

Blessed are You!

Jesus is known by just about all the world. But which name or story is Jesus best known by? Here today I'm sure all our answers would revolve around Jesus as our Savior and his death on the cross. If I were to ask this in the faculty lounge at U of A, I imagine Jesus would be called a fantasy of the early church. But I wonder how would our country answer that question? I did some looking on the internet and found a survey from the Barna Group. As of Easter 2015, 56% of American adults said that Jesus is God. 26% said he is a religious or spiritual leader. The remaining 18% were not sure. Do those results surprise you? I was surprised. I thought the percentage of people saying Jesus is God would be 40-some percent tops. But when you crunch the numbers, 82% of adults agree that Jesus was either God or a religious teacher. When we step outside of our church, I think we can all agree with the survey. People, in general, say that Jesus was a famous teacher. And it is on today's mountain that we see an example of Jesus' masterful teaching. Christians come to Jesus for his teachings about sin and grace. Curious unbelievers come to be amazed at his wisdom and ability to make the complex simple. And in Jesus' teaching today from the Sermon on the Mount, we continue to learn even more about our God.

Just about anyone who knows about Jesus is vaguely familiar with the Sermon on the Mount. But it didn't dawn on me until I sat down to prepare for today's message that I realized how contrary it is to the world's logic. Nothing better exemplifies this than the Beatitudes which are the verses that begin with **Blessed are the...** All of them start off with a description that isn't found too much outside of Christianity. The **poor in spirit** are those who realize how spiritually worthless they are before God's perfection. **Those who mourn** are those who understand how sad their spiritual situation is and mourn because of it. **The meek** are the humble who are often passed over or taken advantage of. **Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness** want everyone to live with integrity. **The merciful** are those who do not give a person what they deserve. **The pure in heart** are those who can stand before God because they believe they are forgiven. **The peacemakers** are the tireless souls who work for true harmony. **Those who are persecuted because of righteousness** are those who are criticized for living the life that comes from faith.

But when we mourn because of how poor in spirit we are, do you feel blessed? When you strive to live Christian values like meekness, mercy, and peacemaking, do you feel blessed? I know I don't. Rather than feeling blessed, it feels like I'm the odd guy out. And how hard it is to believe we are blessed when this happens. Our Lord tells us to come to his Word regularly so that we may strengthen our faith and fight off the Devil. But how does the world view you for coming to church or putting time aside to read your Bible? They say *"That's a waste of time!"* or *"What's the point? It's not like God listens or cares about you."* These are the persecutions that come from following Christ. And persecution doesn't make us feel all warm and cuddly on the inside.

If you want to get a promotion or recognition for your efforts, what must you do? The answer should be a life full of integrity and hard work. But in the real world, the answer is far from that. Take advantage of the meek and humble. Break the rules where no one will notice. Drop your name wherever you can and suck up to the right people. When Christians live the Beatitudes, it's hard to feel blessed. We're left behind in the dust and the winners gloat over their ill-gotten gains.

But never it is harder to feel blessed than when we consider ourselves before God. Without Christ living in our hearts, there is nothing good in us nor any way we can do anything that pleases him. When I consider how poor in spirit I am and how impure my heart is, I cannot help but mourn. I can do nothing else than what the tax collector did who prayed in the synagogue. While the Pharisee stood in the middle of the crowd so he could pridefully gloat about his sacrificial life, the tax collector stood at a distance. Overcome with grief, he beat his chest and prayed **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**

But it is in that precise moment that our Lord tells us, *“You are blessed! Even though you do not deserve it or feel it, you are blessed!”* Notice in each of the Beatitudes our Lord not only tells us that we are blessed, but how we are blessed. The poor in spirit have the kingdom of heaven. The merciful will be shown mercy. And we see proof for these blessings in the same person who teaches from the mountain – Jesus Christ. He teaches us not only with his words, but with his life full of object lessons and impromptu sermons about why he came. He did not come simply to be a model for teachers to follow. Not simply to be a good influence or role model. No, Jesus came to be our Savior. And to do so, he did what we could never do. He never doubted his blessings. He never faulted under persecution or regretted living the Christian life. Sin never tainted his perfectly pure heart. Because of this, he died the death we cannot. He died a perfect death even though he lived up to all of God’s demands in the law. And this is why we call him our Savior – because his death saves us from hell. Each and every one of your sins were laid upon Jesus when he died on the cross. The punishment that we deserve has been given to Christ instead. And now we look forward to the promised home that is heaven as we live a life full of blessings here on Earth.

