

Grace, Mercy, And Favor (Part Four): Favor To Live As God Lives

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We began this series of messages entitled “Grace, Mercy, and Favor, Part One,” with the subtitle: To The Beaten, back on February 6 because of a curiously-titled question we had received, asking the question, “To the beaten, what is the difference between grace, mercy, and favor?”

In the course of trying to understand exactly what the person meant and how the question could best be answered, it began to become evident to me that this subject may be something that was quite important for all of us to consider with an eye toward Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and the count to the Feast of Firstfruits. We began in that split sermon with a focus on Luke 18:9-14 with Jesus Christ’s very clear warning to all who would by the grace of God be given the privilege to stand in God’s presence.

So before we go any further into this sermon, as a reminder we will begin this sermon again in Luke 18, verses 9-14. I will be reading out of the Amplified Bible [classic edition].

Luke 18:9-14 (AMPC) He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves and were confident that they were righteous [that they were upright and in right standing with God] and scorned and made nothing of all the rest of men: Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee took his stand ostentatiously and began to pray thus before and with himself: God, I thank You that I am not like the rest of men—extortioners (robbers), swindlers [unrighteous in heart and life], adulterers—or even like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I gain.

But the tax collector, [merely] standing at a distance, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but kept striking his breast, saying,

O God, be favorable (be gracious, be merciful) to me, the especially wicked sinner that I am!

I tell you, this man went down to his home justified (forgiven and made upright and in right standing with God), rather than the other man; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Both had been given the privileged opportunity by the grace of God to be in God's presence, but one stood toward the back with his head bowed, beating his breast in a humble attitude of repentance, while the Pharisee pretentiously boasted of his seemingly self-ascribed accomplishments.

I would like to add a couple of other scriptures at this point that are not only relevant but will become a more obviously important part of this sermon regarding God's favor later on.

First please turn with me back a few chapters to Luke 11 and again we will be reading Jesus Christ's chastisement of the Pharisees with an eye, not to what they were, but what they had become.

Luke 11:33-43 (AMPC) No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or crypt or under a bushel measure, but on a lampstand, that those who are coming in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye (your conscience) is sound and fulfilling its office, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound and is not fulfilling its office, your body is full of darkness. Be careful, therefore, that the light that is in you is not darkness. If then your entire body is illuminated, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright [with light], as when a lamp with its bright rays gives you light.

Now while Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee invited Him to take dinner with him, so He entered and reclined at table. The Pharisee noticed and was astonished [to see] that Jesus did not first wash before dinner. But the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside you yourselves are full of greed and robbery and extortion and malice and

wickedness. You senseless (foolish, stupid) ones [acting without reflection or intelligence]! Did not He Who made the outside make the inside also? But [dedicate your inner self and] give as donations to the poor of those things which are within [of inward righteousness] and behold, everything is purified and clean for you. But woe to you, Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every [little] herb, but disregard and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone. Woe to you, Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and [you love] to be greeted and bowed down to in the [public] marketplaces.

It is good to keep in mind what Richard Ritenbaugh said in his 2004 series on the Pharisees. Richard said in his introductory remarks to the “The Pharisees (Part Three)” given on April 24, 2004,

In the first two parts of this series on the Pharisees we learned about the history and the general characteristics of the Pharisees, as well as the points of contention between them and Jesus. We learned, especially in the first sermon, that their dedication to the law really was admirable, especially at the beginning. They started out with fine intentions.

As we read there in Nehemiah 8, they dedicated themselves to the keeping of the law and doing the things required of them because they wanted to make sure that the mistakes that were made before they went into exile did not happen again.

They understood from the writings of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and other prophets, that their problems were idolatry, and Sabbath-breaking, and generally a breakdown in the way that the people kept the law. Those who dedicated themselves did their utmost to keep the law as meticulously and perfectly as possible.

But somewhere along the way, their human nature, rather than God and His Word, began to define their quest to follow the law perfectly.

As a result, their whole pursuit became vainglorious. It became a one-upmanship type of thing where they tried to show themselves more holy, more pious, more righteous than others. It began to be a way that they could climb the ladder—a way in which they attracted attention to themselves.

