

The Twelve: Simon and Matthew

Bio:

Matthew the tax collector

There is not much information we have on Matthew from reliable sources, outside of a few biblical references.

Name: Levi, then Matthew, after he was called to be a disciple

Marital Status: Unknown

Home town: Galilee

Profession: Tax collector (publican). The tax collectors were as a class, detested not only by the Jews, but by other nations also, both on account of their employment and of the harshness, greed, and deception, with which they did their job. They paid the taxes to the Roman authorities up front, and then extorted from the people way more than was due to them. Rightly so, they were especially despised by their own nation!

Age: 20-30 years old

Relatives: Son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27)

Social status: A tax collector, despised by his own nation, the Jews, but had a standing amongst the Roman authorities because of his ill-gained wealth

Personality: Because of his profession as a tax collector, Matthew was probably an accurate record keeper and keen observer of people. In today's terms he was a 'bean counter' with sly tendencies. But he became a Christ-follower!

General facts: Matthew left everything to follow Jesus, and threw a party to celebrate his new life. (Matthew 9:9-13)

Position amongst the 12: There are no mentions of Matthew in the Gospels outside of his call and on the list of Jesus' disciples. But from Jesus choosing opposites on His team, a tax collector and zealot, we infer that there must have been a need to work out their relationships.

Ministry and death: Tradition has Matthew spreading the Gospel in Persia and Ethiopia. Unconfirmed historical sources disagree about Matthew's martyrdom. One source has him stabbed to death somewhere in Ethiopia, while preaching the Gospel there.

Bio:

Simon the zealot

There is even less information about Simon the zealot, except for his mention in the list of apostles.

Name: Simon the zealot

Marital Status: Unknown

Home town: he is referred to as Simon the zealot (Luke 6:15; Act1:13), or Simon the Canaanite (Matthew 10; Mark3:18). He probably stayed somewhere in Galilee, because the Zealot movement was based there.

Profession: Unknown, but he was a political activist, wanting to see Israel restored to its own rule. This obviously ceased after he was called by Jesus.

Age: Upper teens or lower twenties

Relatives: None mentioned.

Social status: According to traditional accounts and drawing inference from his name, we believe he was probably a member of the Zealot sect which was alive in Galilee and Judea around the time of Christ. The Zealots were a fanatical religious sect, very similar to the Pharisees (religiously conservative and literal) but absolutely radical in their opposition to Roman rule to the point of terrorism. Therefore, there was potential for conflict between him and Matthew! He probably initially had a fairly conservative and literal religious outlook, having been a member of the Zealots - Pharisaical in nature. He would have been a 'Pharisee' in his religious views before coming to follow Jesus.

Personality: Presumably radical and an extremist - zealous. His name, 'Zealot' possibly referred to both his personality and his membership in the Zealot sect.

General facts: We know nothing of Simon's interaction with Jesus or the other disciples. We infer certain things, and rely heavily on inaccurate history!

Position amongst the 12: No significance. He is mentioned 11th in the Matthew and Mark lists of the apostles, and 10th in Luke and Acts. It's not clear whether the order of these lists have any significance although they are very similar in all accounts.

Ministry and death: Initially in Jerusalem and then we have no sure Biblical account. Tradition puts him in various places, including having traveled north to reach the British Isles, in Egypt, in Asia Minor (Turkey), and in Persia. It is unlikely that any of these accounts are probable. There are no reliable accounts of his death. He possibly died in Pella, Armenia or Suanir, Persia or Edessa, Caistor or Babylon, Iraq. Probably martyred, possibly crucified.

MEET MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR AND SIMON THE ZEALOT

We've put Simon and Matthew together because they couldn't be more different. They were at opposite ends of the spectrum in their ideologies, value systems, and much more.

Matthew was a tax-collector and therefore worked for Rome, Simon was a zealot and therefore hated Rome. Matthew was hated by the Jews and Pharisees, Simon was loved by the Jews and Pharisees. Simon was a political freedom fighter (that's what the zealots were) while Matthew was seen as a traitor - so much so that the words "tax-collector" and "sinner" were synonymous terms. Simon wouldn't mind putting a dagger into someone's back while Matthew was sneaky and underhanded.

