

FINDING FAVOR IN GOD'S SIGHT

Luke 1: 5-38, especially 1: 26-38 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

The very first book Eli Weisel wrote was entitled “Night.” Eli Weisel is a Jew, and he became a Nobel Peace Prize winner who survived the Holocaust. His book shocked the generation yet living after World War II. In “Night,” Eli Weisel tells the story of how his family, and all the families of his small village in Transylvania, part of central Romania where his family and many other Jewish families were forced from their homes, stripped of their possessions including their gold teeth, and taken in cattle cars by rail to a Nazi concentration camp. Eli Weisel recounts the horror of filth, degradation, genocide, and deprivation in this book of barely 100 pages. His tone is not shrill or panicked, but in his book “Night,” he quietly tells the story of how his father and mother, and his sister and he too were all taken to an extermination camp. One woman on the train appeared to have a nervous breakdown. Separated from her husband, she despaired to the point of madness. Periodically during the train ride through the night, she would stand and cry out, “Look at the fire! Look at the fire!” The Jewish occupants of the cattle car strained to see through the slats, but all they could see was only the dark night outside. Several times this lady jumped to her feet to shout again the same message “Look at the fire!” “Look at the fire!” Finally, two men gagged and tied her up to keep her from disturbing everyone. But as the train pulled into the concentration camp platform, Eli Weisel said they were all stunned to see giant smokestacks belching flames of fire high up against the night sky. These smokestacks they later learned were the crematoria where almost all the Jews were being cremated—burned up. The Jewish Holocaust back then as the Abortion Holocaust in America today both stand as epic examples of how humanity can fail and fall so far short from finding favor with either God or man.

“At about 11 a.m. ET on Wednesday, December 16, 2015, author Elie Wiesel passed away. Elie Wiesel was born on September 30, 1928 in Sighetu Marmăției, in northern Romania close to the Ukraine border. In his book, “Night,” Eli Weisel wrote about the death of God as well as his disgust for humanity. In the concentration camp he said, "Here there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends." Beloved, Eli Weisel was right about the fallen state of humanity, but he missed it badly when he wrote about the death of God. In the days of Noah, in Genesis 6: 8, times were equally terrible. We read, “But Noah found grace/favor in the eyes of the Lord.” What did God say about Noah’s generation? He said, in Genesis 6: 5, we read, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” In the days of the Exodus, after the turning of the 3+ million of the children of Israel against Moses, in the worship of the golden calf, God said to

Moses, in Exodus 33: 17, “You have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” In Ruth 2: 10, we hear Ruth speak to Boaz who wanted her to glean only in his fields. Ruth said, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” In Proverbs 18: 22, we read, “He who finds a wife, finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord.” The strange thing about God’s favor being given to Noah, Moses, to Ruth through Boaz is that favor or grace is the same Hebrew word, **chen**. Hen as it is pronounced means graciousness, kindness, favor, grace, and well or highly favored. The Hebrew word used for the favor God gives to a man who finds a wife is **ratsown**. It means delight, favor, and acceptance or pleasure in God’s sight.

When we come to the New Testament, the word for grace or favor is **charis**. Charis means favor, grace, acceptance, gifted, or to find grace. We see in our text in Luke 1: 30 that the angel Gabriel said to the virgin maiden named Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary for you have found charis/favor with God.” After Jesus as a boy was not in the company of the people returning to Nazareth from Jerusalem, and after coming back a full day’s journey after being gone one day’s journey and then looking in Jerusalem for 3 days, Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple seated with the teachers of the law. When asked why he was there, Jesus replied, “Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business, or in My Father’s house? Then we read, in Luke 2: 50-52, “And Jesus went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor/charis with God and man.”

