

The Oak Grove Oracle

(Family News & Views of the Oak Grove Church of Christ)

Meeting Weekly At Our Building Located At:

14 CR 3240, at the intersection of FM 1402 N. (Mailing Address: P.O. Box 523), Mt. Pleasant, Texas 75455, (903) 572-0859

Church Website: www.churchofchristoakgrove.com or, www.ogcoc.net

David A. McCain, Gospel Preacher & Bulletin Editor, (903) 577-1540 (H), 285-1756 (M)

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Amazing GRACE

There is no theme of the Holy Scriptures which is more amazing than the grace of God. Many Christians think the most beautiful Christian hymn ever written is the one that takes its title from this theme.

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.

Who has not thrilled to the heart-stirring words of this great spiritual song? Most of us have likely sung this hymn many times with tears rolling down our cheeks, knowing that our sins condemn us, but that thanks be to God, Christ saved us from our sins by the sacrifice of His own blood.

What you may not know about this haunting hymn is that it was written in the late 1700's by an Anglican "clergyman," who in his earlier life had been the captain of a slave ship. If you look the song up in your hymnal (#15 in our *Oak Grove* songbooks), you'll see credit for the words is given to a man by the name of **John Newton**. On the right side of the page, credit for the classical arrangement says only, "Southern Melody." Some music scholars have suggested the music score, which contains only five notes (a, b, d, e, & g), which by the way form the pentatonic scale (the black keys on a piano, sometimes called the slave scale because most Negro spirituals contain just those five notes), was a tune Newton heard coming up from the bowels of one of his slave ships. It makes for a heart-tugging story concerning the origins of Newton's thoughts in composing this compelling hymn. However, further research in the Library of Congress indicates it was not until some 60 years later that the words and music became wed as one in the song we now revere.

Whatever stirred the heart of John Newton to pen the inspiring words to this timeless hymn we may never know for certain, but there is not a one of us who does not need to contemplate the amazing grace of God, which can save us from our sins. Truly, what some have called "the miracle of reconciliation" compels us to reflect upon God's "unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15). John 1:17 says, "For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

What could turn a persecutor and the chief of sinners into a great preacher of the Gospel? What could turn a denying foul-mouthed fisherman into a fiercely faithful follower of Jesus? What could turn a slave ship captain into the man who wrote the words to *Amazing Grace*? As another old song says, "nothing but the blood of Jesus!" "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor.8:9). Because of God's amazing grace:

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

David A. McCain