

Matthew the Publican

We do not know much about Matthew the writer of that first and glorious Gospel, but what we do know gives us a portrait of a great man indeed. One observation we glean is that of his description of his own self. Mark and Luke in their writings both make references to Matthew but benignly call him Levi. Though the other two synoptists mention his employment they graciously omit a title from his proper name. Matthew however, approaches the subject differently. When he refers to himself, he with obvious intent describes himself to us as Matthew the Publican. We know by inference of the scriptures that a publican was an odious position held by some Jews who chose to collect Caesars' tribute. In one passage the occupation of publican is coupled together with harlots! Why would Matthew so demean himself with the title when the other writers so kindly left it out?

I believe that Matthew first of all was humble. Then next he had a purpose. At the writing of his Gospel he was in an exalted position of being one of the original twelve disciples who walked with Christ. No doubt in the early church he was revered highly, and much honor and respect given to him. He no doubt with the other eleven were somewhat of celebrities of the thriving infant church. Yet, being in this blessed place of elevation the Apostle insists on labeling himself Matthew the Publican. Could it be that this great preacher of the Gospel in revealing his ill-favored and former occupation was seeking to take the attention off of who he was and give attention to the Grace and Goodness of Christ? To refer to his old occupation that held with it disrespect, and a type of treachery was to show how Christ picked him up and dignified his life. It was as if to say, "What I am today I have not always been! When I was but a scoundrel and selfish man, Christ found me! Jesus said, 'Follow me!' And I am what I am today by the Grace of God." What a testimony this Apostle displayed by simply referring to himself as Matthew the Publican.

My dear saint of God, the condition of this present world may appall us. Those who we see in our places of commerce may surprise us with their attire, language and demeanor. As we live holy and righteous before the Lord the world will seem all that more wicked. However, let us not forget what we used to be! And such were some of you! What title could we add to our name that would define our egregious violations of God's law?

However, we are not what we used to be, thanks be to God! Our minds have not always been sober, our hearts not always cleansed, our tongue not purified, but Christ found us, and we are what we are by the grace of God. This too is our greatest tool of evangelism. Let the world know that what you are you have not always been, but God...

I fear that at times the poor and dejected walk into a midst of suited, well groomed, and materially blessed congregations and feel very intimidated. It is easy to forget where He brought us from. God forbid the day that the poor and hurting no longer feel welcomed in His house. The unsaved should feel like they have entered an inviting Holy Place not an exclusive country club. If they only see what we are they are left without hope. However, if we can tell them what we were, then hope arises and they look to Jesus for redemption. Let them know, let them know—I once was lost, but now I'm found, once was blind but now I see.

When we do this one thing, we gain a four-fold blessing. The sinner is encouraged, we are blessed with that sweet memory, God is given glory, and Satan is reminded!

Rev. 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony...