

BIBLICAL RESOURCES

Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 115 (114); Romans 8:9, 11-13; Matthew 11:25-30

Jesus said: take my yoke upon you and learn from me

Matt 11:25 At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Matt 11:28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The first part of this passage (11:25-27) is found also in Luke (10:21-22; there is no comparable passage in Mark). The Lucan version has slight variations as well as the typically Lucan addition of “rejoicing in the Holy Spirit”. The second part, vv.28-30, is unique to Matthew. The language of the passage is very striking—quite different to the usual manner of expression in Matthew and indeed Luke.

Because of the resemblance to the way Jesus speaks in the Fourth Gospel it has often been referred to as a “Johannine bolt of lightning” in the Synoptic tradition. The verses shared by Matthew and Luke come from that hypothetical document on which both of them drew, the Q or “Source” document.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

25: Therefore mortals fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit. (Job 37:24) Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. (Psalms 8:2)

28: This is personified wisdom, inviting all who desire wisdom to come to her. “Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits. (Sirach 24:19) Draw near to me, you who are uneducated, and lodge in the house of instruction. (Sirach 51:23)

30: Thus says the LORD: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, “We will not walk in it.” (Jeremiah 6:16) Put your neck under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction; it is to be found close by. See with your own eyes that I have laboured but



Thought for the day

The Lord understands us and knows us better than we know ourselves. *O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.* (Psa 139:1-3) He knows of what we are made and so we can come confidently before him with our brokenness and need of his grace. It might be good during Mass today to become aware of whatever is a burden to me now in my life and ask the Lord for his love and healing touch.

Prayer

Lord, you bore the weight of our humanity to come as near to us as possible. Help us to realise you stand beside us and walk with us the journey of life.

little and found for myself much serenity. (Sirach 51:26-27)

Yoke: The metaphor of yoke is used in a very positive way: Lam. 3:27 refers to the yoke as correction administered by God. Even more striking is Jeremiah’s use of the term as a metaphor for God’s authority, probably as expressed in the covenant and the word of God (Jer. 2:20; 5:5).

Jesus’ shorthand use of the term in Matt. 11:28-30 refers to the rabbinic concepts of “the yoke of the kingdom of heaven/Torah/commandments” (cf. Sir. 6:24-30; Pss. Sol. 7:9 *But we (shall be) under Thy yoke for ever, and (under) the rod of your chastening*

KIND OF WRITING

Part of the Jesus tradition echoes the sapiential or wisdom books of the Bible. In this passage, Jesus, in a prayerful exclamation, acts as the herald of divine wisdom.

Matthew 11-12 have a special structure, laid out in three triads as follows: Mt 11:2-14: Jesus is the Christ; **Mt 11:25-12:16:** *Jesus is the Son, the revealer, the giver of rest*; Mt 12:17-50: Jesus is the anointed Servant. Our brief section has three steps: thanksgiving (vv. 25-26); revelation (v. 27) and two invitations and two promises (vv. 28-30).

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

(i) *Connections with Matthew:*

v.25 “Thank” (or literally confess) occurs at the Jordan Matt 3:6; the *binomium* “heaven and earth” is typical of this Gospel (Matt 5:18; 6:10; 11:25; 16:19; 18:18; 24:30, 35; 28:18); “hidden” is typical Matthew (7-0-3-3; Matt 5:14; 11:25; 13:35, 44; 25:18, 25; Luke 13:21; 18:34; 19:42; John 8:59; 12:36; 19:38); reveal is typical of Matthew and Luke, but curiously rare in John (4-0-5-1). “Infants” comes back in one other place in Matthew, which seems relevant: Matt 21:16 and said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’”

v.28: “Come” in this form is typical of Matthew (6-3-0-2).

v.29: “Learn” recurs in Matthew (3-1-0-2); “gentle” (= meek) is unique to Matthew (Matt 5:5; 11:29; 21:5).

(ii) *Echoes in John*

These are very interesting—it might be that in this passage of the historical Jesus we find some of the roots to the special vocabulary and theology of the Fourth Gospel.

v.27: John 6:46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. John 6:46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. John 7:29 I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” John 8:19 Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” John 10:15 just as the Father knows me and I

know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. John 17:25 “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me.

V. 28: John 7:37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me. John 6:37 Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away;

V.29: John 13:15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 1 John 5:3 For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome...

ST PAUL

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 25 The word used for “thank” is more correctly rendered “confess” or “praise” (NAB “I give praise to you”; NJB “I bless you”). Family language is often used for Jesus’ followers “brothers and sisters”, little ones, children and, here, infants. What things? Surely “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:11), including the identity of John and of Jesus.

Verse 26 The reversal of human expectations or criteria is found widely in the NT.

Verse 27 This is the verse which most resembles the Fourth Gospel. If it goes back to the historical Jesus—and it may very well—it signals an important moment in his own developing self-awareness. The word apocalypse is used here literally, i.e. unveiling or revelation. Cf. Moses knowledge of God in Num 12:8; Ex 33:12-23; Sir 45:1-5.

Verse 28 This verse has had enormous appeal in the spiritual tradition, understandably. The word “rest” is synonymous with salvation (cf. Heb. 3:11; 4:1, 3, 5, 10-11; Rev. 14:13). Contrast: *They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others.* (Matthew 23:4)

Verse 29 Jesus echoes rabbinic tradition here, with the added nuance that his teaching is less “scrupulous” but existentially more challenging.

Verse 30 Easy/light because he had made it so for us.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Human beings are always setting up barriers which divide people into those who are important and those who are not. It happens in every community and Jesus met it among the Jewish people of his time. God wants to break down these barriers so that those who are on the wrong side of them can experience that they too are his children and have a unique contribution to make to their community. Perhaps you can recall someone whom you did not think of highly but who turned out to be very good in some sphere. What good news that you were wrong!

2. Great intelligence is not sufficient to develop a relationship with God, unless combined with an open child-like capacity to wonder. Does this resonate with your experience?

3. The ministry of Jesus was to introduce people to a relationship of intimacy with God. How has Jesus given you that kind of relationship?

4. Another aspect of the ministry of Jesus was to free people from the burden of a legalistic understanding of religion, and to introduce them to a faith marked by freedom and love. Perhaps you have made that journey also. Who has been a Jesus person for you and helped you to find freedom, joy and rest in your faith?

PRAYER

Father, Lord of heaven and earth, by whose gracious will the mysteries of the kingdom are revealed to the childlike, make us learn from your Son humility of heart, that in shouldering his yoke we may find refreshment and rest.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Your king comes to you, humble, riding on a donkey

Zech 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! (3+3)
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he, (3+3)
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (3+2)
10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem; (3+2)
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations; (3+3)
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth. (3+3)

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

One word seems to have inspired the use of this reading: humble. The image of universal peace which follows is very attractive in every age.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

One of the twelve minor prophets, Zechariah was composed during the Persian period, in the aftermath of the Exile. Date: 520-400 BC. The book is in two large sections (1-6 and 7-14), within which other divisions may be identified.

- I. 1-6: Prophetic call and visions
- II. 7-8: from fasts to feasts
- III. 9-11 To restore and purify
- IV. 12-14 Future victory

Part I links penitence to the renewal of the community. Part II takes account of insincere repentance, which delays the promised renewal. Part III names the failure of Davidic leadership and lays the ground for Part IV, a darker section, which nevertheless looks forward to the direct action of YHWH as warrior and king. Our section comes from the start of Part III, in the more positive section.

KIND OF WRITING

This is a prophetic oracle (see v.1), still looking forward to a restoration under the descendants of David. The only real candidates at the time would have been Zerubbabel (r. c. 520-510 BC) and his son-in-law Elthan (r. c. 510-490 BC). The section begins in ch. 9 with great hopes but these have evaporated by chapters 12-14.

The form of the oracle is that of an entrance liturgy. The king is coming and so rejoicing is fitting. The king's character is them described, leading to an idealised picture of great peace, when the instruments of peace will be taken away. Vv. 9-10 have a separate metre and there is a discussion about their place in Zechariah 9 as a whole.

The oracle respects the parallelism typical of Hebrew poetry and, in fact, each pair of lines is in strict parallel. The rhythm varies somewhat from 3+3 (praise) to 3+2 (lament), as noted in the text above.



OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save. (Psalms 33:16-17)

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD. The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the

altar. (Psalms 118:22-27)

May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust. May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service. (Psalms 72:8-11)

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? (Micah 6:8)

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 145 (144) takes up the theme of blessing and elaborates on it much more richly. We can see this in phrases such as: *The Lord is faithful in all his words and loving in all his deeds. The Lord supports all who fall and raises all who are bowed down.*

THE GOSPEL LINK

There is no doubt that this text of Zechariah had a tremendous influence on Jesus—underwriting for example the dramatic entry into Jerusalem. The notes of gentleness and peace lie behind this Gospel reading as well and are surely connected with awareness of being a different kind of messiah.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 9 This eschatological oracle is one of the most familiar passages from Zechariah. The language echoes other important passages: from the prophets Is 9:6-7, 11:1-5; Mic 5:2-4; from the New Year festival Ps 72:1-11 and 89:38-45; from the promise to Judah: Gen 49:10-11. This kingship language is also by association messianic. Hence the acclamations and shouts. Nevertheless, this king is significantly different.

The choice of a donkey is a choice against militarism, represented by the horse which was not a farm animal at this time. In context, the king arrives after success in Syria, Phoenicia and Philistia, though it is not said that that victory was his. He has three qualities: righteous, saved

and humble (not well represented in the NRSV above).

The word “humble” is easily related to poor and means meek and lowly as opposed to than proud and boastful. There may be an echo of Moses, whose mark is meekness (Num 12:3).

Verse 10 There are three themes here. (i) War and even the semblance of war will be destroyed. Cf. Mic 5:10; Hos 2:20 (Eng. 2:18); Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3; Isa 9:5; Ps 46:9.

(ii) Peace to the nations. Cf. Isa 2:4 and Mic 4:3. Peace, as usual, has richer meanings in Hebrew such as blessing and wholeness.

(iii) YHWH’s reign will be truly universal. At this point, the writer ceases reference to Psalm 72 (in which the foes are defeated; see above) and goes on to speak more directly of inclusion.

What is the great river? The Euphrates or more probably the great cosmic sea which nourishes the holy city, as in Ps 46:4, Ezek 47:1 and Zech 14:8.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1 There is a note of real joy, even exultation in this first reading. It may help to remember such feelings in your own life—and indeed in your life as a disciple.

2 The contrast between power and humility is strong and this echoes the Pauline theme of power in weakness. Is it your experience that gentleness can be more effective?

3 God’s universal reign means all are included without distinction. When has this become evident to you and did you change in any way as a result?

PRAYER

God of all that is, you are all powerful and yet you come to us through Jesus, through the fragility and love of your Son, true God and true Man.

Help us to embrace your humble love of us by living lives of service and humility, modelled on that of Jesus, our messiah.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Zechariah 9:9-10

Our first reading should conjure up a memory, an image of Jesus. As the same time, it gives us an insight into God’s project of gentle, even vulnerable love.

Second reading

Romans 8:9, 11-13

These few brief sentences take us to the heart of Christian experience and believing, that is, the Spirit dwelling within. As always, the gift has consequences for our we live.

Gospel

Matthew 11:25-30

Our Gospel today is good news at almost any time. Who doesn’t need the support and guidance of the saviour? It may help to name for myself whatever is burdening me at the present moment.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 7 July St Maelruain

Hosea 2:16, 17-18, 21-22

Until Thursday, we read from the prophet Hosea, known for his use of marriage as a symbol of God’s love for his people. This emerges rather touchingly in today’s reading.

Tuesday 8 July St Kilian

Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13

The worship of idols was a constant threat in the ancient world. Idols were more tangible and visible. In case we dismiss the risk too readily, it may help to remember the words of our Lord: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Matthew 6:21)

Wed 9 July Augustine Zhao Rong

Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12

This plaintive text is very powerful. It begins with the traditional image of the vine and goes on to ask penetrating questions. The final paragraph surely speaks today: *it is time to go seeking the Lord until he comes to rain salvation on you.*

Thursday 10 July

Hosea 11:1-4, 8-9

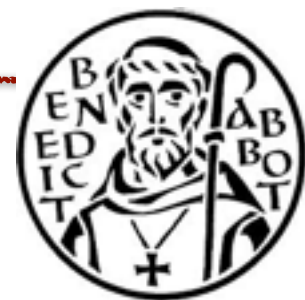
We may think that God as father is

found only in the New Testament, but not so! Speaking from God’s point of view, Hosea portrays God as a loving, anxious, deeply attached parent.

Friday 11 July St Benedict, abbot

Proverbs 2:1-9

The reading is special for the feast and very appropriate. The great Benedictine tradition has proved itself over centuries in many forms to be a wholesome way to follow the Gospel. We see something of Benedict’s inspiration mirrored in the quest for wisdom in our first reading.



Rule of St Benedict (ch. 20)

Reverence in Prayer

And let us be assured that it is not in saying a great deal that we shall be heard (Matt 6:7), but in purity of heart and in tears of compunction. Our prayer, therefore, ought to be short and pure, unless it happens to be prolonged by an inspiration of divine grace. In community, however, let prayer be very short, and when the Superior gives the signal let all rise together.

Saturday 12 July

Isaiah 6:1-8

Beginning today, we have a week of readings from Isaiah. To start, the lectionary offers us the foundational vision of the prophet, a fabulous vision of the holiness of God, both awesome and alluring. You may recognise words we say at every Mass.

