

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

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### **BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS**

#### **The Beatitudes Part 7**

*by Maurice Barratt*

Peace is something everyone wants. From the militant anti-nuclear activists of the “peace movement” to the ordinary man in the street, everybody would say they want peace on earth. And Christianity promises it - the angels announced it at Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:14). Jesus is “the Prince of Peace”; and here in this beatitude we are called to be “peacemakers”. But Jesus didn’t say “Blessed are the peaceful”. This is not to do with having peace in yourself. Being peaceful is a passive thing. A cemetery is the most peaceful place on earth - every gravestone tells you the people there are “resting in peace”. But peacemaking is an active thing. Dead people cannot make peace. Psalm 34:14 instructs us to “seek peace and pursue it” - to actively chase after it.

#### **Three Questions**

There are three questions we need to consider with regard to peacemaking. Firstly, Can we bring peace to the world? Should we make peace with the world? Secondly, Did Jesus come to bring peace to the world? And lastly, Can there be peace without war? Can peace come without it being enforced? The answer to our first question puts an immediate and major qualification on our role as peacemakers. We can have no peace with the world. John says, “Love not the world” (1 John 2:15). James says, “Whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). “The world”, let us be clear, means the systems of this world, which are ruled by the devil and heading towards the kingdom of antichrist. “The world” doesn’t mean people. We are to “live peaceably with all men ... if it be possible” (Romans 12:18).

It isn’t possible, of course. But we are to make every effort. People who are ruled by the devil can never have peace with people who are ruled by God. The kingdom of darkness can never be at peace with the kingdom of light. We are to love all men, to bless them when they hate us, to pray for them when they persecute us. We love them, but we know who they’re serving, we know which kingdom they belong to, so we can never make peace with them. To do so would be to compromise. “Peace” in the world often actually means compromise. “The peace process” always means making compromises on both sides. But that’s not true peace, because neither side has got what it really wants. Likewise the husband who says “Alright, I’ll do anything for peace!” has only achieved compromise, not peace.

#### **Peace At Any Price?**

This is why we have to be careful when we talk about peacemaking as Christians. It would be easy to think that Christianity is about making peace at all costs, by all means. Many Christians do think that, and they join themselves up with peace movements in the world - and end up compromised, losing their salt and light, and only succeed in getting absorbed into the world's systems. We need to be alert to the fact that the antichrist will fulfil all the hopes of the peace movement and put an end to wars on earth. He is a deceiver. We must not be pulled into his deceptions.

Jesus made it clear that we cannot have peace with the world, and his words plainly answer our second question: Did he come to bring peace on earth? "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter against her mother ... and a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matthew 10:34-36). This shows just how impossible it is for a Christian to "live peaceably with all men" .History bears out the fact that true Christians have always attracted the opposition and hostility of the world. The apostles did; all the men of God who ever achieved anything for the kingdom have been hated, despised and persecuted. There has been no peace.

### **"Peace On Earth"?**

So what did the angels mean when they proclaimed "Peace on earth" at Jesus' birth? The Jews missed the coming of the Messiah, even though they knew the scriptures well, because they could not see the difference between the two comings of Jesus. They were looking for the revolutionary coming in glory as King, and they missed the "suffering servant", "despised and rejected of men" .We can sympathise - sometimes in prophecy the first part of a verse is talking about the first coming and the second part refers to the second coming - or vice versa! The angels' words also referred to Jesus second coming. That is when he will come as the prince of peace. Then the devil's system which blocks the way to peace will be removed, and when there will finally be peace on earth.

### **Peace With God**

Yet we are called to be peacemakers. Who can we make peace with? Firstly, we can make our peace with God. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). This wonderful possibility is open to all men. God has never judged anybody yet. Jesus did not come to judge or to condemn but to offer reconciliation - peace with God - to all men. We are also ambassadors for God, preaching that same reconciliation - the free offer of God's forgiveness and grace to all men. That is one important way we can be peacemakers. We may not be able to have any truck with the kingdom of darkness, but we can offer people the good news of the kingdom of light!

