

**Blessed by Jesus:**  
**January 29, 2023**

**[Sing - Hot Time in the Old Town] [1 Cow]**

What do you know about...  
The Great Chicago fire?

Well... the fire burned for three days...  
It began on October 8th 1871...  
Until October 10th.

It caused 200 million dollars worth of damage.  
If we convert that into today's money...  
It would be over 4.8 BILLION dollars...  
Worth of damage.

Around 300 people... perished.  
And it burned 3 square miles...  
Of downtown Chicago.

Strangely enough...  
There was another disastrous fire...  
That very same day...  
In Peshtigo Wisconsin...  
1.2 million acres of forest...  
Burned to the ground.

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Anyway... according to the song we sang...  
The Great Chicago fire was started by... a cow.  
Mrs. O'Leary's cow... in fact.

But guess what. It's not true.

It was a rumor started by a newspaper reporter...  
Named Michael Ahern...  
He retracted his false statements...  
20 years later... in 1893...

But it didn't matter.  
It was too late.  
The damage had been done...  
The lie caught on...  
And people believed...  
What people what people wanted to believe...

As a result... Mrs. O'Leary...  
Who was a real living breathing person...  
Had to deal with...  
Anti-immigrant... Anti-Catholic... Anti-Irish... Attitudes...  
Her whole lifelong...  
Until she died in 1894.

Then in 1997... 103 years later...  
The city of Chicago...  
Exonerated her...  
And the cow.

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This whole situation...  
That I'm describing today...  
Is what you call a misconception...  
That's when we think something is true...  
Whether or not... it is true.

But the truth is the truth... right?

The truth is not determined...  
By the majority of people...  
Holding a certain specific idea.  
And repeating it over and over again.  
Or posting it over and over again...  
Until everyone thinks it's true.

Popularity does not make something true.

The truth has to be something else.  
The truth has to mean more.  
The truth has to be true.

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I can give you another example. **[2 Twinkies]**  
Of something we all think we know.  
How long do TWINKIES last?

They are rumored to be eternal.  
I read a comment that said...  
They haven't made any new Twinkies...  
Since the factory opened...  
Back in 1930.

They just keep changing the packaging.

But it's not true. They don't last forever.  
According to the manufacturer...  
Twinkies only last...  
27 days.

Then the beef fat... ummm... that's right... the beef fat...  
In the delicious creamy center...  
Begins to go rancid.

Also the outside cake...  
Dries out and becomes unpleasantly crusty.

So. It's not true. Twinkies do not last forever.  
Not even a month...  
If you want it to taste good.

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One more.... Ok?  
And even before I open my mouth...  
I fully understand...  
This misconception... is blasphemous...  
Especially here in Colorado.

But did you know... **[3 Cowboy Hats]**  
That cowboys...  
In the Old West...  
I'm talking that time period...  
When the country was first being expanded...  
From early 1800's on...  
Did you know...  
That cowboys did not wear cowboy hats.

Nope. They typically wore Derby's...  
Like in this picture...  
Of the Fort Worth Five...  
That Infamous group of outlaws...  
Including Butch Cassidy...  
And the Sundance Kid.

They don't look...  
So impressive...  
Quite as tough... or scary...  
Wearing their fancy Bowler hats!

But they didn't have a choice...  
They couldn't wear a good old cowboy hat...  
Because they didn't exist...  
Until they were created...  
By John Stetson...  
Back in 1865.

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The first hat he made... was called... **[4 Boss of the Plains]**  
The Boss of the Plains...  
It looked like this!  
Still not quite...  
What we think of...  
As a cowboy hat.

It wasn't until 1872...  
That people could custom order...  
The kinds of hats...  
Our cowboys wear today!

By that time...  
The Old West...  
Was pretty much settled...  
And all those John Wayne...  
Cowboy days were done.

Oh. By the way... as long as I'm ruining everything...  
You should also know...  
John Wayne was a farm boy from Iowa.

Anyway...

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The reason I'm focusing on all these misconceptions today...  
Is because of the teaching... **[5 Jesus Teaching]**  
That Jesus is doing...  
In our gospel lessons.

