

# FEW ARE CHOSEN

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*Matthew 22:14* *Many are invited, but few are chosen.*

This has to be one of the most puzzling and unnerving scriptures you will read, especially because these are the words of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

I imagine many of you, like me, have had the experience of waiting to be picked to play on a sports team. Throwing my shoulders back and drawing up as tall as I could make myself I hoped for the best, but often was nearly last to be chosen. It was disappointing, sometimes bordering on rejection, because, unless there are too few players to begin with, few are chosen.

Jesus, however, does not have to guess about your capabilities, and your stature is a matter of indifference to Him, for He Himself intends to provide all the power you will need. He is more concerned about whether you will follow and rely on Him for the wisdom, power, and endurance you will need.

When Jesus spoke to the crowds, He used stories; only His disciples heard the explanations of the stories' meaning and application.

Toward the end of His life on earth, Jesus spoke to them about final events, the end of time. His aim was not to wow them, nor to frighten them, but to prepare them. For they would have to endure much opposition to their faith — from circumstances they could not understand, from slick and persuasive charlatans, and from threatening persecutors. He wanted them (and us) to understand the character and function of the Kingdom of God, so they (and we) could serve Him successfully. Here is one of those stories:

*Matthew 22:1* *Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying:*

<sup>2</sup> *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.*

Some people indiscriminately invite everyone they know to their wedding, but others are more selective, inviting those they have been closest to, those who have been most supportive of them, those who have personally made a difference in their lives — their real friends.

The King of Heaven invited His friends to the banquet for His Son. His friends were those with whom He had a relationship over a long period of time; those with whom He had shared His heart.

Out of all the people on the face of the earth, God had chosen the small, Semitic race of the Israelites, descended from Abraham through Isaac, his promised son, to be His friends.

He promised them a land for their own possession. He brought them to Egypt in a time of famine in order to preserve them. When they fell into slavery to the Pharaoh, God delivered them by mighty acts of power. For forty years He led them through the desert wilderness of Sinai, where He gave them His Law and taught them to rely upon Him for all they needed. He gave them victory after victory as they took possession of the land He had provided. He established them there in peace and prosperity. They were His friends. Then He sent them His Son.

*Matthew 22:3* He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

<sup>4</sup> “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

<sup>5</sup> “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. <sup>6</sup> The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

On one of His last visits to Jerusalem, Jesus wept over the once-holy city and its people:

*Matthew 23:37* “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me. <sup>38</sup> And now, look, your house is abandoned and desolate.

And so it came to pass, in the year 70 A.D. that the Roman general, Titus, besieged the city, scaled its walls, burned the Temple, and leveled nearly the entire city. They missed their opportunity.

*Matthew 22:8* “Then [the king] said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. <sup>9</sup> Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ <sup>10</sup> So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

So, the followers of Jesus, anointed with the Holy Spirit, began to carry the invitation (the Good News) to Jerusalem, to all Judea, to Samaria, and to the uttermost ends of the earth. The door is open. The invitation is for everyone! Personal worthiness is no longer an issue, because Jesus paid for our sins with His death. Our compassionate God now welcomes all.

*Matthew 22:11* “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. <sup>12</sup> ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

<sup>13</sup> “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

<sup>14</sup> “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

What made the man who was expelled one of the “unchosen”? What did he do wrong? Hadn’t he answered the invitation, as others had refused to do?

The King’s invitation is to everyone, but there is a danger of showing up without meeting His demands.

Perhaps you’ve been to a yard sale where there was a table, or a bin, or a sheet on the ground for items that might have been throwaways because they were estimated to be of so little value to most people, but instead they are simply free (giveaways). Just help yourself!

Well, salvation is free, but it is not cheap; it is not a “throwaway” gift. There is nothing you can do to deserve God’s kindness; you cannot earn an entrance into Heaven. But not because it is worth so little; rather, because it is worth so much! So much that you could never attain it on your own.

You may be a good person, kind-hearted, encouraging. But it doesn’t matter how good you may be, you’re just not godly enough.

Heaven is where God lives, in the company of godly beings. Some, we call angels; others, we call saints. But all of them are godly.

And what is godliness? It is not goodness, although godly people are good. It is devotion to God, dependence upon God. It is leaning heavily in God's direction.

This is what God demands: leaning heavily upon Him, trusting in Him. Exactly the opposite of what the world urges: self-reliance. Until we realize this, we will always show up in the wrong clothing.

Godliness is what Paul will describe so carefully in next week's reading of his letter to the Romans: the unique kind of righteousness which is gained only by faith in Jesus Christ. It requires the renunciation of self-dependence, a turning away from doing it on your own and doing it your way. It is the righteousness that is *not earned*, but received as a free gift by those who put their whole and continuing trust in Jesus Christ.

Thus, Jesus said, "He who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 24:13). Faithfulness is everything.

Faking it is nothing. Hypocrisy has its rewards, but the pleasant ones are short-lived, and the awful ones are interminably long. Ultimately, it is "the darkness outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." That is how Jesus described the place of the hypocrites.

Hear another story:

*Matthew 24:45 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?"<sup>46</sup> It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.<sup>47</sup> I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.<sup>48</sup> But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,'<sup>49</sup> and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.<sup>50</sup> The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.<sup>51</sup> He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The place of the hypocrites.

How can it be that the Master's servant does not expect Him and is not aware? Had he forgotten the Master's words? Or simply discounted them? Does he no longer expect Him because he no longer believes His words?

Is the servant unaware because he is so absorbed with himself? His service has turned to oppression and indulgence! Now, it's all about him.

Could this become your story? Or do you remember to practice leaning heavily on the Lord each day? Do you turn from the allure of the world, the flesh, and the devil to say "yes" to God?

Faith is not an event, not a momentary experience. Faith is a long journey toward God. Faith is a daily renewal, a repeated recommitment to the Lord Jesus, in the face of everything that would lead us to lean elsewhere.

On whom (or what) are you leaning right now? Lean on Jesus. Don't just hang out with God's people; *be* a person of God.

*Ephesians 4:24 Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

*Colossians 3:10 Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Be one of the few, the faithful, the chosen.