

“Confrontation, Graceful Blessing, Hope”

Micah 6:1-8 and Matthew 5:1-12

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Scripture Readings

Micah 6:1-8

Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. ‘O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.’ ‘With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘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, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

“Confrontation, Graceful Blessing, Hope”

Pastor Barbara Brown Taylor tells of a friend whose life was falling apart. Desperate to find some peace, she went to a nearby convent for a spiritual retreat. She was met by a nun who asked her, "What brings you to us, my dear?" The woman poured out her heart, tearfully explaining that her mother had just died, her father was an alcoholic and her marriage was falling apart. The nun smiled and said, "God must love you very much."

Pastor Barbara said, “What kind of answer was that? The sister must have been very insensitive, or perhaps she knew something that we do not—that there are discoveries to be made in

the dark that can only be made in the dark, and that these are the most precious discoveries. Pain and suffering are portals to unique blessings. That seems to be the message of Jesus' Beatitudes.

I don't like that story or the idea that pain and suffering are portals to blessings. First, God loves us all very much period. Second I don't believe God sends trials, pain and suffering in order to get our attention, to make us change so we can experience a blessing. However God certainly often uses the bad things and our pain and transforms them into something good, into a blessing. Just like I would never hurt Spencer and Abigail although a hurtful moment is often a teaching moment.

Preaching on the beatitudes is a struggle for me. The core of the message for us today is unclear to me. Every time I read the beatitudes and every sermon I have heard on the beatitudes I am confronted and comforted in different ways. I consulted about a dozen commentaries on the beatitudes and each had a very different perspective. Even the Greek is hard to translate as various Bible translations use different words. We are unsure exactly what "blessed" entails, the top ideas are fortunate, whole and happy. However, how are the poor in spirit, mourning, persecuted, etc. and the lady whose life is falling apart fortunate, whole and happy? The beatitudes speak of a blessing in the present tense, in the midst of the struggle and also of a future promise to be realized. The formula is blessed are... for they will... should our focus be on today's blessing or the future promise? We are unsure of the intended audience. It could be for all people. The range of the beatitudes are broad enough to show that God is with everyone and blessing all people. However, the beatitudes could be just for us, disciples who have climbed that mountain of faith, sacrificed and devoted our lives to Jesus radical message, therefore the blessing empowers us today and the future outcomes encourages us. It could be prophecy of how God's grace is transforming everyone and the world turning all upside down. Is the thrust of the beatitudes about our service of discipleship, or is it God's grace filled response or both? Are the blessing purely a gift God gives or are the blessings something we draw to ourselves by the way we live? Are the beatitudes a call to discipleship to risk everything to break the cycle of violence, oppression and sin or are they an invitation to join God's transforming of us and the world, or are they a source of comfort, hope, grace and encouragement while God breaks the cycle, transforms and resurrects? All of this is challenging enough then there are nine beatitudes each of which could have its own sermon.

Perhaps the beatitudes is one of Jesus teachings that contain an abundance of insights, a truth for each of us for each moment of our life. Each beatitude contains a confrontation to the world and a you, a way that we are to be transformed. Each beatitude contains a graceful blessing, a free gift from God that we are to receive, savor and enjoy. Also, each beatitude contains a hope that is to inspire and encourage us. Listen for God's word for you today and let the other words fall away as we examine each beatitude from three translations and ponder one possible confrontation, graceful blessing and hope per beatitude.

**Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and God's rule." "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for God for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs." Matthew 5:3**

A confrontation is to trust in God's power and not your own or another source. We are to be God dependent. A graceful blessing is realizing God will give you all that you need, if God is your shepherd you shall not want for anything. A hope is that God's perfect kingdom of wholeness, resurrection and perfected love will be enjoyed by you for eternity.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you." "God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Matthew 5:4

A confrontation is to grieve all the wrongs and sufferings of the world and to work through all, pain, grief and loss without becoming depressed, bitter or cynical. A graceful blessing is God will give you a peace that only God can give and this peace will sustain you and see you through. A hope is Jesus will fully comfort you by wiping away every tear and healing every tear you shed.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought." "God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth." Matthew 5:5

A confrontation is to be self aware, to know your gifts talents and abilities and how to humbly share your gifts, working together with others and praising your teammates for accomplishments. A graceful blessing is enjoying the abundance of good a true team produces. A hope is knowing that one day everyone and all of creation will be perfectly interconnected, with each individual shining with their unique gift, together radiating a glory beyond your wildest imagination.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. God's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat." "God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied." Matthew 5:6

A confrontation is to seek first God, God's will and God's righteousness, to give your entire attention to what God is doing and join God in doing God's work. A graceful blessing is the joy and satisfaction of serving God. A hope is that one day all will be redeemed, whole, complete and enjoy justice and righteousness.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for." "God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Matthew 5:7

A confrontation is to forgive others and yourself, to love others and yourself whether you or they deserve it or not. A graceful blessing is when you forgive you are set free, able to love extravagantly. A hope is that God's forgiving, renewing grace will unite everyone in enjoyment of perfect harmonious community.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." "You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world." "God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God." Matthew 5:8

A confrontation is to live with integrity, to think pure, good thoughts and live them. A graceful blessing is wholeness, harmony of body, mind, heart and soul that perceives God's goodness. A hope is trusting that one day all will enjoy purity so you will easily see God's beauty, goodness and love in every person.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family." "God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God." Matthew 5:9

A confrontation is to let go and rid the world of all hate, judgments, stereotypes, categories, walls, barriers and divisions, to strive for complete reconciliation with everyone. A graceful blessing is celebrating healing peace. A hope is that all relationships will flourish and reflect the perfect dance of God's harmonious love.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom." "God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs." Matthew 5:10

A confrontation is to have great passion in doing God's will, to be bold in serving God to never give up on doing what is right and loving. A graceful blessing is the joy that flows from living with purpose, passion and being certain that your service is making the world a better place. A hope is that you will enjoy the eternal outcomes of your passion.

Jesus said, "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, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. "Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit God. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble." "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way."

Matthew 5:11-12

A confrontation is to live a life that is counter cultural wherever the culture is counter to God. A graceful blessing is the fellowship with fellow believers. A hope is knowing that God's ways, the way of love will prevail and your reward for speeding the time of the realization of heaven on earth will be great.

Each beatitude contains numerous confrontations to transform you, numerous graceful blessings for you to enjoy today and numerous hopes that you will enjoy in the future. Wrestle with the beatitudes until you find a confrontation to live into, a graceful blessing to celebrate and a hope to encourage you. Amen