**“God’s Regard”**

Genesis 4:1-15

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

**Luke 18:9-17**

 Pentecost 20, Oct. 22/23, 2022

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

There is **no time, in my life, where I did not know myself (feel myself) blessed by God**. I remember not a single sermon in churches from my pastors. I remember, vaguely, things in my lifetime, good all for the most part, challenges certainly yet brought through challenges and grew up safely and married and had children. Memories, I think, go back to when I might have been **three years old**. My **religious life** had church as a priority (I can’t think of any occasion to miss services for more than 2 weeks **ever**, and that would have had to have been an extended vacation somewhere). As I said, sermons I couldn’t tell you anything about, but from young onward my parents and grandmother and great-grandfather focused upon the activities of the front of the church, and I learned to focus there too as they taught my care there, showing me where we were in a hymnal that I held (whether I could read it or not) and making me to respect that I was in God’s house … almost without failure again, weekly. Great-grandpa said the mealtime prayer when he was alive and we all said “Come, Lord Jesus” each other time. And we said night-time prayers (I remember). And the thing I grew to **know and appreciate soon on** was Aaron’s Benediction at the end of a weekly service. Without hearing that said over me, all might be lost, I thought. But with what it said to me, my weeks to follow were secure and more blest.

“The Lord **bless** you and keep you. The Lord **make His face shine upon you** and **be gracious to you (or “regarding” of you)**. The Lord **lift up His countenance upon you**, and **give you (that way) peace**.” “**Blest**” and “**kept**” **by God** were **things I knew and felt … and still do**. The Lord’s “face shining upon me” / His “countenance upon me” / His “regard” for me, **THAT** I have always craved and wanted to hear (and I remember all of it) every week of 62 years so far / **THAT** I most-notably cherish (and consciously do) as I look back and remember and know. Everything else (because of that fact) has been “**blessed**” rather than “**lucky**”, and it’s because of **“God’s Regard” for me** **(I know that)**. I pray as you look back on your years and weeks, you’ve got a **conclusive joy** **that “God’s Regard” for you has reminded you of as notable**.

**Text**

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector”. God “**regarded**” the prayers of the tax collector. He did not “**regard**” the prayers of the Pharisee. Two brothers “brought to the Lord offerings”. “The Lord **had regard** for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he **had no regard**”. In both cases, God’s “**regard**” could have been upon both men. His “**regard**” could have been upon neither. It was upon one of the two … and “**regard**” is the **blessing and blessedness of God’s notice (His look and attention / His favorable gaze), His “face shined” upon someone / “His countenance lifted” upon someone**.

As I’d said before, **I’d not known God’s “regard” as not being, overall, upon me by promise and experience**. If I’d not heard it petitioned for me most every week of my life, I may have not had that confidence and peace, but I did have that petitioned to me (and it’s been what I most remember about Christendom’s gift from a pastor’s mouth), and I **appreciated it always**. I do not know the Pharisee’s consideration of that, so can’t speak to it; it appears that he’d never really felt the need for it. I do not know Cain’s heart. I see his intent, but don’t know his heart, so don’t know why the blessing of God’s “regard” was not upon his offering.

I just know the reality of **two men pronounced differently**, and don’t ever want to be the man (in each pair) who **did not gain the “regard” of God**. Both judgments and fact statements were made upon four men who were **supposed to be God’s men each**. Pharisees were leaders of the religious. They were **supposed to bestow “regard” from themselves having it**. And Cain was the **firstborn of Eve and Adam**. Eve thought that he was the deliverer and the crusher of Satan’s head, the “Seed” promised born of a woman (her). Neither, however, were **of God’s (at least at that moment) “regard”**. They **should have been but weren’t**. On paper, they made even some better sense than the other men of the comparisons … but **commended the “regard of God” differently**.

Even though it is God’s desire to “**regard**” **everyone**. The only ones **not having it** are those **unappreciative of it has to be the only answer**. Pharisees (often) **appreciated themselves inappropriately** and Cain, well he may have heard his own “press” too often. He was **not** the deliverer / **not** the savior. He wasn’t “the man” even his mom, Eve, thought he would be, and first born of a fallen world was still **first born**, and he may have been fuller of himself than appreciative of the Lord and the Promised Gospel that wasn’t **him**.

**Repentant** tax collectors, though, and a second born **appreciative** of God’s “regard” (evidenced by one’s return of the sacrifice of the best of his flock and a the other’s most humble and non-prideful approach to God as a sinner who knows himself to be that), both Abel and a tax collector demonstrated themselves **appreciative** of, literally, **any** gift of God’s “regard”). ….

**Application**

I’ve come to learn that my confidence in “God’s regard for me” has come **not just** by way of the church’s benediction at the end of its services. It started (I’ve learned) with a mark made upon me (like God put graciously upon Cain) to bless and protect, and beginning of a service (“Invocation” of God’s name, Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit at it) remembers my baptism **into God’s “regard” in Jesus**. I have always (as long as I could read, but even before that memorizing so much of it) said the words of “Confession” in church, and the promise of God’s “regard for me” after confessing in the forgiveness of “Absolution” always felt Good yet has grown more cherished as understood better over time. Pastors have always **preached** forgiveness on humble confession, and it by the grace won for us all through Jesus’ bloodshed upon the cross and **I’ve never failed to hear those Words spoken** (though the contexts have been different, and I don’t remember each, forgiveness from mercy and grace has been the over-arching feature in all one way or another). And since I was about 13, the Holy Meal has fed me Holy Food and, again, seldom has there been two straight weeks (with me) missing that Food consumed by me (almost 50 years running now). That benediction still is my **final Word** … but **not the only Word**. I’ve **appreciated** **it** (I know and recognize) and have evermore grown to **appreciate all the Words**.

That may be **the difference** the parable’s Pharisee and Cain had. **Pride** and **an improper self-image** become heart things that become personal religions apart from **joy in God**. God wants us to joy in Him, and that simply **changes everything**.

I don’t know each of your personal histories in the **enjoyment** of the “regard” of God, but **I know the promise**. For each of you marked by baptism’s cross and God’s name, you **have the start of His favor and, literally, His blessed “regard”**. Your **appreciation of that: in the hearing of it and the liking of it and the consuming of it all the way into your very soul, that’s what God promises to feed and fill up and bless in you**.

Christ died so that you might **have** **His life**, and **that (it / His life)** in abundance. “So, indeed, may the Lord bless **you** and keep **you**. May He, now and always, **make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you**. May the Lord, **for you**, lift up His countenance **upon you** … and **forever, and for every day, give you peace**.”

In Jesus’ name. Amen.