

引言 INTRODUCTION

There is a Chinese saying: “It takes three years to cultivate a good habit. But it takes only three days to indulge in a bad habit.” It needs a long time to build a success. But it can be destroyed in an instant. King Manasseh did just that. His father, Hezekiah, was the noblest king in the history of Israel. People might have expected Manasseh to build onto Hezekiah’s achievement. Quite the contrary. Judah returned to a wicked path. God told Hezekiah that his country would eventually be defeated by Babylon. But Manasseh was not interested in changing that destiny. He was too busy worshipping idols on altars. The word “altar or altars” appears five times in this chapter. A related phrase “high places” is also used three times. High places were shrines equipped with altars built on mountains for pagan worship. People burned a sacrifice on an altar to the object of their worship. In our message today, we will use an altar to represent our hearts. We worship whatever and whoever we cherish the most. How we spend our time and money reflect our values. Just look at your schedule and your bank and credit card statements. You can also check the Apps you install on your phone and how much time you use them. Everything boils down to this: we either gratify ourselves or glorify God in our life.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 可憎的祭壇 Detested Altar

In this chapter, Manasseh went through three phases in his heart condition. First, he began his kingship like a detested altar. He was completely devoted to idol worship. Manasseh had the longest reign among the kings of Israel. Unfortunately, in this case it meant more time for lasting spiritual damages. Listen to how the author describes this king. In verse 2, he says: Manasseh followed “**the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.**” In verse 9, the people of Judah “**did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites.**” Under his leadership, Manasseh surpassed the wicked level of all the northern kings. He was more like a foreign monarch who did not know Jehovah. Let us look at the specific sins Manasseh committed. **First**, he rebuilt the high places Hezekiah had torn down (v. 3). Manasseh completely replaced what his dad removed. **Second**, Manasseh made altars dedicated to the Baals, Asherah and some starry hosts (v. 3). The Baals and Asherah were the deities the Canaanites worshipped. The native people believed that those gods controlled the weather, and the productivity of crops, animals and humans. Asherah was believed to be the wife of Baal. Her statue was in the form of a pillar. Therefore, the Bible calls it the Asherah pole. Whereas, astrology was a common practice of the Assyrians and Babylonians. **Next**, Manasseh repeated two despicable sins his grandfather king Ahaz committed. He installed pagan altars in the temple courts (v. 4-5), and he sacrificed his sons to idols (v. 6). **Fifth**, Manasseh practiced witchcraft (v. 6), which the Law of Moses clearly prohibited. In essence, Manasseh worshipped every deity except Jehovah. God cares so much about our hearts. God desires to bless us if we put Him at the center of our hearts. God promised Judah in verse 8: “**I will not again make the feet of the Israelites leave the land I assigned to your forefathers, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them concerning all the laws, decrees and ordinances given through**

Moses.” God would preserve their land if they gave God their hearts. Their kings were more than political and military leaders. God installed them as spiritual rulers to lead their people to follow God. When people fear God first, they should not be afraid of any foreign enemy. Every powerful empire like Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Rome comes and goes. But God stands forever. That is why we should always put God first. Our decisions are driven by our priorities. That reminds me of a retired Christian couple. The husband was a university professor. Similar to most young teachers, this brother devoted long hours to his research when he started his career. One day, his wife and two kids were sitting outside when he got home. She was weeping because the washer broke down and he was not home when she needed help. From then on, the brother decided to spend more time at home as much as he could. He was one of the last persons among his peers to get his tenure. But he had no regret at all. By God’s grace, both of his children are walking with the Lord. I know some of you have a demanding job. Your boss expects you to work over-time without asking. I do not intend to add to your guilt. But I would encourage you to re-examine your priorities. Once I asked my older son what legacy I will leave him with. He said: “Perhaps your house and your car?” Of course, I was not referring to the stuff he will get from me. He may be disappointed that he will not get much. The more important thing is how I prepare my two sons to be men of God. You may see me as a decent Bible teacher in the church. But my family sees the real me at home! One day when we meet the Lord, He may not ask about the size of our salary, retirement fund or home. But most definitely He will ask where our family members are.

