Christ Is NOW!

7 Groundbreaking Keys to Help You Explore and Experience the Spectacular Supremacy of God's Son Today

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Preface

Meet Him Again for the First Time

The Whole Church (Including You) Wholly Alive to the Whole Vision of the Whole Christ

Does either of these experiences feel familiar to you?

At a tenth-year class reunion, you get into conversation with an old girlfriend who used to join you at sports and parties. Now as the two of you talk a decade later, you realize she is far more interesting, more personable, more talented, more inspiring than she ever appeared to be back then. In a sense, you meet her again for the first time.

As an avid NBA fan, you end up in the locker room with some of your hometown team heroes after a game, asking them for autographs. As they sign your program, allowing you to interact with them up close and personal, it's apparent they are far warmer, more down-to-earth, and more open-hearted than you had assumed based on how fiercely they battle out on the court. You see them in a new light. In other words, you meet them again for the first time.

Now imagine this: What if similarly striking encounters happened to you practically *every day*? In addition, what if these amazing discoveries were always about *the very same person*?

Most importantly, what if that person happened to be the single most consequential individual in all creation, throughout all history and for all eternity? I'm talking about Jesus, the Son of God.

And what if you started seeing that many previous reports about him were flawed, at best, diminishing him by misguided opinions and misleading claims? What if you found him to be so much greater than his popular reputation—much more alive and active, much more astonishing but also more appealing, much more awesome but also more approachable?

What if you kept on meeting him over and over, day after day, in such unexpectedly fresh and surprising ways that it were almost *as if* with each new encounter you were meeting your Lord and Savior for the first time?

That's How This Book Took Shape

For over forty years I've been caught up in an extraordinary journey with Jesus precisely like this. To be sure, at times it has run hot and cold, fearful then bold, with ups and downs, in the light plus through the night.

Yet for me, this Spirit-guided course has remained a steady trek in the same direction—toward an ever more astonishing wealth of disclosures about who our Lord is today in the fullness of his spectacular supremacy.

And that brings me to *you*.

Finally, after decades of writing parallel books that actually foreshadow this volume, I offer you my *magnum opus* (chief work). *Christ Is NOW!* shares with you my distillation of exciting insights about our Redeemer King — uncovered while I was "meeting him again for the first time" — over and over and over.

In these pages I hand you keys that will unlock doors into the wide-open spaces of a renewed vision of and involvement with God's Son in all of his greatness and goodness and glory. You'll find these insights to be simple but also comprehensive, practical but also radical, breathtaking but also life-giving. Rooted in God's Word, they will *reintroduce* you to the Lord Jesus Christ to help you see him for *all* he is right now.

In its approach lies a way for you to move into deeper intimacy with your Savior, not just in terms of who he was or who he will be, *but in terms of who he is today.* I think you'll find this approach truly is groundbreaking. Long before you finish reading *Christ Is Now!* you will begin undergoing a genuine "Christ Awakening" — which is my great hope not only for you but for the entire Body of Christ.

The Hope at Hand: The Reformation That *Must* Come

Unfolding in answer to decades of concerted prayer globally, a nationwide and worldwide Christ Awakening movement, many believe, is at hand.

This is urgently needed because far too many of this generation of Christians are slumbering concerning the full extent of the supremacy of Christ now. J. I. Packer says most believers only have pieces of him. John Stott calls us pigmy Christians because we worship a pigmy Christ. The late Chuck Colson suggested evangelicals have made him a "product" to meet our needs as consumers. Kendra Creasy Dean's research reports that many Christian youth have lost true passion for Jesus. William Willimon concludes that the reigning Christ is essentially "missing" for us in the thick of all we try to do for him.

We need a grander exaltation of God's Son that is able to breathe new passion into God's people to advance his kingdom purposes at this moment of history; yet we remain asleep. Here's how American theologian Kevin

Vanhoozer puts it (emphasis added): "Present-day Christians need to awaken to the glory of the transfigured, risen Christ in our midst, and we need to *stay awake* so that we, like the disciples, see 'no one but Jesus only' (Matt. 17:8)."

Said another way, we need a "Christological reformation"—one in which God's people wake up to meet God's Son all over again, as if it were for the first time, thus *re-forming* their whole vision of all he is.

On November 1, 1517, citizens of Wittenberg, Germany, found nailed to their church doors an extensive, militant document that spread rapidly throughout Europe due to a recently invented "social media" called the printing press. The Protestant Reformation, which had been brewing for decades, was unleashed!

On the exact date 500 years later, something similar happened: The release of another lengthy treatise was announced on — "nailed" to — current forms of social media: websites, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. It presented a similarly radical call for a reformation — a magnification — of the Church's vision of who Christ is today.

