

“DIFFERENCES ERASED”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:26-29

GOD’S WORD: JAMES 2:1-13

I – FAMOUS HYMN:

It is one of the most recognizable songs in the English speaking world. One composer stated that it is “without a doubt the most famous of all the folk hymns.” It is estimated that it is performed about 10 million times a year. If you want to sing a song somewhere and you don’t have the words printed out, most people can sing at least the first verse from memory. The hymn I’m talking about is “Amazing Grace.”

The hymn was written by a man named John Newton. John was a character. He was drafted into the British Navy at a young age and served upon various ships, mostly those who traded in slaves. He became famous for the fact that he was extremely crude and even in a time and organization that prided themselves in being able to cuss proficiently, he could out cuss them all. He made up words to go above the normal ones. He prided himself on insubordination and spent a good deal of time chained in the stockade. He eventually became a slave trader himself. Going to Africa and bringing back black natives to be sold in England. He later left this profession and studied theology and became an ordained priest in the Anglican Church. He wrote the words to this hymn for a sermon illustration on New Year’s Day in 1773. It didn’t become well used in England but it made its way to the America’s where it became a favorite of the Baptist and Methodist movements in this country. And we still sing it today.

I tell you all of this because I think it addressed a problem we have right now. We are all painfully aware of the fact that the matter of prejudice has reared its ugly head. A fuse that has been burning for 400 years has finally resulted in an explosion and it would seem to be to be justified. I want to suggest that in a country that claims to be Christian, this should not exist or be a problem.

II – WHINTLEY PHIPPS CLIP:

Today's sermon will be a little different today. You may think I've turned Jewish and am chanting part of it. But I hope you understand all of it's meaning and it helps you to understand where you should stand in the present day matter of prejudice. I want to start by showing you this short video clip about the origins of the hymn by a Christian singer and speaker named Whintley Phipps.

Show clip: (stop at 3:25 spot)

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=amazing+grace+on+black+notes+only&docid=608008094374561525&mid=78BDECAB8D4B94BF7BCA78BDECAB8D4B94BF7BCA&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

I wonder how many of you really knew all of this about this beloved hymn. I've asked Karen Scott to come in today. Using the first verse of the song let's see how it works.

1. 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.

It works! I can sing this song with just those 5 notes. With just the black keys.

III – UNITY:

But Whintley pointed out that this song proves that two cultures can come together. That the song was written by a white preacher, but the music was from an African tribal chant. The two of these come together to make this message of grace and forgiveness speak to everyone.

But I want to point out that two different things, in this case black and white, can come together to make this call to Christianity even more powerful, more meaningful. Listen to the change when Karen plays both the white and the black keys for the 2nd verse...

- 2.' Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved; how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.

Did you hear it? Did the two colors together make the song even more vibrant and alive in your hearts...in our faith? YES!

That's what James was telling us in this morning's reading. He was telling us that discrimination of any kind is wrong. He uses the example of rich people verses poor people of the difference in social economics, but in reality he is talking about all the differences of people. Gender, skin color, etc. He drives it into our hearts when he starts the whole section with the question, "How can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? Folks, that's what I call "In Your Face." There is no wiggle room here. Either you're a Christian or your prejudice – you can't be both.

He refers us to what he says is "The Royal Law" to love one another and says that if we don't we are committing a sin. Again – no wiggle room here. And to make it hurt a little more he says committing this sin is just as bad as committing murder. It is still a sin. God doesn't rank sins, we do.

IV – TEXT:

Then we get to what the Apostle Paul has to say about the matter. In his letter to the church in Galatia we read this...

Galatians 3:26-29 (NLT)

²⁶ For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

Paul's words echo those of James in the earlier reading. If you are a Christian you can have no prejudices. There can be no distinctions between people.

Paul starts out naming his distinctions with the one we face today...race. In his time there was a big bias between the Jews and the Gentiles. Two different races of people. They came from different backgrounds, different gods, different standing, different values, and on and on. This was a big obstacle to overcome in the first century church.

You could change these words for today and say that for Christians there are no longer black or white, Caucasian or oriental, and keep going until you list every difference you can think of. If you are a Christian it doesn't matter.

Paul says if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ, if you believe, if you have made him your Lord and Savior, then you are united. Everyone who has done so is a child of God and thus our brother and sister in Christ.

Then he says that our common faith has made us all one race, one gender, one tribe, one family...the one started by God through Abraham.

When Christians treat each other as true brothers and sisters in Christ then the power of distinctions is broken and a basis is laid for social change.

V – LIVE YOUR FAITH:

It is a shame because I know that some who are hearing this message will still harbor feelings of prejudice. They will still see differences and live their lives accordingly. I am calling on all of you to be true to your faith. To look at others as a brother or sister in Christ and if they aren't then to lead them to the cross and make them one.

I call on you to recognize that there is no black or white, no yellow or red, no southerner or northerner, no rich or poor, no republican or democrat, no straight or gay, or any of the other barriers we have thrown up. We are all one in Christ.

We need to stop worrying about flags, statues, and start worrying about the cross. The only hope we have is the power of God's love as shown by Jesus for all. It is through his faith we are forgiven and united. As I close lets sing the last verses (3-4-6) of our hymn and realize the words apply to all of God's creation:

3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;' tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

4. The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures; he will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures.

6. 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'd first begun.

Thank You Lord,

AMEN