Never forget – you are blessed! Are you poor in spirit? You are blessed because the kingdom of heaven is yours. Do you mourn? You are blessed because you will be comforted. Are you meek? You are blessed because you will inherit the earth. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? You are blessed because you will be filled. Are you merciful? You are blessed because you will be shown mercy. Are you pure in heart? You are blessed because you will see God. Are you a peacemaker? You are blessed because you will be called a son or daughter of God. Are you persecuted because of a righteous life? You are blessed because yours is the kingdom of heaven. And as if there were not enough, our Lord supplements his promise with the example of the prophets. The faithful believers before us have gone through the same hardships. They were blessed here on earth and above with heaven. In the same way, we are blessed because of Christ and what he has done for us.

But God’s blessings do not stop with us. They go to others through us. After Jesus finished telling his students how blessed they all were, he also called them the salt and the light of the world. In today’s world, salt gets a bad rap. But in Jesus’ time salt was a precious commodity. It made food taste good. I can attest to that from my couple of years as a bachelor trying to cook for myself. It was hard to get salt in pure form in those days. But its most important use was the preservation of food. In the days before fridges, freezers, and food savers, there were few ways to preserve your food.

Just as salt preserved food from physical decay, so spiritual salt preserves Christians from spiritual decay. This spiritual salt is the Word of God. Whenever we hear and apply God's Word to ourselves, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and blesses us again. But if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word, we remove ourselves from the Holy Spirit. We cut off our supply of salt and run the risk of spiritual decay. Keep on doing this and that spiritual decay will eventually rot the heart. And then what good is the former Christian? Just like salt that has lost its saltiness, they are good for nothing except to be thrown away. The former Christian is like any other unbeliever who must be converted to be saved. As I look out on you today, I know that is not the case. You listen to God's Word and have his salt. You and I are the salt of the earth and resist sin's decay on our hearts because we have the Word of God. Keep coming back to God's Word so that you keep yourselves salty. Tell others about their Savior and how blessed they are so that they too may have God's salt in them.

You are also the light of the world. Scripture depicts the sinful world as darkness and calls Jesus the light. As followers of Jesus, we shine the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. As a city shining on a hill cannot be hidden from the darkness, so Christians cannot hide themselves from sin-darkened unbelievers. Does this sound intimidating? Do you get uncomfortable when the spotlight is on you? You don't have to be. Remember that the light that pierces the darkness is not your light, it's God's light. Where God's light is, he is there with you.

But how can you do this? God has put each of us into different situations with different people. Consider how a Christian mother showed her light and think about how you can let your light shine.

There once was a Christian woman named Monica who was married to an unbeliever. They had 3 children and it was a fight just to get them baptized. Yet despite her husband's unbelief, she did her best to raise her children in a Christian household. When the oldest son was 17, he left the house to pursue further education. It did not take long for him to forsake the Christian faith. Monica was overcome with grief and let her light shine the only way she knew how – she prayed for her son and constantly encouraged him to listen and study the Scriptures. But her son did not listen; he continued to live in sin's darkness. For 14 years Monica continued to let her light shine despite her son's wild living. Finally one day the son went to hear a talented preacher partly because of curiosity but also because of his mother's incessant light shining. It did not take long for the Holy Spirit to bring that wayward son back into the Christian fold once he was back in Scriptures. Monica certainly rejoiced when her son came back into the light and lived once again in God's blessings.

Are you curious who the son was? His name was Augustine and was one of the most influential Christians in the Western world. The Holy Spirit blessed Augustine with an incredible mind. He wrote books that explained and defended the Christian faith for centuries after his death in 430 A.D. But if it were not for Monica and her light shining, I don't know if Augustine would have come back to the Christianity faith. But because Monica let her light shine where God placed her in life, she brought God's blessings not only on her son but upon the entire world. How could you let your light shine where God has placed you?

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But when we mourn because of how poor in spirit we are, do you feel blessed? When you strive to live Christian values like meekness, mercy, and peacemaking, do you feel blessed? I know I don't. Rather than feeling blessed, it feels like I'm the odd guy out. And how hard it is to believe we are blessed when this happens. Our Lord tells us to come to his Word regularly so that we may strengthen our faith and fight off the Devil. But how does the world view you for coming to church or putting time aside to read your Bible? They say *"That's a waste of time!"* or *"What's the point? It's not like God listens or cares about you."* These are the persecutions that come from following Christ. And persecution doesn't make us feel all warm and cuddly on the inside.

