

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 6**

#### **DENY YOURSELF - The Cost of Discipleship, Part 1**

*by Maurice Barratt*

It's a wonderful thing to receive a revelation from God. Suddenly the truth becomes crystal clear. Peter experienced it when Jesus asked him "Who do you say I am?" He replied: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus recognized that it was not human wisdom or guesswork that made Peter give this answer. It was a revelation from heaven.

From this point in Matthew's gospel, virtually no miracles are recorded. The real drama of Jesus' life had begun. His next words underline the point. "He charged them that they should tell no-one that He was the Christ." The revelation was to be kept secret! It was not to be shouted from the housetops. A strange thing indeed. The truth had to be kept quiet. But stranger things still were to follow. Jesus told his astonished disciples that He was going to suffer and die at the hands of the Jews.

Peter, the very person who had been given the revelation, was the one who found the truth the hardest to accept. There's a lesson for us in that. Because we receive a revelation, it doesn't mean that we understand it! I can sympathize with Peter's point of view. "Why forget the miracles? Why keep it a secret? Why die? No, Lord, this shall never happen to You! You're the Messiah!"

#### **The Messiah's Purpose**

Peter didn't understand. Jesus didn't come to be a great healer and miracle worker; nor did He come to be King. He came to show God's character, which is mercy and compassion. Because of His compassion, He healed people; but His purpose in coming to earth was to go to the cross. We all accept that now, because it's history. We know about the resurrection. We have the benefit of hindsight. The disciples didn't, and they were shocked.

But what about the Messiah's followers? Their expectations of Him had just been radically altered, and Jesus was about to do the same to their expectations of themselves. The followers of a king are in for a good time - power, prestige, influence - that's what everyone wants. But if the king is going to die, what of his followers? Before they had time to think it through, Jesus let them know. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26)

In His dramatic challenge, Jesus said, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me". In this message, (the first of a series), we will look at the first condition: "Deny yourself".

The three conditions are purposely in that order. We have to do the first one first. The problem is, we would rather like to do the last one first! Can't we follow Jesus to start with, then maybe start practising self-denial when we become more mature Christians, and last of all take up the cross - if we have to at all!? But Jesus says in effect that unless you've already denied yourself and taken up your cross, then you're not following Him.

To help us understand these three things, I want to link them with three other things we are all familiar with: the world, the flesh and the devil. I see "denying yourself." as being to do with the world, "taking up the cross" as dealing with the flesh, and "following Jesus" as the means by which we destroy the work of the devil. Of course, we like to do these the wrong way round as well! We all want to fight the devil first, applying "spiritual warfare", and leave being separate from the world until a later date. The problem is, if we aren't denying ourselves by living differently, and if our flesh has not been dealt with before we try fighting the devil, he'll laugh at us, as he did at Sceva's sons, saying, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" (Acts 19:13-17)

It's very important that we examine what Jesus is calling us to do. What, then, does it mean to "deny ourselves?" It doesn't mean "stop sinning". It's not to do with the moral battles we have in our conscience. We all have an old nature; and we all experience what Paul talked about: "The good that I want to do I don't do, but the evil that I don't want to do, I do!" (Romans 7:19) We can only deny ourselves things that we want to do. I wouldn't be denying myself if I didn't sin - I'd be pleased! I can only deny myself things I like. I like what most people like - friends, family, comforts, possessions, pleasures, a nice home, a nice car, nice food ... Those aren't sinful. They're just natural things. But it's in those things that we are called to deny ourselves. That's why I believe that denying yourself is to do with being different from the world.

### **Spiritual Adultery**

John says "Love not the world" - that is, not the created earth, but the system, the thinking of the world, the ways of the world - but he also tells us to not love "the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15). "Things" mean material possessions; it means anything physical. James reinforces John's words: "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God!" (James 4:4) He calls them "adulterers". We know what physical adultery is, but he's not talking about that. He's talking about spiritual adultery. What's that? It's when we go to church and sing "I love you Lord..." "There is nothing I desire besides You ..." and then we prove by our lifestyle, behaviour and conversation during the rest of the week that we love many things besides God. Going to church doesn't count for much. We go to church - another person goes to bingo, another to the pub. The Moslem goes to his mosque. It doesn't mean anything. They're all "clubs". It's how we live outside church that's important.

