

## The Divine Favor

Luke 12:49-53

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 14, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

God loves everyone. God does not favor everyone.

Let me say that again because you are never going to understand what our Lord said in the Holy Gospel reading unless you understand this. God loves everyone. God does not favor everyone. A simple example of how God does not favor everyone is the several times repeated in the Bible statement that God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

God created everything. God hates nothing that He has made. God therefore loves everyone and everything. But the Scriptures do not allow us to draw the conclusion that because God loves everyone that He therefore favors everyone. In fact the Scriptures themselves are the account of those whom God has favored.

While God loves everyone only a few people receive His favor. His favor brings about some promise to those whom He favors and the fulfillment of that promise in due season. God does not do that to everyone. He does that to whom He chooses.

When God favors someone or some group of people there is conflict between those people whom God has favored and those people whom He has not favored. Those people whom He has not favored take action against those whom He has favored. Such action is often violent. Even the world with its unbelief and blindness somewhere in the back of their hearts know that if God favors a certain group of people that group of people receives the divine backing. They have the divine favor. They will receive divine promises and aid. God hears their prayers and listens to their cry. Even those in darkness are jealous of that favor. They think that God is unjust to favor the people that He favors. They argue and fight against God's will when He shows His favor to a certain group of people. They even come up with rational sounding reasons why God does not in fact favor the people that He says that He favors. The people of the darkness will say that the people whom God favors are only claiming the divine favor, God really doesn't favor them. They will say that if God loves everyone then He also favors everyone. Those in the darkness despise the divine favor and if they really believed the things that they say about those who have the divine favor then they would not respond with hatred and violence toward those who have the divine favor. If they really believed that God did not favor those whom He has said that He favors or if He really favored everyone because He loves everyone then the people in the darkness should have dismissed those who have the divine favor as quacks not worth the time to deal with. But since they unleash all kinds of hatred toward those who have divine favor, it reveals that they too understand that God has favored some and it has not been them. Unwilling to humble themselves in order to receive the divine favor they tear apart families and societies in order to rebel against God and His decisions. They do so by persecuting those who have the divine favor.

When we talk about the divine favor and God's favorites we must talk about it the way that God talks about it. After all He is the One who is bestowing the favor.

Our Lord Himself teaches us that God sends His rain on the just and the unjust. God causes His sun to rise on the wicked and the righteous. When Jesus says these things He is not talking about human sin in general. He is talking about those who have God's favor and those who do not. Whether you have God's favor or not you will receive rain on your fields and the sun will rise upon you. So we cannot use

the blessings of this world in order to determine the divine favor. We cannot use divine providence to determine whether or not this person or that person or this group or that group has God's favor.

It is determined by which groups have the promises of God. When God promises you something you have His favor. Such promises usually involved things that are not visible when God promises them, but will become visible later on. Whenever such favor is bestowed there is conflict between the one who receives God's favor and the one who does not.

Let us take some simple examples.

Cain and Able both offer to God sacrifices. Cain offers plants from the field as his sacrifice to God. Abel offers fat portions of his flock to God as his sacrifice. Later in the book of Leviticus God will command that both kinds of offerings should be given. God will command cereal offerings from the field be given to Him. God will command certain animal sacrifices be given to Him. So the reason that God favors Abel's sacrifice over Cain's is not entirely clear. Many have made much of the fact that Abel brought the fat offerings whereas Cain simply brought what was expected of his produce. That may be the case, but the main thrust of the account does not emphasize this. What does get emphasized is that Abel had God's favor and Cain did not. Cain resented it and so he murdered Abel. Therefore from the very beginning those who do not have the divine favor oppose those who do. Such opposition may result in violence.

Now with Cain and Abel no promise was made to Abel so let us take an example of someone who received the promise. Abraham received a promise from God that he and his descendents would be a blessing to the other nations of the earth. God favored Abraham and his descendents. He favored them with His presence among them in the tent of meeting and later in the temple. He favored them with access into His presence through the sacrificial system that He gave them through Moses. He favored them with His prophets who spoke the word of God to them. He favored them with the specific revelation of His will at Mount Sinai. And throughout history there has been conflict between Abraham's descendents and other people. Whether the other nations acknowledged it or not there was jealousy on their part of all that God had given to Abraham's descendents. The nations tried to imitate Abraham by offering sacrifices to their false gods and even offering their children as Abraham was commanded to offer his son. But since the nations offered their sacrifices to idols, they never did receive the divine favor. They continued to resent Israel and to conquer it. They continued to consider Israel as of no account on the world stage. Why would God favor such a tiny, insignificant nation like Israel?

