

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

**Issue No. 20**

### **Persecuted For Righteousness' Sake**

#### **The Beatitudes Part 8**

*by Maurice Barratt*

We have reached the last two beatitudes. Some people categorize these two as one beatitude - "Blessed are they which are persecuted". But verse 10 and verse 11 are actually talking about different things. They are both about persecution, but persecution for quite different reasons. Persecution is the end result of living the beatitudes. In our studies we have been reminding ourselves that the beatitudes are progressive. This is the culmination! It's the opposite of what we'd like to think. We might imagine that a holy person who lives out the beatitudes, who is humble, meek, merciful and pure in heart, would attract the respect and admiration of the world and of other Christians. But the opposite is the case. They attract hostility and hatred - a hatred that cannot be content with just thinking evil, but turns it into malicious action.

#### **Persecution For Doing Good**

The final beatitude, which we will study in the next issue, concerns persecution which takes the form of false accusation and slander. This is what we generally associate with persecution. But the verse we are considering here concerns people who are persecuted for a different reason: not with false accusation, because they have allegedly done something evil, but "for righteousness' sake" - because they are righteous. This is persecution for doing good, for being a good Christian. You wouldn't believe that people would persecute you for doing good and being righteous, would you? But, as my examples will show, this is what always happens. Persecution comes in two stages. Before people accuse you of things you haven't done, they'll accuse you of things you have done! You've been justified. You've been called by God. You've been separated from the world. You've become like Christ, you have his character, his righteousness. And this is why you are persecuted.

Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you ... If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you ... The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you ..." (John 15:16-20). Paul made it clear that persecution is the lot of the godly Christian. He said to Timothy, "Thou hast fully known my manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions ... yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). This is one of those "promises" which we usually leave out of the "promise box"! But we have to come to terms with it.

I have three examples from the Bible of people who were persecuted for being righteous. Later in the lives of these same three men, we find that they were also falsely accused - the last beatitude - but before this, each of them faced persecution for righteousness' sake.

### **Joseph**

Joseph was initially persecuted because he was his father's favourite, and because of his dreams, which came from God (Genesis 37:3-8). His own brothers hated him so much that they threw him in a pit and would have left him to die, had not Judah's conscience smitten him and persuaded them to sell him into slavery instead.

### **David**

David was persecuted and hunted down by Saul for no other reason than that he was righteous. Saul had no false accusations to bring against David, only the fact that God had chosen him. When David had come upon Saul secretly in the wilderness and refused to kill him, Saul confessed to David, "Thou art more righteous than I ... behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand" (1 Samuel 24:17,20). Yet even after this Saul continued to persecute David and try to kill him.

### **Jesus**

It was prophesied of Jesus, "Princes have persecuted me without a cause" (Psalm 119:161); and at the beginning of his ministry we find a remarkable incident. He went to the synagogue and read from Isaiah, and told the people that the scripture was being fulfilled that day. "And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke 4:22). It all sounds very positive. Then what did they do? They tried to throw him over the cliff! (verse 29). Later, Jesus faced many false accusations. But here, they tried to kill him just because he was righteous, because he was chosen by God.

Jesus says that we are blessed when we are persecuted. How can this be? Persecution is not blessing! But it's because of the effects of persecution that we are blessed. Here are five reasons.

#### **1. Persecution Fashions Character**

Persecution tests and proves our call by offering resistance to it. It's easy to say we are Christians, but the reality of our words is tested when opposition comes - when we face hostility and hatred because we are Christians. The progression of the beatitudes is important because we have to be tested on each stage before we progress to the next. God tests us with circumstances and trials in order to see if we will be poor in spirit when everyone else is exalted, if we will mourn when everyone else is rejoicing, if we will be meek when everyone else is claiming their rights, and so on.

And finally, before we face false accusation, we have to be tested to see whether we will stand up to persecution just for being Christians. This makes sense, after all; if we will not come through when we are accused of something that is true, we will certainly not stand when we are accused of something that is isn't true!

