



## Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen: Narrative Analysis and Socio Theological Critique in Matthew 22:1-14

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### ABSTRACT

The parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14 constitutes a significant theological and historical narrative in the Gospel of Matthew. This narrative combines the metaphor of a messianic banquet while simultaneously reflecting the socio-political tensions of first-century Palestine, particularly the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. The parable's structure illustrates both the rejection and acceptance of God's invitation, along with the consequences of judgment for those who refuse or prove unworthy. Narrative analysis reveals a dynamic relationship between God's universal grace and human responsibility in responding to that calling. The symbolism of wedding garments emphasizes that merely accepting the invitation is insufficient; genuine spiritual transformation and readiness are required. Within the eschatological framework of "already-not yet," the Kingdom of God is already present in the community of faith, yet the anticipation of final fulfillment is marked by judgment upon unfaithfulness. Beyond its theological aspects, this parable also contains socio-political critique of contemporary power structures. Its implications are far-reaching, undergirding the church's inclusive mission while simultaneously affirming the importance of authentic discipleship and spiritual standards, calling believers to live in spiritual readiness and build an authentic church according to God's will.

**Keywords:** Parable of the Wedding Feast; Matthew 22:1-14; Kingdom of God; messianic banquet; divine invitation; eschatology; already-not yet; wedding garment; spiritual readiness.

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### INTRODUCTION

The parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14 constitutes a profoundly rich and complex narrative that integrates various theological traditions, eschatological imagery, and the socio-political conditions of first-century Palestinian society. Within the overall structure of Matthew's Gospel, this parable occupies a critically important position as the culmination of three consecutive parables (21:28-22:14) delivered by Jesus during His direct confrontation with religious leaders in the Temple a site symbolizing the center of Jewish religious and political systems. (Allison 2004)

Redactionally, Matthew positions this parable at the critical juncture of Jesus's Passion Week, where His every word and action acquires profound prophetic and eschatological significance. This historical and theological context serves not merely as background but as an interpretive framework that determines how each narrative element must be understood. The narrative tension constructed by Matthew reflects the actual situation of the early

Christian community wrestling with their identity following the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, an event that radically transformed the face of both Judaism and early Christianity.

The parable's connection to Old Testament tradition demonstrates extraordinary theological depth. The imagery of the eschatological banquet (Isaiah 25:6-9; 55:1-3) is not merely quoted but reinterpreted within the context of Christ and the already-inaugurated eschatological fulfillment. Matthew weaves together Isaiah's vision of a mountain feast for all nations with wisdom literature's tradition of Wisdom's invitation to humanity (Proverbs 9:1-6), creating a theological tapestry that combines prophetic universalism with wisdom literature's particularity. Furthermore, allusions to the wedding feast tradition in Hosea and Jeremiah where the covenantal relationship between the LORD and Israel is depicted in marital terms provide a profoundly covenantal dimension to Matthew's narrative. (Anslow and Neville 2022)

Structural analysis reveals that Matthew constructs this parable in a highly ordered pattern: A (invitation to the worthy/Israel) - B (rejection and violence) - C (retribution and destruction) - B' (second invitation to everyone) - A' (rejection due to unworthiness). This structure functions not merely as a literary device but as a means of conveying a complex theology of salvation history, wherein grace and judgment, inclusion and exclusion, operate in dynamic relationship. (Basser and Cohen 2015)

The parable's socio-economic dimension unveils a subtle critique of power structures within Mediterranean patron-client society. A wedding banquet in the ancient Near Eastern context was not simply a private celebration but a political statement displaying the host's wealth, power, and social networks. The invited guests' rejection of the invitation thus constitutes a public insult demanding retaliation. Matthew employs this social dynamic to explain how the Jewish religious leaders' rejection of the Messiah represents not merely theological disagreement but political rebellion inviting divine judgment. (Blomberg 1992)

The characterization within this parable demonstrates remarkable psychological complexity. The king in the narrative is not merely an allegorical representation of God but a character constructed to display multiple facets of the divine nature: generous host, patient inviter, righteous judge, and wrathful avenger. His transformation from generosity to wrath reflects the biblical pattern of divine patience ultimately culminating in judgment. The guests who reject the invitation are likewise not flat characters but representatives of various forms of misguided spiritual complacency: those preoccupied with business (materialism), those absorbed in daily life (secularism), and those hostile toward the messengers (the religious leaders' persecution complex).

