



Become Like Jesus

Witnesses to Blessing

June 13, 2021

SONG #1

CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 16:5-11

My choice is you, God, first and only. And now I find I'm *your* choice!

You set me up with a house and yard. And then you made me your heir!

The wise counsel God gives when I'm awake is confirmed by my sleeping heart.

Day and night, I'll stick with God; I've got a good thing going, and I'm not letting go.

I'm happy from the inside out, and from the outside in, my whole being (my glory) rejoices, for I'm firmly formed.

You canceled my ticket to hell— that's not my destination!

Now you've got my feet on the life path, all radiant from the shining of your face. Ever since you took my hand, I'm on the right way.

SONG #2

KIDS DISMISSAL

SONG #3

PRE-SERMON READING | Colossians 1:15-23

We look at this Son (Jesus) and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son (Jesus) and see God's original purpose in everything created—*everything* got started in Jesus and finds its purpose in Jesus. Jesus...holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, Jesus organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body. Jesus was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—Jesus is supreme in the end. From beginning to end Jesus is there, towering far above everything, everyone.

So spacious is Jesus, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in Jesus without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of Jesus' death, Jesus' blood that poured down from the cross.

You yourselves are a case study of what Jesus does. At one time, you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got. But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually *dying* for you, Christ **Jesus brought you over to God's side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence.** You don't walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, **constantly tuned in to the Message,** careful not to be distracted or diverted. There is no other Message—just this one. **Every creature under heaven gets this same Message.**

BECOME LIKE JESUS | Connecting the Dots

*You yourselves are a case study of what Jesus does...put...together, whole and holy in his presence.
(Col. 1:21-22)*

Ever since we responded to Jesus' invitation to follow him as an apprentice, ever since he took our hand to train us for life (Ps. 16:11), we've been on a journey home with Jesus, to our Father's house, where he has everything set up for us (Ps. 16:6, Jn. 14:1-4). A place where "our whole nature and capacities are fulfilled"¹ in contact with the One who formed and knows us most truly. A relationship in which our "whole being, our glory rejoices" (Ps. 16:9) as our lives gradually become brighter and more beautiful (Ps. 16:11), reflecting in attitude and action the glory we behold. Apprentices and children able to live absorbed into the life of God, like Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18), participants in good creation and intended salvation unfolding everywhere for everything (2 Pet. 1:4, Col. 1:15-20).

It's a pretty picture, isn't it? Life whole and holy with the intimacy and immensity of God. A brilliant image that's not complete, nor possible, in isolation. The pilgrimage we are on and the end we seek in union with God requires that we travel with others. We are journeying through the magnificent peaks and shadowy valleys of life, trekking through daily deaths and resurrections with spiritual companions who encourage us to not "walk away from [that] gift" of our real life in Jesus (Col. 3:1-4). A family of faith ever prompting us to listen and respond to our Father together (Lk. 8:21). Sharing life with these fellow apprentices helps us remain "grounded and steady in that bond of trust [in Jesus], constantly tuned in to the Message, careful not to be distracted or diverted." (Col. 1:23)

That's what it means to be the church, people who "announce to [one another] early [, often,] and clearly the kind of life into which we can grow, to help us set our sights on what it means to be a human being complete."² Whole and holy in the presence of our Father through Jesus. A community of companions, spiritual friends, who help us name what we are seeking when we accept Jesus' invitation to follow him and support us as we,

Delight...[and] Keep company with God," believing that "he will give us the desires of our heart...trust[ing] he will act, doing whatever needs to be done...valdiat[ing] your life in the clear light of day...

(Ps. 37:4-6, Phil. 2:12-13)

What a Message, right! To be desired by Jesus (Mk. 3:13), discovering we are his choice (Ps. 16:5) to share life with, and then to have him do everything necessary to make sure we end up where and with all God intended for us (Ps. 16:6), is to be genuinely "Blessed." "happy from the inside out, and from the outside in," as the psalmist says (Ps. 16:9). **Whole, content, and satisfied in who you are and where you are going in life.** We'd all say that such happiness is our aim, and so do our neighbors. Every creature under heaven is after this same thing—even if at times they and we settle for less. The fantastic news, the gospel Message—and just the message meant for those same creatures under heaven—is that through Jesus, our aim is our sure (inevitable) end, as well as our *middle*.

¹ Thomas Merton, *Bread In The Wilderness*, 13.

² Eugene Peterson, *Run With The Horses: the quest for life at its best*, 30.

