

## SERMON NOTES OF THE 3 CALLS OF GOD TO BELIEVERS

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### TITLE: THE 3 CALLS OF GOD TO BELIEVERS

MAIN TEXT: MATTHEW 22:1-14. Let us begin with a short introduction.

#### Introduction:

The Word of God reveals certain kinds of calling, including a **general call** to everyone (Act. 17:30; Rom. 10:18), and what some Reformers refer to as an **effectual call** to those who hear and respond by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit (Act. 2:39; John 3:3-8), and also what some Reformers might describe as a **technical call** to a particular vocation in life (Amos 7:12-15; Jer. 1:5). Some Reformers may liken the 3 calls of God to [1] a general call; [2] an effectual call; and [3] a technical call. The main text (Matt. 22:1-14) is the parable of the wedding feast, it is very useful in addressing the various calls of God. Let us read the main text from Matthew 22:1-14.

It is clear, like all of the Son of Man's [Christ] parables, that not every detail of this parable is to be taken literally, but there are certain lessons to be drawn from it. This sermon particularly focuses on the following 3 CALLS OF GOD TO BELIEVERS taken from the main text from Matt. 22:1-14:

1. THE EFFECTUAL CALL TO BELIEVERS (Act. 2:39; John 3:3-8).
2. THE SPECIFIC CALL TO BELIEVERS (Amos 7:12-15; Jer. 1:5).
3. THE HEAVENLY CALL TO BELIEVERS (Rev. 11:12; Heb. 3:1).

### 1. THE EFFECTUAL CALL TO BELIEVERS

Reading the main text Matt. 22 [from] verse 14, "For many are called, but few are chosen." This verse distinguishes between the general call that everyone receives by hearing the gospel and the effectual call that leads to salvation. The gospel is available to everyone, but as humans, because of our sinful nature, no one will turn to God without God first impressing Himself on us—according to John 6:44, God does not force, but draws. God invites *many*, which in regards to the Jewish way of speaking, the usage of *many* can refer to *all*—so according to Matt. 22:14, the general call goes out to everyone, but only a *few are chosen*. In Luke 13:23-24, a disciple of the Lord asked Him whether a few are saved, which the Lord responded by saying, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." This does not mean that God has chosen to save some, and chosen NOT to save others—for the Word of God reveals that there is no partiality with God (Rom. 2:11-16), or in other words, God does not show personal favouritism to one person over another in regards to salvation, because [1] it is the sovereign will of God to save by grace alone—none of us deserve it (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 9:11), and also [2] God is love (1 John 4:16), God loves all people, and God desires all mankind to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4-7; 2 Pet. 3:9). The

Lord also reveals in another passage that “wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many enter into it” (Matt. 7:13). “And narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life, and few find it” (Matt. 7:14). Well, if the way that leads to life is difficult, “Who then can be saved?” The Bible makes it clear that the way of salvation is difficult for man to obtain by our own human efforts, but what is impossible for humanity is not impossible for God (Matt. 19:25-26). Therefore, in Matt. 22:14, the Son of Man [Christ] ends the parable of the wedding feast with a general truth that summarizes the parable’s meaning, which is, although a general call goes out to everyone, it is possible to refuse, as many Jews did. And so, *few are chosen* refers to those who accept God’s gracious invitation and remain loyal, which is only possible as God the Father draws them (John 6:44), and enables the general call to become an effectual call onto salvation through [1] the power of the Holy Spirit [in accordance with 2 Cor. 3:18 & Heb. 9:14], and [2] by the Word of God [in accordance with Psalm 119:9-11 & Eph. 5:26]. Let us focus yet further on these two methods used in the effectual call of God to believers into His kingdom (Col. 1:13).

[1] Firstly, in the effectual calling to believers, the Holy Spirit works in the heart of believers to hear and respond to the general call, so that it might become effective onto salvation through faith in Christ. The Bible says that Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness, which reveals that election is conditional on a person’s faith (Rom. 4:3). The Lord, by His Holy Spirit opens the heart as He did the heart of Lydia (Act. 16:14), impressing on the heart the Gospel of the grace of God, so that the heart no longer resists the work of the Spirit, but as revealed in Luke 19:1-10 when Christ called Zacchaeus—Zac received Him joyfully, and in like-manner, we are to respond joyfully in faith, and welcome Him in our heart. Rev 3:20, reveals Christ as the perfect Gentleman who stands at the door of our hearts and waits for a response, which further reveals that election is conditional on a person’s response in faith, you must believe in Christ to be saved (Act. 16:31). And so, we ought to be in awe, gratitude and amazement for what God has done through Christ in order to save our souls (1 Pet. 1:8-12; Rom. 3:24-26).

