

CHAPTER 7

MATTHEW THE PUBLICAN AND SIMON THE ZEALOT

MATTHEW

The eighth disciple listed for us in Matthew 10:2-4 is named "Matthew, the _____" (verse 3). This man also has another name. In Mark 2:14 he is called L_____, and we also learn that he was the son of _____.

Most of the disciples we have studied so far were fishermen by occupation. Matthew was not a fisherman. The Bible tells us that he was a P_____ (Matthew 10:3). Instead of being a "gatherer of fish" he was a "gatherer of taxes." The word "publican" means "tax collector."

Tax collectors were not very popular in the land of Israel where the Jewish people lived. In fact, they were hated and looked down upon and considered one of the worst kinds of sinners. There are at least two reasons why the publicans were so disliked and hated by the Jewish people:

1) No one enjoys paying taxes, not even today, and the tax collector has never been a very popular person, but in New Testament times the Jews hated tax collectors for another reason. The tax collectors worked for Rome. The Roman government was the ruling power at that time, and the Jewish people did not enjoy being under Roman rule. They would rather live in a free country that was not controlled by any outside power. Thus, many of the Jews looked down on the publicans who helped Rome and worked for Rome. They considered such men as traitors, renegades, and turncoats.

2) The fact that they worked with and for Rome was bad enough, but the fact that certain publicans were dishonest made things even worse. Some tax collectors overcharged the Jews and pocketed the surplus or kept the extra for themselves. They took from the people to make themselves rich. Often they made money at the expense of their own Jewish countrymen. They not only helped Rome, but they helped themselves and sometimes in very dishonest ways. It was one thing to be a TRAITOR (supporter of Rome), and it was another thing to be a CROOK!

For these reasons the tax collectors were considered the lowest class of people. Publicans were grouped with the worst kinds of people. In the following three passages, notice what kinds of people the publicans are grouped with:

1. Matthew 9:11	"publicans and _____"
2. Matthew 18:17	"a _____ man and a publican"
3. Matthew 21:31	"publicans and _____ [wicked and immoral women]"

Who do you think wrote the Gospel of Matthew? _____ It is interesting to notice in Matthew 10:3 that Matthew himself calls his name "Matthew the _____." Matthew became a believer and a disciple of Christ, but he never forgot what a great sinner he was. In Matthew 10:3 he acknowledged that he was "Matthew, the publican (tax collector)." In the days of Jesus, tax collectors had a bad reputation for being dishonest sinners. The phrase

"publicans and sinners" is found eight times in the New Testament, these two terms being grouped together. When Matthew wrote about himself in Matthew 10:3, it was as if he were saying, "I am Matthew the publican! I know that I am a no good, rotten, wretched, dishonest sinner who has been saved by the grace of God. I am a great sinner, but I have a **greater** Saviour!" Matthew in many ways was like the publican described in Luke 18:10-14. He recognized how sinful he was!

How sinful are you? Have you ever grouped yourself among the worst kinds of sinners? Do you see yourself as a great sinner? Do you see Jesus Christ as a great Saviour? Why did Jesus come into this world (1 Timothy 1:15)? _____

Jesus Calls Matthew

What was Matthew doing when Jesus called him (Matthew 9:9)?

_____ This means that he was working as a tax collector. Jesus called Matthew by using only two words: " _____ " (Matthew 9:9). (These two words mean: "*become My disciple*"). Did Matthew quickly do what Jesus said (Matthew 9:9)? _____

Matthew was a man who was all wrapped up in himself and in his business of collecting taxes and making money. He was only interested in SELF. Many people today are just like Matthew. They are concerned only about ME, MYSELF and I! They are all wrapped up in themselves and have very little thought for God or for others.

As soon as Jesus called Matthew, everything changed. No longer was Matthew all wrapped up with Matthew. Suddenly he forgot Matthew and followed Christ. Not only did he begin thinking about the Lord, but he also began thinking about and being concerned for others. According to Luke 5:27-29, what did Levi (Matthew) do after he followed Christ (see verse 29)?

_____ Whom did he invite (Luke 5:29-30)? _____ and _____ Matthew was reaching out to others! He was concerned for others. He wanted others to know about the great Saviour whom he had found!

Matthew was happy to have found Christ. Matthew was also happy to help other sinful people find Christ, but there were some people who were not very happy about what went on in Matthew's house (see Luke 5:30). They thought, "If Jesus is supposed to be so good and righteous, then why does he eat and associate Himself with people who are so sinful?"

The Lord's answer for these people is found in Matthew 9:11-13. In verse 12, Jesus say, "They that be _____ (healthy) need not a _____ (doctor)." What did Jesus mean by this statement? What spiritual meaning do these words have? Remember, the doctor needs to be among his patients! The doctor cannot help his patient if he is 10 miles away. He needs to be with them so he can treat them. Were the Publicans and sinners sick? In what way? Who could cure them? Did the Pharisees think that they were sick? WHAT ABOUT YOU? Do you have a problem that only Christ can cure? What is your problem? What is the cure? Who is the GREAT PHYSICIAN who can heal the sin-sick soul? Matthew was healed. Have you been healed? What kind of people did Christ come to save (Matthew 9:13)? _____ Matthew was this kind of a person, and Jesus was just the FRIEND whom Matthew needed (see Matthew 9:12).

