

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 62**

#### **What Is The Kingdom?**

#### **The Kingdom Series Part I**

*by Alex Robertson*

Over the next few months our teaching articles in Challenge will concern the kingdom of God. These studies follow on from Maurice Barratt's Sermon on the Mount series and are directly related to it. It is not always appreciated that the Sermon on the Mount is "the gospel of the kingdom of God" which Jesus came proclaiming (Mark 1:14). The Sermon on the Mount is a gospel — 'good news' — because it begins by announcing a nine-fold blessing of wonderful promises. And from beginning to end, the Sermon on the Mount is all about the kingdom: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven ... except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven ... Seek first the kingdom of God ... Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven ... (Matthew 5:3, 5:20, 6:33, 7:21 — just a few examples.)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks very little about eternal life, grace, or justification by faith. This has caused some Christians problems in the past, and they have decided that the Sermon on the Mount must have been only for the Jews, or only for the millennium. A convenient belief, because if it isn't for us, now, then we don't have to obey its radical commands! But I am under no such illusions. Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples, and it is for Christians, now — but it does not concern eternal life and grace, it concerns the kingdom. And as we shall see, the kingdom of God and eternal life are different matters entirely.

#### **A tricky question?**

Ask three or four Christians "What is the Kingdom of God?" and you are likely to get three or four different answers. There are massive differences in the way that Christians perceive the kingdom. For some, the kingdom means a prosperous 'health and wealth' lifestyle. For others, it is all about taking our cities and nations for Christ, or about power — signs and wonders. The kingdom of God seems to be one of those vague, ill-defined terms that could mean pretty well anything. Or, to put it more bluntly: Christians down the ages have, albeit unknowingly, used their own definition of the kingdom of God as a justification to support their own particular doctrines and preferred lifestyles.

But what does the Bible say? Can we learn anything solid and definite from scripture about the kingdom of God? Yes, we certainly can. And it is hugely important, because what we believe about the kingdom of God has a direct influence on our lifestyle and behaviour. If one person believes that the kingdom is about prosperity in all areas of life, and another believes it is about poverty of spirit and persecution, those are opposites: only one of these people is right — and whoever is wrong is badly wrong!

Let's start with a simple definition. A kingdom is always a geographical area, a territory. You can't have a kingdom without possessing some territory, with borders which are protected and laws that hold good within that kingdom. This is true of the kingdom of God as much as for any other kingdom.

## **Israel**

The first mention of God's kingdom in the bible is in Exodus. By this time men had set up many rival kingdoms on earth, so God set about to establish his own kingdom, a territory populated by his people. He said to Israel, "You shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Israel had no king, only judges, because God was the king. When the people asked for a king in the days of Samuel, God was grieved and told Samuel, "They have rejected me, that I should not be king over them" (1 Samuel 8:7). So Israel by this definition was the kingdom of God. And centuries later Jesus told the Jews, "The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation producing the fruits" (Matthew 21:43).

So Israel was the kingdom of God, but it is no longer, although Israel is still in God's purposes. The kingdom has transferred and been given to another 'nation' — us. Christians have now inherited exactly the same promise as God gave Israel in Exodus 19; Peter quotes it in 1 Peter 2:9. We are now the kingdom of God. This is the second manifestation of God's kingdom.

## **Territory**

But if a kingdom always has territory, what territory does God now possess? This is not an area of land like Israel. The only physical 'territory' God possesses now is our physical bodies. We are to come under God's rule. This is why the New Testament talks about presenting our bodies to God (Romans 12:1). "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost ... you are not your own, you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body ..." (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). The temple is always the centre of the kingdom. The temple is the king's residence — God's residence. As in Israel, so now. God has no other territory but us. There is no such thing as 'God's own country' - not Israel, not England or America. Even your own house or church is not God's territory. He only owns us. That is why it is folly to try and impose the rules of God's kingdom upon a land in this age. It ends up in hypocrisy and an unholy alliance of political and religious powers. The Roman Catholic church tried to do it in the 4th century; the Pilgrim Fathers tried it in the "New World" a few hundred years ago. However well intentioned, it always ends up as Babylon.