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But never it is harder to feel blessed than when we consider ourselves before God. Without Christ living in our hearts, there is nothing good in us nor any way we can do anything that pleases him. When I consider how poor in spirit I am and how impure my heart is, I cannot help but mourn. I can do nothing else than what the tax collector did who prayed in the synagogue. While the Pharisee stood in the middle of the crowd so he could pridefully gloat about his sacrificial life, the tax collector stood at a distance. Overcome with grief, he beat his chest and prayed **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**

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But God’s blessings do not stop with us. They go to others through us. After Jesus finished telling his students how blessed they all were, he also called them the salt and the light of the world. In today’s world, salt gets a bad rap. But in Jesus’ time salt was a precious commodity. It made food taste good. I can attest to that from my couple of years as a bachelor trying to cook for myself. It was hard to get salt in pure form in those days. But its most important use was the preservation of food. In the days before fridges, freezers, and food savers, there were few ways to preserve your food.

Just as salt preserved food from physical decay, so spiritual salt preserves Christians from spiritual decay. This spiritual salt is the Word of God. Whenever we hear and apply God's Word to ourselves, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and blesses us again. But if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word, we remove ourselves from the Holy Spirit. We cut off our supply of salt and run the risk of spiritual decay. Keep on doing this and that spiritual decay will eventually rot the heart. And then what good is the former Christian? Just like salt that has lost its saltiness, they are good for nothing except to be thrown away. The former Christian is like any other unbeliever who must be converted to be saved. As I look out on you today, I know that is not the case. You listen to God's Word and have his salt. You and I are the salt of the earth and resist sin's decay on our hearts because we have the Word of God. Keep coming back to God's Word so that you keep yourselves salty. Tell others about their Savior and how blessed they are so that they too may have God's salt in them.

You are also the light of the world. Scripture depicts the sinful world as darkness and calls Jesus the light. As followers of Jesus, we shine the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. As a city shining on a hill cannot be hidden from the darkness, so Christians cannot hide themselves from sin-darkened unbelievers. Does this sound intimidating? Do you get uncomfortable when the spotlight is on you? You don't have to be. Remember that the light that pierces the darkness is not your light, it's God's light. Where God's light is, he is there with you.

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But when we mourn because of how poor in spirit we are, do you feel blessed? When you strive to live Christian values like meekness, mercy, and peacemaking, do you feel blessed? I know I don't. Rather than feeling blessed, it feels like I'm the odd guy out. And how hard it is to believe we are blessed when this happens. Our Lord tells us to come to his Word regularly so that we may strengthen our faith and fight off the Devil. But how does the world view you for coming to church or putting time aside to read your Bible? They say *"That's a waste of time!"* or *"What's the point? It's not like God listens or cares about you."* These are the persecutions that come from following Christ. And persecution doesn't make us feel all warm and cuddly on the inside.

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But never it is harder to feel blessed than when we consider ourselves before God. Without Christ living in our hearts, there is nothing good in us nor any way we can do anything that pleases him. When I consider how poor in spirit I am and how impure my heart is, I cannot help but mourn. I can do nothing else than what the tax collector did who prayed in the synagogue. While the Pharisee stood in the middle of the crowd so he could pridefully gloat about his sacrificial life, the tax collector stood at a distance. Overcome with grief, he beat his chest and prayed **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**

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But God’s blessings do not stop with us. They go to others through us. After Jesus finished telling his students how blessed they all were, he also called them the salt and the light of the world. In today’s world, salt gets a bad rap. But in Jesus’ time salt was a precious commodity. It made food taste good. I can attest to that from my couple of years as a bachelor trying to cook for myself. It was hard to get salt in pure form in those days. But its most important use was the preservation of food. In the days before fridges, freezers, and food savers, there were few ways to preserve your food.

Just as salt preserved food from physical decay, so spiritual salt preserves Christians from spiritual decay. This spiritual salt is the Word of God. Whenever we hear and apply God's Word to ourselves, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and blesses us again. But if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word, we remove ourselves from the Holy Spirit. We cut off our supply of salt and run the risk of spiritual decay. Keep on doing this and that spiritual decay will eventually rot the heart. And then what good is the former Christian? Just like salt that has lost its saltiness, they are good for nothing except to be thrown away. The former Christian is like any other unbeliever who must be converted to be saved. As I look out on you today, I know that is not the case. You listen to God's Word and have his salt. You and I are the salt of the earth and resist sin's decay on our hearts because we have the Word of God. Keep coming back to God's Word so that you keep yourselves salty. Tell others about their Savior and how blessed they are so that they too may have God's salt in them.

You are also the light of the world. Scripture depicts the sinful world as darkness and calls Jesus the light. As followers of Jesus, we shine the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. As a city shining on a hill cannot be hidden from the darkness, so Christians cannot hide themselves from sin-darkened unbelievers. Does this sound intimidating? Do you get uncomfortable when the spotlight is on you? You don't have to be. Remember that the light that pierces the darkness is not your light, it's God's light. Where God's light is, he is there with you.

