

THE FAVOR OF GOD
April 30, 2017 Morning Service
Proverbs 22:1

Thank you, Brother Jon. Just take tonight off, alright? We're not having church tonight. Amen. You can take a break. It's going to be a long afternoon though with the baccalaureate services, a lot of stuff going on around here so we decided not to have service tonight. Well I'm glad you're here. Thanks again, choir. Amen. Ya'll come back next week, though. Amen.

We'll take your Bible and we're going to look this morning at the favor of God. We need God's favor. That doesn't mean you're God's favorite, alright, but His favor speaks of His face, of His countenance, His smile, His blessing that comes on us. The favor, the favor of Almighty God.

When I leave this service in just a few minutes I'm going to run and get in my car and go down to Warrington. They're having their last service as the Warrington Baptist Church. In the morning they are no more, really tonight, and they are folded into the body life of our church and we will begin to break up fallow ground, plant seeds for a new plant, and a new rebirth that's there. At the end of their morning service the last thing Warrington Baptist Church will do, the last thing they're going to do is baptize three new believers. Amen. That's a good way to end, you know it? A good way to start. Whichever way you want to call it. They're going to be a part of us and some of us will be down there and be a part of that ending and new beginning. I'm telling you, it's a hard day for a lot of people. It takes courage to do what they've done. Bringing people together is not always the easiest thing you'll do. You need God's favor.

Psalm 90:17, the Bible says: *Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; And confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands.*¹ O God, let Your favor, your *rashaan* be upon us and confirm the works of our hands. Proverbs 22:1. The first half of that verse we quote a lot but the second half is the most important. *A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold.*

If Olive Church has the favor of God we are more blessed than if we've had a record offering. Where the favor is, God'll take care of His church. Then in the New Testament in Galatians 1:10, Paul wrote these words. He asked the question. *For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men?* [Let me tell you, friend, if you live to please men you'll miss the favor of God.] *If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.* You cannot serve both God and man. You bow down to man's whim and their favor, you'll miss God's wonder and His favor. The favor.

¹ Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

In Zechariah 11:7, Zechariah the old prophet is trying to bring together Judah and Israel. They're split, they're divided, and he walks out among the people in Zechariah 11:7 and he says, "I have today in my hand a staff in my right hand and a staff in my left hand." Both of those are needed. He said, "I named one favor and the other union." Favor and Union.

Every church needs favor and union. Every family needs God's favor and union. Every marriage, man and woman, needs favor and union. We've got to have it. The favor, the *rashaan*, the smile, the good will, the delight, the beauty, the word sometimes means brightness. There are three words in the Old Testament for favor. One of them just means the shine of God. It's like the glory of God that comes. The shine. The favor.

When I studied the scripture I found Noah had favor. Amen. He's an old man. Even old people need the favor of God. Paul was middle-aged and he had the favor of God. However, most people I find that have the favor of God in the scriptures are people like Ruth, David, Mary, Esther. What these people have in common is that they are young people. Mary's just a teenage girl. I'm going to ask you in this room today if you are a middle schooler, a high schooler, or a college-aged person I'm going to ask you to rise to your feet across this room today. Middle schoolers, high schoolers, college-aged students. They're there all up in the balcony, all around here, over here, over here, across this group, over here.

Now listen to me. The most important thing you could ever have in your life is the favor of God. It's more important than a scholarship. It's more important than the right date to the prom. I'm here to tell you, the favor of God is what you need and you can have. When we get to the end of this service I'm going to pray for you that you would know the favor of God and that He would rest on you. I pray in Jesus' name the favor of God would be on you. I'm going to ask you, because I can't give it to you, I can pray for you to have it but you've got to do something for the favor, the smile, the blessedness of God to be on your life. Old people like Noah need the favor of God. Like my daddy. People like Paul that are middle-aged like me need the favor of God. I'm telling you, most of the time favor begins at a young age because it sees you all the way through your life.

The first time I knew the favor of God I was 17 years old. It was a smile as bright as His touch, His anointing. That favor will see you through your life. When I get to the conclusion I'm going to ask you to rise and come right here and pray with me, all of you middle schoolers and high schoolers and college aged students. I had many of your parents down here in the early service. I was shocked. This place was packed full of parents of middle schoolers, high schoolers, and college-aged students. We're going to pray today that God would give us favor. We're going to study for a moment what is favor, how do we receive favor, and then we're going to say, "Oh God, do it, do it among us."

