

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue no. 8

FOLLOW ME - The Cost of Discipleship Part 3

by Maurice Barratt

Jesus always let his hearers know that following Him was more than it might at first seem. It's not just a matter of making a decision and saying "Yes, I'll follow You, Lord!" We know from the gospels that some people did say that. "I will follow You wherever You go", one scribe announced to Jesus (Matthew 8:19). That sounds like real commitment! It doesn't sound like a half-hearted, wishy-washy decision. It would be accepted in our churches today as a decision for Christ, another soul in the Kingdom. But Jesus was not so ready to accept it like that. In fact, He rebuffed the scribe with the words "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head". It seemed that rather than encouraging this would-be disciple, Jesus tried to put him off! Why? Because Jesus knew that His disciples had to realize the cost.

And for the same reason, He plainly said, "If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me". Those are the conditions for discipleship. Deny yourself, and take up your cross, and the consequence is - you are following Christ! You are doing what you wanted to do in the first place - following Jesus - but you had not realised at first what the cost was, and what the conditions were.

In this series we have been linking the 3 parts of Jesus' statement with the 3 enemies of discipleship - the world, the flesh and the devil. Denying yourself is to do with being different from the world. Taking up your cross is to do with allowing God to deal with your flesh. But now, following Jesus is to do with destroying the works of the devil.

God's Work

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). What is the devil's work? The exact opposite of God's work. God's work is to make people holy, like Himself. The devil's work is to make people unholy, like himself, utterly different from God.

Jesus' work was to destroy, or undo, all the devil's work. Not to destroy the devil - the devil is still alive, and prowling round like a roaring lion - but to undo all his work, to reverse the process, to make people holy. Jesus came to die - yes, but the cross was only the means to an end. The end, the purpose, was to destroy all the devil's work, to make people holy, like God. "Be ye holy as I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).

Christians who have been through the first two stages - those who are denying themselves and taking up their cross - can justly claim to be following Christ. The cost of discipleship may be high, but the consequences are glorious. There are two important consequences for such people. Firstly, God listens to them. How many times God seems not to hear our prayers! And unanswered prayer,

as E.M. Bounds says, is the bane of Christianity, breeding unbelief and discouragement. But answered prayer is within the reach of all disciples. Secondly, the devil fears them. The devil doesn't fear power. He has plenty of that. But he does fear holiness, because he has none of that. The devil has none of God's character. "We know who you are" cried the demons to Jesus, "the holy one of God." (Mark 1:24). Not "the powerful One" but "the holy One".

Qualifications For Ministry

True ministry can not begin until we have been through the process, until the world and the flesh have been dealt with in our lives. Until then, we are not qualified to minister to others. This takes time, and God is happy for it to take many years, for a thorough job to be done.

We can see in the lives of three famous Bible characters how they each went through this process of self-denial and taking up the cross, and came to a position of power with God and power against the devil.

Our first example is Moses. He was born in Egypt, which symbolizes the world. As Pharaoh's adopted son, he was trained in the culture of Egypt, and destined for greatness in the world. But God's call was upon him, and he had to leave the world (Egypt) and have his flesh dealt with, before he could begin his ministry and deliver Israel. In fact, Moses tried to fulfil that ministry in the flesh, while he was still in Egypt. He released one Israelite, and killed one Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-12). That was all he could do! - because he hadn't been through the process yet. And because so many Christians haven't been through the process yet, the church today is in the same trap: working in our own strength, spending millions of pounds on evangelistic campaigns, organizing and administering like fury, but accomplishing in the flesh only a minute fraction of what God wants to do through us. But what God wants to happen can never happen unless we will go through the process. No self denial - no effective ministry. No crucifixion of the flesh - no revival.

The church often does no more than collect the devil's cast-offs - the people with whom the devil has gone too far, the drug addicts, the alcoholics, the ones who have been beaten by overwhelming circumstances and problems. The devil batters them, and because of their desperate need, they cry out to God and find Him. Thus the devil would seem to be the greatest agent in helping people find God!

But this should not be the way. It is never the way in revival. The vast majority of the 50 million population of Great Britain are normal, respectable people. They have no dire needs; they have not been battered by the devil; therefore they have no conviction or need of God. So our evangelism hardly bothers them. But in revival, these normal, respectable people come under conviction. Only revival will save our nation - but for that, the church has to go through the process.