BECOME LIKE JESUS | Blessed to Blessed

[We've discussed this before](#), the future and present weight of the “Bless-ed” beatitudes at the foundation of Jesus' message and ministry found in Jesus' famous “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5:2-12).

Blessed are the poor in Spirit...Blessed are those who mourn...Blessed are the meek...Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...Blessed are the merciful...Blessed are the pure in heart...Blessed are the peacemakers...Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness...Blessed are you when others revile you...on Jesus' account.

(Matthew 5:1-11)

“Blessing is the end of the road,” for us journeying home with Jesus together. And as Eugene Peterson points out, “**that which is at the end of the road influences everything that takes place along the road.** The end shapes the means.”³

[Over the last several weeks](#), we've focused on “the means,” the ways we journey together, helping one another stick on “the Way,” the path that is life full and forever. These “[together practices](#)” help us deepen our bond to Jesus and one another as they develop our skills in faith that keep us attentive to God's presence and actions so that we can join in (and not miss out) on the maturing (fruitfulness) of this gift, which is our real life in Jesus. Our final practice has the same goal—to *become like Jesus: whole and holy in life together with our Father and his family*—but springs from the middle, the experiencing of present “Bless-edness” of apprenticeship and pilgrimage.

If, as Peterson said, “that which is at the end of the road influences everything that takes place along the road. The end shapes the means,” then **our means for becoming blessed is through blessing.** Jesus says as much immediately after those famous and foundational “Blessed are” statements,

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

(Matthew 5:13-16, ESV)

I want to point out a couple of things here that we often miss. First, “You” is plural. Jesus is speaking to his apprentices and a larger crowd. While we hear the word and just think “my life,” we should listen to Jesus' description as “our life.” Jesus' second and third analogies help us recognize the togetherness of blessed to be a blessing is what he is after.

Like most analogies that Jesus uses, “A city set on a hill” is not unique to him but comes from the Old Testament. Here Jesus is referencing Psalm 48, in which God's

³ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience In The Same Direction: discipleship in an instant society*, 197.

His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation [remarkable, exquisitely distinguished], is the joy of all the earth.

Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.

(Psalm 48:1-2)

The psalmist goes on to describe the mountain city, the city set on a hill, as a place that the rulers, authorities, and systems/ways of the world look upon and take “to flight...trembling” and against which they are “shattered.” (Ps. 48:4-7). A place, the psalmist says, where what

***we have heard, so we have seen** in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God, which God will establish forever.*

(Psalm 48:8)

So, a city set on a hill is the city of God, the city of God’s rule, his kingdom come, distinguished for the joy (good, blessing) of all the earth. And, as we recently saw in the Revelation, this city, God’s dwelling, is also a people,

The one who conquers I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, coming down from my God out of heaven...

(Revelation 3:12)

We are together, to be a people in which God dwells, built into his temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17), and in which God’s rule is distinguishable, going forth over the world for the joy of all the world. **People where, what is heard about what Jesus does, is seen.**

In case we wondered about the together nature of our calling, the following analogy, *a lamp on a lampstand*, as we saw throughout the first few chapters of the Revelation, is the language for church—those apprentices and pilgrims following Jesus together.

*I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard...a loud voice...saying, ‘Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches’...on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man...he laid his right hand on me, saying, “As for the mystery of...the seven golden lampstands...**the seven lampstands are the seven churches.***

(Revelation 1:10-11, 12-13, 17, 20)

So, the bringing together of apprentices and pilgrims on the journey home is itself a way of shining light on who God is and what he is up to in the world. It is a witness to the reality of God with us and for us. We are blessed together and, therefore, a blessing together for the joy of all the earth.

Okay, with that background, let's read Jesus' words one more time in a less familiar tone, with phrases that don't so easily roll in one ear and out the other because of familiarity or overconfidence in our "getting them."

*Let me tell you why you are here. [Following Jesus together with others] You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the **God-flavors** of this earth. [That proper place and purpose for everything and everyone fit and fixed together in vibrant harmonies that Jesus' death and resurrection bring about (Col. 1:15-20). The place and people that witness to God's distinguishably good rule to the joy of all the earth.]*

If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? [Who they are truly meant to be as opposed to what the rules, authorities, and systems/ways of the world say they are intended to be/forces them to settle for.] You've lost your usefulness [your purpose and place] and will end up in the garbage. [The very opposite of where we are aiming! And not the destination the psalmist says is not ours because God chose us (16:10)!]

*Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the **God-colors** in the world. [Who he is and what he is up to, beautiful in elevation.]*

God is not a secret to be kept. [He is the reality to be witnessed.]

We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bears [shining a light on—witnessing to—the who, what, and how of God], you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. [I'm putting you together.]

Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! [Witness, bless! Bless, witness!]

*Keep open house; be generous with your lives. **By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.***

(Matthew 5:13-16, The Message)

BECOME LIKE JESUS | Blessing as Witness, Witnesses to Blessing

The openness we've received from Jesus, his life opened up and given for us so that we might know who the Father is and what the Father is up to in our lives and this world (Jn. 14:1-7, 15:14-17), is what we open to others—our neighbors, co-workers, family members, those in need, those oppressed, those in pain, those alone or settling for less. **We witness to the “already blessed” reality of life with God.** A life where we recognize who God is and what he is up to (at the peaks and in the valleys, in the dying and in the rising) and live responsively, obediently, and joyfully with and for another, for we are blessed!

This design to bless as witness and be witnesses to blessing is not an act of service but of friendship. Witness and blessing is the outworking of a deep relationship with Jesus and a deepening love for one another. Here is how Jesus put it,

*You are my **friends** if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide**, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

(John 15:14-17)

Paraphrasing Ruth Haley Barton⁴,

“In our life together with Jesus, we discover that becoming like Jesus, whole and holy, is both an end in itself (being like our Master (the goal of all apprentices) who brought glory to the Father (Jn. 12:28), will bring glory to our Father too) and a means to other ends.

Becoming like Jesus together enables us to convey or witness the presence of Jesus to the world. We become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), participants in the life of God—Father, Son, Spirit, and children!

so that Jesus' presence and purposes are witnessed in real-time to the world—through us!”

Blessing to witness like Jesus, witnessing the blessing of life with Jesus, is being salt that draws out God-flavors and light that draws into God-colors. Blessing to witness and witnesses to bless can take many forms in our everyday lives, city, society, and world.

- **Evangelism** | sharing that one only Message—an invitation to wholeness and holiness in life with the Father through Jesus with others, which we who are blessed can bear witness to in our own lives in the middle. This witnessing to “the mighty works of God” in daily lives is what Acts 1-2 is all about.

⁴ Ruth Haley Barton, *Life Together In Christ: experiencing transformation in community*, 154-155.

- **Generosity of Resources** | internal (our lives, emotions, relationships, friendships) and external (time, money, homes)
- **Care** | compassion that leads to helping those in need and those without advocates
- **Peacemaking** | ministry of reconciliation (1 Cor. 3:14-15), working for the justice and equity of God’s kingdom on earth as it in heaven against opposition and lack (negative)
- **Flourishing** | doing work and the kind of work that bears fruit that lasts (positive)

Blessing to witness and a witness to blessing can be as simple as opening our home as a place of peace for family, neighbors, and friends or inviting others to journey with us through the transformation God is leading us through in a particular season. Blessing to witness and witness to blessing can be as simple as cultivating hospitality in your life with others—space and ways for your lives to be open as Jesus’ life was open, and **“By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”** (Matt. 5:16)

Blessed to bless, to witness to God with us for the joy of all the earth, is what we are made for! And the details of which are what we help one another discern, support one another to pursue by assisting one another in living congruently with who God has made us, individually and together. Blessed, we become a blessing in our time and place in salvation history still unfolding. Shining a light on who God is and what God is up to through Jesus in our lives and the world we inhabit.

“Spiritual formation,” maturing or becoming more and more like Jesus along the journey home with others, says Barton, “results in the ability to discern how God is sending us [individually and collectively] into the world uniquely to do his will.”⁵ “discerning how God is sending us [individually and collectively] into the world” is the aim of our final together practice.

TOGETHER PRACTIC | [Considering Our Journey](#)

⁵ Ibid., 155.

SONG #4

COMMUNION

Father, you have taught us to abide;
in you,
your Word
and your Love.

In joyous obedience,
to keep company with you;
by loving you, our neighbor,
and one another.

Grant us the grace and strength of your Holy Spirit,
that we may be devoted to you
with our whole heart, mind, soul and body

and united to one another with pure and gentle affection;
until we have all become like Jesus inside and out.

Be present, O Jesus,
who died for our sins
and is alive for our living.

Be present with us as you were with your disciples,
and be known to us as we follow you with one another;
until our real lives in Jesus become the only life seen.

To your glory
and our neighbors' good,
Through Jesus, amen.

SONG #5

BENEDICTION

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2:1-11)