## **The third manifestation**

Nevertheless, there will be a time when God possesses land again as his kingdom. When Jesus returns, he will bring in God's kingdom, God's rule and God's laws, ruling "with a rod of iron", and this time the territory of the kingdom will be the whole earth. The millennial reign of Christ is the 3rd and final manifestation of the kingdom of God. Numerous scriptures attest to this fact; to quote just

one: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ” (Revelation 11:15). This only happens, and can only happen, when Jesus returns. The mistake made by so many sincere and zealous Christians down the ages has been to try and bring it in before the time. That is why it has always ended in failure. Only Jesus can do it. The earth is our ‘promised land’ which we are waiting to inherit. Jesus is our ‘Joshua’ (the names are virtually identical in Hebrew) who will lead us in to conquer the whole earth. That will be the time for taking cities and nations for God. Those Christians who believe we should do so now have only made an error of timing.

God instructed Joshua in warfare, taking cities and strongholds. We are also instructed in spiritual warfare in the New Testament: but the strongholds we fight against and pull down are “imagination ... bringing into captivity every thought ...” (2 Corinthians 10:5). We are now to conquer our ‘territory’ - ourselves — and wait for Jesus to conquer the earth.

That is not to say that we should sit idle and just wait for Jesus. We are to preach the gospel in all the world and build the church, preparing the bride for her husband. There is much to do. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 3:10, a foundation has been laid in our lives by grace, and it is our job to build on it. If we build well, we will receive a reward in the millennial kingdom. The kingdom reign of Christ is the time for rewards, as the parable of the talents and many other parables of the kingdom testify.

### **The roots of error**

We can see from this initial study that many of the errors made by Christians in the past and in the present have been caused by a misunderstanding of these three manifestations of the kingdom of God. Israel, Christians at this present time, and the millennial reign of Christ are all scripturally ‘the kingdom of God’. But although there are similarities between the three, there are also major differences. We do not take swords and destroy nations like Joshua. Many of the Old Testament commands do not apply to us at all. The blessings of Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 28, on which the ‘prosperity gospel’ so heavily depends, find no corollary in the New Testament at all. And as we have briefly seen, the only ‘warfare’ we are called to is a personal one against our own thoughts and pride.

We shall study these things in more detail later. But it is clear that if we take the ‘rules’ of one manifestation of the kingdom and apply it to another manifestation, we will end up in serious error, which will very probably include living an entirely different lifestyle to the one Jesus calls us to. No wonder those who believe in ‘health and wealth’ try to say that the Sermon on the Mount is not for us!

### **Conditions and promises**

But Jesus’ radical teachings, which we have been studying for some time in Challenge, are the clear example of what our kingdom lifestyle should be. The Sermon on the Mount, the gospel of the kingdom, promises great rewards and blessings in the kingdom when Jesus comes (the 3rd manifestation) but painful conditions in this age (the 2nd manifestation). Inheriting the kingdom in

the future calls for poverty of spirit now; being comforted in the future necessitates mourning now; satisfaction in the future demands hunger and thirst for righteousness now; and a great reward in the kingdom is conditional on suffering persecution, slander and false accusation now! We have not yet entered our 'promised land'; we are still in the 'wilderness', living as pilgrims and sojourners, without a home, looking for the return of Jesus, our bridegroom, our 'Joshua' who will conquer the whole earth and bring in the final kingdom.

## **EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **Something Has To Give**

What is the Kingdom of God? Good question. I would think the majority of people who believe that there is life after death have a vision of spirits floating around in the heavenlies, sometimes playing harps, but doing nothing in particular other than experiencing peace and serenity. But in actual fact these people couldn't be more wrong.

If you have been receiving 'Challenge' for any length of time you will probably remember Maurice's teaching on Matthew 5:13 & 14 ... "Ye are the salt of the earth ... Ye are the light of the world". Maurice shows that there is a clear distinction between earth and world. Whenever the bible talks about the earth it is referring to this planet we live in, which was created by God. One of the characteristics of salt is its preserving quality, and Jesus was saying that if we were children of God and had the character of Jesus Christ we had the potential to preserve the earth from becoming rotten. On the other hand whenever in the New Testament the bible talks about the world it is invariably referring to the kosmos, the systems which have been set up on this earth, which is why we as Christians are intended to shine our light. Light, even if it is only from a small candle, will be clearly seen in a dark room, whereas a handful of salt will have no effect whatsoever.