[2] Secondly, in the effectual calling to believers, the Word of God in effect is the voice of God to us (Matt. 7:24; Deut. 4:12; Heb. 3:7; John 6:63), in a sense it can be likened to God speaking to us from heaven (Heb. 12:25)—His Word is like drops of dew into our hearts (Hos. 14:5; Ps. 133:3) that gives us the assurance we need to know that God desires us to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4-6), and to be delivered from sin into His kingdom (Col. 1:13; Matt. 13:3-23). Thomas Watson, a non-conformist Puritan preacher, in regards to the method God may use, stated, [quote] “The Lord does not tie Himself to a particular way, or use the same order with all. He comes sometimes in a still small voice. Such as have had godly parents, and have sat under the warm sunshine of religious education, often do not know how or when they were called. The Lord did secretly and gradually instil grace into their hearts, as the dew falls unnoticed in drops. They know by the heavenly effects that they are called, but the time or manner they know not. The hand moves on the clock, but they do not perceive when it moves.” [unquote]. The most important lesson to receive from this quotation, is that although you may not know the precise time you were called, [but] it is so important to KNOW the heavenly effects of your calling. Have you experienced a spiritual work of God in your heart? Are you certain that the effects of the general call of God have led to an effectual calling? An effectual calling can be a gradual process, before a believer eventually responds more positively, as was the case with the calling of the Lord’s first disciples—Mark’s Gospel (1:17) records the call of the first disciples—Simon and Andrew, but this was not the Lord’s first encounter with Simon and Andrew (see John 1:35-42; 2:1-2), but rather the Gospels of Mark and Matthew (Matt. 4:18-22; 8:9-13), both record the eventual point of the disciples’

response in faith leading to firstly, a closely knit fellowship as they followed Christ, and then secondly, a commitment to the call of God. The general call at first is met with ignorance resulting in rejection and resistance, but through a spiritual work of God it leads to an effectual calling onto salvation, before eventually arriving at the point of fellowship, and also commitment.

In our main text in Matt. 22 [go to *notice...* - let us READ from verses 2-7].

*Notice* in [- read] *verses 2-7*, that the general call first goes out to the Jews, but the response of those invited was not right, they were not willing to come, and they continued their daily way of life, while others treated the servants of God spitefully and killed them, which resulted in the king burning up their city—probably an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The response of the Jews invited to the wedding feast reflects the rejection of the general call that occurs when witnessing in our present day, many people do not want to hear God’s invitation of salvation in Christ for their souls, some people respond by saying, “I’m not religious,” or “It’s not for me,” while others are hostile and offended by the message. However, those who do respond positively in faith to the general call of God are the recipients of this effectual, internal call, progressing onto particularly commitment—as the parable of the wedding feast also reveals. Notice the commitment of the servants to carry out the Lord’s command in Matt. 22:10, “So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.” Also, notice in this parable, the reference to those “found, both bad and good,” this refers to ALL believers—none are good by nature, if they were, they would not need the gospel, some may be worse than others, but none are too bad to receive an invitation. Therefore, I appeal to all listening to this message to respond to the general call of God in faith in Christ that it might be sure, an effectual call onto salvation—as God the Father draws (John 6:44; Act. 10:34-43; 16:14), particularly by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word—come—for all who come to Christ have this assurance—that none will He cast away (John 6:37).

## **2. THE SPECIFIC CALL TO BELIEVERS**

There is a distinction between *the effectual call* of God and *the specific call* to believers. The effectual call refers to God’s electing love and sovereign will to choose to save by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 9:11), which is an election that is conditional on a person’s faith (Rom. 4:3), whereas *the specific call to believers* is unconditional based on God’s sovereign will to choose certain individuals for specific kingdom work to fulfil His own sovereign purposes, as was the case with King David (1 Sam. 16:12-13). God’s gift and God’s calling are irrevocable (Rom. 12:29), which means God does not change His mind in regards to the specific calling to believers. This is evident in the Biblical account in the Book of Jonah (Ch. 1-4), God placed a specific call on Jonah’s life as a prophet, and sent him to the people of Nineveh. God did not change His mind even when Jonah refused to do the task, but God overruled Jonah, and eventually the prophet carried out the divine calling on his life. In other words, *the specific call* to kingdom work can be likened to a calling that relates to one’s life’s work. Do you know the specific call on your life? It may be to the ministry, like the prophet Amos calling [7:14-16], to parenthood [as was the case with Mary, the mother of our Lord, and Joseph her husband – Matt. 1:18-25; 2:1-15, 19-

23], to government [as was the case with Joseph, the son of the patriarch Jacob – Gen. 45:5-8], or to the arts, and beyond. Have you specifically been called into the ministry? Or have you been called of God in connection with a spiritual gift? (Act. 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim. 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6; Matt. 19:13-15). The purpose of a specific call into the ministry [a divine call] is not something we create, but something God places within us, in regards to the way He wants us to serve Him, and it becomes more and more clearer within us in our daily walk with the Lord in fellowship, particularly through prayer and reading and meditating in the word of God for deeper understanding and practical application in obedience to the Lord (Deut. 28:1-9; 29:9). The Lord desires each believer in all of life's action to look to his or her calling (1 Cor. 7:17; 1 Pet. 1:10-11). What about you? Do you know the course God has marked out for you? Have you taken the time to seek God earnestly, believing He will lead and direct your steps? Pay attention particularly in regards to your spiritual gift such as an evangelist, or pastor-teacher primarily for planting and growing churches in the Kingdom of God (Eph. 4:4-7, 11-16; 1 Cor. 12:28-29). Also, there are supporting spiritual gifts such as giving, service and teaching primarily to organize and administrate the churches in the Kingdom of God, so that it may best carry out its responsibilities (Rom. 12:6-8). If you are called to specifically play a supporting role in the kingdom of God, never under value your importance. The example I am about to use may not be the best example, but maybe helpful to some believers. For example, in the sporting world, a certain Michael Jordan is probably the greatest basketball player in the history of the game, but in his early NBA career he failed to achieve his ultimate goal of an NBA championship although he had the talent, yet it was not enough. He learnt a valuable lesson of the importance of his team mates. When he began to encourage and to harness the talents of his team mates, only then was he able to succeed, and to achieve his ultimate goal of an NBA championship. Another example of natural talent along with team work leading to success is evident in the building of the Tabernacle. Natural talents, such as artistic skills, are sometimes the vehicle through which spiritual gifts can be used, as seen with Bezalel, the artisan charged with building the Tabernacle who was filled with the Spirit of God, wisdom, knowledge and understanding (Ex. 31:2-5), but it is clear that without the supporting role of others, the natural talent of Bezalel would obviously not be enough to build the Tabernacle. The believers in the Kingdom of God are equipped by God for special service to Him—from the OT to the NT God frequently called people to Himself and to His work, and Christ revealed to us that all work in the kingdom of God should be viewed as humble service onto the Lord (John 13:1-20; Col. 3:17). Therefore, never under value your importance, and never doubt that God created you on purpose for a purpose. You may be the one blessed with a special talent or granted a supporting role, but you also play a vital role in building and advancing His kingdom—for all believers are the servant people of God charged with establishing His kingdom on earth (Matt. 6:10; 28:18-20), as also revealed in the parable of the wedding feast.

Turning again to our main text in Matt. 22. Reading from verses 2-4.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding.”’ And reading from verses 10-11, “So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding *hall* was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.” There are believers who are a part of God's kingdom [that is, those who have received an effectual call] who are also called to a certain work in the kingdom. Look again at our main text of Matt. 22, notice in the verses 2-4 just read, that the servants in the kingdom had a certain work of inviting as many people to *the wedding*,

which perhaps can be likened to receiving a *specific call* or a special talent to preach or to minister in the name of the Lord—waiting expectantly for the coming of the Son of Man [Christ] and in the process preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God [with the aid of others in a supportive role], appealing to people to enter into the kingdom now, so to also experience *the wedding*, which is symbolic to the consummation of God’s kingdom at the return of Christ, the king (Matt. 22:10-11).

Notice also in verse 11, that there was a man in the wedding *who did not have on a wedding garment*. Bible commentators interpret the wedding garment to be symbolic to righteousness—when clothed in Christ’s righteousness (Matt. 22:11; Is. 61:10), then a life of good works of righteousness should follow (Eph. 2:10). Righteousness needs to be practiced by the servant people in God’s kingdom (1 John 3:7), who are called to a certain kingdom work and must faithfully acknowledge and subject to His commission and rule, for the Lord bids each servant to walk worthy of the calling of God (1 Thess. 2:12). Therefore, each individual believer has his or her own kind of living assignment by the Lord, so that he or she may not heedlessly wander about throughout life. It is evident that the man without a wedding garment in this parable, firstly is symbolic to a person that walks unworthy of the call of God, without grace, and without being clothed in Christ’s righteousness. And secondly, this man has no good works of righteousness in accordance with the calling the Lord has assigned to him. The warning is clear, that such who do this would face the same consequences revealed in this parable of the wedding feast as revealed in verses 12-13. [READ] Matt. 22:12-13 states, “So he said to him, *Friend*”—this is the same way in which the Lord addressed Judas in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:50)—here in this parable it has the term of distrust and disapproval. Continuing from verse 12, ‘*Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And He was speechless*’—the scene depicted here is symbolic to at the consummation of the kingdom of God when the Lord returns, any person who walks unworthy of the call of God, and particularly any person without the grace of God or without Christ’s righteousness, such persons shall not be able to answer, for they shall be without excuse, and shall ultimately be condemned—like this man in the parable, his silence was evidence of his conscious awareness of guilt. Also, verse 13 reference to the darkness outside the wedding feast, filled with the despairing groans of those who were excluded from the feast—reveals the final punishment of those condemned by the King. In contrast, let us consider believers who take heed to the call of God using the example of the servants in this parable of the wedding feast who were *sent out* by the King.

