

Barratt Ministries Challenge
Issue 55
The Broad Way
Sermon on the Mount Series, Matthew 7:13,14
by Maurice Barratt

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” (Matthew 7:13).

Let me repeat at the outset that Jesus is talking to disciples. He is not saying here that Christians are on the narrow way to heaven and non-Christians are on the broad way to hell. Both categories, the narrow way and the broad way, are roads that can only be trodden by Christians. All Christians are on one of these two ways, either the narrow way or the broad way.

We need to take note of the key words here: *wide*, *broad*, *many*, and *destruction*. First of all, the gate is *wide*. It is as wide as the strait gate is restricted - it's very wide, so wide that you're not even aware that you're going through it. About the strait gate, Jesus says "Few there be that find it". But you do not "find" the wide gate, you just "go in thereat". To find something you have to seek it, which means it's not obvious, not easy to find. The strait gate and the narrow way must be sought. But going through the wide gate happens by default. If you haven't found and entered the strait gate, you're going through the wide one.

Secondly, the way is *broad*. Just as the narrow way does not broaden out after the gate, but remains tight and restricted, so there are no bottlenecks on the broad way. It stays broad and easy. It's easy Christianity, grace without the cost and without the cross. Grace is a very wide gate, open to all the world. All we have to do is believe in Jesus and repent of our sins. But this is not the narrow way of discipleship.

Thirdly, *many* are on the broad way. That means multitudes - of Christians. The majority of Christians. "Few" is the minority, "many" is the majority. Do not expect that you will find many Christians in the church on the narrow way. The lifestyle that you see the majority of Christians leading is, if Jesus' words are true, the broad way.

And lastly, the broad way leads to destruction. But not to hell, not to the lake of fire. There is more than one sort of destruction. The Greek word here is *apoleia*, meaning destruction, ruin, or perdition (loss). What sort of destruction is this, if it is not hell? It is the same as what Jesus says at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount: anyone who hears his words and doesn't do them is like a man building his house on sand; when the storms come, the house falls, it is destroyed, it comes to ruin, it is lost. But Jesus does not say that the man is destroyed. He is safe, but his house, his building, his work, has come to destruction.

Paul says the same in 1 Corinthians 3, also talking about a building. The foundation is laid, which is Jesus (verse 11). But we must build on the foundation, and be careful how we build (verse 10), because the building will be tested - in this illustration, not by storms, but by fire. And **“if any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss”** - the destruction of his building, the ruin of his work - **“but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire”** (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). The man is safe, but his work is destroyed. This is the destruction at the end of the

broad way.

The broad way for a Christian is not following other religions or philosophies. All on the broad way are following Christ, but they are not disciples. The broad way is the easy Christian life. It costs little to build with wood and hay and stubble. It costs little to build on sand. But the price at the end is heavy. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul is talking about appearing before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of how we have used our Christian life. **“The day will declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work”** (1 Corinthians 3:13).

The broad way is Babylon. Babylon is mixture, compromise, corruption, confusion. Babylon is the world mixed in with the church. The narrow way implies a single eye, purity. Whenever we bring anything of the world’s ways and systems into the church, that’s the broad way. Most churches have brought elements of the world into their worship or their structure - entertainment, culture, fashion. I can confidently say “most”, simply because Jesus says that many, the majority, are on the broad way. The narrow way belongs to a remnant - or even a “remnant within the remnant”. When Jerusalem was destroyed, a remnant were taken captive into Babylon. But within that remnant was another remnant - a very few - who lived a lifestyle different to that of those around them. Daniel was one - he refused to eat the king’s food and risked his life rather than compromise his lifestyle. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were others - they refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s image, when all around them were doing it. That’s when you feel the squeeze and the restriction of the narrow way - when all around you in the churches are conforming to those around them, pastors and congregation alike - and when they are putting pressure on you to join them on the broad way, arguing that you are being legalistic, judgmental, elitist and extreme, that true Christianity is what *they* are practicing ...

But such pressure is good, because it reveals our true character. It brings out what’s really in us. The pressure will force some people into the broad way. The same pressure will force others onto the narrow way, because they see that it’s the only way to be true to Jesus and his challenge to discipleship.

