

## LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS WITH THE TWELVE APOSTLES

### WHO ARE THE APOSTLES?

The word “apostle” means “one who is sent.” Some moments were shared by all the apostles. Other conversations and moments happened with specific Apostles. As we get to know the Twelve, we will be focusing more on their unique moments with Jesus.

### Quick Glance with the Twelve Apostles Trading Cards

John



John gets +2 to community building when happy, -2 when angry.  
(Mark 10:35-45)

Born: c. 6 AD in Bethsaida, Galilee

Name(s): John means “graced by the Lord” or “the Lord is gracious.” Jesus nicknamed John and his brother James ‘Boanerges,” which means “Sons of Thunder.” Some say he’s the “disciple whom Jesus loved.”

Major Moments: Called with James at the sea; Healing Peter’s Mother-in-Law; Raising Jairus’s Daughter; Transfiguration; Scolding the Non-Disciple; Who Sits on Jesus’s Right and Left in Glory?; Fire on Samaritan Town; Jesus’s Prophecy at Mount of Olives; Passover Prep; Gethsemane; Visit the High Priest; Foot of the Cross; Empty Tomb; Miraculous Catch of 153 Fish; Jesus Predicts John’s Death

Death: c.100 AD in Patmos, Greece – only Apostle said to have died of natural causes

See Him in Art: Often depicted as an old man with a gray or white beard (Byzantine Art) or a beardless youth (western European art). Shown with a book or scroll (writings), a serpent in a chalice (a legend that he drank poison to demonstrate his faith), cauldron, eagle.

### BACKGROUND & CALLING

James and John were the children of Zebedee and Salome. John was probably the younger brother since he is always named second. Zebedee was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee and was likely a man of some means since he had hired boatmen in addition to his sons working for him. They fished in partnership with Simon Peter. Salome is listed as one of the

pious women who also followed Christ, unlike Zebedee. She was probably one of the many women disciples who provided for Jesus' mission from their own financial resources (see Luke 8:3; Mark 5:1; Matthew 27:56). John is generally thought to be the youngest apostle. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he and his family lived near Capernaum.

In Mark 3:17, in a list of the twelve apostles, Mark notes that Jesus nicknamed James and John "Sons of Thunder." This is not mentioned anywhere else and there is no information in the Bible about what this means or why Jesus gave them this nickname.

There is also a person in the Gospel of John called simply, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." This "Beloved Disciple" is mentioned six times and his stories are not shared in the other Gospels. The Gospel of John is said to be based on the witness of the Beloved Disciple. Church tradition has long held that John was the Beloved Disciple. Others say it might be Nicodemus, Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, or Matthias (the replacement for Judas Iscariot).

### **-CALL STORIES (MATTHEW 4:21-22 & LUKE 5:1-11)**

Jesus called James & John from their boats by the Sea of Galilee

Jesus got into one of Simon Peter's boats and granted him a large catch of fish. James and John were amazed, left everything, and followed Jesus.

### **LIFE & TIMES WITH JESUS**

John is part of a special group within the apostles (Peter, James, and John) who are there for important events like the Transfiguration, the miracle with Jairus's daughter, and Jesus's time of prayer in Gethsemane. After Peter, John is the most prominent of all the apostles.

Jesus **Heals Peter's Mother-in-law**

(Mk 1:29-31; Lk 4:38)

Jesus **Restores Jairus's Daughter to Life**, witnessed only by Peter, James, and John

(Mk 5:21-43; Lk 8:40-56)

**Transfiguration**, witnessed only by Peter, James, and John

(Mt 17:1-13; Mk 9:2-8; Lk 9:28-36)

John sees **Another Exorcist** casting out demons in Jesus' name and tries to stop him. Jesus says, "Whoever is not against us is for us." Only story that features John solo.  
(Mk 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50)

Who Will Sit at Jesus' Right and Left in Glory? (Mark 10:35-45)

<sup>35</sup> James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." <sup>36</sup> And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" <sup>37</sup> And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." <sup>38</sup> But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" <sup>39</sup> They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; <sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

