life of Israel's King Manasseh, who, despite having a godly father, walked away from the Lord and served other idols. He explains how God punished him for his sin, but also stood ready to receive him back and restore him when he repented.

I would ask you to turn in your Bibles today to 2 Chronicles chapter 33. In 2 Chronicles 33 today we begin a brand-new series, and it's a series that is just simply entitled *Best Supporting Actor*. Now I don't need to spend a lot of time describing to you or explaining to you what that means or what that's about. A best supporting actor, if you've watched any of the shows like the Oscars© or any of the others, they use that phrase and they use that to talk about lesser-known roles, lesser-known characters that have major impact on the film or the TV show that is being portrayed.

Well, that's exactly what we're going to do over the coming months. We're going to talk about best supporting actors, and we're going to look in the Old Testament and find some people that maybe you've never heard of before, some lesser-known characters in the Old Testament that have had major impact in the kingdom of God.

And today we're going to begin in 2 Chronicles 33, beginning with verse 1, talking about a guy that maybe you've never heard of. You probably have heard of his name, but not in the context of what we're going to talk about today. And the man we're going to talk about is King Manasseh. Let's read together beginning with verse 1,

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, following the detestable practices of the pagan nations that the Lord had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites. He rebuilt the pagan shrines his father, Hezekiah, had broken down. He constructed altars

for the images of Baal and set up Asherah poles. He also bowed before all the powers of the heavens and worshiped them.

He built pagan altars in the Temple of the Lord, the place where the Lord had said, “My name will remain in Jerusalem forever.” He built these altars for all the powers of the heavens in both courtyards of the Lord’s Temple. Manasseh also sacrificed his own sons in the fire in the valley of Ben-Hinnom. He practiced sorcery, divination, and witchcraft, and he consulted with mediums and psychics. He did much that was evil in the Lord’s sight, arousing his anger.

Manasseh even took a carved idol he had made and set it up in God’s Temple, the very place where God had told David and his son Solomon: “My name will be honored forever in this Temple and in Jerusalem—the city I have chosen from among all the tribes of Israel. If the Israelites will be careful to obey my commands—all the laws, decrees, and regulations given through Moses—I will not send them into exile from this land that I set aside for your ancestors.” But Manasseh led the people of Judah and Jerusalem to do even more evil than the pagan nations that the Lord had destroyed when the people of Israel entered the land.

The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they ignored all his warnings. So the Lord sent the commanders of the Assyrian armies, and they took Manasseh prisoner. They put a ring through his nose, bound him in bronze chains, and led him away to Babylon. But while in deep distress, Manasseh sought the Lord his God and sincerely humbled himself before the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed, the Lord listened to him and was moved by his request. So the Lord brought Manasseh back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh finally realized that the Lord alone is God!

After this Manasseh rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David, from west of the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley to the Fish Gate, and continuing around the hill of Ophel. He built the wall very high. And he stationed his military officers in all of the fortified towns of Judah. Manasseh also removed the foreign gods and the idol from the Lord’s Temple. He tore down all the altars he had built on the hill where the Temple stood and all the altars that were in Jerusalem, and he dumped them outside the city. Then he restored the altar of the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings and thanksgiving offerings on it. He also encouraged the people of Judah to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. However, the people still sacrificed at the pagan shrines, though only to the Lord their God.

The rest of the events of Manasseh’s reign, his prayer to God, and the words the seers spoke to him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, are recorded in The Book of the Kings of Israel. Manasseh’s prayer, the account of the way God answered him, and an account of all his sins and unfaithfulness are recorded in The Record of the Seers. It includes a list of the locations where he built pagan shrines and set up Asherah poles and idols before he humbled himself and repented. When Manasseh died, he was buried in his palace. Then his son Amon became the next king.

The reason that I have read this entire passage to you today is because this passage tells the entire story of Manasseh's life. It takes us from the beginning of his reign all the way to his death, and it's important that we do that, because we want to set up the stage here for what this best supporting actor really did and how he lived and what he accomplished and what he caused. So that's the reason why we read this entire passage.

And this story is a story of one of the kings. You can read through the book of Kings, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, and the one thing that you see over and over again is a story that's told countless times that there was a king who died and then another king took his place, and that king either did that which was right in God's eyes or he did that which was evil in God's eyes. And it's story after story after story, which is why it's easy, so often, for us to read a passage like we read today and miss the underlying importance, the meaning for this passage and why Manasseh has such an important lesson for each and every one of us today.

