



Amazing Grace

I Timothy 1: 12-17

In a small cemetery of a parish churchyard in Olney, England, stands a granite tombstone w/ this inscription: "John Newton, clerk [pastor], once an infidel & Libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy." You may not remember his name, but all of us know the song he wrote as a testimony of his life: "Amazing Grace."

It finds its lasting legacy in the simplicity of the words & the universal understanding of man's need for grace. This beloved song bears witness to a multitude of testimonies from all corners of the world & all types of sinners who found forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation thru the grace of Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible records the conversions of the demon possessed maniac of Gadara, the despised tax collector and traitor to his people Matthew, blind Bartimaeus, the adulterous Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, the Roman centurion at the crucifixion, Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch, the Philippian jailer, and many others. But of all the conversions ever recorded none was more remarkable than that of Saul of Tarsus. This bitter enemy of the cause of Christ, in his own words the foremost of all sinners, became the greatest evangelist & theologian the world has ever seen.

Acts 9, 22, 26, Galatians 1-2, Philippians 3, and 1 Timothy 1 all describes aspects of his conversion. Paul never lost the wonder that God could and did redeem someone like him. He viewed himself as the supreme example of God's saving grace. His story is very much though, also my story, and your story. Every one of us was lost, each one of us was blind, but now we're found & now we see.

John Newton told often the story of his early life & conversion experience, & wherever he preached, large crowds gathered to hear the "Old Converted Sea Captain" as he was called. He is quoted before he died in a message saying: "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember 2 things: That I am a great sinner & that Christ is a great Savior!"

As the apostle Paul writes to his dear friend, Timothy, who led a church in the city of Ephesus, he thought it valuable to share his own personal testimony for all to know. **He didn't do this to show how bad he was, but rather how good God is!** After showing power of the Law to expose both sin & sinners in vv.8-11, he turns to his story in vv.12-17 to show God's Amazing Grace.

Paul's testimony is nothing short of miraculous. I'd like to highlight at least 5 different aspects of God's amazing grace in his life & show how amazing it is in our own lives as well.

1. The first aspect is: The Pattern of Grace. The first thing we need to understand about grace is where it comes from. It finds its source in Jesus as we find Paul thanking Him for what He has done in his life.

Read V12

Grace is used in the original Greek language to convey the idea of a free gift.

It has at its root the concept of joy. As it's a delight to receive something you don't deserve. The theological impression of grace speaks of God's loving forgiveness, which he gives freely to those deserving only condemnation & judgment, and transfers them from darkness to light, from death to life w/o any worthiness on their part & based on nothing they have done or failed to do.

The Bible repeatedly affirms that Jesus, along w/ God the Father is alone the source of all grace.

John 1:17 states "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ";

Rom.3:24 says "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is Christ Jesus"

In verse 12 Paul gives thanks for 4 aspects of God's grace in his life.

- 1) **Electing grace.** Always conscious of God's choice of him, both for salvation & apostleship.
- 2) **Enabling grace.** Enabled is translated into "who has given me strength." Literally "empowered me" it is the same word used in Phil.4:13 "I can do all..."
- 3) **Entrusting grace.** God considered him faithful/trustworthy & it was grace that made Paul so. In 1Cor.7:25 he described himself as "one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy."

- 4) **Employing grace** that put him into service.

Plutarch (Greek writer) tells us that when a Spartan won a victory in the Greek games, his reward was that he might stand beside his king in battle. That's a great illustration of what service Paul was called to, & each of us as believers enjoy from God's employing grace. What we do in service is to stand w/ Lord! Like the Spartan, Paul sought no honor for himself. His only desire was "to know Him & the power of His resurrection, & fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Paul's pattern of grace was Jesus and it was Jesus who told him in 2Cor.12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you."

II. Verse 13 shows us the second aspect which is the Power of Grace.

The grace of God was especially vivid in Paul's mind because of his past. As a great sinner, he needed great grace.

Read Verse 13

Before he met Christ, Paul, who at the time was called Saul, hunted down Christians & did all he could to persecute the church. In fact, his goal nothing short of the complete extermination of "the Way." In Acts 9:1, Luke describes him as "breathing out murderous threats against believers." It's as if he lived & breathed to destroy what he considered to be the enemy, like a warhorse who sniffed the smell of battle. He was a frightening, violent adversary. A callous, pious, self-righteous, bigoted murderer hell-bent on a full-scale inquisition. Listen to how he later described his behavior to Agrippa in Acts 26:9-11 ***"Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus this I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them and I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities."***

In the middle of his wretchedness, he was met w/ God's compassion. He could say w/ the hymn writer ***"How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!"***

Now, you may ask, "what does Paul's ignorance have to do w/ his salvation? Is ignorance an excuse before God? Absolutely not! But there is a special Jewish law that he evidently refers to here from Numbers 15 & Leviticus 5. The law provided for someone who thought he was doing the right thing but was actually doing wrong/sinning an opportunity to bring the proper sacrifices for his sin. But deliberate & willful sin put a person beyond the hope of atonement because they were unrepentant. Jesus used this principle as He hung on the cross for the sins of the world, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

Apostle Paul was responsible for his sin. He received mercy & forgiveness because he believed the truth when he was finally faced w/ it. The whole point of this is to show that the grace of God is powerful enough to redeem the worst sinner who is willing to repent.