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But when we mourn because of how poor in spirit we are, do you feel blessed? When you strive to live Christian values like meekness, mercy, and peacemaking, do you feel blessed? I know I don't. Rather than feeling blessed, it feels like I'm the odd guy out. And how hard it is to believe we are blessed when this happens. Our Lord tells us to come to his Word regularly so that we may strengthen our faith and fight off the Devil. But how does the world view you for coming to church or putting time aside to read your Bible? They say *"That's a waste of time!"* or *"What's the point? It's not like God listens or cares about you."* These are the persecutions that come from following Christ. And persecution doesn't make us feel all warm and cuddly on the inside.

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But never it is harder to feel blessed than when we consider ourselves before God. Without Christ living in our hearts, there is nothing good in us nor any way we can do anything that pleases him. When I consider how poor in spirit I am and how impure my heart is, I cannot help but mourn. I can do nothing else than what the tax collector did who prayed in the synagogue. While the Pharisee stood in the middle of the crowd so he could pridefully gloat about his sacrificial life, the tax collector stood at a distance. Overcome with grief, he beat his chest and prayed **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**

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But God’s blessings do not stop with us. They go to others through us. After Jesus finished telling his students how blessed they all were, he also called them the salt and the light of the world. In today’s world, salt gets a bad rap. But in Jesus’ time salt was a precious commodity. It made food taste good. I can attest to that from my couple of years as a bachelor trying to cook for myself. It was hard to get salt in pure form in those days. But its most important use was the preservation of food. In the days before fridges, freezers, and food savers, there were few ways to preserve your food.

Just as salt preserved food from physical decay, so spiritual salt preserves Christians from spiritual decay. This spiritual salt is the Word of God. Whenever we hear and apply God's Word to ourselves, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and blesses us again. But if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word, we remove ourselves from the Holy Spirit. We cut off our supply of salt and run the risk of spiritual decay. Keep on doing this and that spiritual decay will eventually rot the heart. And then what good is the former Christian? Just like salt that has lost its saltiness, they are good for nothing except to be thrown away. The former Christian is like any other unbeliever who must be converted to be saved. As I look out on you today, I know that is not the case. You listen to God's Word and have his salt. You and I are the salt of the earth and resist sin's decay on our hearts because we have the Word of God. Keep coming back to God's Word so that you keep yourselves salty. Tell others about their Savior and how blessed they are so that they too may have God's salt in them.

You are also the light of the world. Scripture depicts the sinful world as darkness and calls Jesus the light. As followers of Jesus, we shine the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. As a city shining on a hill cannot be hidden from the darkness, so Christians cannot hide themselves from sin-darkened unbelievers. Does this sound intimidating? Do you get uncomfortable when the spotlight is on you? You don't have to be. Remember that the light that pierces the darkness is not your light, it's God's light. Where God's light is, he is there with you.

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But when we mourn because of how poor in spirit we are, do you feel blessed? When you strive to live Christian values like meekness, mercy, and peacemaking, do you feel blessed? I know I don't. Rather than feeling blessed, it feels like I'm the odd guy out. And how hard it is to believe we are blessed when this happens. Our Lord tells us to come to his Word regularly so that we may strengthen our faith and fight off the Devil. But how does the world view you for coming to church or putting time aside to read your Bible? They say *"That's a waste of time!"* or *"What's the point? It's not like God listens or cares about you."* These are the persecutions that come from following Christ. And persecution doesn't make us feel all warm and cuddly on the inside.

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But never it is harder to feel blessed than when we consider ourselves before God. Without Christ living in our hearts, there is nothing good in us nor any way we can do anything that pleases him. When I consider how poor in spirit I am and how impure my heart is, I cannot help but mourn. I can do nothing else than what the tax collector did who prayed in the synagogue. While the Pharisee stood in the middle of the crowd so he could pridefully gloat about his sacrificial life, the tax collector stood at a distance. Overcome with grief, he beat his chest and prayed **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**

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But God’s blessings do not stop with us. They go to others through us. After Jesus finished telling his students how blessed they all were, he also called them the salt and the light of the world. In today’s world, salt gets a bad rap. But in Jesus’ time salt was a precious commodity. It made food taste good. I can attest to that from my couple of years as a bachelor trying to cook for myself. It was hard to get salt in pure form in those days. But its most important use was the preservation of food. In the days before fridges, freezers, and food savers, there were few ways to preserve your food.