So today what I want to do is take a few moments and bring to light out of this passage four very important truths, four very important thoughts that we can glean from Manasseh's life so that we can understand, so that we can see that indeed Manasseh, this lesser-known, almost unknown king of the nation of Israel, had incredible impact, and that we can learn from him.

And the first thing we can learn from him is this—this is cool—that God is patient. Think about those words. God is patient. And aren't you glad that He is? Aren't you glad that God is a patient God? Look what it says in verse 10. It says this, "The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they ignored all his warnings." The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people and they ignored all of His warnings.

That's a quick verse, but that very quick verse tells a story that probably took place over decades, that took place over a long period of time that God was speaking to them, calling them to repentance, calling them to change, calling them to obey, calling them to live the life that God had called them and intended for them to live, and yet they ignored and they ignored and they ignored.

But here's the cool thing: God never gave up on them. Why? Because God is a patient God. God is patient. And Manasseh, in all that he did in continuing during his reign and continuing to do what he was doing, he allowed all of this to take place, and God was patient with Manasseh, even as he dishonored God, and God's protection remained, even as they moved further and further away from Him.

I mentioned earlier I've got four children. You know that. And I've, many times in my life, taken my kids to different amusement parks. And when my kids were a lot younger, as many of you do, when you go to an amusement park, there's scores and scores, thousands of people that are there. And the smaller your kids are, you know what we do, right? We grab ahold of their hand, we grab ahold of their arm, because we want to keep them close because of all the thousands of people. We don't want to let our kids go. We don't want them to get lost in the crowd. We don't want to lose track of where they are.

I remember many times walking through those amusement parks, and I would have one hand here and one hand here and Shari would have one hand and one hand, and we'd walk through those parks and all four of our kids we'd have them. You've probably seen it—I've seen it—where some people walk through the parks and they've got leashes on their kids. Interesting idea. Maybe an image I am not so sure I'd want, but still not a bad idea. I just can't imagine walking through and putting on a leash, "Here, boy!" I don't know that the kids would respond real well to that. But it's a great idea. Why? Because you want to keep ahold of your kids. You don't want to let them go. You don't want to let them disappear.

But you know what also happens when you're walking through those parks and you've got your kids firmly by the hand? What do the kids do? They spend their entire time—in fact, one of the rides at the amusement park is them trying to pull away from you and they're trying to do everything they can to get out of your grip so they can run over here and see that and run over here and do that and run over to this park and run over to this ride and run over to this stand and run over and get ice cream here, and they're always, constantly trying to pull away and get away from you, and yet you hold on tighter and tighter and tighter.

That is what God does with us. It's what God did with Manasseh. Manasseh, everything he did dishonored God. He got further and further and further away from God, and anything he could do to dishonor God, he did it proudly. But you know what? It says there that God continued to talk to Manasseh, He continued to grab ahold of Manasseh's hand, He continued to try to hold him close, and even Manasseh, as he pulled and pulled to try to get away from the grip of God, God still hung on.

And I'm going to tell you, I'm so grateful that we serve a God who continues to hang on. My dad said it a thousand times: Our God is not the God of the second chance; He's the God of the 10,000th chance. And I'm so grateful for that. But I've got to be honest with you. Even though we have a patient God, even though we have a God who keeps us firmly in His grip, the other thing we can learn from this passage is this: God will not be mocked. God will not be mocked.

I read verse 10 to you a moment ago that said that God continued to speak and continued to call, but look what it says in verse 11. After they had ignored everything, it says in verse 11, "So the Lord sent the commanders of the Assyrian armies, and they took Manasseh prisoner. They put a ring through his nose, bound him in bronze chains, and led him away to Babylon."

Manasseh not only dishonored God, but he dismissed God, and as a result we learn the lesson here that there are always consequences for dismissing God. There are always consequences for dismissing God. The results of our sin are absolute. No question about it.

In fact, let's go back a few books in the Old Testament to Exodus 20. Look what it says here in verse 1, "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them nor serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generations of those who hate me.'"

You read those verses there. Let me just tell you something. There is something that is crystal clear: there are consequences for our sin. God will not be mocked. Manasseh mocked God over and over and over again; he dismissed God over and over and over again; and there was a price to pay.

There's a very close correlation to what we see in our culture and our world today. You read that passage and it says that the actions that they took will be visited upon the third and fourth generations. There are many people today, many Christians today, who believe that my little private sin, my little pet sin, my sin that nobody knows about that's not hurting anybody, it doesn't hurt them, it doesn't hurt my wife, it doesn't hurt my husband, it doesn't hurt my kids, it doesn't hurt my friends. No one's going to know about it; it's just mine, and it doesn't hurt anybody.

The Bible says otherwise. The Bible says that what we do that dishonors God not only will affect you, but it will affect those who come after you. There is always destruction when sin is present. There is always destruction when sin is rampant in our lives. You want to look at our culture today and ask the question, Is this true? Is this something that we can see? Oh, absolutely.

Go back 40 or 50 years, when God was thrown out of the public schools. Do you think there's been any consequence to the second, the third, the fourth generation? Absolutely. Do you think there's been any consequence back in the 1970s when the Supreme Court decide that any time that we want to we can freely kill unborn babies in our nation and call it abortion? Do you think that is something that has affected the second and the third and the fourth generations? Make no mistake; our country has been affected by that decision.

What took place a couple of weeks ago when the Supreme Court redefined marriage? Lots of people, many Christians, who said, "That's not going to affect my marriage. It's not going to harm my marriage. It's not going to do anything to me." Let me just tell you something. Mark my words. Write it down and put today's date down. Ten years from now, 20 years from now, 30 years from now, I promise you: When God is dishonored, it will bring consequences, and it will affect not only us, but it will affect our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren, the third and the fourth generations. God will not be mocked.

But there is a great truth here. We started, remember, with God is patient, and then we talked about yes, but God will not be mocked. We're going point/counterpoint here. You know what the next one is? This is cool. God is always faithful. God is always faithful. There is good news, even in the midst of bad news.

Look what it says here in verse 12, "But while in deep distress, Manasseh sought the Lord as God and sincerely humbled himself before the God of his ancestors, and when he prayed, the Lord listened to him and was moved by his request, so the Lord brought Manasseh back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh finally realized that the Lord alone is God."

The great truth here is this: It doesn't matter how far away from God we get; it doesn't matter how often we dishonor Him, how often we dismiss Him. When we come to that place where we know that we've blown it, where we realize that we've sinned and we run back to Him and we

get on our knees before God and repent and pray to God in deep distress and ask for God's forgiveness, our God is always faithful. He is always listening. And aren't you glad that's true? Come on, clap. Aren't you glad that's true? I know you're hungry, but come on, our God is faithful.

We're sitting here today, and make no mistake, because so often in the Church we get really good at this. We get really good at looking at the sins of the world and condemning the sins of the world, and talk about how bad things are out there and how awful things are out there, and I can't believe they're doing that and I can't believe they're living like that and I can't believe they're saying that and I can't believe they're making the decisions like that.

And let me just tell you something: We don't look at our own sin. You want to know why our country's in trouble? It's because our Church is in trouble. You want to know why our country is going the direction it's going? It's because the Church has taken our hands off of the wheel. Now I'm not saying that our job is to go out there and to control the White House and to control the Congress and to control the Supreme Court. That's not our job. Our job is to live our lives according to the principles of God's Word so that the world will see something different in the way that we live, something that is attractive in the way that we live, and they will say, "I want what he's got." That's why the world's in trouble.

And so when we hear the statement "God is always faithful," it's such good news. Remember Romans 3:23, that all have sinned? I've got bad news for you: All means you. All means me. We blow it, and we mess up. And we do things that are just awful sometimes. And we spend way too much time sweeping those things under the rug. We've spent way too much time dismissing those things as not a big a deal as the sins of the world.

I'm going to tell you something: There are no degrees of sin when it comes to God. When you steal a cookie out of the cookie jar or you murder someone, before God that is sin, that is sin, that is sin, and it's all equal at the foot of the cross. Now the consequences of that sin are different. You will not get the electric chair for stealing a cookie. Thank God. But I'm telling you, the sin of the Church has got to be repented of. The sin of our marriages must be repented of.

We must do like Manasseh did and realize we've blown it, we've blown it, we've blown it, and in great distress fall on our knees before God and, "God, I'm sorry. God, I can't believe I've done this. God, change me. God, heal me. God, restore me. God, restore my marriage. God, I'm sorry that I walked away when troubles got tough. God, I'm sorry that I made that mistake that hurt my wife/hurt my husband. God, I'm sorry that I did that. God, I'm sorry that I didn't forgive them for when they came to me and admitted what they had done. God, I'm sorry that I just walked away because I thought that I couldn't put up with anymore. God, I'm sorry."