And so over time—maybe 100 or 150 years—they had already become a byword for hypocrisy in Judea and Galilee.

So when we get to the Bible and the evangelists and apostles about these people, they present them as hypocrites. They are merely, as the gospel writers say, self-seeking, play-acting posers.”

Brethren, there is a vital reason why we began this series on grace, mercy, and favor heading into the Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread, and into the count to Firstfruits (Pentecost), just as there is a reason I am taking so much time at the beginning of this sermon to drive home this point again.

By the grace of God and with the added strength of the Father and the Son dwelling within us through their Spirit, we have been set apart by grace, mercy, and favor to suit God’s purpose.

We too, like the Pharisees, have started out with fine intentions, and dedicated ourselves to the keeping of the law and doing the things required of us, because God is making sure that the sins of men will not be perpetuated in His Family. But each one of us bounces back and forth to some degree between the pridefully chest pounding Pharisee and the publican that beat his breast in humble contrition.

I can tell you this as a fact because carnal nature is still in play, and the resurrected Christ admonishes those within His Body to repent of this very thing.

Turn to Revelation 1.

Revelation 1:4-6 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia:
Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and

from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:10-18 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death."

Revelation 2:1-7 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

Brethren, within the very first set of instructions to those who have been given the privilege at this time to be called into His Body is the Pharisee /Publican warning. (Paraphrasing) "I love you and I know how hard you are working to fight the good fight. But nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent."

Right here in His first correction to His church [in the book of Revelation] that is still fighting this battle, which could be overwhelming, except for His dwelling in us, He tells us to *do the first works*.

What was that first work when we were called?

We heard, just as the apostle John did, as recorded there in Revelation 1:12, and we turned as he did to see in our mind's eye the glory of resurrected Christ and our own inadequacies. We recognized, by the grace of God, a glimpse of the glory of God, and we too fell to the ground as dead, and humbly treasured the blessing of being resurrected as a new man, having His hand upon us, not to fear, but to totally trust in Him as the First and the Last.

Only through Him were we brought into the presence of the Father and beat our breast with absolute conviction that we were only there by the grace of God. The resurrected Christ reminds us that we always need to keep in mind what we were like, or else we can never become the beacon of light we were intended to be.

Please turn with me to Romans 5.

Romans 5:1-10 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

This is the first love. And if we always keep this in mind, then the grace of God will always dwell in us, and we will righteously continue with Jesus Christ doing what He confirms in Revelation 2:6-7.

Brethren, we have been spending so much time in this Pharisee/Publican parable because it is absolutely crucial to correctly carrying out our responsibilities while in the grace, mercy, and favor of our Great God. It is absolutely crucial to staying in this privileged relationship with the Father and the Son.

Revelation 2:1-6 is what Jesus Christ wants those firstfruits of the Kingdom of God to hear, as it says in verse 7! For all intents and purposes this is the Isaiah 66:1-2 of the book of Revelation.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has

made, and all those things exist," says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."

As we sit here on the first Sabbath of the seven Sabbaths count to the Feast of Firstfruits having come through the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, reminding us of all the work the Father and Son have done on behalf of all those who have been carefully put within the body while we were yet sinners, are we growing in grace and knowledge while continuing in the attitude of the breast-beating publican with a poor and contrite spirit? Or are we using our growth before God as the chest-thumping Pharisee?

Brothers and sisters, I apologize that I am spending so much time where we began eight weeks ago, because I did not intend to go on so long, but as I was putting this final message together, I realized how critical this is to us in our responsibilities before God under His grace, mercy, and favor.

At this point I would like to insert another rather long quote cited again from Richard Ritenbaugh. This time it is cited from his Part Two of his series of sermons on "Letters to the Seven Churches" that specifically addresses not only leaving the first love, but the consequences that loom.

Richard said,

Revelation 2:4 "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

Oh, what a condemnation! It does not sound like much just putting it that way, but it is! It is devastating! It is maybe one of the worst things that Jesus could tell you! Jesus criticizes them for leaving their first love, departing from their original devotion, if you want to put it that way. As a matter of fact, some scholars say this is the language of divorce—they had divorced themselves from their first love. They had left it like one would leave a spouse.

