



Conducted by
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PLEASE comment on the statement in Matthew 22:14 "For many are called but few are chosen". We read elsewhere that the church are the "called" of God. Does Matt. 22:14 mean therefore that few in the church will be "chosen" for life eternal?

I think that to understand the above verse we must give due regard, as always to the context and setting of the statement. The words, "For many are called, but few are chosen" come at the end of the well known parable of the marriage of the Kings Son.

The Parable : To The Jews

Jesus said, "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son." We must keep before us the fact that the parable is designed to describe some aspect of the "Kingdom of heaven". The parable relates that the king sent his servants to call those who were invited to come to the wedding feast, but they refused. Some of them made light of (or just ignored) the invitation. Others of them were hostile and assaulted and killed the king's servants. When the king heard about this he was exceedingly angry and sent his armies against those who had been invited to the wedding and had assaulted his servants. His armies destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

To my mind, so far in the parable Jesus has clearly been referring to the Jews. Their response to God's overtures to them had been to stone His prophets and slay His Son. By and large they rejected Christ and His invitation to them into the Kingdom of Heaven. Did not our Lord say so much in Matt. 23:37 as He looked down upon the doomed city of Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate."

Thus, in the parable the king said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find bid to the marriage. So those servants went into the highways and gathered together all as many as they could find, both bad and good : and the wedding was furnished with guests."

...and to the Gentiles

Clearly this is where the invitation is extended to the Gentiles. The Jews had proved themselves unworthy of the king's invitation and so the other nations (the Gentiles) are given an opportunity of coming to the wedding feast. We are in the happy position of having hindsight in most New Testament matters: we can look back into the Acts and epistles and see that in fact these things did come to pass. For instance Paul is described as a chosen vessel of God's to bear His name before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Indeed in Acts 13:46 Paul and Barnabus implement the action indicated by the parable: "Then Paul and Barnabus waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been preached to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee

to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth." Truly the gospel is God's power unto salvation to the Jews first and also to the Greek (Gentiles: Rom. 1:16; see also Acts 3:26; 28:27-28).

We notice that when the King's servants were sent into the highways and byways to invite all and sundry to the feast their invitation was extended to "as many as they found, both bad and good". The "highways" mean, of course, the world in general, and "both bad and good" refers to the fact that even in the world at large there are differences in men socially and morally — some are worse than others. No man is so bad, however, that the gospel cannot purify and redeem him, and no man is so good that he can be regarded as being without need of the saving power of the gospel of Christ. The fulfilment of this part of the parable is easily recognised and took place when Jesus said to His apostles, just prior to His ascension, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). "Go into all the world and preach to every creature." Previously Christ's instructions (to the twelve and the seventy) had been to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel — not to the Gentiles nor even to any of the Samaritans (Matt. 10:5,6).

And thus the wedding was furnished with guests.

The Wedding Garment

The next part of the parable deals with what transpired when the king came in to take a look at the guests. It has a direct bearing on the 'phrase introduced by our questioner, "Many are called but few are chosen".

In eastern countries it was, and in some places still is, a custom for visitors to the king to be provided with robes of honour so that they may be suitably attired when they present themselves before him. Marcus Dods in The Parables as recorded by Matthew, tells of ambassadors being invited to the table of a Persian king and given "splendid vests" sent from the king to be worn over the ambassadors' dresses prior to their appearance in the king's presence. The ambassadors at first refused to wear the vests, but the officer urged them most earnestly to comply with the request, for refusal would have greatly displeased the king. The ambassadors had probably taken a great deal of trouble in dressing for the occasion and were dismayed that their best finery was to be covered. I suppose in the same way today many in the highways on hearing the invitation (the gospel) resent being told that they must comply with the king's request to adorn themselves with humility and obey the terms of entry into the Kingdom of heavens — remember, this is a parable about the Kingdom of heaven. Upon inspection of his guests the king noticed a man who had not a wedding garment. "And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called but few are chosen."

To my mind the significance of the wedding garment is, in the analogy of the parable, that in being called in from the highways and byways we all come (the good and the bad) in various states of dress and undress — dress being equated with what we are morally. To be fit for presentation to the king we must cover our own dress (or rags) with the garment provided by the king. No matter how well dressed we already think we are we still have to cover ourselves with the covering provided. "All our righteousness is as filthy rags." We must stand before God clothed not in our own righteousness but in the white robes of Christ's righteousness.

The man without the garment, who had been ejected from the wedding feast, had apparently refused to avail himself of the wedding garment, had defiantly pushed past the attendants and taken his place at the table disregarding the wishes of the king, thinking perhaps that his own dress was too good to cover. No matter how good

we are (or how evil we are) we must enter the kingdom of heaven in the prescribed manner, figuratively wearing the proper covering. Some, as we know, are too proud to humiliate themselves by being baptised for the remission of sins. Some want to come in by the back door or to come in some other more suitable way. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door of the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1). Thus, putting on the garment could very well be likened unto "putting on Christ". Paul said, "As many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Abbot on this passage says, "The garments we put on are when we put on the Lord Jesus by faith in baptism. (Rom.13:14; Gal. 3:26,27).... To be without the wedding garments, offered freely to him, implies that the man thinks his own attire is good enough." The man in the parable, therefore, represents those who, while professing to be for Christ, think that they can find their own way into the kingdom of heaven. When discovered, the man is speechless, self-condemned. He is not reasoned with, for God will not reason with men on Judgement Day. Now is the only time we can "reason together" with God. And so the man is cast out into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth — truly "many are called but few are chosen."

The Call

The "many called" included, according to the parable, virtually all men. The Jews received the call (or invitation into the kingdom of God). Some quietly ignored it and carried on with their farming and merchandising and some violently opposed it (both attitudes being equally bad). The Gentiles (both the good and the bad) also received the call. Of the many called or invited only a few responded favourably to the invitation. The same obtains today. Jesus in Matt. 7:13,14 said that it would be so; "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life and few there be that find it." God has not predestined that some will be called and some will not. The call is made available to all and whosoever will may come. But from the vast armies which hear the call God chooses to give His blessings only to those who love, serve and obey Him. We must place ourselves in a position whereby God can bless us. If we learn that Jesus said that we must be born again and choose either to ignore it or even to challenge it, then we can't expect God to make us His choice. If we choose Christ then God chooses us. Peter said to those who had chosen to follow Christ "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (see also Eph. 1:1-14).

In this one verse we are told that God has called us out of darkness, and because we responded to His call we are His chosen generation. But of the many called few are chosen, because few sincerely respond to His call.

Thus then, the man found without the wedding garment represents those who, on Judgement Day, will be found in the church without suitable character. The few chosen are those who will be found at their posts clothed in the garments of righteousness.