This also brings home the point that the beatitudes are not just attitudes. They are marks of character. Attitudes are only in the mind, but character is the actions which result, and it is character which is tested by God, not attitude. God is not interested in what you think or believe, but in what you do as a result of what you think or believe. In other words, your actions only prove whether you believe, or only thought you believed.

Nothing builds character like persecution. Hebrews says about chastening that God allows it "for our profit, that we might be partakers in his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). Peter prays that "the God of all grace, who bath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Peter 5:10). It is the suffering caused by persecution and opposition that forms character within us.

## **2. It's Part Of Our Commission**

Enduring persecution is part of our calling and commission. Jesus sent the disciples out "as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matthew 10:16), and told them they would be "delivered up... scourged ... persecuted ... hated of all men" (Matthew 10:17-23). In other words, persecution is part of God's will - and we're always blessed when we're in God's will.

## **3. God Can Use Us**

If we endure persecution, God can make a statement to Satan. In the book of Job we learn a great secret. God wanted to use Job's faith in enduring trials and suffering to make a statement to the devil. Job was in the middle of an argument between Satan and God. Many people think that Satan started this argument by accusing Job before God. But this is not the case. In fact, God provoked Satan first, by making a statement: "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man ...?" (Job 1:8). Only then did Satan counter and suggest that Job only served God because God blessed him. And so the case had to be proved. Would Job still serve God if God took away the blessing? If not, then Satan's accusation would be proved true: Satan could then use Job to make a statement against God.

### **Why God Tried Job**

Sometimes we think that the trials of Job were to prove Job's righteousness and faith. In fact, the issue was God's righteousness and faith. Job's trials were to prove that God was right in what he said: that Job truly feared and loved him, regardless of the circumstances, in blessing or affliction. It was God's faith in Job that was on trial. When we are tested with persecution, we are in the same place as Job - in the middle of the debate between God and Satan. If we come through, God can

make a statement about us to the devil, and the devil's accusations and insinuations are defeated, proved to be lies. If we don't come through, the devil wins - he can accuse us before God. Maybe it is of no serious consequence to us - we are still covered by God's grace - but God didn't do it for our sake, he did it for his sake, so he could make a statement to the devil about the love his people have for him - and now that categorical statement cannot be made.

#### **4. It Proves Our Seed**

Our reaction to persecution proves which seed we belong to. In the Bible, from the very beginning there are two seeds, two lines or generations, a good seed and a bad seed. In the beginning there is the seed of Cain, and the seed of Abel. And the bad seed always persecutes the good seed. Cain killed Abel, not because Abel had done anything wrong; neither did Cain falsely accuse Abel of evil. He killed Abel because Abel was righteous. This is the first case of persecution for righteousness' sake in the Bible, and it remains an unchanging principle throughout. In Galatians 4 we read of Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac - two seeds again, one of the flesh, one of the promise. And again the bad seed persecuted the good seed. "He that was born of the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit", and "even so it is now" (Galatians 4:29).

The principle continues today. The flesh always persecutes the seed of promise. It is instructive to note where persecution comes from. In all our examples, it comes from God's own people, not from the world. Joseph was persecuted not by the Israelites or the Egyptians but by his own brothers. David was persecuted not by the Philistines but by King Saul. And Jesus was persecuted not by the Gentiles but by his own people. In Luke's account of the beatitudes Jesus pointedly remarks that those who suffer persecution are only following in the steps of the prophets, who were also persecuted - and those who do the persecuting are also following in the steps of their fathers, who persecuted the prophets (see Luke 6:22-23). They are each proving which seed they have come from.