What they had divorced themselves from was their former intimate relationship with their Savior. Oh, they still believed the truth mattered. I told you they would go out and defend it at the drop of a

hat. They would defend it to the death. They would go and be martyrs. But they had lost and apparently had forgotten the beautiful relationship with their God, that was the real original reason for their belief and devotion.

They forgot why they were fighting. They were fighting by this time for objective truth, rather than fighting because they were devoted to a Person, to a Being, a great and awesome and wonderful loving Being that they were to have an intimate relationship with.

In a way, you could say that the true religion, or the true faith had become a philosophy to them. And that is all. They were fighting for facts. They were fighting for doctrines, not for Jesus Christ. They were fighting to be right, and to be seen as right, and be on the right side of history, as it were.

But they were not fighting to please Him. They were doing it for the wrong reasons. That is why it is so bad, because they had forgotten Christ, they had forgotten their Savior. They had left their love for Him. They would rather wield a spear or a sword, as it were, than pray to be with their God, just to put it in those forms.

Continuing a little farther down:

That is what removing the lampstand means—they were this close. All the battles they had fought for Him, actually not for Him, fought for truth, had fought for right, had made them scarred, hardened, and marred like grizzled old drill sergeants. And Christ intimates here that He liked them better when they were innocent, and yielding, and childlike, and humble, and teachable.

They had been so long in the church-fighting in all the sheep wars that they had forgotten the most basic of things. So first they must remember how they were before all the doctrinal wars, and all the sheep wars, and all the persecutions, and repent, that is, make the change. Do a 180. Do what is right, and do the first works, He says. That is, return to basic Christian works, particularly those things

that are all about love—the agape love—loving deeds of service toward God and others. The two great commandments: Do those first works. Love God with all your heart, and love your brethren as yourself.

Brethren, do you understand what is the difference between grace, mercy, and favor to the beaten, and its tie-in with Jesus Christ's parable of the contrite, teachable, breast-beating publican behind the boastful chest-pounding Pharisee? Christ's warning to His church is vital to us during these days of our count to the Feast of Firstfruits!

The resurrected Christ makes it clear that He hates the Nicolaitan way of lawlessness, and He expects us to hate it too! But He also makes it clear that without remaining in the attitude that we had at the beginning of our calling like the contrite and teachable publican, we are useless to Him. Our righteousness is only worthless self-righteousness, not the godly righteousness driven by the Christ dwelling within us.

We will see how this works into the rest of this sermon regarding the aspect of God's favor in a moment. But before we move on, I would like us to note how crucial this first letter to His churches is to the whole Body of Christ.

He makes it clear how important it is being in the vanguard of His fight against lawlessness, tempered with the inner attitude of the humble in sacrificial service, when He says we are to be just like Him in living by every word of righteousness while maintaining the same yielding, childlike, humble, and teachable attitude toward the One we loved from the beginning of our calling of our journey of firstfruits.

Brethren, either we have both these qualities that will produce eternal life with Him, or He will remove the useless lamp stand.

But our marching order are clear as stated in Young's Literal Translation of Revelation 2:7:

Revelation 2:7 (YLT) “He who is having an ear [or who is paying attention]—let him hear what the Spirit saith to the assemblies: To him who is overcoming—I will give to him to eat of the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

The proper contrite attitude together with being a witness of righteousness, through the grace of all God’s gifts in action, is the difference between uselessness and eternal life for us.

We are all standing together before God by election as firstfruits to continue in patient labor, overcoming the evil, carefully weighing the Word of God in perseverance, without becoming weary in walking the walk.

As John Ritenbaugh has written:

Anyone who, like the Pharisee, thinks he can supply anything of great worth to the salvation process is deluding himself! Against whom do we evaluate ourselves? Pride usually chooses to evaluate the self against those considered inferior. It must do this so as not to lose its sense of worth. Pride’s power is in deceit, and the ground it plows to produce evil is in a faulty evaluation!