If we don't live differently in our daily life, we can't prove that we really believe in God. Talk is cheap. It's our values that have to be different. If our values, fashions, politics and integrity are the same as the world's, we haven't proved that we're different - we've proved that we're no different! Spiritual adultery is a serious problem, just as serious as physical adultery - perhaps even more serious.

Does that mean we are not to have material possessions? No! It's not about whether we have things, but whether we love them, whether they have any power or hold over us.

Jesus put it this way. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." We find it difficult to know where our heart's allegiance truly lies. Jesus tells us we can prove it easily enough. Look at where our treasures are, and we'll know for sure our heart is in the same place! Our treasures are what we love and value - not necessarily riches. A poor man also has treasures.

Take a look at your own life and ask yourself some important questions: What do I spend my time on? What do I spend my money on? What do I think about when I go to sleep and wake up? What couldn't I live without? My husband, or wife, or children? My house? Music? TV? What we're doing is finding out if any of those things have any power over us - because if we want to be separate from the world, there are only two alternatives: either we have to leave the world, or the world has to leave us. Some people do leave the world, and enter a monastery. We might call them escapists, but if we can't live in the world without loving the world as well, then they're one step ahead of us! Perhaps we'd be better leaving the world for a while!

We have to get free of the world. We're free from it when nothing in it affects us, impresses us or influences us. That's what it means for the world to leave us. To live in it, but be entirely free from its influence. Remember, there's nothing sinful about "the things that are in the world". It's whether we can deny them to ourselves and live without them, and prove our allegiance to God. Let me give you some practical examples in my own life.

### **The Things We Value**

1. I don't have any insurance. I know people will say I'm irresponsible and not being a good steward of what I have. But I look at it this way; If I say that I trust God and that He looks after me, then I pay the world to look after me in case something goes wrong - can I really say that I trust God? Or does it make my words a farce? As Christians, shouldn't we mean what we say? Or if "trusting God" doesn't mean trusting Him practically, what does it mean?

I had a visit from the insurance man some years ago. So rather than just telling him I didn't want insurance, I tried to show him where I was coming from. First I asked him, "Do you have a policy that will guarantee that my wife will always love me?" He looked bemused. "Or what about my children - I've two daughters growing up, and I'd hate them to get on drugs or into trouble. Can you insure me against that?" "I'm afraid not", he replied. "Well", I ventured, "how about insuring me so that I'll always be happy?" He must have thought I was joking, but I was being serious. Anyway, he did his best. "I can insure your house, your car, your possessions, even your life", he said, giving me the chance to make my point. "But I don't value those things" I replied. "I only want to insure the things I value. You see, I'm a Christian." "Oh" he enthused, "we sell insurance to plenty of Christians!" "Well, now you've met a real one", I said. "I really do trust God. I'm not scared of what happens. It really doesn't matter to me if I lose everything tonight. I might be a bit sad, but I've made my decision, I've counted the cost, and I know I can trust God".

## **Living as a Witness**

I thought he'd just laugh at me and think I was a fool. But he surprised me. He said "I wish I could live like that!" He continued, "I'm insured up to the eyeballs. I couldn't sleep at night without knowing I was insured." He'd realized that he wasn't free, and that I was. He was having to pay for it, and I wasn't! I realised then that the world won't criticize you for having no insurance. They'll admire you. They'll glorify God, as people always do when they see something that they can't explain, behaviour that goes beyond what they are capable of. That's what being a witness means. That's what it means to be a light to the world. People in the world won't criticize us. People in the church will! But that's because it shows them up. If we prove we can take Jesus at His word, we expose the people who don't! Please don't think that I'm suggesting you should go out and cancel your insurance. Certainly not if you're going to worry that you might get burgled or have an accident! You have to sit down and count the cost. If you haven't the faith, you need insurance.

