

A sound still sweet

Credo

Marylynn
Rouse



Tomorrow is the 250th anniversary of *Amazing Grace*. Written by John Newton, it is enduringly popular, chosen for both weddings and funerals. It was written during Newton's ministry as curate of Olney, Buckinghamshire. His diary records for January 1, 1773: "I preached this forenoon from I Chronicles xvii, 16-17." *Amazing Grace* is an exposition and application of that passage of scripture.

It describes how David, king of Israel, was embarrassed to live in a palace of cedar while the Ark of the Covenant (symbolising the presence of the Lord) was in a tent. He resolved to build a worthy "house" for it. But the Lord sent him a message: "It is not you who will build me a house to dwell in. Moreover, I declare to you that the Lord will build you a house." From David's house would come a Son whose kingdom would last for ever — the Messiah.

David exclaimed: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? You have also spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come and have shown me future generations."

In his sermon Newton drew attention to David's reaction to the Lord's promises: "This filled [David's] heart with praise. My text is part of his acknowledgement. I would accommodate [these verses] to our own use as a proper

subject for our meditations on the entrance of a new year. They lead us to a consideration of past mercies and future hopes."

We can trace the themes in *Amazing Grace* as the chapter unfolds. The Lord reminded David how he had "been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you". David's battles had been against lions, bears, Goliath and Saul. Newton urged his congregation to recall their own experience of the Lord's mercy. "His providential care preserving us from a thousand seen, millions of unseen dangers, when we knew him not." We can each affirm, as David did: Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come.

Just as the Lord promised David "I will subdue all your enemies", so we can have confidence that He will my shield and portion be.

The Lord promised to appoint a place for his people where they would "be disturbed no more". Newton reminded believers: Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail, and mortal life shall cease, I shall possess, within the veil, a life of joy and peace.

David was overjoyed that "you have promised this good thing to your servant". So too we can have the assurance that The Lord has promised good to me.

His sixth and final verse concludes: But God, who called me here below, will be for ever mine.

Let's do some spiritual stock-taking as we enter this new year, starting with "a consideration of past mercies and future hopes".

Marylynn Rouse is director of the John Newton Project