

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue No. 14**

#### **BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN - The Beatitudes Part 2**

*by Maurice Barratt*

“The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of the fools is in the house of mirth” (Ecclesiastes 7:4). Was Solomon right?

The gospel of the kingdom always contrasts the present and the future. The future holds the glorious promise of Christ’s coming in His kingdom, the promise of reigning with Him, of rewards, comfort and victory. The present time is in stark contrast: it is a time of battle, of opposition to the world, a time of tribulation, sacrifice, hardship and persecution; a time of paying the price and counting the cost.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the beatitudes, where Jesus contrasts poverty of spirit now with the glorious wealth of the kingdom in the future, mourning now with comfort in the future, meekness now with inheriting the earth in the future, hunger and thirst for righteousness now with being filled in the future. The promises are all very desirable; but none of the conditions are pleasant.

Mourning is perhaps the most obvious case of this. Mourning, or grief, can be a very unpleasant thing indeed. Grief is the sorrow of spirit that so grips and overwhelms you that it even affects you physically. Perhaps you have known grief if a person very close to you has died, or if a close relationship has ended. Indeed, grief can come upon us when anything we love is taken from us. It may seem a small thing to other people, but if it is important enough to us, we will grieve. Thus a child grieves when its pet rabbit dies, or a man grieves when his precious car is written off. Whatever it’s about, grief is a horrible feeling. Often when a person is mourning, they lose their appetite. Fasting may have been a hard discipline to them in normal circumstances, but to a grieving person, it is natural. They couldn’t eat if they tried. A person who is normally full of jokes, frivolity and fun can change dramatically when grief comes upon them. Suddenly they don’t want to know any more. They have become a different person - serious, grave, sober. The heart has been wounded, and the pain can affect the whole body. That’s what mourning is.

So why would Jesus call us to such an unpleasant thing? The Bible tells us why.

#### **Mourning Is In God’s Character**

“And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying ‘We have sinned’... And the Lord said, ‘Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, and from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines?... Yet you have forsaken Me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation! And the children of Israel said unto the Lord, ‘We have sinned: do Thou unto us

whatsoever seemeth good to Thee; deliver us only, we pray Thee, this day.' And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord; and His soul was grieved for the children of Israel" (Judges 10:10-16).

At first God gave Israel a hard answer to their plea for help; but when He saw their repentance and their sad plight, His heart was moved, and He grieved for them. He could not carry out his promised punishment, but changed His mind, and sent Jephthah to deliver them once more.

In Hebrews 3:17 we read that God was grieved with Israel for 40 years in the wilderness because of their hardness of heart, disobedience and unbelief. It caused God great sorrow. He punished them and carried out His judgement; but He was grieved to have to do it.

We may tend to think of God as being permanently contented and happy. But the Bible does not confirm this view. God has passions and emotions; He can be stirred to anger and moved to pity; and He can mourn and grieve. Does He not mourn and grieve over the things that happen in the world today? Or does He sit aloof, uncaring and uninterested, a God without a heart? We know He has a heart, and His heart can be wounded, just as ours can be.

### **Jesus Mourned On Earth**

Jesus, who in His life on earth was our example, knew what it was to grieve and mourn. When Lazarus died, Jesus wept (John 11:35). Jesus was not mourning the dead; He already knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead (verse 11). Jesus was grieved because He saw the grief of His friends, Martha and Mary (verse 33), and He caught something of their spirit. He could be grieved for other people's grief; He could identify with their sorrows.

As Jesus approached His own great battle in Gethsemane, He said to His disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death" (Mark 14:34). He "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy" (verse 33). Grief and mourning consumed Him in that garden. Isaiah had already foretold the character of the Messiah: "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3) And indeed the Messiah's great work was to identify with the sorrow of mankind: "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4).

The Bible records more than once that Jesus wept. But it never records Him laughing. Jesus was not a man of jokes and light talk. His words were always serious. Some people have said that the gospels are full of humour. Well, perhaps it amused Jesus' followers when He talked about a camel going through the eye of a needle - I'm not so sure - but at any rate, the point Jesus was making was deadly serious. His words were never idle or wasted. Neither should ours be, if we accept Jesus' words - that we shall have to give an account on the day of judgement for every idle word we speak (Matthew 12:36).

Jesus is now our intercessor, and an intercessor's life is marked by sorrow and grief. Mourning is still His garment as He pours out His soul to His Father on our behalf. The time for triumph and victory will come later. Until then, He is still our High Priest.

## **Mourning Needs Restoring**

“Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many... and in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine; let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, ‘Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from off you till ye die’ saith the Lord God of hosts” (Isaiah 22:9-14).

