

Amazing Grace

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[0 : 00] It's good to be with you tonight. And this is the first time that for a baptism, they haven't actually put any water in the bowl.

They thought I'd be greeting so much that there'd be enough water from my tears, which may or may not be the case that remains to be seen. So it would be special, I guess, if someone was baptized in the tears of a preacher.

But they would be tears of unbridled joy. So I'm not going to preach from that passage.

I'm going to refer to it briefly at various points. But I want to take a, do an old-fashioned thing, and I'm going to take a verse, a text, from the Old Testament, which I hope is relevant for this evening, but generally relevant because it's in the Bible.

And it's Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 11. I don't know if that's coming up in the screens or not. It may or may not do.

[1 : 10] Okay, that's fine. No problem. Proverbs chapter 22, verse 11, which says, He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious will have the King as his friend.

Or it could be translated, one who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have the King for a friend. And that's what I wanted to speak about this evening for a little while, because I think it encapsulates the gospel and what the gospel is all about.

King Solomon, who wrote Proverbs, was gifted wisdom, an amazing quantity. He was the wisest man who ever lived.

There's been no one like him before or after. And under this, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he breathed out God's divine wisdom in this book, in this book of Proverbs.

I think he spoke, as is often the case with the Old Testament writers, he spoke more than he understood. But it's a great book. If you have time, you should read.

[2 : 20] Yeah, I would advise you. I would encourage you to read a Proverb every day. It's great. Great to read a Proverb every day. If you've never read the book of Proverbs, go to it.

They're marvelous. The wisdom books of the Old Testament are incredible sections of the Bible. They speak about life and about suffering.

They deal with complexities. They're not simplistic in any way. But it's not law and it's not prophecy. It's just this amazing peeling back of God's mind.

Kind of God's common sense for us. It's God's wisdom poured out to us. In this section, or in the section, chapters 10 to 29, you've got all these little individual Proverbs that you can really just take on their own.

That's the best way to take them. It's the outworking of God's mind to us. And they really are great to consider.

[3 : 21] And these Proverbs speak about life either with God, often or without God, wisdom and foolishness living in the light of God's grace or ignoring God's grace.

And they speak so much about the person whose foundation rather is a humble trust in the justice and in the love of God.

They speak about life, about leaning on God. They speak about knowing the paradox of peace in a broken world and even in suffering, finding that all our hopes and all our dreams and all our longings and our searchings are satisfied in a friendship with God through a longed for Savior who we recognize as the Bible has unfolded its revelation as in the person of Jesus Christ.

So we're looking back in Proverbs with the perspective of knowing history and knowing the revelation of God in sending his own Son Jesus, which as Corrie mentioned, we consider and think about especially at this Advent season.

But I think verse 11 here encapsulates life to the full. You know, we talk about life a lot. This is life to the full. You may not think so, maybe, as you read it.

[4 : 42] He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious will have the King as a friend. But it's living along the grain of God's universe. Living the kind of life that God wants us to know and to enjoy, the incredible love and the incredible joy of finding ourselves back home.

The only place that is truly real, the only place where we can absolutely be ourselves, whoever we are, where we're more alive than we could ever be without Him.

And this verse does absolutely transcend its time of writing as God's revelation because we see and we experience that when we come to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the fullness of coming to know the sent Savior Jesus.

And it's the truest wisdom of all is knowing what Corrie mentioned this morning as God en fleshed. God the Son who became flesh, who became a person. So wisdom in the Bible always grows towards revelation of a person rather than a philosophy or a set of ideas.

[6 : 05] It is in the person of Jesus Christ. And we read that in Corinthians that Jesus Christ is a wisdom of God. His God's mind revealed, it's God's salvation revealed, it's God Himself revealed to us where He reveals Himself in His grace and in His love.

That great word. I'm going to speak a little bit. The title of the sermon, Amazing Grace, that's because Colin chose the song Amazing Grace to sing later on. And that seems a great song to remind ourselves of the wonder of salvation, which is God's unmerited love gifted, never earned, that we receive through Jesus Christ.

We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but those who are called both Jews and Greeks Christ, the power of God, the wisdom of God. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us the wisdom of God, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

So just want to say a few things about this passage or maybe more, say a few things about grace. The great thing about the Proverbs is the verse that you can kind of broaden out and you can move to wider and more significant areas of the Bible that help explain what's being said.

But it speaks here very much about grace, the power of grace. He who speaks with grace and I've used that word grace as the foundation for what we're saying, because grace is very much about, as we see here, it's about a changed heart, one who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace, well, the King is a friend.

