

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue No. 21

FALSE ACCUSATION

The Beatitudes Part 9

by Maurice Barratt

We have come to the final beatitude. This is the culmination, the high point, because as we have seen, the beatitudes are a progression. This is where they are all heading. This is the end result, on earth, of becoming more like Jesus. We have perhaps become used to the idea that the more Christ-like we become, the more we will win the approval of men. The last beatitude gives the lie to that idea. Jesus says that the more of his character we get, the more hostility and persecution we will attract. In the last issue we studied the 8th beatitude, persecution “for righteousness sake” (verse 10). This last one is different: it is about false accusation. “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake” (verse 11). In the previous beatitude, it was persecution for doing good, for being righteous. In this beatitude, it is for allegedly doing evil. There are several notable things about this beatitude.

The Personal Beatitude

Firstly, this is the only beatitude that is addressed personally. All the previous beatitudes say “Blessed are they which...” It’s impersonal, almost abstract. This one suddenly hits home. “Blessed are ye...” It’s about you! This is a preparation for the rest of the chapter. From now on everything is addressed personally: “Ye are the salt of the earth ... ye are the light of the world ... I say unto you ...” Why does it become personal? Because this is about having a person inside you - having Jesus’ character. It’s not a set of doctrines or principles, it’s a personal relationship.

Not Our Choice

Secondly, this is the only beatitude which is not our choice. Most of the beatitudes involve active choice. They are not just attitudes or dispositions, they are something we have to actively choose to do. But the last two beatitudes are different. We don’t “do” anything - the circumstances of persecution are forced upon us, whether we like it or not. All we do is develop the character of Christ, and persecution will sooner or later happen to us. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

Notice, Paul says, “All that will live godly”. There is an option. You can live a lesser standard. You can compromise. And that protects you against persecution. Many churches have done that. They have watered down their Christianity; their salt has lost its sting and their light is not bright enough to confront the darkness. They court governments, hoping that they will be able to influence society

that way, but by doing this they actually insure themselves against persecution. This move also suits the governments, because it protects them from criticism by the church. The church won't criticize the government if it thinks its going to lose its valuable place of "influence" in the world.

The Conclusion To A Holy Life

Thirdly: persecution is the only possible conclusion to a holy life. If we will "live godly in Christ Jesus", there is only one conclusion - we "shall suffer persecution". Jesus tells us, Paul tells us, and history tells us the same story. All the great men and women of God who have brought revival and changed society have suffered persecution. The apostles, tradition tells us, were all martyred. The early Christians in the Roman Empire were habitually thrown to the lions, or used as human torches in Nero's garden parties. When the church became joined to the state, it lost its salt and light, and there was a notable lack of persecution. But when the reformers came along, the persecution returned. Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, all suffered great opposition and persecution. In the 18th century, Wesley was fiercely opposed. All sorts of false accusations were levelled at him. But he brought revival and changed England.

Preachers Who Pay The Price

At the beginning of this century, the same was true of William Booth and his "Salvation Army" .But today, many preachers seem to have learned to avoid persecution. Which famous preachers in the western world do you know today who have been falsely accused of immorality or fraud? I know of some who have been accused of shameful things, and the accusations have turned out to be true! - but I don't know many who've been through persecution, and I don't know any who've changed society and brought revival. On the contrary, many seem only to be contributing to society's greed and materialism, courting governments and politicians, and seeking fame and fortune.

The Progression

This is a progression from the previous beatitude. It is more difficult! To be persecuted for doing good, because you are righteous, is one thing; but to bear false accusation and be accused of doing immoral, deceitful or ungodly things is quite another, because it attacks your reputation. It slanders both you and God. There is a tremendous temptation to defend yourself and shout out the truth. If your enemies spread the word around that you visit prostitutes, or that you are involved in financial misdealings, what do you do? Should you not counter-attack and vigorously defend yourself? Would it not be right to do so, seeing that Christ's name, and not just yours, is at stake? If you are "exposed" as a depraved or corrupt Christian, people will think that much less of Christianity. "Oh, it's just a big fraud. Didn't you hear about that man ...?"

