

“Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen”

It’s Not About Getting Into Heaven

The interpretation of this parable has shifted over time to focus on who enters heaven and who does not. However, the Greek text suggests a different meaning. The feast, γάμος (*gamos*), symbolizes connection and union. The sacrifice is already complete before any guest arrives, with τεθυμένα (*tethymena*) and ἑτοιμος (*hetoimos*) indicating a finished state. Those who decline do not reject the feast; they simply do not care—ἀμελήσαντες (*amlésantes*). The invitation then extends to the διεξόδους τῶν ὁδῶν (*diexodous ton hodon*), the exits of the highways, where *hodōn* is the same word used for the Way in John 14. Evil and good sit side by side at the feast. The man removed is not wicked, but he refused the ἔνδυμα γάμου (*endyma gamou*), the wedding garment, made from the same verb Paul uses in Galatians 3 for being clothed with Christ. The king calls him ἑταῖρε (*hetaire* - friend), the same formal, cold address Jesus used to confront Judas during the betrayal. His silence is ἐφιμόω (*phimoō*), a muzzle—the same verb Jesus uses to quiet a storm in Mark 4. His binding is δέω (*deō*), the same verb used to bind the strong man. His removal is ἐξώτερον (*exóteron*), meaning further out, away from the center. The passage functions as a map of what happens when the invitation to inner transformation is heard but never embraced.

Summary

Decoding Matthew 22 through the Greek word ἐκλεκτός (*eklektos* – chosen) shows that many are called, but few are chosen, serving as a guide to readiness rather than to divine selection.

This verse-by-verse walkthrough of the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22 traces the sequence from invitation to rejection, then to the inspection of the garment. The Greek word *eklektos*, translated as “chosen,” conveys a sense of being select, special, and pure.

The most striking point in the passage is this: clearly evil guests feast at the table without facing consequences. The man thrown into outer darkness isn’t cast out for wickedness; he’s removed for refusing the provided garment. In this interpretation, the wedding garment symbolizes an inner willingness to be changed by what you entered into, rather than moral performance.

The word your English Bible translates as 'speechless' is the same Greek word Jesus used to describe muzzling a storm. It doesn't mean silence or embarrassment. It means a muzzle. The same verb, with the same grammatical force, is used of a man in a banquet hall who shows up without the proper garment. That’s Matthew 22, verse 12, the parable of the wedding feast. The Greek in this passage challenges everything you were taught about many called, few chosen.

The king calls the garmentless man a friend. But the Greek word isn't the word for friend. It's the very word Jesus uses to address Judas during the betrayal. The same word. The same cold tone. The same implication. And the word "chosen" at the end of this parable has never meant what your church told you it meant.

The Greek does not describe a selection. It describes a quality, a condition, or a readiness. We will walk through this parable verse by verse. The feast was already over when anyone arrived. The Greek word for the highways changes who the invitation reaches. The garment Paul connects to a completely different letter. And the muzzle links a wedding guest to a silenced demon.

Built on a single Greek phrase, this passage can be carried into any room you enter today. Let us begin with the feast. Matthew 22:1–4. A king prepares a wedding feast for his son. The Greek word is *gamos*. It appears sixteen times throughout the New Testament, with eight of those instances in this one parable. This makes it the most frequent use of *gamos* in Scripture. And *gamos* does not just mean a party or a reception. The root carries the sense of binding, of union. This is not merely a social event; it is a covenantal encounter.

The setting of the entire parable is a union. You recognize this feeling. It's the difference between an event on your calendar and a moment that will change something forever if you fully participate. *Gamos* describes the latter: a gathering where something is being joined that cannot be undone.

In verse 4, the king says my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered. The Greek word is *tethymena*, meaning they are already done, already completed. The sacrifice is not happening now; it is finished. Then *hetoimos* means everything is ready. Already prepared, not still being prepared or coming together. It is done. The feast is finished before a single guest sits down. That matters for everything that follows. Nobody needs to prepare anything. Nobody needs to bring anything. Nobody needs to earn a seat. The table is set. The sacrifice is complete. The only question remaining is whether you walk through the door.

The key detail that transforms the entire parable is verse 3. The king sends servants to call those who had already been invited. Your English makes this sound like the first call—a fresh invitation to people who are not yet aware of the feast. But the Greek says something different. The word is *κεκλημένους* (*keklāmenous*), which indicates a state already in effect. These guests had already been invited before the story begins. They had already received the message and had already said yes. This is the second call—the follow-up. It's time; the feast they agreed to attend is ready. The call goes out. Their refusal is not due to ignorance; it's a betrayal of a prior yes. You know this—you've agreed to something when it was still far off, when the cost was just theoretical, and then backed out once it became real and was actually happening.

