

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue 5

PIERCE MY EAR - The Call to Discipleship

by Maurice Barratt

Perhaps the greatest gift that God has given to mankind is free will. Have you ever thought what it would be like to be a robot? Being programmed would mean not having to think or make decisions for ourselves. But we are different. Every day we have to make thousands of decisions. We can't escape it. Even if we make up our mind to make no decisions, that's a decision in itself!

So it's very important what decisions we make. Our life hangs on it. There is no such thing as a small decision. One little decision can affect the whole course of our life. What is the most important decision we can ever make in our life? Is it the decision to follow Christ? You would think so. But I believe that there's a much more important decision that we have to make after we become Christians! How can I say that? Can anything be more important than the decision to follow Jesus? Well, I think so, and I think I can prove it, from scripture and from experience. I have five examples to illustrate.

1. Israel

Israel were delivered from Egypt. They had to make a decision to leave or stay behind. But that wasn't a hard decision! They'd been slaves all their lives, under cruel masters. They didn't have to think hard about whether to go or stay - they nearly ran out of Egypt! And it's like that when we accept Jesus. When God opens our eyes and we see what Jesus has to offer, we want to run to Jesus. It's an easy decision. But after Israel left Egypt, they were faced with another decision - a much harder one. That was the decision whether to go into the promised land. God said to them, "Now go in and take the land". Why was that such a hard decision? Well, God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey. Wonderful! But He didn't tell them that the milk and honey belonged to someone else! They had to conquer 7 powerful nations to get it! And there were giants in the land. And we are the same. When we first follow Jesus, everything is wonderful, we're walking on air. But then God says, "Now go and take the land". We'll see what that means for us in a moment. But we know what Israel's decision was. They said "No". They refused! Only Joshua and Caleb - 2 men out of 2 million - were willing to go and obey God. So God said to Israel "Now you will have to stay in the wilderness and die there". He never gave them a second chance. That's frightening. They then changed their minds, and said "We'll go in", and when they tried to, God let them be defeated! We must be careful with God. He's merciful, but we can't play around with mercy, or demand it. If we say "No" to God, especially after He's delivered us, that's a serious thing.

Now this is a picture of our big decision - the call to discipleship. Jesus has too many followers! - and not enough disciples. There's a big difference. Following Jesus is easy. But being a disciple is very

costly. It's a big decision. People think that when we follow Jesus we get our ticket to heaven, and that's it, we're safe. No we're not! Because Jesus isn't looking for followers but for disciples.

2. The Hebrew Slave

Immediately after the Ten Commandments in Exodus come these unusual instructions about how to treat your slaves (Exodus 21:1-6). In those days, there was no social security! If you were destitute, you'd starve - or you could become a slave, and someone would buy you and feed you, and you'd work for them. God said it was all right to buy a man. But you couldn't buy him for life. After 6 years he had to be released. However, if the slave wanted to stay on with his master, he could, for life. His master would then put a mark on him, piercing a hole in his ear lobe, which everyone could see - not a tiny pin-prick like today's ear piercing, but a big hole - a mark for life.

We don't easily understand about slavery, because we associate it with exploitation and suffering. But that's the abuse of slavery, when the master is bad. Slavery to a good master is great! Why? The master has all the responsibilities - the slave has none. The master carries the can, he has the financial burdens, the organizational burdens. All the slave has to do is be obedient. And that's what frightens us! We have to do anything we're told to do. But if we don't mind saying "Yes" every time, then it's great! If we can be happy doing anything, it's a wonderful carefree life!

When we make a decision whether to stay on with our Master, that is also for life. God's character hasn't changed. When big decisions come, He wants us to think about them. He gives us time to make our own decision. When we first come to God, it's like being bought. It's not really our decision at all. It's God's grace. But after a while, we get to know whether we have a good master or not. And then we're in a position to decide. God gives each one of us that initial period to get to know Him. But after that is when we have to make our big decision.

Perhaps you are wondering what all this talk of slavery is about. Didn't Christ come to make us free? Yes! He freed us from the devil. Why? So that we can serve Jesus! We're still slaves - we've just changed masters. So God bought us, with a price. But sooner or later we have to decide - are we going to serve him for life? And He lets us make that decision ourselves. He wants us to reason it out and think about it.

3. My Experience

I had a Christian upbringing. I gave my life to Jesus Christ as a child. For years, I was a follower. I knew Jesus was in my heart. But when I was 30, God challenged me. I knew I had to give everything to Jesus. I could no longer be just a follower - I was being called to be a disciple. I made my decision, and I've never looked back. But it's a completely different life. You see, I used to follow Jesus - but please myself! Now, I don't make the decisions, I just obey. If God says, "Give everything away", I don't even have to think. I just do it. It's no problem!

