

Amazing Grace

Text: I Timothy 1:13-17

Most sermons are one way events, the preacher speaks and the audience listens. (We hope) This morning I would like for you to participate in the sermon. I will speak a few minutes and then we will sing a verse of a song together. [The communicator may choose to have three recorded renditions of the song and have a verse played between the points. I believe the variety of styles would be most effective. There are many to choose from.]

As I thought about the message I wondered, "What song might be most familiar to this audience?" I settled on a song written 229 years ago that still speaks to our hearts. The song is "Amazing Grace" written by John Newton.

Why does this old song remain so popular with both church and un-church folk? I believe it continues to touch one of the deep seated needs that all of us experience. We all need God's grace. We often look to God for help. This is true of each one of us. Why do we need grace? There are three requirements in the life of John Newton that grace meets

YOUR CONDITION REQUIRES AMAZING GRACE.

Let's sing that first verse. **Page _____ or on the overhead.** A very brief introduction from the piano or maybe just the cord and then play as we sing.

THAT SAVED A WRETCH LIKE ME, Why would a person use that term? So demeaning, so repulsive. Perhaps you will understand as I share some of the experiences of John Newton. John's mother died when he was only **seven years old.** She was a devout Christian and aware that she was very ill and would not live long. So she taught little John the Bible. His father had no interest in religion. He was a sea captain. When John was eleven he was made a cabin boy. As he listened to the crew he developed a vile mouth. He said, ***"I never met a man with a more vile mouth than mine. I wasn't even content with the common oaths everyone knew. I invented new ones everyday some so vivid that the captain, a blasphemer himself would bawl me out."***

Once he was shanghaied and forced to join the Royal Navy. He was placed on a **British Man of War.** One time he deserted, but was caught and beaten until blood streamed from his back.

Eventually he became a captain of a slave ship. He said, ***"I went to Africa that I might be free to sin to my heart's content."*** On one occasion he was so drunk that he fell overboard. The sailors looked upon their captain as **an animal.** They had so little regard for him that they would not take the time to lower a boat for his rescue. They threw a harpoon at him hooking him in the thigh and roughly landed him on the deck. That incident gave him a lifelong limp. He said, ***"Each limp is a constant reminder of God's grace to this wretched sinner."*** At one time he himself was a slave to a powerful African woman. She gloried in her rule over him. She made him

crawl for the crusts she would toss under her table. Newton said, "***I often saw the necessity of being a Christian as a means of escaping hell, but I loved sin and was unwilling to forsake it.***"

"***A wretch like me,***" still sounds so coarse, so demeaning that you may not identify with it. Our text spoke of another man who used it, "What a wretched man I am!" Romans 7:24 that man has been called, "The Greatest Christian since Christ" by the famous preacher Dr. George Washington Truett. But what a different life experience Paul had from that of John Newton. See Philippians 3.

- Circumcised the 8th day. (that's about as early as you can start in religion.)
- Taught by the most revered Rabbi, Gamaliel.
- Ranked far ahead of his peers in knowledge of the Torah.
- Blameless as pertaining to the law.
- Yet with all his religiosity, Rabbi Paul was out of breath chasing the followers of Jesus.
- Separating children from parents.
- Hauling Christian into prison.
- Voting that they be stoned to death.
- Flashbacks of those ugly acts.

A propensity to do what he did not desire to do and not do what he ought to do caused him to cry out, "What a wretched man I am!" I believe it was John Wesley who said, "Oh, that a man might arise in me that the man I am might cease to be."

What patience and longsuffering God shows us in his grace. You may not see yourself as such a pitiful lawbreaker as John Newton, but we are made of the same stuff. Given enough mistreatment, loneliness, and despair we might contemplate such unimagined rebelliousness. Around the world today and in streets near to us people show this deep seat propensity for evil.

Nevertheless, **YOUR CONVERSION REVEALS GOD'S GRACE.** Let us sing verse two. [Here I encourage the communicator to research the work of God to bring Newton to repentance and faith.]

YOUR CONTRIBUTION REFLECTS AMAZING GRACE.

Brief piano introduction. We will sing verse four. He entered the ministry and pastored in Olney where he preached to overflowing crowds. There he was joined by William Cowper and others to produce the Olney hymns. Newton wrote 280 hymns. Two well-known were **Glorious things of thee are spoken** and **How sweet the name of Jesus sounds**. It's almost shocking that a man whose youth was so dissipated lived to be 83 years old full of grace and widely respected. At 80 years old John Newton went to the pulpit. There he was met by a man who would help him find the right place in the sermon manuscript. When told that he didn't have to continue to preach he answered, "What, shall this old African Blasphemer stop while he can still speak?"

I believe that it was in 2006 when I saw a movie Â entitled **Amazing Grace**. It was well attended in many theaters. It depicted the political career of William Wilberforce. As a Parliament leader he devoted himself to the overthrow of slavery in Britain. In the movie his mentor John Newton was shown motivating Wilberforce to be courageous in that just cause. In 1792 Thomas Jefferson was honored by the college of New Jersey, now known as Princeton University. But also honored on that day was a preacher by the name of John Newton.

The last verse was added some filthy years later from a man who was captured by the charm of this hymn. Verses are still being added to this great song. [The communicator may have a testimony given prior to the message or during it that tells a similar story of God's grace. I think you might not find it hard to identify acts of deliverance, desperate situations, and possible deeds that might have taken one to the depths of despair, but somehow was rescued.]

Invitation or call for response. Have you taken the time to consider God's grace that sent Jesus to be our Savior? I've walked the streets of San Francisco and often I've understood the words of the great Puritan, **"There but by the grace of God, goes John Bradford."** "There, but by the grace of God goes Jim Higgs." Your response to the grace of God is but a reaction to his action on your behalf. He loved you and gave himself for you.