But much as it may seem to be right, this is not the way of Jesus. His way is to say nothing, to accept the loss of reputation. "But that means everybody will think it's true!" Yes, it does. "And you may never be vindicated!" Correct. "And your ministry may be finished just because you refuse to stand up and speak the truth!" Yes! This beatitude strikes at the heart of our sense of self-preservation, even our sense of justice. It's foolish to accept false accusation. But aren't all the other beatitudes

foolish? Isn't "Blessed are the poor in spirit" a foolish thing to say? Isn't it foolish to mourn when others are enjoying themselves? Isn't it foolish to be meek and "resist not evil", turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile? This beatitude is only as unacceptable as the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Reject this way and you reject the whole teaching of Jesus. You also reject the example of Jesus, and of the men and women of faith.

Three Examples

In the last issue we looked at three examples of people who were persecuted for their righteousness early on in their lives. But once they had experienced that beatitude, they progressed on to the next one. In each of their lives, we find that they later faced false accusation. This was their second, more difficult test.

Joseph was our first example. Having been persecuted by his brothers for his righteousness, he was sold into Egypt. But in Egypt the harder test came - he was falsely accused of rape by Potiphar's lustful wife. What did Joseph do? Did he angrily deny it and defend himself? No, he never said a word, and was thrown into prison. He never told anyone he was in prison on a false charge.

David was our second example, persecuted by Saul for his righteousness. Much later in his life, when Absalom rebelled against him and he had to flee Jerusalem, a man of Saul's household called Shimei came out and cursed him, accusing him of being "a man of Belial" and of usurping Saul's kingdom. Shimei declared that this was God's punishment on David. "Thou art taken in thy mischief", he declared to David (2 Samuel 16:7-8). David's guards promptly offered to strike off the man's head. But David wouldn't allow it. He said "Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him" (verse 11). David acknowledged God in every circumstance, therefore he didn't try to resist or fight against Shimei, because to do so would be to fight against God. And he looked to God alone, not to men, for his vindication: "It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day" (2 Samuel 16:12).

Our final example was Jesus, who at the beginning of his ministry was persecuted for his righteousness. But as his ministry developed, he began to face more and more false accusations. The Pharisees called him "a winebibber and a glutton". They even said he had a devil. The climax came at his trial. Many false witnesses came. "When he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly" (Matthew 27:12-14). It was foolishness to Pilate that Jesus wouldn't defend himself. He could see that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. Yet he wouldn't defend himself. Pilate decided the whole affair was stupid and washed his hands of it. How could justice be done when, in the face of petty and contradictory accusations, the defendant won't defend himself? So he left Jesus to his fate.

Peter urges us to follow Jesus' example. "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again: when he suffered, he

threatened not: but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:21-23). This is our calling.

Practical Instructions

This is the only beatitude with practical instructions. For the first time in the beatitudes, we are instructed to do something: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad" (Matthew 5:12). In Luke it's even more practical: "Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy"! (Luke 6:23) We like to dance - when we're in the blessing, when everything is easy for us. But Jesus tells us to dance in the trials, in the suffering, in the loss of reputation. Why? Because "great is your reward in heaven". It's the future we have in sight, not the present. There's nothing joyful about persecution and lies. But there's something tremendous if, like the Philippians, we are counted worthy "not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:30). God doesn't reward Christians who only do their duty. He rewards those who do more - who go the extra mile. If you just do your duty, in God's eyes you are only an "unprofitable servant" (Luke 17:10). Rewards are always reserved for the few. The Queen awards knighthoods and O.B.E.'s not to those who have diligently and faithfully worked in a shop or office for 40 years - that is just fulfilling duty - but to those who have expended their time and energy "beyond the call of duty", often at personal cost to themselves, in the service of their country. God is the same. He expects more than obedience and duty from us. He demands much fruit. Think of the parable of the talents. (I have a teaching tape devoted to this subject, entitled "God Demands Increase").

