

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue 60

God's Work or God's Will?

Sermon on the Mount Series, Matthew 7:21-23

by Maurice Barratt

“Not every one that saith unto me, ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?’ And then will I profess unto them, ‘I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

This is a disturbing scripture, and there are three basic questions we need to ask concerning these people who stand before Jesus in judgement. Firstly, were they ever truly converted – are they Christians at all? Secondly, is it possible to use Jesus’ name with genuine, miraculous results, and yet not know him? And lastly, how can such “wonderful works” be called “works of iniquity”?

Before we consider these questions, it is essential that we understand the difference between the kingdom and eternal life. When Jesus returns to earth as king, he reigns in his kingdom for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). Then that kingdom comes to an end: when the thousand years are over, Jesus “delivers up the kingdom to God” (1 Corinthians 15:24); this earth is destroyed and a new heaven and earth created for eternity. Jesus is no longer “the king” in this new creation; in Revelation 21 and 22 he is once again “the Lamb upon the throne”. We enjoy eternal life because Jesus was the Lamb slain for us to forgive our sins and make us children of God by grace. On the other hand, whether we reign in the kingdom depends on how we have served Jesus as Lord since we became children of God – we may be children, but have we been obedient children?

Two judgements

There are two separate judgements associated with the kingdom and with eternal life. One is “the judgement seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10), described in Revelation 20:4, which happens before the thousand-year kingdom, where Jesus judges Christians on how they have lived as Christians. Then, after the thousand years are over, there is the “great white throne” judgement (Revelation 20:11), where God decides the eternal destiny of everyone, based on whether their names are written in the Lamb’s book of life. One judgement concerns the kingdom and is only for Christians; the other is for everyone and concerns eternal life.

The judgement we see in Matthew 7:21 is not the “great white throne” judgement; it is the judgement at the second coming of Jesus, before the thousand-year reign, where Jesus decides whether we will have a part in that thousand-year kingdom. Eternal life is not being decided here; reigning in the kingdom is being decided. So that in one way nullifies our first question, for this

judgement is not a matter of salvation. Jesus does not say to these people “Depart from me into eternal fire”; but they are excluded from the kingdom.

So I believe that these people are Christians. Jesus will only judge “his own”, those who have been given to him, – that is, the Christians. And for their part, these people know they are Christians. They are astonished at what Jesus has to say. They always took it for granted that they would share in his kingdom and his rewards. They expected it. But they were terribly wrong. They have not lost their salvation, but they have forfeited their place in the kingdom.

Knowing Christ

Question 2: Is it possible for people who do not know Christ to use his name with miraculous results? Well, according to this scripture, it clearly is possible, for Jesus says that he “never knew” these people who do miraculous works (and Jesus does not contest the fact that they are genuine prophecies, genuine deliverances, and genuine miracles). But what does Jesus mean when he says he “never knew” them? To know Christ is not the same as to be saved. The word “know” in the Bible means an intimate knowledge of the person, not simply a knowledge of the facts. Adam “knew his wife”; this doesn’t mean he knew who she was, or even that they had started a relationship: it meant the culmination of intimate relationship in sexual intercourse. Paul had been a Christian many years when he declared that his aim was to know Christ (Philippians 3:10). He said that he had not “already attained” this, but that he was “pressing toward the mark” (verses 12,14).

The disciples once came across a man casting out demons in Jesus’ name. The disciples did not know the man, he was not “one of them”, so they forbade him. But Jesus said, “Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me” (Mark 9:39). In other words, that man will have to give account at the judgement. No-one can use the name of Jesus lightly, without consequences.

As for prophecy, Balaam prophesied truly of Christ: “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel ... out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion ...” (Numbers 24:17-19). Yet Balaam was a false prophet, a greedy man who taught Israel to sin.

Wonderful works of iniquity

And as for “wonderful works”, does not Paul say that “though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2-3). Miracles and even martyrdom can be “works of iniquity”. We may have “confessed that Jesus is Lord” but unless he truly is Lord in our hearts, unless we have allowed him to be Lord of our lives, then how can he “know” us? Christ recognizes in us only what is of his own character. If we have not allowed the character of Christ to be formed in us, he cannot recognize us, because he cannot see anything of himself in us. His power, maybe, but nothing of his character. And power counts for nothing with God; character of Jesus counts for everything. Great power with

no humility, no meekness, no mercy, no purity of heart, amounts in God's eyes to "nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2).