So, knowing this, how could two men from such opposite dispositions and loyalties be found serving and working on the same team? In our modern day scenario, you could think of one being a hardcore socialist and the other a hardcore capitalist. How is it possible that they could work together?

The answer is Jesus. Before Christ, Simon would have hated Matthew - and for good reason. Matthew would have feared Simon - and for good reason. But here the Lion of Judah had tamed these two snarling and fighting bears and got them focused on a call and mission that was way beyond themselves, their priorities, their desires and personal missions. Jesus had shown both of them that whatever their cause or drive was, their hearts were sinful. Repentance and forgiveness had come into their lives, which is always followed by reconciliation - and you see that happening as these two men of opposite extremes work together.

We've even seen this happen in our own NCMI circles. We've seen freedom fighters of opposite causes come together in our very own NCMI team. We see this power of Jesus demonstrated clearly in these two men of Matthew and Simon.

THEIR CALLS

Remember we're not presenting a historical account of these disciples, we want to learn from their lives and mistakes and their victories. We want to learn from their failures and successes. If we can learn from these men we are learning from Christ and following Him more effectively.

Matthew's call

Matthew 9: 9 - 13

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth,

and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

It's good to place this in context and note what happened before this in vs 1 - 9. Jesus heals a paralytic and says to him, "Your sins are forgiven." There's no doubt that Matthew had often seen Jesus as much of Jesus' ministry took place in Matthew's home town. He would have heard the teachings and seen the miracles. But what might have intrigued him above everything else was this claim of Jesus to forgive sins. According to the Pharisees, forgiveness had to be earned. A man had to cease to be a sinner. So the Pharisees, like much of the world today, had no idea of a forgiveness that's free; it could only be earned by a good life. If that was true, then Matthew was excluded from his sins being forgiven. But Matthew might have very possibly witnessed this event where Jesus claims to forgive sins and afterwards Jesus only had to look at him and speak a few words and Matthew was never the same.

Unlike the religious leaders of the day, Jesus was welcoming, reassuring and, above all, forgiving. Just two words were sufficient: "Follow me" - and Matthew became a totally different person. When Christ calls, determined to save, no one and nothing can stand against Him. We might not think our call to discipleship was as dramatic as Matthew's was, but it was. However long or short the period of preparation, one moment we were a hell-bound sinner and the next a disciple of Jesus. The circumstances may have been different but the result exactly the same. The effective call of Christ sooner or later comes to all appointed to eternal life. Matthew didn't argue about this - He simply followed the irresistible call of Christ.

Simon's call:

Simon's call would have been just as dramatic but very different. Maybe he was drawn to Jesus' declaration of Kingdom, but it wouldn't take long for him to realise that Jesus wasn't a political liberator. Rather, Jesus taught of an eternal Kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Jesus took an incredible risk in calling Simon as part of the twelve. The authorities may have already been watching him and how would it have potentially discredited Jesus' ministry if Simon was arrested? What if Simon couldn't break away from his ideology and his intense hatred of Rome? But we must realise that Jesus took the same risk by calling people like you and I to be His disciples, with very vast and different backgrounds, dark pasts, many failures, many idiosyncrasies, many things we'd love to hide from everyone. **But Jesus knows full well what He can do with every man or woman who He calls out of darkness into his wonderful life.** He

makes no mistakes when He makes disciples.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM MATTHEW AND SIMON

1. Discipleship is about transformation

As we've seen, God calls all kinds of people, no matter their background or how different they are. And he want to transform every one of us. **He doesn't call the qualified but qualifies the called.** With the twelve disciples we see that He called fishermen, doubters, people who loved money, Sons of Thunder and a despised tax collector - despised by his own people - who wrote a Gospel (the Gospel of Matthew) to those same people who despised him; Jesus called a desperate terrorist, once driven to see liberty from occupied forces, and transformed them all. And He has the power to transform all of us into what He has purposed for us.

