

God's Amazing Grace

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[0 : 00] Good evening everyone. Please keep your Bibles open as we look at the passage tonight. Let me pray for us as we start.

Father, we pray that even as we begin to look into this letter of 1 Corinthians, that you will reveal yourself to us and help us to live as a church for the glory of Jesus Christ.

We pray that in his mighty name. Amen. Well, it's good to see you all here. I know it's been a cold and windy day, and so it's great. Good on you for coming out.

It's good to see some of the youth camp leaders here as well. And I've said to them that if they fall asleep tonight, that's okay, provided they don't snore. So you're looking for a new church.

Hypothetically speaking, of course. What are the things you look for? Comfy seats and good heating during winter, particularly if the preacher goes on for a bit too long.

[1 : 08] Good music. Not too loud, not too slow, not too soppy, not too old. Or you look for the vibe. You know, you can't quite describe it to anyone, but you know it when you feel it.

Well, you'd be surprised to know that they've actually done research on this. And the word is that families, for families who come looking for new churches, it's actually the wife that makes the decision.

Not surprised, probably. And she bases it on whether she likes to look off or can get along with the pastor's wife. So all I can say is, thank God for Alyssa.

Well, of course at HDD, we're just more godly with our choices, aren't we? And so my guess is our top three reasons at HDD, in no particular order, are good Bible teaching, good Bible teaching, good Bible teaching.

Yes? Well, maybe not just that. But what should we be looking for in a church? And how should we be deciding whether to remain in one?

[2 : 14] How do we tell whether we're doing well as a church or not? Well, this week we start our new series in 1 Corinthians. And what we want to ask ourselves is, what makes for a healthy church?

And as we listen to what Paul has to say, or God says through Paul, over the next seven weeks, let's think about what we're doing here at the 6pm congregation.

Let's give thanks for what we're doing well, and then ask God to change us if we need to improve.

Well, our case study will be the church in Corinth, which received this letter from Paul.

Well, if you know the city of Corinth, the ancient city of Corinth, I think there's a slide up there. It's located at the Isthmus, Isthmus, not Christmas, Isthmus, which is that little neck joining the Peloponnese Peninsula, that's that bit underneath, to the mainland of Greece.

And from archaeology, what they found is that this was a bustling cosmopolitan city. And because of where it was located, it had a commercial advantage. Traders used to drag their cargo over the sort of 6.3 kilometres of that Isthmus, rather than take its cargo around on that perilous journey around the peninsula.

[3 : 34] In fact, a few of our friends, some of you who have met, Connie and Jillian, are probably going to be there next week. And I've told them to send us some photos. Of course, we also know a lot about the church in Corinth, thanks to the two letters that we get in the Bible.

And as we read the letters, we'll find that, what we find is that the Corinthian church is a case study in what not to be. What not to be, if you want to be a healthy church.

Well, if you were here on Tuesday night, when I gave the devotion at prayer night, you would have heard me list all the many problems that this church had. Sexual immorality, in the sense of a man sleeping with his father's wife.

They were disordering the mudsucker when they came to share in it. They were boasting about their spiritual gifts. They were boasting about the human leaders. And they were taking each other to court outside the church, rather than trying to resolve their disputes inside.

And we get to some of these specifics in the future weeks. But already here in chapter 1, Paul begins to correct them on one of their failures. So as we read from verses 10, Paul says, Verse 11, People were making a big distinction over which leader had more influence over them.

[5 : 20] And so if you can imagine if this church was HDD, it would be like people starting to boast, you know, I got converted under Paul Barker. Or I came here to sit under the ministry of Andrew Reid.

Or I came to HDD only because I was attracted by the ministry of John O. Smith. You know, maybe there might be different pews for different people. And the pews for Paul Barker would probably have Deuteronomy highlighted.

I don't know about Andrew, probably Genesis Daniel. And then John O. Well, I think the pews for John O. would just have iPads with podcasts of his servants. I don't know which one I would choose.

But the point was that Apostle Paul would have none of that in the church at Corinth. He wasn't even happy, as you read, for people to say, I follow Christ. Because that was still going to drive a division between the church.

Now I say all of this by way of context, because if you now have this picture of an imperfect church in your mind, then Paul's prayer in verses 4 to 9 is simply amazing.

[6 : 26] It's amazing because Paul doesn't seem to hold back on his lavish description of the Corinthian church. And so if you look at verse 4, he says, I give thanks to my God always for you, for in every way you have been enriched, verse 5, in speech and knowledge of every kind.

And then in verse 7, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift. God will strengthen you, he says, in verse 8, to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Can you hear this prayer? There are no ifs and no duds. And there's no seeming recognition of the many faults that the church seem to have. So what's going on here?

Is this simply a little pep talk by Paul? Like when I say to my daughters, and they're actually here, I didn't plan on them being here, but anyway, when I say to them, good job for tidying up your room, and then straight after that I go in and tidy it up for them.

Or perhaps, a bit of wishful thinking on Paul's part, that if Paul says it often enough, he'll start to believe, or they'll start to believe it's true. Well, I think the two important things to realize about this prayer, is that first, it's all about what God has done in the church, rather than what God, what the church has done.

