

## God's Amazing Grace Transforms!

A sermon based on 2 Chronicles 33:1-6,10-18

It's probably been a number of years since they've made these toys, but perhaps some of you remember "Transformers." They looked like simple cars, but with a few twists and turns they became robots. The idea was so catchy these Transformers spun off into the world of comic books, cartoons, and there have even been a string of movies (not widely acclaimed, but I love them) movies made telling the story of the Transformers.

In our service today, we are looking at how God's amazing grace is a "transformer." The beautiful hymn Amazing Grace, which you know well and we've sung so many times, reminds us of that grace...how once we were wretches but now we've been saved. Once, we were lost, but now are found. Our gospel shows how Jesus turned a sinful woman's life around and healed her with his **Transforming Grace**. And today we peek back into the history book called 2 Chronicles, where we see an unlikely transformation, one not too different from ours.

Now, the events of our text took place about 700 years before Jesus was born. Israel was well into their downward spiral. It seemed the further history progressed, the further from God they got. As you read through these histories of those kings, it seems like each one is worse than the next. There were a few exceptions, a few bright spots in the story, but they were clearly the exception. There were a few faithful kings like Hezekiah and Josiah, but for the most part, even the men who were ruling over the nation of Judah (men who were part of the line of the Savior) had given up on the Lord.

Now, even though Manasseh's father Hezekiah was one of the faithful exceptions, Manasseh was not. In fact you could say he was exceptionally bad!! The list of offenses committed by Manasseh is not a pleasant list. He built Baal and Asherah idols and then encouraged the grotesque sexual practices that went along with worshipping them. He built altars to worship false gods in God's temple of all places. He built memorials so the people could worship their new gods, the sun, moon, and stars. Our text continues, ***"He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger."***

And much deserved anger right? As far as slapping God in the face sins, there's not much more you can do to top Manasseh, is there? He's not just slapping him in the face, he's punching God in the nose, and then kicking him in the gut while he's down. He was about as far from God as you can be!!!

God wanted to be close to Manasseh, but Manasseh would have nothing of it. We hear, ***"The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention."*** We know from other parts of Scripture how God tried to talk to Manasseh; it was through his faithful prophet Isaiah. He proclaimed law and gospel to Manasseh and to the people of Israel, but they largely rejected him. In fact, if tradition is correct, we know how emphatically he rejected God. Tradition states Manasseh had Isaiah sawed in half for preaching God's Word to him.

Isn't reading that like reading pure evil. Doesn't it make your skin crawl to hear of such vile and wicked behavior? It makes me shudder just sharing this history with you. It's hard to imagine there could be a

person with such hardened unbelief in the world. There's a special place in hell for people like the vile and infamous King Manasseh, isn't there?

The people who do the things Manasseh did are those who deserve to be punished. And that's exactly what happened. Our verses continue, ***"So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.*** In the snap of a finger, in the blink of an eye, Manasseh's kingdom and his freedom were gone, ripped away by God. He fell quickly from a royal palace to a foreign jail cell – and we know why. It's because he rejected the Lord.

We stand here, 2700 years later, and we say, probably without exception "Serves him right!! He got what he had coming!" We're quick to sit in the judgment seat, so quick to declare guilt and hand out punishment. But where does that leave us, then? What is it we have coming? We who are so quick to look down on the sin in the lives of others and so quick to judge will be quickly judged ourselves.

Are we really any better than Manasseh? Do our weekly offerings to the Lord show we are any less idolators than Manasseh was? Do our interactions with our neighbors show we are closer to perfection than Manasseh? We may not ask a witch what the future holds, but don't we display our sinful lack of trust when we worry about the future or complain about the past. We feel like God has not been fair to us in the past or as if we might be forgotten by him in the future. You've never sawed a pastor in two for preaching God's Word to you (and I hope it's not a practice you plan to take up in the near future!), but when God tries to speak to you in his Word, how many times have you, like Manasseh, paid no attention? Our sins may not be recorded in Scripture, but they are just as much sins as the ones we read about today. If the Chronicler were writing our life story, would he not be justified in writing about us ***"(They) did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger"***?