We now, again, have spent a great deal of time on our attitude because, as we read in Revelation 2:5-7, Christ has made it clear to us that attitude and action go hand in hand if we are to be productive members of God’s Family, and produce what God has planned and purposed for us from before the foundation of the world.

Hopefully we have seen through this series that each of us have been placed within the body as a privilege and a responsibility that cannot be carelessly taken for granted. Understand that God is *counting on us* to do our jobs with awesome gratitude, for all He has given us the privilege to do with the Them dwelling in us through Their Holy Spirit!

Please bear with me while I remind us once again what John Ritenbaugh said regarding the apostle Paul’s admonition to all of us, as recorded there in II

Corinthians 6, verses 1-2, where he wrote as translated in the New English Translation:

II Corinthians 6:1-2 (NET) Now because we are fellow workers, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, "I heard you at the acceptable time, and in the day of salvation I helped you." Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation!

John comments, as cited from "The Covenants, Grace, and Law":

In other words, do not receive the grace of God to no purpose. That is what vanity is. It has no purpose, no contact with reality. God is reality, and the Kingdom of God is reality. The law of God is reality, because it is truth, and truth, by definition, is reality.

Again, Paul's appeal is, "Do something!" What are we to do? He replies, "Truly work with Him to accomplish His will in your life."

Jesus says, "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" He is the One who says in Luke 16:29-31 that, if we want to know how to avoid the Lake of Fire, look to Moses and the prophets. This is why Paul says in II Corinthians 5:20, "Be reconciled to God through the repenting of [sin](#). Quit breaking His law."

And then from "Seeking God," John wrote:

J.B. Phillips' New Testament in Modern English renders this verse, "As cooperators with [God](#) Himself, we beg you then, not to fail to use the grace of God."

The apostle Paul warns us against receiving grace with no purpose in mind for making the very best use of God's wonderful gift. God gives grace to be used by those who receive it. The sanctification process that follows justification requires our cooperation with Him so that the right qualities, understanding, and sensitivities are produced by His creative efforts. This cooperation produces

Christian works. We must stop resisting Him through neglectful drifting—thus receiving God's grace in vain.

This series was not intended to be an absolute definitive answer to the question, “To the beaten, what is the difference between grace, mercy, and favor?” But it is intended to help us see more clearly as we went through the Passover, Unleavened Bread, and into the count to Feast of Firstfruits that through Jesus Christ the grace of God dwells within us to produce the same life shared by the Father and Son in self-sacrificial service.

We also saw that because it is God’s intention to bring all men to repentance, salvation, and knowledge of the truth, He has been carefully working His plan and purpose from before the foundation of the earth (or world), and His grace includes His benevolent mercy and favor.

In fulfilling our privileged responsibilities as handpicked members of the body of Christ, the firstfruits behind Jesus Christ, we become part of the great cloud of faithful witnesses to God’s merciful work to save men in spite of ourselves as one generation of called-out ones passes the truth of the Word of God, His plan, His purpose, and our part in it, on to the next.

We have specifically seen through the examples of faithful Abel, Enoch, and Noah how God is carefully working out His plan through the gifts He has given by His grace with foresight beyond human comprehension. God gives each the privilege to be part of a salvation process while we were yet undeserving sinners; and by our actions and words become preachers of righteousness, realizing that none of this is possible apart from the unmerited grace of God.

Today in the remainder of this sermon we are going to take a look at God’s favor, and why and how it fits into this picture.

But I want you to keep in mind the lynch pin of this whole thing rests on our first love attitude that must be a part of us throughout our relationship with our Great God forever—our childlike devotion to our awesome and loving Father in heaven and the relationship so close that we only want to do what is pleasing to Him and in line with the truth of His Word is critical.

The first time the English word “favor” appears in the New King James version is in Genesis 18:3. Although the same word in other places has been translated as grace, I think you will see that “favor” is more specifically correct. As a matter of fact, right within the context we are going to see something very significant regarding God’s favor toward His elect.

So please turn with me to Genesis 18. As you are turning there, keep in mind this particular event was very soon after the events of Genesis 17 took place, where God made the covenant of circumcision with Abram, promising an heir, not only through him, but through him and Sarai together in spite of their old age.