[7 : 47] So you see all the verbs are actually God's actions, not the church. The second, is to realize that it is all about what God has already done, and not what he will do in the future.

And again, if you look at the verbs, they're all in the perfect tense, something that has already been done, completed, with an ongoing impact. And all this is happening because the Corinthians are in Christ Jesus.

All because of what God has already done for them in Christ Jesus. So, what God has done in Jesus' death and resurrection, resulting in his blessing on them.

And what God has given to them, through the Spirit, to enrich and empower them, and to hold them blameless until the end. So it's not what the Corinthians have done, but what God has done.

And Paul says, further in verse 9, that God is faithful. He alone will see them through, in spite of their failures, provided they remain in Christ Jesus. Now, I don't think Paul is saying here that, we turn a blind eye to our failures.

[8 : 57] But sometimes it's really easy for us to focus on one another's faults, rather than on God's grace, isn't it? If so-and-so would only be more friendly. Or, why can't that, you know, so-and-so be more considerate?

And, you know, what about that hurtful thing that, so-and-so just said? You know, how would we actually view one another's shortcomings, if we remind ourselves constantly, of God's grace for us? Well, if you're visiting us tonight, well, here's our little confession. Surprise, surprise, HGD is not a perfect church. And we're no better than, I guess, the society around us.

We all stuff up, we have our insecurities and fears, and there are days that, we are unloving, and ungracious. There are days that we think we're better than others, and better than we really are.

And often, we are quick to criticize others, when we ourselves are guilty of the same thing. But yet, in spite of all that, this prayer shows us that, we are also a vessel of God's amazing grace, given to us in Christ Jesus.

[10 : 09] Do you see that reference there in verse 2, when Paul says, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who, in every place, call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That reference there, Paul was actually talking about us, as he was writing that letter. We are one of those places, where people call on the name, of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

And so, even though the letter was addressed, to the Corinthians, the blessing of this prayer, actually applies to us. And we so often, I guess, gloss over the greetings of Paul's letters, but this one actually, is rich in meaning.

Paul says, to the church of God in Corinth, and he says that, they are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. These are actually direct references, to Israel's own calling, in the Old Testament.

To be sanctified, means to be set apart, set aside for a special purpose. And to be saints, means to be holy ones. And so, when we read in Exodus 19, verses 4 to 6, and it will come up, on the screen here, we see that, God called Israel, out of Egypt, and as he did that, he set them apart, as his treasured possession, and called them, to be a holy nation.

[11 : 36] So right there, in verse 5, it says, Now therefore, if you obey my voice, and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession, out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me, a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation.

And so, when Paul describes the church, as sanctified, and called to be saints, he is proclaiming to the church, this special calling, which Israel used to have, to be God's treasured possession, a holy nation, set apart, as the object, of God's exclusive favor.

And further, when God took Israel, out of Egypt, and this is quite interesting, he placed them, in the land of promise, and as he did that, he also said that he would appoint a place, where he would cause his name to dwell.

That is, God will choose a special place, where his people will gather, to offer worship to him, where he promised that his presence will dwell, where he will reveal his glory.

And so, for example, if we flick again to Deuteronomy chapter 12, and verses 10 and 11, God says, when you cross over the Jordan, and live in a land, that the Lord your God is allotting to you, and that he gives you rest, from your enemies all around, so that you live in safety, then you shall bring everything, that I command to you, and this is the thing, to the place, that the Lord your God will choose, as a dwelling for his name, your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and your donations, and all your choice, devoted gifts, that you vow to the Lord.

[13 : 11] So, it wasn't any old place, in the Old Testament, which the people could choose for themselves, which is why, when, during the time of the kings, when the people started offering sacrifices, in high places, God was actually displeased.

Instead, it was the temple of God, which God chose, and which he filled with his glory, when King Solomon dedicated it. So, in that time, God had said, I would choose a place, but also, in the Old Testament, and close to the end of it, in Malachi, God also foreshadowed a time, when this would change.

And so, in Malachi, chapter 1, and verse 11, and I've got another verse, sorry, a bit of Old Testament going through tonight. Malachi says, for from the rising of the sun, to its setting, my name is great among the nations, and in every place, notice how it's, God's gone from one place, and now he's saying, in every place, incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord, of hosts.

So, what Paul is saying here, is that in Christ Jesus, what Malachi prophesied, that time has actually come. God is now pleased, for his name to dwell, wherever his saints call, on the name of Jesus.

And so, that's every local church, whether big or small, whether the preacher is, Mark Driscoll, or Mark Chu, whether the muses have, a recording of a CD or not.

[14 : 44] There's no need, to go to Jerusalem anymore. In one sense, God has chosen, God comes to the place, where people call upon his name.

Jesus himself said that, to the Samaritan woman, in the Gospel of John, when he says, that the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers, will worship the Father, in spirit and truth.

For the Father seeks, such as it is to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him, must worship in spirit, and truth. And so, it's no longer on Jerusalem, as the Jews did, or on this mountain, as the Samaritan woman did, but in every place, where people call upon his name. And that's, to me, such an amazing thing, that we can come together, called by God, and God promises, that at this place, as we call on his name, this prayer, this blessing, is given to us, because of his promises.

But the thing is, place is still important. In other words, we still need to find a place, where together with other saints, we call on the name of Jesus.

[15 : 57] And so, having your weekly spiritual encounter, with God, in your bedroom, doesn't count. Having your favorite, Hillsong on iPod, and your favorite sermon, from your favorite preacher, on podcast, is not what Paul is talking about here.

The blessings of this, first chapter, of 1 Corinthians, doesn't apply, to individuals. It applies to us, as a church. You know, when we live in a society, which plays so much emphasis, on the individual, and often at the expense, of the community, it's actually important, to keep reminding ourselves, that actually, God's grace works, in and through us, as a church.

It's, God working, for our benefit, rather than just, for ourselves, as individuals. His big plan, is for the church, and his plan, for each of us, is meant, to be, how we fit, into that big plan.

But often, we come, to church I guess, and many people do, hoping that the church, serves, their individual agendas. And so, we need to start, thinking of the local church, as their vessel, of God's grace.

Which means, you only experience, God's full measure of grace, when we are, present, and committed, to our local church. And that means, giving to the church, rather than just, receiving from it.

[17 : 31] That means, investing our time, and energy, into the local church, and becoming part of it, and getting into, one another's lives, and giving, and serving, and being there, for each other.

And I guess, that's, you know, that's messy, isn't it? Because that means, we have to love people, that we may not feel like it. We have to serve people, who rub us up, the wrong way, all the time. We have to be vulnerable, we have to be open, to others, to allow others, to come into our lives, as messy as that is. And that, is what all love, is about, isn't it?

And it can be hard, when we have our failures, and our weaknesses, pointed out to us, that's never a pleasant feeling. And sadly, I guess, many people have given up, on coming to the local church. If you've seen the, census data from, last week, 61.1% of Australians, call themselves Christians, of which, 17.1%, and this is Australia right, claim to be Anglicans.

[18 : 44] But I wonder, how many of these people, belong to a church? Recently, when we had our May Fair, in Autumn Fair in May, we had a little survey, at the table, where we had a true false statement, which people could, give their views to.

And it says, put it up, you have to belong, to the church, to be a follower of Jesus. And do you know what?

Nearly everyone said, that this was false. And then we started, to have a debate, about whether it should be, their church, or our church. As if to belong to, their church, you can belong to their church, without being part of, our church.

Friends, God's grace, does not work in a vacuum. We have to belong, to our church, to experience, God's own, ongoing grace. And the converse, is true as well.

God uses, each of us, to show us, his grace, to the church. Without, each and every one of us, the church, the church, actually misses out.

[19 : 53] So for instance, every time, we are missing from church, you are missed. And not just because of your, you know, personality, or your company, but because God's grace, is unable to work, through you, to us.

So don't think for a moment, that nobody will miss you. Or, you know, saying ahead, I'll take a break, because, you know, I'm not rusted, to do anything today.

I'm not saying that, you know, I don't want to be legalistic, I'm not saying that, we can never miss church. But I urge you, let's be thoughtful, about our presence, because I think it really matters.

Well friends, if you look at the 7th line, your new sheet, setting out the next 6 weeks, you'll see, in the future weeks, what we're going to be looking at.

And some of these topics, will be difficult. The letter of 1 Corinthians, is not for wishes. And God will have some challenging things, to say for us.

[20 : 57] And so I think it's important, before we get there, that tonight, we first need to hear this prayer, of thanksgiving, from Paul. To remember that it's, not us, but God.

Not our work, but God's work. Not what we have to do, but what God has already done. God's amazing grace, as the title of this sermon says, is the sole ingredient, for a healthy church. It is God, who is going to be faithful. And he has given, his amazing grace, to us in this place, Holy Trinity Doncaster. And so we have been enriched, in every way, in speech and knowledge, of every kind.

And we have been strengthened, by the testimony of Jesus Christ. So that we are lacking in, we are not lacking in, any spiritual gift. And so that we will be blameless, to the end.

And so in the next six weeks, as we hear challenging, as we hear the challenge, to live out this grace, please, let us keep reminding ourselves, that God has already, given us his grace.

[22 : 04] And so on the one hand, God's grace has been given to us, and on the other, the challenge, to live out that grace. Paul actually sums this up, quite beautifully, at the end of this letter, in chapter 15 and verse 10.

He says, Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you that, in Christ, we have been given this amazing grace. and that as saints, we gather each week, to call on the name of Jesus.

And because of that, you are pleased to dwell among us. And that you call us together, and therefore your presence is with us. And with your presence, and your spirit, we have been enriched, in every way.

So that we are not lacking, in anything that is required of us, to be a healthy church. So Lord, tonight we do want to thank you for that. And Lord, we ask, that you continue to remind us of that, so that Lord, we can be encouraged, to live out our lives, as the holy ones, the called out ones, the saints of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 31] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.