Is today a day for rejoicing or for mourning in the church? The tragic decline of Christian standards in our nation in the last 3 decades is enough in itself to tell us that the light has gone out in Britain. It is a time for mourning, a time for intercession, a time for repentance and humbling ourselves before God, pleading with Him to have mercy on us, forgive our sin, and heal our land. But what do we find? Celebration and rejoicing. A new spirit of laughter. Eating, drinking and making merry!

“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion ... Ye that put far away the evil day ... that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves out upon their couches, and eat the Jams out of the flock ... that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David: that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph” (Amos 6:1-6). God’s people were indicted because they were not grieved when they should have been. Today’s Christianity has become one-sided. It is right to rejoice - we have been shown grace and mercy, our sins are forgiven, we have a wonderful hope of eternal inheritance. But this is only one side. We have also been called into the kingdom. That means we have been called to tribulation, persecution, and opposition - called to be aliens in the world. We are not our own. We are called to weep with those who weep, called to bear one another’s burdens, called to intercede for the lost. We are called to share in the suffering of Christ, even to lay down our life - to lose our life for Jesus’ sake in order that we might find it. (There is an entire Bible study here! - see 2 Timothy 3:12; John 15:18-19, 16:2,20,33; 1 Peter 2:9-11,4:1; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 12:15; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 1:29, 3:10; Colossians 1:24; 1 John 3:16; Matthew 10:39).

## **Joy In Affliction**

Rejoicing - yes. Study the words “joy” and “rejoice” in the New Testament. You will find that they are invariably connected with suffering, affliction and tribulation. Jesus’ first mention of joy is in the beatitudes: “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad”, He says - when? “ ... when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake” (Matthew 5:11-12). God looks for people who will please Him, people after His own heart. Who are they? David knew - he was a man after God’s own heart. “The sacrifices of God”, said David, “are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17). Isaiah heard God Himself say it: “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word” (Is 66:2).

Here, in conclusion, are 3 reasons why we should mourn. People say we should celebrate because we are coming into the biggest revival in history. But the plain facts, and God’s word, declare this to be nothing more than “vain imaginations”.

1. Our Land. If we cannot grieve for our land, we must be totally blind, totally hard-hearted or totally apathetic. Our land is full of the things which bring God's judgement, full of abominable things that wreck people's lives and displease God. And this after 80 years of Pentecostal testimony. What kind of revival is this? We practise spiritual warfare and march for victory when we should be interceding. (Today's sort of "spiritual warfare" and real intercession are very different things). "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly... let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, 'Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach' ... Then will the Lord be jealous for His land, and pity His people" (Joel 3:15-18).

2. Our Churches. The Church in the west seems ineffective to change society. In the prosperous "first world" we Christians have so compromised the gospel of the kingdom with materialism and the values of the world that we are probably not even aware of how much standards have slipped. The thorns have been choking the seeds for so long that being choked has become a way of life to us. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of money have worked their way in to even becoming an acceptable part of our church programmes and personal lifestyle - and we think this is Christianity!

The last few years have seen churches, leaders and whole denominations exposed for everything from personal immorality to corporate corruption, In a desperate bid for solvency and success, more and more denominations are becoming investment bankers. Fun days and entertainment have taken the place of "Solemn assemblies". In our desperation to win young people to the church we offer them rock concerts and anything else that is acceptable to them.

It is amazing that we have not realised that if we have to bring in rock concerts in order to get people into church, it is they who have converted us, not the other way round. And if young people are converted by entertainment and pop concerts, what are they being converted to? A church of celebration and fun, a "cool" church that prides itself on doing everything that the world can do. Certainly not a church that says "Blessed are they that mourn", or a church that calls its people to fasting and weeping. That wouldn't win many converts, would it? Or so we think. But it works in China! And it would work here too, if we were willing to present an uncompromised gospel to people by "the foolishness of preaching". Then it wouldn't be us trying to organize and do God's job for Him, but He Himself would "build His Church".

3. Ourselves. The world's influences - fashion, entertainment, music, lifestyle, money, politics - hold an increasing grip on the Church. Indeed, many church leaders insist that these things should have more grip, and call us to involvement with the world, mistakenly thinking that we can be "salt and light in society" by doing what the world do "in a Christian way", developing Christian pressure groups, Christian music and "ethical investment" programmes. Claiming to be a "counter-culture", this is sadly no different in its principles than the culture it purports to run counter to. It is simply a package of the world's culture and influences with the label "Christian" stamped on the front.