Following The Prophets

If we are falsely accused, we are following Jesus and the prophets. "So persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:12). We are identified with them. This beatitude is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, facing false accusation and persecution is a fearful thing, and we would gladly avoid it. But on the other hand, if we find that the opposite is true, that we develop a fine reputation and no one has a bad thing to say about us, we ought to get worried, according to Jesus: "Woe to you when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). All of us are identified either with the true prophets or the false. Which side are you on?

Giving God Our Reputation

Lastly, this beatitude demands that we give God our reputation. This is persecution for Jesus' sake, but it is our reputation that suffers. Luke's account of this beatitude puts it clearly: "Blessed are ye, when men shall ... cast out your name as evil for the Son of man's sake" (Luke 6:22). If we are tempted to defend our reputation and repudiate the false charges that come against us, it proves one thing - that we haven't yet given God our reputation. We may have given him our time, money and talents. But our reputation is more precious to us. It is always the last thing to go. That is why it appears in the last beatitude. Once we have given God our reputation, it no longer matters what people think of us; that's in God's hands. It's up to him whether he defends us or not. And scripture

shows us that sometimes he does defend and vindicate and deliver his people, and sometimes he doesn't. It doesn't matter. Hebrews 11, the "faith chapter", lists all the people who had great vindications and deliverances from God, Daniel in the lions' den and so on. But it also lists the people who "were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35). They accepted persecution, and looked for no deliverance or vindication except a heavenly reward in the "better resurrection". That is faith indeed! That's an example to follow. If they could do it, so can we, for we have the same resources - the life of Christ within us.

Experiences From Life

by Joanna Barratt

GOD SEES ALL

At 30 years of age God told me to do a 7-day water fast. I hired a holiday home in Matlock to do the fast away from temptation, and the week after I returned home God spoke to me and told me to stop all the activities I was doing in the church. I recognised God's voice, although it seemed a very unusual instruction, but to emphasise it He allowed me to get a frozen shoulder which physically put me out of action for about 2 months. I struggled with all my might to play the organ for the final service of the year on December 31st, but during the interval when we had refreshments, I asked the music student who had been replacing me for the midweek meetings to take over for the "Watch-night Service" to herald in the New Year - and that was the last time I played in my church as the organist.

People didn't understand that I was obeying God - they assumed I was backsliding. The pressure from attack became so strong that I finally threw the towel in, and prayed, "Lord, if I really do have a ministry, then You personally will have to bring it about, because I'm just not strong enough to hold on any more" .I left the church, and the people who were supporting me. I got a job and a flat and tried to begin life again. After making one decision to throw the towel in I felt that I had lost everything, family, friends, church, and I entered into the darkest period that I'd ever experienced in my life. I was depressed, I didn't know what I was any more - but couldn't stand to be called a "Christian" for fear of being associated with those who'd damaged me so wantonly.

A Strange Vision

I began to think about the vision God had given me just before I'd gone on my 7-day water fast in Matlock. I had seen a woman inside a little dark hut which had just one small window apart from the door. She sat in the gloom huddled up in a dark hooded cloak which not only covered her body but also her face. She was afraid to be seen because she was ugly, she had once been very beautiful but now she was covered in boils from head to toe and was afraid to be seen. From a little crack in the window she looked outside the hut and saw, in the golden sunshine, a peacock with its tail fanned

out behind. It strutted around displaying all its colourful "eyes" and she admired the bird for its wonderful beauty. But God spoke to her in the silence of the dark hut and told her not to admire the bird, for it was a very proud bird, very proud and haughty. And even though it had so many "eyes" in its tail, none of them could see; it was as blind as a bat. As far as sense was concerned, this creature had a bird's brain and couldn't think or feel - it just acted on instinct. But not so with the woman, for God was trying her as He had tried Job, and when He had tried her she too would come forth as pure gold and would have understanding and compassion that the bird would never be capable of having - because she herself had experienced deep trials.

