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THERE'S
MORE
to
JESUS
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Encountering the Fullness
of Christ in Adventism

SHAWN BRACE

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Proudly published and printed in Australia by
Signs Publishing
Warburton, Victoria.

This book was
Edited by Nathan Brown
Proofread by Lindy Schneider
Cover design by Ashlea Malycha
Cover image by Shutterstock/Kiselev Andrey Valerevich
Typeset in Berkeley Book 11/14.5

ISBN (print edition) 978 1 925044 29 4

ISBN (ebook edition) 978 1 925044 30 0

Table of Contents

[Foreword](#)

[Chapter 1 Only Jesus, All of Jesus](#)

[Chapter 2 The Loving Christ](#)

[Chapter 3 The Creating Christ](#)

[Chapter 4 The Speaking Christ](#)

[Chapter 5 The Risking Christ](#)

[Chapter 6 The Law-Giving Christ](#)

[Chapter 7 The Covenant-Keeping Christ](#)

[Chapter 8 The Emptying Christ](#)

[Chapter 9 The Revealing Christ](#)

[Chapter 10 The Serving Christ](#)

[Chapter 11 The Dying Christ](#)

[Chapter 12 The Believing Christ](#)

[Chapter 13 The Forgiving Christ](#)

[Chapter 14 The Compelling Christ](#)

[Chapter 15 The Liberating Christ](#)

[Chapter 16 The Living Christ](#)

[Chapter 17 The Cleansing Christ](#)

[Chapter 18 The Judging Christ](#)

[Chapter 19 The Coming Christ](#)

[Chapter 20 The Protecting Christ](#)

[Chapter 21 The Reigning Christ](#)

[Chapter 22 The Suffering Christ](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Reflection Questions](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

Foreword

When Shawn emailed me his newest manuscript, I knew what was coming.

I got to know Shawn when he was one of our undergraduate student leaders here at Andrews University. He was involved in campus ministries, served as an RA (Resident Assistant) in the men's dormitory, and was everybody's friend. In fact, one evening he invited me to go door to door with him on his wing of the dorm, and it was obvious he had won the respect and admiration of the guys on his hall.

A couple of years later, when as a graduate student he enrolled in my preaching class at the theological seminary on campus, it quickly became evident that the Spirit has gifted Shawn with a penchant for going deeper, for probing beneath the biblical and theological surface. Combine that gift with his ability to articulate his broodings through both writing and preaching—and you can see why God has chosen this young pastor to persuasively communicate Truth to both the church and the world.

So when I began to read this book, I knew I would be blessed. What I didn't anticipate was how much it would impact my own heart and thinking.

Without spoiling the story you're about to read, let me simply testify that God took the tale of that young doctor and Shawn's segueing to the Latin phrase, *totus Christus*, and drew from my own soul a resolve to be driven by the same passion. What does that mean? It means that the fresh theological reflections and insights embedded in this book could trigger a stirring paradigm shift in your own heart, too.

The truth is the community of faith I love and serve has prided itself (understandably and even rightfully, perhaps) in its possession of “the truth,” if indeed truth can be possessed. We have carefully compartmentalised it into manageable segments—28 at last count—and we vigorously champion these truth packages, and why not?

But the inherent danger in possessing “the truth” is that we can miss the

forest for the trees—becoming so enamoured with the parts that we totally miss the big picture—a very big picture, as this book convincingly advocates.

When that realisation struck home for me as I read and reread the young doctor's story and then read my way through the rest of this book, I subsequently stood in the pulpit of the university congregation I serve to testify that I, too, choose to embrace the bright vision the young man witnessed that gloomy afternoon. And if I had one prayer for you as you internalise the stunning spiritual vistas you're about to read, it would be that you, too, will choose to embrace this vision of the fullness of Christ.

Because in the end, can you identify a higher purpose for living, a more compelling reason to believe, in this third millennium? Given that the end may be closer than we first thought, this more-to-Jesus might very well become the most important choice you have yet to make in your life.

