

I was close but Matthias was chosen instead of me. The two of us were up for the opening created by Judas' defection. We were both qualified. Peter took the jar and put our names in it. He shook it up and out came a name. Did it read my name? No. It was Matthias, and I was not the one to join that special group of twelve called the apostles. So close, but I was not the one.

My name is Joseph, but you can call me Barsabbas. Most everyone does. Although some will call me Justus. I suppose it doesn't matter, because I'm better known as the one who didn't get to be the twelfth apostle.

Oh, I **could** have been. I had followed Jesus right from the start. When He was baptized by John in the Jordan River, I was there. When He did a miracle, I saw it. When He taught the crowds about the kingdom of God, I listened. When He prayed, I watched. When He enjoyed some time with His friends and family, I was invited. I was with Jesus during the good times and the bad times too. When people attacked Him, I got angry. When He was arrested, I was scared. When He was crucified, I cried. When He rose from the dead, I saw Him alive and even ate with Him again. Yes, I was with Jesus right from the beginning and had witnessed it all.

So, I could have been chosen. I **could** have been. Those are discouraging words, aren't they, "Could have been"? I could have **been** this. I could have **done** that. Most everyone has said them with a disappointed, "but it's not going to happen anymore" tone in their voice. And you would think that that's how I would feel about the whole situation. Disappointed. Left out. Wishful over what might have been. I mean, that's usually how you feel when you've been left out of the inner circle for so long. When Jesus chose His twelve disciples, I wasn't one of them. I was there. I was ready. I could have been a disciple instead of say, Nathaniel or Thomas. But, no, it wasn't to be. I wasn't chosen then, and I wasn't chosen when a replacement for Judas was needed. I was left out of the inner circle once again.

So, you would have thought disappointment surrounded me. So close, but not again. The bottle is being shaken. My name is rattling around. Out pops the little square die. You hold your breath. And it's someone else. How can you **not** feel disappointment in that moment? The last three years I had been following at the edge, just out of the reach of this group of Jesus' closest followers. And I missed out again. Disappointment would only be natural. But I wasn't- at least not much for very long. I mean, look what I was privileged to see and do. To even have my name put in that bottle meant I had been with Jesus from the beginning.

I remember His baptism. John the Baptist poured water on Him, and the sky just split apart. A dove came down. It was the Holy Spirit. Jesus received the power and presence of God's Spirit to do His work. And the voice boomed out, "You are My Son, whom I love, with You I am well pleased." I heard **God** speaking. You can't be disappointed about that. You **can't** feel left out when you see something so incredible. I simply **had** to follow Jesus. The power of His Word convinced me that he was the Messiah the promised One who would save us for all eternity. Oh, what I saw was wonderful. Jesus went about doing all sorts of good (Acts 10:37). People were blind or lame or sick, and with a simple touch or word, they were healed. I saw a few fish and some bread feed thousands. You can't be disappointed when you see things like that. I heard Jesus speak.

His words gave hope and comfort. He assured us when we needed it. He challenged us when we were in the wrong. He forgave us too. We learned about God's kingdom, the way God rules the world. It was all so wonderful. I wasn't left out, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Oh, not **all** was wonder and rejoicing. Jesus had His enemies. He was threatened and so were we. The night He was arrested was a dark night for all of us. Peter's denial, Judas' betrayal, the rest of us running away, deserting Him. He was left all alone.

But even **that** turned out good. Now we know that salvation came because He shed His blood for us. The Messiah was killed for our eternal life. All prophecy was fulfilled on that deadly weekend. Jesus was indeed the One who had come to save His people from their sins. I'm not proud of my actions, but I saw all this taking place right before my very eyes. Then came that glorious morning. The woman came to tell us. Jesus is alive! He is risen from the dead! Could it be? Yes, I saw Jesus out of the grave. I ate with Him (Acts 10:41). I saw His wounds. I heard Him too. Disappointed? Not on your life! I've seen death defeated and Jesus victorious. I've watched Him ascend into heaven to sit on God's right hand. I've seen so much of what happened with Jesus. I've not been left out. I'm one of His people. No one could ever ask for anything more than that. I know you can't. Oh, I'm sure there are times when you've been disappointed with some decision God has made about your life. Maybe things haven't turned out the way you would have liked them to. Could it be work? *Your* name is in the bottle with everyone else. Who gets the new position? Who gets left out?

Or perhaps you really wanted to be part of a certain group of people. There's an inner circle that looks so attractive. But it doesn't

happen. You're not chosen again. You're left on the edges, following, close, but you're not the one. You're on the outside looking in instead. Everyone wonders, sometime in life, about what could have been. Why did God take me down **this** path and not another? What might have happened if I had been chosen for this position, for this honor, for this opportunity, for this scholarship, for this challenge? Just think what could have happened! Yes, I'm sure you've felt disappointed with God's decisions about your life, left out from what might have been something special in your life. But let me tell you, there's so much more to be thankful for, to rejoice in. *You've* been chosen too. Right from the beginning with Baptism, your Baptism. There, in that water, Jesus came with His loving welcoming embrace. He called you into His kingdom, brought you into His church. **You** belong. You're **not** left out. You're a part of the most special group of all time. You have been chosen to be in God's family. Nothing is more wonderful or important than that.

And you've seen Jesus too. Oh, not face to face. But at His table you've receive the very body and blood of Jesus. You've joined together with all those who have ever followed Jesus- and will follow Him, it's a meal that will last into eternity. What an incredible time with Jesus. In the Lord's Supper Jesus is truly present for us.

You've also heard Him speak, seen Him do miracles. Oh, not right before your eyes, but in His Word, the Bible. As you read and hear those passages of Scripture. Jesus brings you right into the scene. You're a part of His life. You hear Him speak words of comfort. You see Him heal the paralytic. You hear Him teach about God's kingdom. You even live in the dark time when He's killed by those who hated Him. You know it as Good Friday, "good" because of the salvation, the forgiveness of all of your sins that Jesus' death brings to you. But even more, you rejoice in this Easter season, singing alleluias because death, including your death, has been defeated. Life eternal is yours because Jesus rose from the dead.

Now Jesus has ascended into heaven, sitting at God's right hand to care for you, to make wise decisions about the course of your life, to pray for you. You've been with Jesus from the beginning. You've seen His coming and going, doing what is good for everyone His life touches. You've witnessed how wonderful it is to be in His church, His kingdom, His family forever.

No, this isn't a day to feel left out or disappointed. This is a day to rejoice. This is the day to hear once again of the wonders of Jesus; the incredible love He has for you. This is the day to eat with Him at His table. This is the day to celebrate His resurrection, a resurrection that declares loud and clear that you

are His forever, never to be left out. Yes, you are close, so close to the One who chooses you to be His own for all eternity. Amen.