4. Isaiah

When we first follow Jesus, we experience God's grace helping us in every area of our life. We're carried through. But when He wants to call us as a disciple, He has to take His hand off us and show us ourselves as we are without His grace. That's not so nice! Isaiah was a prophet who knew God. But one day God showed him himself, and Isaiah cried out, "I am a man of unclean lips!" He saw himself. But then God called him and gave him his commission (Isaiah 6:1-8).

5. Peter

Was Peter an "instant disciple"? Matthew's account of Peter's call made it look that way. "Immediately he left his nets and followed Jesus" (Matthew 4:20). But actually, Peter was a "follower" before he was a disciple. Matthew only tells us the end. The other gospels give us the background. In John, we find that Andrew and Peter were at first disciples of John the Baptist! They'd had the "baptism of repentance": they were already following God. In Luke, we read that before Peter's call, Jesus healed his mother-in-law. So, Peter had time to see Jesus' power and character before he made his decision. He was seeing what sort of master Jesus was - but Peter hadn't seen himself yet.

One night they were fishing, and caught nothing (notice, Peter still had his fishing business at that time) and Jesus did a miracle, and suddenly they had a huge catch of fish. What was Peter's reaction? Did he jump up and down with excitement? Did he think to himself "Great! Now I've seen Jesus provide a month's worth of fish - I'll leave the business, because now I know Jesus will provide and prosper me". (Many of us would leave our work and go full-time for God, if God would prove to us that he would provide by doing a miracle - before we leave!)

But that wasn't Peter's reaction at all. He didn't say "Now I can follow you". He said the opposite. "I can't follow you! Depart from me. I'm a sinful man!" Peter saw himself! And he saw who Jesus really was - he was sinful, and Jesus was holy. He saw the distance between them. We have to see that before we're called into service for Jesus. People who go into ministry without seeing that get into terrible problems. It's not a light thing. We've got to get humbled first. The gifts of the Spirit without the fruit of the Spirit are very dangerous.

So Peter recognized that he was a sinful man, and said to Jesus, "It's no good. I can't possibly serve you". But Jesus already knew that Peter was sinful! He just wanted Peter to know it as well. And then he called him to discipleship, and said, "Now you're in a position to be a fisher of men". And Peter left all and followed Him.

The Hebrew slave had 6 years to learn his master's character. It will be different with us. It may be 6 months. It may be 16 years. But God knows the time to face us with the decision.

God doesn't need followers. He needs disciples. This country doesn't need followers of Jesus but disciples of Jesus. Jesus had thousands of followers in His 3 years of ministry. But what happened to the multitudes who were fed in the wilderness, the thousands who were healed?

Only 120 got filled with the Holy Ghost. Why? Because followers won't go through the cross. Only disciples will do that. That's the decision. What's your decision? Are you ready?

Experiences from Life

by Joanna Barratt

My Call To Discipleship

I'd seen it happen so many times before. As I was growing up I'd had really good friends who were dedicated Christians and had been called by God to serve Him in a ministerial capacity, and they had faithfully done so - until they found a husband, and children had come along, From that point onwards they felt that their ministry had changed, and now God wanted them to be submissive wives and godly mothers. It had always jarred with me, because I couldn't see how this could be a ministry from God - I could only see it as fulfilling duty, otherwise millions of other non-Christian people in the world had also been given this ministry and were doing their job well! So I vowed that this would never happen to me. Maurice and I continued to take ministerial engagements, but allowed a gap of 3 months when I would be having our baby. Nathan was 6 weeks old when we took him on our first engagement in England. At 10 weeks old we took him to America for 4 weeks, came back for 10 days and then took him off again to Holland for another 5 weeks of intensive ministry.

The Trials of Motherhood

Before becoming pregnant I had never had any interest whatsoever in children, so consequently I was not prepared for the vast changes that motherhood was to bring about in my life. From the time of his birth Nathan had been subjected to different countries, homes, beds, people - and the only constant thing in his short life was the breast milk that he received from me. Towards the end of our ministry in Holland he seemed to go through a time of acute insecurity and during the night time he would wake every single hour for the comfort of being breast fed. At times he would sleep for only 20 minutes before needing to be fed again. It seemed as though he constantly needed the comfort that only I could give him. This, of course, drained me terribly, as for days the baby kept me awake day and night, and the ministry became an exhausting ordeal. Sometimes we had to travel for 2 hours before arriving at a meeting, and then after the service had finished, another 2 hours travelling before arriving home to get wearily into bed. My concentration and patience went, I was on the verge of tears all the time - I was heading for a breakdown.

