

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
Red Bud, Illinois
Adult Bible Class
“Jesus’ Twelve Apostles: Up Close and Personal”

IV. Matthew and Thomas

A. Matthew (a.k.a. Levi) See Matthew 9:9-13.

(This also is reported in Mark 2:14-17 and Luke 5:27-32 where Matthew is called Levi. Mark also mentions that Levi's father's name was Alphaeus. In the listing of the twelve apostles that comes later in all three gospels, he is simply called Matthew. Acts 1:13 refers to him as Matthew.)

The name Matthew means “gift of Yahweh.” The name Levi is after the third son that Leah bore for Jacob in the Old Testament. It sounds like the Hebrew word for “attached.” It is unknown whether he was called by both names before he was Jesus' disciple or that Jesus gave him the name Matthew after He called him to be a disciple (as He did with Simon Peter). Experienced in keeping records and able to communicate in more than one language, Matthew would be very valuable to Jesus and to the early church (author of the Gospel that bears his name). Yet nowhere in any of the four Gospels does Matthew say anything.

Tax collectors were hated in the Jewish culture of the 1st century AD. They would collect however much money that they could. They turned over to their superiors what they had agreed to and then kept the rest for themselves (“extortionists”). Also, the taxes that they collected went to the hated Roman government, a foreign occupation force that the Jews wanted to run out of their land (“traitors”).

Jewish rabbis taught that when God's promised Messiah came, the tax collectors would be at the front of the line with the prostitutes as being the first ones to be punished. The combination of “tax-collectors and sinners” became a commonly used phrase of disdain among the Jewish religious types.

The booth Matthew was sitting at was along the main highway running north-south between Syria and Egypt. It passed through Capernaum and close by the Sea of Galilee. With the amount of traffic on that road it would have been a lucrative spot for a tax collector to collect money (“toll booth”).

Verse 9: Why might Matthew have been so quick to leave his job and follow Jesus?

Verses 10-11: Matthew wants to introduce his old friends to his new friend, Jesus. This may also have served as a “going-away” party for Matthew. In the Jewish culture of the time eating with someone was a sign of close religious fellowship. The fact that Jesus would do so with the very people that the Pharisees considered to be “outcasts” was offensive to them. “How could Jesus be from God if He were willing to be so tight with the very people God was going to punish?”

Verse 12-13: While the Pharisees may have been too scared to question Jesus Himself about His behavior, they got an answer directly from Jesus. He quoted a well-known proverb that in one sense agreed with their way of thinking. These people were sinners in need of spiritual healing. At the same time, Jesus' words point out how the Pharisees fell far short of providing that healing to these people. Jesus is the Great Physician of our souls who knows that He must get close to His ill patients in order to heal us.

Jesus then quotes the words of Hosea 6:6 to point out that going through the motions of religious faith means nothing if the inner self does not reflect the mercy of God. Jesus has not come for those who think they are too good for Him. Jesus has come for those very people who know how bad off they are without Him. The Pharisees, for all their head knowledge, had a lot to learn about the faith of the heart.

The day of St. Matthew is September 21. His symbol is three blue (or gold) money bags on a white shield. Another symbol is a money chest. A third symbol for Matthew is a battle-ax since tradition says that he was crucified in Ethiopia and then was decapitated with a battle-ax. The symbol for him as an evangelist is that of a winged man, since it is thought that his gospel emphasizes the human nature of Jesus more than the other gospels.

B. Thomas

Thomas is named in the listings of the twelve apostles in Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts but he is not mentioned otherwise in those books. Only John's Gospel says anything more about Thomas.

See John 11:1-16.

Verses 7-8: How do the disciples respond when Jesus announces that they were going to Judea? _____ (Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah John 10:31-32)

Verses 4, 14-15: What does Jesus say is the purpose of Lazarus' death? _____

Verse 16: What was Thomas' nickname? _____

The name Thomas in Aramaic and the name Didymus in Greek mean "twin" in both languages.

What was Thomas willing to do? _____

How well did they follow through on this plan in Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested?

See John 14:1-6. This passage is very familiar from the comfort it gives us at funeral services. The context is the Upper Room. Jesus is with the Twelve on the night before His crucifixion. Jesus has spoken to them about one who would betray Him. Jesus has just spoken to Peter about his impending denial of Jesus.

Verse 1: "My Father's house"- where is this? _____

Verse 3: "I will come back"- when will this happen? _____

Verse 5: Thomas' question sounds like it springs from frustration. He does not understand what Jesus is saying. If you don't know your destination, how can you know how to get there?

Verse 6: "I am" This is one of seven such sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel. They are echoes of God's words to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. "The way" became an early name for Christianity in the book of Acts (9:2; 19:9, 23). "Truth" is an important word in both John's gospel and his epistles. There is truth that all people can follow because it comes from the one true God, the Creator of all people.

See John 20:24-29.

Verses 24-25: Thomas had not seen the risen Jesus on the evening of Easter Sunday. He only heard of this from the other disciples. Thomas simply wanted to have the very same thing the other disciples had received, seeing the risen Jesus with his own eyes and touching Him with his own hands.

What are two reasons that Thomas should have believed that Jesus had risen from the dead?

Verse 26: "Peace be with you" is the normal Hebrew greeting.

Verse 27: Jesus addresses all three of Thomas' demands of verse 25.

Verse 28: "My Lord and my God" There was no need for Thomas to touch Jesus' wounds. He had seen enough to make this great confession of faith in Jesus.

See John 21:1-2. Here Thomas is listed with six other disciples as part of Jesus' third resurrection appearance in John's Gospel, when Jesus came to them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In three of the four times that Thomas is mentioned in John's Gospel, John adds his nickname Didymus.

Thomas' day in the church year traditionally is December 21. The Roman Catholic Church has moved his date to July 3 to get it out of the Advent season. Tradition says that he was the first Christian missionary in India. There he is said to have built a church building with his own hands. He was slain by the spear of a King Midsai of Madras who was mad that Thomas converted the king's wife, Queen Tertia, to Christianity. Thus his symbol is a blue shield with a gold spear and carpenter's square.