

Dean of Savannah clergymen releases new book

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By Marcus E. Howard

Many authors remain seated fixtures at book signings, but not the Rev. Matthew Southall Brown Sr., who kept busy mingling with the waves of guests who recently celebrated his new book.

But that's not surprising.

The 90-year-old pastor emeritus of Savannah's St. John Baptist Church, nicknamed "The Mighty Fortress," has been active in his hometown for decades. After retiring from St. John in 2005 after 35 years, he continued his daily radio devotionals on WSOK 1230 AM's "Joy in the Morning" program.

"The Best of Pastor Matthew Southall Brown, Sr.'s 6:30 a.m. Meditative Thoughts," is based on his weekday devotionals that have become a broadcast staple over more than 20 years. It was published in July by AuthorHouse, a self-publishing company.

In the early 1990s, Brown accepted an offer from E. Larry McDuffie, a gospel radio host on WSOK, to do a morning meditative thoughts program.

"Several of our listeners, after maybe 10 years of doing them, requested the thoughts and then started encouraging me to put them into writing for posterity," Brown said.

"It was not until 2005, after my retirement from St. John Baptist Church, The Mighty Fortress, that I decided to sit down and to begin cataloguing some of them."

Brown said he intended to write the 208-page book in the same conversational manner as his radio program.

The Bible, Christianity, Jesus and faith are topics among the book's eight chapters. But there is also a chapter on black history and another called "What About the Children," a topic close to Brown's heart. He has four children and 23 grandchildren and great-grandchildren with his wife of 63 years, Lottie.

"There is a line that says: 'Children are our greatest assets,'" said Brown.

"Any organization — be it a church home, school, city or town — moves forward on the feet of their children. And if we don't train them well, I think you understand what will happen to that institution."

On Sept. 12, friends and family packed Savannah's Aaron L. Buchsbaum Learning Resource Center on May Street for an inaugural book signing and reception for Brown.

He was born to Christopher and Helen Brown in Savannah. In 1943, he graduated from Cuyler-Beach High School. He continued his studies at Savannah State and various theology schools.

During World War II, Brown served in the Army with the 2221 Negro Infantry Volunteers.

"Entering the military as a draftee out of high school, he did his duty to his nation, whose laws did not then fulfill its duty to ensure equal treatment and opportunity for all," said Doug Andrews, chairman of the Veterans Council of Chatham County.

"We call them The Greatest Generation not just for their victory in World War II, but also for what they did in the ensuing decades to get back to living their lives and making America the greatest nation on Earth."

Returning to Savannah, Brown became active in the local civil rights movement.

During school integration in the 1970s, he served as chairman on U.S. District Judge Alexander A. Lawrence's biracial committee. He has also chaired a local group that promoted Emancipation Day and served as chief chaplain of the former Savannah Police Department.

Known as a dean of local clergymen, Brown pastored four churches in his career.

Earlier this month, the National Baptist Convention USA recognized him for more than 50 years of ministry work.

"I'm humbly grateful," Brown said. "As I usually say, all of the awards that I have received throughout my life have to share them with people, because really people made me who I am."

Brown is already working on his next book, which he said will be about the devastating fire that burned in 1993, a tragic shooting there involving a former church minister and other challenges he faced.



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