

Preface

In a day when many in the church are trying to decide how low the bar of Christian living may be set, I find myself moving in the opposite direction. In my view, the bar must be set considerably higher than where most people—in the church and in the larger American society—are setting it. We need more than a minor correction. In both church and society revolutionary change is required so as to set our course on a new path. Our troubled situation, which has been developing over many years, has led me to take a new look at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which, more than any other biblical passage is the defining document for the church. If properly interpreted, it can give us the best chance of providing the remedy we need.

Biblical scholars will know much of what is contained in this book, but I hope that students, pastors, and laypeople will profit not only from the exegesis of the Sermon but from the rabbinic literature cited throughout. Much of the latter has long been available in English but is seldom read as background for the Sermon on the Mount. My hope, then, is that people everywhere, believers and nonbelievers, will find the present study informative and useful.

It is many years since I taught a course on Christian Origins at the University of California, Berkeley, where, in the first term

given over to a study of the New Testament Gospels, I focused on Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount. In subsequent years I have held teaching positions in Old Testament, and my writing has been mostly—but not exclusively—on Old Testament books and Old Testament subjects. Material in the present book has been presented in lay seminars, adult Sunday School classes, and in sermons. The essays in chapters 1–3, prepared originally for a Lay School of Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in July of 2006, are included here to put the Sermon on the Mount in a larger perspective. The essay on the *Imitatio Dei* (chapter 4) is presented for the first time. Remaining chapters are a verse-by-verse commentary on the Sermon.

It gives me great pleasure to return in this book to a study of the Sermon on the Mount, which has been a favorite of mine ever since Confirmation days, when I first began to read the Bible on my own. Jesus' words "Do not be anxious about your life . . ." in Matt. 6:25–34 still move me deeply.

Portions of the essays "Rhetoric and Composition in Matthew" (chapter 1) and "New Covenant in Matthew" (chapter 2) were published earlier in my *Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 313–22, and *Writing Up Jeremiah* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 160–71, and the essay "At What Elevation Is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount?" (chapter 3) appeared originally in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 36 (2009): 440–54. All are reprinted with permission.

The Beatitudes in Chinese on the overleaf are provided by my good friend the Rev. Wing Han Jessica Wong, pastor in Hong Kong and a former student of mine at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong.

I am dedicating this book to Dr. Elder Lindahl, for many years Professor of Theology at North Park College in Chicago. I came to

know Elder first in a Sunday school class on Christian ethics taught at the North Park Covenant Church, Chicago, and he has been a valued friend ever since. Elder has a mind transparent and radiant as clear Swedish glass, having the uncommon ability to make profound ideas simple and easy to understand. He is also a Christian gentleman and a man of deep faith, which count even more among those who know him than academic excellence.*

Biblical quotations unless noted are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), with the exception of quotations from Hosea in Chapter 1, which are my own translation.

Jack R. Lundbom

*Word came that Dr. Elder Lindahl passed away on November 3, 2014. Peace be to his memory.