[7 : 41] A pure heart, a clean heart. In the Bible that simply means someone who has been made clean. So much has said in the Old Testament and highlighted in the Bible about God's righteousness.

It's just another word for His rightness or His purity or His perfection. And it's reminding us that we need all of us to be made clean in order to know Him, because He has a perfect love and He has a perfect heart and He's holy.

That is that He's set apart, He's different. He's undiseased. In His whole being, He's perfectly tuned to a relationship of love sustained in an infinite, trinitarian, societal life within Himself.

There's nothing within Himself that corrupts to spoil, to damage, to lose love and to lose life. He is life and He is love and He is purity and He is grace.

He's everything, actually, that we are not, either individually or as a society, because we in Adam chose to do life with us at the centre, not with God in His righteousness and His holiness at the centre.

[8 : 55] By nature, our hearts don't love Him. Our hearts don't love others as they should. We fall short in terms of love of our own standards, let alone God's, because we have a deep-seated selfishness, pride and internal rage sometimes and anxiety, as we mentioned this morning, and unhappiness, a fear.

And self-help just doesn't cut it. It's impossible to do so. We have a recognition that our hearts can't change. What's our hearts?

The totality of our inner being, our control centre, our thoughts, our character, our mindset. And none of that we can change ourselves. We can tinker, we can fine-tune, but we can't change our hearts at the very deepest level, and that leads us to despair.

And I would challenge us all this evening to recognise and consider that, again, that our fundamental issue is not on the surface, it's not fine-tuning.

It is a deep-seated heart issue. And many people live their lives with a paralysis because they feel unable to change their heart, unable, like leopards, to change their spots.

[10:07] They can't do that. And we'll maybe even despair at the idea of being right with God or trying to be right with God, because the recognition of Scripture is that we need a changed heart, a heart that is renewed, a heart that is refreshed.

And that comes through understanding grace, understanding and coming to accept the beauty and the amazement and the wonder of grace.

And who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have a King as a friend. And grace is at the heart of all we are, isn't it? It's at the heart of what we talk about.

It's at the heart of the gospel. It's at the heart of St. Columbus. It's at the heart of Hope Church. It's at the heart of every gospel-believing church and of every Christian. And it's not religion.

It's not trying to attend to some moral standard that God will one day or another accept. It's not just kind of trying to live a decent life, be as good as anyone else.

[11:20] And then God will not reject us when it comes to that great day. It's not even about baptism. Significant and important and wonderful though baptism is this evening.

It's much, much more incredible and I can't put it into words. I think the older you get as a Christian, the more you realize how little you know and how little you understand and how much there is to grasp and how awesome is the reality of grace.

But grace at least at some levels is coming to recognize certain things. It's coming to recognize that even at its very best, life and love without God at its heart is temporary, is fleeting, is paradoxically incomplete and is shadowed by the ugliness of death.

However we want to dress that up and we're great at dressing up death I think in our sophisticated 21st century society where as God reveals it is something very ugly and very frightening and very spiritual.

As a spiritual dimension to it, it's not just something that happens at the end of life. It is the outworking of being separated from the God of life who has gifted life to us and it leaves us in that terrifying place of being separated from Him eternally in His just and holy and pure and righteous judgment.

[12:54] But it's coming to recognize that the world also in which we live and our hearts are broken, deep tensions we do need forgiveness. There is that deep seated selfishness and ultimately a resentment against God.

Proud, respectable sometimes but nonetheless rebellious. And ultimately the rebellion isn't against the machine, it's actually against our maker.

That's where the deep seated and the most deep seated rebellion reveals itself even if sometimes we don't recognize that. But if we are challenged by the reality of God very often we will feel and sense our rebellion against the lordship of God and the rightness of God and the character of God. But it's by God's grace that is His unmerited favor and kindness that we are all here this evening. It's by grace that every living soul that's walking down the royal mile tonight is breathing.

Every person in this universe enjoys anything that's good, it's by His grace. And it's that grace that should point us towards Him as the giver.

[14:13] Even in our rejection and the rejection of humanity He is the giver and He is the one even in a broken and sad and a world of betrayal He is the one that brings grace into that world by His kindness with the seasons, with His Son in our backs, with laughter, with friendship, with all the various things that we can take for granted.

It is His everyday grace that allows us to enjoy and know that. But more than that, it is in grace that He has given us Christ.

He has given us the Lord Jesus Christ that we remember at this advent season, God the Son who reaches into the darkness of this world in His grace and His compassion.

That's the good news of His love that He comes and He shows us God's righteousness. You know, I wonder what you think of God's righteousness, you kind of think of something definitely unattainable but otherworldly kind of.