Luke writing in Acts 7: 46, quotes the sermon of Stephen before he was martyred, and speaking of David, Stephen said of David, “who found favor/charis in the sight of God.” Is this kind of grace known to be found in Noah, Moses, Ruth, David, Mary and in Jesus, is this kind of grace available to be found in us? I read about the early church in Acts 4: 33, “And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace/charis was upon them all.” Barnabas went to find out what happened with Cornelius and his household and to many Gentiles who came to Christ. Luke reported in Acts 11: 18, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” And Barnabas in Acts 11:23, “When Barnabas came and saw the grace/charis of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them to remain faithful to the Lord with a steadfast purpose.” Can we find grace in God’s sight? The answer is the same as my Swedish relatives used to say, “Yashur, you betcha!” Yes, each of us can find grace in the eyes of the Lord. I ask you, “Have you found grace/favor/charis in the eyes of the Lord? Has God noticed you and allowed you to find grace in His eyes as He sees you? That’s the focus of our message today.

Amazingly, the announcement by angel Gabriel to the young virgin named Mary, that she had been chosen by God to become the mother of our coming Savior—this announcement contains the first mention in the New Testament of the Greek word for grace or favor which is **charis**. What does it mean to find grace in the sight of the Lord? Here are the lessons we can learn from Mary, the virgin maiden, most likely a young teenager of 14-16 years of age. What are these lessons?

WHEN WE FIND GRACE IN GOD’S SIGHT, IT IS NOT BECAUSE GOD HAS FOUND US TO BE SINLESS. (I.)

Let’s clear up this misconception about Mary that she is sinless and that we should worship her or pray to her? Turn to Mary’s own confession, that she spoke in the presence of Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist. We call Mary’s words the Magnificat. In Luke 1: 46, Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and the mother of Jesus confessed she needed to be saved, she needed a Savior. When we read in Acts 1: 14 about the believers in the upper room (about 120 of them) praying in preparation for Pentecost, we read, “All these, speaking of the disciples, with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.” The 120 were not praying to Mary. That is idolatry. Mary was with them and they prayed with her and she prayed with them. So beloved, at this Christmas time, reject any teachings about the need to pray to Mary as if we go to her to find grace. Reject any words about her being a perpetual virgin. No, any teaching suggesting that Mary never knew intimacy with Joseph is false. Mark 6: 3 is clear that Joseph and Mary had four sons, James, Joses, Judas and Simon and that they had daughters as well, at the least two daughters. 2ndly,

WHEN WE FIND GRACE IN GOD’S SIGHT, IT IS NOT BECAUSE WE HAVE EARNED IT BEFORE GOD. (II.)

Notice the words of Luke 1: 30. These are sacred words we all need to hear. “And the angel said to her (Mary) “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” Notice we don’t hear Gabriel saying, “You have earned favor/grace/charis with God.” The first time we find someone spoken of as finding grace in the sight of the Lord in the Old Testament, it was when God was going to start a new beginning by sending the flood to destroy everyone except Noah and his family. God was starting a new time, a new kind of dispensation with mankind. Genesis 6: 8 tells us that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Just as Noah found grace for a new time coming, so did Mary find grace for a new time or beginning coming. But this new beginning was not something she earned or purchased. Grace is a treasure from God that is found. The Greek word for found is **heurisko**. This word means to find, to get, to obtain,

to perceive, or see. If we are going to learn from Mary how God help us find grace in His sight, we must stop debating how perfect we have to be or how perfect we may have been in the past in our quest to obtain or to find grace. That's not how we find grace or why God gives grace. We must come to understand how God took an ordinary woman—an ordinary person like you and me but He aimed to use her in an extraordinary way—and He did. We have no biblical evidence that Mary was highly educated, or wealthy, or extremely wise. When we find grace, it isn't our achievement to brag about. It appears from Scripture that Mary was not highly educated, extremely wealthy, exceptionally wise or extra special in another way.