I'm pretty sure...  
That the words he speaks...  
Are offensive...  
To the people...  
Who knew the alleged truth...  
Of who God is...  
What God wants...  
How we are supposed to live our lives...

There was back then...  
And there still is today...  
The idea... that we understand...  
How this universe works.

It's simple...  
We think... if we are good people...  
You know... the kind of people God loves...  
Then we will be blessed.

We are blessed or cursed...  
As a direct result of our own action...

Which means... if we are good people...  
We will have blessings in this world.  
We will have success...  
Power... Wealth... Influence... Health.  
We will have whatever we want.

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And it's interesting...  
That Jesus doesn't say...  
That any of those things...  
Should be... a natural expectation...  
Of people who follow Christ.

He doesn't say...  
Blessed are the poor...  
Because I'm gonna make them rich.

He doesn't say...  
Blessed are the hungry for power...  
Because I will make them even more successful.

He doesn't say...  
Blessed are you...  
When you are famous...  
When everyone knows your name...  
Because then... that proves... I love you!

See... the problem is...  
That often we think...  
There is a cause and effect relationship...  
Between the things that we do... and say...  
The way that we live our lives...  
And the immediate results...  
Of how God acts in our lives.

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For example... I have friends... and family members...  
Who have said...  
I can't darken the doorstep of a church...  
Because the roof will fall in.

I mean... that's funny right...  
But listen to what they are really saying...  
They are saying...  
That they are so far...  
From living a life...  
That they think God would approve of...  
That they live in fear...  
That they are going to be punished.  
For the way they live.

Or the opposite...  
When someone says to me...  
Why did this person die...  
Why did they get cancer...  
Why did this bad thing happen...  
To this good person.

As if... they made some kind of mistake...  
That is beyond the mercy of God...  
And now... are being punished...

For not believing enough...  
Or not doing the exact right thing...  
Or not being all that God expected them to be...  
So... now... God is getting them.

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Is it just me?  
Do you hear those things...  
Out in the world?  
Have you thought those things...  
In your own heart?

Well... Jesus is trying to undo...  
These commonly held...  
Misconceptions...

About how God works...  
And who God loves.

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So let's go through a couple of Jesus' teachings. **[6 The Beatitudes]**  
First off... they are called the Beatitudes... which means blessed.  
And Jesus is turning the idea of who is blessed... upside down.

First Beatitude. He says blessed are the poor in spirit.  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What does it mean... to be poor in spirit?  
Some people try to make this about wealth...  
In order to be blessed I have to be poor.  
But that's not what it's saying.

To be poor in spirit... **[7 Poor in Spirit]**  
Should be held in opposition...  
To the idea of being...  
Proud in spirit.

This is an issue of humility...  
Verses arrogance.

The word poor... means helpless...  
Powerless to accomplish an end.

So poor in spirit... means...  
We can't do it... on our own.  
We can't make ourselves right with God...  
We can't gain the kingdom of heaven...  
By our own means.

And it's arrogant... to think we can.

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Last week... Pastor Ryan talked about this...  
Admitting that "I can't do it".  
Well... the whole time I listened to his sermon...  
I kept thinking... of Philippians 4:13...  
I can do all things... through Christ who strengthens me.

It doesn't say... I can do all things...  
Like I am able to accomplish...  
Whatever I want to accomplish...

It says... I can do all things... through CHRIST...  
Who strengthens me.

It's not me. It's him.

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This beatitude is an invitation... from Jesus...  
To be humble in our relationship with God.  
To understand... that we are on the receiving end.  
We need God.

God doesn't need us.  
BUT God loves us.

And when we humbly come before God...  
No matter who we are...  
Or where we have been...  
Or what we have done...

If we come humbly before God...  
We are given us the Kingdom of heaven.

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There's a story... that when Martin Luther died...  
He had a note in his pocket.  
The note said...  
We are all beggars. This is true.

I like that... it's understanding...  
That everything comes from God.  
We receive with thankful hearts...

And when we have a right relationship...  
With the source of our life and hope.  
We see ourselves as blessed...  
All the time...  
No matter what.

