

## Chapter 2

### *THE JOURNEY BEGINS*

The service was over in the little chapel, and a small group of teenagers gathered around the youthful preacher. We had gone that evening to encourage him as he was new to the work of lay preaching, so essential to the many small chapels of Wales. His message has long since been forgotten but the conversation that followed has not. We talked about my school, Cowbridge Grammar, where he had been a pupil just two years earlier, and then Aneurin asked the question that has changed my life.

"Tell me, Gareth," he said, "what will you do with the Lord Jesus Christ?"

It was just five weeks earlier that I had first entered the home of Vince and Betty Bishop. They held meetings for teenagers which my sister Barbara attended each Friday evening. There they sang lively choruses, played some Bible quizzes and, sometimes, had a visiting speaker. I had been to Sunday School until my mother died when I was fourteen but had little interest in spiritual things now. However, at Barbara's invitation, I found myself seated in the comfortable corner seat of the Bishops' living room and had to admit that I was enjoying myself. You will understand that that was quite easy, seeing I was the only boy there with fifteen girls ! I thought that might be the reason why Betty called me into the kitchen at the end of the evening while cold drinks and cookies were being prepared. Naturally, she would expect me to carry in the heavy tray of drinks. I did not expect her to say what she did as she turned to me.

"Tell me, Gareth," she said. "what will you do with the Lord Jesus Christ?"

In the busyness of that kitchen, evading the question was easy, but it was impossible to shake from my mind until the young preacher challenged me again. In the meantime, I had come to realise that Christianity proclaims not only the death of Jesus upon a cross, but also His resurrection from the dead. I began to reason that if He is indeed risen from the dead, He is alive, and therefore it is possible to know Him personally. Each week I had managed to avoid being alone with Betty as I knew she would again ask the question to which I had no answer, but now that question had caught up with me. As the others walked with Aneurin to the bus terminal, I climbed the hill toward home. Entering my bedroom, I knelt beside the bed and prayed a simple prayer.

"Lord Jesus, if you are real, please come into my life, take away my sin and make me yours. I did not know what else to say, so I continued with the words of a simple chorus recently learned.

"Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today, come in to stay, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Amen"

Little did I realise the exciting journey of faith I had just begun.

Some may say that it was just a coincidence that Aneurin would ask the same question that I had been avoiding, but I have come to see so many examples of God's intervening in my life in similar 'coincidental' ways, that I now recognise them as God's appointments - stepping stones in my walk of faith. My purpose in this book is to introduce you to the God who is concerned in leading each one of us into an intimate walk with Himself. He opens doors and closes them; He leads through valleys and over mountain tops; He takes our disappointments and makes them His appointments.

'When God wants to drill a man...  
and thrill a man ...  
and skill a man;  
When God wants to mold a man to play the noblest part;

When He yearns with all His heart to create so great and bold a man that all the world shall be amazed,  
Watch His methods ! Watch His ways !  
How He ruthlessly perfects - those He royally elects;  
How He hammers him and hurts him  
and with mighty blows converts him into trial lumps of clay which only God can understand !  
While his tortured heart is crying and he lifts beseeching hands !  
How He bends, but never breaks those whose good He undertakes;  
How He uses those He chooses, and with loving purpose fuses, by burdened soul induces him to try  
God's riches out.  
God knows what He's about !

(Author unknown - but appreciated)

In the months following my simple prayer, I had grown a lot in my understanding of basic Bible truths. I was blessed by having some good teachers who loved the Lord and His Word. I had joined a church and was active in their young people's group, the "Crusaders". I was beginning to discover the 'riches of our inheritance in Christ' - the fruit of His Spirit. Truly, "*Heaven above is softer blue, Earth around is sweeter green. Something lives in every hue that Christless eyes have never seen.*" (G Wade Robinson). Those were the days when we showed our allegiances by wearing lapel 'badges'. Some advertised support for the local soccer club, others for the latest entertainment 'star'. Mine simply said "Elim Crusader". Hardly inspiring, but very significant.

The following Summer, I stood watching our school cricket team playing one of their strongest rivals, a Swansea grammar school. The visitors were batting and struggling against our bowlers, and I was intensely involved in the game.

"I see you belong to Elim Crusaders" said a voice at my ear. "I assume you know the Lord".

I turned to see that the speaker was a player from the visiting team. He looked a fine athlete in his cricket 'whites' and his engaging smile invited friendship.

"Ye-es" I stammered, as I had not yet met anyone who was so open in revealing his faith. "Yes, I do".

Soon we began a stroll around the edge of the cricket ground as we warmed to one another and our newfound friendship in Christ. Just as we arrived at the gate leading into the school playing fields, my former Latin teacher, a hard task master who also happened to be a selector for the Welsh Schoolboys cricket team, entered. My new friend was being considered for a position on the Welsh team, so he was known to my teacher. I was also known, not for my skills on the cricket field, but for my ignorance in the Latin class ! He also knew that our surnames were the same - Evans.

"Hello Don! Hello Gareth!" he said, and then added "Are you two brothers ?"

How foolish the question was, considering we lived over thirty miles apart! I was startled to hear Don reply, "Yes sir! Brothers in the Lord!"

That was the first time I had ever heard someone speak out his faith with boldness, and I was highly embarrassed.