<sup>41</sup> When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. <sup>42</sup> So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. This story is also told in the Gospel of Matthew 20:20-28. It is very similar to this version except that it is James's and John's mother who asks Jesus to declare that her sons will sit on Jesus's right hand and left in his heavenly kingdom. James and John (or their mother) want a favor – they want special treatment. Why do you think they were so concerned with their position or rank? Jesus had a large number of disciples, named and unnamed in his earthly ministry, twelve select Apostles, and only three in the elite group (Peter, James, and John). Why was this not enough for the sons of thunder? What draws us to positions of power and prominence? How much is temptation and how much a yearning for righteousness? How do we tell the difference?
2. Jesus responds to their request with a challenge: to rise in righteousness is to have added responsibilities – some of which will be quite difficult. Jesus tells them that the way is clear for them to walk a very difficult journey, but that the places of glory are not his to grant. What do you think that means? Sitting at the right and left of the host was a sign of honor and favor. Of all the saints past and present, who do you think might sit at the right and left of Jesus in heaven?
3. Not surprisingly, the rest of the apostles are angry about James's and John's request for special treatment. Some say that the reason James and John were called the "Sons of

Thunder” is because they had both a deep capacity for love and connection in community, but they also had pretty serious tempers. Feeling things deeply can be a real help in nurturing community, but it can also blind us when we get caught up in the things that we really want. Look at how Jesus responds to their flash of selfishness. What does Jesus say about what it means to be in Christian community? What is a Christian leader? How can our feelings (including deep feelings) help us become a stronger community?

A Samaritan village refuses to welcome Jesus. James and John ask Jesus if they can **Call Down Fire** from heaven. Jesus says no. (Lk 9:51-56)

On **Mount of Olives**, Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask Jesus when the buildings of the Temple will be thrown down. Jesus warns them of things to come. (Mk 13:3-8)

Jesus sends John and Peter ahead to Jerusalem to make **Preparations for the Passover** meal. (Lk 22:7-13)



The Beloved Disciple lay his head on Jesus' chest and asked who will betray Jesus at the **Last Supper**. (Jn 13:23-25)

The agony of **Gethsemane**, witnessed by Peter, James, and John. (Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42)

Peter and “another disciple” at the courtyard of the high priest for **Jesus's Arrest**. High priest and disciple acquainted. (Jn 18:12-16)

Beloved Disciple at the **Foot of the Cross**.  
Jesus says Mary will be his mother and the Disciple will be her son.  
(Jn 19:25-27)

Peter and the “other disciple” run to the **Empty Tomb** on Easter morning. The other disciple gets there first, but Peter goes in first.  
(Jn 20:1-10)

Jesus appears to seven apostles and grants them a **Miraculous Catch of 153 Fish**. John is the first to recognize Jesus.  
(Jn 21:1-14)

## THE EARLY CHURCH

The book of Acts mentions that John was there for the Ascension and for the meeting to find a replacement apostle for Judas Iscariot. He was also very active in the early church! In Galatians 2:9, Paul says that Peter, James, and John are “acknowledged pillars” of the church.



### Peter Heals a Crippled Beggar

Peter and John were at the Temple and saw a beggar, lame from birth. The beggar expected alms, but Peter healed him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

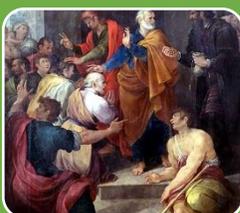
(Acts 3:1-10)



### Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin

Peter and John preached about Jesus in the Temple. The priests arrested them. At their trial, they said that the man was healed through Jesus. The court ordered them to tell no one about the healed man or about Jesus. Peter and John said they would follow God's commands and not theirs. The court sent them away.

(Acts 4:1-22)



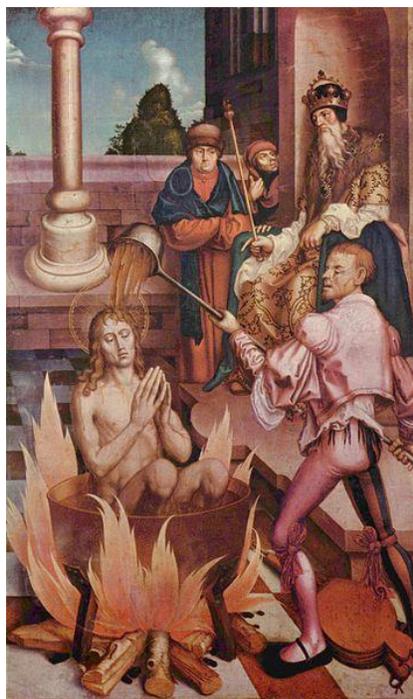
### Peter and John in Samaria

The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria so that the Samaritans could receive the Holy Spirit. Simon the Magician tried to purchase the power with silver. Peter rebuked him and continued spreading the Gospel in Samaria. (Acts 8:14-25)

John is thought to have stayed in Judea at least until 51 AD. As persecution of Christians intensified, the apostles scattered to their mission fields throughout the Roman Empire. Then, John is said to have gone to Ephesus (modern day western Turkey).

