

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 53**

#### **DO UNTO OTHERS ...**

#### **Sermon on the Mount Series**

#### **Matthew 7:12**

*by Maurice Barratt*

“Therefore all things whatsoever that ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” Matthew 7:12

Everyone knows the golden rule: “Do unto others”, treat other people as you would wish to be treated. But though the world know these words, they don’t understand them. When you read them in their context, you may not understand them. Coming directly after Jesus’ statements about asking, seeking and knocking, the sentence seems strangely out of context and unconnected with what has gone before. But the key word is “Therefore”. It tells us that there is a connection, that this is in fact not a statement standing on its own but a conclusion to what Jesus has previously said.

We have seen in our previous studies that what Jesus says about asking, seeking and knocking is also misunderstood. We can only accept what Jesus says about God giving us whatever we ask if we also accept that we must ask for “good gifts”. We must understand that the things God gives us are the things that will be good for us. They may sometimes not seem so good from our point of view. They may be trials or chastisements. But every parent knows that timely chastisement applied rightly is very good for a child, and the lessons of hard and painful experience can be a most precious gift.

#### **Treat others as God treats you**

So when Jesus says that we should treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves, what he is telling us is that we are to be like our heavenly Father, who gives good things to those who ask him. The world may quote the “golden rule”, but when they ask, “How would I wish to be treated?”, their answer is simple: “I want to have the best of everything!” “I want my every wish to be granted!” “I want to be respected and admired!” But those are not good gifts. Our experience as God’s children should leave us with a different perspective on how we would wish to be treated. I wish to be treated as my God treats me: with the wise and perfect blend of loving nurture and discipline that has my ultimate good in mind. So Jesus says to us, treat others that same way. Be like your Father.

How would you like your brother to be towards you? Truthful? Kind? Generous? Reliable? Full of integrity? Then Jesus says to us, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, “Go and do likewise”.

This is a principle we find throughout the Bible. In Psalm 15 David asks the question, “Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?” The answer includes: “He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour ... he that putteth not out his

money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent" (Psalm 15:1,3,5). We would not wish others to backbite about us, reproach us or charge us interest on a financial loan.

Paul strongly affirms the words of Jesus in Romans: "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification ... receive ye one another, as Christ also received us" (Romans 15:1,2,7). Paul is urging us not simply to please our neighbour but to please our neighbour "for his good", for the things that will edify or build him up.

### **Fulfilling the law and the prophets**

In one way we can see this verse of Matthew as a condition tagged on to Jesus' words about receiving from God: if you won't do good to others, why should you expect God to do good to you? This, as Jesus says, is the whole meaning of the law and the prophets. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" was specifically written into the law (Leviticus 19:18); and six out of the Ten Commandments are to do with your neighbour. Don't kill him, don't steal from him, don't bear false witness about him, don't covet his wife or his possessions ... it's all to do with treating your neighbour as you would wish to be treated yourself. Paul sums it up in Romans 13:8-10: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Jesus says it fulfills the law "and the prophets". Time and again when the prophets spoke against Israel it was to rebuke them for neglecting their duties towards their brethren, failing to care for the widows and orphans, abusing and despising the poor, oppressing the stranger - lacking love for their neighbour, and certainly not loving their neighbour as themselves.

### **"Self-esteem" is not the answer**

It is sometimes said that in order to "love your neighbour as yourself" you must first "love yourself" — that is, you must have a better "self-image", a better sense of "self-worth" or "self-esteem". But this is not a Christian thought, it comes from the world's psychologists who imagine that all our problems will be solved if we all think a bit more of ourselves.

It is not difficult to demolish such arguments with a little thought, but too often we don't apply a little thought. The fact that the basic root sin of mankind is pride — that is, too much self-esteem and self-centredness — ought to tell us that the psychologists are on the wrong track. A little thought should also tell us that anyone who increases their "self-love" will by definition become more selfish and self-centred, and therefore become less loving, not more loving, towards their neighbour. It's people who are not concerned with themselves who are caring and thoughtful of others.