For that reason, I pray this book will accomplish for you what must surely be its Spirit-intended mission.

Dwight K Nelson
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Chapter 1

Only Jesus, All of Jesus

Under a rain-drenched tent in central California in 1882 sat a young man—all of 27 years old. He had a medical degree but little direction. Although the son of a well-known Christian preacher, he had never been converted. But there, in Healdsburg, California, his life was about to be turned upside down. History was also about to change.

But we need to take a step back for a minute.

Fourteen months earlier and 2300 miles away, a discouraged wife sat by the bedside of her dying husband in Battle Creek, Michigan. Ellen White, one of the founders of a young Christian denomination, was about to lose her companion of nearly 35 years. All deaths are untimely, but James' death, at only 60 years of age, was especially so—not only because he had been a pillar in the young Seventh-day Adventist Church, serving as its president and editor of its various publications on different occasions, but also because of a recent conviction he had shared with Ellen.

He had expressed this conviction in print a few months earlier: “With some there is an unutterable yearning of soul for Christ,” he declared, “and the writer is one of this class.”¹ He had come to a sobering realisation: all his work, all his effort, was nothing without Christ. It dawned on him that he and Ellen needed to devote more time to enjoying the love of Christ, as well as sharing it. And thus he proposed that the two of them needed to retreat to the Pacific coast for the winter months and devote their time to writing about the “precious light of truth which God has opened to our minds. . . . The glorious subject of Redemption should long ago have been more fully presented to the people.”²

James never made it to the Pacific coast. He took ill a few months later,

never to recover. For the few intervening months, however, he did seem to achieve modest success in bringing before the people the “glorious subject of Redemption.” Later recounting the last few months of his life, a travel companion recalled: “As all will remember, wherever he preached the past few months, he dwelt largely upon faith in Christ and the boundless love of God.”³

However, this was little consolation to Ellen as she sat by his bedside, wondering how God was going to move the work forward that James had recently encouraged. But hope did present itself in the form of a distinct impression from the Lord. “While I sat there on the bed by his side,” she recounted, “he in such feverness, it was there, like a clear chain of light presented before me: The workmen are buried, but the work shall go on. I have workmen that shall take hold of this work. Fear not; be not discouraged; it shall go forward.” Receiving great encouragement from God, she resolutely added, “I do, as far as possible, the work that God has given me to do, with the understanding that God was to bring an element in this work that we have not had yet.”⁴

That “element” and those “workmen” were to come, but not before Ellen became gravely ill herself. In the meantime, she had followed the encouragement of her husband and travelled to California to become a permanent resident of the warmer state. However, her illness caught up with her there and she was taken to a health retreat where she hoped to find respite. It didn’t come. Burdened by an approaching camp meeting near where she lived, she requested to be returned home where she hoped to gain enough strength to attend the camp meeting and share the burden that was on her heart.

Though wearied and worn out, she asked to be transported there on the first Sabbath of the camp meeting and arranged for a special sofa to be set up where she could hear the speaker. They carried her and set her on the sofa. Many who saw her enter the tent noticed a sickly and deathly look on her face.

But she was there with a burden on her heart.

After listening to the speaker, she turned to her son and a woman nearby and asked if they would help her stand to her feet. She wanted to say a few words. “For five minutes I stood there,” she later recalled, “trying to speak,

and thinking that it was the last speech I should ever make—my farewell message.”⁵

But then something miraculous happened. As if someone had flipped a switch, the once-pale face turned pink, she gained strength and began to speak in clear intonations. Everyone marvelled at the miracle—and they marvelled at what she shared. Over the next week, she would share five more times, each time with the same miraculous strength and vigour.

And the same message.