God renamed Abram, Abraham, and Sarai, Sarah, as the father and mother together of nations! Abraham believed God and followed through on everything God had said, even immediately circumcising himself, Ishmael, and all his household, even though, in physical reality, he knew Ishmael and everyone else outside of those born through Isaac, would be outside of the everlasting covenant agreement. Just think about that one, brethren. We will get back to that in a minute.

But first as a recap to this point: Genesis 16 begins when Abram was 86 and had been dwelling in the land of Canaan for 10 years. He and Sarai were childless even though God had promised in Genesis 15 that his descendants would be as the stars in the heaven. Abram had considered that the only heirs he would have could come through his servant Eliezer. However, God made it clear to him that his heirs would in fact have to come directly from him, even though he was already an old man.

All this must have been discussed between Sarai and Abram, and Sarai came up with the bright idea to give Abram a son by her through a surrogate, her maidservant Hagar. The son then would be born in fact from Abraham’s seed, even though she herself was too old to conceive.

We are told that Abram “heeded” his wife, considered the idea, and agreed.

Just as an aside, it is interesting to note that this is the same word in Hebrew that God used in Genesis 3:17 when He told Adam, “because you have heeded the voice of your wife and have eaten.” In each situation the

indication is that both Adam and later Abram considered and then agreed when they both should have known better! Both situations turned out pretty badly to say the least!

Brethren, as mentioned, Abram had been dwelling in Canaan for 10 years at that point and was 86. So now before we get to Genesis 18:3, when Abraham was 99, I just would like to establish another piece of the foundation for this part of the sermon. Please turn with me a few chapters back to Genesis 13.

Genesis 13:1-3 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai.

Genesis 13:5-12 Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land. So Abram said to Lot,

"Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom.

Genesis 13:14-15 And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place

where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.”

Genesis 13:18 Then Abram moved his tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD.

Ten years before the events of Genesis 15, Abram at 76 submitted himself to God’s judgment for the sake of peace, and let Lot choose what physically looked to be the best territory. On Lot’s part, here is another decision driven by the mind of men based on what is seen that did not work out very well either.

Now let us finally go to Genesis 18, where the English word “favor” is first used in verse 3, but we will begin with verse 1.

Genesis 18:1-15 Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said."

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." And He said, "I will certainly return to you

according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"

Genesis 21:1-7 And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

Brethren, we have taken so much time here because we needed to see over the expanse of time Abraham's, as well as Sarah's faith grew in the grace and knowledge to more carefully consider God's solutions to things and not their own.

Over decades they were also developing the mind of God as evidenced in a number of places. Although perhaps not as pointedly here, as in other places, there is a lesson for us in seeking God's favor.

Here in Genesis 18:3 the word translated favor is the Hebrew word *khane*, #2580 in *Strong's Concordance* and can be subjective (kindness, favor) or objective (beauty).

In the Hebrew this word first appears one time prior to this in Genesis 6 where we read, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Grace may very possibly be the correct translation here, because as we saw in the last sermon, God showed His mercy to all men as part of the whole package of His grace given to Noah to continue His plan to bring all men to repentance, salvation, and knowledge of the truth, even in the face of such catastrophic times.

However, in the New English Translation, you will find the same sentence translated as, “But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.” Because they rightly noted that in a marginal reference that the phrase “find favor [in the eyes of]” is the Hebrew idiom meaning “to be the object of another’s favorable disposition or action; to be a recipient of another’s favor, kindness, mercy.” The marginal reference goes on to say in citing Bible references, the favor/kindness is often earned (that is right!), coming in response to an action or condition.

Right now we will be turning to two of those references just to drive home the point and especially since the second one is quite germane to this firstfruits season.

Turn to Proverbs 3, and as you do, keep in mind God’s words in Isaiah 66.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."

Now with this in mind, and God’s strong desire to grant His favor to those who have the humble attitude of the publican, we will be reading Proverbs 3.

Proverbs 3:1-7 My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so

find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil.

The more we lean on Him and the truth of His Word rather than our own limited understanding the more likely He will grant His favor, and not just any old favor, but rather the way of thinking like He thinks as a way of life; a carefully considered witness to His righteousness and His way of life!

Now please turn with me to another very simple but very appropriate scripture during this firstfruits season, one that is part of the cycle of scriptures that are rehearsed this time of year. Also please keep in mind that we are looking at favor as seen in God's Word, as a response to an action.

Please turn with me to Ruth 2.

Ruth 2:1-2 There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

Ruth 2:5-12 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, "It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house." Then Boaz said to Ruth, "You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn."

So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."

It is likely that we will hear more concerning this book before the end of the Feast of Firstfruits, but it was important for us to see that there is a direct tie between humble submission in sacrificial service, and favor being shown.

Now with this let us get back to Abraham. In chapter 13 we saw Abram taking a step in faith of self-sacrifice for the sake of peace, while literally putting his own destiny into God's hands when separating from Lot. And within God's favor he ended up in the Land of Promise and his own home base of operation for the rest of his life, "by the Terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron," as we read in Genesis 13:18. This was 23 years before the events of Genesis 18 and his interaction with the Lord and two angels, and the first time the English word for favor is used in the Bible.

This is very significant to us as we consider our own life journeys during this count to the Feast of Firstfruits.

Over this 23-year period of time we see he had been growing in grace and knowledge, while maintaining His humble attitude. He was actively involved in a relationship with God, who was showing His friend that his own solutions to problems were not the answer. He was continuing to earn God's favor through humble submission and trembling at God's Word—building layers of mutual trust as he was trusting the Lord with all his heart and not leaning on his own understanding of things, just as it says there in Proverbs 3.

But what we should see in Genesis 18 is not just earned favor, but the kind of godly favor a lifetime of growth in our relationship with God produces.

There are two things I hope we will recognize here.

The first is that someone who has grown in a relationship with God to the point Abraham was in Genesis 18 looks for favor from God, but with the very mind of God! If we look carefully, we will see that the favor that Abraham requested there in verse 3 was for the opportunity to serve.

The second thing is that as the relationship develops through humble submission and trembling at God's Word, God's favor grows to the point of holding nothing back in letting us know why He does what He does, even if it can only be seen by faith during our lifetime. But we are assured that God will do exactly as He promises. He never changes.

Perhaps we can see this a bit more clearly in this translation of part of Genesis 18 from The Good News paraphrased translation:

Genesis 18:1-19 (GNT) The Lord appeared to Abraham at the sacred trees of Mamre. As Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day, he looked up and saw three men standing there. As soon as he saw them, he ran out to meet them. Bowing down with his face touching the ground, he said, "Sirs, please do not pass by my home without stopping; I am here to serve you. Let me bring some water for you to wash your feet; you can rest here beneath this tree. I will also bring a bit of food; it will give you strength to continue your journey. You have honored me by coming to my home, so let me serve you." They replied, "Thank you; we accept."

Abraham hurried into the tent and said to Sarah, "Quick, take a sack of your best flour, and bake some bread." Then he ran to the herd and picked out a calf that was tender and fat, and gave it to a servant, who hurried to get it ready. He took some cream, some milk, and the meat, and set the food before the men. There under the tree he served them himself, and they ate. Then they asked him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" "She is there in the tent," he answered. One of them said, "Nine months from now I will come back, and your wife Sarah will have a son." Sarah was behind him, at the door of the tent, listening. Abraham and Sarah were very old, and Sarah had stopped having her monthly periods. So Sarah

laughed to herself and said, "Now that I am old and worn out, can I still enjoy sex? And besides, my husband is old too."

Then the Lord asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Can I really have a child when I am so old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? As I said, nine months from now I will return, and Sarah will have a son." Because Sarah was afraid, she denied it. "I didn't laugh," she said. "Yes, you did," he replied. "You laughed." Then the men left and went to a place where they could look down at Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on their way. And the Lord said to himself, "I will not hide from Abraham what I am going to do. His descendants will become a great and mighty nation, and through him I will bless all the nations. I have chosen him in order that he may command his sons and his descendants to obey me and to do what is right and just. If they do, I will do everything for him that I have promised."