Holiness and purity have another worldly kind of imagery about it. Whereas the absolute righteousness of God is revealed in Jesus who is a carpenter who talked, who talked, who laughed, who cried, who loved, who cared, who spoke.

[15 : 44] It's a righteousness that He lived perfectly in this world. He was wisdom person if I would, when we're looking for and thinking about how to live a wise life we see in the person of Jesus Christ.

A wisdom that we can't begin to come near. And it was a righteousness and it was a wisdom that should have meant He just kept on living. There was no place in His life for death.

There was no calling for Him to die. There was no separation from His Father. There was no judgment on Him. He could have lived forever.

But instead He chose to take that place of death in our place. He chose to go to that place of judgment so that we wouldn't need to face that judgment.

So that death has its sting removed when we put our trust in Him and He offers us that great substitution, life for death, covered in His righteousness.

[16 : 41] So every believer this evening, calling this evening, covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ because He gives it as a gift to everyone who accepts.

And we're called, you're called this evening to accept Jesus Christ into your heart if you haven't.

And if you have, you need to live in that grace and know that that grace changes you forever.

So I never, I never graduate beyond grace. We never move from the ABC of grace to something different. Grace becomes our motivation. It becomes our empowerment.

It becomes our life. It changes us forever and we continue to be changed by His grace. And Collins' baptism tonight is a reminder of that journey.

It's a reminder of who God is and what God does and His great power and His great patience and His great love towards anyone who will come.

[17 : 44] And the washing of baptism, the pouring of water symbolically, speaks of life and speaks of cleansing and speaks of a testimony of a changed heart.

If you're not a Christian this evening, I would really, it's really great that you're here. It's really amazing to see you. But I would ask you at least to ask yourself the big questions.

Ask yourself some of these big, ugly, uncomfortable questions about who you are, why you're here, what it's all about, who God is, if there is a God.

If there is a God and He's revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, what are His claims, do they make sense? What about the lives of people that you know who have been changed by grace? Do take that journey. Take it and do so openly and do so seeking with humility the answers.

[18 : 46] And I would even challenge you to pray to the God you might not even believe in and ask Him to reveal Himself in the person of Jesus. Because what I have found and what I'm sure Colin increasingly will find, that every longing of our heart is met in a relationship with Christ, our Creator, our Savior and our Judge.

So I just want to finish with two practical points this evening before we move on to the baptism and Corey will come and do a little bit there as well.

When we have come to be touched by grace and it makes me sad when I think how little I understand grace and how little it transformed my own heart.

What does it mean to live with this changed heart? A heart that's been transformed by grace? Well, it means a whole lot of things. But I'm not going to say two and then give you another five and then another seven and then eight finales.

I'll not do that, I've just got two. I've only got two tonight. The first is, and this is for us all as believers and the challenge for you if you're not a Christian as well to think about the great gift that enables us to make these changes.

[20 : 15] Firstly, that you speak differently. The proverbial verse that we read said, one who loves with a pure heart and who speaks with grace will love the King as a friend.

So grace changes the way we speak and that may seem a very kind of not a particularly deep thing to come out with, but I think it's very important.

There's so much in the Bible about how we speak, reflecting what's in our heart. And you know that, don't you? We know that what's in our heart very often comes out in the way we speak.

Bitterness, jealousy, anger, joy, grace. It comes out in the way that we speak. Jesus says in Matthew 12, 24, for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

It's great, isn't it? It's a great picture. The mouth speaks what the heart is full of. And what we long for is our heart to be so full of grace that it comes out in the way that we speak.

[21 : 22] When we're touched by grace, then we speak it. The proverbs are actually full of that. They're full of God's wisdom about how the power of God in our hearts changes how we speak.

One of the famous ones is a gentle word turns away wrath. And that is an outworking of grace. Look them up. You can go tuck in accordance and you look up the word mouth or word or speak.

And it'll give you all the different proverbs that relate to it. But wisdom, kindness, kindness. Today, kindness. What an important outworking of grace.

Humility, forgiveness, gentle but strong words. All of these things are a reflection of what's in our heart and a testimony of what Jesus has done for us in the office, in the workplace, behind the wheel, in our neighborhood, in our minds, how we speak.

All reflects what has been transforming us in our hearts. So in this gospel community, St. Columbus here, how you speak matters, how you speak to one another, how you speak about one another, how you speak about Jesus, how often or lot you speak about Jesus Christ.

[22 : 49] All reveals our heart and all reveals what our motivation is. And so we will speak differently when we've been touched by God's free gift of grace that He offers to us in salvation.