2. I don't vote. Why? Because I'm an alien! If I go to a foreign country, I can't vote there because I don't belong there. We're supposed to be citizens of heaven, pilgrims, aliens, foreigners in the world. We want to promote God's kingdom, His values, His way, His lifestyle - a real alternative - and we can't promote God's kingdom through the world's system. We can't promote God's politics through the world's politics. The two systems are opposed. One is corrupt, the other incorruptible. But the older the world grows, the more gullible Christians become. It's a dangerous time. When I was in Poland, I learned that Polish people will go over to Germany to work for a couple of years, and while they're there, they live like paupers. No fancy food, no car, just the bare essentials. Then they go back to Poland with all the money they've saved, buy a Mercedes, and a satellite dish, and live like kings!

Now the question. If they'll do that for a Mercedes, for treasures on earth that rust and corrupt and get stolen, why won't we do it for heaven and for God? Logically, there would seem to be only one reason - we don't really believe in heaven! We only think we do. But real faith is always provable. If we like nice things - and we all do - why don't we lay up some nice things

in our real home? It can only be because we're not so sure about our real home. We're not going to be sitting on a cloud with a harp! Jesus talked of real mansions and palaces and true riches, responsibilities, status, reputation and power. Or do you think it's only symbolic and "spiritual"?

## **The Rich Young Ruler**

When the rich young ruler came to Jesus, he had everything going for him in the world - he had wealth, youth and status. Jesus had a deal for him - a swap. Jesus didn't just call him to give up his earthly treasures. He said "Sell all you have, give to the poor", but then He added "... and you'll have treasure in heaven". That's the deal. And Jesus didn't tell him that the earthly treasure was physical but the heavenly treasure was only symbolic. I've found that the problem with people who think the heavenly treasure is symbolic is that they start saying that the giving up of earthly treasure is also symbolic! "It's only to do with your attitude", they say, and that becomes fair justification for living exactly as they please.

It's easy to kid ourselves. But the cost of discipleship is meaning what we say, putting actions behind our words and swapping the values of one kingdom for another.

Those who expected the Messiah to be King weren't wrong. They just got the timing wrong. When Jesus comes as King, his disciples will be the followers of a King, and will reign with Him. But we can only reign with Him then if we follow Him now, and we can only follow Him now if we deny ourselves.

### **Experiences From Life**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **My Greatest Challenge**

I have never seen in any church anything to compare with what I witnessed with my own eyes 20 years ago in my own church. I was brought up on a miraculous ministry. The miracles were so impressive that Granada television, at their own expense, produced an hour long documentary of the events going on in the church and showed it on television at peak viewing time to millions of people. This documentary was later shown in many countries of the world and people from Greenland, Iceland and many outlandish places came to the church looking for God's healing power. The highlight of our yearly calendar used to be a Divine Healing Crusade when we would invite everybody, Christian and non Christian alike, to attend. We were never disappointed, tremendous things always took place. But one year the minister did something very unusual. He told us not to invite friends, church members or people who were sick because God had told him to hold a crusade particularly for the church members and that he should speak from the Sermon on the Mount. I was 26 then, and had been attending the church since I was 9. During the course of all those years I'd learned very much about God. I'd also become very involved in church activities when at the age of 15 I'd become the church organist, church secretary, and had been asked to join a musical gospel group as a singer. The church had answered so many of my needs and had helped me through many traumatic and lonely years after leaving home at the age of 16. Yes, God had been of tremendous 'value' to me, and I was glad that I was a Christian. But the Sermon on the Mount was different, I found that I wasn't being faced with Christianity but with discipleship, and I had to ask myself the question, "Am I of any 'value' to God?"

### **A Personal Challenge**

God began to challenge me about the practical things a Christian should do like praying, fasting, almsgiving. To be honest, I'd never heard a sermon on almsgiving so I didn't know what it really was. As far as fasting was concerned this was something I thought people did when someone was dying or in dire need. I didn't realise that these were things a disciple was expected to do as a lifestyle. I know for sure that this crusade for the church had been inspired by God because after 6 meetings a week for a whole month, the minister had only gone through the first 8 verses of Matthew 5, and