The Bitterness Returns

I knew when God gave me this vision that He was forewarning me of some terrible ordeal I would have to pass through, but I never envisaged it could be so bad. It was rumoured by some that I had been excommunicated from the church, and others even spread rumours that I had left to have an abortion! I was disgusted at the filth which some "Christians" not only thought, but gossiped about in church, and the hatred and bitterness that God had once delivered me from where my parents were concerned now began to return, only this time it was aimed at the church. I had served on the church platform for 15 years and it seemed as though the only one who cared was the minister, who had broken down in tears before me when I told him of my decision to leave. I found prayer impossible because all that was in my mind was the hurt I was suffering.

After a while I began to go to church again but this time it was so different. I needed fellowship so much, I couldn't seem to find God on my own. I was just a member of the congregation, taking instead of giving, and gradually God began to rebuild my life. After attending this new church for about a year the minister mentioned to me that somebody had told him I was a singer, and he asked if I would like to stage a concert in his church. To be honest I thought that my ministry had ended, but now a ray of hope began to shine in my heart as I thought that maybe God could be remembering me. Maurice and I worked on the programme and then had tickets printed which we distributed to lots of old friends, who in turn passed them on. It so happened that one of these tickets made its way into my parents' hands and they immediately rushed round to my former minister demanding that the minister of my new church should be informed that I had been excommunicated from my former church. It seemed that my parents not only wanted to humiliate me, but also wanted to crush and destroy me completely.

Knocked From The Pedestal

Well, the show went on, and from my very first song, which was "O how I love thy law" from Psalm 119, I experienced something brand new as I sang. I didn't have any facilities for lighting effects, but during my opening song the congregation seemed to fade into darkness and a light beamed down on me from the ceiling. I looked into the light and saw past the ceiling, past the roof, through the sky and right into heaven where I could see God sitting on His throne listening to my every word. I don't remember anything else about the concert other than I was totally engrossed in God. During those past 2 years of being totally stripped of my ministry, the humiliating process that I had travelled

through had wrought incredible changes in my heart which I hadn't been aware were taking place. I'd been in the limelight far too long and God in his mercy had needed to knock me from my pedestal to make me realise that I wasn't His gift to the church, He himself was His gift to the church, and His intention for anyone who stands on the platform is that they should be a mediator between Himself and the congregation, so that God can communicate with His people. I now realised what a tremendous privilege it was to stand on the platform and be called to the ministry, and after that concert I recall saying to Maurice that now I understood what Jesus meant when He said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me" (John 4:34).

A New Beginning

God had forewarned me in the vision that He was going to try me as He had done Job, but now He began to bless me also as He had done Job and He gave me back not only what I had lost, but far more than I had dreamed of. My voice took on a whole new dimension: from being very sweet and pure it now became very strong and powerful and carried a far greater conviction. God then told Maurice and I to "get back in the ministry", and together with his father we formed "Barratt Ministries" and began to travel once again. Our ministry was well accepted and we had far more invitations than we could cope with. In one year I recall being in 8 different countries and had difficulty remembering not only which church, but which country I was in!

The Rewards Of Persecution

Considering the fact that people had so strongly resisted our ministry together, I was amazed to see that God had taken us as far as the U.S.A., Barbados, the Canary Islands, Holland, Poland, Germany, Belgium, Scotland and Wales, quite apart from all the work we did in England. In some of these countries we also had radio and television interviews and were invited to speak in prisons and at Full Gospel Business Men's Dinners. A few years after I'd left my former church someone in authority took it upon himself to make a full investigation of all the allegations and accusations made against me. After a few weeks of research he brought a written statement in which he said that not only had he found the rumours to be malicious gossip but also downright lies! I felt quite let down when he didn't take his findings to the congregation, but then this was yet another trial I had to pass through. I know one thing though, God sees all. Persecution may not bring its reward down here, but there's one thing we can be sure of, and that is that God will certainly make it up to us in His future kingdom, and the reward there will be eternal ... I know which I prefer, but that's because I really do believe in "life" after death. Your attitude down here proves whether you do too!