The person who says “I hate myself” is often taken as a classic example of someone lacking in self-esteem. Consider the teenage girl who has spots and too much weight. She says she hates herself. But in fact she doesn’t hate herself at all; quite the opposite, she loves herself. What she hates is the fact that she has spots and is overweight. Why? Because it hurts her pride and her self-love. If she really hated herself, logic tells us that she would be happy that she was overweight and spotty. The fact that she is not happy proves that she loves herself and is obsessed with her appearance. Other people may have all the same “problems” with their appearance, but because they aren’t so proud, vain and self-centred, they’re not obsessed with their image and they aren’t bothered about what others think or offended by what others say.

There is no doubt that people such as those described above are desperately insecure, and insecurity is a hugely widespread problem — but what I am saying is that pride and self-centredness is at the root of insecurity, and therefore neither self-esteem, self-help nor self- anything else can solve the problem. Paul tells plainly that “no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it” (Ephesians 5:29). It’s instinctive to us all to “look after Number One”. Our problem, simply put, is not that we don’t have enough sense of self-worth and self-love, but that we have too much of it.

### **Excuses**

Jesus forcefully pointed out in the parable of the Good Samaritan that the religious people are often the ones who exercise the least love for their neighbour, and they justify themselves with religious reasons.

The teachers in a bible college thought they would test out their students on their practical application of this parable. They told the students to each prepare a sermon on it, and one by one each student was summoned to preach their sermon to their professors. In order to get to the examination hall they had to cross a courtyard. In that courtyard lay a man who had just fallen over and suffered an injury. In fact he was a “plant”, put there by the teachers. The students had to walk right past him to get to the hall, but if they stopped give the man proper attention and help, they would be late for their appointment. The results were dismal. Hardly one student was willing to help the man and be late for the appointment. They all apologized to the man and said they wanted to help, but they couldn’t because they had an urgent appointment to go and preach a sermon on the Good Samaritan ...

We also have our reasons for avoiding doing good to our neighbour. Proverbs 3:27 says, “Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, ‘Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give’, when thou hast it by thee.” But how many times do we tell the tramp at the door to “come back tomorrow” because we want to “test his integrity”? Is that really the reason? Or is it just because we don’t want to give? And did Jesus say “Give to everyone who asks of you”, or did he say “Give to everyone who asks of you unless you think they might be a con man, or unless you think they’re going to waste the money” ...?

Proverbs 14:21 says, “He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth.” But how many people do we despise? Of course we say we are right to despise them. That man is lazy and beats his wife; that

woman drinks all her money away and makes her children suffer ... How many Christians despise their pastor, because he doesn't preach a brilliant sermon every week and he didn't handle a situation as you thought he should and he doesn't match up to the preachers you see on the God channel ...? Or how many pastors despise people in their flock, because they only seem to make trouble and they're divisive and they're always gossiping, or they're always confessing that same old besetting sin, it's always the same old problems, they'll never change ... ? What it comes down to is attitudes in the heart. That's where loving your neighbour begins.

### **Legal - but not moral**

In Jeremiah 34:12-17 God rebukes the Israelites for failing to keep the jubilee and let slaves go free. Doubtless they'd found a way round it in the law. Jesus likewise rebuked the Pharisees who worked their way out of honouring financial obligations to their parents by "re-classifying" such money as "gifts" which were exempt from the obligation (see Mark 7:9-13). Just like many modern-day "legal" tax fiddles, this was legally allowable (though not in God's eyes), but certainly not moral. It's easy for businessmen to take financial advantage of their employees and still be legal. But scripture is full of God's contempt for those who take advantage in such ways. We call it "legal", God calls it oppression and defrauding.

The rich young man who came to Jesus (Matthew 19:16-22) came with justifications and reasons. He wanted to be right and do the right thing, but he also wanted to prove that he was right and was doing the right thing. So when Jesus told him to keep the commandments he proudly asserted that he had kept them all. Including "love thy neighbour as thyself"? The rich man must have thought so. But Jesus proved otherwise. When it came to practical realities, the man wouldn't sell his riches and give them to the poor — to his neighbours. He coveted his riches for himself, and therefore he couldn't love his neighbour as himself.

In Ephesians 4:25 Paul urges us to "speak every one the truth with his neighbour" and he follows through with instructions to every man to work hard, "that he may have to give to him that needeth", to "let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying ... let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour and evil speaking be put away from you ... be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (verses 28-32). This is all doing good to your neighbour, and it all starts with attitudes in the heart.