Look at verse 14 Read

III. This shows us the Perfection of Grace

In fact, this is the only place the word “grace” appears in the passage, yet it permeates Paul’s thoughts. Abundant sin gives way to the more than abundant grace from the Lord. Paul adds the word exceedingly or “hyper” to the word translated abundant. He did this often, adding intensity & extra force to a concept of truth. Our English word “hyper” comes from this & we speak of hyperactive children or hypersensitive people. Meaning that they are more than normal!

There’s a story about:

An artist once submitted painting of Niagara Falls to an exhibition but didn’t give it a title. The gallery came up w/ the words “More to Follow.” Here you have NF, which has been spilling over billions of gallons per year for thousands of years & has more than met the needs of those below, as a good picture of God’s grace. There is always “More to follow,” or as James so beautifully says, “He gives us more grace.”

Martin Luther wrote: “Just as the sun is not darkened by the whole world enjoying its light, and could, indeed light up ten worlds; just as 100,000 lights might be lit from one light & not detract from it; just as a learned man is able to make a thousand others learned, and the more he gives, the more he has—so is Christ, our Lord, an infinite source of all grace, so that if the whole world would draw enough grace and truth from it to make the world all angels, yet it would not lose a drop; the fountain always runs over, full of grace.”

There is no hyperbole here. Paul expressed the facts w/ careful precision at the end of Rom.5 verses 20 & 21 “Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”

There is no conceivable accumulation of sin that grace cannot overflow. Grace increases the more we need it & there is always “more to follow!”

The perfection of grace is always linked w/ its visible expressions, faith & love. Hearts like Paul’s, previously filled w/ unbelief, are now filled w/ faith; hearts once filled w/ hatred are filled w/ love.

IV. In vv 15-16 We find the Purpose of Grace

Read vv 15 & 16

we find here one of the most carefully worded summations of the gospel message in the entire Bible.

It's the good news in a nutshell: **"Jesus came to save sinners," he says, "and if He can save me, He can save anybody."**

Paul understood where he came from & who he was in Christ. The depth of sin & the height of salvation.

You'll notice he said, years after his salvation experience, not "I **was** the worst," but "I **am** the worst."

This is the thinking of a healthy regenerate heart. Saving faith never gives one a sense of superiority. It breeds humility and gratitude just like the lyrics penned by John Newton: "How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me" its amazing grace that if God could & would save one like Paul; that gives hope to you & me!

Paul says here that the reason God did all this was for him to be an example for others. When he said he was the "worst, foremost, or chief of sinners," he wasn't looking for any accolades or pious pats on the back. He was simply telling it like it is. I've had people tell me, "God couldn't save me; I'm too bad, done too much." I take them to this passage. "the worst sinner has already been saved, so you don't have that excuse!"

In fact, this guy was so bad, & his conversion was so dramatic & unbelievable that the Jerusalem church thought it was just a trick to lower defenses. Like a Trojan horse? But it was real & stands as an example for all others ever since he was shown mercy, so that all who believe on Jesus would receive eternal life. In any case, his life was like a model w/ a sign hanging on it that read, "This is what a life looks like when it's shaped by the grace of God...and it could be your life!" Let me ask you something this morning. Do you know that God is working in you so that others can see His handiwork? And you never know who's watching, so let God's amazing grace shine thru!

V. That brings us to the fifth aspect the Praise of God's grace.

Read v17

This is the exuberant doxology that Paul breaks into after writing of all that God has done for him. From speaking about the work of God's amazing grace, to a declaration of praise to God in awesome, transcendent terms like Paul I want to leave you with this morning.

The King Eternal: Sovereign of the universe before creation, after creation, to the final ages and on into eternity is honor and glory forever and ever.

The King Immortal: To the One true God who is not subject to decay or destruction and is absolutely imperishable & incorruptible be honor and glory forever and ever.

The King Invisible: To Him who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see be honor and glory forever and ever.

The ONLY God: He is the LORD and there is no other, the I am that I am be honor and glory forever and ever.

Church, you've heard about God's amazing grace this morning. The good news is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and that means you and me. Paul knew that when he received the Savior, Jesus gave His righteousness to him, & his experience of mercy, grace, love, faith & ministry drove him to his knees.

This conviction is the same reality that drives me. God has saved me, and if He can do that in my life, He can do it for anyone. Do it for you. I believe this w/ all my heart! No one on this earth is beyond God's amazing grace.