We do know Mary was a virgin. We read in Luke 1: 26-27, “Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.” That was God's plan for every betrothed young maiden—she must be a virgin. Pre-marital purity and virginity in Mary's day was demanded not just by God, but by His people. Deuteronomy 22: 20 tells us that “If evidence of virginity is not found in a woman, then they shall bring her to the door of her father's house, and the men of the city shall stone her to death with stones, for she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father's house.” Be sure there were many other virgin maidens in Israel at this time. Mary was not the only one for sure. Finding God's grace is never because we have earned it in one way or the other. Paul writes it clearly in Ephesians 2: 8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Thirdly,

WHEN WE FIND GRACE IN GOD'S SIGHT, IT IS BECAUSE GOD AIMS TO USE US BECAUSE HE KNOWS WE DESIRE TO DO HIS WILL. (III.)

Beloved God wants us to desire to do His will above all else and He has plans for all of us as to what He wants us to do. When the angel Gabriel told Mary how the Holy Spirit would overshadow her so she could conceive as a virgin. Mary heard the startling words by Gabriel, “For nothing will be impossible with God,” Luke 1: 37. The Lord who knows all things knew Mary's heart was eager to do His will, and He was right as God always is. What did Mary say to Gabriel? Notice Luke 1: 38, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word.” Mary had a choice. She could have said, “No!” God will not force us to do His will. Some of us know that and we may have taken advantage of God's gentleman kindness. Some of us may to date have said “No!” to an assignment of the Lord. Without a strong desire to do the will of God, we are heading down a slippery slope of unpleasant circumstances and God's discipline. Why? Though God will not force us to obey Him, His trademark is that He often helps us to bring us to willingness, even as God helped Moses. God's aim for us is for us to humbly

receive His commands and then for us to be found doing His will. I ask you, “Has God placed a task before any of us that we do not intend to do? Have we in effect said, “Behold, Lord, in this task, I will not be Your servant; let it be to someone else according to Your word.”? Fourthly,

WHEN WE FIND GRACE IN GOD’S SIGHT, IT IS BECAUSE GOD EXPECTS US TO BE WILLING TO PAY THE COST OF OBEDIENCE TO HIS WILL. IV. Were you listening as the Scripture was being read today? Was the assignment of the angel an easy assignment most of us would have jumped at? To tell a virgin she is going to conceive and bear a son because the power of the Holy Spirit is going to overshadow her, is that a costly assignment? Mary had not been betrothed before, so all this matter of betrothal was new to her. But don’t mistake Mary for being so simple she was naïve, and unable to connect the dots on the cost now lying before her. This was a reputation breaker at best. What would Joseph do? What would the Jews in Nazareth do? Would she be summarily stoned to death? Yet, notice verse 31, for Mary heard angel Gabriel say, “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus.”

When the angel left, what were all the questions racing through Mary’s mind? Perhaps over losing her life to stoning for being accused of pre-marital intimacy, Mary must have been sobbing as she knew Joseph. Would he believe her angelic story? He was a wise man. Was she about to lose the man she loved?

Beloved, when we find grace in God’s sight, it is because He has a task or duty or assignment in mind. Fulfilling that role will mean many others will not, may not or cannot understand. If we do what God asks, we may be shunned, slandered, and strongly disagreed with. After finding grace in God’s sight, life may never be the same. Comfort zones will be a thing of the past. Jesus said to everyone in His presence one day in Luke 9: 23, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” When we find grace in God’s eyes, we can expect assignments. God is up front. Often the assignments are unique to us and no one else can as adequately or rightly do what God assigns us to do. We ultimately find grace to learn how to obey Matthew 6: 33. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Mary’s words, “Be it unto me according to Your Word” meant so much more than “Thanks for coming and sharing those words, Gabriel. See you some day after Jesus is born.” No, finding grace in the sight of the Lord means that we must lay down our richest treasures to the Lord—our gold—it will cost us financially for we will be giving our everything to the King of all kings, our frankincense—it will cost us sacrificially for we will be giving ourselves to the One who paid the ultimate sacrifice for us, and our myrrh, for it will cost us suffering for the one who suffered most for us by dying in our place on Calvary’s

cross. Paying the cost of obedience is not about fringe obedience in fringe matters. Hebrews 13: 9 is clear, “Do not be led away by diverse an strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace/charis—(primary issues) not by foods/meats (fringe issues) which have not benefitted those devoted to them.

