

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 71**

#### **The Net**

#### **The Kingdom Series Part 10**

*by Alex Robertson*

We have reached the 7th and final parable in the sequence of Matthew chapter 13. Let's remind ourselves of what we have learned from the parables up to this point. The parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3) concerned the sowing of the word of the kingdom into people's hearts. The "word of the kingdom", we said, was the challenging word of discipleship, the call to deny self, take up our cross and follow Jesus' lifestyle.

The parable of the sower describes people's differing reactions to that strong message. Sometimes it just 'bounces off' a hard heart; sometimes it is received with initial enthusiasm, but when it is tested it 'withers away'. Sometimes the word of discipleship is willingly received and 'roots down' deeply, but the cares of life and materialism stop the word coming to fruition in a person's life. Others bear fruit and start living for the kingdom.

#### **Compromise, corruption and mixture**

But the enemy has a further plan to disrupt, deceive and destroy, and in the next 3 parables we saw what form that plan takes. Remember, these parables are prophetic of the time from when Jesus spoke them through to the time when he returns, and therefore we can look back through church history to the present day and confirm what actually happened in the kingdom. Satan's plan is to subtly seduce and introduce compromise, corruption and mixture into the kingdom. Tares are planted among the wheat (Matthew 13:24) – false prophets, "children of the wicked one" who sow confusion and a subtle mixture of truth and error regarding the kingdom. They're still around today, but this corruption began in earnest in the generation following the apostles' death, as Paul warned it would (Acts 20:29). The corruption resulted in the church gaining many members, but it was not a godly growth; by the 4th century the church had turned into a worldly empire (symbolized by the tree with the birds nesting in its branches, Matthew 13:31), joining forces with the imperial might of Rome and becoming the empire's official religion. It became a home to false teaching and corrupt compromise where truth and error seemed inextricably mixed in together, as symbolized by the leaven penetrating through the dough (Matthew 13:33). Greek philosophy and Roman politics were all added to the mix that resulted in the confusion of the Dark Ages and the pre-reformation medieval church.

It seems as if the enemy has done a thorough and effective work, and the legacy of this plan is with us to this day. The corrupt, worldly, mixed up institutions of the church still remain. But God also has a plan, and he works the opposite way from the devil. Satan seeks to seduce, to deceive, to compromise, to mix, to confuse, to corrupt; God seeks to speak the truth, to confront, to separate

and to purify. Satan works on the institutions; God works on individuals. So in the final 3 parables we see 3 ways in which God seeks to “purify unto himself a peculiar people” (Titus 2:14). The parable of the treasure in the field (Matthew 13:44) speaks not of us finding Jesus but of Jesus finding us, and redeeming us, paying the price to buy us for God. The result of that redemption is that “you are not your own, you are bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Being redeemed means that we are separated and set apart for God.

But redemption is an accomplished fact, and God has more ways to separate and to purify his people. The process God uses today is suffering and trials. We considered this in the last issue when we looked at the parable of the pearl (Matthew 13:45), seeing how the pearl is something very beautiful, but is formed only through suffering. The persecuted church is something very valuable to Jesus, for in their suffering his character is formed in them and shines out of them with a rare beauty. Persecution, we noted, is not part of the devil’s plan, it is part of God’s plan. The devil is certainly involved, but all his attacks serve only to bring the Christians closer to the image of Christ. Persecution, tribulation, suffering, opposition all purify and separate the church like nothing else.

### **The conclusion to the story**

Now we come to the final parable in the sequence, the parable of the net. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:47-50).

This is the conclusion to the story. The first parable, the sower, spoke of the beginnings of the gospel of the kingdom in the days of Jesus, when he first preached the word of costly discipleship. Now with the last parable we see what happens at the end. All the testing and proving and preparation for the final kingdom that the Lord has done in our lives is now brought to judgement. It is the final way in which God separates and purifies his people – through judgement. This judgement is a judgement of Christians. It takes place when Jesus returns, immediately before he sets up his kingdom. There is a strong similarity with the parable of the tares and the wheat, where Jesus speaks of the harvest as being “the end of the world” (Matthew 13:40), and he says “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (v. 41-42).

“The end of the world” means the end of this age, the end of the rule of this current system, when “the kingdoms of this world ... become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ” (Revelation 11:15). The wicked are removed from the kingdom, but “the wicked” are not all the unbelievers in the world. The unbelievers were never in the kingdom. They will not be judged until the 1000-year kingdom is over (Revelation 20:5,11-15). “The wicked” referred to here are the false prophets, the seducers, the ones who perpetrate the devil’s plan and sow compromise, deceit, corruption and mixture – and the ones who buy into that deceit and, although they are Christians, born again children of God, live a life at odds with the costly life of discipleship spoken of by Jesus.