The wedding garment motif in verses 11-13 represents an interpretive crux that has sparked debate for centuries. Within the context of ancient banquet customs, the provision of appropriate attire by the host was a sign of generosity, making the absence of wedding garments an insult to the host. Theologically, this wedding garment functions as a complex symbol integrating various biblical motifs: the righteousness of Christ (Isaiah 61:10), new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), and eschatological transformation (Revelation 19:8). Matthew employs this imagery to address potential misunderstandings about cheap universalism: though the invitation is open to all, participation in the Kingdom demands genuine transformation. (Davies and Allison 2005)

The closing statement "many are called, but few are chosen" represents a theological pronouncement encapsulating the entire tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in Matthean soteriology. The use of "called" and "chosen" in this context demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the order of salvation involving both divine initiative and human response. Matthew does not teach predestination in a deterministic sense

but rather a dynamic relationship between universal divine grace and conditional human response. (Davies and Allison 2005)

The eschatological perspective within this parable exhibits the characteristic "already-not yet" theology of Matthew. The banquet is not merely a future hope but a present reality experienced through participation in the community of faith. Nevertheless, the future dimension of the Kingdom is maintained through imagery of judgment and separation between worthy and unworthy guests. This tension between "already" and "not yet fully" reflects the existence of Matthew's community living between the resurrection and the return of Christ, between inclusion in the Kingdom and awaiting eschatological consummation. (Blomberg 1992)

The connection to other parables in Matthew's Gospel demonstrates remarkable theological coherence. The motif of separation between wheat and tares (13:24-30), sheep and goats (25:31-46), wise and foolish virgins (25:1-13) all converge on the central theme of divine judgment based on readiness and faithfulness. The wedding feast parable is thus not an isolated teaching but an integral component of Matthew's discourse on Kingdom ethics and eschatological accountability. (Allison 2004)

The missiological dimension of this parable is profoundly significant in the context of the Great Commission (28:16-20). The invitation to "whomever you find" on the highways provides theological foundation for a universal mission transcending ethnic and cultural boundaries. However, the requirement for wedding garments indicates that the Gospel does not nullify moral demands but rather provides divine enablement to meet the standards necessary for participation in the Kingdom.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The narrative research process begins with the selection of subjects or participants who possess distinctive or significant experiences to be explored in depth. The researcher plays an active role in listening to and facilitating these stories, establishing collaborative relationships that enable the excavation of rich information and nuanced experiential details. In the analytical phase, the researcher organizes data in chronological sequence (restorying), identifying key themes, patterns, and relationships between narrative segments. This analysis focuses not only on the story's content but also on narrative structure, sociocultural context, and the meanings attributed by the narrator. The application of chronology is crucial as it helps connect an individual's past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations, thereby producing a holistic portrait of the life journey under investigation. (Powell 1990)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Narrative Structure and Socio-Historical Context**

The parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew 22:1-14 presents a highly complex narrative structure with several interwoven layers of meaning crafted in a sophisticated literary design. Overall, the narrative can be divided into four segments forming a progressively dramatic pattern: first, the initial invitation and rejection (vv. 3-5); second, the escalation of conflict and retaliation (vv. 6-7); third, the universal invitation and positive response (vv. 8-10); and finally, the ultimate selection and exclusion (vv. 11-14).

This structure is not merely a simple narrative organization but a theological construction that reflects the pattern of salvation history moving from particularism to universalism, from calling to judgment, from opportunity to accountability. Each segment carries a distinct narrative rhythm: the first unfolds slowly, emphasizing repeated

rejection; the second erupts in violence and retribution; the third flows with abundance and inclusion; while the last advances with tension toward a startling climax (MacArthur & MacArthur, 1989).

