



HG266: Amazing Grace (Verse 4)
The Lord Has Promised Good To Me

Hebrews 10:23-39

Home Group Study Notes

22 October 2023 - Revd Canon Hugh Dibbens



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

What is your favourite hymn / worship song and why?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Introduction

Some hymns are worth learning by heart. If they become part of our memory bank, then we can call them to mind when we need them to strengthen our faith. It is a worthwhile practice to identify such hymns that have spoken to you and commit them to memory. Surely, ‘Amazing Grace’ is such a hymn. I have been grateful to have had this hymn in my account when, bewildered by the Japanese culture, my wife Ruth and I were working in Hokkaido, and more recently, when I was facing life-threatening surgery.

John Newton wrote this hymn to accompany his New Year’s Day sermon in 1773 which was 26 years after his conversion experience on HMS Greyhound. In the hymn he looks back on his spiritual journey, and is truly amazed at the overwhelming kindness of God towards him. He had become a changed man, but the change had taken time. When initially converted he immediately gave up gambling, swearing and drinking heavily. But he continued as crew on the slave ship. In the next 6 years he personally captained three such ships, seeking to demonstrate his Christian faith by holding prayer meetings and Bible studies for his crew during their voyages, but with no conscience about the wretched people chained up below deck.

In 1754, aged 29 yrs. he had a stroke and retired from seafaring. He recovered and sought ordination in the Church of England. (God had His own ways of reaching Newton and continuing his conversion!) It was during these next years that he began to see the evils of the Slave Trade. In 1788 he wrote a pamphlet – ‘Thoughts on the African Slave Trade’ - which was widely distributed and identified him with the Abolitionists. Probably his best contribution to the movement was to persuade William Wilberforce to stay in politics and fight for abolition. At the time Wilberforce had also had a dramatic conversion experience and was thinking that he should be ordained.

It is important that we all consider where our own blind spots are, and those of the Church and Society around us. In recent years the ‘Black Lives Matter’ campaign has helped to high light **institutional racism**. But what about **attitudes to migrants**?

‘Walk Free’, the International Organisation for Migration has released estimates about the extent of modern slavery globally for 2022. These show that 49.6 million people are trapped in **slavery worldwide** and in the UK there are 122,000 of them. This is not just a problem of the past! Then there is **ageism**. This is a particular scourge because it diminishes older people as well as depriving society of their significant potential contribution.

When it comes to hymns to be learned, may I also commend ‘Breathe on me Breath of God’, as you will recognise the first verse goes on to say *“Fill me with life anew, that I might love what Thou dost love and do what Thou wouldst do.”*

A. CALLED TO MOVE FORWARD vs32 -35

Just as John Newton looks back to his conversion experience and the impact it had on him in verses 1, 2, and 3 of ‘Amazing Grace’, so the writer to the Hebrew churches looks back to how it all began. They were tough days of persecution at the beginning. Would you have wanted to be part of these Fellowships? How might you have responded? But this was a time of spiritual strength when the bonds of Christian love among them and their eternal perspective must have given our Lord much joy (cf. Luke 10:17-21). But **the writer to the Hebrews**, who rejoiced in the wonderful beginning that the churches had made, **was writing not to congratulate them on their faith but to call them back to faith.**

He/she perceived that the churches were drifting from their secure moorings in the Gospel (Hebrews 2:1). Time had passed, life had become easier and they had lost their first love for God. The writer is anxious to call them to renewed commitment.

Times of transition in a church’s life can be a time of spiritual drifting. This might be particularly true between Rectors, especially if a church has had the privilege of a clear-sighted, compassionate and strong leader who has lead the church into growth. Yet he transition time itself can be a time of growth. One of the foundation stones of stable Christian progress is the discovery that John Newton expresses in verse 4 of this hymn. The first three verses have gloried in God’s blessings of grace that Newton experienced, even though an ill-formed Christian.

But in verse 4 he ‘comes clean’. It is not just that he was the unworthy recipient of untold blessings, but that these came from a personal relationship with the Lord Himself! How amazing is that! The word ‘Grace’ drops out of the hymn in favour of the Lord Jesus.