Like Luther's famous "95 Theses," this contemporary declaration seeks to be revolutionary. It gathers together years of teaching presented around the world regarding the breadth and depth of Christ's spectacular supremacy. A timely volume, it captures the heartbeat of a grassroots insurgency already underway — soon to flourish as a "Christ Awakening movement" in which the whole Church becomes wholly alive to the whole Christ.

You are holding that book. Handle with prayer.

Meditations on His Majesty

Meditations on His Majesty

Welcome to Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls. Three cataracts convulsing into one terrifying, titanic torrent. A massive deluge of 750,000 gallons of river descending every second to form the highest flow rate of any waterfall on the planet.

If you've ever visited this natural wonder, commanding a portion of the border between the US and Canada, then like millions of others you too have felt minimized by its magnitude. Mesmerized by its magnificence. Enraptured by its quadraphonic-like cannonade drowning out all conversation.

Niagara Falls. Reverberating. Captivating. Breathtaking.

Believe it or not, there was a moment when a first-century follower of Jesus had a Niagara Falls-type encounter of his own.

Without even being there.

His adventure was an experience meant for all of us.

Mentored by the Master

Come with me into the book of Revelation as we observe the final days of an apostle's astonishing sixty-year mentorship with his Master.

We find John sidelined, now a prisoner in the grip of a self-deified emperor. Confined to a Roman gulag. Elderly and abandoned.

Still he remains resolute, faithful to his "Best Friend Forever" for whom he willingly suffers it all.

Still he goes on waiting, watching for the Judge of all to act on his behalf, even in these dire circumstances.

Still he stands at attention, ready to obey his Lord and Savior to any extent, without conditions.

That's because John remains convinced of one truth above all others: *Jesus is reigning supreme*. Right here and right now.

As he once observed: "The Son of God came to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3).

But loftier manifestations of the majesty of Jesus wait to be explored — a Niagara Falls-sized connection with Jesus that looms around the corner for John.

John is about to be engulfed in infinity's effusions, swept up into the vastness of the victor he adores. He's about to be overtaken by an explosion of wonders — marvels about the Christ that God intends for *all* of his children to behold — sooner or later.

In some ways, this divine appointment mirrors familiar territory for John. Throughout his ministry for his Lord, he had been regularly reenergized by an array of thrilling episodes springing from his bedrock commitment to Emmanuel.

After all, this devout disciple had taken part in launching the greatest revolution in human history, serving a spiritual insurgency stretching from Jerusalem to Antioch to Rome, and beyond.

It all began for John when he was chosen for a three-year apprenticeship as part of the inner circle of the miracle-working Messiah of God.

But then all hope seemed to end for him one sunless afternoon when he witnessed the inexplicable, sacrificial death of the Lamb of God.

Yet shortly after that the adventure resumed during forty days when, along

with fellow disciples, he conferred with the risen Redeemer of God about their continuing mission together.

That extraordinary seminar culminated for John when he witnessed the long-anticipated ascension of the Son of God to sit with universal authority at the right hand of the throne of God.

Subsequent installments of his vocation filled up an additional five decades as the Spirit sent him to serve the people of God in the Holy Land, in Ephesus, and elsewhere.

Then, as a capstone to his ministry, John produced an exquisite, lyrical treatise on Jesus — its final page telling the Church there still was so much more he knew about his Lord that if he wrote it all down, he supposed "that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21).

Evidently, he considered himself to be more than a little familiar with his Savior!

Until . . . late in life along came this watershed moment on a little Mediterranean island when John intersected one more time with his gracious Lord. But this time it was very different. It was almost *as if* he had never seen his Savior before, *as if* he was meeting him again — for the very first time!

Unexpectedly, this mission-driven martyr ended up, as it were, being *re-introduced* to his Mission-master, who appeared before him in the glory of an unfamiliar guise. Suddenly, John found himself face to face with Jesus as . . .

The Master of Surprises

Surprise! Though wrinkled, weary, and worn, today John is about to enter the crescendo of his ministry, the pinnacle of his extraordinary spiritual walk.

Surprise! Though still a political pawn in a Patmos prison, today John is about to foresee cosmic events destined to consummate all of earth's dominions, subsumed under Jesus as the universal Sovereign.

Surprise! Erroneously perceived as a disenfranchised captive of Caesar, today

John is about to be liberated by "the Ruler of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1:5), as Jesus invites him to experience "riches in glory" no earthly magistrate could ever claim.

Surprise! Seemingly sidelined in solitary confinement, in reality John is about to be ushered into the control center of the cosmos, surrounded by a festive multitude of saints and angels celebrating the irreversible, redeeming triumphs of the Monarch of mankind.

Surprise! No matter how much he feels temporarily limited by his immediate surroundings, John is soon to discover there's an unlimited grandeur to God's Son beyond all he has yet uncovered — a grandeur that, as John will witness shortly, the entire universe could never design, or define, or refine, or confine.