Father, bless these that are on their feet and I pray, God, you'll put them on Your face and that Your favor would rest on them in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you, students. You be seated as we think together about favor.

In the Bible there are three pictures for favor. We find them in the Old Testament. These pictures are there that help us see what favor is and then secondly we see how do we receive or have this favor in our life. These three pictures that we find. Number one. Favor is a shield. In Psalm 5:12 the Bible says: *For it is You who blesses the righteous man* [The righteous man. God, You bless the righteous man], *O Lord, You surround him with favor as with a shield.* It is a favor that protects. It is a favor that surrounds. Hear me, dear friend, you are safe under God's favor. You cannot die until God says so. The favor of God surrounds us like a shield. That is protection. I'm not telling you somebody may not kill you with the faith. I'm not saying to you that you will not undergo persecution. I'm here to tell you that what God protects is your integrity, your testimony, and your life message. That life message will be protected all the way.

I know many people that are still alive today even though they're dead and in the ground, yet they live the Bible says because the favor of God has allowed their life message to live on and on and on and on. I would that God would do that with you. Understand when His favor's on you, it surrounds you like a shield. It protects your integrity. It protects your testimony. It protects your life message. It protects you from the flaming missiles of the evil one and God knows we all need it but especially middle school, high school, and college-aged students need the protection of God.

We send so many of our students off to universities where godless professors stand and expound against the things of Bible faith. I'm telling you, you need to have the shield, the favor of God around you. I read just yesterday from a non-theologian talking about theology in a local publication speaking about the Baha'i faith. The Baha'i faith started in 1860. The Baha'is, they believe in the unity and the plausibility of truth being found in every religion. They say that every great religious leader that comes is an educator of the people from Muhammad and Jesus and Buddha and the leader of the Baha'i. I wish that were true. It would just make life so sweet and everybody just hug each other. The only thing wrong with that is I'm sold out to Jesus and Jesus said, "That's a lie." We were just singing about it. You were singing it. The way, the truth, the life. No man gets to the Father but that he comes through Jesus.

You see, Jesus said, "I didn't come to get you together. I came to divide you." That's what He said. He'll set a son against a father. "If you're not for Me, you're against Me." Oh He wants the unity. It's the unity of the Spirit, the unity of the faith. He wants us to love everybody. The biggest sinner in town, you ought to love them but it doesn't mean that everybody's the same, even though our messages are different. You've got to stand for truth. You say, "Well I have a hard time." I'm telling you, the favor of God will protect you in that.

Secondly, the Bible says that favor while it's a shield, secondly, it's a cloud. Proverbs 16:15, the Bible says: *In the light of a king's face is life, And his favor is like a cloud with the [What? A cloud with what?] spring rain.* If you're in the King James it says with latter, the latter rain. The reason we're not having church tonight is because it's coming a flood tonight. Six weeks ago I prayed and God said, "It's going to rain hard on Sunday night." No, we were just so busy we decided not to do it but I'm telling you, there's a storm coming crashing through here this afternoon if something doesn't dissipate over around the Alabama line. I'm telling you, there's a red cell that is over there and it's coming crashing in a little while. Some people decided that it was so close, 400 miles away, they'd skip church this morning. They could just smell it in the air, you know.

Let me tell you, the favor of God is like a cloud that brings the spring rain. While the shield protects, clouds with the spring rain bring produce. You'll never have a harvest if you don't have the spring rain. When God comes He brings the refreshment and He brings the ripeness of the crop. He brings the harvest.

Absolutely I was astonished standing early down here this morning. All of those young couples going in with those babies, just kids everywhere. Upstairs and downstairs, just kids going in. This is not Easter. This is after Easter. There are kids everywhere. One momma brought by me a little redheaded baby. She said, "I knew you'd want to see this child." I said, "Amen." That child had flaming red hair like I used to have. Amen. Before I started pastoring you, I had flaming red hair. It's kind of washed out a little bit now but oh those kids. Let me tell you, that's life and in the life of the church the harvest are the souls of men, women, boys, and girls brought to faith in Jesus Christ. God, with His favor is like a cloud over His people.