A Big Decision

Maurice and I had worked together in the ministry for 25 years and we prided ourselves on always keeping our engagements no matter what obstacles were put in our path, but during this period of ministry in Holland, I let him down twice and he had to preach on his own while I stayed at home, as I felt just too weak to carry on. I knew I had to do something about my situation, and so I made the decision to give up my part in the ministry for about a year, in the hope that Nathan could get into some sort of routine. Since the theft of our musical instruments Maurice had developed

tremendously where his preaching was concerned, so I did my best to encourage him to continue taking bookings without me for this period. For the next couple of months after returning to England, Maurice and I had planned to fulfil some local engagements and take a holiday before embarking on another tour of Scotland. I tried to persuade Maurice to get in touch with the ministers and let them know that I wouldn't be going with him, just to warn them of what was happening, but Maurice wouldn't discuss it with me and kept telling me to wait until nearer the time. I felt sure in my mind that God had spoken to me so I just waited for the situation to sink into his head.

The Call

On the Sunday of our holiday, Maurice and I visited a local church and I asked God to speak to him to let Maurice know what He had told me. But throughout the sermon, instead of the minister speaking to Maurice, he was speaking directly to me! He was talking about Peter, about his failures and in particular his denial of Jesus Christ. When Jesus rose from the dead he didn't find Peter with the other disciples, he found him back at work, fishing, doing his old job. And it was during this time of failure that Jesus called him, yet again, to be His disciple and fulfil His will. The minister stressed that the circumstances were not important, what was important was the call. This particular phrase hit me hard, and I had to examine myself. I knew I'd been called by God; all my life I had known a sense of destiny, I had known that God wanted me in the ministry. Then God brought the scripture to my mind that unless a man is willing to forsake his father, mother, sister, brother, children, lands, houses, everything for His name's sake, then he's not worthy of the Kingdom of God. I was convicted, terribly convicted. In tears I made the promise to God that even though I knew it was going to be very costly I would take up my cross and follow Him. At the end of the meeting I told Maurice that I would be going with him to Scotland and that I would be taking up my position by his side in the ministry even though I had Nathan in tow. The very moment that I gave up the control of my life God stepped in and took hold of me.

The Blessings Followed

That week after I returned from holiday I received a telephone call from a Dutch minister who asked if I would come over to Holland to sing at their Pentecost meeting which was scheduled to be held at the Congress Hall in Den Haag. This meeting was to be filmed and shown on Dutch Cable Television. After looking at our diaries, Maurice and I realised that this was the only weekend free of ministry that we'd had for quite a long time. As Maurice had already arranged to be away at a recording studio in Scotland during this period, he told me to go ahead and accept the invitation. I telephoned the minister and he made all the arrangements and said the airline tickets for myself and Nathan would be waiting at the airport. I'm at a loss to describe how I felt at that particular moment, but I knew that this was the Lord endorsing my decision to carry on in the ministry. At the end of the weekend, as I was preparing to come home to England, somebody came up to me with £125 and told me that this wasn't for the ministry, but for my own personal needs. In all the years that I have been ministering for the Lord, nobody has ever given me a sizeable gift like this before. I came back to England really blessed and encouraged by the Lord. A couple of days later I was having a chat with

Paula, Maurice's younger daughter, She had recently come to live at Barratt Ministries and had noticed that I needed help where the baby was concerned, so she offered her services saying that she would come to Scotland with me and babysit every evening while I went out with Maurice to the meetings. As we generally take a 5-berth caravan with us when we go touring in the UK, this meant that Nathan (who was still only 7 months old) would be sleeping in the same bed every night, looked after by the same person for the whole month, and, as he'd already become very fond of Paula, I knew that this was an answer to my prayer. As I write this story I am again in Holland, in a 3-bedroomed apartment which has been provided by the Dutch organization we help. Maria, Maurice's elder daughter, is here with us too. When Maurice and I go out on ministry, Maria faithfully comes and looks after her little brother (who adores his big sister!) which means that Nathan can sleep in his own bed each night and keep some sort of routine in his life, even though Maurice and I are here, there and everywhere for the Lord.

God's Responsibility

I can't thank God enough for the way He has provided for all my needs. My biggest fear was leaving Nathan with other people whilst I was away so much. But God had already foreseen my decision to take up my cross and prepared his 2 older sisters, who don't do this task out of duty, but because they really do love and enjoy their little brother. Being a mother is a tremendous responsibility, but being a Father who has to look after both mother and child (and that's what God is to me and Nathan) must be a far greater responsibility, which He seems to have willingly accepted!