Each section fulfills a unique narrative function, yet all are interconnected in a complex theological symphony. The first part establishes the premise of the divine invitation and introduces the escalating conflict through successive rejections. Matthew carefully constructs a gradation of rejection that mirrors increasing resistance to divine will. The use of the imperfect verb “καλέσαι” (“to call”) in verse 3 indicates a repeated and ongoing action, suggesting divine patience that continues despite rejection. The pattern of refusal is not mere passive absence but an active, progressive dismissal: from those who “paid no attention” (ἡμέλησαν) in the aorist, marking a completed act to those who “went off” (ἀπῆλθον) to their own affairs, likewise aorist, implying a definitive decision. This variation of responses reflects a realistic spectrum of rejection toward the gospel, ranging from modern secular indifference to deliberate religious antagonism (MacArthur & MacArthur, 1989).

The second section introduces an element of violence that shifts the narrative genre from a simple invitation story to a conflict narrative with deep political undertones. The murder of the servants (δούλους) is not merely symbolic within the parable but an explicit historical allusion to the persecution of the prophets throughout Israel’s history and later the apostles in the early church. The term “servants” here employs the same terminology used to describe the prophets in the Deuteronomistic tradition, thereby establishing a theological continuity between prophetic and apostolic missions. The king’s response sending his troops (στρατεύματα) and burning their city depicts divine judgment that is decisive and irreversible, most likely alluding to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, which Matthew interprets as a direct consequence of rejecting the Messiah. The use of the aorist “ἀπόλεσεν” (“destroyed”) underscores the final and completed nature of divine judgment (Sim, 1998).

In the Greek text, the plural form of “servants” (δούλοι) in verses 3 and 4 indicates that the invitation was extended multiple times through various messengers. This mirrors God’s persistent sending of prophets to Israel throughout history, as outlined in the Deuteronomistic tradition and developed in prophetic literature. The use of “πάλιν” (“again”) in verse 4 reinforces the repeated nature of the divine invitation, showing that God did not give up after the first refusal but continued to offer opportunities. The verb “paid no attention” (ἡμέλησαν) in verse 5, again in the aorist, denotes a completed and definitive act depicting a rejection that is final and irrevocable. This is not a momentary neglect but a settled disposition of refusal (Gaebelein, 1984).

### **Socio-Historical Context and Political Overtones**

In the socio-political context of first-century Palestine, a royal wedding banquet carried profound political and religious significance inseparable from the structures of power. In the honor–shame culture of the Mediterranean world, banquets involved a complex web of obligations, reciprocity, and social hierarchy that defined a person’s standing within the community. A banquet was not merely a social event but a political arena where alliances were formed, loyalties tested, and social hierarchies affirmed or challenged.

An invitation to a royal wedding feast represented the highest possible honor, demanding attendance as an expression of loyalty to the host and acknowledgment of his legitimate authority. To decline such an invitation was not a trivial matter it constituted a political rebellion and a public insult requiring retaliation under the laws of honor (Evans, 2012). In the Mediterranean honor–shame system, every public insult demanded an equivalent response to restore lost honor. Matthew employs this social dynamic to articulate the theological reality of Israel’s rejection of the Messiah not merely as a religious disagreement or interpretive divergence, but as a cosmic act of

betrayal that invites divine retribution. The king's militarized response ("he sent his armies") thus symbolizes not a mere civil punishment but an act of holy war, underlining the gravity of the offense. The burning of the city represents total destruction, prefiguring an irreversible final judgment (Evans, 2012).

The timing of the parable during Passion Week in Jerusalem adds another layer of profound meaning within Matthew's overall narrative framework. The setting in the temple courts, before the chief priests and elders (21:23), creates an atmosphere of direct confrontation that mirrors the height of tension between Jesus and the religious establishment. The temple is not just a geographical backdrop but the symbolic center of the Jewish cultic and political system now being challenged by Jesus' presence. Every word in the parable is charged with prophetic judgment against the temple establishment, which was soon to face destruction. Dramatic irony emerges as the very people hearing the parable are those depicted as rejecting the invitation. Thus, the timing shows that this parable is not merely a general teaching about the Kingdom of God, but a specific proclamation of judgment against a concrete audience (Nolland, 2008).

