

For many are called, but few are chosen

When Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast, He indicates that the call to heaven is by invitation, and people have the choice of accepting the invitation or not. At the end of the parable, Jesus enigmatically states that “for many are called (invited), but few are chosen.” What did Jesus mean?

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who held a wedding feast for his son. And he sent his slaves to call (**kaleō**) those who had been invited (**kaleō**) to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come.

Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited (**kaleō**), “Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened cattle are all butchered and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast!”’ But they paid no attention and went their separate ways, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and treated them abusively, and then killed them.

Now the king was angry, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those who were invited (**kaleō**) were not worthy. So go to the main roads, and invite (**kaleō**) whomever you find there to the wedding feast.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.

But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Tie his hands and feet, and throw him into the outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in that place.’ **For many are called, but few are chosen.**” (Matt 22:1-14, NASB)

1. What is your initial understanding of Jesus’ statement, “**for many are called, but few are chosen?**”

2 Refresh your understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant. What did God choose to be to Abraham and his descendants?

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. (Gen 17:7, NASB)

3. Refresh your understanding of what God stipulated to the nation of Israel before revealing the Mosaic Covenant. This is where God defines who His people are and His own possession.

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” (Ex 19:5-6, NASB)

4. In light of the Abrahamic Covenant and how God defines who His people are, what is the correct understanding of Jesus' statement, "**for many are called, but few are chosen?**"

5. When you read Revelation, what do you realize about Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Feast?

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the **marriage supper of the Lamb.**'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev 19:7-10, NASB)

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Teacher Notes

When Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast, He indicates that the call to heaven is by invitation, and people have the choice of accepting the invitation or not. At the end of the parable, Jesus enigmatically states that “for many are called (invited), but few are chosen.” What did Jesus mean?

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Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited (**kaleō**), “Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened cattle are all butchered and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast!”’ But they paid no attention and went their separate ways, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and treated them abusively, and then killed them.

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But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Tie his hands and feet, and throw him into the outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in that place.’ **For many are called, but few are chosen.**” (Matt 22:1-14, NASB)

Inform the student that the phrase “for many are called, but few are chosen” is confusing to understand. What does this reveal about God? One approach to understand this issue is to examine the word “call.”

Using a Greek lexicon, the Greek word **kaleō** underpins the English word call. When Jesus uses **kaleō** in this parable, it is in the context of “to invite.”

1. What is your initial understanding of Jesus’ statement, “for many are called, but few are chosen?”

Ask the student: without any understanding of the biblical context, what comes to mind when you read this phrase?

Many people are invited but only a few are chosen by God to come to the kingdom of heaven.

2 Refresh your understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant. What did God choose to be to Abraham and his descendants?

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. (Gen 17:7, NASB)

Remind the student: the Bible is a historical record of God’s interaction with His creation Man. And God’s interaction is within the context of the divine covenants He has committed Himself to. To understand what God is choosing to do, one must explore the Abrahamic Covenant.

Ask the student: what did God choose to do?

God chose to be God to Abraham and Abraham’s descendants.

Ask the student: did God tell Abraham that He would choose who would be Abraham’s descendants?

3. Refresh your understanding of what God stipulated to the nation of Israel before revealing the Mosaic Covenant. This is where God defines who His people are and His own possession.

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” (Ex 19:4-6, NASB)

Inform the student: you will discover that learning about God requires a lot of knowledge about the Bible. Every Believer starts where you are starting from. It just takes time, diligence, and guidance from the Holy Spirit to build your knowledge base and understanding.

Ask the student: what must you do to be God’s own possession among all the peoples? Encourage discussion and ask questions.

1. Recognize that the invisible God does really exist.
2. Obey God’s word.

Ask the student: what covenant is God referring to? Does this mean that this is obsolete?

The covenant that God is referring to is the Mosaic Covenant. It might appear so if it weren’t for Jesus’ explanation:

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matt 5:17-18, NASB)

Jesus states that He has come to fulfill the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant – to teach what sin is, how to atone for it, and how to be holy!

4. In light of the Abrahamic Covenant and how God defines who His people are, what is the correct understanding of Jesus’ statement, “**for many are called, but few are chosen?**”

Encourage the student to think logically and review the Parable of the Wedding Banquet in light of the Abrahamic Covenant and how God defines who His people are.

“For many are called.”

Many people are invited to the kingdom of heaven and they have a choice to come to the King’s banquet for His Son’s wedding or not.

Teacher Note: Matthew is believed to be written in Hebrew or with the Jewish audience in mind in which the Hebrew meaning behind “many” is in the context of “all.” **“For all are called.”**

“But few are chosen.”

For those few who come to the wedding banquet, they must be wearing the proper wedding clothing which is symbolic of their faith in Jesus.

Because of their belief in Jesus and obedience to His word, God has chosen to be God to them.

5. When you read Revelation, what do you realize about Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Feast?

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the **marriage supper of the Lamb.**'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev 19:7-10, NASB)

Ask the student: do you see any parallels to Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Feast? Encourage the student in his observations of the text. Circle the similarities.

The "fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

Faith in Jesus Christ is what makes one righteous in God's eyes. This is the righteous act.

Ask the student: based on your observations, is Jesus' parable simply a parable or is it something more?

Ask the student: how does this study affect your view of the Bible?