

BIBLICAL RESOURCES

Isaiah 25:6-10; Psalm 23 [22]; Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20; Matthew 22:1-14

The king who gave a wedding banquet for his son

[Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people,]

Mt 22:1 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ 5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12 and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the

outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

In this parable, the main story seems to contradict the final paragraph! It is interesting to note that the same parable is found in Luke 14:15-24, but this time without the appendix, leaving us with the image of the kingdom of God open to all comers. Matthew’s version makes the parable “edgy” and uncomfortable to read.

Several expressions are to be found only or almost only in Matthew: outer darkness (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30); gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28); friend (there are two words for friend in the NT, *philos* and *etairos*—Matthew alone uses the latter and always in an unfriendly way (Matt 20:13; 22:12; 26:50 [= Judas])).

All of this means that the final paragraph was added by Matthew to the text to speak to some situation in the community for which he was writing.

This editorial footprint is confirmed by the strange insertion of the story of a war in the middle of the parable. The very difficult v.7 produces a dissonant combination of nuptial and bellicose imagery. (On a practical level, interrupting the gathering of guests by a mini-war would surely have created problems

Thought for the day

In the parables of Jesus, wedding feasts are mentioned from time to time. The original parable may have ended with the words invite everyone you can find to the wedding. The detail of the troops—highly unlikely as an actual part of a wedding invitation(!)—realistically portrays the later destruction of Jerusalem, which Christians looked back upon as punishment precisely for that rejection. The end is difficult for us today on a spiritual level. However, it is meant to provoke conversion in a possibly complacent church.

Prayer

Lord, we know that you love us and invite us to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Help us to respond to your love that we may be followers of your Son not only in name but also in fact.

for those preparing the food!) In reality, this insertion is a further “allegorisation” of the text, bringing in an apparent reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. Naturally, as this took place some forty years after the ministry of Jesus, it cannot have been part of the original parable. So, all in all, a lot of “interference” by Matthew to get the old parable to speak again to his community. He may be anxious that the story of the rejection of the original tenants (the Jews) and their replacement by the new tenants (the Gentiles) might lead to undue complacency and so he introduces the guest “not dressed” for the occasion. Hence the scary warning at the end: many are called but few are chosen.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

- (i) God is often called a king in the OT. It matters here that God is named not simply as a host but as a ruler. It is precisely as ruler that God will dispense justice at the end.
- (ii) A feast is often used as an image of God’s future “hospitality”.
- (iii) Wedding language is common the



OT to refer to the God of the covenant, with God as the bridegroom and Israel as the bride.

KIND OF WRITING

We have again a parable, but a highly allegorised, even historicised text. It could indeed have a context in the ministry, as Jesus did address the rulers, but originally in a more simple way. Probably the earliest version lacked the theological details pointing to the cross and the outcome of Jesus' life.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

(i) Other parables we have heard recently deal with similar topics—e.g. that of the weeds in the wheat. Again, at issue is a “church” question—what to do with those “in” but not “of”. This was not an issue during the ministry of Jesus, but in the settled context of Matthew’s Gospel is very much an issue. Just as in that parable, the message is do nothing—leave it to the Lord. Behind that, as we saw with the parable of the weeds and the wheat, lies the hope that people may change, so that our judgement of others is premature. At the same time, these parables do recognise a problem in the community.

(ii) The imagery of the feast occurs frequently in the parables and that in turn mirrors Jesus’ own practice of open table-fellowship, a symbol of the Kingdom of God.

ST PAUL

“What then are we to say? Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, “See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall, and whoever be-

lieves in him will not be put to shame. Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” (Rom 9:30-10:4)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

The introductory words above constitute the commentary for this passage, but a word or two in some verses may not be out of place.

Verse 7 This unexpected interruption is most likely Matthew’s reflection on the Jewish War and the destruction of the Holy City and the Temple.

Verse 10 This verse marks the transition to the final paragraph. Naturally the other version in Luke lacks the distinction “good and bad” and goes its own, also theological way: “Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’” (Luke 14:23-24)

Verse 14 This awkward, well-remembered verse is found only here in the New Testament. It represents the growth of a more stringent, even pessimistic view of the Kingdom, in some contrast with the parables of extraordinary growth.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Scripture often speaks of the kingdom of God as a banquet. It is not meant to be taken only as referring to life after death but it also shows how God wants us to be in our relationships with one another in this life. The image of people being at a meal where everyone is happy and welcome and where all hunger and thirst is satisfied gets across the idea that God loves, accepts and welcomes us and

wants us to make that experience available to one another. Think of times in your life when you have had “banquet” experiences and when you have felt accepted and loved?

