Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen
Scripture: Matthew 22
Code: BQ011312

But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:11–14)

The last scene in the parable focuses on an intruder into the wedding feast, who did not belong because he was **not dressed in wedding clothes**. The man obviously had been included in the general invitation, because the king made no restrictions as to who was invited, having instructed his slaves to call both the evil and good wherever they might be found. He was not a party crasher who came without an invitation, but he had come improperly **dressed**, and he obviously stood out in the great wedding hall, in stark contrast to all the other **dinner guests**.

At first reading, one wonders how any of those who accepted the king's invitation could have been expected to come properly attired. They had been rounded up from every part of the land, and many had been taken off the streets. Even if they had time to dress properly, they had no clothes befitting such an occasion as the wedding of the king's son.

But the fact that all of **the dinner guests** except that one man were **dressed in wedding clothes** indicates that the king had made provision for such **clothes**. It would have been a moral mockery, especially for such an obviously kind and gracious ruler, to invite even the most wicked people in the land to come to the feast and then exclude one poor fellow because he had no proper clothes to wear.

That man was fully accountable for being improperly dressed, but the gracious king nevertheless gave him an opportunity to justify himself, asking with undeserved respect, **"Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?"** Had the man had a good reason, he would certainly have mentioned it immediately But **he was speechless**, unable to offer the king even the feeblest excuse. It is therefore obvious that he *could* have come in **wedding clothes** had he been willing.

Until that point the man had been utterly presumptuous, thinking he could come to the king's feast on his own terms, in any clothes he wanted. He was proud and self-willed, thoughtless of the others, and, worst of all, insulting to the king. Arrogantly defying royal protocol, he was determined to "be

himself.”

But his arrogance was short-lived. When, as the king knew in advance, the man could not excuse himself, **the king said to the servants**, “**Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth**.” The binding of **hand and foot** probably represents prevention of the man’s resisting as well as prevention of his returning. By that time it was night, and although the wedding hall would be well lighted, it was dark outside. The man was permanently expelled from the presence of the king and of the king’s people **into the outer darkness**. He would have great regret and remorse, and, with everyone else **in that place**, he would experience perpetual **weeping and gnashing of teeth**. But though he had a great opportunity, he had never had, and did not now have, the godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation (2 Cor. 7: 10).

The proper wedding garment of a true believer is God-imputed righteousness, without which no one can enter or live in the kingdom. Unless a person’s righteousness exceeds the hypocritical self-righteousness that typified the scribes and Pharisees, he “shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). The only acceptable wedding garment is the genuine “sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Jesus surely would have been pleased had one of His hearers interrupted and asked, “How can I be clothed in the proper garment? What can I do to keep from being cast into the outer darkness like that man?” He no doubt would have said to that person as He had said many times before in various ways, “Come to Me, that you may have life” (John 5:40). As Paul explained to the Corinthians, God made Christ “who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). That is the wedding garment that God demands and His Son provides.

Jesus did not ask the Jewish leaders to comment on this parable as He had done with the previous two, where in each case they condemned themselves by their answers (21:31–32, 40–45). He knew they would not be trapped again, because it was now obvious that the whole thrust of the parables was to condemn them. Their only purpose, now heating up to a fury, was to trap and condemn Him to death (22:15;cf.21:46).

Consequently, the Lord closed with the simple but sobering statement, **Many are called, but few are chosen**. That phrase reflects the scriptural balance between God’s sovereignty and man’s will. The invitations to the wedding feast went out to **many**, representative of everyone to whom the gospel message is sent. **But few** of those who heard the call were willing to accept it and thereby be among the **chosen**. The gospel invitation is sent to everyone, because it is not the Father’s will that a single person be excluded from His kingdom and perish in the outer darkness of hell (2 Pet. 3:9). But not everyone wants God, and many who claim to want Him do not want Him on His terms. Those who are saved enter God’s kingdom because of their willing acceptance of His sovereign, gracious provision.

Those who are lost are excluded from the kingdom because of their willing rejection of that same sovereign grace.

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