

**Lent Course 2023 Session 1.**  
**Laying the foundations**

This morning we'll be trying to reach back into the Christian community a couple of thousand years ago, into its mind-set, and the work of someone who was shaped by and in turn shaped those first Christians. From early days the Gospel has been associated with one Matthew: one source may witness that was the tradition as early as the first decade of the second century.

However, if that sounds a little dry and pointless – after all, we have a Gospel, so what's it matter who wrote it – we have a little exercise to perform.....

I trust you get the point!

It's interesting, then, to try and find out what we know about the Gospel character and Apostle, Matthew.

**In pairs**, have a look at these references and see what comes out of them:

Matthew 9.9ff and 10.3; Luke 19.1-10.

**In the group** - what does this tell us?

Now (in pairs) look at the following texts:

Matthew 5.46-7; 18.17. 21.31-32.

Luke 3.12; 5.27; 7.29 15.1; 18.10-13. 19.2.

Mark 2.15-16.

Try to answer the following questions:

1. Who is Matthew the Apostle? What is his name?
2. What do the passages tell us about how devout Jews viewed tax-collectors (*'Publicans' AV*)
3. What does Jesus have to say about tax collectors? Is there any tension between the passages which you have read?

**In the group** – Share what you have found, and discuss how well the character of Matthew the tax-collector fits with that of the author of Matthew's Gospel.

**Group Exercise:** Look at Matthew 1.18-2.23. Now read Luke 1.26-2.39. How often do each of them draw explicit attention to what is written in the Prophets/OT?

**In pairs**, compare these passages:

Matthew	Mark	Luke
13.34-35	4.33-4	-
8.16-17	1.32-34	4,40-41
21.1-9	11.1-10	19.28-38

What do you notice?

Does this tell us anything about Matthew? Does it tell us anything about to whom/for whom he is writing?

Now look at Matthew 23. Any further thoughts about where his sympathies lie?

Share your thoughts with the group.

**Was 'Matthew' an eye-witness?**

According to the Gospel, Matthew's joining of the disciples takes place quite late on in Jesus' ministry, so naturally Christians have always assumed that, for those earlier events 'Matthew' was relying on what other told him. However, an interesting question arises when we start to look at the different Gospel texts side by side.

**Exercise: in pairs** look at the handout of the argument about James' and John's demand to have seats at the right and at the left of the Lord, specifically Matthew 26.26-29 and Mark 14.22-25. Underline those words which are the same.

Does anything strike you? Do you have any ideas why this might be so? Share your thoughts with the group.

Examine the second handout, ready-underlined. Don't worry if you don't understand it, just compare the underlined words in each column. Does this add to your thoughts in any way?

You may wish to ask yourselves:

1. Is the Gospel written by an 'insider' of the Jewish faith or an 'outsider'?
2. How important does keeping the Jewish Law seem to be in Matthew's Gospel?
3. What 'voice' do you hear coming through in the Gospel?
4. How close *in your opinion* are 'Matthew the Apostle' and 'Matthew the Gospel-writer'?
5. Was Matthew the Gospel-writer present at the events he describes, or not? Why do you come to the conclusion which you do? And
6. (The big one) For what sort of person, and at what time, was Matthew writing?

**In the group** discuss how this may influence our reading of what Matthew writes. Are we the same as his target group? If so, how, If not, How not?

This will lead into next week's study, which will try and look at the 'Sermon on the Mount.' If you can, acquaint yourself with Matthew 5-7, and bear in mind what his readers might be expecting. (If you wish, and have time, compare it with Luke's 'Sermon on the Plain' Lk 6.20-49).