

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 61**

#### **Wise and Foolish Christians**

##### **Sermon on the Mount Series, Matthew 7:24-27**

*by Maurice Barratt*

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:24-27)

We have reached the concluding verses of the Sermon on the Mount, and they are a conclusion. Jesus says “therefore” — that is, following on from all that he has said — and he gives a final illustration. I believe that the whole of chapter 7 is talking about the wisdom of God, and now the challenge is: will you be a wise Christian, or a foolish one? The second half of the chapter confronts us with two-way choices: the two gates, strait or wide; the two roads, narrow or broad; the two trees, good or corrupt; and now we have two buildings.

#### **Teaching for Christians**

Remember, this is all teaching to Christians. The choices are not about whether you will gain or lose your salvation. The broad way and the narrow way is often preached as a gospel message, but that is not the true meaning. The broad road that leads to destruction is not the road to hell, it is the road to the destruction of all you have built since you became a Christian. And in this final illustration, which is also often used as a gospel message (usually with the rock signifying Jesus) it is not the man who perishes but his building. The man remains as he was, but all his work is destroyed.

The rock is not Jesus at all; Jesus explains clearly what the rock and the sand mean. Building on rock means hearing what Jesus says and putting it into practice; building on sand means hearing what Jesus says and not putting it into practice. The wise Christian hears and does; the foolish Christian hears but doesn't do. In other words, we can hear the Sermon on the Mount, approve of it, agree with it, decide to do it — but if in the end we don't put it into practice, we are in fact rejecting it.

Jesus is saying that both these categories of people have heard the Sermon on the Mount - the call to discipleship, not the gospel of grace — and have understood it. All Christians hear about the cost of discipleship when they read their bibles, so there are no excuses. But many do not like the cost, and choose to change it — sometimes by making it applicable to others but not to themselves. So we have some Christians who say that the Sermon on the Mount is for the Jews, and some who say it is only applicable in the millennial kingdom. Others take specific things that Jesus says and refuse

to take them at face value, they turn it into an allegory or a symbol and say, “Ah, but what Jesus really meant was ...” These are all ways of avoiding the “doing” of the Sermon on the Mount - so they are all ways of building on sand, subtle ways of rejecting the message.

Let’s recap over some of these blunt commands of Jesus — the sort that we are liable to avoid if we can. When someone hits you on one cheek, turn the other. When someone compels you to walk a mile, walk two. Give to whoever asks you. Pray, fast and give to the poor in secret. Take no thought for your daily needs, food, clothes and so on, but seek first the kingdom of God. Don’t lay up treasure on earth. All this is to do with discipleship. Followers will do none of these things. There are always excuses for them to find. Only disciples will be doers of the word. Followers are fools who hear but don’t do.

### **Three tests**

Jesus says that there are three things that test our building: the rain, the wind and the floods. It is certainly possible that this could mean the trials and tests that come in this life, but one thing is for sure: whatever happens in this life, our work will be tested at the judgement seat of Christ. We have to give an account of what we have done, not what we have believed. We don’t give an account for our doctrines, but for our works. It’s whether we have applied what we believe that counts. The person Jesus calls “foolish” is not an idiot or a simpleton. A fool is someone who has knowledge but doesn’t apply it. Wisdom is knowledge applied. The wise man hears the words and applies them.

Paul talks about this judgement in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. 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: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

### **Man’s work**

One phrase comes out repeatedly from this passage: “man’s work”. The building is our work. The foundation is God’s work — that is grace, the fact that we are Christians. Only God can lay the foundation — but only we can do the building upon the foundation. That is our work, and it will be tested by fire. The foundation — the fact that we are Christians — will not be tested; that stands sure. But the building may all be burned up. Christians on the broad way will not lose their salvation. Building on sand will not lose you your salvation. Building with wood, hay and stubble will not cost you your salvation. Even if everything you have done comes to destruction or is burned up, Paul emphatically says, “he himself shall be saved” (verse 15). But what a tragedy, if your whole Christian life is wasted, if it all comes to nothing and counts for nothing.

