

Amazing Grace Turns A Sinner To A Saint

Acts 9:1-31

Introduction:

a. John Newton – “Amazing Grace”

- His mother was a godly woman but she died when he was six
- His father was a wicked, irreligious sailor that washed away John’s spiritual roots planted by his mother. John started sailing with his father from ages 11-18.
- He was a slave trader who reached such depths of wickedness
- At 20, in Sierra Leone, West Africa, he even became a slave himself who was given food by African slaves that felt sorry for him
- He was the captain of a slave ship until epilepsy ended his career
- Yet it was God’s amazing grace that gripped John Newton
- On March 21, 1748, on board heading home to England in the North Atlantic ocean, God intervened to rescue the "African blasphemer." Newton was so impacted by this day that he would make note of it in his diary 57 years later when he wrote: "March 21, 1805. Not well able to write. But I endeavor to observe the return of this day with Humiliation, Prayer and Praise."
- That evening, we woke up to a violent storm. His room was being flooded. He was reporting to his post, but the captain stopped him to run another errand. The person who replaced was knocked overboard. After this dose of life and death, he uttered the first prayer in several years: "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us."
- John Piper’s biography recounts: "He worked the pumps from three in the morning until noon, slept for an hour, and then took the helm and steered the ship till midnight. At the wheel he had time to think back over his life and his spiritual condition. At about six o'clock the next evening it seemed as though there might be hope. 'I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour. I began to pray: I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a reconciled God, and call him Father . . . the comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted; The great question now was, how to obtain faith.'"
- He found a Bible and read Luke 11:13, which promises the Holy Spirit to those who ask. His response was: "If this book be true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise. I have need of that very Spirit, by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask: I must therefore pray for it; and, if it be of God, he will make good on his own word."
- After the storm cased, he spent the rest of the voyage in prayer and in reading the Bible. Afterwards, he journals: "Thus far I was answered, that before we arrived in Ireland, I had a satisfactory evidence in my own mind of the truth of the Gospel, as considered in itself, and of its exact suitableness to answer all my needs. . . . I stood in need of an Almighty Savior; and such a one I found described in the New Testament. Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvelous thing: I was no longer an infidel: I heartily renounced my former profaneness, and had taken up some right notions; was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the undeserved mercy I had received, in being brought safe through so many dangers. I was sorry for my past misspent life, and purposed an immediate reformation. I was quite freed from the habit of swearing, which seemed to have been as deeply rooted in me as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man."

- He wrote his own epitaph that read:
JOHN NEWTON,
Clerk,
Once an Infidel and Libertine,
A Servant of Slaves in Africa,
Was,
by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior
JESUS CHRIST,
Preserved, restored, pardoned,
And appointed to preach the Faith
He had long laboured to destroy,
Near 16 years at Olney in Bucks;
And [28] years in this church.



- John Newton said that there will be three wonders when we get to heaven. It's a wonder:
 - (1) who is there
 - (2) who is not there, and
 - (3) the fact that I'm there!
- *Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.*

b. Grace

- **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**
- Unmerited Favor – getting what we don't deserve
- "Free sovereign favor to the ill-deserving" (Benjamin Warfield)
- "Love that goes upward is worship; love that goes outward is affection; love that stoops is grace." (Donald G. Barnhouse)

c. Saul's Conversion

- John Stott: "Saul's experience on the road to Damascus is the most famous conversion in church history." (*The Message of Acts*, p. 165)
- Luke describes this event 3x. The 2 other times in Paul's speeches.
- This is not your typical conversion story
 - Blinded by a light
 - Falling to the ground
 - Hearing the audible voice of the resurrected Christ

Proposition: But the Amazing Grace that falls on a sinner makes him/her a saint. This passage illustrates how this happens: the work of grace in salvation.

Dad App: As it is Father's Day today, we will also make some "Dad Applications" to help us think about the work of Grace as parents bringing our children to Christ.

