MANY CALLED — FEW CHOSEN

Matthew 22:14: *"For many are called, but few are chosen"*, comes at the end of the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (or Wedding Feast).

The Parable in Brief

Jesus tells this story to illustrate the kingdom of heaven:

- A king prepares a wedding banquet for his son and invites many guests (initially representing Israel and its religious leaders).
- The invited guests refuse to come – some ignore the invitation, others mistreat or kill the servants (prophets and messengers).
- The king then extends the invitation broadly to anyone on the streets (representing Gentiles and all people).
- Many come, but one guest arrives without the proper wedding clothes (provided by the host in that culture). The king has him bound and thrown out into outer darkness.

Jesus concludes with: *"For many are called, but few are chosen."*

What Does It Mean?

- "Many are called" (or "invited"): The invitation to God's kingdom, salvation, and relationship with Him through Christ goes out widely. In the Gospel age, this is the general call of the gospel preached to all people. Everyone who hears the message is "called" or invited to respond in faith and repentance.
- "Few are chosen": Not everyone who hears the invitation truly accepts it on God's terms. The "chosen" (or elect) are those who respond with genuine faith, receive the righteousness of Christ (symbolized by the wedding garment), and persevere. The one without proper clothes represents someone who outwardly accepts the invitation but lacks true heart transformation, they are ultimately rejected.

The parable emphasizes both divine sovereignty (God chooses and enables true responders) and human responsibility (people must respond appropriately and cannot come on their own terms). Many hear the call but reject it outright, treat it lightly, or try to enter without genuine faith and repentance.

Word Study

"*Many*": Greek '*πολύς' (polys)*. Of multitude, number, etc., many, numerous, great.

"*Called*": Greek *'κλητός' (klētos)*. Called, invited as in 'invited to a banquet'.

"*Few*": Greek *' ὀλίγος' (oligos)*. Of multitude, quantity, etc., little, small, few.

"*Chosen*": Greek *'ἐκλεκτός' (eklektos)*. Picked out, chosen, elect of God.

Does This Mean Those Who Are Called Are Not "Saved"?

No, not exactly, but it highlights an important distinction:

- The general call (the invitation) goes to many and does not guarantee salvation. Many hear the gospel but never truly believe, repent, or receive Christ. They may even attend church or profess belief superficially but lack the "wedding garment" of Christ's righteousness.

- The effectual call (the one that leads to being "chosen" or "elect") results in salvation. Those who are truly chosen respond in faith, are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and are saved. In biblical theology, all whom God effectually calls and chooses will be saved (see also Romans 8:29-30 on the chain of predestination, calling, justification, and glorification).

In short:

- Being "called" (hearing the invitation) is necessary but not sufficient for salvation.

- Being "chosen" refers to those who respond in the way God requires – with true faith – and are therefore saved and included in the feast.

This verse warns against presumption. It's not that God is stingy with salvation; the Bible repeatedly affirms God's desire for people to be saved (e.g., 2 Peter 3:9). Rather, human hardness of heart, self-righteousness, or superficial response means few ultimately enter on God's terms.

Broader Biblical Context

Similar ideas appear elsewhere:

- The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13), many hear the word, but only some produce lasting fruit.
- Jesus often says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
- Passages on election and perseverance show that true believers are secure, but we are called to examine ourselves and respond faithfully (2 Corinthians 13:5, Philippians 2:12).

This verse encourages self-examination and wholehearted response to the gospel rather than casual or hypocritical profession. If you've responded to Christ in genuine faith, trusting in His finished work, you can have assurance that you are among the chosen.

Does The "Many" In This Verse Mean That Not "All" Are Called?

No, the "many" does not mean that not all are called. In Matthew 22:14, "many" is used in contrast to "few" to emphasize that while the invitation (the *call*) goes out broadly and to a large number of people, only a relatively small number truly respond in the right way and are ultimately chosen.

Key Points from the Parable and Context

- In the story, the king first invites specific guests, then – after rejection – sends servants to invite anyone they can find on the streets (good and bad alike). The invitation becomes very wide and inclusive.
- The phrase "many are called" highlights the general/external call of the gospel: it goes out extensively to people from all backgrounds. In the New Testament era and today, this means the good news is proclaimed widely – to "all" who hear it.

The word "many" here functions similarly to how it's used elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., "many" will come from east and west to the kingdom in Matthew 8:11) – it means a great multitude, not a limited or partial group excluding others. It does not imply that some people never receive any call or invitation from God.

Theological Understanding

Most Christian interpreters see this as teaching a universal/general call:

- The gospel invitation is extended to all humanity (or at least all who hear the message). Passages like Matthew 28:19 ("Go and make disciples of all nations"), 1 Timothy 2:4 (God "wants all people to be saved"), and Revelation 22:17 ("Whoever is thirsty, let him come") support that the call is broad.

- Not everyone responds positively → hence "few are chosen."

The "many vs. few" contrast warns against assuming that hearing the message or outwardly responding is the same as genuine saving faith. It does not restrict the scope of who is invited.

In Summary

All (or virtually all who hear the gospel) are called/invited, but many of them do not accept it on God's terms, so only a few are chosen. The "many" stresses volume and the sad reality of widespread rejection, not that some are left out of the invitation entirely.