That is the state this perfect tense describes. Not people who have never heard. People who have already committed and then chose not to show up. The feast is ready. The sacrifice is complete. Nobody needs to earn a seat. And those who already said yes are about to do something the Greeks call *ἀμελήσαντες* (*amelāsantes* - disregarded). It does not mean they refused; it means something much worse. Matthew 22:5 says, And they *amelāsantes* went away, one to his field, one to his business.

The English translation says they dismissed it. They paid no attention. They did not consider it. The Greek offers a sharper nuance. Amelāsantes comes from ἀ (a), meaning 'not,' and the verb μελῶ (melō), meaning "to care." It signifies a negation of caring. They did not argue with the invitation. They did not challenge it. They didn't even hate it. They simply didn't care. That is the essence of amelāsantes. Active rejection at least acknowledges the invitation exists. Amelāsantes occurs the moment the invitation arrives, and you glance at it and keep going. The call comes in, you look at it, and you set it down. Not hostility. Apathy. And in the structure of the parable, apathy is the first and most common form of refusal. Not the dramatic rejection of something important. The quiet drift. The slow forgetting. The thing you said yes to that you let die by simply not caring enough to show up. Amelāsantes names that drift. Then the king acts.

Verse 7 tells us that he sends his armies to destroy the murderers. Verse 8: the wedding is ready, but those invited were not ἄξιοι (axioi), not worthy, not significant enough. They did not take the seriousness of the occasion seriously. And verse 9 marks the turning point. Go to the diexodous ton hodōn, the exits of the highways. The word for highways here is hodōn. That word matters greatly. Hodos is the word used in John 14:6, where Jesus says, "I am the Way." It is the word used in Acts chapter 9:2, where early Christianity is literally called the Way, ἡ ὁδὸν. The invitation goes to the crossroads of the hodos, to the place where every path converges. The most open, most public, most universal location imaginable. The invitation that was first given to those who already said yes now goes to everyone standing at the exits of the Way.

And the text reveals exactly who shows up. In verse 10, the servants gather all they find, both πονηρούς (ponārous - evil) and ἀγαθοὺς (agathous - good). Ponārous should stop you in your tracks. It is the same Greek word used for the Evil One in Matthew 13:19 and for the devil himself in the parable of the Sower. These are not merely flawed people or morally ambiguous individuals. They are explicitly wicked. And they feast. They sit at the table. They eat the prepared meal. They recline in the king's hall. Nobody checks their past at the door. Nobody asks for a resume. The hall fills with the evil and the good side by side, and nobody, not a single one of the ponārous guests, is thrown out for being wicked.

This is the point that should cause every sermon to stop reading this parable as a moral judgment. The evil feast versus the good feast. No, everyone feasts. That means the man who gets thrown out in the very next verse is not removed because of wickedness. He is removed for something entirely different, something unrelated to how good or bad he is.

And this is where the most quoted line in the parable finally makes sense. Verse 14 says, πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰσιν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί (many are called, but few are chosen). Your English says "called and chosen," implying two categories: one group received the invitation, and another was selected by sovereign decree. As if God held a lottery and only some names were drawn.

But what the Greek reveals is something your translation completely obscures. Klétoi comes from καλεῶ (kaleō), meaning to call, summon, or invite. It describes the state of having been invited — a general call that everyone heard. Everyone in the hall was klétoi. Eklektoi, on the

other hand, comes from a different verb altogether. Ἐκλεγομαι (Eklegomai) means ‘to choose out, to select, to pick for quality.’ It does not share a root with klétoi.

Here, Matthew intentionally places these two words side by side in the same sentence. The phonetic echo between klétoi and eklektoi would resonate immediately with a Greek-speaking audience. Invited versus selected. Summoned versus refined. A Greek listener would catch the contrast instantly. Two different words, placed together on purpose. The invited versus the fitted.

This part undermines the idea of the divine lottery reading. Every church teaches that people are chosen as if God simply pointed at individuals and said, “You are in, you are out.” But Thayer's Lexicon defines eklektos not only as chosen but also as *select, choice, pure*—using precise language. It describes what someone has become, not what was arbitrarily done to them. And notice how Thayer contrasts them in Matthew 22:14: the eklektoi are those who have become true participants in Christian salvation, while the klétoi are those who have been invited but have not demonstrated they are worthy of it.