Archaeological and textual evidence demonstrates that the imagery of banquets was deeply familiar to Matthew's audience across various social strata. Josephus, in *Antiquitates*, describes royal banquets involving thousands of guests, elaborate social protocols, and severe consequences for breaches of etiquette sometimes even resulting in death or exclusion. Herod's banquet, which culminated in the beheading of John the Baptist, provides a concrete historical example of how royal feasts could become arenas of life and death (Nolland, 2008).

### **Intertextual Connections and Literary Echoes**

Matthew develops this parable through highly sophisticated intertextual references that create multiple layers of meaning in a complex dialogue with both Jewish and early Christian traditions. The reference to Isaiah 25:6–9, which speaks of a banquet for all nations on Mount Zion, provides the theological foundation for the universal invitation that transcends ethnic boundaries. In Isaiah's context, this banquet marks the climax of eschatological restoration, in which God will "swallow up death forever" and "wipe away tears from all faces." Matthew adopts this imagery but transforms it within a Christological framework, where Jesus, the Son of the King, becomes the center of the eschatological feast.

However, Matthew also integrates elements from the Parable of the Great Banquet found in the Q tradition (Luke 14:16–24), introducing significant modifications that reflect his particular theological agenda within the context of the post-70 CE community (Brown, 1997).

A synoptic comparison with the Lukan parallel reveals the sophisticated redactional work Matthew undertook to adapt the parable tradition in accordance with his theological vision. Luke's version shows that Matthew added several distinctive elements that transform the basic nature of the story: the identification of the host as a king (βασιλεύς), which adds an explicit political dimension; the portrayal of the event as a wedding feast for his son, which introduces a Christological focus; the violent response of the invitees and the subsequent military retaliation, reflecting experiences of historical persecution; the burning of their city, likely referring to the destruction of Jerusalem; and finally, the wedding garment episode with its surprising eschatological twist.

These additions are not arbitrary editorial decisions but deliberate theological statements expressing Matthew's understanding of salvation history and ecclesiology in the context of post-Temple Judaism (Brown, 1997).

Intertextuality with the prophetic tradition is also evident in the use of vineyard and wedding feast motifs, both of which were familiar in prophetic literature as metaphors for the covenantal relationship between YHWH and Israel. Hosea uses marital imagery to depict both Israel's unfaithfulness and its eschatological restoration, while Jeremiah develops this motif within the context of exile and return. Ezekiel likewise employs an extended marriage metaphor in chapter 16 to portray Israel's spiritual history.

Matthew integrates these prophetic traditions in a sophisticated way, showing that the rejection of the wedding invitation is not merely an isolated event but the climax of a recurring pattern of historical rejection that has persisted throughout Israel's history. The wedding feast thus becomes a symbol of eschatological consummation long anticipated but ultimately rejected when offered in the person of Jesus (Carson & Moo, 2013).

### **The Dialectic of Divine Calling and Human Response**

The theme of calling (κλήσις) in this parable operates on several theological levels, creating a complex dialectic between divine sovereignty and human responsibility within a highly sophisticated soteriological framework. The dual structure of the invitation first to "those who had been invited" (τοὺς κεκλημένους) and later to "everyone you find" (ὅσους εἶν εὔρητε) establishes a pattern of salvation history moving from particular to universal, from exclusive to inclusive, from a covenant community to a cosmic community.

The use of the perfect participle "κεκλημένους" in verse 3 indicates that the first invitation had already been extended and remains in force, reflecting Israel's special status as the people chosen and called since Abraham. But when this invitation is rejected, a radical expansion follows depicted through the present imperative "καλέσατε" in verse 9, which conveys an urgent and ongoing command (Morris, 2020).

The first invitation represents the divine calling to Israel as the chosen nation extended through the prophets and ultimately through the Messiah in continuity with a long historical revelation spanning centuries. The historical particularity of this calling is evident in the phrase "those who had been invited," expressed in the perfect tense, signifying an already established covenantal relationship and expectations grounded in the promises made to the patriarchs.