### **Peace in The Heart**

Secondly, we can have peace in our hearts. "Peace be unto you", said Jesus to his disciples (Luke 24:36), and again, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you - not as the world giveth, give I

unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). This is inner peace, peace in the heart. It is not the outward peace of circumstances; it is not political peace. It is peace despite the circumstances, peace in any circumstance. We must have peace in order to make peace. The peace that Jesus gives is "his peace" - the very peace that he had! Like the rest of the beatitudes, this peace which enables us to be peacemakers is the character of Christ. It is the new nature - not a hypocritical, outwardly respectable self-control of the old nature, but a wonderful, natural peace from within.

### **Peace With The Jews**

Thirdly, we can make peace with the Jews. Ephesians 2 says that before Christ came, there was enmity between Jew and Gentile. Moreover, this was a God-instigated enmity. God told the Jews to have nothing to do with the Gentiles. The Gentiles were "dogs", outside the promises and the covenants: only the Jews were the chosen people. But Jesus came to break down the wall that divided Jew and Gentile. Now the barrier is not between Jew and Gentile, but between the citizens of the kingdom of heaven and the citizens of the kingdom of the devil. The Christian and the Jew who believes in Jesus are one in Christ - "one new man" (Ephesians 2:15). All the differences are abolished.

### **The Broken Wall**

This disproves the arguments of those who say that God is finished with Israel and that the church is now the "New Israel" .It also mitigates against the idea that there should be a separate class of "messianic Jews" .God makes no such distinction. All are part of the body of Christ. The wall is broken down. Paul says, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly" (Romans 2:28). Christians are "Jews inwardly" .What really gives "Messianic Jews" their distinctiveness is the fact that they are part of the Body of Christ, not that they are Jewish. Paul understood that he was free from the law, but that nevertheless he also felt free to keep certain customs; he participated in the Jewish feasts and shaved his head as a sign of a vow he had made. However, Jewish Christians today who wish to keep such Jewish customs (even though they know they are free in Christ and not in bondage to anything), are often greeted with suspicion and mistrust by other Christians, who suspect them of being legalistic and not free. So the Jewish Christians feel cut off from the Church at large, and the ghetto mentality begins to develop all over again. This is an obstacle to unity, and both "sides" are to blame. There should be no segregation. "He is our peace, who hath made both one" (Ephesians 2:14).

### **Peace In The Body**

Lastly, we are to make peace with Christians. There is to be peace in the Body of Christ. Peace and unity are the same thing. True peace means absolute unity, oneness in spirit. But disunity has been a terrible blight on the Body of Christ down the centuries. Catholics have burned Protestants at the stake, and Protestants have burned Catholics. Now, of course, we don't do that sort of thing - but we

are quick to anathematize with our words all the other denominations who don't agree with our doctrines. We can crucify other Christians with our tongues, and do just as much damage as with sword, fire or gun. "Follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith we may edify one another" (Romans 14:19). "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33). Why then is there so much dissension and strife? Could it be because there are not many saints in the churches today? - not many who have the character of Christ, who live the beatitudes? James has some pertinent words for us. We have referred to them several times in our studies of the beatitudes, because they echo them so strongly. "If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. For this wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish ... But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:14-18). How many things in these verses are relevant to us if we are to be peacemakers in the Body of Christ! The context of James' words is the unruly tongue, which murders and destroys unity; and the tongue only speaks what is in the heart. Envy, partiality, hypocrisy, lack of gentleness and mercy - all those things sow discord in the Body of Christ. Thus Paul urges the Ephesians: "... with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2-3). It's clear from Paul's and James' words that this is not going to happen by itself. We need to "endeavour", to strive after, to "seek peace and pursue it". Peacemaking is definitely an active thing!

### **No Peace With False Prophets**

Peace with Christians does not, however, mean peace with all who call themselves Christians. It means peace in the Body of Christ, among true Christians. This calls for discernment on our part. There are false prophets in the church, but we are not to make peace with them. There are "Pharisees" in the church today who are full of the same self-righteous, legalistic hypocrisy which characterized the Pharisees of Jesus' day - and Jesus had no peace with them. Once again we are learning that peacemaking involves careful discernment.