And another light was turned on during that camp meeting as well. Our young 27-year-old doctor sat in the audience during one of Ellen White’s talks. “It was during a talk given by you,” he shared with Ellen White in 1902, “twenty-one years ago that I received the light which has been the great blessing of my life and which so far as I have kept it in view, has guided me in the study of the Bible.”⁶

Elsewhere, he recounted it this way:

Many years ago, the writer sat in a tent one dismal rainy afternoon, where a servant of the Lord was presenting the Gospel of His grace. . . . [I]n the midst of the discourse an experience came to me that was the turning point in my life. Suddenly a light shone about me, and the tent seemed illumined, as though the sun were shining; I saw Christ crucified for me, and to me was revealed for the first time in my life the fact that God loved me, and that Christ gave Himself for me personally. It was all for me.⁷

For the first time in his life, he recognised the beauty of Christ. Then and there he decided in his heart that he would become a workman for God—the fulfilment of the promise God had made to Ellen White only 14 months earlier.⁸ For the next two decades, that young man—Ellet J Waggoner—became one of the most influential and heralded preachers and writers in his Christian denomination. Indeed, he brought Christ to the world.

But there was more to Ellet’s testimony. Just as significantly as the realisation that Christ loved and died for him personally, it dawned on him that Christ was the message of the entire Bible. Recognising that the entire Bible was God’s inspired Word, Ellet testified, “I knew that in the Bible I should find the message of God’s love for individual sinners, and I resolved

that the rest of my life should be devoted to finding it there.” He then added, “The light that shone upon me that day from the cross of Christ, has been my guide in all my Bible study; wherever I have turned in the Sacred Book, I have found Christ set forth as the power of God, to the salvation of individuals and I have never found anything else. . . . Not one line is written except to reveal Christ. . . . [S]tudied in the light of Calvary, it is a delight, and things that would otherwise be obscure are made clear as the noonday.”

This was a crucial realisation. It occurred to Ellet that, just as the entire Bible was God’s Word, so the entire Bible testified to God’s love and revealed Christ.

Whether he recognised it or not, the young man’s discovery and practice of Bible study was actually a profound combining of two axioms of the Protestant Reformation. And such a method allowed him and those who were later influenced by him to enjoy a richer understanding of Christianity than had been previously appreciated.

One of the axioms of the Protestant Reformation was the Latin phrase *tota scriptura*—a close cousin to the better-known idea of *sola scriptura*. This teaching maintains that all of the Bible is God’s Word and that no portion of the Bible is more important than other parts of the Bible. With this idea in place, one couldn’t bolster Matthew, for example, to the diminishing or neglect of Deuteronomy—as if Matthew was more important to our understanding of God and the Christian life than Deuteronomy.

The other great axiom of the Protestant Reformation that young Ellet subscribed to was *solus Christus*—or “Christ alone.” He realised that Christ should be the all and everything for the Christian—a thought that, according to Ellen White, had been apparently lost by many within the young Christian denomination. “Many,” she later recounted, “had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits and His changeless love for the human family.”¹⁰

Of course, even some of the more favourite portions of Scripture plainly revealed this need to lift up Jesus—apparently passages that were missed by Ellet’s fellow pilgrims. Over and over again in Hebrews, for example, the author urges the reader to “consider Christ” (3:1) or “look to Jesus” (12:2), realising the beautiful truth that, as a person looks to Jesus and considers Him, the heart and life will be changed into the same image.

But this realisation about Christ wasn't the only one Ellet stumbled upon. He also realised that Christ was revealed in all of Scripture, and therefore Scripture presented a fuller picture of Jesus than had been previously understood. There was more to Jesus. These two concepts together produced a complete Christ, fuller than what had been understood before.

To some degree, this wasn't possible for previous generations of Christians. Some of the great Protestant Reformers had their favourite books of the Bible and didn't care for others. For example, Martin Luther declared at one point that the book of James was an "epistle of straw." Though he later amended that view, there was no doubt that he had a harder time seeing Christ in that book than the eminent letters of Paul. And so the trend went—and still goes, to some degree.

But what Ellet saw was that Christ was in all the books of the Bible—everything testified of Him, from the laws of Leviticus to the prophecies of Revelation (a book, by the way, that labels itself the "Revelation of Jesus Christ"). Therefore, he saw more of Christ.