And I think it also involves developing in terms of speaking differently. It encourages us to develop the strength of character and courage to tell our own story.

To tell our own story of grace. To share the good news wisely in real personal terms, thoughtfully, that is meaningful, not just a kind of parrot fashion repetition of the gospel story, but how Christ has changed you, what it has meant in your life.

And now that truth is transformative and give that prayerful, gentle, respectful, prompted explanation of why Jesus by His love and by His patience has changed your heart.

And it's not anything you've earned and it's not that you're better than anyone else. In fact, you may feel much worse than anyone else as you know your own heart, but that He has transformed and renewed you and given you hope.

[24 : 08] So the first thing is you speak differently. And the second and last thing is you have a friendship like no other. When you know grace in your heart, one who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have the King for a friend.

That's a great proverb. And it goes way beyond what I think even King Solomon knew when he was speaking. None of us, I don't suspect, although I was a concert, well, I came to a concert last night, Alec McDonald, a previous minister in the free church.

He does a lot of singing and things like that. He's got a band and he was playing last night at Cornerstone. But he spoke at one point about having lunch with the Queen in Balmoral because he was asked to go and preach there.

But not many of us will have that opportunity to be friends of a Queen or a King or indeed have influence in high places. But with grace, we do come to know the King of Kings.

And that is the greatest friendship that we can ever have. Proverbs 18, one of the earlier proverbs says, one who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

[25 : 33] And then in John 15, Jesus speaks and he says, great, our love is no one than this, to lay one's life down for one's friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command.

I no longer call you servants because a servant doesn't know his master's business. Instead, I've called you friends for everything I've learned from my father I've made known to you. You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so they might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. This is my command, love one another. So there's this great reality that King Jesus is the one who comes and who offers this for a better friendship even than friendship with King Solomon, the author of life, the Holy One, infinite in power and glory, promises to stick closer to us than any family member.

He's all out for you. He's all out for every believer, even in all the mysteries and all the sufferings and all the paradoxes of life, things we don't know and don't understand and wish were different.

He says to us, look, I can't love you more than I have. I've gone all the way to hell and to the darkness of hell and the cross and I've gifted you life and I'm saying to you, I will not let you go.

[26 : 46] I will not let you go. And this is coming to the time of year when we get gifts at Christmas time, Christmas day, it's great. And we open the wrappers, it's exciting.

And we're delighted with the present we've got or not. And we revel in it and we enjoy it and we wear the woolly jumper and we put on the new slippers and the woolly socks and all the kind of

things we get.

But soon they become pretty normal again. And we enjoy the gift for a while, but soon it sometimes breaks or becomes worn and ordinary and needs to be replaced again.

But here is the King, the King of Kings who gifts himself to us, always with us, always our friend, always transforming, always changing, always teaching, always guiding, challenging, correcting, listening, speaking through His Word and through His people and through the preaching of His Word, pouring out His divine love into us.

And the best thing about it all is the best is still to come. As we know the King for a friend, we will be with him in his kingdom forever and we will be home, home forever in his presence.

[28 : 24] And the Bible says that's beyond our wildest imaginations, we can't put it into words.

Because it will be so remarkable that this life will seem just like a passing dream that will have passed in an instant and we will be home with our friend and with the King of the universe forever.

So Colin's baptism is a visible sign of God's grace at work in his life, of the cleansing and of the love and of the grace that has gifted him this friendship with the King as he confesses Christ as his Lord and Savior.

And that is immense. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that You would help us to know and understand who You are.

Help us to strip back our misconceptions. And I was touched by what Cody said this morning about the theme for next week in the morning, which is about being bored.

And we ask that You would forgive us if we are ever bored by Your grace. If we think we have understood it or that it's an unwanted gift or it's a gift that has become ordinary and plain and unexciting.

[30 : 05] Forgive us for thinking it has boundaries, it has limitations, it can be known fully. Lord, just help us to dive into that infinite pool of grace that can never be exhausted.

Help us to experience it more, to find Your patience and love and provision and answers to our needs more and more remarkable each day.

Even in the darkness of circumstances that would humanly speaking seem to contradict the reality of Your grace.

But may we see in and through suffering often God working gently and powerfully and significantly in our hearts and lives.

So we ask that You would bless us this evening, bless the visible signs and symbols in baptism and in the bread and the wine that speak about Your death and resurrection and speak about Your life and about Your promises and about Your hope.

[31 : 30] And we thank You, Lord God, for the privilege of being involved tonight. The privilege of taking part in such a great evening together.

So we pray that You would bless us and that You would bless Colin and Annie and all of us this evening. Amen.