Matthew

Key Passages: Matthew 9:9-13, Mathhew 10:3, Luke 6:15, and Acts 1:13

Question: In your opinion and based on the current Church culture, what are some jobs that a Christian would garner criticism for holding?

Question: Are there people in your life you view as "too difficult," or as so "bad" that they are beyond forgiveness?

Of all the Apostles, which would you say was the worst choice? Our view of this is shaded because we have the benefit of hindsight. If you could answer this question for the other Apostles, who might they bestow such an honor on?

Matthew was, in their eyes, the worst of the bunch. Based on your knowledge of the culture during Jesus' day, why so you believe he was so despised? Matthew was a tax collector for the Roman government. Every Jewish employee of Rome would have been considered as the lowest of low, and was considered a traitor, or a cheater, or worse yet, a thief.

Read Acts 1:13 – What name is used to describe tonight's Apostle? Matthew

Read Luke 5:27-28 – How does Luke refer to him? Levi

Read Luke 6:15 – What name is used to describe him? Matthew

Read Mark 2:14 – What name is used? Levi

What is the difference? Matthew is derived from the Hebrew (*Mattityahu),* which means "gift of God." Levi is a Hebrew name which means "attached" or "joined in harmony." Levi could have meant that he was from the tribe of Levi while Matthew could have been his common Greek name. Does either of these names fit him more appropriately than the other, based on what we know of him? Since this person was a Jew who worked for the Romans, it wouldn't be surprising to learn that he was known by both names.

Tax Collectors - Tax collectors, also known as publicans (*publicanus*), charged tolls and taxes on behalf of the Roman government. These private government subcontractors would tax travelers who were carrying merchandise between properties or delivering goods along certain well-defined roads. Rome preferred to hire locals who were familiar with a region's inhabitants, land, and roads. Some tax agents were responsible for such large territories that they functioned as subcontractors, hiring their own employees to collect the taxes. Zacchaeus fits this category, as he is described as a "chief" tax collector (Luke 19:2–10). Tax collectors earned a profit by demanding a higher tax from the people than they had prepaid to the Roman government. This system led to widespread greed and corruption. Jesus interacts with tax collectors throughout Scripture, but He also speaks disparagingly about them, at times affiliating them with prostitutes (Matt 21:31–32) and Gentiles (Matt 18:17). Jesus agrees that paying taxes is moral (Mark 12:17),

but He disapproves of the corruption common among tax collectors. They are among the lost whom He came to find (Luke 19:10) and the sick whom He came to heal (Matthew 9:10–12).[1]

Not only were Matthew's fellow Apostles discouraged by Jesus' choice of him, but the religious leaders did not like it as well. Jesus' association with tax collectors proves unpopular, especially among the Jewish religious leaders, who regarded fellowship with sinners as guilt by association and equal to moral compromise.

The Bible only mentions Matthew seven times, but we learn from those instance as well as his gospel, that he was also labeled by more than his name. He was called a "sinner" by Jesus. Because he was often mentioned with James and John, we know he was also an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry. He is considered one of the four *evangelion*, or evangelists. Who are the other three? Mark, Luke, and John. Read Matthew 13:51-52. From this, we can know that he was a scribe.

Do we know how Matthew died? As with most of the apostles, it's hard to say exactly how Matthew died. There are several conflicting accounts about his death. The earliest records say he conducted his ministry in a region south of the Caspian Sea, Persia, Macedonia, and/or Syria.

Clement of Alexandria quotes Heracleon, one of the earliest commentators on the New Testament, as saying that Matthew died naturally, but John Foxe's famous Book of Martyrs says:

"The scene of his labors was Parthia, and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd in the city of Nadabah, A.D. 60."

What can we learn from Matthew?

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[1] Jeffrey E. Miller, "Tax Collector," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).