Paul states in II Timothy 2: 23 to have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know they breed quarrels.” Beloved, part of the cost of finding God’s grace is keeping sound doctrine as absolutely essential—and that includes the virgin birth of Jesus, the deity of Christ, the authority of Scripture, salvation by grace through faith, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and His soon return. If it is a Biblical doctrine that is central, pay the price of finding grace in the eyes of the Lord as you defend His Word. Defend God’s Word at all costs. If it is a secondary issue of doctrine, arguing over what kind of bread to use for the Lord’s Supper, or what mode of baptism to follow, teach it in meekness and love and don’t separate over your preference or even raise your voice. If it is a fringe issue, such as which denomination is the best, which translation of the Bible is best, or whether tithing is on one’s gross pay or their net, find God’s grace to pay the cost of swallowing your pride and allowing other brothers and sisters to exercise their freedom in Christ. When the Bible squarely teaches that forgiveness of others is essential or God won’t forgive you, don’t dance around it. Hold to it at all costs. If Jesus says it is primary, there is no secondary road to get around it. Finding grace means God expects you and me to pay the cost of forgiving even when we are not asked, and loving even when we are not loved, and refusing to stonewall those we love by silence, separation, or slander. Finding God’s grace is costly. Fifthly,

WHEN WE FIND GRACE IN GOD’S SIGHT, IT IS BECAUSE GOD EXPECTS US TO TRUST HIS PROMISES BECAUSE WE HAVE FOUND

HIM. V.) God found Mary. God found me. Has God found you? Notice that Mary asked information, for she was a virgin and she knew virgins cannot conceive. She rightly asked in Luke 1: 34, “How will this be, since I am a virgin, or I know not a man—it was as if Mary was saying to Gabriel. “I have never been intimate with a man—no one, including Joseph.” When we trust in God and then in His promises, it means we know we are saved by His grace, and we know we are saved to serve Him as we trust in His promises. Was Mary afraid? She had to be and that’s why we read that Mary was greatly troubled at Gabriel’s words. That’s why the angel Gabriel say, in verse 30, “Do not be afraid.” Every one of us that God finds and every one of us who finds grace in the eyes of the Lord—every one of us will have fears. But may we trust in the words of the Lord—and this trust was not only in the Old Testaments scrolls of the Bible, but this trust was in God’s angel—His messenger who came to announce the virgin birth. Asking information of God is not doubting Him. To assuage Mary’s wonderment and her information needed,

the angel Gabriel reminded her, in Luke 1: 37, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Mary’s response once she knew God’s method of her conceiving was immediate. She had truly found God’s grace in His sight. Despite all the difficulties lurking ahead, Mary in essence said, “I am willing, Lord.” You have my permission to let You work in me so I am a vessel usable for the task you have given me. She said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” This trusting of God’s promise was reviewed at Elizabeth’s homes just a few days later as Elizabeth said to Mary, in Luke 1: 39-45, “In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

As I close today, the haunting question of Elizabeth is for you and me too in God’s assignments for us. She said to Mary, “And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” What was this grant given to Elizabeth? It was another grace upon grace. Elizabeth had found grace in God’s sight to become a mother when she was far past child-bearing days, and she was carrying John the Baptist in her womb and was in her 6th month. Now the mother of her Lord had arrived and grace upon grace, the babe in Elizabeth’s womb leaped for joy at the coming of Mary for she was carrying Jesus. I call us all back from the world’s counterfeits of Christmas, and the devil’s counterfeits of godliness, to humble obedience in our everyday ordinary lives. God will use ordinary people like you and me. We will find His grace, not because we are sinless, not because we have earned His grace, but we will find grace in God’s sight, as we desire to do His will, willing to pay the cost, and as we trust unswervingly in His promises. Merry Christmas to you all. May you too find grace in the eyes of the Lord!