#### **5. Our Reward Is Great**

Lastly, we are blessed when we are persecuted because our reward is great in heaven. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven" says Jesus (Matthew 5:10). We have that wonderful and very real promise to look forward to. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" says Paul (2 Corinthians 4:7). And the earthen vessel is in for a tough time: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). This is the voice of a man who has suffered persecution. He knows how tough it is. He bears the scars. Yet he knows the purpose of persecution. It manifests the treasure more gloriously in the vessel. The more frail the vessel, the more strongly the glory of the treasure shines. And "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Glory, as we have seen previously, means character. A heavenly character is being formed in us by persecution and affliction

- "far more exceeding and eternal". Let that encouragement spur us on to "live godly in Christ Jesus"!

## **Experiences From Life**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **"The Servant Is Not Greater Than His Lord"**

I ran to my bedroom hoping to escape the terrible battering I probably deserved, I was terrified of Dad's anger yet I seemed incapable of saying or doing the right things. He forced open the door which I had locked against his entry and in sheer panic I picked up the standard lamp and began to smash all my bedroom windows with the base of it, screaming for help and for somebody to call the police. The adrenalin was rushing through me and I knew as I lashed out wildly that something outside my control had taken over me. Dad must have seen it too because it frightened him and he backed out of the room telling my mother that I had gone mad.

As they retreated downstairs I continued smashing the windows and screaming at the top of my voice until I had no more strength left. I felt limp and exhausted as I slumped onto my bed and words came into my mind as God began to speak sense to me, "You won't remain a Christian if you stay in this house, you've got to get away. If you don't, you'll go insane." For a few years now I'd been running away from home and staying with various families who'd sheltered me, only to be brought back again by the police at my parents' request. There were times also when my parents threw me out but then had second thoughts and called the police to bring me home. There and then as I sat slumped on my bed, I prayed that even though I was under age God would make a way for me to leave that house. God must have heard for that's exactly what He did ...

### **God Begins To Work**

My oldest sister, who had emigrated to Australia, had written to my parents on numerous occasions inviting them to do the same as she had done and start their lives again in another country. My parents had thought about and dropped this idea every time, but now it took root and they actually went to the emigration authorities to sort out the matter. Their passage out would have been easy if I hadn't been such a hindrance. I adamantly refused to go with them. For the past year I had been putting down roots in my church where I had become organist, secretary and a member of the music group. After all these years of being rejected and unwanted, I at last felt useful, and I think I would have walked over hot coals to keep the friendship and trust that was offered by the minister. The emigration authorities told my parents that they would either have to drop the idea of going to Australia for the time being or find a guardian for me. They chose the latter option, and my minister signed all the necessary papers to become my legal guardian. My parents could now relinquish all responsibility for me and at last I could leave home with their consent.

## **New Loyalty**

Everything was hunky dory, until something happened which stopped my parents pursuing their emigration plans. My mother seemed terribly resentful of the fact that the most godly Christian she knew had become my ally. From her point of view I can see how incredulous it must have been that somebody would take on such a self-opinionated, arrogant, rebellious, troublesome person as myself, but the confidence and trust the minister put into me brought out loyalty and devotion which I never dreamed I could give. He knew I was very lonely and had no friends, and would include me at every opportunity in his family circle. He confessed to me that, even though my parents hadn't emigrated, he'd taken his commitment very seriously and prayed for me every day as he did for each member of his own immediate family. I partook in the family worship, and enjoyed the special treat of Saturday night supper when all his family, married and unmarried, would meet for laughter or serious conversation.

As my relationship with his two single daughters developed we began to holiday together, sometimes making these events special times of seeking God for spiritual growth. The minister's daughter Lis, who was my own age, taught me some very valuable lessons. After graduating from university, she went to Germany to teach English to German children in their schools. Whilst living in Germany she made many friends and did lots of things with her new found freedom. On her return she came back to live with her parents - which I thought was very strange, I had expected her to rent a flat somewhere as I had done. I knew she'd enjoyed her stay in Germany because of the stories she'd told us, so I concluded she must be quite soft and unable to cope for any length of time on her own and needed the support of her family around her. I remember sharing my thoughts with her one day and she was quite shocked. She put me straight there and then by saying that I was totally wrong - the reason for her returning home was that she enjoyed living with her parents. Lis proved this statement over and over again in the things I personally witnessed her doing.