How did God protect His people Israel? How did He lead them? It was a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. I'm telling you, God sets a watch around His people. Favor, favor is the cloud of God and the rain comes and it brings the harvest. The shield protects. The cloud produces and then thirdly the Bible says that favor is like dew. It's like a dew. Proverbs 19:12. *The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, But his favor is like dew on the grass.*

It's that time of year where I'm from in north Alabama, you'd walk out and the dew that's on the ground, I'm telling you, it'll wet your pant legs almost up to your knees if you walk in that grass. Some of you hunt. You go on an early morning hunt. I mean your pant legs will just be wet. Your shoes soaked. It hadn't rained a drop but the dew of God is falling. That's a refreshment. Let me tell you, friend, if the favor of God is on you, you need never be spiritually dry in your life because the refreshment of God comes like a dew as you are walking under God's refreshing spirit. Even in the darkest hour, I'm here to tell you, the favor of God is like a dew that brings refreshment into your life.

So the favor of God, we ought to want it. It's like a shield. It's like a cloud. It's like a dew but how do we receive the favor of God? Now Christians are saved by grace

through faith and this word favor in the New Testament is also the word *charis*, like the Charis House. It's like the grace house. It's the favor house. It's where God has highly favored us and He saves us by grace but then beyond our salvation comes the favor of God, the blessing, the anointing of God.

How do you have this favor of God? Hear me. You must be all in to know favor. You have to pray with Mary. Mary was 14, 15 when she became the womb for Christ to come and she said, "Lord, be it in my life as You will. Not what I want." She was all in.

She said, "Lord, whatever you want, I want. Be it in my life as you will." Dear friend, as a believer, you must come to the place – if you want God's favor, you've got to say, "God, not like I want it, be it in my life as You will." Where I work, who I marry, what I do, what I spend, what I give, how I act. God, not what I want but what You want." You've got to be all in. You can't be a scribe and a Pharisee and a hypocrite, just got your toes in the water, just Sunday morning toe touching. "I come on Sundays. I stay 75 minutes. It gets to 80 minutes, I may give you 80 but I'm telling you, at 81, I'm out of there. That's all I can stand." Friend, get ready. The favor of God's not coming your way. You'll never know His smile. You've got to be all in.

College students, listen to me. Quit living like a hellion. If you're going to name the name of Christ, name Him. If not, get out. You'll do damage to the kingdom. High school student, don't come sing in these choirs and go on these retreats and Disciple Now and all that and go get drunk on Saturday night. For Jesus the Nazarene said, "Gideon, all in the deep end of the pool." Favor. My God, we need favor and it comes.

The Bible says in II Chronicles 16:9 the eyes of God this very moment are going to and fro throughout the whole earth looking for a people with a perfect heart. He doesn't mean that you're perfect. He means that your heart is turned perfectly toward Him. That's the construct of the Hebrew. Your heart is sold out to Him. There's none righteous, no not one. There's nobody perfect in here but your heart is turned in a perfect manner. The Bible says in that verse in II Chronicles 16:9, God's eyes are going to and fro. He's looking and when He finds people with a perfect heart turned toward Him, He will show Himself strong on their behalf. That's the favor of God.

When He finds a church all in, favor. When He finds a group of young people all in, favor. When He finds a college ministry all in, favor. When He finds a ministry in His church all in, favor. When He finds a preacher all in, favor. I'm telling you, it's the smile of God, the power of God, the countenance.

You ever come in and look at your momma and you can tell if you are in good standing by just looking at her face? Can I get a witness? It's not the words she says and it's not the anger she shows, it's the disappointment that breaks your heart. But if she smiles and says, "Well done," she's showing you favor. Let me tell you, friend, if you're waking as a Christian today, you ought to look for the smile of God, the favor of God to say, "I'm all in," and God's touch, His favor is on your life.

You don't get rich by the favor of God. Some people have had the greatest power of the favor of God on their life have died for the faith. Some have been jailed. I'm not telling you that we may not. I don't believe in my lifetime unless things really face forward but I do believe if you run the calendar forward a hundred years in the United States of America, if there is not some spiritual move within the church and within the culture, we'll see the Christian church openly persecuted. It's in route. It's coming.

