



While I know that you have all heard the song, I'm sure that there's at least some of you that do not know the history. You see, the song Amazing Grace was written by a slave trader.

[ 4 : 25 ] His name was John Newton. Newton was born in 1725 in London. His mother died about two weeks before his seventh birthday.

Newton would go on to work at sea and would get involved in the slave trading industry. And on one particular voyage, Newton was caught in a serious and significant storm.

He prayed that God would get him out. And he was saved. He was, he survived. But he was not only saved physically, he would be saved spiritually.

Newton would speak of that being a time in which he began to convert to the gospel, to Christianity. But it wasn't a radical change that was all at once.

It was a transformation that took place in his life over time. You see, it was through months of reading the Bible and spending time in prayer and growing in Christ that he began to look upon those slaves, to look upon the captives with great sympathy.

[ 5 : 49 ] He would eventually write a pamphlet called Thoughts upon the African slave trade. In it, Newton writes, quote, It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, but I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.

In fact, it was from that deep sense of regret and brokenness that he would write the words we all know so well.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found.

I was blind, but now I see. Newton, towards the end of his life, would reflect back on all of these things, and he would write this in his journal.

Many of you have heard me mention this many times. I love this quote. Newton wrote, quote, I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I want to be.

[ 7 : 12 ] I'm not what I one day will be, but I'm not what I was. And by the grace of God, I am what I am.

Faith family, let me ask you a question. What do you do with a man like John Newton? A man that did some serious things in his past.

A man who, by his own admission, would look back and recognize the terrible things that he did. What do we do with a man like John Newton?

Do we get rid of him forever? Should we refuse to sing Amazing Grace because it was written by a man like that? And do not misunderstand me, faith family, for a moment.

Please do not. We absolutely and emphatically stand against racism and slavery. Are you kidding me? That is anti-gospel.

[ 8 : 17 ] It is anti-Christian. It is anti-God. For every single human being, red, yellow, black, and white is precious in his sight.

We are all created in God's image. That is an undeniable truth. But you and I are living in a day that some have called the cancel culture.

It's the notion that if anyone has ever said something or done something or tweeted something in their past that is sinful, they are to be canceled forever.

Well, I don't know about you, faith family, but I am so thankful that we serve a God of redemption, a God of amazing grace.

Amen? That's the God we serve. That's the one true and living God. I'm thankful, aren't you, that the only thing in your past that defines you is the cross of Jesus Christ.

[ 9 : 30 ] That is exactly, it is exactly what we learn from the life of John. And I'm not talking about John Newton.

I'm talking about John the Apostle. I want to take you on just a very brief journey today through the Apostle John's life.

And I want to show you that Jesus did not reject John because of his sins. Jesus redeemed John in spite of his sins.

We're first introduced to the Apostle John in Mark chapter 1. And what we notice is right out of the gate, John was an all or nothing kind of guy, an all or nothing type of guy.

He was intense, passionate, likely type A, an all in personality. Do you know anybody like that? Are some of you like that?

[ 10 : 36 ] He was either all in or all out. And there was very little room for anything in between. Notice Mark chapter 1 and verse 19.

And going on a little further, he saw James, that is Jesus, saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets.

And immediately he called them and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed Jesus.

This is the story of Jesus calling his disciples. John and his brother James, they were fishermen along with Peter and Andrew.

Now, when you and I think about fishing or a fisherman, we tend to think of fishing as like a hobby. You know, it's what you do with your kids or your grandkids or in your spare time or maybe something you do at the cabin up north.

[ 11 : 41 ] But for John and James and Peter and Andrew, for them, this was more than a hobby. This was their livelihood and their legacy.

Here's what I mean. It was their livelihood because it was their security. It's how they had a home. It's how they paid for food. This was like their small business.

It was their trade. But not only was it their livelihood, it was their legacy. Their dad did it. His dad did it. His dad did it.

That's how it worked often in the ancient Near East. You did what your father did. Who did what his father did? Who did what his father did? And the legacy of your family was handing down the family business.

And yet the text says John immediately walked away from all of that to follow Jesus. Now, maybe you say, well, maybe he just didn't like fishing.

[ 12 : 39 ] Well, no, it didn't work that way. You don't leave your father in the boat. You don't walk away from the family business. You don't leave everything that gives your life security unless you're all in.

In fact, we see examples in the gospel where Jesus would call some to follow him and they'd say, you know, I got to go. I got to go check on my parents. You know, I got to go check on my livestock or something like that.

They would give excuses. Not John. John was all in. He was an all or nothing kind of guy. Now, imagine Jesus shows up at your work tomorrow or sometime this week.

And you just you quit on the spot. You turn in your car keys. You give up everything in life to follow him. That's the apostle John.

That's what he did. In fact, James and his brother, James and his brother, John, were so intense like this. They were so all in that Jesus actually gave them a nickname.