The broad way is the way of man-made doctrines. **“This people draweth nigh to me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me ... In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”** (Matthew 15:8,9). Our churches are full of the traditions of men mixed in with the commandments of God. They “draw nigh” to God; they “honour” him; they “worship” him, but Jesus says it is in vain. It is leading to destruction. It will all go up in smoke. It’s all mixed up, and Christians have been doing things “that way” for so longer that they no longer know the difference between the commandments of God and the traditions of men. Man-made interpretations often cause division: division between Calvinists and Arminians, or between pre-millennialists and post-millennialists, or a thousand other things. Allegiance to these doctrines and dogmas makes for a pseudo-narrow way; a “remnant” who believe a certain doctrine, the “guardians of the truth”. But it’s a pseudo-narrow way, because the true narrow way is nothing to do with doctrine and beliefs, and everything to do with lifestyle and action. We jealously defend our “statements of faith” as the things that set us apart and keep us right, but often they are really more like “statements of superiority”, declarations of our doctrinal bias and personal preference, reasons why we are right and you are wrong - and they are all about beliefs and doctrines, never about lifestyle. And Jesus’ “doctrine” (which only means “teaching”) was all about lifestyle. That’s what sets us apart; that’s what defines whether

we're on the narrow way or the broad way.

Believing and not doing is the broad way. Like the Pharisees who “**say and do not**” (Matthew 23:3); like the man who built his house on sand who heard the words and didn't do them (Matthew 7:26); like those of whom James says, “**What doth it profit, brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?**” (James 2:14) - these Christians have all the right words, and they believe that their belief is enough; but it isn't. So many Christians believe in discipleship, affirm it, even preach it - but don't do it. We are experts at talking ourselves around it, and experts at justifying ourselves, and the more we do it, the more blind we become, until everyone around us can see that we are hypocrites and that there are a thousand miles of distance between our words and our lifestyle - and yet we alone cannot see it, and we carry on in our conceited opinions, consciences seared against the voice of the Spirit.

Politics in Christianity is the broad way. Bringing in the world's political systems and methods, whether it be democracy or dictatorship, is not God's way. E.M. Bounds said it well: “God's methods are men”. God raises up men. A church should be led and run by a man of God, not a political system. But those on the broad way prefer big organization, committees, research and focus groups, plans and strategies, finance and influence, “because that's how to get things done”, because “we've got to keep up with the times”. Everything is put to the vote and done “democratically”. The result: the lowest common denominator, the solution that pleases the most people, wins. Not the will of God.

Church growth is the broad way. Those on the broad way love church growth. They love numbers, because numbers are their substitute for fruit. But God doesn't confuse fruit with a big tree. God isn't interested in a big tree, he's interested in much fruit. And to get much fruit, as every gardener knows, you *prune* the tree. You do the opposite of “church growth.” You cut back, and the harder you cut back, the more fruit you'll get. Pruning hurts, of course, and a pruned tree never looks beautiful. If you want the tree to look beautiful, a few little snips round the edges will do fine. But God doesn't care about the tree. The tree serves only one purpose: to bear the fruit. Jesus teaches all about it in John 15.

Materialism is the broad way. In the parable of the sower, some of the seed fell into good soil. The potential was great. The heart was right. And they grew into strong, sturdy plants. Good church-going faithful Christians. But they never bore fruit, and that was the whole point of planting the seed. Churches are full of good faithful Christians who are not bearing fruit. What's stopping them? The thorns are choking them - representing “the cares of this life, and the deceitfulness of riches”. Materialism chokes good solid Christians and makes them unfruitful. They are industrious and busy for God, but there's no fruit - the character of Christ is not being manifested in their lifestyle. They have instead sold out to the world, by hankering after the things of the world, by demanding the same lifestyle as their neighbours, by treating that as their right, even as God's blessing, and never thinking to question otherwise. “God promises us prosperity if we obey him”, they say, “and it works!” It does “work”. You can't outgive God. But you're holding onto the riches you've been given, and holding onto material things is like putting dust in a treasure chest. You have coveted dust instead of true riches. The call to discipleship called the rich young ruler to swap his earthly riches for treasure in heaven (Matthew 19:21). The gospel of the kingdom declares “**Woe unto you that are rich! for you have received your consolation**” (Luke 6:24). Having had your petty rewards and comforts here on earth, having worked and striven to pursue and attain your desired lifestyle, you have nothing stored up in heaven. Jesus says you have cut a

poor deal; you have made a sorry bargain that you will bitterly regret. Destruction, weeping and gnashing of teeth is at the end of the road.

