

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

There is a longing in this nation of ours, a yearning desire to see our hopes finally realized.

I am sure that by now, one such longing is for the election process to be done.

A longing for politics to play its proper role in figuring out how we will care for people, rather than using people and situations to further an agenda.

A longing for peace and stability. A longing for justice and honesty. A longing for kindness and care.

As Christians, we have additional longings.

A longing to **lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and dignified in every way.**^{1Timothy2:2}

A longing for all Christians on earth to be unified in our confession of the Lord.

A longing to be with the Lord. A longing for us and our family to remain faithful to Him all our life, a longing to attain a blessed death and to be with the Lord and each other for all eternity.

In this world, believers have always had these longings and always will.

Our struggles and temptations are really no different from those in previous generations.

And, thankfully, God's solution is no different either, for He always puts Jesus before His people to speak forgiveness and comfort to us as we continue to long for Christ to come quickly.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. ... Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel.

The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention. Therefore the Lord brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon. And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor 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.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

There is another longing that we Christians have, a longing to know the mind of God.

To understand what He's thinking when, after the great spiritual reforms of Judah under Hezekiah,

He lets the most wicked king of Judah reign for the longest time any Israelite king ever reigned (55 yrs).

One of the very sad and, frankly, scary things about this is that Manasseh was Hezekiah's own son.

There was no election to a completely different administration, no illegal coup attempts.

Manasseh was the legitimate heir to the throne, raised in the pious palace of King Hezekiah.

Can we take it for granted that he was circumcised the 8th day according to the Law?

That he was taught the faith by some of the leading spiritual men of his day?

That his father tried to impress upon him the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.

He had all the opportunities to lead a life of faithfulness to the Lord and yet he apostatized, he abandoned the faith, and that in a great way.

We're told **He rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down.**

**He built altars in the house of the Lord, to the Baals, Asheroth, and all the host of heaven.
He burned his sons as an offering, used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery,
and dealt with mediums and with necromancers.**

**Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray,
to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel.
Moreover, 2 Kings also adds, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood,
till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another. ^{2Kings21:16}**

And though **the Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people**
by prophets and priests to bring them back in repentance, **they paid no attention.**
It is just as Jesus said of those in His day, **How often would I have gathered your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!**

How does it happen that the son of such a faithful man and king,
so completely disowns the Lord and actively fights against Him and His people?
We long to know because we hope that there is a secret,
that there is something that we can do to avoid that scenario in our own lives and families.

How does it happen that our righteous God would put up with the harm to His people
and for so many years?
We long to know the mind of God as we think of all the saints who lived under Manasseh's terrorism,
who suffered by watching their family and friends apostatize so quickly or subtly,
following after the idols and fertility cults that sanctioned their lusts and debauchery,
who witnessed the murder of children all around them as sacrifices, legalized by the government,
who were tortured and died during his bloody reign.

We long to know this because we see such things around us even in our day.
We see merciless acts of random violence seem to go unpunished.
We see the government legalize the murder of millions of babies whose only crime is not being born yet.
We see society lunge after every kind of depraved fantasy, broadcasting it and epitomizing it.
We find ourselves tempted by it, and our family and friends quickly or quietly leaving the Church
attracted by the allurements of false teachers, of secular humanists, of liberal professors,
or attracted by nothing at all, just becoming lethargic in the faith.
And we wonder what can God be doing?
How does this all play a part in His good and gracious will for His Church?

Again, we long to know the mind of God, sometimes even to the point of doubting His goodness,
or blaming Him for the evil of this world, evil that He did not create or perpetrate.
We want Him to justify Himself before us as to why He permits the evil around us.
We want Him to explain Himself to us.
But consider, my fellow sinner, that the righteous God does not need to justify Himself to you.
The Creator and righteous Judge does not need to explain Himself to His rebellious creature.
Instead, He has chosen to expend His energy and mercy in justifying you.
And He has chosen instead to reveal to you the answer to the question that He wants you to ask,
not the answer to the question you impetuously ask.

And His answer was to become part of us, to join Himself to you and grow up amidst the same injustices and atrocities and vileness that the world has always known. He knew of children slaughtered for no greater crime than being born in Bethlehem around the same time as He was. He knew of families broken apart by the apostasy of wayward children, and He called some of those wayward children back. He knew of false teachers leading the people away from the Lord, and He rebuked them and warned the people about them. He knew the longing of the faithful for God's justice, the outcries for mercy. And He longed to secure that mercy and justice for you, even though He knew that it meant nothing but injustice and condemnation for Himself. He knew of governors and kings perpetrating horrendous crimes against their own people, and issuing unjust judgments, and, ultimately suffering and dying under them.

God's answer to all the world's injustices was meted out on His Son, Jesus Christ outside that city of which God had said, "**In Jerusalem shall My name be forever.**" Where Manasseh had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood from one end to the other, Jesus' innocent blood has covered over the sins of the whole world. Where Manasseh mercilessly murdered his own sons to show his devotion to worthless gods, God mercifully sacrificed His own Son to show His devotion to you.

And not only you, but also to all those who have apostatized, who have abandoned the Lord who had blessed them with faith before. People who, like King Manasseh, have not only turned away, but even mocked & fought against Him. People who doubt His goodness, or even start to blame Him for the evil in this world.

That He desires your good and the good of all people is shown us in the way that the Lord had mercy on Manasseh, who was at last brought back to repentance through the great distresses of his Assyrian captivity. It was only at this point, at his lowest, that he **knew that the Lord is God and entreated the favor of the Lord his God and prayed to Him.**

Even after all the wickedness and bloodshed of family and foe alike, the Lord's desire to show mercy and to forgive is evident by His being moved by Manasseh's entreaty. The Lord even brought him back and established him on the throne again, which allowed Manasseh the opportunity to demonstrate the completeness of his conversion. Upon his return to Jerusalem, the verses after our text tell us that **he took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem, and he threw them outside of the city.** He also restored the altar of the Lord and offered on it sacrifices of peace offerings 2Chronicles33:15-16 and of thanksgiving, and he commanded Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel.

Accounts like this certainly give one hope for those who have apostatized,
that they can be brought back in repentance and faith.
and that we, in our many and constant wanderings away from the Lord in sin and doubt,
are called back to Him in repentance and forgiveness.

We long to know the secret things of God.

We long to know what the secret is to remaining faithful to Him all our days
and finally to attain a blessed death and to be with the Lord for all eternity.

My fellow redeemed, that is no secret. He has revealed it already.

It is to continue to be in His presence gathered around Word and Sacrament,
to receive His mercy day after day and week after week and year after year until He returns.

It is to recognize the afflictions He sends to you as opportunities to reflect and repent,
and to refine your faith in His mercy and forgiveness through Christ.

It is to continue to pray to and entreat the Lord for His continued faithfulness upon yourself
and your neighbor.

And to long for His return, patiently and with perseverance.

These, of course, are all given to and increased in you by the Holy Spirit.

So you see what a blessing it is to be blessed, as you are each week, by the Lord who
bleses and keeps you and makes His face to shine upon you and give you peace,
now and forever. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria