

Can God Save the Wickedest?

This is a relevant question in today's culture that people have struggled with since creation. It usually comes in the context of people like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, etc. Does Scripture have an answer? Yes, it does. Let's take a look.

Hezekiah reigns in Judah. He was faithful to God, and his reign was "right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Kings 18:3; 2 Chron. 29:2, ESV). He led the Judahites to center their lives around God, destroyed the idols that led Judah astray, and re-established the dying priesthood.

Then, he died, and his 12-year-old son, Manasseh, took the throne. Manasseh was like me at 12; he did the polar opposite as his dad wanted. Manasseh's reign is described as "evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 21:2; 2 Chron. 33:2). He rebuilt the idols his dad had torn down. He worshipped Baal and Asherah, a Canaanite goddess. He built altars for idol gods in the temple and consulted fortune-tellers, mediums, and necromancers. He did the most heinous thing and offered his son as a burnt offering. To top it all off, Judah followed his lead and did more evil than the nations God had already destroyed in front of them. God was so angered that He condemned Judah to exile, but not right away; it would take a few more generations. On the other hand, Manasseh was immediately captured and imprisoned by the Assyrians.

We're probably thinking, "Well, he got what he had coming to him," but something unexpected happens: Manasseh repented. We might be compelled to think, "Of course he called to God. He was in trouble. He wanted God to get him out of it."

After everything Manasseh did, we'd be right to be skeptical. Saul of Tarsus was a most unmerciful persecutor of the early church, but he repented. When he met the disciples in Jerusalem, they were skeptical for good reason (Acts 9:26ff).

As humans, we cannot know someone's heart. God makes this truth plain to Samuel: "The Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sa. 16:7).

So, when God heard Manasseh's cry for help and saw the humility and sincerity of his heart, He was moved and restored Manasseh to his kingdom. Then, Manasseh tore down all the idols and altars and led Judah to serve God faithfully.

Suppose you're like me (and you are if you're honest); then you know what a mess you are. I know that I'm a sinner, and I hate the sin I do. I hate that it gnaws at me and tries to draw me in. I hate the daily battle I have to fight to "do what is right in the sight of the Lord." I hate the sin that I see in others. I hate what it does to them, and I hate how sin has warped the world into rejoicing in it.

The good news is that God saves evil people. On occasion (actually quite frequently), Jesus was in the company of sinners—evil, vile people. On one such occasion, He was asked, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" He answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:30-32).

God can and does save evil people. Manasseh was evil. Saul of Tarsus was evil, and the truth is that when I look in the mirror, apart from Christ in me, I see Manasseh or Saul. Apart from God, I'm a sin-loving, God-hating, self-exalting evil person.

While some have broken the sixth commandment ten, a hundred, a thousand, or several million times over, Jesus teaches that the essence of "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13) is in the heart, not the body. "Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matt. 5:22). How many times have I been angry with someone, even my brother, either in the flesh or in Christ? I'm guilty, and as I read the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7; Luke 6:20-49), I realize how guilty I am.

Yet, while apart from Christ, I am lost, hope is not. Like Manasseh, I may repent and turn away from evil and toward God. I may respond to the Gospel obediently, and God will restore me, not to my kingdom, but to His kingdom. When I repent and obey the Gospel, I am safe from the vengeance of the Lord Jesus (2 Thess. 1:5-10).

I am not so far off that I cannot be saved if I humble myself, repent, and obey the Gospel because where sin increased, the grace of God increased over and above (Rom. 5:20). Still, in keeping with repentance, I must strive to sin no more (Rom. 6:1ff) and live faithfully to God's revealed will, for without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Thank God for His grace and forgiveness. Amen.