We have baccalaureates this afternoon. We're grateful to God we can do them but the school can't even now do that. We're at their mercy of trying to help and do that and salt in it but the culture has said no. But even then if we have favor, God has a way of going around a corner and doing some things that we thought He could never do before. It's called favor. If you'll quit bellyaching about what people tell you you can't do and get under the spout where God's glory comes out and let His favor come. God can do more in a minute than you can do in a lifetime anyway. Amen? You've got to be all in. All in.

Psalm 119:58, David sought favor with all of his heart. Not half, not a quarter. He sought it with all of his heart. In Acts 7:46, Stephen said about David, "David found the favor of God." Daniel, oh thank God, young Daniel, just a kid. Daniel found the favor of God. God granted Daniel favor in Daniel chapter 1, verse number 9. He granted him so much favor he turned a lion's mane into a pillow.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego found favor. How'd they get that? Because when old Nebuchadnezzar brought that statue out that he made look like himself and he said, "When the trumpet blows and we stand up the statue, everybody bows down." It would have been a whole lot easier for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had they just gone down on one knee and said, "You know, we don't mean it but we're going to save our neck. We're just going to bow down here and it'll be good." Then they get up and just go about their business but they said no. They stood up to stand out. They said they'd come to the edge. "I can't do that anymore. I'll stand for God." They wouldn't bow, they wouldn't bend, and bless God, they wouldn't burn when they put them in a fiery furnace. Couldn't do it. What happened with those young men? They were all in.

II Corinthians gives us these words. Favor comes through the prayers of others. *You also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given to the many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.* Friend, not only have you got to be all in but people need to pray for you. Favor comes through intercession.

One of the greatest gifts I've ever been given my wife gave me last year. She gave me a little red journal and written in that journal there was every day in there, January 15, March 13, every day, and she had written every day what she prayed for me for 365 days. Let me tell you, when you've got people like that praying for you, that makes a great wife if she can't cook a lick. I married a home economics major. She

cooks more than a lick. When people pray for you and you're all in, it brings the favor of God.

If you're the parent of a middle schooler or high schooler or college-aged student, you ought to be praying for them and when you see them get all in you ought to pray for the favor of God to be on them. All in, intercession, and then thirdly, this is a requirement as well. It doesn't come to everybody but it comes to some of us. This opportunity that we find in I Peter 2:20. *For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it [patiently endure it], this finds favor with God.* It's when you are under persecution and you walk through because you're all in and people are praying and you walk through, God's favor comes.

I've been talking to you a lot about John Bunyan of late. I just ordered – I read one biography and now I've ordered another biography. John Bunyan, my soul, a man 14 years was in prison when he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Phenomenal how he still lives today now over 300 years after his death. It was because of the persecution that he went through. He was in jail 12 years. He got out and went back to church. They made him the pastor again. He was a pastor for two years. They arrested him again. They put him back in jail in one of the harshest places he could ever be. They had a prison inside the wall of a bridge. They locked Bunyan in there for two years until he got out. The favor of God. Where did he write *The Pilgrim's Progress*? He wrote it in that jail. I'm telling you, the favor of God was in his pen while he was going through the hellishness of persecution. Favor. Oh the favor of Almighty God.

The Bible says that Jesus grew in stature and in favor with God and man. You can grow in favor. Some of you middle schoolers and high schoolers and college-aged students need again to grow in favor. We're going to have high school day here in a few weeks and I'm going to call us to youth revival on that Sunday. I've been praying saying, "Oh God, give me a message." On that Sunday at 11:00 in this service we're going to preach to those teenagers. They won't hear a thing but the rest of the congregation will hear it. Juniors and sophomores will hear it. Seniors have their eye on the prize but there's a few of them already living for Christ. I see them. I see them. I see them on Facebook everywhere. That's the reason I'm on Facebook is to watch kids. That's why I'm there. I put out stuff and have fun and all but I watch young people.

Man it thrills my heart when I see one of them standing up for Christ, going public. More often than not though I see them railing against somebody else and I think, "Dear God, help them shut their mouth, using foul language." Do you know that stuff never goes away? It's going to cost you a job one day, dear friend. You're going to fill out your application and send it J.T. down at Southern Company and they're going to look at it and find out these guys are cussing like a sailor on here and say, "I'm not sure we want him working for us." We check it when we hire here but, boy, when that star begins to rise and the favor of God comes.