[ 13 : 49 ] You remember, many of you know what it is. The Sons of Thunder. What a cool nickname from Jesus. The Sons of Thunder.

Because they were so passionate and so committed and so all in. It just reminds me of something like this from the WWE. You know, the Sons of Thunder.

You know, they drink five hour energy drinks. They're fully caffeinated. They're intimidating. They're in your face. They've got loud personalities. And that's great.

Hang with me. That's great if it's all channeled in the right direction. But it can actually cause you to say things or do things that you will regret.

Anybody ever stuck your foot in your mouth? Anybody ever hurt someone you didn't want to hurt? Anybody made mistakes that you deeply regret? John did.

[ 14 : 53 ] Look at something else we see in his early life in Luke chapter 9, verse 52. Luke 9, 52. Watch. And he sent messengers ahead of him who went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him.

That is for Jesus. But the people did not receive Jesus because his face was set toward Jerusalem. Not only was John kind of an all in, an all or nothing kind of guy, he was also an overly aggressive kind of guy.

Here's what I mean. I don't have to tell you how much Jews hated Samaritans. Many of you know that. The Samaritans were half breeds. They rejected the Torah.

Jews hated them so much they wouldn't even walk in Samaritan territory. But that's not what we see in the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus wants to minister to the Samaritans. Think, for instance, the woman at the well. Jesus wants to reach them. He wants to be compassionate towards them.

[16:02] He has a heart of ministry for people, for the nations like the Samaritans. So, what is John's response when he learns that they have been rejected, when Jesus has been rejected by the Samaritans?

Does he say, you know, hey, it's too bad. You know, you win some, you lose some. Does he say, hey, hey, everybody, let's kind of gather around and let's just have a moment of prayer for the Samaritans.

Maybe their heart will become softened and receive this. Is that how he responds? No, this is how he responds. Luke 9, 54. Luke 9, 54.

And when his disciples, James and John, sons of thunder, saw it, they said, Lord, here's an idea.

Do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?

Wow. I mean, come strong or don't come at all, John. I mean, talk about your evangelism strategy. You talk about having a heart for the nations. I know.

[17:12] I've got an idea. Let's kill them. I mean, what a response for a disciple of Jesus. I mean, clearly John's favorite Old Testament story is not God parting the Red Sea.

It's Sodom and Gomorrah. It's the destruction of all these evil people. Jesus is so displeased by John's response.

Look at what happens in verse 55. This is Luke 9, 55. John, that's not the heart I want you to have. That's not the attitude I want you to have. That's not the approach that we're going to take towards the Samaritans. Do you see? John, early on, was not only a kind of all-in guy, but he was very aggressive.

Very aggressive. He didn't have a soft heart towards people that were unlike him. This is not the only time that John's sinfulness is on display.

[18:27] Look at Mark 10, verse 35. Now hang with me, faith family. I'm building to a point. Mark 10, verse 35 says, And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, sometimes known as the sons of thunder, came up to him and said to him, Teacher, we want you to do for us, I don't know, whatever we ask you.

And Jesus said to them, Well, what do you want me to do for you? And they said to him, Grant us to sit, one at your right, the other at your left, in your glory.

John is not only all or nothing. John is not only aggressive and unloving, but John was also an arrogant guy.

John and his brother were arrogant. I mean, think about their request that they just made to Jesus. Are you serious?

I mean, at least two things are wrong with this. First of all, it's Jesus. We were kind of thinking, like, I know that you're the eternal son of God.

[19:43] I know that you were sent by the father. I know you're the rock of ages and the alpha and omega. We know all that. We know that you're the one to whom everything, including our lives, was created by.

But we think we should be able to tell you what to do. We think you ought to be able to do or ought to do whatever we ask. Really? I mean, could you be any more arrogant than that?

And as if that wasn't enough, their request is this. You know, out of all redemptive history, when it's all over and all the great people are gathered, you know, names like Moses and Abraham and Isaiah and Jeremiah, and all the angels are present.

They cry out, holy, holy, holy. You know, when we're gathered in glory, you know, my brother and I, James, we were thinking, could we get a good seat in the kingdom?

You know, a good seat. Well, James and John, what were you thinking? Like maybe seats 11 and 12. Now we were thinking a little closer.

[20:58] Okay. How about seats eight and nine? Nah. We were thinking a little closer. I mean, hear us out, Jesus. We were thinking maybe one and two.

Of course, we'll let you sit in the middle, right? Because you're Jesus. Out of all redemptive history, when we get to glory, we want the best seats at the table.

In fact, when the other disciples heard that they had made this request, when they heard of their arrogance, they were furious with James and John, so much so that Jesus had to call them all together and teach them this lesson.

Matthew chapter 10, verse 42. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, you know that those who, you know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

But it shall not be so among you. Whoever would be great among you must be your servant. Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

[ 22 : 20 ] Jesus had to teach James and John specifically, but the disciples as well, not to be self-serving, not to be arrogant, but to serve others.