Surprise! Once and for all, Jesus is determined to decisively display himself to John (and to all of us through John) as heaven's Royal Majesty, robed with irrefutable, irresistible splendor surpassing human conception.

Surprise! John is about to be staggered by the Spirit, inducted into an exhilarating, renovating "Christ Awakening" meant to encapsulate the biblical hope for, and the prototype of, God's promised way to revitalize all of his people throughout all generations.

Get Ready. Get Set. Get Going. Get Down.

***Get ready,* John.** Eyes fixed forward. Jesus is approaching you in his spectacular supremacy.

***Get set,* John.** Stay poised to dive into the denouement of all divine decrees, based on who Christ is today: Anointed and ascended as this Potentate of time and eternity. Liberator of the nations and the ages. Lord of glory ruling fully and forcefully, not off in far-flung galaxies but right here and right now. Head of the Church who inhabits his people gladly — not just part of him, but all of him, in the fullness of his authority and majesty and sovereignty.

***Get going,* John.** Awake! Arise! Your "day of visitation" has come.

Concerning the Christ, who over all these years became your highest

passion — well, guess what? There remains much more to him than you ever suspected. A whole lot more!

Shortly you must relay to members of nearby congregations the exceptional, electrifying revelation of Jesus that saturates you. Of course, you'll find yourself grasping for word pictures that you'll know instantly to be totally inadequate for documenting the rapturous vision you behold. Still, don't hold back! To the best of your ability report what you will see, telling your readers:

> I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw . . . someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters . . . his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance (Revelation 1, NIV).

Don't hesitate, either, to confess to them how you respond instantly, the only way you could:

> When my eyes took in this sight I fell at his feet like a dead man (Revelation 1, PHILLIPS).

Yes, John, for sure, *get down.* Overpowered and spellbound, faint away. Prostrate yourself before God's eternal Son — wordless, breathless, smitten by splendor, stunned by shock and awe!

Like never before, and forever, out of this encounter Christ will become ALL to you, John. He will become NOW to you. You'll be unwilling to settle for anything or *anyone* less — more than that, you'll be *unable* to do so.

Now, dear reader, it is your turn to join John in exploring and experiencing the spectacular supremacy of God's Son in whole new ways, to receive your own radically refreshing reconnection with the Lord Jesus Christ — even though you may have trusted him for many years.

Welcome to the beginning of an unparalleled adventure. Uncontainable! Unsurpassable! Unforgettable!

Welcome to Niagara Falls.

Meditations on His Majesty

Have You Heard the Voice That Roars?

What if during the exquisite manifestation of King Jesus to John recorded in Revelation 1, *you* had been the one standing there instead of John? What if after that extraordinary day on Patmos *you* were the one required to describe for neighboring churches your mind-blowing rendezvous with the Savior, as he saturated you in his spectacular supremacy? How would *you* have handled it?

Before answering, return to the scene. Grasping for descriptive images to express what he had never seen before, John came up with fairly startling word pictures of Jesus:

He was dressed in a long robe with a gold strip of cloth around his chest.
The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow.
His eyes were like a blazing fire.
His feet were like bronze metal glowing in a furnace.
His voice sounded like rushing waters . . .
His face was like the sun shining in all its brightness.

If you had seen Jesus like that, what facet of his attributes might have struck you first?

Or struck you down?

Would it have been Jesus' face, lucent like the blazing sun?

Would it have been his eyes, searing with flames of fire?

What about his *voice*?

Yes, his voice. As John notes:

His voice sounded like rushing waters.

One English version translates the Greek phrase for "rushing waters" as a sound like a powerful "cataract" (MSG); another calls it a voice that "thundered like mighty ocean waves" (NLT).

Personally, I think the Good News Translation expresses the original concept best by suggesting that to John's ears Jesus' words resounded like a *"roaring waterfall."*

Roaring? Jesus' Voice Resembles Roaring?

Are we talking about the Lamb of God, often characterized in children's Sunday school classes as meek and mild?

Are we referring to the Palestinian who dwelt in quiet rural obscurity, incognito his first thirty years?

Is this the same Jesus who humbled himself so fully he refused to debate his detractors? The Jesus about whose trial Isaiah prophesied: "As a sheep before its shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth"? The Jesus who surrendered, without protest, to the asphyxiation of crucifixion? Our sacrifice who suffered in silence as he bore the sin of the world?

Does John mean to suggest that now, today, this previously temperate teacher possesses a voice that *thunders*? A voice he's not hesitant to project to John (and to us) at full volume?

It appears so.

Is this vocal delivery like a *lion,* perhaps? In point of fact, Jesus *does* portray himself as a lion in Revelation 5.

But in this case, the image is even more sensational than that. Here, his voice

imposes itself on a devoted hearer with rumbling reverberations reminiscent of a colossal waterfall.

It sounds like we're back to Niagara Falls!

I want to suggest to you that this sonic metaphor supplies us with a valuable insight about the depths of the revelation John received during his arresting reintroduction to our Redeemer. John is providing believers everywhere an invaluable, *audible* testimony about the true nature of the monumental personage whom we proclaim as our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, John's ears enable us to *see* Jesus more clearly by helping us *hear* Jesus more carefully — by focusing us on the *voice* of his Royal Highness, so as not to miss one word he utters.

Considering the Source, Every Word Matters

Jesus' voice speaking Jesus' words — bursting from lips full of virtue and victory to bring vitality to his Church.

Jesus' voice speaking Jesus' words — flooding the nations with abounding hope, amplifying for all earth's peoples the Father's gracious invitation to forsake the dominion of darkness and freely enter into the kingdom of his dear Son.

Jesus' voice speaking Jesus' words — the voice foreshadowed as it was hymned in Psalm 29:

> *The **voice** of the Lord is over the waters;*
> the God of glory thunders . . .
> *The **voice** of the Lord is powerful;*
> *the **voice** of the Lord is majestic . . .*
> *The **voice** of the Lord twists the oaks . . .*
> And in his temple all cry, "Glory!" . . .
> the Lord is enthroned as King forever
> (NIV, emphasis added).

Jesus' voice speaking Jesus' words — as today it issues forth full-throated to continuously animate and energize all of creation:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory . . .
sustaining all things by his powerful word . . .
at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven
(Hebrews 1, NIV, emphasis added).

Listen to Your Master's Voice

This is the voice that brought Lazarus out of the tomb. Suddenly, as before torrential rivers, death was swept aside. He spoke three simple words:

"Lazarus, come out!"
(John 11).

This is the voice that one day will summon all the dead of *all* the ages to stand accountable before him at the final tribunal (Revelation 20), foretold in John 5:

A time is coming and has now come
when the dead will hear
the voice of the Son of God
and those who hear will live
(NIV, emphasis added).

This is the voice of the good shepherd who invites his redeemed people to rally around him every time he's ready to move out and move forward. As he claims in John 10:

My sheep listen to my voice;
I know them, and they follow me.
I give them eternal life,
and they shall never perish
(NIV, emphasis added).

This is the voice of the mesmerizing minister of heaven's communications, whose every utterance requires the saints to give him undistracted attention, just as God commanded in Matthew 17:

This is my Son, whom I love . . .
Listen to him!
(NIV, emphasis added).

Listen to him! The Father's mandate is clear! We must never stop heeding the dictates of the divine Son of whom it can be said, even at this very hour:

His eyes are a blaze of fire,
on his head many crowns . . .
he is *addressed* as *"Word of God."*
The armies of Heaven . . . follow him . . .
A sharp sword comes out of his mouth
so he can subdue the nations,
then rule them with a rod of iron
(Revelation 19, MSG, emphasis added).

Eyes to the Ground, Ears to the Heavens

Fundamentally, the voice that planted John facedown in the dust of Patmos at Jesus' feet bids *all* believers to draw near in reverent awe — with ears expectant, primed to hear from the Messiah who is anointed to powerfully project God's everlasting promises, proclaimed into our everlasting lives.

The fact is, along with heaven and earth, we are predestined to be captivated throughout coming ages by a wholly holy "thundering waterfall" — unceasingly compelled by our Master's voice.

Have *you* heard the voice that roars? Recently?

That's precisely what Hebrews 12 urges you to do, today and every day:

You have come to Jesus . . .
Be sure that you don't say no to the one who speaks.
People did not escape when they said no
to the one who warned them on earth . . .
At that time his voice shook the earth.
But now he has promised,
"Once more I will shake the earth.
I will also shake the heavens" . . .
Then what can't be shaken will remain.
We are receiving a kingdom that can't be shaken.
So let us be thankful
(emphasis added).

As the Church we must never cease to tremble at Jesus' voice, because:

he has a lot to say,
he has every right to say it,
and whenever he speaks —
whenever he *roars* —
nothing stays the same.

Including inside your heart and mine.

His voice is now.

Meditations on His Majesty

Stupefied With Jesus

Generations of daring explorers have successfully circumvented the precarious hazards of Niagara Falls, daring the full force of its awesome (and audible) frenzy.

Starting as far back as 1846, however, entrepreneurs began marketing a safe way for tourists to experience the sensation of the dynamic power of this natural phenomenon — by boarding the *Maid of the Mist*.

This once-every-hour excursion ferries visitors, protected in yellow rain slickers, to the very base of the Falls. For a few exhilarating minutes they become thoroughly enveloped in its pulsating spell — only to turn around and escape unscathed.

On three separate occasions I've joined the *Maid of the Mist* pilgrims. I can attest that each trip delivers an unforgettably visceral experience.

A Whole Other Kind of Ride Is Waiting for You

Even so, that thrilling venture only remotely reminds me of the countless times while working on *Christ Is NOW!* that I've become *spiritually* exhilarated by close encounters of a whole other kind. Those moments sprang from bold

forays into the amazing person of Jesus as I forged into countless expeditions into more of the immensities of who he is today.

Throughout the process of writing, God's Spirit has regularly shaken me awake as my research took me into uncharted territory (for me) regarding deeper biblical truths about the ascended glory of God's Son — about his spectacular supremacy today.

Mind you, I hold two graduate degrees from esteemed theological institutions! I thought I had the Jesus of the Bible pretty well in hand! So naturally I was startled by the thousands of Bible verses about the greatness of our glorious Savior and King that I had failed to unpack, either in seminary or in all my years of ministry since.

I was staggered by — and I choose this alliteration carefully — the *"profusion of profound perspectives"* on Jesus found not only in Scripture but also in a wealth of insights preserved in reams of writings from scores of renowned Christian thinkers down through the centuries.

To be quite candid, there were moments while working on this book that I could do nothing but simply *sit in silence* — enthralled and engulfed by the presence of Jesus, speechless over newly uncovered truths about God's Son — as the Spirit pulled back the curtain to reveal to me more of the realities of who our Savior truly is at this very moment.

This project turned out to be a Niagara-type "boat ride" for me! However, *this* trip was not into concealing mists; instead it caused mists to be dispelled. The Father used those years of investigation to navigate me into a transaction with Jesus similar to John's, two millennia earlier. Like John, I saw Jesus as I had never seen him before! I felt as though the Father *re-introduced* me to his Son, as if — what shall I say? — as if in some inexplicable way I was meeting Jesus again . . . for the very first time! Sort of like I was being born again . . . *again*!

Have You Been Stupefied With Jesus?

For many readers this story might sound rather peculiar, something reserved for a select (and strange) spiritual elite.

Not at all!

What I've described forms the testimony of countless believers through the ages. Deeper biblical truths about Jesus, freshly revealed by the Spirit, await every disciple today without exception, as a way of life. Our Lord promised us no less:

> I have much more to say to you. It is more than you can handle right now. *But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth*. He will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears. And he will tell you what is still going to happen. *He will bring me glory*. That's because what he receives from me he will show to you. Everything that belongs to the Father is mine. *That is why I said what the Holy Spirit receives from me he will show to you* (John 16, emphasis added).

Here's how *Christianity Today's* senior editor Mark Galli recounted his deepening encounter with Christ, writing in his book *Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of an Untamable God:*

> The biblical Jesus is a consuming fire, a raging storm, who shocks people into stupefaction or frightens them to run for their lives. He swirls like a tornado touching down, leaving only bits and pieces of our former lives strewn in His path.

Wait a minute. Did you catch that word Galli used? *Stupefaction*? What does that mean?

Stupefaction: The dictionary defines this as the state of a person who is "astonished, bewildered, astounded, flabbergasted [I like that one!], stunned, speechless, totally shocked."

Such as when one sails too close to Niagara Falls, for instance.

Stupefaction provides a good term to describe where I've often ended up while working on *Christ Is NOW!*

Stupefaction helps describe where I hope every reader of *Christ Is NOW!* frequently ends up as he or she navigates page after page, especially the major seven chapters in the middle.

May you become *so* stupefied with Jesus you'll be moved every day to expand the praises you offer to God's Son, reshaping them to celebrate your most recently discovered marvels about his majesty.

May you become *so* stupefied with Jesus you'll be unable to stop talking

with other believers about the magnificence of God's Son — not only about his *past* endeavors to secure redemption on our behalf, not only about his *future* victories through apocalyptic intervention on our behalf, but most of all about his *current* exercise of saving power and sovereign sway on our behalf.

Stupefaction: The Destiny for All Creation

Stupefaction is precisely what Paul experienced firsthand as he lay face down on the Damascus Road. He later described his stupefying encounter with Jesus like this in Acts 26 (NIV):

> About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground . . . Then I asked, "Who are you, Lord?"
>
> "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord replied.

Stupefaction is precisely what Revelation 1 tells us John endured firsthand, face down on the island of Patmos. Stupefied with Jesus, he wrote: "When my eyes took in this sight I fell at his feet like a dead man" (PHILLIPS).

Stupefaction is precisely what the Father desires for the Church worldwide — that increasingly believers everywhere might be stupefied with his Son, most of all with his spectacular supremacy today.

For you see, the Bible records that at this very second, myriads of angels along with the redeemed of the ages are also stupefied by the incomparable worthiness of Jesus. They are lifting lofty worship before God's face; regaling Messiah's resounding, relentless, righteous, redeeming rule; celebrating the cosmic champion who is anointed and active, decisive and invasive, unavoidable and unimpeachable, irresistible and irreplaceable.

Everything and everyone, everywhere, is destined to be stupefied with Jesus — exalting him and exulting in him with accolades that cascade forever over all creation — like the thunderous outpouring of Niagara Falls.

> That is why God has now lifted him so high,
> and has given him the name beyond all names,
> so that at the name of Jesus "every knee shall bow,"

whether in Heaven or earth or under the earth.
And that is why, in the end, "every tongue shall confess"
that Jesus Christ is the Lord,
to the glory of God the Father
(Philippians 2, PHILLIPS).

Introducing the 7 Groundbreaking Keys:
How to Explore and Experience the Spectacular Supremacy of God's Son Today

One Chapter to Prepare You for the Next Seven

I want them to have complete confidence
that they understand God's mysterious plan,
which is Christ himself.
In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge
(Colossians 2, NLT, emphasis added).

Christ the Redeemer — internationally recognized as a most remarkable marvel of the modern world.

I'm referring to the seven-hundred-ton *Christ the Redeemer* statue erected on top of Corcovado Mountain, looming imperially over Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Standing at its base, one can't help being amazed at this extraordinary sculptural achievement and awed by its overpowering image of Jesus.

You may feel the next seven chapters prove similarly overpowering as they lay out for you a wealth of towering truths concerning the vastness of Christ you may not have encountered before.

To be candid, while shaping this book I frequently found myself taken aback by what I was uncovering of the awesome marvels of the *real* Redeemer—the most phenomenal wonder the world has ever beheld — or ever will.

One term often used for this expansive focus on the Lord Jesus Christ is "Christology." What does that involve?

In one sense, Christology could be pictured as the effort of Church scholars to "sculpt" a Trinitarian-grounded testimony to God the Son in order to amaze us with who he is and what he has accomplished.

To say it another way, Christology rises from a scriptural study of Christ in at least four directions: who he is as God's Son; where he is headed in God's purposes; how he is restoring God's universe; and in what ways he exalts God's glory.

Given a contemporary context, we might define Christology as the Bible's perspective on the current reign of Christ, how right now it is impacting individual lives as well as nations and generations, and what this tells us about the person and passions and purposes of our Lord Jesus today.

This book, *Christ Is NOW!,* is all about "Christology." It emerges from over a quarter century of concentrated research, as I focused exclusively on the inexhaustible, foundational biblical doctrine of who Jesus is.

As a result, for me Christology has come down to this: exploring and experiencing multiple dimensions of Christ's spectacular supremacy by making use of seven major categories or "keys" that unlock a great many of the "treasures" hidden in him (Colossians 2).

Soon you too will become quite familiar with these seven keys as the following pages make a most riveting use of them to revolutionize *your* Christology too.

How I Landed on These Seven Groundbreaking Keys

In this chapter, therefore, my first goal is to share with you how my newly gleaned reformulation of my vision of Christ changed my life — because I'm convinced your accrual of the same fresh perspectives will transform in equal measure your *own* relationship with God's Son.

So, here's my story.

For three decades I gave myself to searching out priceless insights on the nature of Jesus' glories as *foreshadowed* and *foretold* in hundreds of Old Testament passages. In the New Testament I found that the revelations of Jesus foreshadowed and foretold in the Old Testament were not only *fulfilled* in him but also *filled full* of him. Without exaggeration, literally thousands of phrases and verses, as well as entire sections of Scripture, laid before me "*boundless* riches" revealed in the Son of God (Ephesians 3, NIV).

Simultaneously, my growing Bible-based view of the King connected with reams of additional insights taken from early church fathers, influential theologians across the centuries, renowned contemporary Christian thinkers, as well as recent volumes and videos inventoried by the Library of Congress.

To give you a taste of this feast, consider this small sampling of volumes whose very titles hint at how they enriched my understanding of (and my walk with) Jesus as Lord of all:

- **Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs/ "Christology"** (David Bercot, Editor)
- **Christ in Song: Hymns of Immanuel From All Ages** (Philip Schaff, compiler)
- **Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study** (Gordon D. Fee)
- **The Glory of Christ** (John Owen)
- **The Glory of Christ** (R. C. Sproul)
- **The Incomparable Christ** (John Stott)
- **Jesus: Son and Savior** (John Paul II)
- **Who Is This King of Glory: Experiencing the Fullness of Christ's Work in Our Lives** (Tony Evans)
- **Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament** (Christopher J. H. Wright)
- **The Passion of the Lord: African American Reflections** (James Noel, Editor)
- **The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology** (Volker Kuster)
- **Christology: An Ecumenical, International and Contextual Perspective** (Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen)
- **Infinity Dwindles to Infancy: History of Catholic and Evangelical Christology** (Edward Oakes)
- **Altogether Lovely: The Glory and Excellency of Jesus Christ** (Jonathan Edwards)
- **Christ Among Other gods: A Defense of Christ in an Age of Tolerance** (Erwin W. Lutzer)
- **The Real Kosher Jesus** (Michael L. Brown)
- **ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church** (Michael Frost, Alan Hirsch)
- **Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God** (Tim Keller)
- **Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ's Continuing Incarnation** (Gerrit Scott Dawson)
- **Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ** (John Piper)
- **The Jesus I Never Knew** (Philip Yancey)
- **Christ: The Spiritual Sum of All Things** (Watchman Nee)
- **The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited** (Scot McKnight)
- **Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters** (N. T. Wright)
- **Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of an Untamable God** (Mark Galli)

That's just for starters.