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation” (Hebrews 6:1). It’s time to move on. I’ve attended too many churches where the people spend their whole time thanking God for their salvation. It’s all foundation and no building. It is wonderful to be saved, but we were saved for a purpose, and there is work to do. A foundation is an incomplete thing on its own. Its whole purpose is to support a building. You have received grace: now it’s time to put the building up. Work now, while it is day, for the night comes when no man can work. Once your life is over, you’ve had your chance. Redeem the time!

### **Teaching with authority**

When Jesus had finished his message, “the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28,29). This is a strange remark, because the scribes did have authority. They had the whole weight of the law behind them. But Jesus had a different type of authority. The scribes had the sort of authority which comes from knowledge. But Jesus had genuine authority, which comes not from knowledge but from experience. Experience comes only from living a lifestyle — it’s not just adherence to a set of beliefs or a legal system. And experience of the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle only comes from obeying it. It will bring trials — but the trials of the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle teach us compassion, understanding, freedom and security in God. Judgmentalism, legalism, condemnation of others and bigotry all stem from insecurity and lack of experience of God.

### **And finally ...**

After 56 studies and ten years of teaching the message of the Sermon on the Mount in Challenge, I have delivered my burden. My conscience is clear; I’ve said what I had to say. Now the burden is yours. You have heard the word. The onus is on you. Will you obey the words of the Sermon on the Mount, or only believe them? My prayer for all who read Challenge is that you will be Christians who do, not just Christians who know — that you will turn out to be wise Christians, that you will live your life wisely and build with materials that will stand the fire, and not be ashamed or suffer loss before the judgement seat of Christ but hear the words “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

All the past versions of Challenge are available to read or download on our website at [www.barrattministries.org.uk](http://www.barrattministries.org.uk). You may also want to read my books “Will The Real Christians Please Stand Up?”, a series of preparatory studies to the Sermon on the Mount, and “Salt and Light”, my new study of the beatitudes.

## EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE

*by Joanna Barratt*

### Work in Progress

Some time ago a man came to visit me and was perplexed about his son. He was only around 16 years of age and had already been brought before the courts several times. He had perpetually played 'hooky' from school and had been both a vandal and bully in the neighbourhood. Apparently, everyone regarded him as a 'problem' and wanted him locked up. Consequently he had ended up in borstal and his future looked very bleak indeed.

I listened to my visitor with interest and couldn't help but wonder why he was so bemused by what was happening with his son. This man's lifestyle had stared everyone else in the face for years, but he was completely oblivious of how he himself behaved in his own home. During the years prior to this man's visit, his wife had sometimes come to see me to pour out all the pain she was going through because of her husband's treatment. She had shared that he had been a very rough and sometimes cruel man who had battered both her and their children on various occasions. He didn't give her much money to run the house and buy the groceries and she was always struggling to make ends meet. She had brought the children with her on those visits and I had observed that they were just ordinary, friendly little kids who looked to their parents for both love and security like so many others. But the years living in their family environment took its toll, and instead of moulding them into responsible adults, made them menaces to society.

### Knowledge without practice

This couple went to church, and knew all that was required of them, but they didn't practice Christianity in their home. Consequently, the house that they were building completely disintegrated — the wife left, and the children who had been given to them as precious gifts from Almighty God floundered and ended up as fodder for the devil. They had already tasted in their childhood what 'Christianity' was like and probably would never be tempted with that particular 'evil' again! How sad.

On the other hand, I know of one particular couple who did such a good job of 'building' their home as Christian parents, that all their 4 children have not defected from serving God throughout their lives, and they are all aged between 46 and 60. They have not all led charmed lives — far from it, they have had their fair share of catastrophes, but they have always maintained their faith in God and have continued serving Him, some even in a ministerial capacity, no matter what the devil has thrown at them. The 'building' their parents put up in this case proved to stand the test of time.