The Process Of Change

Moses had to leave Egypt. In fact, he was forced to run away. That's the best thing we can ever do, to run away from the world! But then he faced 40 long years in the wilderness, letting God crucify

his flesh. Leaving the world was a quick decision. Crucifying the flesh is a slow process. Moses' time alone with God as a shepherd in the wilderness changed him dramatically. He had been brought up in Pharaoh's palace, educated, cultured, eloquent and confident. But he lost all that in the desert, all his self-confidence was broken. When God finally called him to his ministry, at the age of 80, he said to God "I am not eloquent ... I am slow of speech". Talking to sheep for 40 years, you lose your eloquence! His flesh had been dealt with. He'd been aristocracy. Now he was humbled and broken, "the meekest man on earth" (Numbers 12:3).

He was ready for ministry. The devil feared him, and God listened to him. At his command, the whole nation of Israel was freed, and the entire Egyptian army drowned. Instead of killing one and freeing one, he killed thousands, and freed millions. And when the people disobeyed God, and He threatened to destroy them, Moses alone interceded with God, and God listened to him, and "repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people" (Exodus 32:14). Think of that - God repented because of one man's words!

Daniel - Living Differently

Daniel is our second example. He was captive in Babylon, which represents the church in the world, captive to the world's system. The church is in Babylon now. We can't escape that fact. But we can do something about it. Daniel decided to live differently. He chose to not be a part of it. He was "in it" but he was not "of it". He chose to deny himself, and rather than eat the king's food, he ate simple food - pulses. He deliberately set time aside for prayer; 3 times a day he prayed towards Jerusalem. Several times in the book of Daniel he fasted. All in all, he lived "the secret life of a disciple". The devils feared him - the lions in the den had no power to hurt him. And God listened to him - when he prayed, he set in motion mighty angels in the heavens and instigated the return of Israel to their land.

Jesus - Our Great Example

The final example is Jesus. Jesus is the One we are following, and even He had to leave the world and deny Himself, and His flesh, too, had to be crucified. "Out of Egypt have I called my Son" - Matthew says the scripture prophesied of Jesus (Matthew 2:15). Have you ever wondered why Jesus had to go into Egypt? The action was prophetic. It symbolized the fact that Jesus was born into the world, into its system. He had all of the influences of the world, the flesh and the devil to contend with and overcome. He was tempted in every way that we are (Hebrews 4:15). God had to call Jesus out of the world, out of all its enticements and influences. Jesus was not immune to all the things we have to deal with - ambition, pride, reputation, desires. Moses had to go into the wilderness for 40 years. Jesus also had to go into the wilderness for 40 days. He had to separate Himself from the world. Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh, and it had to be dealt with. At the end of His ministry, His body would be crucified; but before His ministry started, His flesh needed crucifying. The book of Hebrews says that Jesus "learned obedience by the things he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). "The things he suffered" does not mean his passion and death. That was right at the end; it was too late to "learn obedience" then. But we know that throughout His ministry Jesus needed to go aside and

pray, getting up a great while before day, sometimes spending the whole night in prayer. He fasted in the wilderness. Before He called His disciples to forsake everything they had, He forsook everything He had. He had been a carpenter's son. But we never read that He offered to mend anyone's broken chair or make a table for them. He had finished with the world, forsaken it completely. "The prince of this world", He said "has nothing in Me"; and that is because first of all, there was nothing left of "this world" in Him. He had denied Himself and separated Himself from everything of the world. Jesus didn't begin His ministry until after those 40 days in the wilderness, and after He'd been through 30 years training - the process. But when He returned from the wilderness, it was in the power of the spirit (Luke 4:14) - the spirit of holiness. Then it was that the demons cried out "We know who You are - the Holy One of God!" (Luke 4:34) And only then did Jesus quote, and fulfil, Isaiah's prophecy: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me ..." (Luke 4:18).

The Glorious Possibility

We began this series by pointing out that Christians are rather fond of reversing the order of Jesus' statement. We want power over the devil first; we want to just follow Christ. But it is only possible to follow Him if we have fulfilled the first two conditions, denied ourselves and taken up our cross. It is only possible for us to destroy the works of the devil when the world and the flesh have been dealt with.

But what a glorious possibility! You and I can destroy the works of the devil. That is power.

