

Matt Henry
Acts 1:12-26
13 May 2018

“Happy Matthias’ Day”

Grace and peace....

With the voters’ meeting today, this text from Acts 1, the choosing of Matthias, struck me as well-timed. If not by using lots, how else should we choose between two people that have been nominated? There’s rock, paper, scissors; eenie, meenie, minie, moe; and let’s not forget the Magic 8 Ball, source of wisdom that it is! Well, just imagine Matthias’ surprise to realize as the lots fell that he was also chosen by God as an apostle all along. Obviously this is a unique privilege to be chosen as the 12th Apostle! We can say, “Good for him” but what is there for us to get out of it?

One aspect of our identity that we need to cover today is our calling, namely, that we are chosen by God to do certain things in life. God has a list of things to get done. He could just do it Himself, but instead, He chooses to use people to accomplish these tasks. Why does God go that route? It’s more fun for Him. It causes us to grow. God is really interested in growing you and me. God wants you to realize and accept your place in His mighty and wondrous plan. So many people don’t know their place—and I’m not saying that like they’re out of line. No, they don’t know their place because they don’t know where they are.

They can't see where they fit in the big picture of what God is up to. Every believer needs to know where they are and how they fit in the overarching, redemptive mission of God toward the world. Every believer needs to know they are chosen and chosen for a purpose and destiny that is greater than themselves and has eternal significance! God knows we have a lot going on, a lot of decisions to make, but He wants us to take part in the family business.

My hope for us today is to let God's choice of us influence the choices we make in our daily life! Coming before Him in humility and prayer, seeking His wisdom and surrendering our will to His will...that's the route we are going to go today as we look at the designation and function of being chosen as God's elect.

The Scriptures had to be fulfilled. Judas hanged himself, just as Scripture foretold. Psalm 69:25, "Let his camp become desolate. Let there be no one to dwell in it." Judas was out. The next step to replace him was also scriptural. Someone would fill his role, as Psalm 109:8 says, "Let another take his office." Peter quotes these Psalms and the whole bunch of the 120 believers are realizing how the whole story has just played out before them. And now they must choose who will take Judas' place.

There are only two men on the ballot, but there are four names. Joseph AKA Barsabbas AKA Justus vs. Matthias. These guys were nominated because

they were eyewitnesses to the ministry of Jesus from the beginning. They were there at Jesus' baptism by John. They saw the ascension of Christ. Being an eyewitness to the resurrection, most importantly, is what qualified them for apostolic ministry. They're both qualified, but how to choose?

Put it to a vote? Hey, we do have a Primary coming up! Elections are always fascinating to me! I love the stuff. I volunteered to be a precinct worker; no one called me. I'm crushed. Maybe in November. Because I love election drama. Remember Florida in the 2000 election? As you may recall George W. Bush won the state by 537 votes. Well, one of the more interesting stories from that time was the butterfly ballot in Palm Beach County. Here's a picture of it. Pat Buchanan received 3,407 votes—about 3,000 more than he was expecting. Many political analysts and even Buchanan himself said there's no way I actually have that many voters. But because the way the ballot was designed, it's reasonable to say more than enough people intending to vote for Al Gore accidentally voted for Pat Buchanan and that was enough to decide the fate of Florida's electoral votes and the leader of the free world.

I mention this story because we think our modern ways of deciding are so sophisticated. We think we self-determine things. People probably made a mistake in voting. And then some didn't even push the stylus all the way through.

Remember the hanging chads? Election judges were hired to determine what was the voter's true intent. They had to determine it! Rather subjective! Instead of appealing to the Supreme Court, they should have just cast lots...I'm sure that would have gone over well.

Throughout the Bible, God's people used that very method of determining God's will. Lots are mentioned 70 times in the Old Testament and 7 times in the New Testament. The symbolism of those complete numbers is really significant! Most of the use of lots came earlier before the Bible came into existence. Even though they were mentioned so often, we still don't know what lots were—sticks, flat stones or some kind of dice. But the issues they decided were not small potatoes either. Aaron used lots on the Day of Atonement with the two goats—one was sacrificed. The other was led into the wilderness. Lots determined which one was which. Joshua divided the Promised Land for the twelve tribes by lots. Because of lots, Jonah was found out as the reason for the storm and told the other people on the boat to throw him overboard. The priests/Levites/people determined their offering—what to bring and when to bring it. At the crucifixion, the Roman soldiers divided Jesus' tunic and garments. This was done to fulfill Scripture. Interestingly, the use of lots for Matthias is the final example. It's the only positive occasion of casting lots in the New Testament that happens with

God's approval. After this choosing of Matthias, lots aren't used any more in the Bible.

Why not? Is it because now is the age of the Spirit who works more personally in us? That would make sense to me. The living God doesn't dwell in objects, He dwells more closely in people; relationally He reveals His will. He wants us to use the gifts He gives—including wisdom, discernment, knowledge. God is even willing to not make the decision obvious and let a few voters' meeting go haywire if it means people will rely on Him, and not their own intuition. It's about having Him work in the heart.

What does Peter say? "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place" (v. 25). You Lord, know the hearts. You know the motivation. You know the desires. Show us." They cast lots. It fell to Matthias. And they didn't do best two out of three! They didn't put Matthias on 90 day probation. They accepted God's will. He was added to the Eleven. Matthias accepted it. And you know who else accepted it? Joseph-Barsabbas-Justus! That's a whole other dimension—accepting God's will when you want it to be otherwise.

However God makes His will known to you, it's going to be first through the Word, then through prayer, then through circumstances beyond your control, and finally through other people. That order is important. The Word is preeminent of course. God is not going to tell you through prayer or another person to do something that is against His word. But He can use all of these avenues to make His will known.

When it comes to His will for our salvation, He wasn't trying to be subtle. He chose us! Scripture tells us right out, God chose us before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). He "predestined us for adoption as sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5). We're chosen! Whether we think He made a good choice or not is irrelevant. The fact is, He chose you and me. What are we going to do with that? How will the fact that we are chosen for eternity influence the choices we make here and now?

I think the answer has to do with knowing our place in the story. Does this decision, this choice I make line up with how God is using me in the big story? See, we make plenty of decisions that make sense in our narrative, the way we think our life should go. But God has a way of showing us, His ways are better. Sometimes, we have to figure that out the hard way. But He wants us to listen and really lean in. It's really quite simple: God knows better than we do. His

choice is better than our choice. Chosen-ness is not about being better than or feeling superior. It's not about status. Being chosen is about function. It's about being used by God to accomplish His purposes. We get to be used in God's redemptive mission! He wants to grow you and others into the fullness of Christ through actual discipleship. That's been His plan all along. This is the purpose in life. Choose the things in life that agree and affirm His will for you. Since God's will is sovereign and superior than whatever we might come up with, we might as well get on board with it!

In Jesus' name, Amen.