## **An Unbelievable Family**

Lis's mother gradually became incapable of running the household due to osteo-arthritis, so after a family discussion it was decided that Chris, the youngest daughter, would stay at home to look after her mother and do the housework and Lis would go to work and be the bread-winner (as the minister only had a very small income from the church). Lis had some splendid qualifications which enabled her to get high-ranking positions. Each month she would lay her salary before the family at their "business meeting", and after paying bills, food, etc, they would equally divide what remained amongst themselves as spends. It might only be £2 each week, but I know that her parents, in all their married life, had never before had money they could call their own.

This family was unbelievable. I spent more and more time with them, and their attitudes and lifestyle made such a deep impression upon me that they began to rub off and my character gradually changed. I became less hard and aggressive, more willing and adaptable, and because the minister could talk of nothing but God, my desire for holy things grew beyond all recognition. I had always had a good singing voice, now God began to anoint it and I had reports of people being filled with the Holy Ghost and healed as I sang.

The family I was born into was so different from the Barratt's household. We had an embarrassing track record for misconduct. My oldest sister and brother had terrible marital problems and had been divorced, my younger sister had four illegitimate children, and I had a half-sister living a few blocks away whom my father told me about after his conversion! I wasn't bothered that people expected the worst of me - after all, I had come from immoral stock. But the scandal which surrounded me was rumoured by my own mother who was telling everybody that the minister had always coveted me for his family and I was now living with "another woman's husband"!

### **Failed Efforts**

It was only a few months after I had left home that God began to deal with my attitude towards my parents, and as I began to soften up towards them I also tried to build up some sort of relationship. I visited them on Sunday afternoons, yet no matter how hard I tried to hold my tongue we always ended up rowing. My mother was unreasonably jealous of the bond that had been forged between the Barratts and myself and was constantly taunting me, saying that she (my mother) wasn't good enough, and that I now had a new Mum and Dad. I was working hard at this relationship and made great efforts to change my attitude, but this also incensed her and she would sneeringly call me a "little Barratt". The only true friends I had in the world at that point were the Barratts, and Mum's jealousy was just pushing me further towards them.

### **Sad Situation**

Mum could have been so proud of me. I knew many people my own age who had left home and just used it as an excuse to go completely wild. Many of my school friends had ended up in trouble with pregnancy, drugs and crime. The world was an exciting place offering many temptations. I was a good-looking girl, and had no shortage of attention from worldly men who were willing to wine and dine me just to come back to my flat at night.

It wasn't only my parents who criticised my relationship with the Barratts, I got plenty of criticism at work. It didn't take long for bosses to find out what I did in my spare time, and when I refused their advances they would lecherously say "The minister must be onto a good thing!" The fact that I kept stressing I didn't have a boyfriend and wasn't looking for a relationship, seemed to make people think I was either a lesbian or had emotional hang-ups. It used to frustrate me no end. I can't tell you how difficult it is to live a moral life in such a permissive age. Too much television seems to have made people expect the worst of everybody, and they were always looking for the hidden dark secret that lay buried in me. Nobody believed me when I said I didn't want to get married and yet that was the truth, I believed with all my heart that God had given me a ministry, and I wanted Him to have every opportunity to fulfil that destiny in my life.

## **Changed Name - Changed Life**

At 32 years of age God told me to change my surname to "Barratt". I'd been 16 when I'd left home and for 16 years I had been part of this other family, and God told me it was time to legally recognise something that He had done spiritually. This action caused problems, but God had already dealt with me and taken away the hatred and bitterness I once had towards my parents, so I knew that what I was doing was not out of spite but in obedience to God. The stronger I felt the call of God, obeyed His specific instructions to me and changed my lifestyle to live holy and separate, the more people misunderstood and persecuted me. I'm not saying I always felt blessed when this happened, but I know that I have the kingdom of heaven to look forward to, where all tears will be wiped away and we'll receive all the comfort and love we were denied down here.