Look again at Matt. 22:4-6. The most important lesson to learn about the servants who were *sent out* is that these servants can be likened to those who know their life assignment. The Greek verb “*apostello*” means to *send out*. The usage of the word *sent* in this parable of the wedding feast can also be used to compare with the usage of the word *sent* in Heb. 1:14. Turning to Heb. 1:14, “*Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*” The servants mentioned in Matt. 22:4-6 can be likened to those who are certain of their specific calling to the ministry, who are sent out for the work of salvation of souls. Perhaps you are in the process of considering whether you have a specific call to the ministry, maintain a close-knit fellowship with the Lord through prayer (1 John 1:3-7; Jude 20), and pay attention to your spiritual gifts—if you have been called into ministry, discerning this carefully, and gaining clarity on the nature of the call and life assignment, is one of the most important things you will ever do. Because notice in Matt. 22:6, the ill treatment of the servants who were sent even to the point of death, this reveals the commitment of the servants even under extreme and difficult circumstances, which we can draw a very important lesson from in regards to being certain that we have certainly received a specific call of God, because this would enable us during difficult times to remain committed to the Lord, and withstand the pressure to the end. You

also must be certain that you have certainly been called, and be willing to fulfil your ministry to the end.

### 3. THE HEAVENLY CALL TO BELIEVERS

The heavenly calling to believers refers primarily to the call of God to enter into the eternal inheritance in Christ (Matt. 25:21-23; 1 Pet. 1:3-4)—but it is also a call that comes from heaven, and it leads to heaven as well. In other words, this is as much about your ultimate destiny as it is about your initial general call that became an effectual call onto salvation into the kingdom of God. Moreover, it is a call telling us where our hope comes from, namely, from heaven, and also where our hope is taking us, namely, to heaven. In our main text in Matt. 22 [1-14]—reading [from] verse 10, “So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.” The heavenly call is symbolic to those who received the invitation to the wedding to the actual entrance into the wedding, which refers to the invitation that comes from heaven through the initial general call that’s effectual onto salvation, that also finally leads to heaven, that is, the actual entrance into heaven into the eternal inheritance secured in Christ.

Let us briefly look at another Scripture text in regards to the heavenly calling:

[READ] Phil. 3:12-14, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus [Yahushua] has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus [Yahushua].”

According to Phil. 3:12-14, the believers’ life is like a race, the apostle Paul also used athletic imagery to demonstrate the believers’ life to the finishing line in 1 Cor. 9:24-27 (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). The goal of the heavenly calling of God to believers is to live now on earth a heavenly life, which ought to reflect faithfulness in service, holiness and good works for the glory of God (Col. 3:17, 23-24; 4:17; 1 Thess. 2:12). Our goal, like the apostle Paul’s goal ought to be Christ’s goal for us, and Christ supplies the resources for us, *to press toward the mark*. It involves not losing all memory of our past, but learning from our past, and also leaving it behind as done with, and settled, in the knowledge that whatever situation we are in right now, God is taking us through something to get to some place. Our past can be a source of determination to our present and future success toward the ultimate prize of the upward calling according to Phil. 3:12-14, which is the heavenly call, and the heavenly entrance to partake in the eternal inheritance secured in Christ.

## Summary

This sermon has focused on the parable of the wedding feast in Matt. 22:1-14 to make a distinction between the 3 calls of God to believers, that is [1] the effectual call; [2] the specific call (or technical call); and [3] the heavenly call. There are actually 3 CALLS OF GOD TO BELIEVERS (NOT ONE). Do you believe you have been called by God? My question to you is what calling is it? Each one of us receives a general call. To the believers who hear and respond to the general call by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God, it becomes an effectual call onto salvation into the kingdom of God [and Christ] (Rev. 11:15). But do not let the call of God end there. You have a purpose in the kingdom of God like the servants read in our main text from Matt. 22:1-14—these servants who were *sent out* can be likened to those who know their life assignment. You too must find out what your life's purpose is—this is the specific call to kingdom work assigned to you by the Lord, primarily in line with your spiritual gifts. You must locate it, and walk worthy of the specific call of God to a particular kingdom work [or vocation in life], living now on earth a holy and faithful life, that you may have a glorious entrance into the heavenly call, which according to our main text (Matt.22:10), it is those who received a call from the highways to the actual entrance into the wedding, which refers to the actual entrance into heaven into the eternal inheritance secured in Christ, as the Lord says, “Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt. 25:23).

I hope this message has been helpful to you, and may God bless you richly in Christ's name. Amen.