

"Many are Called, Few are Chosen"

This Well-Known Saying evokes Profound Questions. What's the Distinction between these Terms and What Advantage does being 'Chosen' Suggest?

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In the Gospel of Matthew, two passages, and two only, use the above saying in conclusion to two different spiritual lessons. The first is in Matthew 20 which concludes the lesson contained within the laborers called into the vineyards and are paid a similar wage for differing work periods. The second is a few chapters later, in Matthew 22, where the same saying is used in the context of being invited to attend a marriage ceremony and celebration. What underlying message is it intended that we derive from this enigmatic pronouncement?

First, let's review the passages in question:

Seeking Vineyard Workers

Matthew 20:1-16 *"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us,*

*which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: **for many be called, but few chosen.**"*

Seeking Wedding Guests

Matthew 22:1-14 *"And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he 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 out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on 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."

(The wedding garment situation also makes it clear that responding to ones' call requires appropriate respectfulness!)

Called versus Chosen

Before we can begin to understand these sayings, we need to understand the distinction between the two terms.

Being "called" refers to a person being drawn of the Father, giving them the opportunity to become converted at this time. We are told that no person CAN come unless specifically identified as a reasonable candidate for conversion. Any person whom God determines would not be able to "make it" if called in this age is deferred to a later age.

This is not well understood in the religious world, but there are **two** days of salvation, in some circles referred to as "the early and latter rains". The vast majority will realize their opportunity for salvation in the millennial age, or the post-millennial age, also known as the second resurrection period, which we are alerted to in places such as Revelation 20, verse 5 (& 20), which speaks of "the rest of the dead" being raised, after the 1000 years, and having the books opened to them, and James 5, verse 7, which makes the comparison between salvation and the two distinct harvest seasons.¹

Now, being "called" does not preclude that those individuals will be successful in their pursuit of conversion to salvation. Nor should we consider all converted people as being ultimately successful in their quest. Too many things can trip-up people, as anyone who has engaged in battle to overcome his sinful nature realizes.

Examples of those who were unsuccessful are common. The Apostle Paul refers to many who crashed in their journey, in places such as 1st Tim. 1:19; Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1st Cor. 11:30.

¹ The two harvests periods of humanity are explained in detail in the free booklets, "*Understanding the Resurrections and Eternal Judgment*" and "*The Feasts of the LORD – the Plan of Redemption*" which describe a small harvest (the first resurrection) which is followed by a great harvest after the millennial age has run its course.

Chosen Indicates Achievement

Those who are ultimately "chosen" are the individuals who are successful in their righteous quest. It is NOT a foregone conclusion when a person first receives their calling. Upon being called, a person must accept the call, and take the appropriate steps toward conversion² and be in receipt of God's Spirit, without which, that person is "*none of His*" as Romans 8:9 tells us. "Once-saved – always-saved is not a valid concept. There are those who teach such a thing, under convoluted reasoning, ignoring the many scriptures which contain dire warnings.³ Why offer such warnings IF there was no real chance that a person could slip-up once coming "under grace"? Hebrews 10:26-31 makes a strong case for an unpardonable sin by a person effectively coming to despise the Holy Spirit..

In the parable of the ten virgins there is a clear dichotomy between those especially chosen to be a part of the Bride of Christ and those disqualified. While it is the typical explanation that this parable contrasts the "saved" versus the "unsaved", it is more logical to realize that there are some chosen to be included in the Bride, while others who were in fact called, are deferred, due to unpreparedness or under-development, but who still have the possibility to be among the "children of Christ and His Bride", but in a later assignment.⁴

What if someone thinks they're actually chosen when they're at this point only called?

Successful Form a Smaller Group

While the explanation that those called form a group encompassing very many, it's only the successful among them which are ultimately chosen. That's the warning to those who are called, that they should not be complacent, thinking they're all-right in their compliant but lackadaisical state when they may in fact be regarded as "unprofitable servants"!⁵ If that is the case, wouldn't we want to know that ahead of time?

² These are outlined in Hebrews 6:1-3.

³ Hebrews 6:4-6.

⁴ The article "*The OTHER Five Virgins*" examines this group's real situation in a more amenable light.

⁵ Luke 17:10

The parables of the Talents and Pounds ⁶ should be adequate warning that acceptable accomplishment is expected! Complacency in making productive use of God's Spirit can result in the loss even of what one actually has. Can we equate that to salvation itself? How would that play among our "once-saved – always-saved" counterparts?

Chosen for Doing Nothing?

In Matthew 25, the vineyard workers are expected to work all during the day in which they were hired on. The fact of late-comers does not reduce their obligation nor compound their original reward. What they accomplish accrues justly to the landowner. But it does speak to their value as fellow-laborers with him.

In Luke 19, each person invested with a thing of useful value is expected to make increase with that investment. They are to put it to use using their own additional resources, the skills that they were born with, making a good return for the investor. Failure to do so (by at least lending it to others who could increase its base value), is a condition that carries great risk for that individual servant.

Rulers Over His Household

In Matthew 24:43-47 we are shown what the expectations of a faithful servant will be. This is a prelude to the parable of the Vineyard. *"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? **Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.** Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods...."* As we can see, our accomplishment, our profitability as servants, is not so much for the present time, but for the Kingdom.

The thing here, as well as in the parable of the Ten Virgins in the very next chapter is the matter of readiness as well as accomplishment. The term


"faithfulness" is used, as it is in the concluding chapters of the New Testament: *"...for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are **called, and chosen, and faithful.**"* Those who have overcome will accompany the LORD in establishing His Kingdom on Earth. ⁷

Chosen for the Wedding?

In an adjacent parable, (Matthew 25:1-13) the Ten Virgins, we are strongly cautioned to maintain readiness. Their being chosen is directly related to their state of readiness, and the commodity most needed is a good supply of God's Spirit. Now we know from this parable that there is a specific cut-off date for being a part of the Bride, but where does that leave the others?

What is the status of someone called but not yet chosen? (Both don't occur at the same time!) At least, not chosen for that particular assignment? Those not chosen at that point in time? Are they all "lost"? Keep in mind that these were called, they all were invited to the wedding, they came there WITH God's Spirit, but in insufficient supply to endure over time. They are told (by the One who would be its only source) to go and acquire more. That would indicate that there are yet more individuals to be added into the Family of God, but not in time to be a part of the Bride. This speaks to the later calling, or the future completion of the Harvest of humanity that is part of God's Plan. But, as we can see from this, timing is a factor.

The Ecclesia

It is the Saints which are the "called". The word most commonly translated as "Church" is the Greek word "ecclesia". It's important we comprehend the term for what it means. When a person is "called" it represents their opportunity period for salvation. Those who disregard that calling should not expect a later calling. To spurn God's Grace at this present time can leave the person so called in serious jeopardy. On the other hand, we have seekers who are not in fact called at this time. We shouldn't despair if they don't succeed just now, but we should rejoice that they are primed and ready for when their true call actually comes. 

⁶ Matthew 25 & Luke 19.

⁷ You will want to read the booklet: "Understanding the Millennial Kingdom of God".