

## “Life After Sin”

Profiles of Faith #2: Matthew

Read Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 5:27-32, 1 Timothy 1:15

Jesus walked right up to Levi, the son of Alphaeus, and called him into service. Yes, Levi was a Jew, but he had gone far astray. He was a tax collector, which meant he was most likely an underling of the Romans, used to collect tolls in a certain locality. They would give the money to the Roman government, who would then let them keep a percentage for themselves. It makes sense that the more they collected, they greater their profit. This led to all sorts of corruption and excessive taxation. They were a despised and degraded lot, referred to as “publicans” or “robbers,” because they were oppressing people who often couldn’t afford it. Ouch. To make matters worse, the average Jew in Palestine looked at guys like Levi as lower in morality than the Roman tax collectors. The staunch Jews asserted that paying a tax to Ceasar was treason to God, so fellow Jews who propagated this sinful act were seen as the scum of the earth. There is no doubt that other Jews regarded Levi as a traitor, and Levi most certainly felt guilty about how many times he had violated his conscience. When the savior passed by him that day, he was steeped in sin, and he knew it.

To his surprise, Jesus didn’t rebuke him loudly, but pulled him in as a follower! Can you imagine the look on those around that day? Jesus had stooped to a new level. Levi was blown away and completely humbled. The Bible says he “got up and followed him.” It is a remarkable story. Obviously, Jesus was trying to make a statement to the Jews, but more than that, he was just doing what he came to do – save sinners and give them a new vision for their lives. He didn’t have time for politics or quarreling about social standing, he was on a mission of love, and wanted to reach people who had badly turned their back on God. Most sinners are a lot like Levi. They know how much they’ve messed up, and don’t need to be reminded of that! When we do things we regret, it has a powerful way of burdening our hearts. Sinners aren’t truly happy, and they know it. What they need is a new vision for their life, delivered in a loving way. Jesus displayed this for all to see.

Jesus gave him that vision in a powerful way. How powerful was it? Not only did he give Levi a new calling, but graced him with a new name: **Matthew**. It means “gift of the Lord.” Wow! Jesus expected Matthew to leave his life of sin, but gave him a permanent reminder of how deep God’s love for him is.

Matthew responded in the most appropriate way he knew – he had all his friends over for a feast with Jesus! The Pharisees did what they knew, they criticized Jesus for hanging out with scummy people. Jesus immediately told them dining with these people was why he was here. There were so many Levi’s around back then, burdened by their sin and wondering if God has any vision left for their life. Jesus did his best to reach them, and could only do that by being around them! We need to imitate Levi in “feasting with sinners.”

In the end, Matthew was defined not by his sin, but by his service and sacrifice to God. He was a disciple of Jesus, an apostle in the early church, and wrote one of the magnificent Gospels. The church father Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria claim Matthew preached in Judea, then traveled to other countries with the message before finally being martyred. Matthew sinned much, but in the end he shows us how rich and meaningful life can be **AFTER** sin!