Each treatise (and hundreds more like them) highlighted astounding, life-changing gems about our Savior that far too many faithful followers have overlooked — as I once did — to our great loss.

In addition to all this reading, in the early 1980s I started *listening* a whole lot more when I joined Christian gatherings across the globe in all kinds of settings. What I heard supplemented my research with equally invaluable truths gained simply by paying closer attention to God's people (especially their leaders) as they shared how to think about God's Son based on their own life experiences and traditions.

In more ways than one, growing my Christology also required very *personal* endeavors. Through intimate seasons of heartwarming yet soul-humbling encounters with Jesus, orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, my vision of God's Son was greatly expanded and deepened. During private retreats and in times with fellow believers, through the Word and worship, I forged an unforgettable communion with my Lord that made my Christology grow into something profoundly alive to me and life-giving for others.

You Are the Main Reason I Wrote *Christ Is NOW!*

Throughout this entire process, however, one central concern would not let me go.

Must *all* believers, I wondered, invest years in exhaustive studies on all these various levels if they're to have any hope of finding for themselves a wider, stronger, more enriching, more intimate grasp of who Jesus is today? Does every disciple need to spend countless hours researching biblical passages and scholarly works on Christology to make sense of the magnitude of our Master?

Or instead, might it be possible for me to *distill* and *simplify* the thousands of individual insights acquired by the approaches outlined above in order to gift fellow Christians with an effective approach to unlocking the wonders of Jesus for themselves — a strategy that is less complicated and confusing, more orderly and accessible? If so, how?

Might there be a way to create a resource that helps God's people catch and keep such a wide-ranging vision of Christ's glory that it compels them to embrace and apply the blessings of Christ's spectacular supremacy to everyday life?

Finally, I was able to formulate a plan to do just that.

In the early 1990s I started cataloging my findings on thousands of 3 x 5 index cards. Each contained a specific truth or insight or Scripture or quotation regarding what makes Jesus on the throne so special. Within a few years, the tally packed out more than a dozen shoeboxes!

Next I tried organizing this trove under major headings. After much trial and error, and following extensive field-testing with all kinds of audiences, I landed on an easy-to-recall template to effectively funnel this massive survey of Christ into a manageable, workable, replicable way of describing a host of incomparable qualities found in who Jesus is today as "Ruler of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1).

I concluded that everything I had uncovered about the glory of Jesus could be summed up in just seven overarching categories. These facets of Christ's supremacy comprise what might be described as the "seven wonders" of God's Son — wonders that reveal who he *was* and who he *will be,* but most importantly, who he *is* at this very moment.

This became my personal "take" on Christology. And what a "take" it has proven to be!

Over the years I've watched these seven fundamental outlooks encourage thousands of Christians to encounter Jesus *as if* (as I often put it) "they were meeting him again for the first time." I don't know another way to say it!

At the same time, I was encouraged to watch how many of these awakened believers started talking a whole lot more with one another about what they were discovering about their Savior. This renewed vision of Christ was spreading!

On top of that, these seven dimensions have furnished Christian leaders with effective teaching tools with which to teach their people about the "whole Christ" and to lead their people to offer themselves more fully to the lordship of Christ, moving them into a God-given awakening to the fullness of Christ.

And now, with this book — especially through what is laid out in the next seven chapters — I get to share many of these rich discoveries with you also! I can hardly wait!

Therefore, I suggest:

Consider this book to be a major *re-introduction* to God's Son,
designed to ignite in every reader
a new level of decisive devotion toward him.

You Can Be Sure These Keys Are Thoroughly Sufficient

Throughout the years of research I kept crisscrossing the Body of Christ to pass along my new findings, interacting with a variety of audiences. This included open forums with diverse groups during presentations of *The Christ Institutes (TCI)* — a live, 48-hour interactive seminar built around the same seven-fold vision. Responses from the attendees of this multimedia outreach provided me added substantive feedback that sharpened my thinking even more. (Today, *TCI* has evolved into *The Christ Institutes Video Series,* available at *www.ChristNow.com* for free download).

Everywhere I went — including gatherings replete with theological academicians—I openly invited participants to make me aware of any vital characteristics of the person of Christ not captured by one or more of these seven categories.