### **God so loved the world**

I was reading through John's gospel a short time ago and as I ran my eyes over verses 16 and 17 of chapter 3 a whole new understanding of the scripture came out to me. This is how I read it ... "For God so loved the world (the order He established in the Garden of Eden), that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world (the order that has come about through the fall of mankind) to condemn the world (the order that has come about through the fall of mankind); but that the world (the order that has come about through the fall of mankind) through Him might be saved." Reading it this way I realised that God regarded so highly what He had originally ordained at the very foundation of creation, that He was going to start anew in the Millennium when Jesus Christ comes to reign literally on this earth with His saints who have been resurrected from the dead. "If we

suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12). "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection ... they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

### **The cost of the Kingdom**

So, it seems that there is a cost involved if we want to take up an active role in the literal Kingdom of God which Jesus Christ will set up. And if this is true, how do we start planning for the future? You've already had this explained at the very beginning of the Sermon On The Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:3), "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (v. 5), "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (v. 8), "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (v. 11), "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you ... for My sake ... for great is your reward in heaven" (v. 12). It's apparent from these statements that it's all to do with attitude. Deny your legitimate rights down here on this earth, and you will be working towards laying up treasures in the Kingdom of Christ.

Twenty years ago I was employed in the best firm I'd ever worked for. My job was totally satisfying and the management valued my services so much that they bent over backwards to make me happy. When I took time off to pursue other activities, they continued to pay my salary. They took this so far that I found it quite embarrassing. As an employee I received 6 weeks paid holiday per year, but because I was in the ministry and travelled quite extensively, 6 weeks was not enough free time to meet my needs and I remember one particular year when I took off another 8 weeks and the firm paid me. I realised I couldn't keep going on like this and something would have to give so I handed in my notice. When I explained my reasons, and said that I was not available to work normal hours, I was told that the firm would accept what I gave and carry on paying me. I loved the job, the people I worked for, and most of all my independence, but I knew the Lord was calling me to give it up to be available for the ministry He had called me to. So I left, and was assured that if I ever wanted to return there would be a job waiting for me.

As far as independence was concerned I was still solvent because for quite some time I had been a professional jingle singer. This job was wonderful. I went to recording studios, was given sheet music and, huddled around a couple of microphones, together with a group of male and female singers sang in close harmony the little ditties that accompanied products being advertised on radio and television. These sessions took up perhaps one or two days at a time, and sometimes could be fitted in to my evenings. The money was very good indeed and I could make in one day what it took a whole week at the office to earn.

### **Something had to give**

But here also I was experiencing problems. I dearly wanted to keep this job as not only was the pay extremely good, but it also boosted my ego to be mixing with showbusiness personalities and people with influence in the entertainment world. The ministry started encroaching on my recording sessions and I had to make some decisions. Something had to give, it was either the jingles or the

ministry. When faced with my dilemma in cold blood I realised that there was no contest — God came first, and so I had to start turning down recording sessions. It didn't take long before another talented singer stepped into my shoes, there were so many of them waiting for these golden opportunities. I was no longer needed and the phone calls stopped.

I must say, these were not easy decisions to make. It was really hard giving up my right to earn my own money and run my own life. But I knew this was what God was requesting from me and that I wouldn't be truly happy if I didn't commit myself to Him completely.

I was amazed at how many things in my life changed just by leaving work. I found that my attitude towards clothes altered immediately. What I wore to the office was completely unsuitable for lounging around at home, walking up and down the streets putting thousands of tracts through letter boxes, or chipping old plaster off our cellar walls and decorating the recording studio we were building there. Every day I was kept busy, but my income ceased. I could have been earning good money to pay for the things I needed, but now I found I had no money ... and no needs! No wonder Paul said, With food and raiment be content! You can be content with the bare necessities if you are not bothered about storing up treasures on this earth. If you lay up for yourself treasure in heaven you will live completely different to everyone else around you who are living for the here and now.

### **Change of attitude**

A change of attitude is the all important requirement if we are going to live for the future Kingdom. Fighting for our rights in this earthly life is of no consequence if the things we truly desire belong to the Kingdom of Christ. When a man is called up to fight for his country, he can only go to war with a clear conscience if the government of that country make a promise to provide for his wife and children whilst he is away. So it is with God, if He calls you to leave all and follow Him, He undertakes not only to look after you, but your dependants also. There is no risk involved.

If God is God, the One who created the whole universe from nothing, placing stars and planets into space, the maker of this earth, sending rain and sunshine, night and day, times and seasons, and creating all life form — animals, birds, reptiles, mankind, then surely it is not difficult for Him to provide for you. If you haven't already started living for the Kingdom of Christ, then the most sensible thing you can possibly do is begin right now. Nothing else in this world is more important than making that decision.