

Matthew: His Life And His Gospel – Part 1

About Matthew himself we know very little.

We read of his calling by Jesus Christ in **Matthew 9:9** and **Mark 2:14**.

Levi is another name for Matthew.

We know that he was a tax collector and thus he was a bitterly hated man for the Jews hated members of their own race who had entered the civil service of their conquerors.

Matthew would be regarded as nothing better than a quisling.

More than any other disciple, Matthew had a clear idea of how much it would cost to follow Jesus Christ, yet he did not hesitate for a moment.

When Matthew left his tax-collecting booth he guaranteed himself unemployment. For several of the other disciples who followed Jesus Christ, there was always fishing to return to, but **for Matthew there was no turning back.**

Mark 2:15 [New King James] *“Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi’s house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.”*

The same day that Matthew [Levi] was called by Jesus Christ, he held a meeting at his house to introduce others to Jesus.

Matthew invited the only people who would accept such an invitation, other tax collectors and sinners. **Matthew did not waste time in starting to share what had happened to him.**

Two major things happened to Matthew when he decided to allow Jesus Christ –

Jesus Christ gave him a new life –

Matthew not only belonged to a new group of people, he now belonged to Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:28 [New King James] *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*

Every person who becomes a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, becomes a purchased bond slave of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 [New King James] *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*

We are now to live a life that will bring honour and glory to our Saviour and Master, not only with our body, but also in our human spirit, [Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11; Proverbs 20:27].

Matthew out of gratitude towards Jesus Christ accepting him as a friend [**John 15:13-16**] offered his whole life to Jesus Christ.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

“*Bodies*” is the English translation of the Greek word “*soma*” meaning whole life, physical body, mind and human spirit.

Jesus gave Matthew a new purpose for his natural skills –

When Matthew followed Jesus Christ he brought with him one skill that most of the other disciples did not have, putting words together on paper.

God made Matthew a record-keeper, he was a keen observer and recorded all he saw happening around him.

The gospel that bears his name is a result of his diligent work.

Matthew’s experience points out to every Christian that from the beginning of our life we are God’s work in progress.

Much of what God wants us to do for Him, He has given us the skills and experience, long before we consciously responded to Him.

God has trusted us with skills, abilities, opportunities and experience ahead of our work as a disciple of His, a Christian.

God has made us each capable of being His servant in some area of life.

When we trust God with what He has given us, we begin a life that is a real adventure.

Matthew could not have known that God would use the very skills he had sharpened as a tax collector to record the greatest life ever lived by a human being Who was also the Son of God.

Have you recognised Jesus Christ’s call to follow Him? –

What has been your response so far?

Are you allowing Jesus Christ to use the skills and experience that you have had in your life before that calling to follow Him?

Jesus Christ constantly accepted people to become disciple of His from every level of society when He was on earth, He has **not** changed this in any way today.

Sometimes the decision to follow the path in life that Jesus Christ wants us to tread requires difficult and painful choices, Matthew left behind a lucrative career.

Luke 14:25-27 [New King James] *“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not **bear his cross** and come after Me cannot be My disciple.’”*

Matthew was an example of a person who had counted the cost and gave greater value to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The Greek word translated “**hate**” is “*misēō*” meaning love less by comparison.

To “**bear our cross**” means the total crucifixion of our old way of life.

Romans 6:3-6 [New King James] *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we*

also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”

Our baptism by total immersion is symbolic of the death of our old life as is our old life being crucified.

Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ involves changes to every part of our life, with no turning back, [2 Peter 2:20-22] Matthew is the perfect example of this statement.

Matthew wrote especially to the Jews, and the gospel that bears his name forms a connection link between the Old and New Testaments.

Matthew 5:17 – The key verse that shows us the goal that Matthew had in his writing.

The gospel of Matthew is filled with Messianic language, “*Son of David*” is used throughout and there are 53 quotes and 76 other references to the Old Testament.

This gospel was not written as a chronological account, its purpose was to present clear evidence that Jesus Christ was the awaited Messiah and Saviour of all humanity.

Matthew 1:1 [New King James] *“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:”*

Presenting the genealogy of Jesus Christ was one of the most interesting ways that Matthew could begin a book for a Jewish audience.

In Jewish culture a person’s family line proved their standing as one of God’s chosen people.

Matthew shows that Jesus was a direct descendent of Abraham, the father of all Jews, and a direct descendent of King David, thus fulfilling prophecies about the Messiah’s line. The facts of this ancestry were very carefully preserved by Jewish religious leaders.

This is the first of many proofs recorded by Matthew to show that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, [Matthew 1:1-17].

More than 400 years had passed since the last Old Testament prophecies, and faithful Jews all over the world were still waiting for the Messiah, [Luke 3:15].

Matthew wrote this book to Jews to present Jesus Christ as King and Messiah, the promised descendent of King David who would reign forever, [Isaiah 11:1-5].

The entry of Jesus Christ into human history when the promised land of Palestine was controlled by Pagan Rome and considered as only an insignificant outpost of the vast Roman Empire.

The presence of Roman soldiers in Israel gave the Jews military peace, but at a price of oppression, slavery, injustice and immorality.