Conclusion

A broad mind belongs to the broad road. Christians shouldn't be broad-minded. If someone accuses you of being narrow-minded, take it as a compliment. Christians are "a holy nation, a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9); and the way of holiness is restricted. The priesthood in the Old Testament was very narrow. It was hedged about by all sorts of limits and restrictions. It wasn't a broad, easy way at all. Many times it was painful. The narrow way is painful. David Wilkerson says, "If you enter the path of full surrender, you'll suffer much more than the average, complacent Christian". In other words, on the narrow way, you'll suffer much more than on the broad way. And those on the broad way will laugh and call you a fool, or get annoyed and angry at you, or even persecute you.

But God wants fruit, which comes from the narrow, restricted way. **"I have ordained you, that you should bear much fruit, and that your fruit should remain"** (John 15:16). God wants our work to remain, to abide, to pass the test of the fire: **"If any man's work abide which he hath built, he shall receive a reward"** (1 Corinthians 3:14). Jesus wants us to have reward. He wants to say to us "Well done". He wants our house to stand. He doesn't want us to see everything we have done destroyed. Far from it. That's why he issued these warnings in the Sermon on the Mount - if we have ears to hear.

Experiences From Life

By Joanna Barratt

DARE TO BE A DANIEL

You don't have to be a Christian to know what is right and wrong. Somehow deep inside everyone, there is something there which sets off an alarm when we are tempted to sin. When I was very young and impressionable I was lured by friends into stealing from stores. I never took anything valuable or large, just bits of make-up or a bit of underwear, but my heart used to beat so fast and loudly that I thought everyone around me was well aware of what I was doing and that at any moment I would be discovered. I knew it was wrong, and so did my friends who were certainly not Christians, but it seemed so prudish to be a 'goodie goodie' all the time. God, in His mercy, did allow me to be caught by a store detective who took me to the manager where I was threatened with the police and given a thorough ticking off. That incident miraculously gave me the backbone I needed to say no to future stealing because I knew God had let me off lightly, next time He might not be so kind.

One particular thing I really did struggle with though, as I grew up through my teens and twenties, was fashion. It is incredible how fashion dictates to everyone no matter how old or young they are. If you think you are an exception just look at a 1920's war film to see how much things have changed, from hairstyles and hats, right the way down to shoes and then look at your wardrobe to see if you still have some of the old gear there ... if you haven't, you too have conformed! As I grew up I found it harder to be 'unfashionable' than it was to be a

Christian. Mini skirts, hot pants, low necked dresses and tops, knee length leather boots and stiletto heels were all the rage when I was in my early 20's, and even though I was freezing and suffering with rheumatism in my legs with the cold and damp of winter, I preferred to wear 2 and sometimes 3 pairs of tights beneath my tiny skirt than wear a longer one. It's a wonder I never caught pneumonia ... or worse still, was raped!

When you start out as a Christian you seem to automatically know in your own heart what is acceptable in Gods eyes and what isn't. Even non-Christians know how Christians ought to live. You are even prepared to go the whole hog and do what God requires, but all too often freshly cleaned out new converts are corrupted from having a pure heart towards God when they observe the looseness of all the other long standing Christians who have long since given up the good fight and allowed their standards to plummet.

The world has a terrible pull and demands, not requests, that we conform to it's standards. David wrote in the Psalms that we should "guard diligently the heart for out of it are the issues of life." If we maintain a pure heart before God and allow Him to illuminate where we are at fault without defending our actions, we have a chance of walking on that strait and narrow pathway which is exceedingly restrictive. If we conform to what everyone else in the church is doing who is walking unconsciously on the broad way, we will become desensitised and the strictness of the narrow way will seem ridiculous. "We are only human, after all", was said to me the other week. What a shameful confession for a mature Christian. That means they are complacently walking in the old nature and forgetting the obligation to walk in the new nature. No wonder there is often no difference between the church and the world.

