

All Saints' Church
Cottenham with Rampton

Pastoral Letter #82
June/July 2023



Dear Church Family,

'The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. 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 his distress he sought the favour of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to them, 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.'

2 Chronicles 33: 10-13

Over the last few weeks the daily lectionary readings have been taking us through the second book of Chronicles in the Old Testament. The two books of Chronicles are described as history books from Adam to Abraham, and Second Chronicles continues the history of the Hebrew people (also known as the Israelites) from the reign of King Solomon to captivity in Babylon. Second Chronicles deals primarily with Judah, the southern kingdom, virtually ignoring the rebellious northern kingdom of Israel.

To set the context, shortly after their escape from slavery in Egypt (detailed in the book of Exodus), the Israelites built a tabernacle, under the direction of God. This portable tent served as a place of sacrifice and worship for hundreds of years. Whilst Israel's second king, David, planned a magnificent permanent temple to honour God, it was his son Solomon who carried out the construction.

The wisest and richest man on Earth, Solomon, married many foreign wives, who led him into idolatry, squandering his inheritance. Second Chronicles records the reigns of the kings who followed him, some of whom destroyed the idols and high places, and others who tolerated the worship of false gods.

King Manasseh from the reading above comes right at the end of Second Chronicles. He was just twelve years old when he became king and he reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-five years. That's some reign! But he was not a good king. The start of chapter 33 tells us that he did *'evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.'* This included erecting altars to the pagan god Baal, worshiping the stars, sacrificing his children in the fire and practising sorcery, witchcraft and divination. For an Israelite king, he couldn't be any worse! And by his actions, he led the people of Jerusalem astray so that they too did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed.

But the Lord does not give up on them. We read in verse 10 that *'the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention.'* As we see time and time again in the Old Testament, turning away from the Lord and forgetting who they were as 'children of God' leads the Israelites into humiliation and captivity by stronger nations and it's no different for Manasseh. But the outcome *is* different.

We read that in his distress Manasseh *'sought the favour of the Lord and humbled himself greatly'* and, as a result, God was moved by his words, listened to him and restored him back to his kingdom. And the outcome continues to be positive. If you read to the end of the chapter, you learn that Manasseh began to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, got rid of the foreign gods and restored the altar of the Lord, and he told the whole of Judah to only serve the Lord too.

The story is a wonderful testimony to the grace and mercy of God. God doesn't give up on us, even if we have to arrive at times of distress before we listen to his voice. If God can see something worth redeeming in the life of King Manasseh, who had done such evil, then there is great comfort for each one of us, that we are not beyond redemption, however far we think we may have fallen.

And there is also great challenge. If God could see the potential for good in Manasseh, how dare any of us presume to write off another person and say, *'They'll never change!'* People can and do.

As we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask God each day to *'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.'* The danger of being so familiar with a text is that it can lose its power, but these are strong words from Jesus. We ask God to forgive us for the things we have thought, said and done and we know that, by the saving grace of Jesus' death upon the cross, we *are* forgiven. But we so often fail to forgive ourselves and that can cause us difficulty in also forgiving others.

If that is you, know today that *you are forgiven* and, as St Paul said, there is nothing *'in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'* (Romans 8:39).

As we move into summer with the joy of holidays for some, do come to church when you are home. We will be exploring some of the questions that Jesus asked using a resource by John Pritchard. It looks very interesting.

If you are receiving this letter and cannot get to church, do remember that we are very happy to bring church to you. If you'd like to receive a visit, have someone pray with you, or receive home communion, do let me know. It would be our pleasure.

Best wishes,

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