Many are defined by what they lack: fitness and readiness. The few are defined by what they carry. If the klétoi failed because they were unfitted, then the eklektoi succeeded because they were. Fitted—not randomly selected or arbitrarily separated. Thayer's contrast highlights readiness as the dividing line, and the parable confirms it. Evil people feast; the garmentless man does not. The filter isn't morality; it's what you're wearing.

You understand the difference between being selected for a team and being prepared to play. One is external and entirely beyond your control. The other is a state you carry within yourself before anyone calls your name. Eklektos refers to the second, the readiness, the quality. In this context, the garment symbolizes the inner state you bring to the encounter. It's not about your behavior or moral performance, but about your condition.

What are you wearing inside when you walk through the door? This is correspondence, not a medical claim. We are decoding a text, not prescribing treatment. The evil feast. The good feast. And one man among them all was singled out: not for wickedness, but for what he is not wearing.

But before the king directly addresses the garment, he calls the man by name. The Greek word he uses is the same one spoken to Judas in the garden. The king comes to look at the guests and notices a man not wearing an endyma gamou, a wedding garment. Endyma comes from endyo, meaning to sink into a garment—to put something on, not to carry or display it, but to inhabit it. This word family extends far beyond the parable.

Paul uses the same root verb, endyo, in Galatians 3:27: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves, [endysasthe], with Christ.” This word family conveys the ideas of putting on and sinking into. Romans 13:14 states, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 4:24 says, “Put on the new self.” Colossians 3:10 instructs, “Put on the new self, created in the image of the one who created it.” The most striking use appears in Colossians 3:12: “As God's chosen, eklektoi, put on, endysasthe, compassion, kindness, humility.” Notice that Paul places

eklektōi and endyō in the same sentence. These two concepts from the parable relate to the chosen ones being the ones who put on.

Paul is reading from the same page Matthew wrote. Every time Paul describes inner transformation, he reaches for this verb—the garment verb. The sinking-into verb. The word that doesn't mean perform, achieve, or earn, but receive, wear, and inhabit. The garment the man in the parable refuses to wear belongs to the same vocabulary Paul uses to become something entirely new.

The endyma gamou represents the endyō of the new self. The man stands in the feast hall without it, making the king's question even more devastating. In the ancient Near East, kings often provided garments for their feasts. As Genesis 45:22 states, Joseph gives his brothers changes of garments. The host provides the clothing, and the guest receives it. If garments were provided, this man had access. He refused what was offered, entering the hall his own way, wearing what he already had on, and declining the covering the king set out for everyone at the table.

You have experienced this—the moment when something is offered to you. Not earned. Not purchased. Not negotiated. Simply given. And you stand there, deciding whether to accept it. Whether to let it cover you. Whether to set down what you're already carrying and accept what's being handed to you instead. Endyō is not about performance. It's about willingness—the willingness to be clothed by something you neither created nor chose for yourself.

Now the king speaks. Verse 12, “How did you get in here without a wedding garment [Hetaire]? Your English says ‘friend.’ The Greek says something very different. Hetaire is not φίλος (philos). Philos is the warm word for a beloved friend. Jesus uses philos in John 15 when he tells his disciples I have called you friends. Philos conveys an emotional bond, affection, closeness, and personal warmth. Hetaire means “comrade, associate, acquaintance.” It is formal and distant. A surface word with no warmth beneath. A word of courtesy that masks the coldness of what is about to happen. And it appears only three times in the entire New Testament. All three are in Matthew; all three are confrontational.

- In Matthew 20:13, the vineyard owner told the worker who complained about wages, "Hetaire, I am not being unfair to you." That is a rebuke. The worker expected more. The owner asserts entitlement and ends the conversation.
- Matthew 22:12. The king to the man without a wedding garment: "Hetaire, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" That is an exposure. The man entered the hall but skipped the garment. The king points out what everyone else can see.
- Matthew 26, verse 50. Jesus to Judas in the garden of Gethsemane. Hetaire, do what you came for. That is devastation. The kiss has already landed. The betrayal is already in motion. And Jesus addresses it not with anger but with the coldest possible recognition.

Three uses. Three confrontations. Every time this word is spoken, something terrible follows. It represents courtesy without warmth. Formality without affection. The way you address someone when the relationship has already ended, and all that's left is acknowledging what happened.

