

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

**Issue No. 12**

### **SEEING THE MULTITUDES**

#### **An Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount**

*by Maurice Barratt*

The beginning of Jesus' ministry was certainly spectacular. Returning from the wilderness "in the power of the spirit" (Luke 4:14). He came to Galilee and began "teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria... and there followed Him great multitudes of people ..." (Matthew 5:23-25)

When you have a miraculous ministry, it quickly brings fame. And when you do miracles, people are all the more willing to listen to your message and believe it. This is why many people believe it is vital that we have signs and wonders and powerful demonstrations, because it brings multitudes in to hear the message of the gospel. But how true is this?

For Jesus, as so often, did not do what we expect He should have done. Instead of capitalizing on His fame and drawing ever bigger crowds to His healing meetings, instead of "winning souls", He left the multitudes and went up into a mountain! And the crowds didn't follow Him up the mountain. Only His disciples did.

Why would Jesus leave all the multitudes of people who needed His compassion and healing? Lame, sick people couldn't follow Him up a mountain! What was so important to Jesus that He would leave His divine healing ministry?

#### **Jesus' Real Ministry**

The key is that Jesus did not come to just change us outwardly. He is never satisfied with changing only our circumstances. Jesus wants to change us inwardly. He wants to transform our characters, and change the old nature of Adam for the new nature, the character of Christ Himself. He wants to replace the works of the flesh in our lives by the fruit of the Spirit. This was Jesus' true ministry. He had compassion for people's physical and temporal welfare, certainly. And today He still heals, delivers and blesses us. But that's His compassion, not His purpose. Compassion is just one of the effects of His character; but His purpose is to transform us into all of that character! So Jesus was content to leave the ministry of healing and concentrate on teaching His little flock His real message.

## **The Bible In Three Chapters**

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew's gospel, The Sermon on the Mount, is the only recorded full sermon of Jesus. And full it is! It contains the essence of all His teaching. In fact, it contains the essence of all the teaching of the Bible. If you want to know the message of the Bible, it's all concentrated in these three chapters. All the law and the prophets are fulfilled in this teaching on the mountain. Jesus quotes extensively from the Old Testament to show that He and His teaching didn't destroy or contradict the law but fulfilled it. The teaching of the epistles only amplify what Jesus taught here in the Sermon on the Mount.

Parables and prophecy, types and shadows, need explanation. But this is clear, straightforward, easy to understand, practical teaching, from the lips of the Son of God. "He opened His mouth, and taught them". As such it is very precious. Jesus said, "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to hear the things you hear, and have not heard them" (Matthew 17:17). We are obligated to give very careful attention to every word that Jesus spoke. As the letter to the Hebrews says, "Therefore we ought to give more heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 2:1).

When we look at Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, we don't find much about soul-winning or evangelism. Everything is about personal lifestyle and character. Neither do we find an emphasis on signs and wonders; rather we find warnings that not everybody who does signs and wonders is a true Christian. Why is this? Is evangelism wrong? Are signs and wonders wrong? Not at all. But if evangelism is our main emphasis, we are missing the point. If signs and wonders are our main emphasis, we are in great danger. Jesus has the right emphasis - on character, on lifestyle, on purity of motive, on humility.

History is littered with the sad records of evangelists with wonderful healing ministries, people genuinely anointed of God, who "forgot the weightier matters of the law" and neglected to attend to their own characters and lifestyle. They fell, they are still falling today, and they will continue to fall. Our emphasis must be right. Our priorities must be right. What are your priorities?

## **A Personal Testimony**

My father founded a church on the miraculous power of God. His ministry was supernatural from the beginning. The church experienced mighty miracles, extraordinary signs and wonders. There was a time when, as the people raised their hands and hearts to God in worship, shiny droplets of fragrant oil would appear on their hands. The whole church would be filled with a beautiful perfume. Representatives from the Assemblies of God were sent to find out whether the amazing things they had heard were true. True they were! Miracles happened. There was dancing and laughter, excitement and tears, salvation, healing and deliverance. The church attracted world-wide attention.

But then there was a change. Every year the church used to hold an evangelistic outreach for a month. The emphasis was on soul-winning and signs and wonders. But this year my father decided something different was needed. He saw that the people in the church were not being built up. They were not growing in grace. They were sold out to excitement and miracles, but they weren't growing more like Christ. My father realised a profound thing: you can't build solid Christians on the

miraculous. However genuine, however powerful, however anointed it is, the excitement of the supernatural will never build Christians into the image of Christ.

So instead of a miracle crusade, my father held teaching for the church members, every day for a month. And he chose the Sermon on the Mount to teach from. He wasn't confident that he would be able to get through messages from three chapters to see him through a message for every day of the month; but to his amazement, when the end of the month came, he found he had hardly touched the surface of Jesus' teaching! He taught from the Sermon on the Mount every Sunday for the next five years!

And that is why I am teaching it today. Not because I heard it and approved of it, or had it drummed into me, but because it personally changed me; changed not just my thinking but my lifestyle. It was a practical and radical change, and a change that has lasted, and been ongoing, ever since. That's why we are going to study the Sermon on the Mount together in the next issues of "Challenge".

Now that we know why it's so important to study the Sermon on the Mount, let's take a brief overview of its contents. Jesus begins by describing our goal - the qualities of character which gain us acceptance into the kingdom (Matthew 5:1-12). Like the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, it is actually a description of Christ's own character. The only way we can have more of this character is by having more of Christ in us, which means less of self.