Brethren, in the course of these four messages over the last two months on the question, "To the beaten, what is the difference between grace, mercy, and favor?" we hopefully have seen, like the recent Berean by John Ritenbaugh stated, "God's grace is the whole package!"

God's mercy and His favor are an inseparable part of the package that God is using to patiently bring all men to repentance, salvation, and knowledge of the truth, as we read in II Peter 3:10 and I Timothy 2:4.

And as we have seen those primary heroes of faith—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, are all directly connected to each other, and us, by the grace of God, just as He has determined to fulfill His plan and purpose, even when the linkage is only seen in faith at a distance.

As we read about them and us, as we number our own days through this count to the Feast of Firstfruits, as recorded in Hebrews 11:

Hebrews 11:13-16 (AMPC) These people all died controlled and sustained by their faith, but not having received the tangible fulfillment of [God's] promises, only having seen it and greeted it from a great distance by faith, and all the while acknowledging and

confessing that they were strangers and temporary residents and exiles upon the earth. Now those people who talk [and walk] as they did show plainly that they are in search of a fatherland (their own country). If they had been thinking with [homesick] remembrance of that country from which they were emigrants, they would have found constant opportunity to return to it. But the truth is that they were yearning for and aspiring to a better and more desirable country, that is, a heavenly [one]. For that reason God is not ashamed to be called their God [even to be surnamed their God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob], for He has prepared a city for them.

Brothers and sisters, as we go through this count to the Feast of Firstfruits and carefully consider our own walk as the elect of God, perhaps we have seen that the focus of the original question was wrong. For us, it should not be, “What is the difference between grace, mercy, and favor?” They are all part of the package God is using to help us, and eventually all men along the way. The real focus should be right where we began, the attitude of “the beaten.”

Are we walking this walk as the resurrected Christ commands maintaining the humble, teachable, child-like attitude, and love for our awesome Creator, while trembling at His Word? If we are, then in faith we grow in the favor of God that ultimately is shown in the same fruit of sacrificial service He and the Son do Themselves.

We are going to finish up today with several sets of verses from Proverbs. Again, I will be reading them from the Amplified.

Proverbs 13:9-12 (AMPC) The light of the [uncompromisingly] righteous [is within him—it grows brighter and] rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked [furnishes only a derived, temporary light and] shall be put out shortly. By pride and insolence comes only contention, but with the well-advised is skillful and godly Wisdom. Wealth [not earned but] won in haste or unjustly or from the production of things for vain or detrimental use [such riches] will

dwindle away, but he who gathers little by little will increase [his riches]. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire is fulfilled, it is a tree of life.

Proverbs 13:15 (AMPC) Good understanding wins favor, but the way of the transgressor is hard [like the barren, dry soil or the impassable swamp].

Proverbs 14:2-3 (AMPC) He who walks in uprightness reverently and worshipfully fears the Lord, but he who is contrary and devious in his ways despises Him. In the fool's own mouth is a rod [to shame] his pride, but the wise men's lips preserve them.

Proverbs 14:5-9 (AMPC) A faithful witness will not lie, but a false witness breathes out falsehoods. A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain [for his very attitude blinds and deafens him to it], but knowledge is easy to him who [being teachable] understands. Go from the presence of a foolish and self-confident man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips. The Wisdom [godly Wisdom, which is comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God] of the prudent is to understand his way, but the folly of [self-confident] fools is to deceive. Fools make a mock of sin and sin mocks the fools [who are its victims; a sin offering made by them only mocks them, bringing them disappointment and disfavor], but among the upright there is the favor of God.

Among the humbly teachable who walk uprightly, reverently, and worshipfully fearing the Lord, there is comprehensive insight into the ways and purpose of God.

Among the humbly upright is God's favor to live as He lives with outgoing concern in sacrificial service to God and man.

May we all have a very productive count to the Feast of Firstfruits, as we seek to show God in faith that we understand by His grace, His mercy, and

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His favor; we must continue in this privileged walk to do what He expects from those who maintain a first love relationship with Him, and each other in truth.