The rejection of this invitation, therefore, is not merely a missed opportunity among many, but a violation of the covenant relationship that carries cosmic consequences, since it entails the refusal of the climax of divine revelation in the person of Jesus. The historical specificity of this rejection is further reflected in the details describing the reasons for refusal being occupied with one's field (γεωργίου) and business (ἐμπορίαν) which symbolize the priority of material concerns over spiritual devotion (Harrington, 2007).

### **The Second Invitation and the Radical Expansion of Divine Grace**

The second invitation signifies the radical expansion of divine grace that transcends ethnic, social, and religious boundaries in a movement that was revolutionary within the context of ancient Near Eastern religion. The phrase "*both evil and good*" (πονηροὺς τε καὶ ἀγαθοὺς) expresses the moral impartiality of the divine invitation, emphasizing that the initial call is based purely on divine grace (*sola gratia*) rather than on human merit or moral achievement.

This universal invitation reflects the post-resurrection reality in which the Gospel extends beyond the Jewish community to the Gentile world, fulfilling the universal promise made to Abraham that "through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed." The use of the aorist verb "συνήγαγον" ("they gathered") in verse 10

indicates a completed action, signifying the success of the universal mission in contrast to the failure of the particularistic one (Harrington, 2007).

### **The Spectrum of Human Responses**

Matthew presents a sophisticated taxonomy of human responses to the divine invitation, reflecting the varied spiritual conditions of humanity through carefully crafted characterization that mirrors actual human psychology when confronted with divine calling. Each category of response is portrayed with remarkable psychological depth, revealing Matthew's profound understanding of human nature and spiritual dynamics.

#### **1. Indifferent Neglect (*ἠμέλησαν*)**

The first category represents those who completely ignore the divine invitation, treating it as irrelevant to their concerns an attitude of total spiritual indifference. The verb “ἠμέλησαν” appears in the aorist tense, indicating a completed action; this indifference is not a temporary mood but a deliberate and final decision.

Such apathy represents a spiritual condition potentially more dangerous than active hostility, as it reflects a total disconnection from spiritual reality and an inability to recognize divine initiative. In modern contexts, this may correspond to total secularism, where the spiritual dimension of existence is completely ignored or deemed irrelevant to practical life. The psychological profile of this group depicts people completely absorbed in material concerns, leaving no space for spiritual reflection or engagement (Senior, 1998).

#### **2. Competing Priorities (*ἀπῆλθον*)**

Those who “went off” to their fields and businesses represent individuals who acknowledge the invitation but deem other matters more urgent a classic case of misplaced priorities. The use of the aorist verb “ἀπῆλθον” denotes a deliberate departure not passive neglect but an active choice to prioritize material concerns over spiritual opportunity. The references to the “field” (ἴδιον ἀγρόν) and “business” (ἐμπορίαν) highlight two major spheres of material concern agriculture and commerce representing the basic economic activities necessary for survival, but which can become idolatrous when they overshadow spiritual priorities. This reflects Jesus' teaching about the impossibility of serving two masters (Matt. 6:24) and the necessity of rightly ordering one's priorities so that the Kingdom of God remains supreme.

The psychological profile here describes individuals who are not necessarily hostile to the Gospel, but are constantly distracted by legitimate concerns that gradually become ultimate concerns, thereby displacing the spiritual center of their lives (Senior, 1998).

#### **3. Active Hostility (*ἐκράτησαν – ὕβρισαν – ἀπέκτειναν*)**

Those who “seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them” represent an escalation from indifference to persecution, illustrating how rejection can evolve into active hostility. The sequence of verbs “ἐκράτησαν” (they seized), “ὕβρισαν” (they mistreated), and “ἀπέκτειναν” (they killed) depicts a progressive intensification of violence, reflecting the demonic nature of opposition to the Gospel.

This group includes not only those who reject the Gospel for themselves but those who actively oppose its proclamation to others, embodying the spirit of persecution well known in early Christian experience. The

historical context indicates that this is not merely a hypothetical scenario but reflects the actual experience of the early Christian community, which faced persecution from both Jewish authorities and the Roman government.