In the first seventeen verses of Matthew’s writings we meet 46 people whose lifetimes span 2,000 years. All were ancestors of Jesus Christ, but they varied considerably in personality, spirituality and experience.

Some were heroes of faith, others had “shady” reputations, many were very ordinary people, and others were evil.

God’s work in history is not limited by human failure or sins.

Matthew compresses Israel’s history into three sets of 14 generations, but there were probably more than those listed by him. Genealogies are often compressed history.

Just as God used all kinds of people to bring His Son into the world, He uses all kinds of people to accomplish His will in every generation.

Matthew 1:18-25 [New King James] *“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.’ So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.”*

There are three steps in a Jewish marriage.

First, the two families agree to the union.

Second a public announcement was made. At this point the couple were “*betrothed*,” a relationship that could then only be broken by death or divorce, [even though sexual relationships were **not** yet permitted].

Third, the couple were married and began to live together as husband and wife.

Because Mary and Joseph were “*betrothed*,” Mary’s apparent unfaithfulness carried a severe social stigma, and according to Jewish civil law, Joseph had a right to divorce Mary, and the authorities had the right to stone her to death, [**Deuteronomy 22:23-24**].

Why is the virgin birth important in the Christian faith? [verse 18]

Because Jesus Christ was God’s Son, [John 1:1-5, 14] He was free from the sinful nature passed on to all other human beings.

Jesus Christ had to be human to be able to shed His blood as a sin-atonement sacrifice for all humanity, also as a human He could fully understand our experiences and struggles, [Hebrews 4:15-16].

But because He was God, He had all the power and authority to deliver all humanity from sin, [2 Corinthians 5:21] became sin for us, [Galatians 3:13] the “*curse of the law*” was no amount of law-keeping can ever give us the right to receive eternal life for it is a gift from God, [Romans 6:23].

Note that the physical resurrected body of Jesus Christ had **no** blood, it was totally sacrificed on the cross, [**Luke 24:39-43**].

Jesus Christ is also still referred to as a “*man*” at God’s throne, [**Acts 7:56; Revelation 1:13; Revelation 14:14**].

Jesus Christ remained at the throne of God as the Word and Son of God, one being of the Triune God, while He was the “*Son of Man*,” a human being on earth, [John 1:1-3, 18; John 10:30, 38; John 14:10; John 17:11, 22; Philippians 2:5-8]. It was His glory that the Word, the Son of God, set aside to become our Saviour by shedding His blood as a human being.

Through the same Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ can live His physical life on earth, as we actively follow His lead and develop the “*fruits*” of the Holy Spirit, the very character of God, [Galatians 5:22-25] and by doing this fulfil the second part of the reason that God created human beings, [Genesis 1:26-27] to take on His “*likeness*.”

We must **not** overlook the faithfulness of Joseph to God and his future wife. [See the article on Joseph on this website under the main heading 'Ancestors – Learning From'.]

Matthew 2:1-2 [New King James] *“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.’”*

The “*star*” that the Magi saw is the translation of the Greek word “*astēr*” which is also used in **Revelation 1:20** which tells us that these stars were angels.

Logically it could have been an angel that led the Magi or wise men to the birth of a special King. God used angels to bring the shepherds to worship the baby Jesus, [Luke 2:8-20].

Matthew 2:3-10 [New King James] *“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.”’ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.’ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.”*

Bethlehem was the place mentioned by the prophet Micah, [**Micah 5:2**]. Jesus was probably two years old when the Magi found Him. By this time Mary and Joseph were married and living in a house and intended to stay in Bethlehem for a while.

Matthew 2:11-12 [New King James] *“And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.”*

The gifts offered were expensive gifts for they were worthy of a future King.

These gifts may have provided the financial resources for the trip to and stay in Egypt and back.

Matthew 2:13-15 [New King James] *“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’ When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’”*

This flight to Egypt was prophesied by Hosea, [**Hosea 11:1**].

Matthew 2:16-18 [New King James] *“Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’”*

This was an obsessive attempt by Herod Archelaus to kill Jesus the young future King, for he was afraid that this new-born King would one day take his throne.

Rachel in these verses quoted from **Jeremiah 31:15** was the wife of Jacob and was buried near to Bethlehem, [**Genesis 35:19**].

Matthew 2:19-23 [New King James] *“Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.’ Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’”*

Herod the Great died in 4BC, Rome trusted him but **not** his sons. Herod Archelaus followed his father Herod the Great ruling in Judea [**verse 22**].

Herod’s other two sons were given rule, Antipas Galilee and Peraea Philip the north-eastern territories.

Herod the Great had divided the area of the realm, for he knew that Rome would **not** trust any of his sons to the whole area that he had ruled over from 40BC-4BC.

Matthew 3:1-2 [New King James] *“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’”*

Almost 30 years had passed since the events of chapter 2.

John the Baptist burst on the scene preaching repentance, a person who repents stops rebelling against God and His way of life and begins to follow Him.

The Kingdom of Heaven [or God] began when the Son of God, Jesus Christ, entered human history, but will not be fully realised on this earth until all the evil in this world is judged and removed.

The prophet quoted is **Isaiah 40:3**, both John and Isaiah preached repentance.

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus Christ to preach the good news of this coming Kingdom.