God listens. God always listens. But He doesn't *just* listen. Listen to this; this is cool. As we just read, not only does God listen, God always restores. God always restores. That brings us to our last statement. Our God is worthy to be praised. Look what it says in verse 14, the first part of that verse. It says this, "After this," after his repentance, after he had sought God's forgiveness, after he'd realized that he'd blown it and messed up and done everything wrong that he could possibly do, he'd come to God and said, "God, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." He didn't come to God

thinking God was going to deliver him; he probably came to the point he realized, “Man, I’ve blown it so much, there is no hope, so I’m just going to have to say, ‘God, I’m sorry,’ and just trust God for being in captivity for the rest of my life.”

I don’t believe for a minute Manasseh thought that if he would come to God and ask for forgiveness that God would restore. I may not be right about that, and we won’t know until we get to heaven, but I tend to believe Manasseh thought he’d blown it way too much. But thank God Manasseh didn’t just throw up his hands in disgust and say, “Well, I’ve blown it and I’m just going to go ahead and forget about it and just keep living the way I want to live.”

No, he didn’t do that. He realized that even when we’ve blown it and we’re paying the consequences for our sin, we still need to ask God for forgiveness. And he did that, but look what He did—and this is why God’s worthy to be praised. It says, “And Manasseh rebuilt.” You know what that means? That Manasseh not only was restored, he was brought out of captivity and brought back to Jerusalem, but here is what he did: He spent the rest of his life living the way he should have lived, and God gave him the strength to do it, the ability to do it, and the opportunity to do it. God restored his kingdom.

And I’m going to tell you something. There are some people here today that have blown it time and time and time again, and I’ll be honest with you—I’m one of you. We’ve made mistakes that we shouldn’t have made, said things that we shouldn’t have said, done things that we shouldn’t have done, and maybe there are some people here today that have gotten beyond that point where they’ve gotten to the point where they are paying the price for that and throwing their hands up in disgust, throwing their hands up and saying, “I’ve blown it and I’m done for. There’s nothing I can do. All hope is gone and I’m just going to live the rest of my life and just wait to die.”

God did not send His Son Jesus so that we would spend the rest of our lives in discouragement and depression. Let me just tell you something, and I want you to hear me. If you’ve heard nothing else today, I want you to hear this: There is no reason for the Church today to be discouraged about what is taking place in our world. Do you know why? Because our God is still on the throne and our God still restores and our God will still allow us to do what He’s called us to do.

And so today we look at this king from the book of 2 Chronicles, this king that we have probably not spent one minute talking about in this church probably in all the years here—maybe, I don’t know when Harold Willmington or Ed Hindson was doing a study of the Old Testament he might have been mentioned, but probably not a lot of time spent there.

Today when we look at this guy, this supporting actor that could very easily have been written off as just another person in the Old Testament that really didn’t do much, today we can learn so much from him, because here’s a man who was given an opportunity. He blew it. He sinned. He paid for his sin. He repented of his sin. And God did what He promised that He will always do: He restored him after his sin. And today, my friends, that message, that lesson, doesn’t only work in 2 Chronicles. It doesn’t only work in the Old Testament. It doesn’t only work in the Bible. My friends, that message is still at work today, because my God is still at work and on the throne today.

And so today, wherever you are in your walk with God, wherever you are along your journey, know this: There is not a person in this room that is any different than you. The names might be different, the backgrounds might be different, the skin color might be different, sins might be different, but when it comes right down to it, all of us are equal before God. And it doesn't matter who we are or what we've done. It doesn't matter what our background looks like. It doesn't matter what the sins we've committed are.

But there was a time when God said, "I so love that world that I'm going to send my Son Jesus, and He's going to die on the cross, and He will be buried and He's going to rise again, and the moment that He walks out of that tomb, He's going to give every person that has ever lived—and it doesn't matter whether they are red, yellow, black, white, gay, straight, it doesn't matter who they are or what they've done, I don't care; they could be preachers and they can be pornographers—I am telling you that when Christ rises from the grave, they will have the opportunity for forgiveness and salvation and hope for eternity." And my friends, that message today is for you.

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