

## INTRODUCTION

A number of my experiences are significant, I believe, in the development of my interest in the Cross as our paradigm and will give readers a helpful background for teachings covered in this book.

### **Experiences of the Cross Before 2000**

My initial experiences of repentance and commitment to be like Jesus (see Chapter 6) show that, from the beginning of my Christian experience, the Lord wanted to direct my focus on the Cross and to the need to be changed to be like Him. Chapter 5 relates how I started to learn that all things were planned by the Father to conform us to the image of His Son. In Chapter 8, a shocking experience taught me that it was vital to focus on the Cross and that Satan has blinded many from seeing the teachings of the Cross. In a discussion of brokenness in Chapter 12, you will discover how I saw the glory of the nature of Christ was really in me, but that brokenness was essential for the glory to flow out to others. In all these chapters, I relate how these past experiences prepared me for learning to know the Cross as a paradigm or model for all our behaviour.

### **Isaiah 53 as our Standard of Love**

In the fall of 2000, the Lord spoke to me clearly about the connection between the Cross and our becoming like Christ. To benefit from the other chapters, you should definitely pray through the scriptures detailed in Chapter 2 and ask the Lord for a further revelation of being “conformed to His death”.

### **Commissioned and Warned in a Dream**

About two months after that arresting spiritual experience (in Chapter 2), I had a dream that played a significant part in motivating me to focus on the Cross as a paradigm. I have not had many dreams that seem to come from the Lord, but I believe this one was given to me to help confirm His will for this series to be developed and to warn me of apathy and opposition.

The setting of my dream seemed clearly to be a meeting of a Christian fellowship. Across a long table from me was an older man, apparently the leader. He beckoned to a little girl in a pretty white dress. After she had obediently approached him, he picked her up and laid her down face-up on the table. He then proceeded to inform us that, for the good of the group, she had to be sacrificed. He further explained that he would give her ether through a mask so that she would not suffer pain.

I was horrified. In panic, I backed away from the table and called the leader over to the side of the room. Loudly and passionately, I objected to his intentions. A member of the group passed by and encouraged me in my protest, but I wondered why I was the only one trying to save the girl’s life. The other people in the room seemed oblivious to what was happening, as if their eyes were blinded.

I awoke very disturbed and puzzled. The table reminded me of the “Lord’s Table”, the name given to Communion by the group in which I was raised; and thus it suggested that the church’s attitude towards the Cross was somehow involved. But how I was involved in all this was a mystery.

As I was pondering the dream later that day, I seemed to be taken right back into the dream. I found myself insisting that I take the girl home and look after her as my daughter. After a physical struggle with the man, I picked her up and carried her home with me.

When I searched in a book about dreams,<sup>1</sup> I found that the author also dreamt that he saved the life of a little girl. He was convinced that she represented a teaching that was at the core of his ministry, which needed to be rescued and developed. It was not hard to see that the young girl in my dream could represent the teaching of our living out the Cross, a teaching that some Christian groups have tended to render unconscious (by repetitive ritual, by avoidance, etc.) and, some, to actually do away with. This truth had to be fully adopted, developed, nurtured by me and not allowed to be “snuffed out”.

As I prayed that the Lord would confirm this interpretation, scripture after scripture came pouring into my mind, all proclaiming the importance of the Cross as a paradigm. Later, a visit with a counselor, Ken Reeves, helped me to understand the dream more fully and to see why it was a girl, not a boy. The aspects of the Cross that I am focusing on can be thought of as the feminine side of the Cross—His compassion, love and forgiveness; our receptivity of His life poured out on the Cross; our reflection of the glory of the Lord as we worship Him, etc.

Consequently, I took this dream as a confirmation that the Lord was calling me to put a major emphasis on studying the paradigmatic aspects of the Cross and to prepare to confront opposition and apathy as I taught these truths. At first, I interpreted this apathy and opposition in the dream to refer to attitudes of groups that I had been attending up to a few years ago. However, now I am realizing that these attitudes and actions are to be found also in groups with whom I am presently associated and that I need to confront them with anointed clarity and strength.

### **Studying the Cross**

My dream about the rescue and adoption of a little girl triggered a much greater intensity in my studies on the Cross; I read every book about the Cross I could find, particularly those that linked the Cross with our becoming like Jesus. With the help of my computer software, I recorded every passage in the New Testament that referred to Jesus’ suffering and death beyond the actual accounts of the Crucifixion and the basic teachings of forgiveness and justification. I was amazed at the amount of Scripture about the Cross that I found and at the number of references to the Cross as a model or paradigm for our actions and attitudes. Then working again through the whole New Testament, I found about 100 references commanding or encouraging us to become like Christ. Over 80% of these passages had specific connection to His suffering and death. How had it been possible that I had missed this emphasis in Scripture?! How come I had heard so little teaching about it?