Having set out the qualities we need, Jesus then shows us that we all fall hopelessly short of the mark! Keeping the letter of God's commandments is not good enough - Jesus came to fulfil the law (not, as some think, to somehow "replace it by grace") - and fulfilling the law means keeping not just the letter of the law but the spirit, the real meaning, of it as well (verses 17-20). Jesus then gives 6 examples (verses 21-48) of the difference between the letter and the spirit of the law, and each example exposes our secret inner lives, our thoughts and hidden motives, showing us that we are not godly at all, no matter how outwardly righteous we may appear.

Chapter 6 is concerned with "the secret life of the disciple". The secret, inner motives of our hearts which Jesus exposed in chapter 5 can only be dealt with by another secret, inner means. So in verses 1-18, secret prayer, secret fasting and secret aims-giving are explained. The rest of the chapter continues to deal with our motives, values and attitudes to service of God and materialism.

Chapter 7 contains more practical instruction and examples: on judging others, on prayer, on discernment of false prophets. Jesus concludes the whole sermon with an illustration - the house built on rock and the house built on sand (verses 24-26).

### **A Misunderstood Illustration**

Sometimes this is taken out of context and used as a gospel message, and the rock then becomes a symbol for Jesus; but this is not the true meaning. In fact, Jesus clearly explains the meaning Himself. He said that the house built on a rock is people who hear his words and do them, and the house built on sand is also people who hear his words - but don't do them. This is a powerful warning. It is not enough to hear the Sermon on the Mount, to believe it, to accept it, to study it, or to preach it. Only

doing it counts. We face the same danger as we embark on our study of the Sermon on the Mount. Will we believe it and study it and accept it - or will we start to do it? To only believe it is to reject it.

The people “were astonished at his doctrine” (verse 28). So are the church today! The Sermon on the Mount is too strong, too radical, too destructive to self. It’s too challenging to the church. So the great majority of the church don’t practice it. They may believe it, but they don’t do it. And that’s why our country is in a mess. That’s why the light has gone out of our nation, and the salt has become tasteless. Take it personally. The challenge is here for every one of us.

## **Experiences From Life**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **Learning To Swim**

“Wendy, Wendy, I can swim! I can swim!” It can be quite embarrassing sometimes being the mother of a 3-year-old child. Maurice and I had taken Nathan on holiday when I was 8 months pregnant with Izaak. He’d received the “Peter Pan” video for his birthday and watched it rather a lot, and had consequently started naming himself Peter and me Wendy. That was OK at home, but the problem was that he called me Wendy everywhere we were, and in some circumstances, it was quite embarrassing. As I was 8 months pregnant, Maurice took Nathan to the swimming pool each day and I would go along about 20 minutes later to see how they were doing. The last time Nathan had been swimming was when he was 10 months old so this was quite a novel experience for him and he was always thrilled to bits to see me enter the doors. We couldn’t convince him that he wasn’t really swimming because there he was, with his rubber ring on, floating and splashing about in the water without his feet touching the ground. I’ve learned a lot watching Nathan grow up, and it’s caused me to look back and remember quite a few things that happened in my own life.

### **Playing in the Spirit**

As our regular readers know I was the church organist from the age of 15. My Pastor was full of encouragement and before each service he would take those participating in the service into the vestry and we would pray for the meeting. He would give us a pep talk so that we all understood what the aim of the meeting was and have a common vision in view. Nearly every time we walked onto the platform he would say to me, “Now, Joanna, you have to play and sing in the Spirit this morning”, and I would always respond with a knowing look as if to say, “Of course, that’s what I always do” - I knew what we were after and every week I would put my heart and soul into what I was doing - until one day I actually did sing and play in the Spirit! It took me completely by surprise, but suddenly the Spirit of God came upon me during a song and something happened which I’d never experienced before, it was as though I’d suddenly become possessed and something had taken over even my mind and I was no longer aware of what I was doing or where I was, it was just me and God.

## **Educational Growth**

Becoming a Christian is just like being born. Every child, if fed properly, will grow daily until it becomes an adult, but unless that child has been schooled and educated it can grow up being very stunted in its development of knowledge and experience. I was introduced to the church at the age of 9 and by the time I was 12 I'd been baptised in water and in the Holy Spirit. Now what? It wasn't until the age of about 23, when Pastor Barratt started to preach the Sermon on the Mount at Sharon Church, that I realised I needed to do something practical to grow. I had a very good friendship and relationship with the Pastor's two daughters, and because we were all desiring to be more like God we decided to holiday together, but make it more like a retreat. We planned out how we would spend our days incorporating time when we would pray and seek God together for development in our spiritual lives. Lis, who was the same age as myself, was the only one of us who had ever seen a vision so we made her lead the meetings, and during the course of that week I tried my best to leave myself open to God.

By the end of our time together both myself and Chris, his youngest daughter, were seeing visions, albeit very small pictures, but still we had learned somewhat to open ourselves up to God. Because we found so much benefit from holidaying in this way together we decided to do this for a few years afterwards and slowly we got to know God in a better and more deeper way and, at the same time, realised that we'd always only had our toes in the water - we'd never learned to swim.

## **Living Christianity**

The spiritual realm is a vast realm and totally outside our human understanding. I'm convinced that even during a whole lifetime we could never understand God in the way He intends us to; that will only happen when we meet Him face to face in eternity. We go through a 10-week course to learn our fundamental doctrines and think we know all about Christianity instead of realising that this is only the introduction to our faith. I've found that Christianity is not something to think out, but to live out, and this is the part we all find the most difficult, and can cause us to be pharisaical. That's why Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount. These teachings are all over the Old Testament, but Jesus came to show us what God really meant, and how to put it into practice as a lifestyle. I wasted a lot of time between the ages of 12 and 23 riding on my cloud of grace, but the fact is it's not how much we know, but how much we change that counts with God, and to change we have to take a good look at ourselves. The Sermon on the Mount challenges us to do just that!