Psychologically, this group represents those who feel threatened by the Gospel message because it challenges the power structures and value systems they uphold (France, 2011).

#### **4. Positive Response with Inadequate Preparation (*μη̄ ἐνδεδουλευμένον ἔνδυμα γάμου*)**

The incident of the wedding garment introduces a fourth and perhaps most complex and tragic category those who accept the invitation and attend the feast but are insufficiently prepared to participate fully in the eschatological banquet. This category is represented by the figure who was “not wearing wedding clothes” (*μη̄ ἐνδεδουλευμένον ἔνδυμα γάμου*), creating dramatic tension as the scene turns unexpectedly from celebration to judgment.

This is perhaps the most tragic category, as it represents those closest to blessing yet ultimately excluded due to inadequate preparation. The psychological profile here depicts individuals attracted to the benefits of the Gospel but unwilling to undergo the transformation required for authentic discipleship. They may enjoy the community, teaching, and even spiritual experiences, yet remain uncommitted to the ethical demands and lifestyle changes that are integral to the Christian calling (Reeves, 2017).

#### **Wedding Garment: Multilayered Symbolism**

The wedding garment (*ἔνδυμα γάμου*) functions as a complex theological symbol operating on several interpretive levels simultaneously in a multilayered symbolism that integrates various biblical themes and theological concepts:

**Cultic-Ritual Dimension:** In ancient Near Eastern banquet practices, hosts often provided special garments for guests as a sign of honor and inclusion, a custom well-documented in ancient sources. Archaeological evidence from Mesopotamia and Egypt shows that royal banquets involved specific dress codes that indicated status and relationship to the host. Refusing to wear the provided garments constituted an insult to the host and a serious violation of hospitality protocols in an honor-shame society. This historical context emphasizes that the rejection was based not on an inability to obtain proper attire (since it was provided by the host), but rather on a deliberate choice to appear inappropriately, reflecting an attitude of contempt or carelessness. Within this framework, the wedding garment represents divine provision for proper participation in the eschatological feast, emphasizing that God provides everything necessary for salvation and holy living. (Morris 2020)

**Ethical-Behavioral Dimension:** In biblical tradition, clothing (*ἔνδυμα, ἱμάτιον, στολή*) often symbolizes moral and spiritual condition in a rich metaphorical tradition spanning both Testaments. Prophetic literature employs clothing imagery to depict righteousness (Isaiah 61:10: "He has clothed me with garments of salvation"), salvation (Isaiah 61:3: "a crown of beauty instead of ashes"), and spiritual transformation (Zechariah 3:3-5: the replacement of filthy garments with fine clothing). The wedding garment thus represents righteous living and moral transformation that must characterize Kingdom citizens in a lifestyle consistent with Kingdom values. (Reeves 2017)

**Soteriological Dimension:** Paul's writings develop an extensive theology of "putting on Christ" (*ἐνδύσασθαι Χριστόν*) in Galatians 3:27 and Romans 13:14, providing an interpretive key for wedding garment symbolism in Christian theological tradition. The garment represents not human righteousness, which is always inadequate, but rather the righteousness of Christ received by believers through faith and manifested through

transformed living in the process of sanctification. The Pauline concept of the "old man" and "new man" (Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:9-10) uses clothing metaphor to describe the radical transformation that occurs in conversion: putting off the old sinful nature and putting on the new nature created in righteousness and holiness. Within this framework, the wedding garment represents the imputed righteousness of Christ that is simultaneously declared (justification) and progressively realized (sanctification) in the believer's life. (Reeves 2017)

**Eschatological Dimension:** Revelation 19:8 identifies the "fine linen, bright and clean" of the bride as the "righteous deeds of saints" (τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων), connecting the wedding garment with eschatological preparation for the eternal feast of the Lamb. This dimension emphasizes that proper attire for the heavenly banquet consists of a lifetime of faithful discipleship and obedience demonstrated through lifelong service. The eschatological wedding feast in Revelation represents the consummation of salvation history when the Church as Bride will be united with Christ as Bridegroom in eternal celebration. Preparation for this feast requires not only an initial faith response but a lifetime of spiritual development and moral growth. Within this framework, the wedding garment represents eschatological readiness that combines divine grace with human cooperation in the process of spiritual maturation. (Morris 2020)