Just as salt preserved food from physical decay, so spiritual salt preserves Christians from spiritual decay. This spiritual salt is the Word of God. Whenever we hear and apply God's Word to ourselves, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and blesses us again. But if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word, we remove ourselves from the Holy Spirit. We cut off our supply of salt and run the risk of spiritual decay. Keep on doing this and that spiritual decay will eventually rot the heart. And then what good is the former Christian? Just like salt that has lost its saltiness, they are good for nothing except to be thrown away. The former Christian is like any other unbeliever who must be converted to be saved. As I look out on you today, I know that is not the case. You listen to God's Word and have his salt. You and I are the salt of the earth and resist sin's decay on our hearts because we have the Word of God. Keep coming back to God's Word so that you keep yourselves salty. Tell others about their Savior and how blessed they are so that they too may have God's salt in them.

You are also the light of the world. Scripture depicts the sinful world as darkness and calls Jesus the light. As followers of Jesus, we shine the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. As a city shining on a hill cannot be hidden from the darkness, so Christians cannot hide themselves from sin-darkened unbelievers. Does this sound intimidating? Do you get uncomfortable when the spotlight is on you? You don't have to be. Remember that the light that pierces the darkness is not your light, it's God's light. Where God's light is, he is there with you.

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But when we mourn because of how poor in spirit we are, do you feel blessed? When you strive to live Christian values like meekness, mercy, and peacemaking, do you feel blessed? I know I don't. Rather than feeling blessed, it feels like I'm the odd guy out. And how hard it is to believe we are blessed when this happens. Our Lord tells us to come to his Word regularly so that we may strengthen our faith and fight off the Devil. But how does the world view you for coming to church or putting time aside to read your Bible? They say *"That's a waste of time!"* or *"What's the point? It's not like God listens or cares about you."* These are the persecutions that come from following Christ. And persecution doesn't make us feel all warm and cuddly on the inside.

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But never it is harder to feel blessed than when we consider ourselves before God. Without Christ living in our hearts, there is nothing good in us nor any way we can do anything that pleases him. When I consider how poor in spirit I am and how impure my heart is, I cannot help but mourn. I can do nothing else than what the tax collector did who prayed in the synagogue. While the Pharisee stood in the middle of the crowd so he could pridefully gloat about his sacrificial life, the tax collector stood at a distance. Overcome with grief, he beat his chest and prayed **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**

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But God’s blessings do not stop with us. They go to others through us. After Jesus finished telling his students how blessed they all were, he also called them the salt and the light of the world. In today’s world, salt gets a bad rap. But in Jesus’ time salt was a precious commodity. It made food taste good. I can attest to that from my couple of years as a bachelor trying to cook for myself. It was hard to get salt in pure form in those days. But its most important use was the preservation of food. In the days before fridges, freezers, and food savers, there were few ways to preserve your food.

Just as salt preserved food from physical decay, so spiritual salt preserves Christians from spiritual decay. This spiritual salt is the Word of God. Whenever we hear and apply God's Word to ourselves, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and blesses us again. But if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word, we remove ourselves from the Holy Spirit. We cut off our supply of salt and run the risk of spiritual decay. Keep on doing this and that spiritual decay will eventually rot the heart. And then what good is the former Christian? Just like salt that has lost its saltiness, they are good for nothing except to be thrown away. The former Christian is like any other unbeliever who must be converted to be saved. As I look out on you today, I know that is not the case. You listen to God's Word and have his salt. You and I are the salt of the earth and resist sin's decay on our hearts because we have the Word of God. Keep coming back to God's Word so that you keep yourselves salty. Tell others about their Savior and how blessed they are so that they too may have God's salt in them.

You are also the light of the world. Scripture depicts the sinful world as darkness and calls Jesus the light. As followers of Jesus, we shine the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. As a city shining on a hill cannot be hidden from the darkness, so Christians cannot hide themselves from sin-darkened unbelievers. Does this sound intimidating? Do you get uncomfortable when the spotlight is on you? You don't have to be. Remember that the light that pierces the darkness is not your light, it's God's light. Where God's light is, he is there with you.

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But when we mourn because of how poor in spirit we are, do you feel blessed? When you strive to live Christian values like meekness, mercy, and peacemaking, do you feel blessed? I know I don't. Rather than feeling blessed, it feels like I'm the odd guy out. And how hard it is to believe we are blessed when this happens. Our Lord tells us to come to his Word regularly so that we may strengthen our faith and fight off the Devil. But how does the world view you for coming to church or putting time aside to read your Bible? They say *"That's a waste of time!"* or *"What's the point? It's not like God listens or cares about you."* These are the persecutions that come from following Christ. And persecution doesn't make us feel all warm and cuddly on the inside.