A good work done in Christ's name with the wrong motive is a work of iniquity. Anything done in Christ's name without Christ's character is a misrepresentation of Christ, a blasphemy. Sadly many Christians have learned to use God's power, but lack his character. They know God's power, but they don't know God. They love the gifts, but they don't know the Giver. And because people in the world see the miracles, but also see an ungodly character doing the miracles, that is a blasphemy of God - it slanders his name and gives him a bad reputation.

Using God's power

It is easy to use God's power. It is available. Everyone uses God's power to some extent. The worlds are upheld by his power. All power is God's. He is "Almighty God", all-powerful. That means he has all power, which means no-one else has any. Even the devil uses God's power. But not everyone has God's character. That is only available to those who will deny themselves and allow Jesus to have his way in their lives; those who will take up their cross and die to self so that Christ can be formed in them. Just because you've become a Christian doesn't mean that Christ's character is in you. Paul told the Galatians that he was travailing in prayer for them "until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). They were Christians, but Christ's character was not formed in them.

A name always denotes character in the Bible. To do something "in Christ's name" means to do it "in his character". We say that a certain action is "in character" or "out of character" for a certain person. We may use Christ's name, but the action may not be "in character". For instance, let's say I know the owner of the local garage, and I'm due to collect a car from him. A thief knows about this and comes along to the garage and says to the owner, "Maurice sent me to collect the car". He has come "in my name". The owner doesn't know the thief. But he says, "Oh yes, I know Maurice", so he lets him take the car. Because the thief came in my name, he gets the same result as if I had come myself - he gets the car - but because the thief doesn't know me (although he knows about me), and because he is not acting in my character, his action is a "work of iniquity" - a theft.

In the same way, because we do things "in Jesus' name", we often get the same results as Jesus would have done himself - healings, miracles, power, manifestations of gifts. But if we don't know Jesus (although we may know all about him), because we are not acting in his character, because Christ is not formed within us, our works are "works of iniquity".

"The will of my Father"

What Jesus is looking for is not those who do mighty works, but "those that do the will of my Father" (Matthew 7:21). What is God's will? First of all, it's not that we do signs and wonders, but that we preach the gospel. Signs and wonders then follow the preaching of the gospel. It's a consequence of faithful, uncompromised preaching. Secondly, God's will is that we "bear much fruit" (John 15:8). Fruit, as we have remarked many times, is not gifts, nor the number of souls saved under our ministry. Fruit is the character of Christ - a perfect confirmation of the fact that it is Christ's

character, not just Christ's works, that God wants to see manifested. Thirdly, God's will is that we should become a holy bride for his Son. So the aim of all the gifts and ministries to the church is only one thing: "for the perfecting of the saints ... till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13). Again, we see here the same thing: we have to come to "the knowledge of the Son of God" – we have to come to know Christ.

Conclusion

The works of God are always a consequence of doing the will of God. Never reverse the order, that spells disaster. Many ministries pray because of the work. "We must pray, because we are involved in this and this ..." That's the wrong order. We should work because of the prayer. It's the communion with God and Christ that forms his character in us and drives us on to do his will and his work. Our emphasis should be all on knowing Christ. At the judgement seat of Christ, gifts mean nothing, and having the character of Christ means everything. No wonder Paul, even at the end of his life, was still running the race with one aim: "that I may know him" (Philippians 3:10).

EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE

by Joanna Barratt

God's talking to me - not you!

Many years ago, in the long gone days when I was single and had my own flat, there was an occasion when I wanted to use my premises for God and not be selfish with my own 'things'. I didn't have anything particularly to boast about in other people's opinions, but I had space and comfort in a nice quiet environment.

Looking around the church I attended I noticed that there were quite a number of old people who had lost their partners and lived either alone, or in worldly old people's homes. I decided to invite them all along to my flat after the Sunday morning service where they could spend the next few hours being waited upon by myself, enjoying Christian fellowship together and I would then take them to the evening meeting. I did this one Sunday each month for quite a time and was quite amused to hear them chatter away about the past, their families, sometimes showing one another the scars from their operations (on one occasion I had to draw a line when they began to raise their clothes!) ... But very, very seldom about God, indeed this often only came about because I asked them to share how they had become Christians in the first place. They loved to talk about the past, I suppose they never for one moment realised they had a future.