I have reassuring news to report! To date, no one — *not one individual* — has approached me to suggest these seven dimensions are inadequate for allowing believers to take deep dives into the fullness of God's Son!

Therefore, even though the marvelous realities of the second person of the Trinity remain unfathomable and unsearchable, just as his love for us "surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3, NIV), still let me say again:

Consider this book to be a major *re-introduction* to God's Son,
designed to ignite in every reader
a new level of decisive devotion toward him.

Here Are the 7 Keys, Ready for Your Immediate Use

As a result of my pursuits, I now offer you this most intriguing means for acquiring superb vistas on the wonders of Jesus — insights as robust today as they will be ten thousand years from now. After all, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and *today* and forever" (Hebrews 13, emphasis added). Therefore, each key unlocks more of who Jesus is *right now!*

This seven-fold Christology, when applied by the power of the Spirit, can equip any believer to enter into a life purpose and life direction and lifestyle that are *Christ-driven* as never before — which is why I sometimes refer to it as a "*consequential* Christology."

Perhaps surprisingly, this approach to such a crucial and inexhaustible topic is based on seven very simple, ordinary words — tiny prepositions spoken repeatedly in everyday conversations by all of us ever since we were little children.

To be sure, ten million times ten million words could never begin to describe the innumerable glories of our mighty Savior. However, these seven prepositions give Christians a new template to start exploring and experiencing in new ways the *essentials* of who the Lord Jesus is in the majesty of his supremacy.

These are the seven prepositions: Who Christ is **TO** us, **FOR** us, **OVER** us, **BEFORE** us, **WITHIN** us, **THROUGH** us, and **UPON** us.

Think of them as seven sacred keys shaped to open seven sacred doors through which anyone may enter to see, seek, savor, and then share with others more of the truth that *is* Christ.

Let me risk a bold assertion: There is nothing to know about who our Lord Jesus is today beyond what stretches before us on the other side of these seven portals as we work with each of the seven categories. I assert that to explore and experience a fuller measure of who Christ is we need only to discover more of:

who Christ is TO us today
as we take stock of his
divinity, character, names, destiny, supremacy

who Christ is FOR us today
as we investigate his
incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension — combined

who Christ is OVER us today
as we unpack his
reign over creation, history, rulers, nations, powers, the Church

who Christ is BEFORE us today
as we follow him
into the future, into the heavens, into the promises, into the world

who Christ is WITHIN us today
as we welcome him
to inhabit his people and rule among us in his fullness

who Christ is THROUGH us today
as we invite him
to open up opportunities to use us in advancing his global cause

who Christ is UPON us today
as we celebrate
his victories promised at the consummation of all things
as well as approximations of that consummation he provides us today

Please, never let the simplicity of this basic outline deceive you. Learning to know Jesus so much better really can be this *profoundly simple.*

Yet at the same time, never be casual about it. Everything you learn about him over the next seven chapters will always be *simply profound!*

Behold then! — the seven-fold exaltation of God's dear Son, designed to foster in you and me fresh fervency for his name.

Behold then! — the seven core characteristics of our King for believers like you and me to ponder and praise and propagate widely.

Behold, then! — the seven-part message about the magnificence of who Christ is today, for the Church to *reclaim* and then *proclaim* to our generation.

A Prayer for the Adventure Ahead

Exploring and experiencing more of the glories of Christ Jesus — it's an adventure unlike any you've taken before!

Over and over in the coming pages you'll be challenged to reevaluate how you view and value your relationship to God's Son. Refuse to turn back. Keep pressing on. With the turn of every page embrace the thrill of growing to know our Savior more fully than ever!

With such prospects in view we close this chapter with a prayer about what's ahead, adapted from the one that closes Ephesians 1. **Pray with me now:**

Father, our destiny rests exclusively in your dear Son and all he is. So, because you are the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we ask you to grant us through the Holy Spirit a greater measure of supernatural revelation so that we may know your Son more clearly, more thoroughly, and more intimately.

Father, as we *explore* Christ in these next seven chapters, open the eyes of our hearts to a much larger view of him. Especially, give us fresh insight into Jesus' incomparably mighty power that is at work in all who trust in him — that very same power that you exerted when you raised your Son from the dead and seated him at your right hand in the heavenly realms. Dazzle us with how and why his reign today is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

O dear Father, as a result of these studies we also want to *experience* Christ more deeply. In the most personal sense, may we encounter more of his greatness and goodness and glory — as you fill us with more of the life of the One who at this very moment is filling the entire universe with his presence, his passion, his kingdom activity, and his saving power.

AMEN!

Recommendation to the reader: Take a minute to read back through the section titled "You Absolutely Must Read This First!" found at the opening of this book. Note its practical suggestions on how to get the most out of the unusual layout, creative graphics, and application sections that shape the next seven chapters.

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