What we need today, as they did in Ellet's day, is to see more of Jesus. We cannot favour one aspect of Christ to the diminishing of others. We need to recognise that all Scripture testifies of Christ—that the Jesus of the Gospels is also the Jesus of the Psalms; that the Christ of the cross is also the Christ of the Most Holy Place; that the Jesus of love is also the Jesus of law; that the Christ of pardoning grace is also the Christ of perfecting grace; that just as Jesus must be our all, we must be about all of Him.

Wonderfully, this understanding keeps us out of ditches and protects us from false dichotomies. Many of us simply want to talk about the Jesus who hung on the cross, who was so full of grace that He never held anyone accountable. Others of us don't have time to talk much about the forgiveness and mercy of Jesus, practically insinuating that Calvary has little significance other than it being a stop on the road to the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, with this mentality, the only Jesus worth meditating on is the Jesus who gives us power to overcome sin.

But, wherever we might be, there's more to Jesus. This picture of Christ helps us recognise that it is not this or that, but this and that. Indeed, Jesus is both the Saviour who "tasted death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9) on the cross, and the Saviour who ministers on our behalf in the Most Holy Place

of the heavenly sanctuary.

And so much more.

And all of it is good and important and necessary news!

Indeed, if we want to experience healing, only a complete Jesus can heal us completely.

Thus, it is my goal, by God's grace, to paint a more complete picture of Jesus that will give you a deeper and greater sense of appreciation for all that He has done for you, all that He is doing for you, and all that He will do for you. To a large extent, this has been lacking among us as a people. Even after young Ellet spread this powerful message, Ellen White still lamented a few years later, "The ministers have not presented Christ in His fullness to the people."¹¹ So I, as a minister, want to present Christ in His fullness to you.

Of course, I expect that we will be learning more and more about Jesus throughout eternity, so even the term *totus Christus* has its limitations. Indeed, the apostle John declared that Jesus did so many things that "if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). There is always more to Jesus.

Nevertheless, with this recognition firmly in place, I want to invite you to ponder anew, or perhaps for the first time, the matchless charms of this Saviour called Jesus.

Let us therefore heed the invitation of Pilate to "behold the Man!"

All of Him.

1. James White, "Eastern Tour," *Review and Herald*, February 8, 1881, page 81.
2. As recounted by Ellen G White, *In Memoriam: A Sketch of the Last Sickness and Death of Elder James White* (Battle Creek, Mich: *Review and Herald*, 1881), page 54.
3. D M Canright, "My Remembrance of Eld. White," *Review and Herald*, August 30, 1881, page 153.
4. White, *Sermons and Talks, Vol 1* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G White Estate, 1990), page 124.
5. White, *Daughters of God* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 1998), page 220.
6. See Ron Duffield, "A Promise Kept—Part 2," *New England Pastor*, May/June, 2011, page 12.
7. Ellet J Waggoner, *The Everlasting Covenant* (London: International Tract Society, 1900), page v.

8. This story is recounted in greater detail in Ron Duffield, *The Return of the Latter Rain*, (4th Angels Publishers, 2010), pages 36–45.
9. Waggoner, *ibid*, pages v–vi.
10. Ellen G White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1923), page 91.
11. White, *Review and Herald*, September 3, 1889, emphasis added.

Chapter 2

The Loving Christ

As the sun sets over the southern shores of the magnificent Mediterranean Sea, you find yourself basking in its glory, smiling with joy over what you are about to devour. Though only 12 years old, you've waited for this moment a long time. The child of a Jewish artisan, you have procured—if only for a short time—one of the most prized possessions anyone of your faith could come upon. It's the Torah—the first five books of the Bible that were written by Moses.

But it isn't just the Torah; it's the Torah written in your language—in Greek.