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But never it is harder to feel blessed than when we consider ourselves before God. Without Christ living in our hearts, there is nothing good in us nor any way we can do anything that pleases him. When I consider how poor in spirit I am and how impure my heart is, I cannot help but mourn. I can do nothing else than what the tax collector did who prayed in the synagogue. While the Pharisee stood in the middle of the crowd so he could pridefully gloat about his sacrificial life, the tax collector stood at a distance. Overcome with grief, he beat his chest and prayed **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**

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But God’s blessings do not stop with us. They go to others through us. After Jesus finished telling his students how blessed they all were, he also called them the salt and the light of the world. In today’s world, salt gets a bad rap. But in Jesus’ time salt was a precious commodity. It made food taste good. I can attest to that from my couple of years as a bachelor trying to cook for myself. It was hard to get salt in pure form in those days. But its most important use was the preservation of food. In the days before fridges, freezers, and food savers, there were few ways to preserve your food.

Just as salt preserved food from physical decay, so spiritual salt preserves Christians from spiritual decay. This spiritual salt is the Word of God. Whenever we hear and apply God's Word to ourselves, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and blesses us again. But if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word, we remove ourselves from the Holy Spirit. We cut off our supply of salt and run the risk of spiritual decay. Keep on doing this and that spiritual decay will eventually rot the heart. And then what good is the former Christian? Just like salt that has lost its saltiness, they are good for nothing except to be thrown away. The former Christian is like any other unbeliever who must be converted to be saved. As I look out on you today, I know that is not the case. You listen to God's Word and have his salt. You and I are the salt of the earth and resist sin's decay on our hearts because we have the Word of God. Keep coming back to God's Word so that you keep yourselves salty. Tell others about their Savior and how blessed they are so that they too may have God's salt in them.

You are also the light of the world. Scripture depicts the sinful world as darkness and calls Jesus the light. As followers of Jesus, we shine the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. As a city shining on a hill cannot be hidden from the darkness, so Christians cannot hide themselves from sin-darkened unbelievers. Does this sound intimidating? Do you get uncomfortable when the spotlight is on you? You don't have to be. Remember that the light that pierces the darkness is not your light, it's God's light. Where God's light is, he is there with you.

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But when we mourn because of how poor in spirit we are, do you feel blessed? When you strive to live Christian values like meekness, mercy, and peacemaking, do you feel blessed? I know I don't. Rather than feeling blessed, it feels like I'm the odd guy out. And how hard it is to believe we are blessed when this happens. Our Lord tells us to come to his Word regularly so that we may strengthen our faith and fight off the Devil. But how does the world view you for coming to church or putting time aside to read your Bible? They say *"That's a waste of time!"* or *"What's the point? It's not like God listens or cares about you."* These are the persecutions that come from following Christ. And persecution doesn't make us feel all warm and cuddly on the inside.

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But never it is harder to feel blessed than when we consider ourselves before God. Without Christ living in our hearts, there is nothing good in us nor any way we can do anything that pleases him. When I consider how poor in spirit I am and how impure my heart is, I cannot help but mourn. I can do nothing else than what the tax collector did who prayed in the synagogue. While the Pharisee stood in the middle of the crowd so he could pridefully gloat about his sacrificial life, the tax collector stood at a distance. Overcome with grief, he beat his chest and prayed **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**

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But God’s blessings do not stop with us. They go to others through us. After Jesus finished telling his students how blessed they all were, he also called them the salt and the light of the world. In today’s world, salt gets a bad rap. But in Jesus’ time salt was a precious commodity. It made food taste good. I can attest to that from my couple of years as a bachelor trying to cook for myself. It was hard to get salt in pure form in those days. But its most important use was the preservation of food. In the days before fridges, freezers, and food savers, there were few ways to preserve your food.

Just as salt preserved food from physical decay, so spiritual salt preserves Christians from spiritual decay. This spiritual salt is the Word of God. Whenever we hear and apply God's Word to ourselves, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and blesses us again. But if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word, we remove ourselves from the Holy Spirit. We cut off our supply of salt and run the risk of spiritual decay. Keep on doing this and that spiritual decay will eventually rot the heart. And then what good is the former Christian? Just like salt that has lost its saltiness, they are good for nothing except to be thrown away. The former Christian is like any other unbeliever who must be converted to be saved. As I look out on you today, I know that is not the case. You listen to God's Word and have his salt. You and I are the salt of the earth and resist sin's decay on our hearts because we have the Word of God. Keep coming back to God's Word so that you keep yourselves salty. Tell others about their Savior and how blessed they are so that they too may have God's salt in them.