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I also want to talk a minute about the second beatitude. **[8 Mourn]**  
Blessed are those who mourn...  
For they will be comforted.

Just this week...  
In the Wednesday morning Bible study...  
We were talking about our cultural discomfort...  
With death and mourning.

How our families...  
Don't want to talk about death.  
How the plans that we make...  
Sometimes scare the people around us.

We also talked about...  
How the time of mourning...  
Has become so short...

Overruled... by the need to be convenient...  
For all our family...  
To set a date.

But mourning is a natural part of our life...  
It's the way... that we express...  
That deep felt sense of loss...

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You know... Lisa Marie Presley died recently...

Sarah Ferguson... the Duchess of York spoke...  
At her memorial service.  
I didn't see much of the service...  
But I heard Sarah Ferguson say...  
That the Queen mother often said to her...  
Grief is the price we pay for love.

And I know that's true.  
The depth of our love...  
Determines the depth of our grief.

I think it would be wise for us...  
As people of faith...  
To become more comfortable...  
Expressing our pain and sorrow...  
Of this life...

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Especially within the context...  
Of the community of faith.

We can't fix... the grief...  
That we experience in the world.  
We can't make it magically go away...  
We have to go through the grief...

But we don't have to go through it alone...  
We can do it together.  
In the name of Christ...  
Which binds us together...

We face our grief...  
Side by side.  
Arm in arm.  
Through tears and silence.

And we can proclaim a word of hope...  
That even in the face of death...  
We have comfort... from our God.

**1 Thessalonians 4: 13-14** says...  
We do not want you to be uninformed,  
Brothers and sisters,  
About those who have died,  
We do not grieve as those who have no hope.  
For we believe that Jesus died and rose again,  
Even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him...  
Those who have died.

See. We don't have to be afraid.  
We can be sad and broken hearted.  
We can mourn with all of our strength..  
In all our weakness...



Because we know...  
That we have life in Christ.  
And he promises... that one day...  
Our sorrow... will be turned into joy.

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Now... let's skip to the end... **[9 Persecuted]**

Blessed are you...  
When people revile you...  
And persecute you...  
And utter all kinds of evil...  
Against you falsely...  
On MY ACCOUNT...

Rejoice and be glad...  
For your reward is great in heaven.

This last one is the hardest beatitude...  
In my opinion...

Because we hold onto...  
An incorrect assumption...  
A misconception...  
About this world.

That if... we are good...  
We will get good.

If we are nice.  
People will be nice.

If we live in the love of Christ...  
Everybody... will hold hands...  
And sing Kumbaya...

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But what if that DOESN'T happen?  
What if they don't want to hold your hand?  
What if they don't like the song Kumbaya?

What if they think...  
You're dumb.  
For loving God...  
And living the life...  
Of a follower of Christ.

What if they look at you...  
And you are poor in spirit...  
And mourning...  
And meek...  
And hungering for righteousness...  
And merciful...  
And pure in heart...  
And a peacemaker.

What if you do all those things...  
And the world still hates you.  
The world doesn't understand you.  
The world doesn't value or reward you.

What if you... O follower of Christ...  
Find yourself... completely out of sync...  
With the world around you.

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Well. Jesus says... it's going to be ok.  
He sees you.  
He knows you.  
He loves you.

And if you are doing your best...  
Confessing your love for Christ...  
Trying to live your life...  
In a way that is right...  
According to him.  
According to his values.  
According to what Jesus says is true.

Rest assured.  
He sees you.  
He knows you.  
He loves you.

So. Whatever happens.  
He will never leave you.  
He will never forsake you.  
He will never take away...  
The Kingdom that he has given you.

So. Live your life bravely.  
Live in the absolute truth of Christ.

Don't believe the misconceptions...  
Don't buy what this world is trying to sell.  
Don't follow anything...  
That tries to lead you away...  
From the One who loves you.

Just know.  
Know in your heart.  
No matter what happens...  
During your whole life long.

**YOU ARE BLESSED.**  
Fully... and forever...

Thanks be to God.  
Amen!