

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 72**

#### **Blessings of Wealth?**

#### **The Kingdom Series Part 11**

*by Alex Robertson*

In the first part of this series we saw that there are 3 manifestations the kingdom of God: Old Testament Israel was the kingdom of God (the first manifestation), but the kingdom was taken from them and given to us as Christians now (Matthew 21:43 – the second manifestation). Finally when Jesus comes to reign on earth, that thousand-year reign is also referred to in scripture as the kingdom of God (the third manifestation).

I also said that many errors in understanding the kingdom today come from confusing one of these manifestations with the other. Satan has taken advantage of such misunderstandings to plant false conceptions of the kingdom which result in a counterfeit kingdom – something that looks like the kingdom of God and has scriptures to justify it but is in fact nothing to do with the kingdom that Jesus preached, and how we are to live now.

#### **The root of wrong doctrine**

Wrong doctrine is always rooted in wrong motives, and wrong motives will lead us into the wrong kingdom. The Pharisees had wrong doctrines – they added the traditions of men to the commandments of God – but the root of their problem was wrong motives. And we're not immune. It's so easy for our heart to deceive us (Jeremiah 17:9). When something in God's word is unpalatable to our flesh, we can often find a 'get-out' in the shape of a doctrine that supports the view we'd prefer to believe. But we're kidding ourselves and we've let a wrong motive in.

Many Christians believe that all scripture is applicable to us. I think that is a dangerous assumption, and in fact it is plainly not true. Who, for example, could apply the instructions God gave to Joshua to Christians today: to go into the land and slay young and old, women and children without pity? Of course we may apply it by 'spiritualizing' it; but that is another matter. It is not literally applicable. But here is a passage of scripture which many Christians have believed is literally applicable to them. It is Deuteronomy 28:1-14, where Moses tells the people, immediately before they enter the promised land, the benefits that will come to them if they obey his voice. For the sake of space, this is an abridged version:

“And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe his commandments, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee ... Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle ... The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they

shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways ... Thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath ...”

### **Is this true for us today?**

If this is true for us today, we should be wealthy – in fact we should be the wealthiest people on earth, the most prosperous people on earth, the most successful people on earth, in physical terms (note, there are no spiritual blessings here). But is this New Testament teaching?

Well, it's true that God still wants to bless his people; but the way he intends to bless us has changed dramatically, because the kingdom has changed dramatically. In the New Testament trouble, not success, is promised us if we follow Jesus. “In this world you shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). “All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). “It is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom” (Acts 14:22). “Think it not strange at the fiery trial which is to try you” (1 Peter 4:12). We are called not to the fellowship of Christ's success or prosperity but to “the fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10).

To be persecuted in the Old Testament was a sure sign that you had disobeyed God and come under his curse (see Deuteronomy 28:25 – part of the curses that are the corollary to the blessings). But in the New Testament Jesus says “Blessed are you when men persecute you ...” (Matthew 5:11). The beatitudes, the very beginning of Jesus' teaching, radically contradict Deuteronomy 28 on every point. Jesus' “blessings” must have shocked the disciples. “Blessed are those who mourn” (Matthew 5:4). Under the Old Covenant, sorrow and mourning was a sign that disaster had overtaken you because God's blessing had left you. It was a sign of his judgement. But in the New Testament it's a blessing!

### **Wealth in the New Testament**

What about wealth? Certainly it was a sign of blessing in Deuteronomy, but Jesus sends the disciples out with no money, commands them not to lay up treasure on earth, declares that they cannot serve God and mammon, advises his “little flock” to sell all they have and give to the poor, and tells them it is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 10:10, 6:19, 6:24, Luke 12:33, Matthew 19:24). He even curses the rich in Luke 6:24 – “Woe to you who are rich!”, and James does the same (James 5:1). Now, in the light of that, how can Deuteronomy 28 possibly be compatible with the New Testament? If that is what we believe, something is wrong with what we have been taught; either that, or Jesus was a liar and a deceiver, and the apostles were the most dismal failures, because Paul was shipwrecked, stoned, in hunger, in poverty, in perils on land and sea ... But Jesus was not a deceiver, and the apostles were not failures.

## **Prosperity and provision**

Let's get it sorted out. God does still want to bless his people, and the blessing will come in full when Jesus returns to reign on earth. Prosperity is a promise, but it is a promise for the millennial kingdom. We inherit the promises "with faith and patience". Nevertheless, God does promise us blessings even now. There are two sorts. Firstly, spiritual blessings: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Deuteronomy 28 is all physical blessings; the New Testament is mostly spiritual blessings. But secondly, we are promised physical blessings – of provision. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things [food, clothes, daily necessities] shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). But there is a huge difference between provision and prosperity. Provision is all you need, prosperity is all you want. "My God shall supply all your needs" (Philippians 4:19). But even provision is conditional on seeking the kingdom. We don't seek to get our needs supplied, we seek his kingdom, and God supplies the needs. And the blessings of prosperity in the kingdom are for those who suffer now. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12). We are "joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him" (Romans 8:17). Wealth, ease, prosperity and success all pander to the flesh and to self, and God wants to deal with the flesh and kill self, not nourish it!