In verse 12, the king's question "Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" uses the word "friend" (ἑταῖρε), indicating a familiar but not intimate relationship a carefully chosen term suggesting familiarity without intimacy. This is the same word used for Judas in Matthew 26:50, suggesting a superficial or compromised relationship. This indicates that this person was not a stranger who accidentally wandered into the feast, but someone who should have known better about the proper requirements for participation. The question posed is not merely rhetorical but a genuine inquiry providing an opportunity for explanation or defense, demonstrating divine justice that gives a chance for response before pronouncing judgment. The silence of the accused person (verse 12: "but he was speechless") shows recognition of guilt and absence of legitimate excuse, emphasizing personal responsibility in spiritual preparation. (Morris 2020)

### Theology of Predestination and Free Will in Matthew's Context

The closing statement "for many are called, but few are chosen" (πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰσὶν κλητοὶ ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί) represents a theological crux that has generated extensive interpretive debate throughout Christian theological history and continues to be a challenging crux interpretum for theologians across various traditions. The relationship between "called" (κλητοί) and "chosen" (ἐκλεκτοί) in Matthew's theology reflects a sophisticated understanding of salvation that avoids both the Pelagian extreme emphasizing human effort and the hyper-Calvinist extreme emphasizing divine determinism in a carefully balanced theological position. The use of this terminology in the broader context of the New Testament demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility that avoids simplistic solutions to complex theological questions. (Blomberg 1992)

**Universal Calling:** "Many" (πολλοί) in this context represents the totality of humanity receiving divine invitation through various means: general revelation in creation (Romans 1:19-20), special revelation through Scripture, prophetic witness in Israel's history, and ultimately the proclamation of the Gospel in the Great Commission. This call is genuine and sincere, not merely pretense or a conditional offer based on foreknowledge of the response to be given. The universal scope of divine calling reflects God's character as one who "wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4) and who is "not wanting anyone to

perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The divine desire for universal salvation reflected in these texts provides theological foundation for understanding the authentic nature of the universal invitation as not merely a formal gesture but a sincere offer carrying genuine possibility of acceptance. (Blomberg 1992)

**Particular Election:** The "few" (ὀλίγοι) designated as "chosen" (ἐκλεκτοί) represent those who respond appropriately to the divine call in a demonstration of authentic faith evidenced through lifestyle transformation. Election in Matthew's understanding is not an arbitrary divine decree or decision made independent of human response, but rather divine recognition of those who demonstrate genuine faith response that includes both initial trust and continuing faithfulness. This interpretation is consistent with Jesus's emphasis throughout Matthew on the necessity of bearing fruit (7:16-20, 12:33) as evidence of authentic spiritual life and obedience (7:21-23) as demonstration of genuine discipleship that goes beyond mere verbal profession. Election thus represents divine acknowledgment of those who not only accept the initial invitation but also demonstrate readiness to participate fully in the eschatological Kingdom through transformed living. (Nolland 2008)

**Dynamic Relationship:** The tension between calling and election symbolizes a relationship that is not static between God's grace and human response, but rather an interactive and progressive process. God's calling is universal, establishing the possibility of salvation for all people while simultaneously providing spiritual capacity to answer the invitation. However, election only occurs when that call is realized through appropriate concrete response containing repentance, faith, and faithfulness. This affirms that election is not merely passive grace but actualization of the potential given by God through the call. Thus, the relationship between calling and election constitutes a dynamic dialogue wherein God's grace operates effectively when combined with responsible human response, rejecting passivity and fatalism in the experience of faith. This reality avoids rigid dualism between predestination and human freedom, showing that salvation requires active willingness and authentic personal engagement. (Keener 2009)