But building is not only to do with raising children, although this is a very good practical example to study in our natural lives if we want to see how we are doing in the spiritual realm. Indeed, the qualities looked for by the apostles when choosing elders to be appointed in the churches were that they "be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly"

(Titus 1:6). In Timothy, Paul goes one step further by saying, "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) ... Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Timothy 2:4-7). So if you are wondering how you are doing spiritually concerning putting up a building which will stand when the winds and flood descend upon it, take a good and honest look at the natural family God has given you to practice on.

### **Stickability**

And such a lot depends on your stickability! You may have started to build on the right foundation, putting up really good walls and setting in wonderful windows, but if you don't get the roof on, you will be drenched in the storms. A building cannot be left half finished. Your dependants and those looking up to you need to know that what you are doing is solid and will stand the test of time. Otherwise all your hard work and patient labour is in vain. To walk away from a building before you have finished it, has an even worse effect than never even starting. You become a laughing stock and are mocked for ever having such grand ideas in the first place. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.'" (Luke 14:26-30)

The problem with building a house is that it will stare everyone in the face. You don't need to say a word to anyone about what you are doing, they will see your work every time they come into contact with you. Being a Christian is not something you can keep quiet about. You may not be out witnessing all the time, but if you are truly a disciple of Christ your life will be so different to everyone else around you. Your values will be different (you are not living for this world), your language will be different (God will have cleaned out your filthy mouth), and your attitudes will be different ("by this shall all men know you are my disciples, if you love one another"). People may not know what you are building, work in progress is not always easily recognisable, but this will only arouse curiosity and there will be no shortage of questions from those who are dying to know why you are doing what you are doing. At these times we hopefully "share will meekness the hope that it within us". People may admire or despise what you are doing, but one thing is for sure, if you don't fulfil what you have set out to do, they will delight in your downfall and mock. Don't give them the opportunity.

### **Finish the job!**

If you thought you were acting in faith and obeying God when you first set out to build something, then see it through to the end and don't let anyone or anything put you off finishing it. God will never regard you as a 'good and faithful servant' if your faith fails and you leave the job half done.

Remember, you 'can do all things through Christ who strengthens you', and the 'all things' referred to here are intense hardships and setbacks.

Maurice and I have known for the past 35 years that God has called us to do a particular work, and throughout these years many people have worked with us who have been called and told the same as ourselves. Every Christian has been called into the Kingdom of God for a specific purpose. We know scientifically that we are all individual and different, so it stands to reason that because there is nobody else in the world quite like us that we are unique to enable us to fulfil a particular commission God has intended for us, and us alone. Opposition is inevitable, and everyone experiences it. But we don't all have to give in to it. The opposition is good — it strengthens our resolve and makes us more determined to trust God no matter what the obstacles are. They give us opportunity to prove the will of God in our lives. But when we give in to the opposition we deflate the purposes of God. The devil wins a minor victory and is allowed to delay the plan a little longer. God always wins in the end, but because we are so unwilling to submit 100% to the will and purpose of God, He either has to spend time breaking us and bending us so that we will conform, or else He puts us to one side and uses someone else. The children of Israel went on a 40-year death march around the wilderness because they refused to obey God when He told them to go in and possess the land filled with giants. But His purpose was fulfilled through Joshua later on. God's plan will succeed in the end, but it may be delayed because He is working with us.

### **Taking the pressure**

Some years ago I had a vision. I saw a football game in progress. There was a white team and a black team. Automatically I imagined I was on the white team (we always see ourselves on this side don't we?). The game was furious and the ball was kicked so ferociously that opposite players kicked it at the same time and it would burst. The game was stopped whilst the windless ball was thrown out and a new football thrown on to allow the game to continue. Both sides scored goals as the game progressed, but they went through many footballs. Then the Lord showed me that the game was between angels and devils — the angels being the white team and the devils being the black team — and that we are the footballs. While ever we can withstand the pressure God will use us in this great game, but if we burst, we will be thrown out and a new football will be thrown on. Our job is to make sure we can stand the pressure so that God's ultimate plan is not delayed.