

Sing before the service: Scripture hymn 11-2:2

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Psalm of praise: 119:51

Prayer

Psalm 41:2

Scripture reading: 2 Chronicles 33

Scripture text: 2 Chronicles 33:12; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 33

In his distress he sought the favour of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.

(2 Chronicles 33:12 NIV-UK)

Manasseh is one of those who repented as a result of what happened to him and his people.

Manasseh's father, Hezekiah, was a true believer and during his reign he introduced significant reforms in respect of worship among the people.

Manasseh, when he became king, immediately did away with all these reforms.

- During his earlier years Manasseh was a very bad man.
- He had very few good qualities and because of that he should actually never have become a king.

Look at a summary of all Manasseh's evil practices:

- He reintroduced the worship of Baal in Judah.
- He rebuilt the high places for worship.
- He erected Asherah poles once again.
- From the Scriptures we learn that Manasseh was the first man in the Bible who worshipped all the starry hosts.
 - Today it is called astral religion.
 - Nowhere in the Bible do we find anything like this in the history of Judah.
- Apart from worshipping the starry hosts he also practised sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists.
- Manasseh even burnt his son as an offering to Molech.
- From what is told about Ahab in 1 Kings 16:31-33 it is clear that Manasseh was his equal considering his ungodly practices.

He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him. (1 Kings 16:31-33 NIV-UK)

The Lord uses the life of this man to reveal to us how great his love is. Hence He let the repentance of this bad man, Manasseh, be written down for the believers in centuries to follow.

- Manasseh sincerely repented and humbled himself greatly before the Lord.
- No longer did he worship Molech and the starry hosts.

- He only worshipped the Lord God.
- This is true repentance. Or we can put it like this: It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow about what you have done wrong and to turn away from it completely.

There are quite a few things to be said about repentance. First, it is **essential** in every person's life.

- Through our sins we all turn away from the Lord.
- Hence John the Baptist started his ministry by saying: Repent! (Matthew 2:3).
- The Lord Jesus Christ preached the same:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

These words became a refrain in the history of the church; Peter (Acts 2:38) addressed the first converts in exactly the same way:

Peter replied, Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 NIV-UK)

Paul puts it the other way round in his letter to the Corinthians.

- He says that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?

(1 Corinthians 6:9 NIV-UK)

- This means, after all, that those who do not repent will not have access to God's kingdom.

Repentance is therefore not a one-off happening.

- Repentance begins with a one-off happening as in the case of Manasseh who turned away from idol worship and turned to the Lord.
 - Today we call it root/radical conversion.
- But then there is also a daily review of your works.
 - Our articles of faith (Heidelberg Catechism in this instance) call it the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.

When people experience a sense of guilt because of some wrong they have done, they think it is impossible to return to the Lord. The truth is:

- Just as it was possible for Manasseh to turn back to the Lord, it is possible for everyone to repent by the grace of God.
- Although you have gone astray like Manasseh, the Lord can still bring you to repentance.
- But then you **must**, same as Manasseh, humble yourself remorsefully before God.

Repentance must not be pretence. Repentance must be real.

- Repentance must be internal as well as external. That is to say it must be in your heart and in your works.
- You should realise that an unconverted person is a person of shame.
 - The shame is that such a sinful person cannot even keep the Ten Commandments.

Repentance is to turn away from all that is evil, to love what is good and to maintain justice (Amos 5:15).

- Hence true repentance involves your entire life.

Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. (Amos 5:15 NIV-UK)

Is there any one among us who would not wish to live like this?

- We all want to do it and therefore we must honestly try to serve the Lord sincerely.
- Hence we should kneel down and remorsefully plead for forgiveness of our sins.
- But we must also praise and worship the Lord from the bottom of our heart.

Have you ever thought about Manasseh's life? Have you ever considered that it was humanly impossible for him to repent?

- Yes, with men it was impossible, but it was possible with God.
- Hence Manasseh was converted.

We are living by the same grace of God.

- He thinks of us all the time – true to his covenant.
- Let us then respond to this covenant through a life in which we strive to more and more turn away from all evil and at the same time grow in holiness.

Let's listen to what our articles of faith say about repentance in Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 33:

88 Q. What is the true repentance or conversion of man?

A. It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.[1]

[1] Rom. 6:1-11; I Cor. 5:7; II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:5-10.

89. Q. What is the dying of the old nature?

A. It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it.[1]

[1] Ps. 51:3, 4, 17; Joel 2:12, 13; Rom. 8:12, 13; II Cor. 7:10.

90. Q. What is the coming to life of the new nature?

A. It is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ,[1] and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.[2]

[1] Ps. 51:8, 12; Is. 57:15; Rom. 5:1; 14:17. [2] Rom. 6:10, 11; Gal. 2:20.

91. Q. But what are good works?

A. Only those which are done out of true faith,[1] in accordance with the law of God,[2] and to His glory,[3] and not those based on our own opinion or on precepts of men.[4]

[1] Joh. 15:5; Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6. [2] Lev. 18:4; I Sam. 15:22; Eph. 2:10. [3] I Cor. 10:31.

[4] Deut. 12:32; Is. 29:13; Ezek. 20:18, 19; Matt. 15:7-9.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Closing psalm: 73:10, 12

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen

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