You and I can be true disciples of Christ, living the glorious life described in the Sermon on the Mount. We can be people who God listens to, people who, in Brother Andrew's phrase, "change God's mind". Let me encourage you to take up the challenge of Jesus! Let me encourage you to deny yourself, live differently from the world, begin to change your lifestyle, resolve to spend time with God, pray more, fast more, give more. Be ruthless, strive with all your might! If your eye offends you, pluck it out. If the TV offends you, kick it out! Be radical. Forget how you've lived your Christian life so far - start afresh. Imagine that today is your first day as a Christian. Today, the saying goes, is the first day of the rest of your life. It can be the start of a completely different Christianity for you. We can all take up the challenge and meet it! If we do, we will become people who don't just pray for revival but carry it. Revival is us. That's the challenge.

Experiences from Life

by Joanna Barratt

Giving God Rights

It's happened so often that I have come to recognise there must be a principle involved here. My family became Christians when I was only nine years old, but I'm afraid the lifestyle which we led caused me to grow up to be a very rebellious, stubborn, quick-witted and sarcastic teenager... not that I was aware then of my shortcomings; there always seemed to be some justifying reason why I

didn't get along with people. After discharging myself from school at the age of fifteen I talked my way into a clerical job which I thoroughly enjoyed. I loved going out to work every day, and the idea of a wage and bonus at the end of the week proved an added incentive. I worked hard and within two months was promoted to a position of supervisor over two women older than me. Promotion must have gone to my head, as after another four weeks had passed I was told to do something quite menial by one of my superiors which I adamantly refused to do. The next day when I arrived at work I was called into the boss's office, handed a wage packet and told I was free to leave immediately. I was devastated and wondered what had gone wrong. I really had enjoyed my work, but I'm afraid that when it came to female superiors telling me what to do I just couldn't handle it.

Bad Attitude - Bad Witness!

My next few jobs were no different - they all ended up in the same way, I would start off great, but then I would end up being sacked for my rebellious attitude. What seemed to make matters worse was the fact that people always knew that I was a Christian. From my very first day at work people used to question me as to what I did in my spare time and I told them that I went to church, I was the organist, I sang in a church-based group, and this always used to open up conversation about God and the gospel. So to end up being dismissed from my employment reflected badly on my Christianity and witness, and I felt that not only was bringing disgrace on myself but also on God. Many times I pleaded with God to change my character, but it was no use. I always ended up losing my temper and doing something which I regretted later on. My problem was intensified by the fact that I used to live in a flat and I needed a regular income each week to pay the rent and bills - and I knew that if something didn't happen soon to enable me to hold down a job then I would end up in real trouble.

It was at this point that I decided to join a temporary services bureau where people could take jobs on a temporary basis to cover for somebody in permanent employment who was ill or on holiday. It meant that I would stay at a firm no longer than one or maybe two weeks at a time before I was moved into some other temporary position. Some of the jobs were good, others were not so good, but this wasn't important because I didn't stay long enough to encounter any problems - except one particular time when I was sent to an insurance company and put in a typing pool filled with women, with a woman supervisor over all of us. Our work quota was to type sixty letters a day which meant that you had to be a swift, accurate typist. But often I had races with myself to see just how many letters I could complete, and sometimes I would end up with a hundred letters under my belt at the end of the day!

My work capacity was recognised by the male bosses and I was regularly asked if I would become a permanent member of staff, but I adamantly refused time and time again. The reason for this was because of the female supervisor who was over us - she didn't take to me one little bit and would always be looking for opportunities to find fault with me. Because I was there as a temporary employee I used to ignore her snide remarks and think to myself "Well, I may not be here next

week.” Other times I would think, “I don’t work for this firm, I work for the bureau,” and “she has no real authority over me” .Because of my change in attitude, I managed to hold down this job for nine months until a permanent person was found to take my place. I left the firm on good friendly terms and was reassured that if ever I wanted to come back to become a permanent member they would accept me without question.