James warns us that we are not to have faith "with respect of persons" (James 2:1), that is, Christianity with built-in discrimination. Using the example of a poor and a rich man coming into the meeting and being treated differently, James makes it clear that admiration and contempt are just two sides of the same coin. If we respect and favour some people because of their social position, or for any other reason, we will despise others who do not come up to the same standard. James says such thinking makes us "partial", and such thoughts are "evil" (James 2:4). He calls it "sin" (verse 9). And James' proof that "faith without works is dead" is the example of the Christian who says "God bless" to the poor man and does nothing to meet his physical needs (verses 14,15). The whole context of James' words is that the answer to all these problems is fulfilling what he calls "the royal law ... thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (verse 8).

## **Who is my neighbour?**

Who is my neighbour? The lawyer asked the question, and we all think of the “Good Samaritan” as the typical example. Your neighbour is your enemy. But Jesus has more strong words in Luke 14:12-14. He tells us that when we make a special meal and invite guests, we shouldn't invite our friends who can repay us. Nothing wrong with having friends round for a meal, but it's the way of the world, and as Christians we have to do more, otherwise we prove we are no different to the world around us. Doing the social rounds is not good enough. In fact, Jesus tells us we are foolish if we only invite our friends. He says “Don't invite your friends and relatives, lest they invite you back, and you get your recompence (reward)”. Invite those who can't repay you, the poor and the blind, and because they can't repay you, God will — you've used the opportunity to gain a tremendous eternal reward! Invite your friends, and you've wasted that golden opportunity and traded eternal reward for an evening of chit-chat and keeping up with the social standards.

You protest that Jesus is forbidding you from having a meal with your friends. No need to protest; just have one occasion a year when you do as Jesus suggested. That's a start. One year our family decided to invite a homeless ex-drug addict to spend Christmas Day with us. I have to tell you it wasn't nice. It spoilt our Christmas. I liked having Christmas Day as a family time. We had to accomodate a not-so-nice person. But Jesus' question lingers: are we going to be different from the world or not? It's the extra mile that hurts, but it's the extra mile that makes us Christians.

## **Conclusion**

We are coming to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus is forcing us out into the open. We can't be hypocrites and hide behind our doctrines; Jesus has exposed us. It's only how we live that counts. That's the only proof of our Christianity. The profession is just hot air; the doctrines are just theories in our heads. The test of a disciple is the extra mile, and the extra mile is always practical. Turn the other cheek. Give to everyone that asks. Do good to those that hate you. We can pray and say nice words and do many religious things, but the practical outworking is that we must be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. God is indiscriminate: he sends good gifts upon the righteous and the unrighteous. He is kind to the unthankful and the evil. We are to be like him if we want to be called the children of God.

## **EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **Experience is the best teacher ...**

We are all basically selfish. You don't think you are? Neither do I, but what actually happens is we usually look for ways out of doing things for others rather than the other way around. The proof

that we have the right attitude in this area is if we don't feel as though we are putting ourselves out any more - you know, when the pain of making the effort has completely gone!

I can think of occasions in my life when I have really needed someone to be there and nobody was around. You see, I live in quite unique circumstances. I am in the ministry and don't really belong anywhere in particular. I mean to say, I am a member of a church nearby, but because I travel to different churches in different countries on such a regular basis, I am not really involved with people in the church where I am a member. I have lots of friends, but they are all dotted around the world and never actually with me when I desperately need their practical help.

### **Being in need**

I remember when I had my first child, Nathan. Because he had been breech throughout my pregnancy he had to be delivered by caesarean section. This, of course, involves major surgery and is quite a serious operation which leaves you very weak and unable to lift or do anything at all which requires normal strength as the stitches are quite likely to burst open. I didn't have any relationship at that time with any member of my family, nor did I have neighbours as I live in a conservation area where to the left of me is a private hospital and to the right, and all around, student residences for the University of Manchester. The church weren't aware of my need and so I was left completely alone except for the midwives who called for an hour each day for a short period. There were times when I was so distressed that I would cry hugging the baby. Post natal depression, however mild, plays a big part at this time, too, and I couldn't get used to the hormonal changes that were going on inside my body. I'd always been so organised and particular where my housework and home were concerned but suddenly I found that I couldn't cope with everything and this added to my defeated feelings.