I. **Amazing Grace Is The Only Hope For Sinners (1-6)**

A. **Every Hardened Sinner Needs To Turn To God (1-2)**

¹But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

- Saul of Tarsus was an instigator of Christian persecution
- V. 1 – breathing threats and murder – as if every breath of his is full of contempt
 - “Breathing” alludes to the OT imagery of being so angry, the nostrils are enlarged and snorting like an angry bull
- He hunted people in their homes (8:3)
Acts 8:3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.
- V. 2 – Saul had permission to extradite Christians he found in Damascus who fled from Jerusalem to hide
 - “letters” were extradition letters – permission from the high priest to bring back followers of “The Way” as prisoners
 - The Roman Empire permitted the Jewish Sanhedrin to control those in the Jewish sector – Saul was the bounty hunter for the Jewish leadership
- “the **Way**” = the early name for Christians based on John 14:6 where Jesus describes Himself as the Way, Truth and Life
 - There were the Jews, the Pagans and the followers of The Way (of Christ)
 - The Church wasn’t called “Christians” until Acts 11:26 in Antioch
- But even the hardest sinner needs to turn to God – the terrorist, the mass murderer, those with repulsive political or moral views
- Every atheist needs to turn to Jesus
- But so does every nice person on earth

Dad App: Even your most stubborn and rebellious kid can turn to Christ.

- Don’t get discouraged or exasperated when you have the stubborn, rebellious and overly-wild child – if God can save Saul and turn him to the Apostle Paul, He can do the same with your child.
 - Your child probably won’t grow up hunting Christians and putting them to death. But even if they do, God can save them.
- Remember how rebellious we were or could have been!
- God’s grace can “save a wretch like me”
- God’s grace finds the lost
- God’s grace gives spiritual sight to the blind

B. **Every Single Sinner Needs To Be Confronted With The Light Of Christ (3-6)**

³Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “**Saul, Saul, why are you**

persecuting me?" ⁵And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." ⁶But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

- V. 3 – Saul traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus, which is 175 miles northeast from Jerusalem, which took 6 days to travel
 - Damascus is the 2nd oldest city in the world that still exists today
 - Tarsus is the oldest (Anders, p. 139)
- V. 3 – A **Light** and a **Voice** from Christ communicates to Saul who falls to the ground
 - Acts 26:13 says the light was brighter than the noon sun
 - **The Light is Christ's Glory**
- V. 4 – Christ: why are you persecuting me?
 - This statement affirms to Saul that Christ is alive, resurrected and persecuted
 - Paul recounts in Acts 26:14 that Christ stated this very personally – "Why are you kicking me in the groin?"

Act 26:14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

- This is one of the most intense pains a male can experience
- V. 5 – Saul: who are you, Lord?
 - *Kurios* could also mean "Sir" which is more common than intending "Lord"
 - But because of the dramatic and intense confrontation, Saul is recognizing Christ as the Lord of the universe
- V. 5 – Christ: I am Jesus

Dad App: Continuously share the Gospel with your kids.

- Even though your 5 year old prayed to trust Jesus at the bedside, continual to share the Gospel
- It is one thing to understand Jesus died on the cross for me – that's actually difficult to comprehend and the Spirit of God brings that conviction to our hearts
- But it is another thing to repent and remorse our sin – understanding we put Jesus on the cross.
- As our kids mature, they understand more significantly this great salvation more than the initial "Jesus loves me this I know"

II. Amazing Grace Is The Transforming Power For Saints (7-31)

A. Every Saint Needs To Comprehend The Transformation Of Salvation (7-12)

⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."

- Saul was struck blind
- V. 9 – 3 days without sight, food and drink
- William Larkin: "What is Saul to make of his blindness? It is not a punishment, nor an indication of divine disfavor, nor simply a concrete proof of the vision. An acted parable, it shows Saul the spiritual bankruptcy of his pre-Christian condition." (*Acts, IVP Commentary Series*, IVP, p. 141)
- "Ananias" means "protected by Yahweh"
- Ananias was sent by God to go find Saul on Straight Street which is still a main thoroughfare in Damascus today (runs East/West) called Derb Le-Mustaquim
- Saul already received a vision that Ananias would lay hands on him

Dad App: Help show your kids the difference Christ makes through "conversion."

