

Pastor on Call – Devotion 032920

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Beloved (loved) of God, in light of our present momentary afflictions [i.e. all of the seen and unseen implications of the Coronavirus Pandemic] (2 Cor 4:17-18), John Newton's timeless hymn, *Amazing Grace*, reminds us of the magnificent and boundless sufficiency of the **past**, **present**, and **future** grace of God in our lives.

Past Grace (Salvation):

*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.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!*

Present Grace (Sanctification):

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

Future Grace (Glorification) :

*When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Then when we first begun.*

While it seems like we live in a world dominated by fear, worry, and anxiety (Prov 24:10), God's all-empowering grace remains our sufficient source of help and hope! John Newton experienced this same help and hope of God's grace:

My faith upholds me under all trials, by assuring me that every event is under the direction of my Lord; that disciplines and suffering are a token of God's love; that the season, measure, and continuation of light momentary afflictions (2 Cor 4:16-17) in my life, are appointed by an infinite and all-wise God, and designed to work for my everlasting good; and that God's grace and strength will be provided for me, according to the challenges of the day. (Memoirs, 1:169)

Newton's unshakable confidence in the all-governing sovereign grace of God animated his heart to not fear but sing... *Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and GRACE will lead me home.*

Beloved, our strength in God's grace is what animates and empowers our hearts today to live out the **Great Commandment** (Matt 22:36-40), as we lean into Christ while coming alongside one-another and our community whose lives have been turned upside down.

GRACE... a sweet-sounding word!

But what is grace?

Grace tends to be a word that many of us do not fully understand, resulting in life's momentary afflictions overwhelming us! Many define grace as "God's unmerited favor." Now while this is, in part true, the theologian Louis Berkhof provides us with a more comprehensive and truly satisfying definition that refines our understanding of God's amazing grace - **Grace is the unmerited operation of God in the heart of man, effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit.** Clearly, God's grace is a priceless and unfathomable, active gift to sinners who deserve God's judgment and wrath (Eph 1:5-6), but who are now saved from the penalty of our sin and empowered, moment-by-moment, by God to make much of Him in our daily lives!

So grace is not just a **past** act of salvation for sinners, but grace is also a **present** active gift that empowers God's people to live the Great Commandment life that is beyond our natural means (Titus 2:11-12)! In the midst of the Pandemic, as Christ's ambassadors in this crooked and perverse world, we stand in **present** grace (Rom 5:2), which enables us to "deny ungodliness and worldly desires" (Titus 2:12), in order to live a life that makes much of Him - "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). So when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me"... he is saying that God's empowering grace effects every word, deed, emotion, and thought of his life in Christ.

This week, may we be motivated by God's **past** grace of salvation and be empowered by his **present** grace to accomplish great things in us, for us, and through us, as a reflection of our love for Him and desire to make much of Christ!

So beloved, when we consider the work and ministry God has purposed for us at CHCC; when we come alongside others who are battling another day of sickness, or working through a difficult marriage, or a troubled child, financial hardship, or even a day of great blessing, may we encourage one-another to cling to the reality that God's grace is the most powerful, provision, mercy, and wisdom for everything He desires for us to do in the next ten minutes, ten weeks, ten months, and ten years (2 Cor 9:8). And it will be the **future** grace of God that will one day set

us forever free from the influences of sin (1 John 2:16), and unleash us to make much of God, even when we've been there ten thousand years!

This Week - Practically Apply God's Past, Present, and Future Grace:

- **Past Grace:** Reflect and rejoice in the wondrous truths of what the Gospel saved you from and what it saved you for (Recommendation: *Gospel Primer* by Milton Vincent)

- **Present Grace:** While it matters what we think about the coronavirus, it matters most is God thinks and says to us from His Word:
 - “The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever” (1 Pet 1:24–25).
 - His words in Scripture “cannot be broken” (John 10:35).
 - Hearing and doing God’s Word is like building your house on a rock, not sand (Matt 7:24).
 - His Word is true and perfectly wise for every situation. “He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom” (Isa 28:29).
 - God’s words in these times are not only true and wise; they are also precious and sweet. “More to be desired are they than gold . . . sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb” (Ps 19:10).
 - The sweetness is not lost in this moment of bitter providence — not if we have learned the secret of “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:10). The secret is this: Knowing that the same sovereignty that could stop the coronavirus and doesn’t, is the very sovereignty that sustains the soul in it. Indeed, more than sustains — sweetens with hope that, for those who trust him, his purposes are kind, even in death.
 - “Behold the kindness and severity of God” (Rom 11:22). His providence is both sweet and bitter because he “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph 1:11). Nothing just happens. Everything flows from the eternal counsels of God.

- **Future Grace:** Look forward to and fixate your hope in the future inheritance of the new heavens and the new earth – Read and Meditate on Revelation chapters 21-22