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## Seek First the Kingdom (A Reading From the Sermon on the Mount)

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# Seek First the Kingdom

## A Reading from the Sermon on the Mount

LEE MAGNESS

*This reading comprises most of the words of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 3–5), arranged as echoes of the Beatitudes. It is configured here for a leader (L) who reads the Beatitudes, and three other readers (1, 2 and 3).*

### Prologue

L        You are the light of the world.  
1            A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.  
2            Nor do you light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand,  
3            and it gives light to all in the house.  
1            In the same way, let your light shine before others,  
1,2          so that they may see your good works  
1,2,3        and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

### Part 1

L        *Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .*  
1            Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,  
              where moth and rust destroy  
              and where thieves break in and steal,  
2            but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,  
              where neither moth nor rust destroys  
              and where thieves do not break in and steal.  
3            For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.  
L        *Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .*  
1            Ask, and it will be given to you;  
2            seek, and you will find;  
3            knock, and it will be opened to you.  
1            For everyone who asks receives,  
2            and the one who seeks finds,  
3            and to the one who knocks it will be opened.  
1            If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,  
2            how much more will your Father who is in heaven  
3            give good things to those who ask him!  
L        *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

### Part 2

L        *Blessed are those who mourn . . .*  
1            Enter by the narrow gate.  
2            For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction,  
3            and those who enter by it are many.

1 Enter by the narrow gate.  
 2 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life,  
 3 and those who find it are few.

L *Blessed are those who mourn . . .*

1 Everyone then who hears these words of mine  
 2 and does them  
 1 will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.  
 2 And the rain fell,  
 3 and the floods came,  
 2 and the winds blew and beat on that house,  
 3 but it did not fall,  
 1 because it had been founded on the rock.

L *Blessed are those who mourn . . .*

1 And everyone who hears these words of mine  
 2 and does not do them  
 1 will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.  
 2 And the rain fell,  
 3 and the floods came,  
 2 and the winds blew and beat against that house,  
 3 and it fell,  
 1 and great was the fall of it.

L *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

### **Part 3**

L *Blessed are the meek . . .*

1 You have heard that it was said to those of old,  
 2 You shall not murder.  
 Whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

1 But I say to you  
 3 everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment;  
 2 whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council;  
 3 whoever says, "You fool!" will be liable to the hell of fire.

L *Blessed are the meek . . .*

1 So if you are offering your gift at the altar  
 2 and there remember that your brother has something against you,  
 3 leave your gift there before the altar and go.

1 First be reconciled to your brother,  
 3 and then come and offer your gift.

L *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

### **Part 4**

L *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . .*

1 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;  
 I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.  
 2 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota,  
 not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.  
 3 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments

and teaches others to do the same  
 will be called least in the kingdom of heaven,  
 1 but whoever does them and teaches them  
 2 will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.  
 1 Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,  
 3 you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.  
 L *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . .*  
 1 Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people  
 in order to be seen by them,  
 for then you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.  
 2 When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your  
 right hand is doing,  
 so that your giving may be in secret.  
 3 And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.  
 L *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . .*  
 2 When you pray, go into your room and shut the door  
 and pray to your Father who is in secret.  
 3 And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.  
 L *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . .*  
 2 And when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,  
 that it may not be seen by others but by your Father in secret.  
 3 And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.  
 L *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
 for they shall be satisfied.*

**Part 5**

L *Blessed are the merciful . . .*  
 1 You have heard that it was said,  
 2 You shall love your neighbor  
 and hate your enemy.  
 1 But I say to you,  
 3 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,  
 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.  
 1 For if you love those who love you,  
 what reward do you have?  
 2 Do not even the tax collectors do the same?  
 1 And if you greet only your brothers,  
 what more are you doing than others?  
 3 Do not even the Gentiles do the same?  
 1,2,3 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.  
 L *Blessed are the merciful . . .*  
 1 For if you forgive others their trespasses,  
 2 your heavenly Father will also forgive you,  
 1 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses,  
 3 neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.  
 L *Blessed are the merciful . . .*



1 Judge not, that you be not judged.  
 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged,  
 and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.  
 1 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye,  
 3 but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?  
 1 How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye,"  
 2 when there is the log in your own eye?  
 1 First take the log out of your own eye,  
 3 then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.  
 L *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

**Part 6**

L *Blessed are the pure in heart . . .*  
 1 You have heard that it was said,  
 2 You shall not commit adultery.  
 1 But I say to you  
 3 everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent  
 has already committed adultery with her in his heart.  
 L *Blessed are the pure in heart . . .*  
 1 If your right eye causes you to sin,  
 2 tear it out and throw it away.  
 3 For it is better that you lose one of your members  
 than that your whole body be thrown into hell.  
 1 And if your right hand causes you to sin,  
 2 cut it off and throw it away.  
 3 For it is better that you lose one of your members  
 than that your whole body go into hell.  
 L *Blessed are the pure in heart . . .*  
 1 The eye is the lamp of the body.  
 2 So, if your eye is healthy,  
 3 your whole body will be full of light.  
 L *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

**Part 7**

L *Blessed are the peacemakers . . .*  
 1 You have heard that it was said,  
 2 An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.  
 1 But I say to you,  
 3 Do not resist the one who is evil.  
 L *Blessed are the peacemakers . . .*  
 1 But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek,  
 turn to him the other also.  
 2 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic,  
 let him have your cloak as well.  
 3 And if anyone forces you to go one mile,  
 go with him two miles.

1 Give to the one who begs from you,  
 2 and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.  
 L *Blessed are the peacemakers . . .*  
 1 So whatever you wish that others would do to you,  
 3 do also to them.  
 L *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.*

**Part 8**

L *Blessed are those who are persecuted . . .*  
 1 Blessed are you when others revile you  
 2 and persecute you  
 3 and utter all kinds of evil against you on my account falsely.  
 1,2,3 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.  
 L *Blessed are those who are persecuted . . .*  
 1 Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life,  
 2 what you will eat or what you will drink,  
 3 nor about your body, what you will put on.  
 2 Is not life more than food,  
 3 and the body more than clothing?  
 1 Look at the birds of the air:  
 2 they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns,  
 3 and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.  
 1 Are you not of more value than they?  
 L *Blessed are those who are persecuted . . .*  
 1 And which of you by being anxious can add one hour to his span of life?  
 And why are you anxious about clothing?  
 Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow:  
 2 they neither toil nor spin,  
 3 yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.  
 1 But if God so clothes the grass of the field,  
 which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven,  
 will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?  
 L *Blessed are those who are persecuted . . .*  
 1 Therefore do not be anxious, saying,  
 2 "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?"  
 3 For the Gentiles seek after all these things,  
 and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.  
 1 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,  
 2,3 and all these things will be added to you.  
 L *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**Prayer**

L *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*  
 1,2,3 Blessed are the poor in spirit  
 L *Your kingdom come . . .*  
 1,2,3 Blessed are the peacemakers

L . . . *your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*  
 1,2,3 Blessed are the meek  
 L *Give us this day our daily bread . . .*  
 1,2,3 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness  
 L . . . *and forgive us our debts . . .*  
 1,2,3 Blessed are those who mourn  
 L . . . *as we also have forgiven our debtors.*  
 1,2,3 Blessed are the merciful  
 L *And lead us not into temptation . . .*  
 1,2,3 Blessed are the pure in heart  
 L . . . *but deliver us from evil.*  
 1,2,3 Blessed are those who are persecuted  
 L *For yours is the kingdom*  
 1 *and the power*  
 2 *and the glory*  
 3 *for ever and ever;*  
 L,1,2,3 *Amen.*

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