

9. A tale of two kings

December 11, 2014

Some of you may have read Charles Dickens' classic novel "A tale of two cities" that depicts the condition of the French peasantry demoralized by the French elite class in the years leading up to the French Revolution, the corresponding brutality demonstrated by the revolutionaries toward the former noble people in the early years of the revolution, and many unflattering social parallels with life in London during the same period.

Tonight's teaching title has nothing to do with Paris or London, but I see the same human depravity and pride as well as humility that brought good results. We are going to meet two kings – one king who was a cat's meow in his own eyes was humbled by the Lord in a terrible way, another king who humbled himself before God. I believe that the Holy Spirit has a very important lesson for us to take heed.

A. THE KING WHO WAS HUMBLING BEFORE THE LORD

2 Chronicles 33:1-2 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. 2 But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.

2 Chronicles 33:5-10 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. 6 Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. 7 He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; 8 and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers--only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses." 9 So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel. 10 And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen.

2 Chronicles 33:11-13 Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon. 12 Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, 13 and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.

King Manasseh was the most wicked king in the history of Judah the Southern Kingdom. At the same time he had the longest reign than any others – 55 years, even longer than king David. All the wicked things that his godly father Hezekiah had torn down, Manasseh rebuilt as he led the nation back into idolatry. He even introduced the worship of Baal.

To make the matter worse, Manasseh added altars that dedicated to many different pagan gods in the temple where there were supposed to be one altar that was exclusively for Jehovah God. In other words, he downgraded the Lord to one of many gods.

I often said this to you guys: There is something better than going to heaven. It 's taking someone to heaven with you. At the same time there is something far worse than going to hell. It's dragging someone down to hell with you."

2 Kings 21:9 But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.

2 Kings 21:9 tells us what the attitude of the Jewish people was: they could care less about what the Lord commanded them. This described the basic attitude of the people of Judah during the early part of Manasseh 's reign. They went along with Manasseh's pagan worship because it was enticing and meeting their carnal desires.

This was a transformation of the culture from something generally God honoring like the glory days of America in 1940s to 1950s to a culture that glorified idolatry and immorality from 1960s to present days. In general we can say this happened because the people wanted it to happen. They didn 't care about the direction of their culture. The only thing that matters to the unbelieving public is satisfying their own selfish carnal desires at all cost including their families.

Somehow humans generally think that they are invincible and don 't care about what God tells them to do through the Bible until something devastating happens like king Manasseh. When the bottom drops out, all of sudden they don 't feel so invincible.

Some of you may have heard about pastor named Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church that headquarters in Seattle, WA. He was a very controversial pastor because though he was a dynamic speaker, he often used vulgarity from the pulpit. His reasoning was connecting with the people. He authored several books that were on the list of New York Times Best Sellers. For his newest book, he hired a marketing company with \$200,000 of the church money to promote his book so that it can be in the NY Best Seller list again while his church was laying off employees.

In the meanwhile there were a large group of staff members and some from the congregation who were accusing him of creating a climate of fear through his verbally abusive language, lack of self-control, bullying, abusive behavior, and mismanagement of church funds. That 's quite a list of complaints.

Two weeks after Driscoll's resignation, Mars Hill announced in an October 31 post on the church website that as of January 1, 2015, "the existing Mars Hill Church organization will be dissolved." After the church lays its central structure to rest, its 15 campuses across four states will float alone, if possible. Thousands of Christian worshipers gathering weekly, their church boasting annual revenues of more than \$30 million, dissolving. Done. All because of one leader 's blind ambition and selfishness. Driscoll brought an opportunity for the enemies of God to blaspheme His precious name.

Fortunately Manasseh repented from his sins and humbled himself before the Lord. From the royal throne to a dungeon, from the royal receiving line to a war prison chain with a hook on his nose, the whole experience was one of great humiliation of this wicked king, but the Lord used it to chasten him, break his pride, and bring him to his knees. Manasseh prayed to the Lord for forgiveness and the Lord kept His promise and forgave him.