It's the bitter pill of reality to read words like these and have to say "That's me!" "I'm the one who has angered God with my sinful life" "I deserve the hook through my nose, the shackles and worse – I deserve to die for my sins." It's tough to swallow the fact we are in the same boat as evil Manasseh, or maybe some contemporaries, Kim Jong Un, Mohamed Abrini (headed up the Paris terrorist attacks), members of ISIS? It's tough to think we are no different from them, from a spiritual standpoint, isn't it? That adjective evil sounds fitting before names like those, but put it before my name or yours and it doesn't sound as good. It may not sound as good, but it is just as fitting, just as true.

Before you despair in thoughts of your similarity to this evil king, let's look at another similarity. We find it in the words of the second half of our text.

***In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. <sup>13</sup> And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.***

We share in common the sins of Manasseh, but we also get to share with him in God's love. God showed how his amazing grace transforms in Manasseh's life. He's done the same in our lives as well! The one man captivity he planned for Manasseh did just what God had hoped. It forced him to see the futility of his life and turned his eyes back where they belonged.

The power of his gracious gospel transformed Manasseh from worst to first. It turned him from one who had known God's anger to one who was experiencing his love. In a moment, he was transformed

from prisoner to freeman. Despite the plethora of guilt Manasseh had collected during his life of evil, at his repentance he was forgiven – washed, made whole. His debt was paid – great as it was, his debt was paid in full!! He was pardoned of his many wrongs and was immediately declared to be righteous in God's eyes.

**God's Transforming Grace** is active in our lives as well. It's quite the turnaround God worked in us. We were dead in sin. We were powerless to defend ourselves. We were fighting on the wrong side of the spiritual battlefield. In arrogance and ignorance we made war against God, yet God transformed our hearts and lives.

Do you know how? The answer's right over there! The waters of holy baptism transform us from worst to first, from sinner to saint. They make enemies into family. They take dead flesh and bones and make us alive. They give us who were powerless the might and the strength to serve the Lord. Our lives were stained so severely by sin that you could hardly make out who we really were, but God knew and that's why he cleansed us with his love. God's gospel love reminds us we have been transformed through his forgiveness.

Now, that transformation worked only because Jesus became our sin. He took our guilt and our shame, and transformed it into perfection. We have spent a lifetime collecting guilt and shame, but we don't experience its weight or endure its pain. We don't have to allow that guilt to collect in our lives, because it was all collected once before. It was collected as Jesus brought your sins and mine with him to the cross. There he paid off the debt we had incurred. There's nothing more that we can do, no more price for us to pay. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection paid for us!

So, when guilt and shame creep their way back into your life, remember the cross of Christ. Remember Jesus collected your guilt and corrected your wrongs. He paid the price to free us from the bonds of shame and death. Don't let the devil cloud your memory!! Don't let him distract your focus or allow you to forget you have been set free!! You have been blessed and transformed with **God's Amazing Grace**.

And this transformation continues each day. Every day we sin, and every day our Spirit-led repentance allows God's Transforming Grace to shine. We sinners are turned anew each day into saints of God. And as his saints the transformation continues. He changes us from babies in the faith into mature Christians through study of his Word. He changes our weak faiths into eager and willing reliance on him. He changes us from reluctant followers to bold believers. He changes us from those who conform to his will under a sense of compulsion to those who are excited to honor God and please him with our obedience. And it's the gospel of grace working such an awesome change.

It's **God's Amazing Grace** that has transformed us into who we are today. When we consider where we were and where we could be, we are led all the more to praise and thank our loving God for where we are and where we will be. He saved us from the pit and now promises us his prize. He saved us from gloom so that we could share in his glory. Secure in the love of God, now we await the final transformation – when these lowly frail bodies will be changed to be eternal, perfect, heavenly bodies – fit for an eternity at Jesus' side. Today we see it in part, on that day we'll see in full the glory of **God's Transforming Grace**. Amen.