**FAVORITE HYMNS**

***Amazing Grace***

(Note: I had intended to only write 5 articles last week on Favorite Hymns, but because so many sent me suggestions to research the background of their favorites, I will again use this week to write five more. Thank for your response. I love doing this).

When it comes to hymns we all have favorites. For instance, for those who drive on the interstate at 55 mph (“God Will Take Care Of You”), at 75 mph (“Nearer My God To Thee”), at 85 mph (“This World Is Not My Home”), at 95 mph (“Lord, I’m Coming Home”), and at 105 mph (“Precious Memories”). Or, for those who go to work, if you’re a weatherman (“There Shall Be Showers of Blessings”), if a golfer (“There’s A Green Hill Far Away”), if an IRS agent (“I Surrender All”), if an electrician (“Send The Light”), and if you’re running for political office (“Standing On The Promises”). – *thanks Dale B.*

I realize many of you already have heard the amazing story behind *Amazing Grace*, but since there are a number of you reading this new to the faith I wanted to share the history of what many consider the greatest hymn ever written in the past 300 years.

John Newton once wrote in his diary on July 7, 1774 these words: “I usually make a hymn weekly and sometimes it costs me so much time and study that I hardly do anything else.” But the day he wrote this hymn to be sung on the first Sunday of 1773 at the little church in Olney, England, it was time well spent. It would powerfully impact millions of desperate souls looking to God for salvation. For 247 years this hymn has stirred the hearts of sinners longing for grace, including mine, and likely yours too.

Newton was 47 years old when he sat down one night to write his weekly hymn. He wanted a song that would tell his life’s story. It became every saved sinner’s biography. He chose his text for Sunday – I Chronicles 17:16, which says, “*Then King David went in and sat before the LORD; and he said: “Who am I, O LORD God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?”* From that he wrote his sermon and song. From being a shepherd boy, the youngest son of eight born to Jesse, to a hero that slew Goliath, to a great warrior for King Saul, to a king that built an empire called Israel, he looked back on his life and saw God’s amazing grace. So he asked, “Who am I…that you have brought me safe thus far?” But now he wanted the church to ask the same question of themselves. “What has God done for you?” This hymn revealed his answer.

“**Amazing grace, how sweet the sound**.” Paul used the word grace – *CHARIS* - 87 times in his 13 epistles, making that the theme of his life. “*By the grace of God I am what I am*” became his motto (I Cor. 15:10), Newton’s motto, and our motto. Mr. Newton wrote that opening line while thinking back 25 years into his past, remembering how God had rescued him from a blasphemous life of debauchery.

“**That saved a wretch like** **me.**” Here is where you learn of his former life as captain of a slave ship that bought and sold men like cattle at auction. His father was a sailor who was often at sea, so his mother raised him to quote scripture and learn all of Isaac Watt’s hymns (“*How Shall The Young Secure Their Hearts*” – *I’m Not Ashamed To Own My Lord*” – “*Joy To The World*” – “*When I Survey The Wondrous Cross*” – and 750 more). But then his mother died. His dad remarried and cast him off. He soon forgot his mother’s training and went to explore the “exciting” world of a sailor. This led him into a life that could best be described in Rom. 1:18-32 and especially Ephesians 2:1-3,

*1 And you … who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath…”*
Yes, “by nature children of wrath” described John Newton to a tee.

“**I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.**” He lived such a depraved life that even he was arrested and put in chains for an entire year, forced to work as a slave off the coast of Sierra Leone in West Africa. He had hit rock bottom. But when released he did not repent, but rose to captain his own slave ship, called *The Greyhound*. What he saw, and did, would haunt him for many years.

**“’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved, how precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed.”**  On March 1, 1748 his life would change forever. While at sea a mighty storm caught them by surprise, threatening to sweep them under the monstrous waves. While holding the wheel for 11 straight hours in the Jonah-type storm, he no longer blasphemed God, but instead prayed for God’s grace and mercy. Gradually the storm broke and the sun shone. His prayer had been answered and he never forgot it. He was a changed man.

**“Thro’ many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. ‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace shall lead me home.”** Over the next 50 years he became a pastor of a church and spent the rest of his life telling the story of God’s amazing grace. Ephesians 2:4-9 became his life’s text:

*4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

John Newton lived to be 82 years old. Nearing death he heard someone read I Cor. 15:10, which caused him to say these words that I could surely speak as my own:

I am not what I **ought**to be. Ah! how imperfect and deficient.
I am not what I **might**be, considering my privileges and opportunities.
I am not what I **wish**to be. God, who knows my heart — knows I wish to be like Him.
I am not what I **hope**to be. Before long, I will drop this clay tabernacle, to be like Him!
Yet, I am not what I once **was** — a child of sin, and slave of the devil!
Though not all these — not what I *ought*to be, not what I *might*be, not what I *wish*or *hope* to be, and not what I once *was* — I think I can truly say with the apostle, *"By the grace of God — I am what I am!"*

On his death bed he said, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner — and that Christ is a great Savior!" To which I say, AMEN!

Until tomorrow… read all 87 quotes from Paul on grace from Romans through Philemon. It might change your life, as it did John Newton’s, and mine.

I love you. Rick