

change—a divine physician alone can cure. Who maketh thee to differ? And what hast thou, that thou hast not received?

The case of Manasseh shows that efforts for the salvation of men are not to be abandoned. The most unlikely may be saved. Many instances of abounding grace are on record. When argument has failed, an arrow from the quiver of the Almighty has wounded the conscience. Man has to stand aside, and let God preach. There is, however, an instrumentality by which God is pleased to work. Into the hands of his servants he has placed weapons of war, not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. These weapons are to be plied industriously. In looking at the field for effort it may seem impossible to do anything; all grown over with weeds—an unreclaimed and waste-howling wilderness; yet the wilderness may become as the garden of the Lord. The last man in a community whom you expect to become religious, may be the first. Could you in Israel have looked for its haughty, idolatrous, murderous king turning to God? Would you expect Saul of Tarsus to own the crucified Jesus?

We see also that grace can reach the chief of sinners. Conviction of sin may be so strong, that a despairing sense of helplessness fills the soul. Sins may rise mountain-high, and shut out the light of mercy. Are there no blessed truths calculated to dispel the darkness? Yes; Manasseh was not too great a sinner to be saved. Jesus is mighty to save—grace abounds to the uttermost. Scarlet and crimson stains may be washed out; the guilty are justified, the condemned are pardoned, through the blood of Christ. There can be no case found so desperate, so far gone, as to be beyond the power of the Healer of the sin-sick soul.

“Not the righteous;
Sinners, Jesus came to call.”

The time of the triumph of grace in this case is remarkable. A long period of prosperity was followed by severe calamities. *Then* Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God. Though surrounded by the grandeur of a court, he must have long carried a fire in his bosom. It must have been after many struggles that he gave himself over to work sin with greediness. God spoke to him—spoke in the accusations of conscience—in the remonstrances of holy men, some of whom he in all probability caused to be put to death, for he shed innocent blood like water. His religious education must have produced an abiding irksomeness, the counsels of a pious father startling him even in dreams of the night. All this he resisted. But God still strives with man; he seeks to win him for heaven and glory; he pleads with sinners. To the terrible consequences of chosen sin, God might give over the sinner. His abounding grace, however, says, “How can I give thee up?” Afflictions, therefore, must come: the joys of the soul depart; its hopes are blighted, its confidences shattered. The pelting storm breaks on the head; refuge faileth. Not all the gods trusted in before can save. The full cup is emptied. Stroke follows stroke, to defeat the policy of the ungodly. The forces of Manasseh are covered with defeat; the banner of Judah is no longer inscribed with victory; the king is led a captive, bound with fetters, to Babylon. Thus was he taken among the thorns. Then the emptiness of all earthly objects appears, and the sad depravity of his wretched heart evokes the penitential tears and the earnest cry. This is the furnace into which the bar of iron is thrust, and then the blows of the hammer of God’s word take effect. Hard, stern, unbending material is moulded by the power at work when God takes it in hand. This may show some why God sent affliction to