2. 沮喪的祭壇 Dejected Altar

Manasseh was having fun with different idols. But God would not allow His covenant go down the drain because of this wicked king. The Bible says God disciplines those He loves. Do not be surprised if God disciplines us when we go astray. It is because He loves us, not hates us. Once again, God used Assyria as a spanking rod. The army attacked Judah, then they dragged Manasseh away with a hook through his nose and locked him up in shackles. What a humiliation! Manasseh finally repented. This time he appeared like a dejected altar. Listen to verses 12 and 13: **12 In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. 13 And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.** A Chinese saying describes Manasseh well: a person will not shed a tear until he sees his coffin! Finally, he admitted Jehovah as his Lord. Jehovah was not only his father’s God or one of the many deities. When we pray to God, we come as His beloved children. He shows compassion to us and He provides for our needs because He loves us. But we cannot bargain with Him, thinking that He will fulfill our wishes if we offer more money or more time in ministries. We should value God’s love over His stuff. God answered Manasseh because he humbled himself greatly before the Lord. God knows everything. We may be able to fool people by our appearance. But we can never fool God. A sincere prayer flows from a humble heart. God decided to give Manasseh a second chance. Finally, he realized that Jehovah was the one true God. He could give blessings and judgment. True confession means we hold ourselves accountable. We do not make excuses that we are being careless or ignorant, or Satan makes us sin. King David once committed grave sins. He stole someone’s wife and later killed the husband too. He humbly admitted his sins when God sent prophet Nathan to convict him. Later David wrote Psalm 51 from his experience. Verse 4 reads: **Against you, you only, have I sinned and**

done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. David understood that he did not only violate the couple and tarnish his reputation. Ultimately, he sinned against God. He abused the God-given power to deprive others. Then skip down to verses 16 and 17: **16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.** David knew that what God wanted was not a sin offering. David could easily order his people to present a thousand animals. It did not cost him much. It is like some wealthy people who like to speed in their expensive sports cars. A few traffic tickets are nothing to them. They may not learn their lesson until their driver's license is forfeited. A dejected altar God wants is a remorseful heart. We do not just feel bad for the harm we caused. We also realize that we grieve God. But God always welcome sinners to turn back. I do not know how many times we have to say to the Lord: "Father, I'm sorry that I hurt Your heart. Please forgive me." God's forgiving grace is always available. Take down your pride and come back to Him! The Bible says God can replenish whatever locusts have devoured. Our sins may lead to irreversible damages. For example, lost money from gambling, lost health due to an ungodly lifestyle or lost trust because of a conflict. However, God will restore our broken relationship with Him. He will give us a new beginning.

3. 專一的祭壇 Dedicated Altar

God allowed Manasseh to resume his position as a king. He was not only chosen by his father to succeed the throne. It was God who put him there. Manasseh finally determined to serve Jehovah only. His heart was turned into a dedicated altar. He directed two main changes in Judah. First, he facilitated military reinforcement. Verse 14 says he rebuilt a wall surrounding Jerusalem, and made it much higher than before. Besides, Manasseh also assigned army generals in all the fortified cities of Judah. Both measures would enhance defense against enemies. In addition to military reinforcement, Manasseh also introduced an extensive spiritual reform. We will look at verses 15 and 16: **15 He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the Lord, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem; and he threw them out of the city. 16 Then he restored the altar of the Lord and sacrificed fellowship offerings and thank offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel.** Manasseh tried to correct the spiritual sins he committed earlier. He removed idol statues and the respective altars. He then restored God's altar and presented sacrifices according to the Law. He also requested his people to worship Jehovah alone. A leader has to lead by good examples. People saw their king indulged into idol worship for years. Manasseh must prove that his heart had been changed. Years ago, Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan. They conquered their enemies and divided the land. Joshua then challenged his people to decide which deity they would serve. He made a well-known statement in Joshua 24:15: **"... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."** People could testify that Joshua did what he said. He trusted the Lord in numerous battles. God fulfilled His promise to give the land to His people. On that day, people echoed in unison that they would serve God too. But talk is cheap. Merely one generation after Joshua had died, the Israelites bowed down to the local false gods. The nation went through cycles of sinning, enemies' oppression, repentance and God's deliverance. Both Joshua and Manasseh knew the important role of a leader. All of us are leaders in our circle of influence. Children will not read their Bible and pray to God if they do not see their parents doing the same things. Church coworkers cannot convince others to attend fellowship meeting or Sunday school if they are not