“Who is as blind as the Lord’s servant?” asked Isaiah (Isaiah 42:19). A virtual epidemic of blindness has struck the church, one which I fear will lead us straight into the welcoming arms of Antichrist, unless we are healed and recover our sight. Jesus’ stern but loving words to this lukewarm, blind church are: “I counsel thee to buy of Me ... eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Rev 3:18). The fact that it is to be bought means that there is a price to pay. But how necessary! The blind can never mourn for what they cannot see. That is why the church today does not mourn. The old saying is true in this sense also: “What the eye doesn’t see, the heart doesn’t grieve for”. Only when our eyes are opened to see our own pitiable state, will we begin to mourn and grieve - first for ourselves, then for our church, and then for our land.

### **“Humble Yourselves”**

Several years ago, as budding intercessors determined to wage spiritual warfare on behalf of Manchester, a group of us gathered regularly for prayer. We used all the “formulas” - binding the devil, claiming the ground, declaring God’s victory. But how wrong and foolish we were! God had mercy on us and put us right. He reminded us that Jesus’ disciples had problems casting a demon out of a boy. (Matthew 17:14-16) Jesus told them, “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting”. The Lord then rebuked us strongly: “The disciples couldn’t even cast one demon out of one boy without prayer and fasting, and you think you can cast all the demons out of Manchester!” God had a different way for us. “Humble yourselves”, He said. We had to start with that, and it took a long while for the veil to come off our eyes and for us to realize how blind we had been. Then we had to start putting things right, and changing our lifestyle. And slowly, God has been changing us over the years. And now we have come to the conclusion that Solomon had it right: The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of the fools is in the house of mirth.

## **Experiences From Life**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **God Can't Be Everything To Us Until He's All We've Got**

The day should have been wonderful. It was Nathan's 2nd birthday and I was almost 3 months pregnant, but then I saw the blood. Panic rose inside me and I found it very difficult to think clearly but I rushed to the phone and spoke with the doctor. She told me to stay where I was and promised that she would be round to see me within the hour. After a brief check up she said that my body was trying to tell me, through these warning signals, that I was doing too much rushing round after a 2-year-old, and the best thing I could do now was rest as much as possible with my feet up (which, in the circumstances, I thought was quite laughable.) She then told me that if the bleeding continued I was to go round to the maternity hospital and let them examine me and it was her opinion that they would probably keep me in for a few days to rest whilst I got over this difficult period.

The next day my condition hadn't improved, so I packed a small bag containing night wear and my bible and then added a bit of correspondence which I hoped I could catch up on during my hours of freedom from responsibility. Maurice accompanied me to the hospital and we were both taken into a room where I was interviewed. I gave them as many details as possible concerning my pregnancy after which they gave me a brief examination, and then made an appointment for me with the radiography department for a scan. As I was waiting for my name to be called I remembered my previous appointments here when I had been given the opportunity to see Nathan before he was born. They were thrilling times as I had been allowed to look inside my own body at the miracle God was performing there. This day also I felt tremendous excitement at what progress my baby would be making at this stage. I believed with all my heart that there was nothing wrong, and that the pregnancy would go on without any problems.

### **Awful Verdict**

I must say I felt a bit disappointed as I lay on the hospital couch because the monitor was by my head instead of my feet so I couldn't see what was on the screen; but I could see clearly Maurice's face and that of the radiographer, and I searched them intently for any tell-tale signs which would have given me a clue as to what was happening. After an external scan the radiographer said that she couldn't comment yet as she couldn't properly see what was happening so she then proceeded to give me an internal scan. Her face didn't give anything away as she called somebody over to confer with in medical jargon, and I didn't understand what they were saying. I remember asking time and again if everything was OK, but the radiographer just kept saying that she would let me know when she had reached a conclusion. She asked me to confirm my pregnancy dates which I did, she then asked me if I was sure of them, and I think at this stage I began to feel uneasy and said that maybe I wasn't so sure after all. It was then that she looked at me and said that she was very sorry but according to my dates my baby had been dead for the last 4 weeks and there was severe haemorrhaging all round my womb as my body was preparing to abort the baby.

### **Unexpected Feelings**

When I was a child I remember my father punching me in my forehead right between my eyes and the effect of the blow stunned me as I reeled backwards; the words of this radiographer had a similar effect, and for a moment it seemed as though her words didn't really penetrate my understanding. Nothing that the doctor had said so far had prepared me for what I had just heard. They hadn't even intimated that there could be a possibility that I could lose my child. For some moments I was stunned, then I began to sob involuntarily and uncontrollably. I kept my mouth closed but my body was jerking as the silent tears came streaming down my face. "Oh God. No, please no!" I could see the nurse was embarrassed. She pulled off a wad of tissue from the roll and gave it to me and she began to usher me into a cubicle where she said I could collect myself before I left the department.