### **Florida Trip**

In January of 2001, I witnessed a little of the “Brownsville Revival” in a Christian training school in Pensacola, Florida. The radical commitment of the young people there and a book by the leader, Michael L. Brown,<sup>2</sup> challenged me to further consider the Cross of Jesus as an example of our commitment as disciples.

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<sup>1</sup>H. Riffel, *Dream Interpretation: A Biblical Understanding* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Michael L. Brown, *Revolution! The Call to Holy War* (Venture, CA: Regal Books, 2000).

## **Israel and the Cross**

In the spring of 2001, I was planning to show a video of a ministry in Israel on a Sunday morning. During the previous days as I contemplated what to say as an introduction, my mind kept going blank. Early on the Sunday morning, I prayed again about how I should introduce the video, a statement from the Apostle Paul popped into my mind:

I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. . . . I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. (Acts 20:22-24)

I had not thought of returning to Israel that summer, but I knew at that moment that the Lord was prompting me to go, and like Paul, I must be willing to face danger and possible suffering to obey Him. It was clear to me that I should spend a couple of months there visiting ministries that our fellowship was supporting and investigate others—to be an encouragement to them and find out ways that we can better help them.

During my stay in Israel, I had a few opportunities to challenge groups and individuals to be willing to suffer for Jesus and to love their enemies as Jesus did during His passion. I expect to devote a chapter on the application of the paradigm of the Cross as a solution for the problems in Israel.

## **First Message on the Cross**

In the fall of 2002, I was asked to preach on the Cross at our fellowship. I sensed God helping in my preparation and in the delivery of the message. I was greatly encouraged by some feedback, and I knew that I was starting to fulfil my calling to proclaim the Cross as a paradigm. In 2003, more opportunities to speak about the Cross arose.

## **B. Th. and Masters' Thesis**

In the spring of 2003, the president of Canada Christian College, where I was teaching Hebrew and English, encouraged me to take a couple of courses there to finish a B.Th. degree, which I received in June of that year. I knew the next step would be a master's degree and thought that my studies on the Cross would make a great thesis. In my starting to work on this, a couple of chapters emerged and others were revised.

## **Teaching in Nigeria**

Not long before graduation in June 2003, a previous student of mine dropped into the College and surprised me with an invitation to accompany him on a teaching and preaching trip to Lagos, Nigeria. Allowed to choose my courses, I decided on a series about the Cross as our paradigm and an introduction to Biblical Hebrew. As I needed to come up with enough lessons for a number of teaching sessions on the Cross, I plunged into further study and preparation. Arriving in Nigeria late in July, I continued to prepare on the go and ended up teaching 10 sessions, the material for them forming the basis of as many chapters in this book. The wonderful testimonies of the impact of my teaching on some pastors and church workers excited me and assured me that the trip was ordained by God and that I would be doing more of similar teaching in the future.

### **Email Series and a Book**

Early in September 2003, I received a request from a pastor in Nigeria to help him set up a email group to facilitate his sending out a regular Christian publication. When I discovered how to do this and started setting up a group for him, it occurred to me that I should create another group of my own to whom I could send out weekly chapters on the Cross. This process has done a lot to make sure that I edit and develop the material, and positive feedback encouraged me to continue and complete the project.

### **Teaching Series Based on This Book**

In a course that I taught at Canada Christian College (Toronto) in 2005, a group of Korean students used this book as one of the texts for the course. I was very encouraged by feedback from them.

During Lent of this year (2006), I was privileged to lead a series of Sunday evening studies in the Schomberg (Ontario) area, using some of the chapters in this book. There were encouraging results in the lives of some who attended. When Easter came, most wanted the Sunday evening studies to continue; we then studied scriptures on different types of prayer. Most desire to continue similar studies in the fall.

Also during Lent, for a series of devotionals at a weekly men's prayer breakfast, I gave short challenges on the same themes we were studying in the Sunday evening group.

### **Focus on *Jesus* NOT on *Us* !**

As I have been working on this latest revision, I have sought to strengthen in each chapter the emphasis that this series on the paradigm of the Cross is to be focused **primarily on Jesus and His nature**, not on our spiritual development. Thus, I have sought to emphasize more in every chapter that our **objective is to be above all the adoration and praise of God's nature as revealed through Jesus. Committing ourselves to be conformed to Jesus' suffering and death is both an integral part of that worship and also a result of such worship.** Focusing on Jesus' nature will result in a realization of how far we fall short of being like Him and will tend to lead us to sincere repentance; however, it is intended that all will seek to keep their focus on Jesus not on themselves, even in the act of repentance. It is sincerely hoped that every reader would approach each chapter with a deep desire to adore more fervently and express more completely the qualities and attitudes of Jesus shown through His passion and death. As a result, **each reader will find LIFE by being conformed to His death—the ultimate paradigm for every aspect of Christian experience.**

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