There is a church tradition that says that John the Apostle was also the writer of the Gospel of John, the Johannine Epistles (1 John, 2 John, 3 John), and the book of Revelation. Questions about how much overlap there is with all these “John”s dates back all the way to around 200 AD! The Gospel of John is anonymous, but it is similar in style and vocabulary to the Johannine Epistles. Either John the Apostle wrote all 5 books or he wrote some while others were written by someone in the Johannine community. These were early churches that used the Gospel of John as their central understanding of Jesus rather than the other Gospels.

So, if John the Apostle and John of the Johannine Epistles is the same person, then the epistles would have been written from Ephesus. John is said to have remained in Ephesus at least until 98 AD. If John the Apostle and John of Patmos (the writer of the book of Revelation) are the same person, then John was exiled to Patmos by the Roman authorities after his time evangelizing in Ephesus.



Tertullian, a late 2<sup>nd</sup>-early 3<sup>rd</sup> century Christian, wrote that John had been captured by the Romans and sentenced to death for being Christian. In front of an audience at the Colosseum, John was said to have been plunged into boiling oil. He came up totally unharmed! It is said that everyone in the audience converted because of this miracle.

There is also a curious passage in the Gospel of John. Jesus has just told Peter about the kind of death that he will endure. Then Peter sees the Beloved Disciple and Peter asks, “Lord, what about him?” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” The scripture continues, “So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die” (John 21:20-23). The Gospel challenges this rumor, but does not explain it.

As for his death, John is the only apostle who is said to have died of natural causes. He outlived all of them and died around 100 AD at the age of 93 or 94.

## **PRAYER**

God of fellowship, we pray to you as people who walk with your Apostle John. As we remember John, we see that on his best days he went “all in” for a life of service. He preached and healed. He wrote and questioned. He cared for the aging Virgin Mary and for the newborn church as it grew. Yet, on his worst days, he was selfish, angry, and demanding. Give us the passion to care as much as John did and the temperance to restrain ourselves when we start to cross lines. Help us to find joy in community – a joy that increases as each one finds deeper

connection. With the gifts you have given us, O God, make us each active members of the body of Christ. Amen.

### *Quick Glance with the Twelve Apostles Trading Cards*



**Born:** Presumably somewhere in Galilee

**Name(s):** Matthew means “gift of the Lord.” Levi means “he will join” or “priest.” He is also called Son of Alphaeus and The Publican.

**Major Moments:** Call Story and a Meal

**Death:** Died near Hierapolis (modern day southwestern Turkey) or Ethiopia

**See Him in Art:** He is often shown with one of the four living creatures from Revelation 4:7 (a man with wings) and/or a book or scroll because he is considered to have written the Gospel of Matthew.

### **BACKGROUND & CALLING**

Matthew and Levi are mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Because their call stories are so similar, they are thought to be the same person. Matthew is the son of Alphaeus. He was probably from somewhere in Galilee and he lived in Capernaum when Jesus called him.

Matthew/Levi was either a tax collector or a revenue officer. This tells us that he had some education. He was probably literate in Aramaic (the language of the locals) and Greek (the language more widely known in the empire). Though most of us are none too pleased should the IRS come calling, being a tax collector was very different in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. The tax

collector bought the rights to collect taxes in a given area. They were then empowered to collect as much as they wanted (or were able to get) as long as they paid the Roman Empire what they felt was due them. This was more than highway robbery – it was like an extortion ring. Most Jewish people were not Roman citizens – they were living under occupation. They had very few rights and almost no recourse if government officials abused them. On top of that, tax collectors often came from the communities they were taxing. So, not only was Matthew one of those hated bandits who strong-armed the people for protection money – he was also a traitor to his own people. As a tax collector, he had sold out his community for the sake of profit.

