



Disciple-Ship

Week 8

Disciple Focus: Matthew (possibly know as Levi)

Tonight's Text: Matthew 9:9-13, Luke 5:29

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

...Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

What's in a name?

The name Matthew means “gift of God”. This is a powerful reminder that salvation is God’s greatest gift to His creation. Matthew was possibly a new name for the publican “tax collector” named Levi. As we have seen with others in the Bible, for example Saul became Paul after his conversion, Levi most likely changed his name to Matthew. Given the choice of a new name, Levi choose a name that reflected the great miracle of personal transformation that had taken place in his life when he met and followed Jesus.

Fun Fact: When we think of tax collector’s most of us will automatically default in our minds to the modern day United States Internal Revenue Service. Publicans, or tax collectors, in Jesus day worked much differently than the IRS. Today, your tax is calculated and in most cases deducted directly from your paycheck. If there is additional tax owed, or a refund due at the end of the year, you personally work out those details with the IRS. Publicans were wealthy local citizens who figured out a loophole in the Roman tax system that was extremely profitable. Tax was required of every person traveling on certain roads. These roads typically were the only viable transportation routes for goods and business, leaving those needing to move their goods with little option but to use them. The publicans would use their own money to “prepay’ the tax for a set number of travelers on a certain road. This entitled him to then set up a toll gate on the road and collect the tax from the users, often at a greatly increased rate that not only covered the amount the publican prepaid, but a substantial profit as well. Often, these publicans were despised and hated not just because of their inflated tax rates, but because they were seen as traitors who enabled to the Roman Empire. Roman soldiers, who exercised complete authority through brutality and fear, were often paid bribes by the publicans to enforce their unfair taxes on the citizens.

Q. Did Matthew write the Gospel of Matthew?

A. Most likely, although the Bible does not clearly state that he did. We do know that Matthew was an eye-witness to much of Jesus' earthly ministry and was an excellent record keeper, a must in his before-Jesus life as a publican.

Q. What did Matthew accomplish as a Disciple?

A. He served as one of the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ. As an eyewitness to the Savior, Matthew recorded a detailed account of Jesus' life, the story of his birth, his message and his many deeds in the Gospel of Matthew. He also served as a missionary, spreading the good news to other countries.

Q. How did Matthew come to know Christ as Savior?

A. According to our scripture reference tonight (Matthew 9) Jesus encountered Matthew in his toll booth. On the same day Jesus invited Matthew to follow him, Matthew threw a great farewell feast in his home in Capernaum, inviting his friends so they could meet Jesus too. From that time on, instead of collecting tax money, Matthew collected souls for Christ.

Think Deeper- *The scripture telling us of Matthews's conversion is pretty black and white. Jesus says "Follow Me" and Matthew does. Without hesitation he leaves behind one of the most profitable jobs in the world. He had everything, yet he immediately stopped his business and began a new life in Christ. Why do you think this was?*

Q. Why Matthew?

A. By surface appearances, it was scandalous and offensive for Jesus to pick a tax collector as one of his closest followers since they were widely hated by the Jews. Yet of the four Gospel writers, Matthew presented Jesus to the Jews as their hoped-for Messiah, tailoring his account to answer their questions.

Matthew displayed one of the most radically changed lives in the Bible in response to an invitation from Jesus. He did not hesitate; he did not look back. He left behind a life of wealth and security for poverty and uncertainty. He abandoned the pleasures of this world for the promise of eternal life. Matthew was an accurate record keeper. He knew the human heart and the longings of the Jewish people. He was loyal to Jesus and once committed, he never wavered in serving the Lord.

On the other hand, before he met Jesus, Matthew was greedy. He thought money was the most important thing in life and violated God's laws to enrich himself at the expense of his countrymen. But that was Levi, before Jesus made him a “Matthew-Gift of God”.

Hard Truth: If you are not changing, you are not a disciple.

Jesus saw his **present**, but he also knew Matthew's **potential**. We serve a great Savior!

Q. *What did Matthew accomplish after the Resurrection?*

A. The remainder of Matthew's life is uncertain. Tradition says he preached for 15 years in Jerusalem following the death and resurrection of Jesus, then went out on the mission field to other countries.

Rumor has it...that Matthew died as a martyr for the cause of Christ. Foxe's Book of Martyrs give us some insight through non-biblical historical documentation, reporting that he was slain with a halberd (a long battle axe with a bayonet on the end of the shaft) in the city of

Nabadar, Ethiopia. This would be supporting evidence of his work as a missionary, as it is 2450 miles from Capernaum to Ethiopia. At the time, a journey of this length would have taken almost three months.

Apostles Challenge

What is your story? Where did Jesus find you? Are you bold enough to tell others about Him and what He has done in your life? On a piece of paper, write out your story of salvation. Knowing your story and sharing it often is one of the most powerful witnessing tools we have in winning the lost to Jesus Christ. Is there someone in your life who is struggling to discover who they are in Christ? How can you help them see that Jesus cares enough to help them in their present, and will help them reach their potential?