

God's Favor is Not for Our Comfort but Our Salvation

Rev. Terrance Jacob on Matthew 16:21-28 at SALC, 8/30/26

After a Tornado in North Minneapolis, a lady said to me, "Pastor, I am blessed. I did not get hit. My neighbor's house was hit, but I am safe. God is good." Really? I know there are unexplainable tragedies that come upon some and not others. This week in the Nepal-Tibet border region, the tragedy from a weather phenomenon claimed over 700 lives with thousands still missing. Along the raging waters some people were swept away while others next to them were not. Can those villages and people that were not hit say, "we have God's favor"? Then what would the towns that were hit say? I'm sure you have engaged many people in the face of tragedy and serious illness. There are often no answers. Some get sick and recover, even from otherwise terminal illness, yet others do not. But can we really say, "We have God's favor because we were spared?" Really? That makes me uncomfortable!

What does the Bible show us about having God's favor? My title "God's favor is not for our comfort but for our salvation. Let's look for that in the Gospel lesson today, where Jesus announced that he was going to go to the city and will be persecuted and killed. Then Peter calls Jesus aside and rebukes him saying he should not go and face that. Then Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!"

Having God's favor might mean that He will rebuke me as a voice of Satan, even when I think I am doing the right thing. Jesus will not let us go down the wrong path. He will bring us back even if

He has to insult us. Peter looked stupid. Jesus told him to his face, "Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me - you set your mind on earthly things, not divine things!"

You are materialistic. So much for the prosperity gospel and its focus on earthly wealth as God's favor. It is a lie. It is more important to God that our minds are set on the things that are eternal. It is more important to God for us to not get in the way of the Gospel that shows God's love to a lost world. Doesn't Jesus say that we should not concern our little minds on what we would eat, wear, drive, live in... seek first the kingdom and will of God. When we find ourselves doing that, THEN we have the favor of God.

So Jesus loves Peter and shows so much favor to Peter - not by heaping accolades on him, but by rebuking, swearing him blue blind! (to hell and back - literally) Why? So that Peter would be in step with Jesus. Rebuked to have his steps ordered in the Word. Because he wanted Peter to walk into his full purpose... living as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. "Get thee behind me Satan!" That's God's favor.

Jesus told his disciples, "If you want to be my follower, you have to take up your cross and follow me." A cross! Suffering. Having God's favor is when by Grace I can deny myself and my desires. I may have to lose my life. I may lose all earthly things. It might mean that I lay down my passions - even if it is for peace, justice and equality until and unless they are aligned with what God wants for me in His Mission in the world. (Some of you are breathing a sigh of relief or saying, Amen under your breath.)

Sometimes the noble thing, like Peter's not wanting Jesus to be killed, keeps us from fulfilling God's Will for us. Satan can trick us with seemingly good values and things.

Satan tried to trick Jesus by tempting Him with fame, material possessions and the so-called blessing of God. So what stops him from tempting us. Peter was tempting Jesus to "save" His (Jesus') life - perhaps save the disciples too by not putting them in harm's way. So if you and I become overly concerned with the things of this world, maybe we too are being tempted to follow the ways of this world at the expense of not following Jesus.

After a hurricane, a reporter interviewed a father who was holding on to his young son as they were being rescued. The reporter wanted to capture the sadness and dire circumstances of the survivors. He asked the gentleman, "So what did you lose in this flood?" The man said, I lost everything... my house, my belongings. Everything... but we are blessed. The reporter then asked again, so you have nothing now? The man replied, "All I have now is my son and this backpack, so we are blessed. I just thank God!" That newsclip blessed many hearts.

It's surprising how many claim to have God's favor - being God's favorite - whenever they experience some great material or physical well-being or earthly success. In many Christian circles, when someone gets a gift; or someone applies themselves to study or work, or someone does something admirable - they are told "You have God's favor!" For goodness sake, you applied yourself, or someone else out of the goodness of their heart,

gives you something, and that is why you are prosperous. It's not God's favor, it's living in this world, whether through the generosity of others, your own opportunities, effort or privilege. I'm not saying God does not bless us by supplying our needs - and we should thank God in all things; but that is not the favor. That is not the "main thing", as Luther says. If anything, it's the mere fringe benefits. Jesus gave the thousands of followers food to eat, but the real food - the real favor - was access to His Grace. Salvation through that Grace by faith alone. No other boast, even if our material needs are met miraculously as theirs were. One boast, says Paul: "in the Cross of Jesus."

Conclusion:

Peter was favored when Jesus rebuked him! O to be blessed by the rebuke of Jesus. Favored to walk in His way, even when our carnal self feels otherwise. That's when Grace walks in. Grace is about favor. Unmerited favor. It has nothing to do with material wealth. Do you want God's favor? Then expect pain and suffering at times, as we grow into denying our carnal selves.

If that is what loss, pain and suffering does, then give me Jesus. You can take the whole world, but give me Jesus. As Jesus said in today's text, "What would it profit us if we gain the whole world but forfeit our souls?" Let Jesus rebuke me, let me deny myself so that I may not be lost in myself. Amen,