



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Philippians 4:1-9

My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers,

whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to the people in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 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.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ 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.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. 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.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live, move and have our being.

During the time of Paul's imprisonment, the emperor Nero was becoming more notorious and controlled the levers of Justice toward his every whim. Nero was the one who jailed Paul.

During Paul's time in prison the church in Phillipi was facing social opposition and persecution for their faith. They also faced conspiracy theorists and phony messengers claiming to come from God. Internally they were vulnerable to infighting which threatened the unity of their church.

Paul must have panicked and told them to defend themselves and guard their Jesus following faith by taking up arms. He probably instructed them to keep weapons handy and to teach their children how to use them.

Paul may have said the Christian faith must be preserved by holding theological pop-up debates in town squares and electing only politicians who will put Jesus in power.

No. According to Paul's recorded letters he gave them these words of spiritual wisdom to those he loved and nurtured at Phillipi. Paul said to keep doing the things our mentor Jesus taught us and that will be enough. Jesus compared it to being invited to attend a celebration of unity where everyone gathers in the solidarity of love and fidelity. At this wedding celebration there was to be no competition or comparison. It was about harmony. The guests were provided with a garment or robe symbolizing belonging and unity.

A garment or robe of righteousness woven by the threads of Gods gracious invitation.

Since Jesus uses a parable of a wedding celebration as an example of what it is like to enter the kingdom of heaven, perhaps this is what Paul describes in his letter to the struggling Philippians. What is he asking the Philippians to adorn themselves with?

Paul says whatsoever is true, whatsoever is honorable, whatsoever is just, whatsoever is pure, whatsoever is pleasing, whatsoever is commendable, if anything excellent or worthy of praise. Then he says to think on these things.

These are the materials to be worn as an expression of solidarity with others who celebrate the feast of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with all people as the family of God.

To resist wearing this robe of Christs righteousness, we are rejecting the embodiment of Christ's peace. By doing this we have chosen to reside in the kingdom of self. A kingdom where I am the emperor and my own needs to be right, enough and to be in control are served.

The little burgeoning church of Phillipi that Nero so feared sent money to Paul for food and Paul returned his letters.

What I hear Jesus saying in this parable is the fruit of solidarity through the receiving of Gods gracious invitation into the kingdom of God's reign. A simultaneous resistance of myself as a

tyrant and to any external tyrant that does not exhibit these traits. A willingness to wear the robe of the marriage celebration. This clothing of self with love has enough power to overcome any circumstance or selfish ambition.

For Jesus it was Caesar, for Paul it was Nero. I must ask who is it for me? What internal or external tyrant has me imprisoned? How are we to discern between false messengers and inner tyrants like the ones we face today?

The kingdom of heaven is right at our fingertips. A seat at the banquet table in the presence of divine union. It waits not for a hereafter; it greets us in the eternal now.

Amen