You know this moment. When someone calls you by your title instead of your name. When the voice shifts from familiar to official. When the register drops from warm to formal, you feel it land in your stomach before your mind even catches up. That is what *hetaire* sounds like in Greek.

And the king is using it in a feast hall at a wedding, speaking to a man who thought his presence was enough. The king does not address this man with tenderness. He does not offer a second chance. He addresses him with the Judas word, the same word that falls on the lips of the one confronting a betrayer already past the point of rescue. And now the text gives the man's reaction. Verse 12 continues, "And he was speechless." But the Greek verb behind "speechless" is not "silence." It is not "embarrassment" nor "the loss of words." It is something far more intense. Your English says, "speechless." The Greek word Matthew chose is the same word Jesus used to silence a storm on the Sea of Galilee. And it changes everything about what is happening in this room.

Every English translation reads the same. The man was speechless. That sounds like he had nothing to say, like he froze—like the awkward silence of someone caught at a party wearing the wrong thing. A social mishap. An embarrassment. The Greek word is *ephimóthé*. It comes from the Greek verb *phimoō*. And *phimoō* does not mean to be silent. It does not mean "to be at a loss for words." It means "to muzzle." To close the mouth with a physical restraint. To gag. Every major Greek lexicon confirms the primary definition: to shut the mouth the way you would muzzle an animal.

This is the same verb used in Mark chapter 4:39, where Jesus stands in the boat during the storm on the sea. He speaks to the wind and the waves. The Greek is *pephimóso*. Be muzzled. And stay muzzled. A permanent gag order addressed to a raging sea.

This is the same verb used in Mark chapter 1:25. Jesus confronts a demon in the synagogue at Capernaum. *Phimóthéti*. Be muzzled. Same word. Same force. The authority that closes the mouth of an unclean spirit is the same authority that closes the mouth of the garmentless man at the wedding feast. And the form of the word matters. *Ephimóthé* indicates the action was done TO him. He WAS muzzled. Something outside him imposed the silence. He did not choose humility. He did not go quiet voluntarily. He did not run out of arguments. An authority above him shut his mouth the way a hand shuts the mouth of a storm.

You know this moment. When something is so true about you that your jaw cannot form a defense. Not because you chose humility, but because the truth arrived with such force that it closed your mouth on its own. That is *phimoō*—the muzzle. The passage uses the same word on this man that Jesus uses on the sea. Then, in verse 13, it escalates further. The king tells his

diakonoι, his attendants, to bind him hand and foot. The word for bind is δέσαντες (desantes), from δέω (deō). And deo carries enormous weight across the New Testament.

It is the same verb Jesus uses in Matthew 16:19, “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” The same verb. The same root appears in Matthew 12:29, “First bind the strong man, then plunder his house.” The same root appears in Revelation chapter 20:2, “The angel seized the dragon and bound him for a thousand years.” Binding in the New Testament signifies authority over resisting forces. It represents complete powerlessness. You cannot move your hands or feet. You cannot walk, reach for anything, or go anywhere. You are frozen in place. The irony is striking. The man who refused to wear the offered garment, endyō, is now forcibly bound, deō.

Two distinct verbs—covering and restraint. One is offered freely; the other is forced. He declines free clothing. He receives involuntary chains. You understand this pattern. What you refuse to wear voluntarily eventually becomes what constrains you involuntarily. The change you refuse to choose becomes the rigidity you cannot escape. Endyō was offered. Deō was imposed.

The parable shows both outcomes, starting from the same door and leading to the destination. Verse 13 says, Cast him into τὸ σκοτός τὸ ἐξώτερον (to skotos to exóteron), the outer darkness. Most people hear "outer darkness" and picture a place or a fixed location called hell. But exóteron does not mean “outer” in the way English uses the word, as if it refers to a specific address. The Greek word means “further out, more outside.” It indicates direction, not a place. It signifies moving away from the lit banquet hall, away from the warmth at the center.

The Septuagint uses the same word in Ezekiel to refer to the outer court of the temple, the area farthest from the Holy of Holies. It's not a separate building or a punishment chamber. It's the same structure, located at the maximum distance from the center. The spatial logic remains consistent: the man isn't sent to a different location but moves in a direction, away from the center and further from the feast.

Further from the light. This is correspondence. In this reading, the outer darkness signifies the growing distance that follows when the invitation is heard but the garment is never worn. It's not a sentence imposed from outside. Instead, it's a direction that begins the moment the offered covering is refused. The feast remains lit. The man moves further from it. Muzzled. Bound hand and foot. Cast further out. Three verbs. Three stages.