regular participants. You have no right to ask the people sitting next to you to put away their phones in a service if you cannot let go of yours. Let us encourage each other to walk the talk and lead by example. We might expect the people of Judah followed their king in his noble acts. Verse 17 gives us a glimpse of their attitude: **The people, however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the Lord their God.** Perhaps people were so used to worshipping at a high place nearby, they found it inconvenient to travel a long distance to the temple. They might ask: “Isn’t it the same wherever I burn my offering, as long as I presented it to Jehovah?” The fact is, doing a right thing the wrong way is still wrong. Some believers buy lottery tickets. They pledge to offer a tenth of the jackpot to the church if they win. Money is money, does God really mind where it comes from? Some churches hire professional instrumentalists or choir members to perform in their worship. They praise God with beautiful music. Does it matter if they are not believers? Even the Mormon choir sings about the Jesus they do not believe on Christmas! God looks at our hearts more than the results. He will bless our work if we dedicate ourselves to Him.

結論 CONCLUSION

Our heart is like an altar. What we present on it reflects who we honor. We either gratify ourselves or glorify God. Our life as a whole is a worship to God. Our study, work, relationship and even entertainment are all parts of our worship. When our hearts are right with God, then our worship will be counted as worthy to Him. The song “The Heart of Worship” was written in a season of soul-searching. The composer, Matt Redman, is a member of a church in England. At that time, the church was struggling about the true meaning of worship. The pastor then decided to make some radical changes. He got rid of the sound system and the worship band. It drew heartfelt thanks to God when participants sang with pure voices. Before long, the song was born. Part of the lyrics read: *When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come. Longing just to bring something that’s of worth that will bless your heart... I’m coming back to the heart of worship, and it’s all about You, Jesus.* Worship must reflect our hearts for God. It does not matter whether the songs are a few weeks or a few centuries old. Or whether the message is inspiring or boring. It is no longer about what we can get from an hour-long gathering. But it is about what we bring to our Lord. Likewise, it does not matter if our jobs are exciting or tedious, whether we eat fancy or simple meals and if we are shut-in or free to travel. Our worship is acceptable to God when Jesus is at the center of our lives.

引言 INTRODUCTION

俗語說：「學好三年，學壞三天。」建立成功需要很長的時間。但是任何的成就可以在一瞬間被摧毀。瑪拿西王就是這樣做的。他的父親希西家是以色列歷史上最敬虔的王。人民可能期望瑪拿西會在希西家的成就之上更上一層樓。可惜猶大國卻走回頭路。神告訴希西家，他的國家最終會被巴比倫所滅。但是瑪拿西卻沒有興趣改變國家的命運。因為他忙於在祭壇上敬拜偶像。「祭壇」這個字在這一章出現了五次。相關的用詞「邱壇」也被使用了三次。邱壇是建在山上，供異教徒崇拜的地方。在今天的生活中，我們將使用祭壇來代表我們的心。我們敬拜任何我們最珍惜的人或東西。我們如何使用時間和金錢反映我們的價值觀。你看看你的時間表以及你的銀行和信用卡帳單便知道。你也可以看看你在手機上裝了什麼應用程式以及你花多少時間在它們上面。歸納起來就是一個簡單的重點：我們的生命要不然是滿足自己的需求，要不然是榮耀神。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 可憎的祭壇 Detested Altar