It is Jesus who is the Protector and our Provider. And in times of transition we all need to get this very clear. Jesus Himself is our Leader and we must fix our eyes on Him, especially at a time of transition, lest we find ourselves drifting away. Mission-orientated churches like Emmanuel, are naturally **sending churches.**

God is calling our present Rector and his wife to a new sphere of ministry. Our business as church is not to look back to our many good times, regretting that they are soon to be past, but to recognise what our Leader Jesus is doing. We must join in by sending them out with love and blessings.

B. CALLED TO RETURN vs26-31

The writer calls on a whole range of images drawn from the Old Testament showing how the Church's leader and saviour had fulfilled every major expectation, and had revealed to us the enormous privilege that we have in the present of knowing this and drawing on these truths (chapters 1 – 10). Jesus the Creator, our Saviour, Apostle, High Priest, Sacrifice for our sins, our Pioneer Leader... is looking to us at this time expecting us to respond with courage to His leadership and persevere with joy.

In addition to this positive encouragement, the writer also takes a lesson from the Old Testament prophets. Like them he warns the Hebrew Christians to be serious about turning back to God. Jesus is the only way. Recognise that it is possible for us to drift beyond the Harbour Wall and incur total ship wreck. This is not the only passage in Hebrews that echoes this prophetic message. Chapter 6:4-12 has the same straight talking, severely warning the Hebrew Christians to turn back to Jesus and His way while they can.

There seems to be a hidden reference here to 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' (Matt 12:31-32). But the writer is confident that his readers have definitely not drifted that far away from Jesus. (Heb.10:39) Nonetheless he feels it his duty to warn his readers. Some sensitive Christians who may suffer from touches of depression, sometimes worry that God has forsaken them and they may have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit and so all is lost. May I say that if any Christian believer is anxious whether or not they might have committed this sin, they haven't!! Anyone who has committed such a sin would never be worried about it!

C. CALLED TO PERSEVERE TOGETHER vs22-25

The writer sees the Hebrew churches as in danger... already they are drifting ... how can this be corrected? His answer is that this is not just an individual matter. There needs to be a corporate response. Christians in the fellowship need one another if the drift is to be corrected and prevented in the future.

First we must '**draw near to God in faith**'... **verse 22.**

Then, **engage with the Hope we are promised** and grasp this '**unswervingly**'. **Verse 23** - "For the Lord has promised good to me, His Word my hope secures"...

Then we need to look out for one another to see how we can **be an encourager of our fellow believers**– verse 24.

And **ensure that we meet together** – verse 25.

Conclusion

The letter to the Hebrew churches continues with a list of Old Testament saints (chap.11) who showed remarkable persevering faith, even though they had only a partial understanding of God’s purposes. Now we have the breath-taking truth of God’s amazing revelation of Himself in Jesus.

How much more should we persevere in faith knowing what we do! So let’s leave all drifting behind us, grasp the great truths of the Gospel and fix our eyes steadfastly on Jesus Himself. He is our Pioneer Leader whom we follow. There is no time and space for persistence in sins, only for faithful perseverance with Jesus. (Heb. 12:1-3) He is leading us into His future, wherever that might be.

*The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures,
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.*

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*The LORD bless you and keep you: the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you: the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26*

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Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. John Newton had a blind spot when it came to the Slave Trade. It took him time to realise that it was, in fact, a great evil.

Do you have a story of how you have come to understand some aspect of life because you have become a Christian to which you were blind before?

Do you think that the Church, either locally or nationally, has any obvious blind spots at the present time?

2. Do you have any thoughts about how Emmanuel Church might grow in spirit and mission during the coming time of vacancy?

3. Do you see any evidence of spiritual ‘drifting’ in our churches locally or in the wider church?

4. In your life's journey have you been given any tough warnings which have proved helpful in guiding you forward.

5. Which of the teachings given by the writer to the Hebrews in Chapter 10:23-25 do you find the most needful for the church today and how might they be effectively taught?

In the last few weeks have you been able to offer spiritual encouragement to a fellow Christian? Any stories?

6. The writer to the Hebrews emphasises the need for perseverance in the Faith – going on going on. How are we to fulfil this?

What are the key supports that must be in place when the going is hard?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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