While adversity often leads many broken souls to heaven, prosperity frequently leads many to hell under spiritual anesthesia.

Those who do not know the Bible often say that the God of the O T is full of wrath while the God of the NT is full of grace. I don't know how they would title what the Lord did for this wicked king Manasseh here. It was pure grace and mercy of God. Even more, the Lord moved the hearts of the Assyrians to release Manasseh and allow him to return to Jerusalem to rule over the people.

Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

B. THE KING WHO HUMBLING HIMSELF BEFORE THE LORD

2 Chronicles 34:1-3 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. 2 And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. 3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images.

2 Chronicles 34:18-21 Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king. 19 Thus it happened, when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes. 20 Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, 21 "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for those who are left in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book."

2 Chronicles 34:29-33 Then the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30 The king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem--the priests and the Levites, and all the people, great and small. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord. 31 Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. 32 And he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take a stand. So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. 33 Thus Josiah removed all the abominations from all the country that belonged to the children of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel diligently serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers.

King Josiah, a grandson of Manasseh was an opposite of his grandfather's wickedness. He was right in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his ancestor king David. There were 20 kings in Judah. Only 8 of them could be called "good".

Hezekiah had cleaned up after his father Ahaz, and Manasseh had cleaned up the consequences of his own evil practices, and now 20 years old Josiah had to undo the damage done by his father Amon. What a tragedy that all the leaders of Judah didn't maintain the law of the Lord and keep the nation honoring Jehovah God.

The four kings who followed Josiah undid all the good he had done and sold the nation into the hands of the Babylonians. Everything rises and falls with leadership, and young King Josiah provided aggressive spiritual leadership for the people.

The late pastor Steve Mays from Calvary Chapel South Bay said after he visited Washington, D.C. after George W. Bush became the President of the US, "It was like a breath of fresh air to compare with the previous administration," which he was referring to Bill Clinton and his ungodly and wicked administration. If the Lord tarries and He graciously allows a godly and conservative man to become the next President of the US, the air in that city will be changed for good as well.

A book that was mentioned in v18 was obviously the Pentateuch, the first five Books of the OT. Don't you think that it is rather strange that the Book of the Law was lost in the temple? It would be like nobody could find a Bible in a church building and nobody misses it, nor were they looking for it for years. There are many real churches in America like that.

It's to Josiah's credit that he desired to hear what the Book said, and when he heard it read, he was gripped by fear of God. Listen, how people respond to God's Word is a good indication of their spiritual appetite and the strength of their desire to please the Lord.

Josiah's son, Jehoiakim was a complete opposite of his godly father. When a man read the Book, this is what he did:

Jeremiah 36:23 And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.

The renewing of the covenant in v29 was a familiar event in Jewish history. When the new generation was about to enter Canaan, Moses had them renew the covenant, as recorded in Deuteronomy. On two occasions, Joshua called for a renewal of the covenant, and so also did Samuel in 1 Samuel 7 and 12. After Nehemiah and the people completed the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, Ezra led them to rededicate themselves to the Lord in Nehemiah 8-10.

I do have one problem with what Josiah did, though he led people with a great intention to please the Lord.

2 Chronicles 34:33b made all who were present in Israel diligently serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers.

Of course, the people of Judah served the Lord in all of Josiah's days because he was the king who could have them killed. But people cannot be coerced into having a relationship with God. It has to be a personal choice. This is the reason 'state religions' have always failed to bring spiritual revival.

I am afraid for our next generation. The majority of the next generation believers is far more influenced by the world than we are now. May the Lord return soon!

C. APPLICATIONS

1) We can do great things for the Lord if we are willing to do little things for others.

2) The only way we can prevent the nectar of praise from becoming the poison of pride is by following the Lord with a humble heart.

3) How people respond to God's Word is a good indication of their spiritual appetite and the strength of their desire to please the Lord.