

Matthew – 2018

One of the most common questions asked by those who are beginning their journey into scripture is simply this: “Where do I start?” Now there are several arguments put forth as to where exactly the best place to start might be. Some say Romans, as it outlines the plan and process of salvation which is fundamental to the Christian faith. Others will contend that Corinthians is better, as it shows the importance having sound theology and rebukes false teaching. Some maintain that Mark is the best because it’s the shortest Gospel, while others will put forth that 2nd or 3rd John are ideal, because you can easily finish them in one sitting, affirming the confidence of the reader in their ability to complete this momentous task. But if you ask me, the best place to start this particular story is the same place where every great story starts: at the beginning.

No I don’t mean Genesis, but rather at the beginning of Jesus’ story.

Matthew is the first Gospel, and while authorship remains anonymous, the early church fathers held in consensus the opinion that the true author was none other than the Apostle Matthew, a witness to and follower of Jesus during his earthly ministry. In fact, of the four Gospels, only Matthew and John are believed to have Apostolic authorship.

As a former tax collector, Matthew would not have been the most popular person. The Jews felt betrayed by him, as he showed allegiance to the Roman Empire. The Greeks didn’t like him... well, because he was a tax collector, and who likes paying taxes? But Matthew made it his personal mission to bear witness to the events that he had seen and experienced, so that others could see who Jesus was, and learn of what He had done. Matthew writes to a primarily Jewish audience, as one of his biggest concerns in writing was to make sure that the Jewish people (who had rejected and ostracized him) were able to see with clarity and conviction that Jesus Christ was indeed the promised Messiah. In fact, Matthew begins his Gospel in great detail on the lineage of Jesus, before delivering a birth narrative that would serve to show to a Jewish audience how Jesus’ birth was in fact the fulfillment of prophecy.

There are several notable passages within this Gospel, many of which are familiar names even to those who have never personally read through them. The Sermon On The Mount, The Beatitudes, The Great Commission... fodder for a thousand Sunday School lessons, but things that take on a new meaning and significance for a more mature reader. Matthew records how Jesus speaks on the fulfillment of The Law, the importance of generosity, the role of judgement. He recounts how Jesus performed miraculous healings, and told provocative parables. He regales the reader with tales of verbal sparring between Jesus and the Pharisees, the likes of which would lead to their jealousy and rage... and eventually, Jesus’ own murder at the hands of the Roman government. He also provides one of the more graphic depictions of the crucifixion, and the immediate effect it had on the world around him.

Matthew’s retelling of this great story ends like so many other great ones tend to: with the call to action. Jesus is leaving, his time on earth and his mission complete, and he hands the keys to the kingdom to his followers... to you. What will you do with them?