



Links Players

--MATTHEW-- FROM DESPISED TAX COLLECTOR TO GOSPEL AUTHOR

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. (Matt. 9:9 NIV)

As you read this, I'm guessing that you have either filed your tax returns or are preparing to file them. In Jesus' time, there were on-site tax collectors who personally collected the taxes each citizen owed to the Roman government. These tax collectors were scorned by the Jewish people. They considered them to be traitors because tax-collectors were loyal to the Roman government and often cheated the people by pocketing a share of the tax collections. Tax collectors were lumped into a category with prostitutes, heathens, and other sinners.

When Jesus saw Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth, he told Matthew, "Follow me". Jesus did not hesitate in the slightest to call Matthew to be an apostle. Even though Matthew was the "lowest of the lowly," Jesus chose to call Matthew to follow him and eventually entrusted him with the gospel.

Jesus forgave the sins of one of the most despicable persons in Capernaum and picked him to be one of the chosen twelve. God's ability and willingness to forgive even the worst of us demonstrates that God's love is boundless.

We are not told much about Matthew—neither in his own gospel nor elsewhere in the New Testament. His name appears less than a dozen times in the Bible. But from what we see, we note that Jesus had a special place for Matthew in his ministry even though he was one of the most detested persons in society. On those occasions when we might feel that we are not worthy of being a child of God, we only need to remember that God invites all kinds of sinners into his Kingdom.

Matthew demonstrated great humility as an Apostle. While the other gospel writers place Matthew before Thomas in their lists of the apostles, Matthew, places Thomas before himself in his list. In that list, Matthew refers to himself as "Matthew the tax collector," a self-effacing title he could easily have omitted like the other gospel writers did. (Matt. 10:3) Commentators suggest he described himself this way as a reminder of his unfavorable societal status as a tax collector.

Think of how you would describe yourself if you had Matthew's humility. Take a piece of paper and write down your name, and place a comma after it. Then, add two or three words that describe your "pre-Jesus" character traits. If you are like me, you certainly wouldn't want to have to sign your name to letters, emails, or important documents with that signature. Yet, Matthew didn't hesitate to leave readers for the next 2000 years (and beyond) with the reminder that he was once a tax collector.

Maybe we don't have to go that far in continually reminding ourselves of the enormity of God's grace and mercy that made us one his children. But, we ought to keep the image of that signature in the forefront of our minds so that we can humbly appreciate the enormity of God's saving grace. What a gift we have received!

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