## **Who are the wicked?**

These “wicked” are the Christians who choose celebration and partying in place of suffering and mourning; those who choose ease and comfort in the place of hardship and sacrifice; those who choose the wide gate and the broad way, who forever talk about grace and mercy but never talk about challenge and cost, who forever talk about joy, freedom and abundant life, but never talk about being slaves of God and the price of obedience. Why are they called “wicked”? Because they have heard the word, but they have chosen to disobey it. They read their bibles. They know what Jesus said, they know what Paul and Peter and James and John said. But they choose to believe something else and live something else. They choose to excuse themselves, or let other preachers excuse them. They salve their consciences by saying, “My pastor says that Jesus didn’t really mean what he said ...” Like the crowds who heard the parables, they choose to “see and not perceive” (Matthew 13:14). They are the foolish man who built his house on the sand (Matthew 7:26). They “hear these sayings” of Jesus, “and do them not”. Their house will come to ruin. When they stand before the judgement seat of Christ, their life will come to nothing. Their work will be burned up (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). They have their salvation; they “will be saved, yet so as by fire”, but they will “suffer loss”, and the loss will be that they miss out on the glorious kingdom reign of Jesus on earth for 1000 years. They will miss out on the rewards that they could have had, the kingdom that was prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

## **A squandered inheritance**

Like the prodigal son, they want it all now. The prodigal son wanted his inheritance before the time, and his father reluctantly but graciously gave it to him. The son squandered the inheritance in the present, when it was meant for the future. And when he finally came to his senses and returned to his father, his father did not turn him away but welcomed him with open arms. Christians who have ignored the call to discipleship will still be welcomed into eternal life by their heavenly Father. But what the father said to the elder son is very significant. The elder son was naturally peeved that his no-good brother was getting a party while he was out toiling in the fields. But his father said, “Son, you are always with me, and all I have is yours” (Luke 15:31). In other words, all that the father owned now belonged to the elder son. The elder son still had his inheritance waiting for him, but the younger son had nothing, because he had already used up all his inheritance. The father had no more for him. So it is with Christians who want the “kingdom now”. They have it all down here, the health and wealth, the “bless me” mentality, the prosperity gospel. And God reluctantly but graciously gives it to them. And God will welcome them into eternal life, for they are his children – but Jesus can not welcome them into his kingdom reign. Jesus can only tell them they are “wicked and lazy servants”. There is no more inheritance left for them. They’ve missed it. They’ve squandered the only opportunity they had. They can’t go back and live another life in the light of what they now know. With regard to the kingdom, they face only exclusion and bitter regret, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There are many Christians living under teaching that encourages them in a lifestyle which runs contrary to the teaching of Jesus. They are the ones in danger of missing out on the kingdom unless they change their mindset. In the next issues of Challenge we shall be looking at some of the wrong teachings that have deceived Christians and led them astray. The aim, as always, is not to criticize

others and point the finger. It is to help Christians who have been deceived by false teaching to see the truth. It is to rescue Christians from the subtle deceptions of the false prophets and point them to the light. And not least, it is to examine ourselves and challenge ourselves to see whether we are truly living the life that Jesus calls us to live now.

## **EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **Exercising The Other Leg**

From the teaching that Alex has been bringing over these past issues on the kingdom of heaven it is clear that there will be a great separation one day. Not only between the saved and the damned, but between the wise and foolish Christians ... those who have heard the word, known it to be truth, but ignored it and lived selfish lives. God did not save us so that we could 'enjoy' our freedom from slavery to the devil. He saved us so that we could change masters and become his bond slaves - slaves who have realised we serve a good master and have now decided for ourselves that we want to continue serving God for the rest of our lives. If God was only concerned about our happiness and enjoyment, then he could have waited until we'd fulfilled all our ambitions and dreams and saved us on our death beds, then whisked us off into eternity with Him. He knows the number of the hairs on our heads quite apart from the number of our days. But he didn't save us so that he could be useful to us ... he saved us so that we could be useful to him. Christianity is nothing, if it is not practical. But this is where the crunch comes, because every single one of us has to come to our own conclusions as to how practical we want to be.

#### **Comfortable slaves?**

In all the letters to the churches, the apostles introduced themselves as servants, slaves, bond slaves, of the Lord Jesus Christ. And slaves don't sit in a nice comfy armchair in front of the fire being waited on hand and foot. No, they are the ones busy serving. We have not been called to live a comfortable life, we have been called to serve ... here, now, in this life. And John goes further by saying, "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20). Love is practical. It has to be seen to be proved.