Working For God

This “success” made me think, and I knew without a shadow of a doubt that if I had been permanently employed there I wouldn’t have lasted nine months at all because there would have been a terrible confrontation between me and this woman supervisor at some stage. From this point my attitude completely changed and I realised that I wasn’t even working for the bureau - I was working for God, and should treat every situation of employment in this manner whether I was permanent or temporary. A preacher friend of mine once said in a sermon, “if you can’t change your circumstances, change your attitude” .From then on I worked for many firms on a temporary basis and was able to witness for Jesus Christ without being disgracefully sacked, and every firm offered me permanent employment, which I refused, until I had the opportunity to work for an advertising agency. This was totally different to any other employment which I had been in so far, it was so exciting and vibrant. I came into contact with many famous people and was given the opportunity to model and do all sorts of things which I’d never dreamed I could have become involved with. When I was asked to work for this firm on a permanent footing I jumped at the chance.

Fulfilment And Frustration

I never dreamed I could be so fulfilled. The people I worked with were not all in a mould, as was usual in the ordinary run-of-the-mill office, but because of the nature of this business they were all incredibly individual. The advertising agency was situated in an old detached house with three storeys and basements where bedrooms and lounges had been converted characteristics into offices, and yet the original structure of the place had been kept intact. To get his inspiration, one of the “ideas men” used to run a bath full of cold water and sit in it in the hope that he would come up with some weird and wonderful slogan for a new advertising campaign which would catch the eye and imagination of the public! The people here were so eccentric that it didn’t matter what ideas they had, however bizarre or strange. Consequently my Christianity was just accepted in the same manner as everybody else’s weird life-style - and it was never taken as something that could possibly challenge them. I witnessed and prayed for a long time that God would use my testimony and lifestyle to speak to these people and bring them to Christ, but nothing happened.

A New Challenge

I’d been at this job for nearly two years when the minister of my church decided that he would hold a crusade for the church members on the theme of The Sermon on the Mount. As I was the organist and worked very closely with the minister, he shared with me beforehand what his intentions were

and stressed that it was very important that we as the leadership ought to prepare ourselves for these meetings. I had never done it before, but I decided that I would fast all day at work then ride to the church on my bicycle and have something small and light before the service and save my main meal until I got home. For a whole month I put the effort in, and as the crusade was meant to challenge the church I reaped the benefit of that challenge and my whole life was devastated. I found that I wasn't thinking of the Sermon on the Mount only during the meetings, but God invaded my thoughts all through the day, and in the course of a month I changed dramatically without even realising it. By the end of that month I had heard twenty-four sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, the pastor had preached it so thoroughly that he'd only got through the first eight verses of Matthew chapter five!

So I was left in no shadow of a doubt about what God intended that the characteristics of a Christian should be. And I knew I didn't match up - hence the challenge! I suppose it was this realisation that caused all my soul-searching during the day. I knew I wasn't in the right place with God - but I didn't know what to do about it. I need not have worried. God had seen my efforts over the month and now He was doing things in my life that I could never have done on my own.

A Bewildering Experience

I remember walking into the office of one of the directors' secretaries one day to ask her something, and we were just chatting in the normal way when suddenly she stopped in her tracks, blushed, put her hand over her mouth and apologised for her foul language saying, "I'm really sorry Joanna, I didn't mean to say that in front of you". When I asked her what she meant she said to me so sincerely, 'Well you're holy and I really didn't mean to say anything like that in front of you'. I walked back to my office feeling very bewildered, I didn't know what had changed this girl's attitude. She was recognised as the most shocking, sexually explicit, crude and daring girl in the company (which was really saying something amongst all these eccentric people!) and yet she was apologising to me for her language!

A week later she and three of her close pals at work asked if they could come along to one of the meetings at the church, after which they told everybody in the firm how much they had enjoyed it. A couple of weeks later one of the bosses came, then shortly afterwards two other girls came, one of whom was a Catholic, and the other one who had been saved and filled with the Holy Ghost on her first visit never stopped going to the church after that. My life at work took on a new meaning as I began to hold prayer meetings and Bible studies during the lunch hours for those who were interested, until the time when God told me to leave work and go full-time for Him in the ministry.

The Principle Of Self-Denial

I didn't realise when I made the decision to deny myself meals for that month, that it would have an enormous effect on my life. At the time I was doing it because I felt responsible for the meetings, and I put effort in for the cause of the crusade, and yet God rewarded me personally. And this has happened so often in my life that I have to recognise that it is a principle. Accepting this lifestyle, and

practising self-denial for the right reasons, provides God an opportunity to touch areas in our lives that He's never been able to get near before.