

**Drawing Near (5-22-2012)**

**A Traitor Turns to Christ**

*The twelve apostles included "Matthew the tax-gatherer" (Matt. 10:3).*

I remember reading a notice in a local newspaper announcing the opening of a new evangelical church in our community. It gave the date and time of the first services, then added, "our special guest star will be . . ." and named a popular Christian celebrity. In its attempt to appeal to unbelievers or simply draw a large crowd, the church today commonly uses that kind of approach.

Jesus, however, used a different approach. None of His disciples were famous at all. In fact, rather than drawing a favorable crowd, some of them might have repelled or even incited anger and hatred among His Jewish audience. Matthew was such a man because he was a despised tax-gatherer--one of many Jewish men employed by Rome to collect taxes from his own people. As such he was regarded as a traitor by his own countrymen.

The Roman tax system allowed tax collectors to keep anything they collected in excess of what was owed to Rome. That encouraged bribes, extortion, and other abuses.

To compound the issue, Matthew was among those who had the prerogative of taxing almost anything they wanted to tax- -roads, bridges, harbors, axles, donkeys, packages, letters, imports, exports, merchandise, and so on. Such men could accumulate enormous wealth for themselves. You might remember another tax-gatherer named Zaccheus, who is described in Luke 19:2 as a wealthy man. His salvation was evidenced by his offer to repay fourfold to those he had defrauded (v. 8).

Some people think God can't use them because they're not famous or because of their past sins. But God has used Matthew, Zaccheus, and millions of others like them. Concentrate on your present purity and let God bless your ministry as He sees fit.

***Suggestions for Prayer:***

Thank God that he has made you a new person in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Minister in light of that reality!

***For Further Study:***

Read Luke 19:1-10.

- Where was Zaccheus when Jesus first spoke to him?
- What was the reaction of the crowd when Jesus went to Zaccheus's house?
- What prompted Jesus to say that salvation had come to Zaccheus?

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