Stop thinking of yourself and think of other people. Now, let's stop right here. Okay. You still with me, fake family? Here's my question.

If you were on a pastoral search team, would John at this point even make your top 10?

For instance, you're on the search team and you notice that this candidate that you're looking at 10 years ago tweeted something, listen, that called for the complete and total destruction of an entire race of people.

And not only that, when you looked at the strengths and weaknesses section on the resume, under weaknesses, it said, extremely arrogant, frequently putting themselves before others.

[ 23 : 31 ] Would you consider that person as a pastoral candidate? No chance. There's no way.

John even makes your top 10. And because of the, the, the cancel culture that we're in, we would remove him. We would get rid of him.

But the good news is faith family, the kingdom of God is not a cancel culture. It is a cross culture. It is a culture all about the cross of Jesus.

Christ. Notice this on the screen. John's ministry, according to our culture would be over, but John's ministry, according to Christ is just getting started.

I love this. Jesus is not going to reject John because Jesus wants to redirect John.

[ 24 : 30 ] He's not going to reject John. He's going to redirect John. Notice this lesson on the screen. Faith family. Oftentimes your greatest weakness is your greatest strength.

Misdirected. Your greatest weakness is your greatest strength. Misdirected. Now I could keep going on and on.

I actually wanted to try to keep this short, though. That's hard for me. I could keep going on and on about John's flaws and looking at him early in his life, in the ministry of Jesus.

But here's what we know. John's early life and early ministry was full of mistakes, big mistakes. And yet, listen, guess who is seated with Jesus in the upper room?

Guess who is close to Jesus when Jesus is sweating drops of blood in the garden? Guess who is at the crucifixion? Guess who Jesus asked to take care of his mother?

[ 25 : 35 ] Guess who is at the resurrection? Guess who is used mightily in the book of Acts? Guess who is used to write and author books in the New Testament?

The answer? That arrogant, overly aggressive, and sometimes unloving and selfish apostle named John.

Why? Because Jesus doesn't reject sinners. He redeems them. Because Jesus doesn't reject sinners.

He redeems them. And over time, after walking with Jesus, John's life is transformed.

A little bit at a time. A little bit at a time. And by the time he becomes an older man in his roughly 90s, and he's writing the book of 1 John, he writes, I hope you feel this, he writes with this kind of tone.

[ 26 : 45 ] Look at it. Verse 1. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Christ Jesus, Jesus the righteous.

John became an aged, mature man. He grew in godliness.

Over the years of his life, he went from, I got a great idea, let's kill them, to my little children. Don't sin. Don't sin.

Don't sin. But if you do, you have an advocate in Jesus Christ. Don't I know it?

[ 27 : 46 ] That's the life of the apostle John. He's still addressing issues within the personality that God has given him, but his response to these Christians who are being influenced by false teaching was not, I hope fire comes down from heaven and destroys you.

It was my little children, don't sin, but don't forget your advocate. I want to leave you today with three simple application questions.

Three simple questions as I close. Number one, Jesus changed John's life. How has he changed yours? Jesus changed John's life.

How has he changed yours? You see, walking with Jesus over many years, John's life was transformed from arrogance to a servant.

Number two, number two, will we be known for religious rejection or gospel redemption? Faith family, this is a question for us.

[ 28 : 59 ] Is this church going to be known for religious rejection of others or gospel redemption?

Will we be different? Will we be counter cultural? Will we be, number three, will we promote a cancel culture or will we be a cross culture?

Will we promote a cancel culture or will we be a cross culture? Faith family, learn from the story and life of John.

whether it's John Newton or John the apostle. Both of them were men with a regrettable past.

Both of them were men who did things and said things they regretted, but praise God, they were not unforgivable.

[ 30 : 05 ] Both of them were men who the culture would cancel and yet they were men for whom Jesus was crucified.

They were men who by the end of their lives were able to say this, I'm not what I ought to be. I'm not what I want to be.

I'm not what I one day will be, but I'm not what I was. And by the grace of God, I am what I am. In other words, faith family, their life, just like ours, are stories of amazing grace.

Amen? Let's pray together. Thank you for the life of John. God, thank you so much for the opportunity to look at the apostle's life.

how early in his life there were so many things he got wrong. He was aggressive and arrogant and Jesus often had to rebuke him and pull him aside and teach him and, but he never gave up on him.

[ 31 : 19 ] And that's because the people of God are not about rejecting sinners. We're about seeing sinners redeemed. And Jesus, you redeemed John's life and you used him in incredible ways.

I pray that each person listening today would be encouraged in the gospel, that the gospel is not a cancel culture. It is a culture all about the cross.

And we pray it in Jesus name. Amen. Thank you, faith family. Thanks for worshiping today. I hope that you're encouraged in the word of God.

We'll see you soon.