

“Blessed, Joyful, Complete”

Micah 6:8, Matthew 5:1-12, & 1 Corinthians 1:30

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January 29, 2017

Our scripture today reveals how to be blessed, whole, and joyful. Each and every verse contains an abundance of insights and a truth for each of us, for each moment of our life. Each verse contains a confrontation to you, a way that you are to be transformed. Each verse contains a graceful blessing, a free gift from God that you are to receive, savor, and enjoy. Also, each verse contains a hope that is to inspire and encourage you.

The prophet Micah proclaims **“God 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.”** NRSV Micah 6:8 These words envelope us with compassionate love as they propel us to savor and share God’s blessings. Notice the verbs to do, to love, to walk. We are to be people of God who joyfully live with compassionate, gracious, caring, love for God, each other, ourselves, and the cosmos. A confrontation is to do justice, to correct inequalities, end oppression, and stop abuse. A confrontation is to reorder life in accordance with God’s will, to bring heaven to earth. A blessing is to love kindness, to receive, savor, and share kindness. A hope is to walk humbly with God, a journey that reveals ever growing joys and loves.

William Sloane Coffin said, “Because we love the world, we pray now, O God for grace to quarrel with it.” Jesus is grace in human flesh. Jesus’ presence, Emmanuel, God with us, shows us how to live. Grace quarrels with disease, suffering and pain to heal, rejoice, and wipe away every tear. Grace quarrels with every barrier, wall, and division to unite, connect, and make wonderful every relationship. Grace quarrels with every mistake, regret, and sin to forgive, make whole, and create an endless bounty of chances. Grace quarrels with chaos, fear, and hate to yield order, peace, and love. Grace quarrels with your brokenness and imperfections to make you complete, glorious, and perfect. Jesus is grace in human flesh who quarrels with anything that diminishes life until all is life giving.

The Apostle Paul said, **“God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”** NRSV 1 Corinthians 1:30 Jesus lived and taught how life is to be lived abundantly and full. In each beatitude Jesus gives us a window revealing how we are to live, a blessing, and a hope. Carl Henry said, “Jesus clothes the beatitudes with his own life.” There is a gladness inherent in blessing. Each blessing is a healing.

N. T. Wright said, “We are to pray that God’s kingdom will come, and God’s will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. The life of heaven, the life of the realm where God is already king is to become the life of the world, transforming the present earth into the place of beauty and delight that God always intended. And those who follow Jesus are to begin to live by this rule here and now. That’s the point of the beatitudes. They are a summons to live in the present in the way that will make sense in God’s promised future; because that future has arrived in the present in Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem upside down, but we are called to believe, with great daring, that it is in fact the right way up. Try it and see.”

Eberhard Arnold explained that when you strive to live the beatitudes, “You will not be perfect, but you will love. Love is the gate and the way. There is nothing greater than love. There is nothing more true than love, nothing more real. So let us hand our lives over to love and seal the bond of love.”

Each beatitude contains a blessing a mysterious grace grander than our pure hopes and way beyond our comprehension. “Blessed” entails healing, shalom, wholeness, joy, peace and love. “Blessed is being filled with the Holy Spirit and revealing the image of God. Each beatitude speaks of a blessing in the present tense, in the midst of the struggle, grace quarreling and also of a future promise to be realized.

Listen for God’s word for you today as we examine each beatitude from three translations and ponder one possible confrontation, 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. Each beatitude is abundant with an array of diverse interpretations. Each Beatitude can be misinterpreted like the pastor who preached to a group of inmates at a state correction prison and began his sermon with the greeting, "It is nice to see so many of you here."

In this silence reread the beatitudes. When a phrase resonates with you let all the other words fall away. Repeat that phrase. What is God inviting you to be or do through that phrase.

Please form groups of three. Use these three minutes to inspire each other with an insight from the beatitudes. Amen. Invite grace to quarrel with you through the beatitudes so you will always have a confrontation to live into, a graceful blessing to celebrate and a hope to encourage you. Amen