- What's different in your life with Jesus?
- When your kid grows up in a Christian home going to Sunday School, Day Camp and church, the Christian life is engrained since childhood.
- What gets converted?
 - Perspective – loving the world to loving God, glorify self to glorify God, walk in the flesh vs walk in the Spirit, immaturity to maturity
- Conversion: broken jalopy to shiny custom car, mathematic transitions, childhood to adolescence, international currency to US dollars

B. Every Saint Has A Divine Purpose (13-16)

¹³But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

- V. 13 – Ananias was hesitant to go to Saul knowing how evil and malicious he was to Christians
- V. 14 – Saul had the backing of the chief priest to arrest on anyone who followed Christ
- V. 15 – The Lord confirmed that Saul is chosen for a purpose
 - Now both Saul and Ananias had confirming visions from God
- Saul is a chosen instrument
- V. 16 – part of his purpose is to endure suffering

Dad App: The greatest goal as fathers is to help our kids realize their divine purpose.

- Their gifting
- Their spiritual passions
- Their God-given strengths
- The Spirit's enablement to overcome our weaknesses (Fruit of the Spirit)
- Their calling

- It's a lifelong journey – your guidance will go through adolescence, college, post-graduate, marriage, parenting

C. Every Saint Needs Discipleship (17-19)

¹⁷So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

- V. 19 – "some days" – many scholars believe Saul was in Damascus for 3 years
- Paul was an expert in the Old Testament law, but he needed to learn to live it and love it, not just
- **Dad App: Spend time with your kids in spiritual conversations.**
- Read the Bible to them
- Have daddy boba time or Happy Meals

D. Every Saint Needs To Witness To Others (20-22)

²⁰And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" ²²But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

- Paul immediately starting teaching in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God
- One of the most powerful witnesses are those who have been radically transformed
 - The atheist, the addict, the rebel
- But that doesn't diminish the testimony of those growing up in a Christian home – we understand the difference between religion and relationship, that even in our external goodness we are sinners inside – all of us need to be radically saved and that's a great testimony!!
- **Dad App: Help your kids be a witness to unsaved friends and family.**
- It's important that a child's deepest friendships sharpen them in Christ
- But they must also develop "redemptive relationships"
 - In a public school, that school is our mission field
 - If home schooling or in a Christian school, there can be other opportunities to develop relationships with the unsaved – sports leagues, community classes
- Is there a risk of worldly influence from unsaved friends? Yes. **But to teach our kids to be in the world and not of it, is extremely valuable.**
- Go on a family missions trip

E. Every Saint Will Face Opposition (23-25)

²³When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, ²⁵but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

- V. 23 – Now he would be hunted by the Jewish leaders – the hunter became the hunted, the predator became the prey
- 2 Cor 11:32-33 describes how Aretas IV, the king of the Nabataean Arabs, in the Damascus region plotted with the Jews to hunt down Saul by setting soldiers at the gates of the city

Dad App: Be there for your kids in their hardest times – even as adults.

- Kids will get mocked by unbelieving class mates
- Kids will sometimes struggle with peer relationships at church
- Teaching them to forgive is a great asset
- Teaching them to learn from their mistakes and their trials is life's greatest lesson

F. Every Saint Needs To Belong To And Supported By The Church (26-31)

²⁶And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. ³⁰And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

- v. 26 – after Damascus, Saul was still carrying the reputation of Christian Persecutor
- V. 27 – here we see Barnabas again as the one who would intervene and bring him to the Apostles vouching for him as a real and reliable believer
- **Dad App: It is vital to ensure our kids are integrated into the local church.**
- Day Camp, Sunday School and fellowships are entry points.
- Encourage them to serve and be active. One who sits only feels disconnected and grows critical.
- Get together with other families in the church to nurture these relationships

Conclusion:

- No sinner is unsavable.
- Every salvation is transformational.
- Every believer has a divine purpose.

Discussion:

- Who are some of the resistant people you know who have come to Christ as Savior? How?
- How do we know when Christ has brought genuine transformation to our child who is pretty good natured?
- How can we help our kids be an effective witness for Christ?