Jon, I'm praying the favor would come. We've got to have a revival of young people in this county and in our culture. I don't know why it can't just begin right here. It's as good a church as any for that revival to start. It doesn't take but two or three.

Now I've got to get done. I've seen it. I've seen it. I'm in a little country church and I'm sitting back here. This is called a cap rail in pew language. A cap rail. At the Pisgah Baptist Church there is a cap rail and it has my fingerprints still in it. When God was calling me not to preach but to holiness I held on so tight my fingerprints are still in the cap rail and one day God finally blew my hands off the cap rail and said, "Get out. Go. Be holy. Turn your heart and I'll show Myself strong on your behalf." So I got up. I said, "God, I'm not mine. I'm yours." Perfect? Goodness no because the same lady that wrote those prayers 365 days a year could give you another book. She could list my sins 365 days a year. That's probably what she was praying about when she wrote that book. It all starts with a step. You've got to step toward favor. I'm all in, people are praying for me, and I'll walk through the persecution if need be.

While everyone turns to the sixth chapter of Numbers, I want every middle school student, high school student, college-aged student to rise to your feet, walk right here to the front and stand looking at me. Come right now. You come from that balcony. It's going to take you a minute. Come running. Every middle schooler, high schooler, college-aged student, come join me right here. The first of you just press up against that deal and just look right here at me. Just come to the middle. That's good. Just wade up in here. You come. Come from everywhere. College, middle school, high school students, come right here.

Everybody else is turning to the sixth chapter of Numbers, Numbers 6. Moses is praying a blessing. I'm going to pray this blessing and then we're going to pray one for another today. In Numbers chapter 6 when Moses got to the end he's praying this blessing.

There are enough people standing right here to turn Pensacola right side up for Christ. Right here. Now we weed out all the lost teenagers. Get rid of some of them. We weed out the hypocrites. We weed out the two-faced. We've still got enough right here to turn Pensacola right side up for Christ. Amen. They're standing right here. Add to that parents that love you, friends that are praying for you, folks that are standing with you.

Hear the word of the Lord in Numbers chapter 6. This is what Moses prayed for his people. He prayed: *The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make His face shine on you* [That's favor. The face of God looking to you. That's favor. That's the favor of God when the face of God is pleased with you, when He sees Jesus in you. Let the face of God shine on you], *And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance [His smile, His demeanor] on you, And give you peace.* Everywhere you find favor in the word of God you find its accompanying word. That is the word peace. When you find favor, you find peace. If you're not at peace right now, you don't have favor but when favor comes, the peace that passes all worldly understanding is on your life.

There's mothers, fathers, friends praying for you. Your pastor's going to be praying for you. I don't know where God's planted you but where you are, if the favor of God is on you and glowing through you, it will make an eternal difference.

Here's what I want us to do as we end this service today. In a moment, many of you that are sitting out here have never trusted Christ. I want you to get saved today. Some of you want to join this church. There are four tables. We call them Next Step Tables out in the foyer because you won't be able to get me because we're all going to be down here. I want you to get up and I want you to go out there to those tables. Somebody's going to be there. You can get saved. You can sign up for baptism. You can join the church. They'll be out there and they've got their iPads, the whole business, they'll be there waiting for you. Just come. They'll pray with you.

Right now I'm going to ask all of these students. Here's what I want us to do. I'm going to kneel and I'm going to ask you just to kneel in this altar. What I want you to do is out loud I want you to pray for yourself and then pray for a friend you know that needs to walk in favor with the Lord God. So I'm going to kneel. If you would, if you're not able – and if you're on crutches you're not able. You just stand, alright? But if you're able I'm going to ask you just to kneel and I want us to pray for God's blessing, God's favor, for revival to come.

My soul, it would be glorious if the power of God fell. Out loud just give yourself to God anew and afresh today, students, college student, middle school student, high school student. Spend a moment just giving yourself to God today. Ask Him for help. Tell Him you're all in if you are.

Father, I thank you for the collection of personalities and talents, spiritual gifts, and potential that kneel in this altar today. I ask you, Father, for each one of these students, for each man, each woman, I pray, God, that You would make Your face to shine on them. I pray, God, that You'd be gracious to them. I pray Your countenance would be upon them and that You'd give them peace, peace that passes anything this world can afford or touch. I pray out of this group You'll raise up leaders, servants, preachers, missionaries, kingdom men and women that would live for You.