For centuries—even millennia—anyone who bore the name “Jew” spoke Hebrew. But things have changed. Because of the conquests of Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece, the land of Palestine has suffered great upheaval, scattering hundreds of thousands of your fellow countrymen across the Middle East. Along with 100,000 or so other Jews, your family has found its way to the glorious city of Alexandria, Egypt, nestled on the shores of the great Mediterranean. Founded a century earlier by Alexander the Great, this city has become one of the great epicentres of Greek culture and life.

This is why your mother tongue has fallen by the wayside. Surrounded by the great philosophers, mathematicians and poets of this enchanting city, the Greek language has swallowed all others. It is hard to resist its splendour. And so, over time, you and your fellow Jews have lost your grip on the language of your fathers and your father's fathers—to the point that Hebrew has been entirely forgotten by most.

However, the hope is that, though Hebrew has been replaced by Greek, your monotheistic faith will not be replaced by the polytheism that surrounds you. So the fathers of your faith have decided that the Torah—

those great books of Moses that stand as the foundation to all Jewish life and thought—must be translated into the language of the people.

A few months before this moment, they did just that.

And now, in what can only be described as a miracle, you have come upon a copy of this work and made your way to the shores of the Mediterranean, eager to bask in its glory. Stories that you have only encountered through the spoken word are about to come alive on the page. For a few short moments, you will be able to read with your own eyes the words that God inspired Moses to write long ago.

Sitting down at your favourite spot on a sandy beach, with the waves gently caressing the shore, you begin to read these epic words in Greek: “In the beginning God created . . .” Enraptured with joy, you continue reading about how God created the world and how He fashioned man out of the dust of the earth. You read about the tragic fall of Adam and Eve, the murder of Abel by Cain. With rapt attention, your eyes race through the story of Noah and the flood, and of the Tower of Babel. You read about how the great father of your faith—Abraham—was called out of Ur of the Chaldees and, though childless, how he was promised that his descendants would outnumber the stars of heaven. Then, of course, you read about the fulfilment of that promise: the miracle of Isaac’s birth.

But then you come across a passage in Genesis that gives you unexpected pause. Only a few sentences into Genesis 22—in a portion of the Torah that your father has told you is called the akedah in Hebrew, the “binding” of Isaac—you encounter a word you’ve never heard or read before: “Then He said, ‘Take now your son’”—but you do not understand what comes next. There is this strange word: *agape*.

Living 200 years before Jesus and more than 2200 years before a smartphone, you have no way of figuring out what this word means. What you do sense, however, is that it carries great significance. It is a word that God ascribes to Abraham’s thoughts toward his son Isaac—the son God asked him to sacrifice as a sign of loyalty to Him. With a heavy heart, Abraham agrees to this strange and troubling request but he—with his son—is ultimately rescued at the last second when God intervenes with a lamb.

Fortunately, this is not the only time you encounter the word. Throughout the rest of the Torah, you come across it more than 40 times. This word is

ascribed to Isaac's attitude toward Rebekah (see Genesis 24:67). The same is true of Jacob's feelings for Rachel (see Genesis 29:18). Over and over, throughout the book of Deuteronomy, it is what Israel is urged to have for God (see Deuteronomy 6:5) and, just as significantly, the attitude they are to have toward strangers (see Deuteronomy 10:19). But, perhaps most compelling, it is the underlying motive of God's actions toward your forefathers—as explained in Deuteronomy 7:8: “But because the Lord agapan you . . . the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage.”

Whatever this word might mean exactly, you are left with the indelible impression that it has great significance. Abraham felt it for Isaac; Isaac for Rebekah; Jacob for Rachel; and God for His people. Rolling up the scroll, you tuck it under your arm and head for home. You'll have to wait another 50 years, when Jeremiah's great book is finally translated into Greek, to encounter the apex of this word.

Until then, you wonder . . .

Love, redefined

Two thousand years later, we take for granted this word that others long ago were fairly unfamiliar with. At one point, scholars believed the word was invented by the translators of the Greek Old Testament (also called the “Septuagint” or LXX). Now, this is not the prevailing view. However, many still propose that these translators took a seldom-used Greek word and infused it with all the richness of heaven.

