Turning Around

Text: 2 Chronicles 33:1-16

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**Scriptures:** 2 Chronicles 33:1-16; Romans 6:1-11

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 164, 515, 119:33-40, 432, 525

Series: Heidelberg Catechism (HCLD33)

Theme: The wicked and idolatrous king Manasseh humbled himself before the Lord, entreating Him for help and came to know the Lord then restoring true worship in Jerusalem

Proposition: To know the Lord and his grace, conversion is essential, leading to joy in salvation.

**Introduction**

Have you ever taken the wrong route and finally come to realise that you are heading in a direction which is not going to take you where you need to go? It can be hard to accept the need to turn around and go back in the opposite direction, but if you’re heading the wrong way that is what you must do if you are going to get to your destination.

This is true of route finding in the physical world and it is also true of following the pathway to life in the spiritual realm. There are 360 degrees in a full circle and a 180 degree turn results in a complete ‘about turn’ with the result that you end up facing in the opposite direction.

This is the essential meaning of the term ‘conversion’ as we find in Scripture (Acts 15:3) and also in the Heidelberg Catechism (LD33Q&A88). For a person to be ‘converted’ they must be turned around, or turned about. There are two parts to this turning: away from sin and towards God. In Biblical theology - conversion may be defined as “*the conscious act of a regenerate person in which he or she turns to God in repentance and faith*” (A Hoekema).

Conversion is the outward evidence of the inward supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. This inner regeneration is the new birth of which Jesus spoke to Nicodemus saying: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*." (John 3:3).

True conversion occurs only once in a person’s life, we see many examples in Scripture of this e.g. Naaman (2 Kings 5:15), Manasseh (2 Chron 33:12-13) – more about him later, Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8-9), 3,000 on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), Saul (Acts 9:1-9), Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48), Lydia (Acts 16:14) and the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:29-34).

There are also examples of what can be termed ‘temporary conversions’ – which are really not conversions at all. In the parable of the Sower, Jesus taught that people may be like rocky ground on which seed falls. He explains “*this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away*” (Matt 13:20-21). A person may appear to have been converted, but later fall away. We have a number of examples in the New Testament: Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:19-20), Philetus (2 Tim 2:17-18), and Demas, ‘who loved this present world’ (2 Tim 4:10).

The Apostle John sadly writes about some: “*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us*” (1 John 2:19).

The individual experience of true conversion varies between individual believers, for example according to theologian Herman Bavinck (Dogmatiek, 4.159) “*Luther’s conversion was a transition from deep feelings of guilt to the joyful awareness of God’s forgiving grace in Christ. Zwingli experienced conversion particularly as a being set free from the bondage of the law into the happiness of knowing himself to be a child of God. Calvin’s conversion, however, was a deliverance from error into truth, from doubt to certainty*”.

Many who grow up in the covenant community of the church experience a gradual growth into a mature Christian faith without any dramatic ‘conversion experience’. However, it is true that in order to be saved, to be a child of God, true conversion is necessary for everyone. It is therefore vital for the gospel to be proclaimed, not only in the world, but also within the church. All people everywhere are to be called to ‘repent and believe’ (Acts 17:30).

Heidelberg Catechism LD33Q asks the question: What is involved in genuine repentance or conversion? With the answer: “*two things: the dying away of the old self, and the coming to life of the new*”. These two elements form the headings for our two points this evening which are illustrated by the life of King Manasseh in our text from 2 Chronicles 33:1-16.

1. **The dying away of the old self (v1-13)**

The kings of Israel were a variable series of leaders. Some good, many not so much. For example, Hezekiah is commended in Scripture: “*he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done*” (2 Chron 29:2). Hezekiah restored temple worship and prayed with Isaiah that the Lord would protect Jerusalem from the Assyrians; which He did. But Hezekiah became proud, displaying the great wealth of the nation to visiting Babylonians whose nation would subsequently capture Jerusalem and take away her wealth and her people. There is no indication that Hezekiah was sorry for what he had done, even when rebuked by the prophet Isaiah and told of the consequences of his pride (2 Kings 20:16-18).