Up in arms

My life took on a different turn and I had to drop this practice. Almost immediately people were up in arms because I had forsaken 'my ministry with the old people'! What! I had no notion that this was a ministry, it was just to my mind a nice thing to do for the old folks. But suddenly everyone in the church was putting me in a pigeon hole and my nice gesture had become 'a ministry'. Maybe someone with a different character to mine would have continued this ministry for the sake of keeping the peace, but it showed me how easy it was for other people to run your life and not allow God to have a say. I knew that God had not called me to this work, indeed it was a time-filler for me whilst I was waiting for Him to guide me. But we must always be at the beck and call of God, and have no other master in our lives. To have continued in this vain would have meant I was doing God's work (as all good deeds are) but not God's will.

I went through similar experiences when helping out with children's work and prison work. People always thought they knew God's will for me and would put me into the little pigeon holes again by saying that I had a 'Children's Ministry' or 'Prison Ministry', and were miffed when I pulled out. But hey, God was talking to me, not them!

Different personalities, different abilities

We are all very different. We have been made with individual personalities and have been trained in many varied ways through life, circumstances, education, disasters, etc. When the talents were distributed to his servants in Matthew 25, the master gave them each according to their several abilities ... they all had different aptitudes, so they were given what he judged they could handle. He had well assessed their capabilities because he had trained them, so he knew what they could cope with. That was why he was so angry with the servant who had hidden his talent, the master knew this was sheer laziness because he had been trained and was well able to fulfil his assignment.

God has trained us throughout our whole lives to fulfil the purpose He specified for each one of us. When He gives us something to do He does not pity our flesh when we complain and say the task is too hard, because He knows we have been trained and are well able to handle what is given. But we must stick to His plan, and His plan only. People - partners, children, pastors, bosses, and even animals, will do their utmost to manipulate and dictate to us. There is always someone who knows God's will for us better than we know ourselves. But Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and they would not listen to the voice of an hireling.

Don't wait for Gabriel

Sometimes you can be in a situation in life when you are searching for God's will. At these times I believe it is best not to sit back on your laurels and wait for Gabriel to come and give you a personal visitation. Indeed that was why I invited the old people around to my flat, it was because I wanted to do something for God until He told me what He specifically wanted me to do. It is quite simple to steer a heavy sled whilst it is moving, the momentum of it's own weight often carries it without

much effort. But try to move a sled from a standing position ... when the runners are frozen solid ... that is quite another story, and in some cases only a bomb will free it.

The ideal would be to do nothing unless we knew what we were doing was God's specific will for us as an individual, but, unlike Jesus, I don't think very many of us are in that perfect place. What I personally believe is that we should do the things God has required everyone to do, i.e. The Ten Commandments, the Sermon On The Mount, all the instructions in the letters to the churches as to how we should treat our partners, families, brethren, neighbours, etc., and then when God can trust us to obey what He has told everyone, He will begin to trust us with the things only we could do.

Get off that wagon!

The last thing God wants us to do is jump on the band wagon of other people. Maurice's father was an evangelist of international repute. God worked miraculously through him when he prayed for the sick and demon possessed. Astounding miracles took place so regularly that the BBC made an hour long documentary of his church and work way back in the 1960's and showed it in many countries of the world. Famous sports people of that era who had suffered injuries travelled from as far as India, and other places, to the church to be prayed for after viewing the film. Spastics and people with incurable illnesses such as cancer, were instantly healed. Maurice and I were there with him, supporting him in music and avidly watching every movement he made completely captivated by what God was doing through him. We had a good example and teacher to follow, God was giving us a good education. But God did not intend for us to jump on his band wagon.

A different calling

Many times when Maurice preaches or shares how he became a Christian, and he gives testimony to the marvellous role model he had in his father, people will expect him to pray for the sick at the end of the meeting. But Maurice knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that his particular calling is different to that of his father. Maurice is not called to be a divine healing evangelist - not even an evangelist. He does not lose any sleep in the night because he is crying for lost souls. He knows his calling. God has specifically and individually called him to be a teacher. And his pupils are not the unsaved, but people who call themselves Christians and are unaware of the cost of real Christianity and discipleship.

Knowing God's will for us personally can give us tremendous freedom because we are confident we don't have to do what everyone else around us is doing. On the other hand it is also very awesome because sometimes God has got a job for us to do and there is nobody else around doing the same thing. It can be very lonely, unappreciated and unattractive, but only doing what we have been specifically called to do will count for anything when we stand before God and give an account for the deeds done in our flesh.