What is that word?

Agape.

Think about this for a moment: those who translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek, for whatever reason, rejected all other words for love in the Greek vocabulary and instead chose to use an obscure word. In so doing, to some degree, they set before themselves—and those who would read their translation—a blank canvas when it came to love.

In its truest sense, love was about to be redefined.

Thus, imagine yourself reading through the Old Testament and encountering this word for the first time. Though used occasionally by Homer and other Greek predecessors of the Septuagint, it was fairly

obscure and largely considered outside a religious context.

And what is the world's first encounter with agape? What is the picture painted? It's the attitude Abraham had for Isaac—the son for whom he had waited 100 agonising years, the son God was now telling him he must excruciatingly sacrifice.

Talk about filling up the canvas!

Picture Abraham, who had waited for his “son of promise” for what seemed like an eternity. There's the love a father has for a son, and then there's the love a father has for a “son of promise.” Abraham's life—past, present and future—is tied up in Isaac's wellbeing and destiny. Talk about love!

And now God has strangely told him to place Isaac on an altar.

But Abraham also loves God. So he takes off for that distant land—his long-awaited son in tow—slowly, deliberately, excruciatingly putting one foot in front of the other.

This is agape.

Of course, the Greek Old Testament—which the New Testament preachers and writers mostly quoted from—adds layer upon layer to that canvas. As we've already seen, the first five books of Moses offer rich insight into the depth of this word and concept. But, from an Old Testament perspective, perhaps there is no greater revelation of what this word means than what we encounter in the book of Jeremiah—a book that would have been translated into Greek in the century following the translation of Moses' books. Following the lead of the translators of the Torah in consistently rendering the Hebrew word for love—ahav—as agape, the translators of Jeremiah 31:3 blessed us with this powerful picture: “The Lord has appeared of old to me saying, ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting agape; therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’”

We are standing on holy ground when we read this verse! For in it the heart of God is revealed. And in it we see a picture of Christ.

Love's greatest expression

A half-century ago, Karl Barth, one of the most celebrated theologians of the 20th century, gave a lecture at the University of Chicago after which he was asked a simple yet thought-provoking question. During the question

time, a student asked Dr Barth if he could sum up the entirety of his life's theological work in one sentence. With little hesitation, Barth responded, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."¹

This word agape has not only reshaped our understanding of love, it has reshaped the world—and is still reshaping it. Yet the fullness of it was veiled in ages past, reflected only faintly through the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—until finding its clearest and most compelling expression in Christ.

This was His all-consuming passion. Everything He did while on this earth—and everything He now does from heaven above—was and is borne out of this agape love. Thus, the apostle Paul boldly wonders, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 9:35). The answer to Paul is obvious and he wishes it would be so for us: nothing "can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 9:39).

To say it is important that we recognise this would be an understatement. All of Christ's actions find their meaning only as we recognise love as the underlying motive—the spring from which everything comes forth. If we ever come to the place where we think love is a footnote in our discussions of Christ, it is at this point that we immediately find ourselves talking about someone other than Him. Even the book of Revelation, when it first introduces us to Christ, declares to the reader that the Christ who is revealed in the book's pages is the One who "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Revelation 1:5).

That our modern version of love has been watered down or turned into an ambiguity does not give us license to give it little attention in our proclamation of Christ. We do not have that liberty. From the first verse of Genesis to the last line of Revelation, the Bible reveals, above all else, the truth about Christ's love for us.

At the same time, this reality cuts both ways because it gives love definition. The concept of love in general—and Christ's love in particular—didn't remain blank on the pages of Inspiration or in the recesses of our minds. It is not a vague concept that has no shape. In many ways, as we encounter the complete Christ, we encounter a complete picture of love. All that we learn of Christ, we learn of love.

That's because love stands not only as the centre of who Christ is, it

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