

The Parchman Preacher: A Christian suspense novel

Michael Thompson

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Twists, turns, and suspense make a preacher's murder mystery chilling.

Michael Thompson offers a tantalizing murder mystery filled with chilling explorations of hypocrisy, true faith, and small-town secrets. The Christian faith colors his work, which is an allegory inspired by the ministry of Christ. It's about sin and redemption. It's about the search for truth, in both the physical and spiritual realms. And it's all wrapped up in a puzzle that keeps even skeptics on their toes.

On a dark night in the mid-1950s, a man arrives at a boarding house in the small town of Solo, Mississippi. What happens next will change the townspeople forever. Their faith—their very lives—are at stake.

A man receives a memoir from an old family friend purporting to tell the truth, finally, about his past. Amid the pages, a mystery unravels. The friend, Martha, tells of a night in Solo when someone came to her boarding house door. After the death of their preacher, it seems the new minister has finally arrived. But Martha is convinced there's more to the former pastor's passing and the new one's arrival than first meets the eye.

As she investigates, the town's secrets are stirred up. Its spiritual center changes. Suddenly no one is safe. Martha is determined to find the truth, no matter the cost, especially when another preacher comes to town, and, once again, things are not the same. Who are these men? What are certain townsfolk up to? And who is responsible for a string of recent murders?

The writing is compelling with a plot that grows ever thicker and offers even ardent mystery fans delightfully unexpected twists and turns. The intrigue is well developed with well-placed clues and cliffhangers: "Rumors have a way of spoiling a good plan—a plan I didn't have at the moment."

The characters are multidimensional and fascinating. Even their descriptions add successfully to the mystery. Of one preacher, the narrator says, "I thought I could see straight through to his crystal blue eyes. At the same time, I imagined he could see through mine, all the way to my soul." And of the other minister's eyes, "They would go from smile to concern to sorrow with each shift in the conversation."

This book certainly comes from a Christian perspective (although some staunch conservatives may find it a bit edgy in language and themes), but it refrains from preaching. The faith themes are so masterfully woven in that those who aren't religious should simply find the novel to be top-notch suspense.

It is, however, allegory—an important thing to note as some, unused to the form, may miss much of the richness. And those not familiar with the Christian faith will miss the depth that many of the author's allusions add (such as one character being named Adam Davidson). However, they won't miss a bit of the fun. This story is one for all lovers of mystery and suspense, and especially believers open to a bit of edge in the stories they read.

DIANE GARDNER (September 25, 2013)

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