We have seen that we cannot make peace with the world, and that Jesus did not come to bring peace on earth. But the earth will have peace when he comes again. Nevertheless, even that peace will only come through war - in fact, through the most terrible battle mankind has seen. It may be surprising, but that's the way it will happen - the only way it can happen. Read Revelation 19:11-21, and see how the "Prince of Peace" brings peace only through a bloodbath, and only by "binding the strongman", Satan, for a thousand years; and he only keeps the peace by enforcing it with "a rod of iron". This is peace by force. Even the millennium is not perfection. That has to wait until the devil is in the lake of fire, until justice is done, until judgement has been passed. When all that has happened, there will finally be peace in eternity. Until then, we are to make peace if we want to be followers of Jesus.

## **Experiences From Life**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **Acquiring A Taste For Humble Pie**

Peace is a very desirable yet elusive thing. Because of my background peace never came easily to me as I never knew quite how to bring it about. The bible says that a kind answer turns away wrath, but I didn't know how to say kind things. Specific times in my life do stand out to me, however, as I recognised that God gave me wisdom and helped me to have a right attitude towards particular situations. People who have no peace are not happy people. At the age of 16 I left home and thought at last I could be happy because I'd have the peace I was craving, but it didn't take me long to realise that peace came from within and not from without.

Dad's pet as a child had its compensations, and the resentment and jealousy that this provoked in my older sister, brother and mother didn't cause me too much concern, until at the age of 6 my younger sister was born and she stole all my father's affection - she was so innocent and sweet, and by this time I had become a cheeky little brat! No one had time for me at home any more; Dad regarded me as too outspoken, Mum, my brother and sister thought of me as being Dad's pet, spoilt, and a real pest. Consequently, I was out of the house as much as possible and did my utmost to be accepted into other people's families. The chores that I found so irksome to do when forced at home, were things that I delighted to do in other people's houses because I knew that my neatness and cleanliness would earn me praise and recognition. Unfortunately, the chip on my shoulder and resentment were growing every day and couldn't be missed in my attitude, and parents would often end up telling their children to keep away from me because they thought I would be a bad influence upon them.

### **Lonely Walks**

The treatment I received from family, friends, and teachers alike, hurt me tremendously as a youngster, and I'd spend hours going for lonely walks with the family dog to sit in woods or fields where I would cry away my frustration and pain. This is the way I always cried, I never used to let people know how their reactions or words affected me, for fear of them thinking I was weak. My exterior told everyone that I was brash, rebellious and hard, but inside I was really sore and wanted so much for someone to love and understand me. The dog was a great comfort, she didn't utter a word, but she would sit by me and lick away the tears that fell so freely down my face. When my crying was all done, and there were no tears left in me, I would put on my fighting gloves again telling myself that I didn't care, and go back home to battle once more. If my troubles had only been emotional that would have been bad enough, but Dad had been a champion boxer when he was in the army and the physical violence that occurred in our household far outweighed any verbal violence, as on these occasions the police had to intervene, and sometimes there would be a hospital admittance.

## **Consent To Leave**

Although I had run away from home, or been thrown out of the house by my parents, on numerous occasions, at the age of 16, when my parents finally gave their written consent for me to at last leave the nest, I'm sure that their relief was as great as mine. I had been going to my church since I was 9 years old, yet it was only of late that I had become more involved in the activities. At 15 years of age I had become the church secretary, the church organist, and a member of the church music group that had just been formed. On hindsight I am so grateful that God prepared me to be on my own at the age of 16, because if I hadn't been so involved in these church activities, with my attitude, I don't know where I would have ended up. All I knew when I left home was that I had a two-roomed furnished flat and more freedom than I had ever known in my life before. I was the only one ruling my life at this point in time, there were no parents or teachers telling me what to do. On one hand I felt incredibly excited at the prospect of all this freedom, yet on the other hand I felt very vulnerable indeed. I had suddenly been landed with responsibilities that I had never known anything about either - paying the rent, and bills etc., but there and then I made my decision that even if I starved I would never go back home.

## **The Nightmares Begin**

For a few months everything seemed to be going well. Gradually I began to let down my defences and relax a little, and this probably allowed my subconscious to take over for I began to be troubled with nightmares. Night after night I would wake up screaming, sobbing and sweating, re-living in my dreams some of the traumatic experiences I had passed through. These nightmares were very painful and horrible, and I prayed earnestly that God would set me free from them, but week after week they continued until I got to the stage where I was really frightened to go to bed at night. My appearance was beginning to suffer because of my sleepless nights and I had huge bags under my eyes. At the end of one music practice evening Maurice, who was then the leader of the music group, asked me why I was looking so unwell.

