

# Favor (For Such A Time As This)

## Sermon Summary

This sermon explores divine "favor." Favor is not the absence of hardship or a guarantee of prosperity, but rather God's active grace, provision, and presence *within* challenging and adverse circumstances. The primary Scriptural study is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was called "highly favored" but whose position entailed immense personal risk, suffering, and sacrifice. The source traces the etymology of "favor" to the Greek word for grace (*charis*), emphasizing its unmerited nature. Ultimately, favor is depicted as God's enabling presence that provides protection and provision step-by-step through trials, with the ultimate expression of this favor being the assurance of resurrection and the eventual restoration of all things.

## 1. Favor in the Midst of Trouble

A common understanding of divine favor is a problem-free, prosperous life. However, Scripture reveals to us that favor is a form of divine intervention that manifests precisely when conditions are difficult.

- **Defining Statement:** "Not favor that prevents bad things from happening, but favor that comes when the circumstances don't look good."
- **Connection to Advent:** The theme is tied to the concept of Advent, meaning "arrival." The source notes that God's arrival, both historically with the birth of Jesus and in contemporary life, often occurs during times of great individual or societal trouble.

## 2. The Paradoxical Favor of Mary

The biblical narrative of Mary from Luke 1 serves as the central evidence for this redefined understanding of favor.

### The Context of the Annunciation

The angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary occurred in a specific and high-stakes cultural context.

- **Mary's Status:** She was a young virgin, estimated by scholars to be around 14 years old.
- **Betrothal:** She was legally betrothed to Joseph. This was a binding agreement, and the couple was expected to remain faithful during the 1-2 year period while the groom prepared a home.

- **Cultural Penalties:** Unfaithfulness during betrothal carried severe social and religious consequences, including public shame and, as required by Jewish Law, the possibility of being stoned to death.

## The "Favor" as a Position of Risk

The angel greets Mary as "highly favored" (Luke 1:28), yet the content of this favor is the news that she will miraculously conceive a son outside of her marriage to Joseph. This honor placed her in a position of extreme peril.

- **The Dilemma:** Mary's immediate response was one of confusion and trouble, questioning how this could happen since she was a virgin (Luke 1:34). The miraculous explanation—conception via the Holy Spirit—would be incredibly difficult to explain to Joseph, her family, and her community.
- **The Cost of Honor:** The sermon introduces the Greek term *Theotokos* ("God bearer") to describe Mary's high honor. However, it argues that this honor came with a "heavy price," posing the rhetorical question from Rev. Chris Coon: "At the Christmas pageant every year, every girl wants to be Mary. But in real life, did Mary want to be Mary?"

This concept is further illustrated with an analogy to the superhero Spider-Man, whose maxim "With great power comes great responsibility" is expanded upon: "...stewarding great responsibility comes with sacrifice, pain, and suffering."

## 3. Manifestations of Favor Throughout Mary's Life

The sermon presents that God's favor was demonstrated not by removing Mary's hardships, but by providing protection, guidance, and provision through them.

Challenge Faced by Mary	Manifestation of God's Favor
<b>Unwed Pregnancy &amp; Potential Death</b>	God revealed the truth to Joseph in a dream, leading him to obey, protect Mary, and claim Jesus as his own son.
<b>Persecution by King Herod</b>	Joseph was guided to flee with his family to Egypt, where they lived for years as refugees targeted for death but under divine protection.

<b>Financial Hardship as Refugees</b>	The gift of gold from the Magi provided the financial resources necessary to survive in a foreign land.
<b>Uncertainty of Exile</b>	Favor was expressed through the knowledge of when it was safe for the family to return from Egypt.
<b>Future Heartache (Simeon's Prophecy)</b>	Simeon prophesied that a "sword will pierce her soul," foretelling the pain of watching Jesus die on the cross.
<b>Grief and Old Age</b>	Even while dying on the cross, Jesus demonstrated favor by entrusting Mary to the care of John the Apostle, who looked after her for the rest of her life.

## 4. Theological and Etymological Foundations

The analysis is grounded in the Greek meaning of the word "favor" and its connection to grace.

- **Charitoó:** The Greek term for "favored one," which means "to bestow grace and special honor."
- **Charis:** The root word, meaning "grace."
- **Core Implication:** Because favor stems from grace, it is unmerited. It "comes not because you've done something right."

This foundation reinforces that favor is a divine gift, not a reward for good behavior, and its purpose is tied to God's plan rather than human comfort.

## 5. Broader Applications and Expressions of Favor

The concept of favor is extended to apply to diverse human experiences and is linked to the ultimate Christian hope of resurrection.

### How Favor Appears

The manifestation of favor is not uniform; it is tailored to the individual and the situation.

- **Sudden Breakthrough:** It can appear as a "mighty flood of breakthrough," where a solution arrives all at once.

- **Sustained Provision:** More often, it arrives incrementally, providing "just enough each step." This is exemplified by the story of **Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath** (1 Kings 17:13-14), where the jar of flour and jug of oil did not run dry, providing daily sustenance. This step-by-step provision is described as keeping one "in the space of worship."

## The Ultimate Favor: Resurrection

The source presents Jesus as the "most favored of all," yet his life was one of total sacrifice.

- **Jesus's Sacrifice:** He laid down his life so that humanity could "live with hope that death never has the last word."
- **The Assurance of Resurrection:** This is described as "the greatest favor of all."
- **Advent's Full Meaning:** The discussion of resurrection during Advent is justified by connecting Jesus's first coming (his birth) to his second coming, when he will "make the wrong things right," redeem losses, restore what is broken, and establish God's kingdom on Earth.

The sermon's call to action is for us to identify our specific needs and pray for God's favor. All of our stories reflect a life of God's favor intersecting our deepest challenges. Rev. Dr. Jacques Conway would often say in the benediction: "The person you're next to is a miracle." Indeed we are such miracles because of God's favor at work in the most challenging moments in our lives.

## Discussion Questions:

1. What do you notice about Mary's reaction to the angel's message?
2. How do you define "favor"? How does this story challenge common ideas of what it means to be "blessed"?
3. Have you ever felt called into something you didn't feel prepared for?
4. Why do you think God often works through ordinary, overlooked people?
5. What do you think it means for someone today to say, "Let it be"—to trust God with something uncertain?
6. What might God be inviting you into in this season, even if it feels unexpected?