The next king, Manasseh was a truly evil ruler, reversing the good changes which Hezekiah had implemented during his reign (2 Kings 21:1-18, 2 Chron 33:1-9). He rebuilt the high places and erect altars for the worship of Baal. He burned his own sons as an offering. He used fortune-tellers, sorcery and mediums. He set up a carved image of Asherah in the temple in Jerusalem. He shed much innocent blood. He made Judah to sin so that what they did was evil in the sight of the Lord and to “*do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel*” (2 Chron 33:9). {Manasseh reigned for 55 years in Jerusalem (2 kings 21:1); the longest reign of any king in Judah. It is likely that the first 10 years of this rule were a co-regency with his father Hezekiah. Scripture does not define how many years he reigned prior to his captivity in Assyria and his subsequent repentance. He did reign after these events long enough to enact reforms in Judah (2 Chron 33:14-16).}

We are sadly familiar with some of the barbarity of groups like ISIS like them the Assyrian Army was fearsome and brutal. Rings were put through the lips or noses of captives as they were led away. Sometimes hands, feet, noses and/or ears were cut off. Assyrian reliefs carved in stone depict the blinding of captives, the tearing out of their tongues. After many years of his own reign of terror, ex-king Manasseh was in the hands of the Assyrians in, having been pierced by their hooks and bound with chains of bronze (2 Chron 33:11).

Then, we read that: “*When he was in distress, he entreated the favour of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God*” (2 Chron 33:12)**.**

Manasseh could simply have been distressed and concerned about the consequences and problems caused by his sins. He could have been sorry that he had not held onto power and had not been able to fight off the Assyrian threat. This type of sorrow is not repentance. It is merely what the Scriptures describe as a ‘*worldly grief which produces death’* (2 Cor 7:10b).

Scottish author George MacDonald, in his classic novel ‘Salted with fire’ depicts the worldly grief of a ministry student who has seduced a young serving girl experienced: “*There came no detestation of himself because of his humiliation of the trusting girl. He did not yet loathe his abuse of her confidence by his miserable weakness; the hour of a true and good repentance had not yet come. The only shame he felt was in the failure of his own fancied strength; there was as yet no shame in the realization of what he was. All he could think of was what contempt could come to him if the thing should ever come to be known*”.

In complete contrast to this worldly grief, true repentance is a ‘dying-away of the old self’. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism: “*It is to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it*”. King David expressed this genuine sorrow after he repented of his sins of adultery and murder: “*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment*” (Psalm 51:3-4).

For King David and later King Manasseh, they had godly grief which produced a repentance that led to salvation without regret (1 Cor 7:10). Is this true of your life also? Have you experienced genuine sorrow for your sin, do you hate it more and more? Do you run away from it?

1. **The coming to life of the new (v14-16)**

We see the grace of God in restoring Manasseh to his kingdom. We see the repentant king ‘delighting to do every kind of good as God wants us to do’. Having come to know that the LORD is God, the reality of His new life was evident in what he did to restore true worship in the land.

He built up the walls of Jerusalem again. He took away ‘foreign gods and the idol’ from the Temple. He removed the altars to false gods and threw them outside of the city. He restored sacrifice and worship to the God of Israel. He commanded Judah to serve the Lord. His works were the fruit of his faith and trust in the Lord.

Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 33 Q90 asks: What is the coming to life of the new self? With the answer: “*It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to*”.

God is pleased to grant the joy of salvation to the repentant. This joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) and is one of the many blessings which the Lord bestows upon those who repent and turn to Him in faith. God, by His Spirit, dwells within those who come to new life. He expresses this truth through His prophet Isaiah: "*I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite*”.

King David and King Manasseh’s hearts were lifted up as they repented and believed in the Lord. They had peace with God which comes through Jesus Christ, who was yet to die for Old Testament saints when Manasseh repented. King David and King Manasseh, “*though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised*”. (Hebrews 11:39). They looked forward in faith not knowing how God was going to fulfil His covenant promise to “*take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God*” (Exodus 6:7).

They did not understand, as we now can, that those who repent and trust in God’s promises are united to Christ in His sacrificial death (Rom 6:5). They did not know that their old self was crucified with Christ in order that their body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that they would no longer be enslaved to sin (Rom 6:6). They experienced the reality of repentance and faith without understanding the gospel as we do on this ‘side of Calvary’.

The coming to life of the new creation in Christ takes place because “*Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him*” (Rom 6:9). As those who have been converted, brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are united with Christ. This means that you have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you. And the life you now live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for you (Gal 2:20).

In light of what Christ has done: “*you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 6:11). So, let’s continue to battle against the old nature which yet remains, confident in Christ that the new self is our true identity in Christ.

Put this new self each morning when you awake, put on:  *"compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*” (Colossians 3:12-17).

AMEN.