2 Corinthians 3 : 18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.** For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

When we look at these disciples we're filled with hope - if God can use them, He can use any one of us. God can use anyone to partner with Him in His mission. Despite appearances, lack of education, our socio-economic standing, or anything you can think of, God can and wants to use every one of His people. God calls us like He called Matthew and He changes us like he changed Simon into being Christ followers; people of character and witness.

For Matthew and every disciple, the proviso is leaving everything and following him. We can't be true Christ followers unless we are prepared to leave what controlled us and owned us and determined our life and values. Matthew left everything; Simon left his ideologies. No matter our past or the things we are grappling with today, God wants to release us of them so that we can be those of His character and witness.

There could be no going back for Simon and Matthew. Christ never offered Himself to His disciples as saviour and friend with an added option that they might consider him Lord as well. No His message was clear - "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?" (Mark 8: 34 - 27.)

He doesn't call us to just friendship He calls us to surrender to Him. He wants to be Lord of our lives and He needs to be. Being a disciple of Jesus is being prepared to deny ourselves, pick up our cross - which is God's purpose for our life - and follow Him with everything we have; and anything that gets in the way needs to be denied and pushed aside. Whatever our ambition

or pursuit or over-riding goal in life is, it must be given to the rule of Christ. When we do that He changes those pursuits and lifts us from the small-minded dreams of this world to something far more important and everlasting. Our eyes are now fixed on eternity and all that God has purposed and prepared for us, which is the only thing that lasts through the end of this age.

Discipleship only comes about through transformation. Without Christ truly transforming us, there will be, and cannot be, true discipleship. Jesus doesn't say "follow me" just for repentance; it's a call to discipleship. God wants to transform us not just from darkness or light but into true disciples who leave all else to follow him. You can allow him to do this or fight it.

2. A stark difference between religion and Christianity

Religion is dead. Christianity full of life. We see this difference when Jesus has a meal at Matthew's house after he calls the man (Matthew 9: 10 - 12 as above) as the Pharisees ask how Jesus can associate himself with tax collectors and sinners. They were concerned with the externals and an outward performance but not the heart.

What does Jesus say? "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Verse 12.)

Christianity is about mercy and not sacrifice. Mercy in Christianity is about love and compassion for sinners, those who are sick, knowing that these are the ones Jesus the Great Physician has come for. The challenge to us is that we don't just maintain what God has for us and given us. We don't adopt a monastery mindset where everything is just about us and our church and how we can be blessed. Jesus gave an incredible demonstration by sitting amongst the tax collectors and sinners. He never isolated himself, knowing these were the people who needed His words of life.

Many of them must have left Matthew's house and been transformed. Let's break away from our religious mindsets and understandings. We need our hearts broken for those who are lost, because God's heart breaks for them. As soon as we get religious we point fingers at them; as soon as we get the heart of Christ we embrace them.

We're not a cut above the sinners in the world. God has put you where you are today because those sinners around you need Christ and must become His disciples.

3. The need for relational integrity and maturity

As we look at these two men and the twelve in general, only in Christ could this have been achieved. These disciples didn't always get it right - remember how angry they were with James and John in our previous study? This all reminds us that we ought to be humble. Despite how

much they got wrong, the disciples became a team under Jesus, united around the one they were becoming like and the one they were following. United around Jesus' mission of seeking and saving the lost - the mission He has for us today. To be effective in this mission, relational integrity and maturity must be a priority.

God's anointing is poured out, whether it's for mission or anything else, where there is unity. This means we have to work on our relationships no matter how different others are. It's in our relationships that our Christianity is effectively worked out.

Proverbs 27 : 17

Iron sharpens iron,
and one man sharpens another.

We need others around us who are willing to sharpen us. This is painful, but when people rub you up the wrong way, see them as sharpening you. Don't climb your miff tree! Rather thank God for bringing those types of people into your life, because it's for your good - discipline, hardships and challenges are good for us. Don't fight each other, God puts others in our lives because he wants us sharp for the mission He has called us to.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

1. Am I aware that God calls and disciples all types?
2. Am I caught in a rules and regulations understanding of discipleship?
3. Is relational maturity and integrity a priority to me?