You are also the light of the world. Scripture depicts the sinful world as darkness and calls Jesus the light. As followers of Jesus, we shine the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. As a city shining on a hill cannot be hidden from the darkness, so Christians cannot hide themselves from sin-darkened unbelievers. Does this sound intimidating? Do you get uncomfortable when the spotlight is on you? You don't have to be. Remember that the light that pierces the darkness is not your light, it's God's light. Where God's light is, he is there with you.

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Blessed are You!

Jesus is known by just about all the world. But which name or story is Jesus best known by? Here today I'm sure all our answers would revolve around Jesus as our Savior and his death on the cross. If I were to ask this in the faculty lounge at U of A, I imagine Jesus would be called a fantasy of the early church. But I wonder how would our country answer that question? I did some looking on the internet and found a survey from the Barna Group. As of Easter 2015, 56% of American adults said that Jesus is God. 26% said he is a religious or spiritual leader. The remaining 18% were not sure. Do those results surprise you? I was surprised. I thought the percentage of people saying Jesus is God would be 40-some percent tops. But when you crunch the numbers, 82% of adults agree that Jesus was either God or a religious teacher. When we step outside of our church, I think we can all agree with the survey. People, in general, say that Jesus was a famous teacher. And it is on today's mountain that we see an example of Jesus' masterful teaching. Christians come to Jesus for his teachings about sin and grace. Curious unbelievers come to be amazed at his wisdom and ability to make the complex simple. And in Jesus' teaching today from the Sermon on the Mount, we continue to learn even more about our God.

Just about anyone who knows about Jesus is vaguely familiar with the Sermon on the Mount. But it didn't dawn on me until I sat down to prepare for today's message that I realized how contrary it is to the world's logic. Nothing better exemplifies this than the Beatitudes which are the verses that begin with **Blessed are the...** All of them start off with a description that isn't found too much outside of Christianity. The **poor in spirit** are those who realize how spiritually worthless they are before God's perfection. **Those who mourn** are those who understand how sad their spiritual situation is and mourn because of it. **The meek** are the humble who are often passed over or taken advantage of. **Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness** want everyone to live with integrity. **The merciful** are those who do not give a person what they deserve. **The pure in heart** are those who can stand before God because they believe they are forgiven. **The peacemakers** are the tireless souls who work for true harmony. **Those who are persecuted because of righteousness** are those who are criticized for living the life that comes from faith.

But when we mourn because of how poor in spirit we are, do you feel blessed? When you strive to live Christian values like meekness, mercy, and peacemaking, do you feel blessed? I know I don't. Rather than feeling blessed, it feels like I'm the odd guy out. And how hard it is to believe we are blessed when this happens. Our Lord tells us to come to his Word regularly so that we may strengthen our faith and fight off the Devil. But how does the world view you for coming to church or putting time aside to read your Bible? They say *"That's a waste of time!"* or *"What's the point? It's not like God listens or cares about you."* These are the persecutions that come from following Christ. And persecution doesn't make us feel all warm and cuddly on the inside.

If you want to get a promotion or recognition for your efforts, what must you do? The answer should be a life full of integrity and hard work. But in the real world, the answer is far from that. Take advantage of the meek and humble. Break the rules where no one will notice. Drop your name wherever you can and suck up to the right people. When Christians live the Beatitudes, it's hard to feel blessed. We're left behind in the dust and the winners gloat over their ill-gotten gains.

But never it is harder to feel blessed than when we consider ourselves before God. Without Christ living in our hearts, there is nothing good in us nor any way we can do anything that pleases him. When I consider how poor in spirit I am and how impure my heart is, I cannot help but mourn. I can do nothing else than what the tax collector did who prayed in the synagogue. While the Pharisee stood in the middle of the crowd so he could pridefully gloat about his sacrificial life, the tax collector stood at a distance. Overcome with grief, he beat his chest and prayed **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**

But it is in that precise moment that our Lord tells us, *“You are blessed! Even though you do not deserve it or feel it, you are blessed!”* Notice in each of the Beatitudes our Lord not only tells us that we are blessed, but how we are blessed. The poor in spirit have the kingdom of heaven. The merciful will be shown mercy. And we see proof for these blessings in the same person who teaches from the mountain – Jesus Christ. He teaches us not only with his words, but with his life full of object lessons and impromptu sermons about why he came. He did not come simply to be a model for teachers to follow. Not simply to be a good influence or role model. No, Jesus came to be our Savior. And to do so, he did what we could never do. He never doubted his blessings. He never faulted under persecution or regretted living the Christian life. Sin never tainted his perfectly pure heart. Because of this, he died the death we cannot. He died a perfect death even though he lived up to all of God’s demands in the law. And this is why we call him our Savior – because his death saves us from hell. Each and every one of your sins were laid upon Jesus when he died on the cross. The punishment that we deserve has been given to Christ instead. And now we look forward to the promised home that is heaven as we live a life full of blessings here on Earth.