在這一章裡面，瑪拿西的心靈狀況經歷了三個不同的階段。當他剛開始成為王的時候，他像一個可憎的祭壇。他完全陷在偶像崇拜中。瑪拿西是以色列諸王中在位時間最長的人。可惜在這個情況下，它意味著更長的時間帶來靈命的倒退。聽聽作者在第 2 節如何描述這位君王：瑪拿西「效法耶和華在以色列人面前趕出的外邦人那可憎的事。」在第 9 節，猶大人「行惡比耶和華在以色列人面前所滅的列國更甚。」在他的領導下，瑪拿西的邪惡程度超過北國所有的王。他比較像一個不認識耶和華的外邦君主。讓我們看看瑪拿西所犯具體的罪。首先，他重建了希西家拆毀的邱壇（第 3 節）。瑪拿西完全補充了他父親所清除的異教設施。其次，瑪拿西為巴力、亞舍拉和天上的萬象建造祭壇（第 3 節）。巴力和亞舍拉是迦南人所崇拜的神明。那些土著相信這些神明掌管天氣，以及農作物、動物和人類的繁殖。他們認為亞舍拉是巴力的妻子。她的雕像是一根柱子。而占星術是亞述人和巴比倫人的普遍做法。接著，瑪拿西效法他祖父亞哈斯王的兩項邪惡的罪。他在聖殿的院子裡安置異教的祭壇（第 4-5 節），他還把自己的兒子獻給偶像（第 6 節）。第五，瑪拿西通靈（第 6 節），這是摩西律法明顯禁止的。整體來說，除了耶和華之外，瑪拿西什麼都拜。神非常看重我們的心。如果我們把神放在生命的中心點，神就樂意祝福我們。神在第 8 節應許猶大：「以色列人若謹守遵行我藉摩西所吩咐他們的一切法度、律例、典章，我就不再使他們挪移離開我所賜給他們列祖之地。」如果他們

把心交給神，神就會保護他們的土地。他們的王不僅僅是政治和軍事領袖。神設立他們為屬靈的領袖，帶領人民跟隨神。當人敬畏神之時，他們不應該害怕任何敵人。所有的古代帝國，如埃及、亞述、巴比倫和羅馬曾一度興盛，但最終都衰落。唯有神永遠站立。因此我們必須把神放在首位。我們的優先次序會影響我們的決定。在這裡我想起一對退休的基督徒夫婦。丈夫是大學教授。與大多數年輕的老師一樣，這位弟兄在剛開始他的事業時埋首在研究中。有一天他回家時，發現太太和小孩坐在外面。太太在哭泣，因為洗衣機壞了，而她需要幫助時先生卻不在家。從那時起，這位弟兄決定盡可能多留在家裡。他是同輩之中最後才拿到終身教職的人之一。但他一點也不後悔。靠著神的恩典，他的兩個孩子都跟隨主。我知道我們中間有些人的工作很忙。你的老闆期望你自動自覺加班。我不想要增加你的罪惡感。但我鼓勵你重新檢視你的優先次序。有一次我問我的大兒子我會留下什麼遺產給他。他說：「也許是你的房子和你的車子？」他最終可能會感到失望，原來爸爸真的那麼窮！當然，我指的是屬靈的遺產。重點是我如何裝備兩個兒子成為屬神的人。你可能會認為我在教會中是個過得去的聖經老師。只有我的家人在家裡看到真正的我！有一天，我們見主面時，祂大概不會問我們的收入和退休金有多少或是房子有多大。但是神肯定會問我們的家人在哪裡。