2. The host enlists the help of his servants to invite people to the banquet. We are commissioned by the Lord to invite people to the banquet of the kingdom, to the fullness of life—as parents, teachers, friends, etc. What has it been like for you to play a part in leading others to a fuller life?

3. There are many ways in which we can reflect on the guests invited, e.g. a) The ones invited first all found excuses to refuse the invitation. How do you feel when someone turns down an invitation you offer? Have there been times when you have found excuses to refuse an invitation from the Lord, or from others? What effect did this have in your life, or on others? b) The second round of invitations went out to ‘everyone in the streets, good and bad’. What is it like for you to receive an invitation, particularly when you do not consider yourself worthy of that invitation? c) Notice that the banquet of the kingdom is an inclusive one. When have you given an open, inclusive invitation to others?

4. As in the parable last week there is a message about being alert to invitations that offer a fuller life and the danger of losing out if we neglect to respond to such invitations. Perhaps there have been opportunities offered to you that you missed, and now regret. Think also of the blessings you received because you seized the moment and took an opportunity that presented itself.

5. The second parable puts the focus on how we respond to invitations. Some invitations are ones that challenge us to change, to conversion, to put on a ‘wedding garment’. What has been your experience of changing in response to invitations?

PRAYER

God of all goodness and kindness, you invite all peoples to the banquet and offer them a feast beyond compare.

Give us your saving grace to keep unstained the robe of our baptism until that day when you welcome us to heaven’s joyful table.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



I have experienced times of need and times of abundance

Phil 4:11 11 *Not that I say this because of need, for I have learned, in whatever situation I find myself, to be **self-sufficient**.* 12 I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In *every (pantín)* circumstance and in *all (panta)* things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. 13 **I have the strength** for *everything (panta)* through him who empowers me. 14 Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress.

Phil 4:19 My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen. (NABRev translation)

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This is our final reading from Philippians and it strikes a quite personal note.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

The context here is not to much in the community but in Paul himself. He really *did* suffer a great deal for the Gospel—as the hardships lists below make clear. As a result, v. 12 is not lightly spoken! It give us the opportunity to get to know Paul a bit better.

KIND OF WRITING

The goal of the popular philosophies of the time was inner calm (*autrakeia*) so that everything could be endured. Paul's strength lies in Christ rather than in some inner pool of spiritual calm. Paul uses the I-style of personal confession (see the related passage). Vv. 19-20 are in the form of a wish-prayer.

RELATED PASSAGES

For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to die, because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to people. We are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, we are dishonoured! To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, poorly clothed, brutally treated, and without a roof over our heads. We do hard work, toiling with our own hands. When we are verbally abused, we respond with a blessing, when persecuted, we endure, when people lie about us, we answer in a friendly

manner. We are the world's dirt and scum, even now. (1 Cor 4:9-13)

We are experiencing trouble on every side, but are not crushed; we are perplexed, but not driven to despair; we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are knocked down, but not destroyed, always carrying around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our body. For we who are alive are constantly being handed over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal body. (2 Cor 4:8-11)

We do not give anyone an occasion for taking an offence in anything, so that no fault may be found with our ministry. But as God's servants, we have commended ourselves in every way, with great endurance, in persecutions, in difficulties, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in troubles, in sleepless nights, in hunger, by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by benevolence, by the Holy Spirit, by genuine love, by truthful teaching, by the power of God, with weapons of righteousness both for the right hand and for the left, through glory and dishonour, through slander and praise; regarded as impostors, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well-known; as dying and yet—see!—we continue to live; as those who are scourged and yet not executed; as sorrowful, but always rejoicing, as poor, but making many rich, as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Cor 6:3-10)

Are they servants of Christ? (I am talking like I am out of my mind!) I am even more so: with much greater labours, with far more imprisonments, with more severe beatings, facing death many times. Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with a rod. Once I received a stoning. Three times I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I spent adrift in the open sea. I have been on journeys many times, in dangers from rivers, in dangers from robbers, in dangers from my own countrymen, in dangers from Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers at sea, in dangers from false brothers, in hard work and toil, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, many times without food, in cold and without enough clothing. Apart from other

things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxious concern for all the churches. (2 Cor 11:23-28)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 11 This verse is not part of the reading but forms an essential lead-in. The word “learned” recurs while the notion of being “self-sufficient” is further explored and illustrated in vv. 12-13. To be self-sufficient was the goal of the popular philosophies of the period. Paul's self-sufficiency lies, of course, in Christ. Even the verb he uses in v. 12 for learn was associated with the mystery religions. Paul takes the risk of playing with buzz words of the culture.