I had never shared my home life with any member of the church for two reasons; 1) I didn't think they'd believe me, 2) I thought that they would probably think that I had brought everything upon myself, so I had kept quiet and become very suspicious, thinking that every family in the church was the same as ours. For the past 18 months I had spent a lot of time at the office in the minister's house as I was the church secretary, and he had done his utmost to make me feel at home. After eating dinner with his family I would go down into the office to do my work, but it wouldn't be long before the minister and I would be deep in conversation and he would spend hours explaining scriptures to me and talking about God in such a way that sometimes my heart felt as though it would burst with gratitude for the fact that God had allowed me to become a Christian. Those times of fellowship and communion that I shared with him boosted me so much that it made all my past and present difficulties insignificant. I knew that he was a real Christian; his lifestyle and family life were so different from my own, and I desperately wanted the relationship that he had with Jesus Christ for myself.

## **Straight Talk**

As Maurice was the minister's son, when he asked me why I was looking so unwell, I felt less inhibited to share my problems with him because I thought he would be something like his father and would show me sympathy and understanding, but I was sadly mistaken. After sharing my nightmares with him, Maurice looked me straight in the face and quoted a verse of scripture which says, "If any man says he loves God and hates his brother that man is a liar" (1 Jn 4:20). He went on to say that it was obvious from my attitude that I had a real problem with hatred and bitterness, and if I wanted to be a Christian then I had to make a decision to forgive; after all, that is what Christianity is - "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Mt 6:12). I can't convey on paper the angry feelings that I had towards Maurice at that particular point in time. I felt so frustrated, because I knew he had no conception of the sort of background I'd come from, especially as I had now been involved somewhat in his family circumstances. In a rage I stormed out of the church, and feeling totally justified in my attitude I vowed that I would not forgive until I was asked for forgiveness!

## **No Peace**

Until this point I don't think I'd ever truly realised the extent of my hatred and bitterness towards my mother and father, there seemed to be a fire burning within me that just would not be quenched. The nightmares continued, the burning sensation continued, I had no peace because I knew what Maurice had said was the truth and God would not let me get away from the fact that I had a responsibility towards my own salvation. I remember sitting down one night in my flat and rationally thinking over the situation. I had left home some time ago. When I was still living with my parents my sarcasm and vicious actions used to hurt them and I received a good deal of satisfaction from this fact, but now that I had left home any murderous thoughts and feelings that I had towards my parents were no longer affecting them, my hatred and bitterness was hurting no one but me. I despised the idea of eating "humble pie", but I really did want to be a real Christian. In my short lifetime I'd witnessed the genuine and the false, and I knew which I wanted. It took a great deal of effort, but I eventually prayed that God would heal me, that He would take away the hatred and replace it with love.

## **Understanding**

The nightmares stopped immediately, and each night I would pray through gritted teeth that God would heal me and take away the hatred and fill my heart with love, but this took a long time. God had a lot to do to soften me up inside. I only understood situations from my point of view, God had to show me that other people had backgrounds too - everyone has a story to tell. He began to remind me of experiences my parents had had to pass through whilst growing up. At the time I'd ignored what my parents had to say thinking that was their problem and nothing to do with me, but now that God was bringing it to mind I realised that everyone is a product of their environment, and God gradually gave me understanding for my parents. From the bottom of my heart I finally forgave them for the things that had gone on in my past and my prayers began to change, I no longer asked

God to take away the hatred and replace it with love, my prayer changed to - "Lord, please bless my parents and show them the kindness that You've shown to me".

When I began to pray this prayer in all honesty I really did feel the peace of God flowing in my heart. The years since I was 16 have proved what a thorough work God did in my heart, because even though there is still no communication from my parents to me (and I've done my utmost to alter this situation), I can still pray in all sincerity that God will bless them and show them the kindness that He's shown to me. We may not always be able to have peace with men, but as Christians we have no excuse for not having peace with God, and bitterness and unforgiveness are two of the major hindrances to true peace in our heart.