

A Doctor Writes to His Comfortable Patients

William R. Miller

A reader's theater for four:

Luke (may be dressed in physician's white coat)
Readers A, B, and C

All of Luke's text is taken from the Revised Standard Version, except where starred to indicate J. B. Phillips (*) or the New English Bible (**).

- A: The way Luke tells it, this is one of the most concise sermons ever recorded: 30 verses - just over 700 words. When was the last time you heard a sermon that short? Of course Matthew - the teacher - has it three times longer than that, but this is the sermon as recorded plainly and simply by a physician.
- L: Then Jesus looked steadily at his disciples and said:*
- Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
- B: Now just what do you mean by that, Lord? The poor? What's so blessed good about being poor? I think I like Matthew's version better, where you say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." I can buy that. I could fit into "poor in spirit," no problem. Are you sure you mean literally poor?
- L: Blessed are you *poor*, - How happy are you who *own nothing** - for the kingdom of God is yours!
- C: Well that's just great. I mean, be reasonable, Lord! These days, many of your followers just aren't poor anymore. Don't you have any good news for *us*? Oh well, I seem to remember that we get a few more chances, at least. Blessed are
- L: Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.
- B: There you go again. The *hungry*, literally the hungry, Lord? Are you sure you've got it right? Matthew says that you blessed us if we "hunger and thirst *after righteousness*." I can relate to that. I'm all for justice. But I can't remember the last time I was *really* hungry. Sure, I get the munchies halfway between lunch and dinner, but I have a hunch that's not what you meant.
- L: Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.
- A: So what I hear you saying is that in order to be happy, I should be sad. This isn't making much sense, Lord. I don't get it.
- L: Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.
- C: Well, now there's *another* problem. We live the best we can, trying to be good people. I'm liked by most of the people most of the time, and I've managed, all in all, to get through without people hating me, insulting me, or throwing me out of their homes and clubs. *Now* you make it sound like I would have racked up more points in heaven if people didn't think so highly of me, if I had made more enemies.
- L: But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.
- B: Woah! Now just a minute here, partner! I can maybe buy that the poor somehow have a simple

happiness of their own. But you're starting to step on some pretty important toes now. It's all well and good to say who's especially blessed. That's not too offensive. I can maybe accept just being an ordinary citizen of the kingdom of God. But when you start saying that I'm *out* because I've already got mine . . .

- L: (interrupting) Woe to you - How *miserable* for you* - *alas* for you** - who are rich.
- C: This isn't going to help bring in the big pledges, you know. Matthew was perfectly happy to say "Blessed are" and leave it at that, without all of this woe . . .
- L: (First word overlaps with C) Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger.
- A: Help, Lord! This scares me. My stomach is plenty full. My *life* is full. I have enough. I'm afraid of being hungry, *really* hungry. I'm afraid of being poor. And I'm afraid of being cut off from you.
- C: Oh, I get it! (laughingly) It's all a metaphor. You're just speaking in riddles again - right, Lord? Let's see, maybe it's an anagram. Full: F-U-L-L. Financially Unwilling to Lend a Little. Is that it?
- L: Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.
- A: (slowly) Whatever it is that we have now, we can expect the opposite. But why?
- L: Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.
- C: We're in serious trouble, friends. My resume' lists all the awards and honors I've received.
- B: They say that I'm the best president we've ever had.
- A: People can't get over how much I do for the church.
- B: Generous
- C: Energetic
- A: Committed
- B: Frugal
- C: Talented
- A: Caring
- B: Faithful
- C: Intelligent
- A: Patient
- B: Amazing
- C: Irreplaceable
- A: Wonderful

ABC: (together) How would we ever get along without *me*?

L: But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your coat as well. Give to every one who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask for them again. And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.

A: Sounds familiar: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

C: But there's more here. Return *good* for evil. *Reward* people for hurting you. Not very practical!

B: Downright unrealistic. I can tell *you* - Anybody who hits me doesn't get a second chance. And if somebody steals my jacket from the locker room, I'm not about to go chasing after the thief saying, "Wait! Here - take my money, too!" What kind of sucker do you think I am?

A: And if I gave to everyone who begs or phones or sends a letter, I'd be poor in no time!

C: I give at church, and I have my children's education to think about!

L: If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you have hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great.

B: Well, I'm sorry. the world just doesn't work that way. You see, the trouble is that this all *sounds* good, but it's awfully naive. People will take *advantage* of you. You can't *trust* our enemies. They aren't playing by the same rules.

L: God is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

C: And we can't just give money away to every needy soul and every deserving cause that comes along. They'd milk us dry!

A: What about my investments? If I'm not gaining interest, I'm actually losing money, with the inflation rates these days.

B: It was different in your day, Lord. Things are a lot more complicated now.

L: Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

A: The golden rule again. Whatever I give to others is what comes back to me, even moreso.

B: Well, I recognize that. If you live by the sword, you die by the sword. Sooner or later, what goes around comes around, and you get what's coming to you.

C: In a way, he's saying that this system of living is in our own selfish interest.

A: I think there's more here than that. He's asking us to take a chance, to stick our necks out, to go first, to be the first on our block to disarm, forgive, give away what we have been given.

- B: But that's where I have trouble again. That works if everybody is playing by the same rules. But (points to congregation) there are a lot of people out there who just can't be trusted, and you'd be a fool to stick your neck out with them.
- L: He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.
- B: OK. I admit I'm as guilty of not trusting as the next person.
- C: And when I don't show love and trust, what will I get in return?
- A: But you ask too much, Lord! You ask us to give and give until we would fall into those blessed states you started with. Who will look after *us*?
- L: There is no such thing as a good tree producing worthless fruit, nor yet a worthless tree producing good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit: you do not gather figs from thistles, and you do not pick grapes from brambles. A good man produces good from the store of good within himself; and an evil man from evil within produces evil. For the words that the mouth utters, come from the overflowing of the heart.**
- C: They'll know we are Christians by our love.
- A: Is that an answer?
- B: I don't hear any promises. He just says to bear the good fruit. Period. No matter what.
- C: He did say, "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure; the measure you give will be the measure you get back."
- A: But the world doesn't *look* that way! Terrible things happen to good people. Evil often is rewarded in power and riches. What is the fruit he's talking about? I'm still frightened!
- C: I'm still confused.
- B: I'm still unconvinced.
- L: Why do you keep calling me "Lord, Lord" - and never do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears what I say and acts upon it - I will show you what he is like. He is like a man who, in building his house, dug deep and laid the foundations on rock. When the flood came, the stream burst upon that house, but could not shift it, because it had been soundly built. But he who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the soil without foundations. As soon as the river burst upon it, the house collapsed, and fell with a great crash.**
- A: I'm standing in mud, Lord. I know that what you say is true, and I'm scared.
- C: I hear what you say, Lord, and I want to follow. I'm just not sure how to do it. I'm confused.
- B: Clearly the things that we have trusted are not made of rock, and sooner or later will fail us: Money
- C: Position

A: Health

B: Physical strength

C: Job security

A: Friends

B: I guess I've known that all along, Lord. But it's hard for me to let go of the controls, to take that first step out into the empty air.

ABC: (together) Help us, Lord Jesus!

B: Your truth is hard.

C: And we are not strong.

A: We just cannot do it . . . alone.