Verse 12 The prose here in vv. 12-13 has a high poetic quality using rhythm, repetition, synonyms as well as contrasting infinitives. The verb for learn is *mueō*, lit. to be initiated (*hapax*), here cleverly translated as “I have learned the secret” thus capturing the cultural nuance of the verb. The Jerusalem Bible is faithful too: *I have been through my initiation.*

Verse 13 In contrast to the popular philosophies and the mystery religions, Paul's power comes through Christ. Cf. *...for whenever I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Cor 12:10)

Verse 14 Lest he should seem not to value their concern, Paul thanks the Philippians. The word for share is related to an important word in Philippians, fellowship or *koinōnia* (Phil 1:5; 2:1; 3:10).

Verses 19-20 This prayer, echoing key terms such as fully, need and riches, brings the whole section vv. 10-20 to a close. Responding to their material support, Paul has very much in view the spiritual needs of the Philippians. Cf. the start: *And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight so that you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.* (Phil 1:9-11)

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Paul's sufficiency in Christ is remarkable—where have I found such strength?

PRAYER

You know our lives and the difficulties we face, O God. Show us, Father, how to draw strength from Christ your Son, that we may live both troubled and yet untroubled, engaged yet truly free. Amen.

The Lord will destroy death for ever

- Isa 25:6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow,
of well-aged wines strained clear.
- 7 And he will destroy on this mountain
the **shroud** *that is cast over all peoples*,
the **sheet** *that is spread over all nations*;
he will swallow up **death** *forever*.
- 8 Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the **tears** *from all faces*,
and the **disgrace** *of his people*
he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.
- 9 It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God;
we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.
- 10 For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.
*The Moabites shall be trodden down in their place
as straw is trodden down in a dung-pit.*
- 11 *Though they spread out their hands in the midst of it,
as swimmers spread out their hands to swim,
their pride will be laid low despite the struggle of their hands.*
- 12 *The high fortifications of his walls will be brought down,
laid low, cast to the ground, even to the dust.*

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This reading will be familiar to people, mainly from funerals, and it is easy to see why it is suitable. In the lectionary excerpt, it comes to a close in 10a on a resoundingly positive note.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Our reading comes from Isaiah of Jerusalem (chs. 1-39 mostly). That section can be outlined as follows:

- I. Is. 1-12 *Condemnation / Salvation*
- II. Is. 13-23 *Oracles against Foreign Nations*
- III. Is. 24-27 *Judgement on the world*
- IV. Is. 28-33 *Judah v. Assyria and Egypt*
- V. Is. 34-35 *Salvation for Judah*
- VI. Is. 36-39 *Isaiah, Hezekiah, Jerusalem*

As can be seen from the context, the social conditions are dire and tremendous suffering has taken place. These conditions are alluded to in the verses added (10bc-12; not included the lectionary).

KIND OF WRITING

Isaiah 25:1-12 (the full reading) is a hymn in two parts. Part I takes in vv. 1-5 and 6-10a and part II vv. 10b-12.

The first part is positive; the second part begins well but deteriorates into local rivalry.

RELATED READINGS

Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead. (Isaiah 26:19)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 6 “On this mountain” suggests the universal rule of YHWH. The banquet takes place where the throne of God is (Is 24:23). Notice: all peoples.

Verse 7 The host makes a tremendous gesture in destroying not just any garment but the shroud of death. To swallow is often used of Leviathan or Tiamat, symbols of chaos and destruction. It indicates complete destruction. St Paul paraphrases vv. 7 and 8 in 1 Corinthians 15: When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54–55)

Verse 8 At the start of the verse, the name of God changes to “my Lord YHWH,” a more personal address as we move from impersonal metaphors (“shroud”) to personal images (“face”).

The two verbs are important here: to wipe away and to take away. Together with swallowing, the message is complete destruction. The five nouns are also powerful: shroud, sheet, death, tears and disgrace. Notice that each one is qualified (in italics in the text). “The” in front of “disgrace” suggests a specific calamity: violence and upheaval as captured in Is 24 cited above. The royal edict of reversal is given as final. Cf. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)

Verse 9 This kind of hymn occurs elsewhere: Is. 33:2; Pss. 25:5; 40:2; Gen. 49:18; Jer. 14:22.

Verse 10 “On this mountain” serves to “stitch” this passage into its literary context ((24:23; 25:6, 7). When you read v. 10bc, it is quite clear why it is not chosen for the lectionary. Suddenly, we are back in local politics and power struggles.

Verse 11 This is quite satirical: God is achieving great things and puny Israel is concerned with humiliating a rival and neighbour. The word “hand” links with the praise which started in v. 9. Manual working of a manure pit will not avail against the hand of the Lord.

Verse 12 The hope-for reversal, illustrated in very concrete terms.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Go back to my own times of bereavement: what brought you through? Was there some moment of healing which you can recall?
2. God’s hospitality is anticipated in the Lord’s Supper when we sit at the banquet of life. We are not always conscious of this and yet it is profoundly real. 1

PRAYER

O God, you heal the broken-hearted: sent your healing touch on who who mourn and give us new hope.

THE LITURGY

Isaiah 25:6-10; Psalm 23 [22]; Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20; Matthew 22:1-14

READINGS 1 AND 3

Even though at the hand of Matthew, the banquet is not necessarily a permanent refuge (!), nevertheless, Isaiah's theme is taken up by the Gospel.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

In its final verses, the Psalm takes up the imagery of hospitality. Each element is eloquent: banquet, oil, cup, house.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Isaiah 25:6-10

Like much of the Bible, the main issue in this reading is life and death. The human tragedy is recognised and hope is given.

Second reading

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

St Paul was really resilient and self-sufficient. But, even he is grateful when the people of Philippi—his favourites among the churches—send him material help and support while he is in prison.

Gospel

Matthew 22:1-14

Our parable has some unlikely features, such as a war. However these features reflect history: the destruction of Jerusalem and parting of the ways between Jews and Christians. But even Christians can't presume...

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Romans

For the next four weeks, we read from Romans. It was and remains a great Christian document, difficult yet rewarding. It is a real letter written to real Christians in Rome. At the same time, it represents a synthesis of Pauline teaching, with strong roots in Galatians and 1 Corinthians. It would be good to read the whole letter again at this time.

Monday 16 October

St Gall, abbot and missionary

Romans 1:1-7

Paul wrote to Christians in Rome be-

cause they were in conflict with each other over how much of Jewish tradition to keep. The opening greeting is enriched with a careful account of the core convictions of the faith.

Luke 11:29-32

In Luke's Gospel, the foundational portrait of Jesus is that of prophet, one who speak on behalf of God a penetrating word. Asking for a sign is to doubt that the prophet comes from God. Jesus, in this passage, has a robust self-understanding, ending in a challenge for us today as well.

Tuesday 17 October

St Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr

Romans 1:16-25

Paul is writing to Gentiles and Jews who have become Christians. He starts by reminding the Gentiles where they came from: idolatry and immorality. No doubt they felt uncomfortable being reminded of their past!

Luke 11:37-41

Lest we sit back in satisfaction, it may help to recall that all religious activity tends towards prizing externals, a reality today as much in the life of Jesus. What lies at the heart of religion? Jesus gives a direct answer in today's Gospel.

Wednesday 18 October

St Luke, evangelist

2 Timothy 4:10-17

The reading is chosen for the feast because it mentions a certain "Luke." This is unlike to be the same as the writer of the Gospel and Acts. However, the reading shows wavering support for the apostle or, in reality, for those sustaining the Pauline tradition in a later context.

Luke 10:1-9

The sending of the seventy-two—unique to Luke and anticipating the wider mission in the Acts—portrays a picture of fleet-footed evangelisers, who travel lightly and without hindrance.

Thursday 19 October

St Paul of the Cross

Romans 3:21-30

Today we hear one of the most difficult

passage in Paul. In a word: Jesus' own faithfulness discloses the faithfulness of God. I would recommend a better translation for these key verses, such as the NET bible (available at www.bible.org).

Luke 11:47-54

Prophets are often blunt, and none blunter than Jesus himself. He does speak offensively and you can see why the officials of the day were offended and roused to opposition, eventually lethal.

Friday 20 October

Romans 4:1-8

Abraham was important because he was considered in "right relationship" (= justified) independently of good deeds (= circumcision, dietary laws and Sabbath observance). In other words, it was always possible to be justified without good deeds on the basis of faith.

Luke 12:1-7

Yeast, which causes inflation, provides a ready metaphor for hypocrisy (lit. mask wearing). The second paragraph assure the friends of Jesus of God's boundless care for them. There's even a flash of humour in the attempt at hyperbole: *you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows* (two could be bought for a penny!).

Saturday 21 October

Romans 4:13,16-18

Great themes are brought together here: grace—the free gift—and faith—or faithfulness. Both Jews and Gentiles have equal access through faith to the free gift and therefore, *For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* (Romans 3:22–24)

Luke 12:8-12

This passage reflects much later experience and concerns. We may see this in the following passage: *The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.* (2 Tim 2:11–13)