The Lord used His disciple Matthew in a great way. Matthew was given the great privilege to be the writer of the first Gospel. As a tax collector, Matthew probably knew how to keep very careful records. As a believer, Matthew kept a very careful and accurate record of the life and death and resurrection of Christ. Today we call this book the GOSPEL OF MATTHEW. Have you ever read Matthew's book all the way through?

SIMON

In Matthew 10:4 another disciple is named. He is called Simon the _____. Among the 12 disciples there were two men who had the name SIMON. The one Simon is mentioned in Matthew 10:2, and we know a great deal about this man whose more common name is PETER. The other Simon is mentioned in Matthew 10:4, and we know hardly anything about this Simon. He is never mentioned except when the names of the 12 disciples are listed. We do not know anything about him except his name!

It is very interesting that Simon was called "Simon the C _____" (Matthew 10:4). This word "CANAANITE" does not mean that Simon was from the city of Cana, and it does not mean that he was a descendant of the Canaanites. Actually this word means that Simon was a ZEALOT or an ENTHUSIAST. He was a member of a political party which later became known as the ZEALOTS.

Notice Luke 6:15 Simon called _____
Acts 1:13 Simon _____

From now on we shall call him SIMON THE ZEALOT.

THE ZEALOTS

Who were the "zealots," and what did they believe? The ZEALOTS were a very "zealous" (enthusiastic) patriotic party of Jews who were strongly opposed to Roman rule. They wanted Israel to be a free nation, and they did not want to be ruled by the Romans. Today we would probably call these people members of the "Israelite Liberation Army." They wanted their country to be liberated and set free from the Roman yoke or Roman control. They felt justified to use "force" to accomplish their goal of liberation. They would use violence, robbery, and even assassination to accomplish their goal of setting their nation free.

The philosophy of the ZEALOTS was that the end justifies the means. They believed that it is all right to do evil if good shall ultimately be accomplished. The end that they desired was LIBERATION FROM THE ROMANS. This end, in their view, justified their means of VIOLENCE, MURDER, FORCE, etc. They were willing to do anything (even sinful things) as long as it they could further their cause. Does God want us to follow this philosophy? Does God want us to do evil so that good may come (Romans 3:8)? _____ Do you think that God wants a father to steal bread so that he can feed his starving family? _____ What can a father do instead?

Remember, IT IS NEVER RIGHT TO DO WRONG TO DO RIGHT!

The Zealot movement probably began with the Judas uprising that we learn about in Acts 5:37. This uprising took place about the time of Christ's birth. During the time of Christ's public ministry there were many "zealots" who wanted to use force to liberate their country. Probably Barabbas and the other criminals who died next to Christ were zealots, and because they were zealots, they were enemies of Rome.

One of these zealots was named Simon. This man decided to follow Jesus Christ. He began to realize that Christ came primarily to liberate the **heart** not the **country**. Something that is much more terrible than Roman bondage is THE BONDAGE OF SIN (see John 8:32-36). Simon followed the Lord Jesus, the greatest LIBERATOR of all (John 8:36)!

The zealot movement never accomplished its purpose. In 70 A.D. the zealots so angered the Romans that the Roman army invaded Jerusalem and destroyed the city. The zealots did not succeed in setting their nation free.

God wants every believer to be a different kind of a "ZEALOT." He wants us to be "_____ of good works" (Titus 2:14), which means that we are to be "on fire for the Lord!" or enthusiastic and excited about the things of the Lord. Are you excited about attending a Bible-teaching church? Are you excited about reading your Bible? Are you excited about prayer? Are you excited about telling others about the Lord? Are you excited about going to prayer meeting? Are you excited about doing those good works that please the Lord? God is looking for zealous, excited and enthusiastic believers today! Compare Revelation 3:19 and the example of Jesus in John 2:17.

SIMON AND MATTHEW

The fact that Simon and Matthew were both disciples of Jesus is highly instructive. We cannot think of two men more opposite:

Notice the two extremes

Matthew was the TAX-GATHERER!
Simon was the TAX-HATER!

(How do you think a zealot would answer the question given in Matthew 22:17)?

Matthew was the UNPATRIOTIC TRAITOR!
Simon was the PATRIOTIC LOYALIST!

Apart from Christ, Simon and Matthew would have been great enemies! The fact that these two men could be together, work together, eat together, serve together, and learn together is one of the great miracles of Christ's transforming power. Apart from Christ, these two men probably would have been at each other's throats! Jesus Christ makes possible *the union of opposites!* Because of Jesus Christ, Matthew and Simon had a great deal in common. Can you think of some things which they had in common? IN CHRIST JESUS there are certain differences that do not really matter. Galatians 3:28 says that believers are "all _____ in Christ Jesus."

Think about your fellow classmates in your Sunday School class. Can you think of very real DIFFERENCES that exist between you? Can you think of some of the things that you have in common because of Jesus Christ? Is it possible for different and opposite people to get along with each other today? How?

The Bible says in Ephesians 4:2 that believers are to be "forbearing _____ in love," which means that we are to be putting up with one another in love! It is amazing that Matthew put up with Simon. It is even more amazing that Simon put up with Matthew. Even more amazing that Jesus Christ put up with both of these men! Are you thankful that Jesus Christ is willing to "put up" with you and that He came into this world to save you? Christ loves us even though we are not very lovable, and His love helps us to reach out to others and love them even though they, too, may not be very lovable. Let us not forget the lessons learned from Matthew and Simon!