Maurice stood close to me as I sat in the cubicle and as I clung to his trouser leg I just sobbed into his clothing for the pain I felt inside was so intense. Then as I sat there, it seemed like my life passed

before my eyes and I remembered all the pain I had suffered throughout my violent childhood and teens, and I suddenly realised that God had given me a new life. A strange feeling came over me as I realised that God had changed so many of my circumstances and I began to look afresh at what God had done for me. As I sat there I remember saying to Maurice, "I have no recriminations, God has blessed me so much" .I began to thank God for Nathan, my little 2-year-old son who had already brought so much joy into my life. I thanked God for Maurice who had been the best husband anybody could ask for, who was not only loving and caring but was also a man of God, somebody I could look up to and respect and take as my example. I thanked God also for the fact that He had called me into the ministry and given me a purpose in life which I knew was worth while. And then like Job I could say with all sincerity, "God gives, God takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord" .In a matter of moments I felt as though I understood that God knew what He was doing and that it He had decided that this child should not see life then His decision was good enough for me, and I accepted it. I wiped my face, blew my nose and took the results from the scan to the lady who had interviewed me at first.

### **A Lesson To Be Learried**

After reading the results of the scan the doctor told me that I ought to stay in the hospital and have an operation to have the dead child removed from my womb. Although I had come expecting to be kept in for a few days, I was now very reluctant to stay. All sorts of thoughts loomed up in my mind and I found myself hoping that God would change His mind concerning what He had decided to do with my baby, I knew God could perform miracles, I knew God could give life, and I was just hoping that God would change His mind. Although my baby was dead I didn't want anybody to take it from me, I wanted to nurse it a little longer. In the end Maurice made me see sense and I agreed to stay and have the operation.

Once I was established on the ward the kind nurses tried to give me information on people who had had miscarriages in the hope that I could cope with the situation. But I didn't feel the need to read any of the material; what I was being faced with now was a lesson which needed to be learned - was I prepared for God to be the Lord of my life? Could I honestly say, "Thy will be done"? As I pondered these questions I knew the answer was yes; no matter what the cost, the answer would always be yes. Once my decision was made I felt my mind relax and the peace return into my heart. A couple of days later I came home from hospital and picked up the threads of life, and, to be honest, I thought I had coped with the situation very well indeed.

### **The Grief Returns**

A few weeks after this event I happened to be flicking through a magazine and came across an article which pictured a woman holding a new-born baby, a gush of emotion suddenly came over me and I wept uncontrollably and felt what seemed like an awful physical pain inside my heart. I was quite surprised at my reaction because until then I had felt as though I had handled the situation very well. There were times too when I would see a pregnant woman in the street and feel grief begin to rise within me and a sense of despair at what could have been and I would again cry and feel that

seemingly physical pain in my heart. These experiences bothered me and I remember praying and asking God why it was that I felt this way, and God told me that although I had accepted His decision concerning my baby, I had also resented it.

This truth was also emphasised by the fact that I had continually prayed and asked God to give me another child, as I didn't want Nathan to be brought up on his own. I was so desperate for another child that I even enquired about adoption, but was informed that I was too old. Then, months later, in prayer I finally made my peace with God and told Him that I would not only accept, but also be happy with His decision and that from now on I would never pester Him again asking Him for another child; He alone knew the future, and knew exactly what I could and could not cope with. I then gathered a whole stack of baby clothes and equipment that I had saved after having Nathan and gave it all away to somebody 100 miles away. In my mind I had closed a chapter of that particular book and was not only saying to God that I was happy with His decision, but I was also proving it with my actions.

### **The God Of Surprises**

A fortnight after all the baby things had gone out of the door I was sick 2 mornings on the run, and I mentioned this to Maurice, who told me with confidence that I was pregnant! When I asked him to qualify his statement he said that God had woken him up in the night just recently and told him very clearly that He was going to give him another son. Maurice had been so convinced this was the voice of God that he had written it down in his diary, which he brought to show me. 10 days after this God gave me a dream, during which He told me that I was to name the child I was carrying Izaac, and from that moment I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that no matter what went on during this pregnancy, Izaac would be born as a gift to Maurice and myself from God, not because I had pressurised Him into giving it, but because it was His will for us.

### **Life Is A Gift**

I realise that not everyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one can be consoled the way I was, but I know we all go through the same emotions and sense of utter despair at our loss. The experience can either make us turn away from God and become hard and bitter, or it can turn us towards God and make us more soft and sensitive towards others in similar circumstances. It's a certainty that we will all experience losing loved ones during our lifetime if we live for any length of time. The bible advises us to "number our days" and spend them wisely, and nothing I know makes us appreciate the brevity of life more than losing someone close. We take so much for granted. Life is a gift, yet we all make so many demands upon God for that life. Someone once said that "God can't mean everything to us until He's all we've got", and I found with my miscarriage that when my heart was the sorest, God was the only One who could pour on the balm I needed to ease the ache and pain of my awful loss. Knowing God really does bring comfort.