2. 沮喪的祭壇 Dejected Altar

瑪拿西敬拜不同的偶像可能覺得很爽。但是神不會因為這個邪惡的君王而讓祂的盟約泡湯。聖經說神所愛的人祂必然會管教。如果神在我們犯罪時管教我們，請不要感到驚訝。祂是愛我們，而不是恨我們。神再一次使用亞述作為祂的刑杖。亞述的軍隊攻打猶大，然後用鉤子勾住瑪拿西的鼻子，還用鍊鎖把他鎖起來帶走。這是何等大的羞辱！瑪拿西終於悔改了。這一次，他好像一個沮喪的祭壇。請聽第 12 和 13 節：**12 他在急難的時候，就懇求耶和華他的神，且在他列祖的神面前極其自卑。13 他祈禱耶和華，耶和華就允准他的祈求，垂聽他的禱告，使他歸回耶路撒冷，仍坐國位。瑪拿西這才知道惟獨耶和華是神。**中文有句話很貼切地描述瑪拿西：不見棺材不流眼淚！他終於承認耶和華是他的主。耶和華不僅是他父親的神，或者是眾多神明之一的神。當我們向神禱告時，我們是以心愛的孩子的身份來向神求的。神憐憫我們，並且供應我們的需要，因為祂愛我們。但是我們無法跟神討價還價，以為如果我們奉獻多一點的錢或參與更多的事奉，祂便會滿足我們的願望。我們應該重視神的愛勝過任何東西。神應允瑪拿西，因為他在耶和華面前極其謙卑。神知道一切。我們也許可以通過外表來愚弄別人，但我們永遠無法欺騙神。真誠的禱告來自一顆謙卑的心。神決定給瑪拿西第二次機會。他終於意識到耶和華是獨一的真神。祂可以賜予祝福和降下審判。真誠的認罪意味著我們願意承擔所有的責任。我們不能編藉口說我們不小心或是無知，甚至怪撒旦使我們犯罪。大衛王曾經犯過嚴重的罪。他偷了別人的妻子，後來更殺了她的丈夫。當神派先知拿單責備大衛時，他謙卑地認罪。後來大衛根據他的經歷寫了詩篇 51 篇。第 4 節說：**我向**

你犯罪，惟獨得罪了你；在你眼前行了這惡，以致你責備我的時候顯為公義，判斷我的時候顯為清正。大衛明白，他不僅侵犯了這對夫婦，並玷污了自己的聲譽。最終，他得罪了神。他濫用神賦予的權力剝奪他人的利益。然後我們看第 16 和 17 節：**16 你本不喜愛祭物，若喜愛，我就獻上；燔祭，你也不喜悅。17 神所要的祭就是憂傷的靈；神啊，憂傷痛悔的心，你必不輕看。**大衛知道神要的不是贖罪祭。大衛可以輕易地命令他的僕人獻上一千隻動物。這對他帶來說並沒有太大的損失。就像一些有錢人喜歡開著他們昂貴的跑車超速。幾張交通罰單對他們來說不算什麼。他們可能不會汲取教訓，直到他們的駕駛執照被沒收。神所要沮喪的祭壇，是一顆悔罪的心。我們不僅為我們造成的破壞感到難過。我們也意識到我們傷了神的心。但神總是歡迎罪人回頭。我們一輩子肯定要多次重覆這樣的禱告：「天父，我很抱歉傷害了你的心。請你原諒我。」神饒恕的恩典總是隨時隨在的。放下你的驕傲，回到祂的身邊！聖經說，就算被蝗蟲食掉的，神都能補償。我們的罪可能導致不可逆轉的損失。例如，因賭博輸光的錢、因為不敬虔的生活方式而失去的健康或是因人際衝突而失去的信任。然而，神能夠彌補我們與祂破碎的關係。祂會給我們一個新的開始。