#### Jesus Calls Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13)

<sup>9</sup> As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

<sup>10</sup> And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>12</sup> But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. This call story begins almost casually. Jesus is just walking along, he sees a man, and he says, “Follow me.” But from Matthew’s perspective, it’s very different. Matthew was hated and feared by his neighbors (and understandably so!). He had probably long since given up on the idea that he could be good or do good or ever be accepted. Yet, here comes this unknown Teacher who invites him into a fellowship of holiness. Sometimes sin feels so impossibly huge that we cannot imagine being called, loved, and forgiven. Are there any parts of yourself or mistakes you’ve made that feel unforgivable? Are there people that you have a hard time imagining Jesus calling, loving, and forgiving?
2. Matthew/Levi’s call story is also presented in Mark 2:13-17 and Luke 5:27-32. In those passages, the Gospel writers specify that the dinner takes place at Matthew/Levi’s house. In Luke, it even says, “Levi gave a great banquet for him.” The sinner, startled by the breadth of God’s grace, responds with celebration and hospitality. This dinner wasn’t for all the “right” people. It was more tax collectors and sinners. When the Pharisees marvel at this surprising dinner party, Jesus says “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” What do you think this means? Is sin a sickness that infects everyone in the world? How are those words a challenge to the dinner guests, to the Pharisees, and to us?
3. Jesus says that God desires mercy and not sacrifice. This is a reference to Hosea 6:6. In that chapter, the prophet calls on the people to repent – to return to the Lord. Hosea

challenges the people because their love appears and quickly fizzles away. Hosea says that sacrifice and burnt offerings are meaningless if they are not accompanied by a life in service of God, a life that seeks to know the Lord. What do we learn about mercy from God? How do we act mercifully in our own lives?

## **LIFE & TIMES WITH JESUS**

Matthew was present for the major events with Jesus like the feeding miracles, the Last Supper, and some Resurrection appearances.

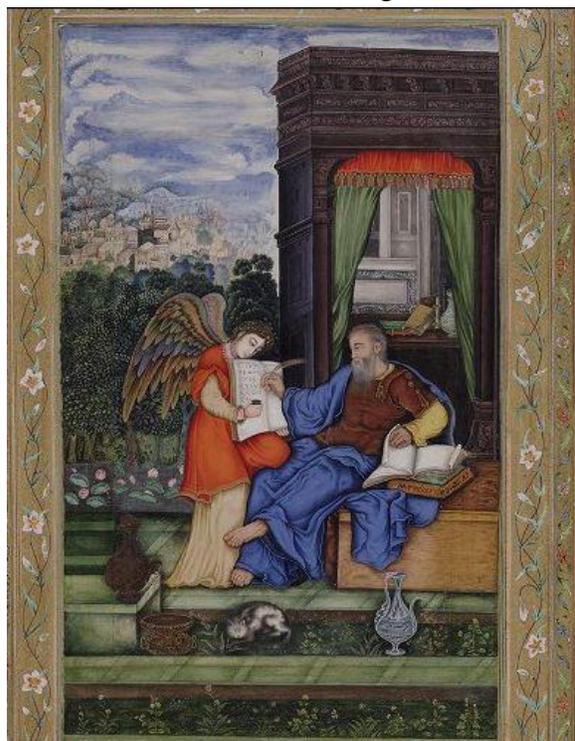
## **THE EARLY CHURCH**

The book of Acts mentions that Matthew was there for the Ascension and for the meeting to find a replacement apostle for Judas Iscariot.

The Church has traditionally held that each of the Apostles had their own mission field. They came together and drew lots to find out where God wanted each of them to go. Matthew is said to have preached the Gospel in Judea to the Jewish community first and then evangelized other countries.

The Gospel of Matthew does not specify that Matthew/Levi is the author. Additionally, the writer of the Gospel does not claim to be an eyewitness of the life of Jesus. However, the church has listed Matthew as the author of the Gospel as far back as the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century.

Matthew was said to have died near Hierapolis (modern day southwestern Turkey) or Ethiopia as a martyr. One legend says that the king of Ethiopia had lustful feelings for his niece who had become a nun. Matthew rebuked the king for his immoral desires. In anger, the king sent a soldier to kill Matthew. The soldier attacked him at the altar, stabbing him in the back while he was celebrating mass.



## **PRAYER**

God of the forgiven, we pray to you as people who walk with your Apostle Matthew. It's so easy for us to take your gift of repentance for granted. Either we hold some sin back from our confession or we forget how truly amazing your grace and mercy is. Help us to make our lives a joyful response to your gift of forgiveness. Teach us to celebrate and be glad because you are an awesome God. Amen.

## References

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