

Readings: Exodus 33:12-17 and Luke 1:26-33

This morning I want to talk about God's favour because when you experience the favour of God there is an overwhelming sense of his purpose, protection, presence and pleasure. Both readings today speak about God's favour. What we'll see is that the favour of God tracks people down – it's not limited to certain types of people; it's not just for people who happen to be in a church building; it's not even restricted to church members.

Look at Moses, in the verses just before where we started it says that Moses used to go into the tent of meeting and talk with God face to face. In vs 12 it says, Moses said to the Lord, "*You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favour with me.'*"

Moses was in a position of leadership and he didn't know exactly how God was going to provide for them. It may be that you're in the position right now - you are being called by God to do something that you don't know how to do. You're being called by God to something and you need the special, supernatural something of God or you're not going to make it!

Vs 13: *If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people.* He says:

"If I have found favour in your sight, show me now your ways that I may know you in order to find favour in your sight."

You see, you cannot achieve favour, you must receive favour.

And so, Moses needs God to fill in the gap. And he said in verse 14, God speaks back: "*My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.*"

15 Then Moses said to him, "*If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 16 How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?*"

The distinguishing mark of the presence, the favour of God, is what should mark God's people.

I wrote down a definition of favour that I think will serve as a great working definition for us. I can't point you to a specific verse although favour is mentioned in the bible almost as much as grace, mercy and blessing. Here's the definition:

The favour of God is the guarantee of His presence and the provision of His power to accomplish His special purpose in and through my life.

When you pray for favour you need to know what you're praying for; because honestly, there are many favour fallacies out there. I'm not suggesting that if you have a special relationship

and connection with God and if you do certain things for God, then your life will always be easy and it will never be difficult, or that you will always have enough money and all the things you want. Most of you know that's not how life works – you don't always get the parking space you prayed for, even though you do tithe and do door duty! Some of us have been where the person that you love didn't get healed and they were a really good person, and you prayed hard and so did a lot of other people. Sometimes bad things happen to God's people and, if you let it, scepticism sets in but what I want to say today is that ***the favour of God is not the same as favours from God.***

I want to say to you today that perhaps what you've been wanting from God isn't His favour for His purpose, but for Him to do you favours for your convenience.

See, when Moses asked God for favour, it wasn't just so that he could have more camels. It wasn't just so that he could have more jewellery or a greater, easier life in terms of whatever modern amenities were available to Moses in the wilderness. ***He wanted God's favour so he could know God!*** And that's why I said that God's favour is the guarantee of His presence. The favour of God is not a formula, the favour of God is not a set of steps that you can take to get what you want; the favour of God is a living, breathing dynamic and a relationship with Jesus Christ that changes the way that you see God and your understanding of the way He sees you. Maybe that's the most important thing about God's favour.

I wonder if you think God only loves you because he has to? You know it a kind of contract – I believe in him therefore he has to love me. What God's favour teaches is that God hasn't been conned into loving us – he loves us because he made us, and he has a plan and a purpose for us.

We sometimes say about people that get on our nerves, "Well, the Bible says I have to love everybody, but it doesn't say I have to like everybody!" I wonder if that's how you think God feels about you? He has to love you but he doesn't actually like you. We all know our weaknesses, and what's wrong with us, and sometimes we don't actually like ourselves, therefore we assume that God must not like us either.

The truth is that God doesn't love you based on your performance – it's not about how hard you work, or how much you give, God loves you because you're you.

I want to bring back something I said a minute ago about how God's favour isn't just for our convenience. In that passage in Luke, Chapter One, where the angel came to Mary and said:

'Greetings you who are highly favoured, you're blessed and highly favoured.'

Mary experienced the favour of God, the ***presence and the provision of His power to accomplish His special purpose in and through her life.***

Mary wasn't just favoured, she was super-favoured. She had an extra-favour factor, okay, blessed and highly favoured. It's interesting to me you know, if we heard that as a young

unmarried girl engaged to be married, we would think, "Alright, blessed and highly favoured. Alright cool. So what's coming next? What's the angel about to say next?" You've been chosen to have a spread in the next issue of best Bethlehem Weddings; somebody is going to pay for your cake, you're going to get a free flower arrangement!

No, here's what came next, you're going to give birth to a baby in a cattle stall that will appear to be born out of wedlock. He will be the Saviour of the world and you'll watch Him die on a criminal's cross.

That's not really what I imagine when I'm asking God to bless me. If I'm honest I would like God to make things a bit easier for me. When we read on through the story of Jesus and You see, I believe that when you experience God's favour, even if you're seeking an answer and you can't find the solution, or even if you're seeking something that you need in your life right now, but God won't seem to give it. When you experience God's favour, it's all about His presence. The essence of God's favour isn't what happens to me; it's who I know is with me no matter what happens to me.

The favour of God is the guarantee of His presence and the provision of His power to accomplish His special purpose in and through my life.

I'm going to speak a bit more about this next week.

This table speaks to us about God's favour. In it we see things that remind us of his presence with us, and we have the memory that we only do it until he comes, but until then we have Holy Spirit to empower us on our journey together.