the effect on the church was so devastating that he promised us he would continue to preach the Sermon on the Mount until he had finished ... it took 5 years! Those who had ears to hear in the church were turned upside down, and I was one of them. During this intensive teaching, God challenged me to fast for a whole week on water. It was a frightening prospect for me because I'd never gone one whole day, let alone a week. I knew in my heart that if I stayed at home I would find it too easy to give in to temptation, so I hired a holiday cottage where there was no food to tempt me. I arrived at the cottage equipped with bible, hymnal and a book that contained a diary of the prophecies, visions and words of encouragement God had given me over the years. The house seemed so cold and lonely. I looked around to see what facilities there were. I tried the television and found that it didn't work, there was no radio or cassette player, and the telephone had a lock on which meant I could only receive calls! I panicked - God had challenged me to spend a week with Him, but I didn't know Him. He was a stranger to me. I must admit I expected some tremendous experiences during this week, but all I discovered was how self-centred, carnal and unspiritual I was. I think this was one of the hardest weeks God has ever asked me to live through, and I have to confess I couldn't wait for the 7th day to be completed.

### **Giving God Rights**

In one respect I think it's a relatively easy thing to give God your life because you can pass over all your burdens and problems and know He'll take care of them. But it's a very different matter if God decides to accept your gift and use your life. This experience of fasting showed me that, until now, whatever I had given to God I had given of my free will ... things I had wanted to give Him ... but now God had decided to put demands on me and ask for things that I would never have dreamed of giving to Him, and I found this to be very disconcerting and costly. And because I didn't refuse to give God this week, I found that He began to work in my life and do things that I never expected. Throughout my school days I was chosen to sing solos in concerts, festivals, etc. It was a natural progression for me to sing and play the organ in the church because that's where my talent lay - in music. By the time I was 26 I had fulfilled a lot of my ambitions, making records and cassettes, and was even being paid an astronomical amount as a session singer with a company who produced radio and television jingles. Life for me as a singer couldn't have been better, I was given a regular platform and recognition both inside and outside the church. But after this fast, God spoke and said He wanted me give up all my activities in the church. At first I doubted that God could say something like this, but I knew His voice and He proved to me (in quite a drastic way) that I had heard correctly. I obeyed what He was asking, despite much protest from people.

### **"You Need to be Humbled!"**

One day a member of the church asked me why I'd stepped down from the platform and I told her that God had told me to do so. She then told me something that surprised me greatly. Apparently for a few weeks she had been fasting and praying for me because she was concerned, and God had told her I'd been in the limelight far too long and I needed to be humbled!! Coming from another person I might have been very offended, but she'd just told me that she'd fasted and prayed for me and I accepted gratefully what she told me. I had never felt so close to God. I knew that at this

specific period in my life I was doing His will and not fulfilling my own ambitions and desires, and yet for all that, within a matter of a few weeks I was out of the church followed by terrible wicked rumours. I've noticed people can only judge appearances. Whilst I was on view working in the church, they thought I was spiritual, but once I was off the platform and obeying God it seemed as though I lost all the protection that the platform offered me, and the devil made a vicious attack and caused people to question why I'd stepped down ... and they came to natural conclusions thinking that I'd fallen into sin and had had to be disciplined, and all their secret jealousy and envy really came to the fore as I found out what they really thought of me. The brutality and viciousness of my "brothers and sisters" in the church was just too much and I ended up leaving, and almost lost my salvation. But it was during this period of desolation that God really began to build my life up from scratch as, He laid new foundations in my heart. He showed me how, for all these years, I had been serving the church instead of serving Him.

### **A New Beginning**

A year after this experience I started my Christianity again, but this time without the props of being on church platforms and singing in public. When I read my bible now it was because I wanted to know God. When I prayed now it was because I wanted to commune with God, and it wasn't for what I could pass on to others in the church because I was in a position of authority. As far as I was concerned I thought my singing career in the church was finished completely, and said: "God gives, God takes away, blessed is the name of the Lord" .Yet God was very merciful to me and 3 years later He put me back in the ministry, but this time I'd had a "heart transplant" and my attitude towards my service for God was totally different and has never gone backwards to what it was before. I thank God for taking hold of this life of mine and making me do what I didn't want to do, because I know that His way is best. "The Lord knows the way that I take, and when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).