Never forget – you are blessed! Are you poor in spirit? You are blessed because the kingdom of heaven is yours. Do you mourn? You are blessed because you will be comforted. Are you meek? You are blessed because you will inherit the earth. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? You are blessed because you will be filled. Are you merciful? You are blessed because you will be shown mercy. Are you pure in heart? You are blessed because you will see God. Are you a peacemaker? You are blessed because you will be called a son or daughter of God. Are you persecuted because of a righteous life? You are blessed because yours is the kingdom of heaven. And as if there were not enough, our Lord supplements his promise with the example of the prophets. The faithful believers before us have gone through the same hardships. They were blessed here on earth and above with heaven. In the same way, we are blessed because of Christ and what he has done for us.

But God’s blessings do not stop with us. They go to others through us. After Jesus finished telling his students how blessed they all were, he also called them the salt and the light of the world. In today’s world, salt gets a bad rap. But in Jesus’ time salt was a precious commodity. It made food taste good. I can attest to that from my couple of years as a bachelor trying to cook for myself. It was hard to get salt in pure form in those days. But its most important use was the preservation of food. In the days before fridges, freezers, and food savers, there were few ways to preserve your food.

Just as salt preserved food from physical decay, so spiritual salt preserves Christians from spiritual decay. This spiritual salt is the Word of God. Whenever we hear and apply God's Word to ourselves, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and blesses us again. But if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word, we remove ourselves from the Holy Spirit. We cut off our supply of salt and run the risk of spiritual decay. Keep on doing this and that spiritual decay will eventually rot the heart. And then what good is the former Christian? Just like salt that has lost its saltiness, they are good for nothing except to be thrown away. The former Christian is like any other unbeliever who must be converted to be saved. As I look out on you today, I know that is not the case. You listen to God's Word and have his salt. You and I are the salt of the earth and resist sin's decay on our hearts because we have the Word of God. Keep coming back to God's Word so that you keep yourselves salty. Tell others about their Savior and how blessed they are so that they too may have God's salt in them.

You are also the light of the world. Scripture depicts the sinful world as darkness and calls Jesus the light. As followers of Jesus, we shine the light of Jesus into this sin-darkened world. As a city shining on a hill cannot be hidden from the darkness, so Christians cannot hide themselves from sin-darkened unbelievers. Does this sound intimidating? Do you get uncomfortable when the spotlight is on you? You don't have to be. Remember that the light that pierces the darkness is not your light, it's God's light. Where God's light is, he is there with you.

But how can you do this? God has put each of us into different situations with different people. Consider how a Christian mother showed her light and think about how you can let your light shine.

There once was a Christian woman named Monica who was married to an unbeliever. They had 3 children and it was a fight just to get them baptized. Yet despite her husband's unbelief, she did her best to raise her children in a Christian household. When the oldest son was 17, he left the house to pursue further education. It did not take long for him to forsake the Christian faith. Monica was overcome with grief and let her light shine the only way she knew how – she prayed for her son and constantly encouraged him to listen and study the Scriptures. But her son did not listen; he continued to live in sin's darkness. For 14 years Monica continued to let her light shine despite her son's wild living. Finally one day the son went to hear a talented preacher partly because of curiosity but also because of his mother's incessant light shining. It did not take long for the Holy Spirit to bring that wayward son back into the Christian fold once he was back in Scriptures. Monica certainly rejoiced when her son came back into the light and lived once again in God's blessings.

Are you curious who the son was? His name was Augustine and was one of the most influential Christians in the Western world. The Holy Spirit blessed Augustine with an incredible mind. He wrote books that explained and defended the Christian faith for centuries after his death in 430 A.D. But if it were not for Monica and her light shining, I don't know if Augustine would have come back to the Christianity faith. But because Monica let her light shine where God placed her in life, she brought God's blessings not only on her son but upon the entire world. How could you let your light shine where God has placed you?

God has blessed you and me to be part of the 56% of American adults who say that Jesus is God. But he is more than that for you and me. He is our teacher who shows us how blessed we are. Whenever we face hardships in this world and face the cold reality of our sins, our Lord blesses us. He blesses us with the promise of heaven and peace on earth. He blesses you with his salt to resist sin's decay. He blesses you with the light of our Savior so you can let it shine in this sin-darkened world. Rejoice! Rejoice in the blessings God has given to you! Live in your blessings and **let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.** Amen.