And then the passage delivers its final line. The one everyone quotes without reading the parable it's from. Many are called, but few are chosen. But after what you just saw, those two Greek words do not mean what you thought they did. And the difference between them is something no English translation has ever shown you.

Matthew 22:14, “πολλοὶ γάρ εἰσιν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί” (polloi gar eisin klātoi, oligoi de eklektoi. For many are called, but few are chosen. Klétoi, from the verb καλῶ (kalaō), “to call, to summon, to invite,” denotes the state of having been invited. Everyone at the crossroads heard the call. Everyone gathered in the hall from the highway exits received the summons. Klétoi is the widest circle. The open door. The table is set for anyone who would come.

Eklektoi derives from eklegomai, meaning to choose out or select for quality—a completely different verb. Yet Matthew places it right next to klétoi in the same breath. Invited and selected. Summoned and refined. Two distinct Greek words, placed side by side to create a contrast no Greek-speaking listener could miss. The invited who became select. The summoned who became fitted. The ones who heard the call and then became what the occasion required.

Revelation 17:14 completes the progression that the parable only begins. Klétoi kai eklektoi kai pistoi. Called, chosen, and faithful. Three stages, not two. Called is the widest door. Chosen is the narrower passage. Faithful, pistoi, is the innermost room. The parable gives you the first two. Revelation adds the third. The direction is always the same: inward, closer to the center. The exact opposite of exóteron.

You see the geometry now. The man was cast exóteron, farther out. The progression in Revelation moves in the opposite direction. Klétoi, eklektoi, pistoi. Each step moves inward, closer to the center of what is being offered. The feast is the center; the outer darkness is the edge. Between them stands one action—whether you put on what has been provided. Now, pull the threads together. In the second chapter, you saw that eklektos means fitted, chosen, pure—a word that describes what someone has become, not a lottery or a finger pointed from heaven. It's a readiness that the text itself measures by the person wearing it.

In the third chapter, you heard the king use the word hetaire, the Judas word, to address the man who lacked that readiness. Not a warm appeal. Not a gentle second chance. A cold, formal exposure. The same word spoken at the moment of betrayal. In the fourth chapter, you watched the muzzle fall (Phimoō). The same force that gags storms and silences demons. Then the binding (Deo). The same verb that restrains the strong man and chains the dragon.

Then the direction. Exóteron, meaning “further out, further from the center, further from the feast.” The parable is not a lottery. It is a sequence. The garment is offered. The garment is declined. The Judas word falls. The muzzle lands. The binding follows. The direction reverses from inward to outward. And at the end, one line. Many klétoi. Few eklektoi. Many invited. Few refined. Many heard the call. Few let it change what they were wearing.

You understand the difference between hearing something and letting it transform you. Between merely attending a room and truly being present in it. Between sitting at a table and being prepared for what the table demands. That is the contrast Matthew illustrates. Klétoi and eklektoi. Invited and refined. Two words side by side that describe the gap between simply showing up and being truly ready. Two words. That is the entire contrast Matthew highlights. Called and chosen. Invited and fitted. Being at the table and being prepared for the room.

And there is a phrase in this passage you can carry with you. Not a theology. Not a doctrine to argue about. A practice. Something you can do in under three minutes that mirrors the one act the parable says makes the difference. One act. Putting on the garment. Endyo. To sink into. Not to perform. Not to earn. Not to fabricate. To receive what was provided and let it rest on you.

It reflects the parable's own structure. The feast is already prepared. The garment is already provided. The only question is whether you wear it. The parable is measuring not whether you arrived at the hall, nor whether you believe the feast is real, but whether you wore what was offered once you got there. Third, remember that the feast is already finished. Tethymena. Already slaughtered. Hetoimos. Already prepared. You are not preparing the feast. You are not constructing the garment from scratch. You are not earning your seat at the table. Everything that needed to be done has already been completed.

The Greek told you that in verse 4, the sacrifice is complete, the table is set, and the door is open. You are not building the room; you are deciding what to wear into it. That is the practice—not a program, a system, or a technique. It is the single act the parable identifies as the dividing line between klétoi and eklektoi—between the invited and the refined, between the many who heard and the few who wore it.

It does not conclude with a checklist or a set of steps to follow. It ends with a distinction. Klétoi or eklektoi. Invited or refined. Called or chosen. The feast is ready. The garment is here. The door is open. Endyō. Sink into it!