But all this is good training. Do you know why? We often can't understand what other people go through unless we have experienced their pain or suffering in some measure. The fact that I have felt what it's like to need someone in these circumstances makes me aware of the fact that others in this same position need my help. I never go past a lone woman with a child at the shops, or in the airport, without being aware that she needs some assistance. It doesn't matter how many other people are around, I'll always carry bags or do anything I can because I know how difficult her situation is.

### **Frustration**

And what about looking after someone else's children for a few hours? There have been times I have really wanted to do some shopping for a pair of shoes or some clothing for myself and I just couldn't because the children put me under so much stress and wouldn't allow me to try things on. On these occasions I invariably walked out of the shop with nothing because I was so frustrated. There have been occasions when I have felt miserable and unwomanly just because I felt so drab and un-cared for. All my time being spent on meeting the needs of the children and my husband, with none left over for me. But it's been good for me because now I can see where others need help.

There are so many areas where we need to have our eyes opened to the needs of others. I must admit, I have had many, many blind spots. During these years of preaching the Sermon On The Mount we have realised that the sermons are no good, either to preach them or listen to them, it's the practical application of the things contained in them that matters and this is where all our so-called professed Christianity falls down - we don't practice the preaching.

### **Practical giving**

Maurice has done lots of practical things in his time which have exposed these areas in me. For example there was a man in Scotland who wanted Maurice to build a video edit suite in his grounds. He had been a very successful, wealthy business man before he had become a Christian and had undergone such radical changes by God that, instead of continuing to build his empire, he had poured his money into helping underprivileged children and the teenage and young people in his area. The facility he was building in his grounds were for the local schools to use without charge for the education of their students, and his intention was that they should have a Christian story board to re-create, like the Good Samaritan, etc.

Maurice took Alex up to Scotland with him for weeks at a time until he had completely built and set up the whole video suite. Yet this man never offered Maurice anything except accommodation when he was doing the work, no expenses for either his time or travel, nothing. I was quite put out because I know how much we struggle financially living by faith. But Maurice kept telling me that God would look after us. On the other hand I was quite miffed that this man who knew all about business, and could well afford it, didn't think that "the labourer was worthy of his hire"! But how wrong I was.

### **Give and it shall be given**

Over the time we knew this man he shared with us some of his godly principles and we will never forget them. He believed that if anyone did something for God, they should do it without looking for payment, and they should do it from a willing heart. This was fine for him to say seeing as it was Maurice who had done all his work, but he also practised this principle himself and had spent fortunes in setting up many facilities for the benefit of others, only to take his hands completely off the projects and hand them over for others to run without his interference. His Christianity had been very practical and that's what he expected of other Christians. With some of his money he had bought a full video edit suite which had been intended for a community centre in his home town, but because the building hadn't been completed and there was nobody at the time who could run the facility, he had allowed Maurice to loan all the equipment for 6 months absolutely free of charge. That was 3 years ago, and we are still using his equipment and making all sorts of Christian videos because of this man's godly principles.

Some time ago a group of people asked Maurice to speak at a house group. We were used to speaking to large congregations where we would usually be given a ministry fee, but because it was a house group with only a few people nobody saw the need. Maurice went week after week at his own expense and again I thought he was being taken advantage of. But he told me that God was our

source and we shouldn't look to people. The need to visit house groups grew as more people requested him to go on different nights of the week. There have been periods where he has had more house groups to attend than nights in the week would allow, some as far as Scotland for just a handful of people, and I've often wondered whether it was worth all his effort. But God has richly blessed these groups and the people who attend are really hungry for God and have grown so very quickly, and likewise God has richly blessed us through these house groups.

There is nothing like personal attention and that is what these house groups are being provided with. I remember vividly when I was just a teenager my own pastor spent hours talking to me about God, the ministry, his vision, his godly principles, and my life radically changed. I could think of nothing else but God, He was the only thing in my mind and heart that had any meaning. I'm certain that I'm in the ministry today because of the unselfish time that my pastor gave to me. He gave this freely, at no cost to me, and because it was personal it met my individual need. The bible says, "freely ye have received, freely give", but to do this we have to exercise our memory. Sadly it is difficult to be more than our experience, but because we have all been through difficult times and know how it feels to need and hurt, then we are in prime positions to "do unto others as we would have had them do to us".