And that is the way that it is with those who are favored by God. Others will hate them, oppose them, ridicule them, all because they are jealous of them.

Take for example Jacob and Esau. Esau despised his birthright and sold it to Jacob. Then when Jacob obtained the blessing of Isaac and therefore the divine favor Esau was angry and sought to kill Jacob. When it was made plain that God favored Isaac because he was the child of promise Ishmael mocked him and Sarah and Abraham eventually had to get rid of Ishmael because of his opposition to Isaac.

And on and on it goes until finally you get to Jesus.

Our Lord's maiden sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth alerted the gathered worshippers that the fulfillment of the prophets had come. Jesus was there to proclaim and bring about the year of the Lord's favor. When the people demanded that they receive such favor from Him because He really ought to favor them because He was Joseph's boy and this was His home town Jesus pointed out to them that they could not coerce the divine favor even if they were descendents of Abraham. While God favors the descendents of Abraham He does not favor all of them. The descendents of Abraham cannot presume that the divine favor is automatic. Jesus sites two examples from the Old Testament. The first that He

pointed out was that there were many widows in Israel at the time of Elijah the prophet, but God sent him to none of them only to the widow at Zarephath which is a Gentile town. Secondly, the Lord pointed out that there were many lepers in Israel at the time of Elijah the prophet, but none of them were cleansed only Naaman, the Syrian. When Jesus pointed out that the divine favor was not theirs simply because they were descendents of Abraham or because they happened to grow up in the same home town as God's Messiah, they were furious with Him. That is when they tried to kill Him. The world is always furious when God bestows His favor upon those whom the world thinks are undeserving or at least that it should not be that way.

Jesus favors the paralyzed man with the forgiveness of His sins and there are Pharisees there who question whether or not Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. Jesus is bestowing the divine favor upon the paralyzed man and the Pharisees are there to question it. And as the ministry of Jesus goes by and Jesus bestows the divine favor upon the likes of tax collectors, prostitutes, and even His own disciples, His opponents begin to hate Him. Jesus favors His disciples with the privilege of eating heads of grain on the Sabbath. Jesus favors a man in the synagogue who had a withered hand by healing him on the Sabbath. Jesus bestows the divine favor upon tax collectors and sinners with whom He reclines at table and eats with them at Matthew's home. The Pharisees hate him for this. They think that they should have the divine favor and not all of these sinners. And yet even when a Pharisee named Simon has Jesus over for dinner, he does not receive the divine favor. The woman who had led a sinful life does. The culmination of our Lord's work in bestowing the divine favor on those upon whom the Lord is pleased to bestow it is that the Pharisees and others who are jealous that they did not receive the divine favor kill Him.

That is how it is with people who do not receive the divine favor.

Now then, you have received the divine favor. Jesus has forgiven you. He has baptized you. He has bestowed His Holy Spirit upon you. He has had the Gospel preached to you. Because of the Gospel you are aware that Jesus died for you to atone for your sins. You are aware that He rose from the dead and that death is conquered. You are aware of a reality that the world cannot see or perceive because of its blindness. Jesus has bestowed upon you His body to eat and His blood to drink. He has transferred you from the kingdom of darkness to His own eternal kingdom. Like Abraham He has promised you something that you cannot see now, but it will come to fulfillment in due time. He has promised you resurrection from the dead and entrance into the eternal life prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Make no mistake about it people are going to hate you for this. They will oppose you. They will be jealous of you. They will either be jealous because you have the divine favor or they will feel threatened because if you have God's favor then God's power rests with you and not with them and they will rage against that. They will claim that they have the divine favor even though they don't. They will claim that they speak for God even though they don't. They will exclude you with their laws and isolate you by controlling how you are able to buy and to sell. Behind it all is Satan himself who rages against the will and favor of God.

The people who oppose you will surprise you. It is surprising to us pastors when members of Christian congregations oppose the Gospel showing themselves to be hypocrites living among those who have the divine favor, but not possessing it themselves. And for you laypeople make no mistake you will be surprised when your own flesh and blood yea even your son or your daughter or your father or your mother opposes you because you have received the divine favor and they have not.

Jesus did not come to bring peace. He came to bring division. He had to do this in order to show the divine favor. Showing the divine favor brings division. It cannot help it. The world cannot stand the divine favor and oppose those who have it.

This is why Jesus longs for His baptism. He is not talking about His baptism in the Jordan River. He had already accomplished that. He was talking about a baptism that at the time that He said it was in His future. He knew that when He underwent that baptism He would kindle a fire that would spread over the whole world. There would be a titanic war that would never end until He returned. His baptism is His cross. Once He dies the divine favor is yours and the fire is kindled.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.