I remember when I was in Sunday School that we used to sing a song which went like this: "Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm, and dare to make it known." Sounds great, but is unbelievably difficult to do. Especially in church environments when surrounded by easy going Christians. We try our best to let the people of the world see that Christians are no different from them, that we too can have fun and we are not killjoys. We do whatever they do and say the only difference between us is that we have Jesus and they haven't, that they don't have to give anything up to be a disciple, Jesus came to give us life, and that more abundantly.

Some years ago I was in a Christian Music Group comprising 4 boys and myself. I was a lead singer who sometimes played keyboard and percussion and the others sang backing vocals and played guitars and drums, etc. We did some touring in the UK and Holland and made a bit of a name for ourselves in church circles. I remember one particular concert we did, we had done the first half and, after taking a break and changing clothes, came on for the second act. But I'm afraid this met with disapproval by an evangelist who was in the audience. We thought we would have impressed him with our professionalism as in the first half we had all worn something dark, but in the second the lads had come out wearing tight jeans and white vests and I was wearing tight white trousers and top. We thought we looked very modern and 'great' and thought this guy was being rather stuffy. When I asked what was wrong he said in a very mild, kind way, that our appearance didn't glorify God. And that was all he said. But Maurice (who was the leader of the group) and I couldn't get away from his words and we knew in our heart of hearts that we were just showing off our talents and bodies, copying the world, and that it really didn't glorify God, it glorified us. I'm grateful that I can say we never appeared like that again, but had to go through many tests and trials before the world was knocked out of us and we understood more fully what it

means to 'minister in song' and music. Music has become so important in our modern churches and I'm afraid the platform has become the stage for so many ego centred worldly Christians who just want an audience to perform before. They probably could never make it in the world, but Christians are not as difficult to please as those who pay good money for their entertainment.

I'm sure Daniel was not the only God fearing man of his day, but because of who he was and the position he was in he had to be *seen* to be uncompromising. Others who served God must have prayed in secret, but he did it openly. Oh that we Christians could hear God and uncompromisingly hold to what we had been told no matter how others in the world or church lived. It is not easy to obey God, there are always those who would oppose us and make life difficult, but then we say so glibly that we want to be God pleasers and not men pleasers, don't we?

Maurice and I have asked God to show us how we have conformed to the worlds standards so that we can 'come out from among them and be separate'. God has revealed many things to us and we have just had to change and be true to our convictions. We refuse to take out insurance policies to protect us against theft, loss or accident. Where it is unlawful not to have insurance, we have complied. But because of this stand we have taken, God has been able to manipulate our lives. For instance, when all our musical equipment was stolen, God told Maurice that He wanted him to be a preacher now, and our whole lives have changed.

Some time ago God spoke to me personally about the communion. The bible says that Jesus broke the bread and wine. The bread was obviously unleavened as no leaven was allowed in the house for a whole week before Passover, and yet in many churches leavened bread is distributed. Jesus told the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, saying that it was like yeast hidden in the dough that spread throughout the whole lump, and that the leaven was symbolic of hypocrisy. Jesus said that He was the true vine and the vineyard was God's chosen people, and we who are not Jews but have accepted Christ have been grafted onto the vine, therefore grapes are extremely important symbols. Yet often black currant juice or some other is given. There were other things too and I felt very challenged and convicted so promised God that I would only take public communion if the symbols were right, after all we would complain if sprinkling was accepted as baptism because sprinkling doesn't symbolise what baptism is.

We send our children to a fee paying Christian school because we cannot allow the heathen to educate them, especially in this permissive, modern age where evolution is taught as fact and not theory, and they are very likely to have homosexual or lesbian teachers instructing them at some point. Our children are too important to hand over to godless people. We believe that the consistent lifestyle of a Christian home, church and school is a must for our family.

I am not suggesting for one minute that you do what we have done, you need your own convictions for that. We have been criticised for many of the stands that we take, but if we weren't we would wonder whether we were on this narrow way or not. After all, if everyone else was doing what we were, that would be a sure sign we were on the broad way ... wouldn't it?!