

YOU ARE NOT A HOPELESS CASE

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: 2 Chronicles 33: 1-17.

This book in the canon of Scripture was completed when the people returned from exile in Babylon. It is similar to the book of Kings but has more of a focus on the southern kingdom, centred on Jerusalem. In this passage we learn about the king of Judah, Manasseh, who made a huge number of mistakes and behaved very badly, yet found mercy. His example shows us that none of us are without hope. We may think that nobody is as bad as I am, but Manasseh shows us that there is a way back to God to any of us if we repent.

1. Manasseh sinned against light.

Manasseh had knowledge of the Lord's ways and will. He had much light. He had a godly father in Hezekiah and the history of the nation and God's dealings with it, at his fingertips. Many do not have those advantages. Paul saw the vision of the Macedonian man begging them to come and help them. These were people with no light. Manasseh, however, knew about the Lord's help in the time of his father, defending Jerusalem from the aggression of Assyria.

We have a duty to try to teach people, especially the young, about the things of God. So much of Proverbs is written with younger people in mind, to teach them the fear of the Lord in their youth (See, for example, Proverbs 1: 8-10; and 2: 1-5). So much of the first seven chapters of that book speaks as to children. We should try to ensure that there is knowledge that we are giving to as many young people as we can.

2. Have we sinned against light?

We may be guilty like Manasseh. We are surrounded by light and truth, the knowledge of God. Perhaps we went to Sunday School when young. We may have heard much preaching through life. There may be a number of Bibles in our home. That is besides something remaining in our national culture that is a reminder of the existence of God. The recent Jubilee had church services and mentions made of the Queen's trust in God.

Maybe at times we were stirred by the light that was all around us to do something, but we then turned back. We resolved to pray but we never did. We resolved to go to

church, or to go more often, but we never did. Each time we failed to follow through with our intentions, we felt more like a hopeless failure. We might have concluded that the Lord would never receive us now because of our past failures. We might feel we have left it too late, or that our relationships are too tangled up and beyond repair. We may also feel embarrassed at the things we are meant to believe, in particular the supernatural aspects of the truth. We may feel the world is so governed by the laws of nature that there is no room or need for supernatural explanations. Like the rich young ruler, we may have stalled and feel paralysed, unable to move forward.

Yet, in it all, we know that we are missing something important. We know there is an emptiness within, and we can also see it in the world at large. We want peace for our conscience and know we do not have it. You know that others have found something you do not have. We are persuaded about the existence of God and the truth of the Bible yet feel unable to move on and act.

3. The God who forgives.

We hardly dare believe that it is true, but the Lord is willing to forgive any that come to Him. It is true that He is very holy and that He remembers everything we do and think against Him and our fellow human beings. But He is not so overcome and shocked by our sin that He cannot forgive. He is the only Person with an objective knowledge about sin and how evil it is. He is also the only Person who knows what to do about it. Indeed, He is the only Person who has already done something about it. If we think we are a hopeless case, we should think again. We should go to the cross and there see the willingness of God to forgive sin. Through His Son's work on our behalf, bearing our sin, we can see the all-conquering grace that abounds to us. He is able to wash away the sin of any who come to Him. Saul of Tarsus looked like a hopeless case. But he too discovered, like Manasseh, that God forgives sinners of all kinds. There are no hopeless cases.

Neither should we think that we have to feel absolutely terrible ourselves before we can come. We should come as we are. We should not wait until we think we are feeling sufficiently penitential. Go to Him with what we have and ask Him to give us more. But we must recognize there is mercy for any who come to Him. This is a great atonement that Christ accomplished for sinners.

We have to accept that there are consequences of our sin. Manasseh had committed some truly awful crimes. He had to live with those consequences and, though he was wonderfully restored to his throne, things were not to be the same for him. Sometimes people who have done such great evil become the most effective evangelists. They are forgiven much and so they love much. Their consciences are more tender, and they are more aware of the corrupting and all-damaging effect of sin. They are made humble by the Lord's mercy and then use the rest of their lives in serving the Lord and repairing, in measure, the damage they had created in their un-converted state. Manasseh shows us

then that there are no hopeless cases. We should hurry to make our peace with God now while there is time and opportunity, and not squander the light God has given to us.