Maurice and I have been in the ministry for 38 years and during that time God has taken us through many different stages. To get from where we were 38 years ago, to where we are now, is a testimony of how long-suffering and forgiving God is. All along the route I have known in my spirit that every stage we were at was just another stepping stone on the way to where we were meant to end up, and I have refused to put down roots by declaring 'this is now my ministry'. Servants just do what they are told to do. They could chauffeur their boss in his Rolls Royce one minute, and then scrub out the toilets the next. The servant is there for the boss's convenience. But it's very hard to

have this mindset when you are 'in the ministry', you can't help thinking of yourself as being in an elevated position. Giving up our rights and becoming the servants of Christ doesn't gel with our human nature. But if we have been called according to God's purposes and we love him with all our hearts, he will make sure we receive the very best education he can give. And Maurice and I have been very well schooled!

For a number of years God has been teaching us about being separate from the world. He has taught us that he is looking for a holy, peculiar people, and the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount have radically changed our thinking and attitudes. We have taught the revelation of this faithfully as God has opened doors for us, and seen many other lives radically changed. But this was yet another stepping stone before God revealed to us the next stage.

In 2001 God showed us a man walking on one leg. He had exercised this leg until it had become very strong, but the other leg was so weak it couldn't take any weight. God then directed us to a scripture, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). We were doing a great job of being 'unspotted from the world' by living a separate, holy lifestyle, but we weren't doing anything practical for the afflicted. Hence our Christianity was very unbalanced, and this leg of the ministry needed exercising until it was as strong as the other one.

### **A more costly step**

For a long time our emphasis has been on getting ministry out rather than on using our products to bring in finance, although that is desperately needed. We've even gone as far as to specify on our books, videos, CD's, etc. that there is no copyright and that anyone is free to use our material without prior permission. We have tried with all our hearts to rid ourselves of covetousness and ambition, and we have the bills to prove that we have put this into practice. But God has shown us a step which is even more costly.

In 2001 Brother Samuel Jaikumar invited Maurice and myself to visit him in India as he had heard Maurice speak and me sing and desired that we shared what God had given us with the ministers he was overseeing. The following year we took the step of faith, bought our air tickets and went to see him. His need was great. He was trying to support around 58 pastors himself so that they could preach the gospel full time. Very few had bibles and none had study books. Some of them were being beaten and persecuted for their faith by Hindu fanatics. He was also burdened for the starving children all around him and not only wanted to feed, but also educate them. In February this year we opened the Bible School which we managed to build using the donations people had given for this project. Some friends of ours took on the burden of the school where at present 60 children between the ages of 3 and 12 years are being educated, 30 of whom are orphans and actually live on the premises.

In 2003 we visited a man, Surakat Nurudeen, in Nigeria who at his own expense was distributing our 'Challenge' leaflets to people in Nigeria and Ghana, and wanted to go under the title of 'Barratt Ministries Nigeria'. Whilst with him we heard of his desire to look after children whose parents had been martyred for their faith in the north of Nigeria where there is a lot of persecution of Christians.

We came home with a terrible burden and felt that we had to help by building an orphanage. At present work is well under way and we hope to see the building completed soon.

In 2004 we answered a call from Frank Musoke in Uganda, who begged us to come and teach the lifestyle of a disciple in a number of churches. We marvelled at the response of the people, they truly wanted our message. Although these people were very generous and took up offerings for us, the sum total of their gift came to about €10 when converted to our currency and our trip had cost us dearly because unlike everywhere else so far, we were unable to stay with Frank at his home and we found out why when he invited us for a meal.

### **Frank's lifestyle**

His home consisted of 2 rooms, a bedroom and a lounge. He didn't have a kitchen. There was a small cupboard on the narrow porch which housed his food, pots, pans and tiny camping stove. He didn't have much and he had only been married about 18 months to a lovely young woman who was about 4 months pregnant. But what he had he was already sharing with 10 orphans, one girl was 18 years of age whilst the others ranged between 2 and 12 years old. They slept wherever they found space. He was so skinny and undernourished himself that he'd had malaria over 100 times during his life. But even if he could only afford one meal a day for the family, at least he was feeding them instead of them being on the streets starving to death. Again we were burdened with trying to help Frank, but there's such a difference with the way we give in the West. We decide how much we can afford, and look at what we will have left after we have given. Often people have told us they would like to support, but the help is rarely forthcoming. If they really feel the urge to help, it would be better if they did it there and then. But these destitute, radical Christians in poor countries don't do this, they give out of their own lack. They have nothing, but what they do have they will share.

### **Costly Christianity**

We have found this type of Christianity very costly. We are learning to give like our underprivileged brothers, out of our own need. God told us we were unbalanced and had to sort ourselves out. It has cost us very dearly financially and in many other ways, but we know that the only way forward is to lay down our lives for the brethren now, that we may obtain a crown in the future.