3. 專一的祭壇 Dedicated Altar

神允許瑪拿西恢復他的王位。他不只被他的父親選為繼承人。是神把他放在那個位置。瑪拿西最終決定只事奉耶和華。他的心變成了一個專一的祭壇。他帶領猶大的兩個主要的改革。首先，他加強國防。第 14 節說他在耶路撒冷周圍重建了城牆，使城牆比以前高很多。此外，瑪拿西還在猶大的所有堅固城中安排了軍長。這兩項措施都將加強對敵人的防禦。除了國防之外，瑪拿西還帶動了全面的靈命更新。我們將看第 15 和 16 節：**15 並除掉外邦人的神像與耶和華殿中的偶像，又將他在耶和華殿的山上和耶路撒冷所築的各壇都拆毀拋在城外；16 重修耶和華的祭壇，在壇上獻平安祭、感謝祭，吩咐猶大人事奉耶和華以色列的神。**瑪拿西試圖糾正他先前所犯屬靈的罪。他清除了偶像和相關的祭壇。然後他修復了神的祭壇，並按照律法獻祭。他還要求他的子民單單敬拜耶和華。一個領袖必須要樹立好榜樣。人民看到他們的王多年沉迷於偶像崇拜。瑪拿西必須以行動證明他的心已經改變了。多年前，約書亞帶領以色列人進入迦南。他們戰勝了敵人，分了土地。約書亞然後挑戰以色列人決定服事哪一個神。他在約書亞記 24:15 聲明：「...至於我和我家，我們必定事奉耶和華。」人們可以證明約書亞言出必行。他在無數的爭戰中信靠主。神也實現了祂的承諾，將土地賜給祂的子民。那天，人們異口同聲地說，他們也要事奉神。說起來很容易。約書亞去世後的下一代以色列人向當地的假神下拜。他們的國家便經歷了犯罪、敵人壓迫、悔改和神拯救的循環。約書亞和瑪拿西都知道領袖的重要性。我們在身處的任何環境中都可以是一位領袖，發揮正面的影響力。例如如果孩子沒有看到他們的父母讀聖經和禱告，他們就不會做同樣的事情。教會同工如果不是經常出席團契聚會或主日學，他們便無法說服其他人來參加。如果你在聚

會時放不下你的手機，你就沒有權利要求坐在你旁邊的人把他們的手機收起來。讓我們互相鼓勵，並以身作則。我們也許以為猶大的人民會效法瑪拿西的好榜樣。我們從第 17 節看到他們的心態：**百姓卻仍在邱壇上獻祭，只獻給耶和華他們的神。**也許他們已經習慣在附近的邱壇敬拜，他們覺得長途跋涉到聖殿太費時。他們可能會問：「不管我在哪裡獻祭，只要我把它獻給耶和華，不都是一樣的嗎？」事實是，以錯誤的方式做正確的事情仍然是錯誤的。一些信徒購買彩票。他們承諾，如果他們中頭獎，就一定會奉獻十分之一給教會。錢就是錢，神真的介意錢從哪裡來的嗎？一些教會聘請專業的演奏家或合唱團成員在敬拜中表演。他們用優美的音樂讚美神。如果他們不是信徒，這有關係嗎？甚至摩門教的詩班也在聖誕節讚美他們不相信的耶穌！神看重我們的心過於結果。如果我們專一地順服祂，祂就會祝福我們的工作。

結論 CONCLUSION

我們的心就像一個祭壇。我們所獻上的東西反映出我們尊敬的對象。我們的生命要不然是滿足自己的需求，要不然是榮耀神。我們的整個生命就是對神的敬拜。我們的工作、人際關係甚至娛樂都是我們敬拜的一部分。如果我們的心態正確，那麼我們的敬拜就會蒙神悅納。一首英文詩歌《敬拜的心》是在神面前反省的結果。作曲家馬特·雷德曼 (Matt Redman) 是一所英國教會的成員。當時，教會為敬拜的真正含義作反思。牧師隨後提出一個重大的改變。他不再使用音響系統和敬拜樂團。當會眾用單純的聲音唱詩歌時，便引起對神衷心的感謝。不久，這首歌便誕生了。部份歌詞寫道：**當音樂消逝，一切都被拿走後，只剩下我一人。我渴望獻上一些有價值的東西來取悅祢的心... 我要回到敬拜的中心，這一切都是關乎祢，耶穌。**敬拜必須反映出我們對神的心。我們唱的詩歌是幾週前還是幾個世紀前寫的，講道信息是有趣的還是枯燥的都不重要。重點不再是我們能從一個多小時的聚會中得到什麼，而是我們獻上什麼給我們的主。同樣，我們的工作是令人興奮的還是乏味的，我們吃的是大魚大肉還是簡單的飯菜，我們是居家還是可以自由的旅行，這都無關緊要。當耶穌成為我們生命的中心時，我們的敬拜就為神所悅納。