Eschatological Framework and Interim Ethics in this parable are remarkably rich and multilayered, reflecting Matthew's understanding of the Kingdom of God's reality as "already but not yet complete." The wedding feast as an image of the present Kingdom implies that Christians today already enjoy the presence of God's Kingdom fully in the community of faith, with the banquet containing Eucharistic nuances as an image of initial participation in the coming eschatological victory. However, the eschatological meaning also displays the horror of future judgment, where final selection reveals the consequences of heart preparedness and life attitude. The scene of expelling the guest without wedding garments depicts clear separation between genuine disciples and mere pretenders, accompanied by symbolic imagery of "outer darkness" and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" that affirms the reality of eternal punishment. Between these is the interim period a time of moral and spiritual responsibility for the church and each individual. The church is given a dual task: on one hand proclaiming the universal invitation according to the Great Commission to all societal levels without discrimination, and on the other maintaining strict discipleship standards so the faith community remains healthy and authentic. This interim period is not merely a waiting time but an active struggle between grace that extends the invitation and serious ethics that demand repentance and spiritual growth, so the church serves as a space for forming Kingdom character in a world still awaiting eschatological fulfillment. (Keener 2009)

Ecclesiological and Missiological Implications of the parable are highly strategic and applicable. The universal call affirms the mandate for inclusive evangelism, where the church is commanded to reach "both bad and good" without regard to ethnic, social, or moral background, carrying the mission of opening the door to God's

Kingdom as widely as possible. However, this call is not without disciplinary implications—the requirement for "wedding garments" underscores that being part of God's Kingdom demands real life transformation and spiritual growth, not just intellectual agreement or formal ritualism. Therefore, the church must balance openness to sinners with strict standards for holy living that demonstrate genuine repentance. Moreover, the expulsion of the inappropriately dressed guest provides biblical foundation for church discipline; this reminds us that a lifestyle inconsistent with Kingdom values ultimately brings serious consequences, though it must be done with compassion and reluctance as the king in the parable demonstrates. This discipline is not to alienate but to pursue restoration and healthy faith growth. (Keener 2009)

Pastoral Implications and Spiritual Formation provide practical insights for individual faith life and church ministry. The wedding garment symbol becomes a call for intensive and ongoing self-examination: to what extent is our faith commitment authentic and transforming our lives, not merely religious formality. The parable's temporal structure, especially the king's sudden arrival testing guest readiness, emphasizes the urgency of watchful living and full preparedness because the time of divine judgment cannot be predicted. Pastoral ministry must deliver a balanced message between generous love that invites everyone and serious demands for genuine repentance and life transformation. Additionally, the church community has collective responsibility to guide and support each member in "wearing proper spiritual garments" through edifying teaching, strengthening fellowship, and spiritual mentoring leading to faith maturity. Thus, the church is not merely a proclaimer of invitation but also a facilitator of growth and guardian of the spiritual life quality of its congregation. (Keck 2007)

## CONCLUSION

The parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14 constitutes a highly complex narrative rich with theological, historical, social, and eschatological layers of meaning. Its carefully structured narrative depicts God's calling process initially directed to the chosen people (Israel) which was rejected, then extended to all people, yet with the affirmation that participation in God's Kingdom demands genuine spiritual readiness and transformation, symbolized through the wedding garment. The rejection of the invitation represents not merely theological refusal but also a serious political and social act, reflecting rebellion against divine will and resulting in judgment consequences.

This parable affirms the dynamic relationship between God's universal grace and human responsibility in giving proper and authentic response. Its eschatological dimension presents the Kingdom of God as "already" present among the community of faith yet "not yet" fully realized, with final judgment as a future reality demanding continual readiness. The theological and missiological implications of this parable provide foundation for the church to carry out inclusive mission while simultaneously upholding serious discipleship standards, maintaining balance between love and truth. Pastorally, this parable challenges each individual and faith community to conduct honest self-examination, respond to God's call with genuine spiritual readiness, and live in repentance and faithfulness. The awareness that the Lord's coming cannot be predicted demands permanent readiness and total commitment in Christian living. Matthew provides timeless and relevant teaching about the universal invitation to salvation that nevertheless demands exclusive response, affirming that only those who wear "wedding garments" that is, who undergo heart and life transformation will be included in the perfected Kingdom of God.

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