

MATTHEW

ONE GREATER THAN SOLOMON

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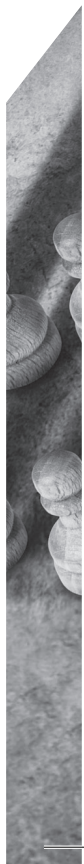
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Unit C, Tomlinson Road, Leyland, PR25 2DY, England

Email: info@10ofthose.com

Website: www.10ofthose.com





Matt Searles

**46 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF MATTHEW**



INTRODUCTION

What is the heart of the Christian faith? How would you summarise the good news? This is a question I often ask people, and it's a vital one to answer, whether we're looking into the Christian faith, or whether we've been Christians for years. How would you answer that question?

There are many wonderful things we might want to include. The hope of eternal life. God's great love for us. The fact that we're made acceptable to God by faith, not on the basis of any good we do. That we're all sinful and deserve judgment, but God has made a way for our sins to be forgiven. God as the good Creator. The gift of the Holy Spirit. The purpose God brings to our lives. An explanation of *grace*, and the *gospel*.

All of these are glorious truths, and ones I delight in daily. All are part of the good news of Christianity. But what is missing?

So far Jesus hasn't been mentioned. Though we'd never intentionally miss Jesus out, we must be careful never to divorce the great blessings that Jesus won for us from *Jesus himself*. He is the one in whom all these other things find their meaning. Yet I know my own heart can sometimes push him out of the picture a little, and focus on other things instead. This is one of the reasons I love the gospels. They take me back to Jesus himself. They put a Galilean carpenter front and centre.

Matthew's gospel is the most Jewish of the gospels, presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, the fruition of age-long hopes and yearnings. Though steeped in history, it is also profoundly contemporary as it presents a Jesus who is raw, confrontational, compassionate, majestic.

My prayer for this book of devotions is that it will help you to delight afresh in the one who is greater than Solomon. I pray that it will help you understand again why the promise "They will see his face" (Rev. 22:4) is the highest and greatest joy the saints in glory can be offered.

We won't cover every passage in detail. Rather than being an exposition of all that is in the text, in each devotion I've tried to focus on one main theme, aware there's far more we could consider if we had extra time. My prayer is not so much that this helps you get to know Matthew's gospel better, but that it enables you to know *Jesus* better.

As you read the gospel, keep asking yourself the question: Who is Jesus? Keep on asking if the Jesus you believe in is as challenging, gracious, holy, gentle (and the list could go on) as the one presented by Matthew.¹ Keep praying that through this gospel God would give you eyes to 'see the king in his beauty' (Is. 33:17).

Things will be different when ...' How would you complete that sentence? A new job, a new relationship, a new house? Debts paid off, a new pattern of eating or exercise? A new beginning can be a time of hope, of expectation.

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is remarkable. It focuses on Jesus' legal ancestry (through Joseph instead of Mary) and points to new beginnings, new hope, blessing through a king in David's line. But who is this good news for?

Five women are included in the genealogy, which was not usual (foreshadowing how Jesus will treat women as equals despite his cultural situation). Rahab and Ruth were foreigners. All five women mentioned had some form of sexual scandal associated with them. Even the way Bathsheba is referred to as 'Uriah's wife' (v. 6) highlights the adultery and murder committed by David.

This is not a list of the spiritual greats, but a complete mix: heroes and villains, princesses and prostitutes, religious and non-religious. Not only are all these people non-western and non-white, but there is a positive emphasis on the foreigners: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Uriah.

These are the people in Jesus' ancestry. And these are the people Jesus welcomes into his family today.

If you've ever longed for a new beginning, if you are looking for things to change, if you know that life is not as it should be, this passage gives great hope. And it is a hope that is not restricted to the good, those with religious backgrounds, those with nothing to hide. This is a hope for people like you and me.

So come to him. Whether for the first time, or whether as someone who's been a Christian for years, come to him. Let him be the ultimate source of your hope. Let him be the new beginning you seek. Let him be your hope for a second, third, or three hundredth chance. His mercies are new every morning.

REFLECTION

What in our past or background makes us fear that Jesus won't welcome us?

How might God use flawed people like us to bring about his plans?

Jesus is not afraid to be numbered with prostitutes, murderers, foreigners and refugees. As a church, are we?

Matthew's gospel is good news. Good news, as we saw in the first passage, for the sinful, the broken, the marginalised and the hopeless. It is a book heralding a new beginning, centring on the king who will come.

The two names given to Jesus in this passage are vital in showing what sort of a king he is. 'Jesus' was a common name meaning 'God saves', pointing to the hoped-for deliverance of the people from their enemies. Here a new feature is added: 'he will save his people *from their sins*' (v. 21, my italics). As will become abundantly clear in the rest of the gospel, Jesus is interested in more than just the spiritual; he wants to bring physical restoration to individuals and to the world. Yet all this must begin with the biggest problem being dealt with: human sin.

The second name is 'Immanuel', which means 'God with us' (v. 23). The people of Israel looked forward to a king who would come, but they didn't realise that this king would be God himself. God would no longer be distant, only *partially* known through the law, the temple and the sacrifices. God would walk among the people, making himself

known to them. Think what a privilege it must have been to have walked the streets of Judea with Jesus. Imagine sitting listening to his teaching. In Jesus, 'God with us', we see not a distant god of the philosophers, but a God who came to earth so we could get to know him; he wants relationship with us. This privilege was not just for the disciples of Jesus' day; Matthew's gospel ends with this same promise: 'And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

REFLECTION

How aware are you of the presence of God with you at every moment of the day? How might you enjoy this reality more?