## **Gain is godliness?**

The Christians who believe that wealth is the blessing of God – that the more wealthy and prosperous you are, the more blessed you are – are actually spoken of by Paul. He says that there are "men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness" (1 Timothy 6:5). Paul advises Timothy to steer clear of such people. But if these people are Christians, if they have been born again, what will be their fate? I don't think they lose eternal life. That's by grace. Jesus never said it was hard for a rich man to enter eternal life. He said it was hard for him to enter the kingdom of God. Paul said we enter the kingdom of God, not eternal life, through much tribulation. Eternal life is easy to enter; just believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. Now the kingdom of God, the millennial kingdom when Jesus comes is our inheritance, just as the promised land was the inheritance of the children of Israel; yet some of Israel did not inherit it because of disobedience, even though they remained God's children.

When it comes to our inheritance, the New Testament makes it clear that we cannot have our cake and eat it. We cannot have the blessings of wealth, prosperity and earthly success now and when Jesus comes. But God will allow us to have the blessings now if we wish. We can have our inheritance now if that's what we want. But that makes us like the prodigal son, demanding his inheritance before the time, and though his father let him have it and squander it, and welcomed him back when he returned, he had lost his inheritance. The father said to his elder son, "All that I have is yours". He had no inheritance left for the younger son. And so it will be for these Christians. They will have eternal life, but they have no inheritance in the kingdom when Jesus comes. They cannot reign with him. They sought blessings instead of seeking the kingdom, fed the flesh instead of feeding the spirit, and refused to walk as Jesus walked.

This is a counterfeit kingdom doctrine. It claims to be kingdom teaching but it isn't, it's not New Testament teaching. Therefore it's counterfeit, and we need to guard ourselves against it, warn others against it and seek – graciously and with care and patience – to advise those who are caught up in it.

## **EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **A Wealth Of Blessings**

When you do a bit of travelling around the world you begin to wonder what a blessing of wealth can do. Is wealth really a blessing, or could it be a curse in disguise? Many people in the world are hungry because they are poor. But even in the poorest of places I have been in homes, which are sometimes no more than tiny shacks, with not only no furniture, but no room for furniture, yet they own a TV and can be entertained by the Western World who display their possessions and corrupt the onlookers morals.

My family had a TV when I was a child. In fact we were one of the first families in our district with a TV and all the neighbours and children did their best to get invited in so that they could watch it with us. But the TV, and all the other stuff we gathered around ourselves didn't make us happy. We still fought and argued, and ended up hating each other. The thing I desired most as a child was a happy home life.

I was scared stiff when I had my own children, not knowing whether they would turn out the way I did. One thing I greatly admired about my pastor was that all his 4 children became strong Christians without deviating or backsliding. They don't often meet up together, but when they do they all have good relationships and would help each other out of any problem.

### **Setting the example**

Maurice and I have really tried to set a good example for our children. Before going to school each morning we have a time of prayer, or will take the bread and wine, together. We only spent 10 minutes, but we could pack quite a lot into a short time if really determined. It was always difficult getting the kids in the right mood, and sometimes we had to be very firm to make them pay attention. Kids are kids and ours are no exception. But a wonderful thing has been happening just recently which has been a tremendous blessing to me and I felt I wanted to share it to encourage those of you who are struggling. God can work with anyone, anywhere. My children are the proof of this.

I always had difficulty getting the kids up for school in the morning. No problem at weekends, in fact they would wake up earlier than they had needed to for school! But no matter how many alarm clocks I bought, I ended up having to individually get the children out of bed.

### **Proof of love**

It all started with Izaac wanting to do something to prove that he loved me and God. He's 10 years old and he decided he would like to bring me a cup of tea in bed each morning. He set his alarm for 6.50 a.m., brought the tea and got into my bed until my alarm went off at 7 a.m. This was a lovely treat for both of us.

A couple of weeks after this, Tamar (6 years old) and I were reading the Bible before she went to bed and she too felt that she wanted to please God. "Mummy, can we get up at 6 a.m. instead of 7 a.m. so that we can spend some time with God before school?" I was very touched that she wanted to do this, but didn't really think she meant it. As it was Friday I told her that if she reminded me on Sunday night before she went to bed then I would get her up at 6 a.m. on Monday morning and we could read the Bible and pray together. Sure enough on Sunday night she asked me again, so I did. We had a lovely time together. I read some of the Bible, then she read some, and we talked and prayed together. At 6.50 a.m. Izaac arrived in the kitchen all bleary eyed in his 'undies' and was miffed that I hadn't told him I was getting up early. "Don't do it again without telling me, Mum", he said. When I explained that I would be getting up each morning with Tamar, both he and Nathan (13 years old) said they wanted to get up too.

### **A real sacrifice**

Now let me explain something. Nathan was in the habit of getting up at 7.45 a.m. just in time to have the prayer with the family before Tamar and Izaac went off to school, as since he's been 12 years old we have home educated him. Nathan loves his bed, always has, and this was a real sacrifice to say that he would get up at 6 a.m. After chatting to the children I decided 6.30 a.m. would be the best time. We could have breakfast first and we could meet with God between 7 and 8 a.m. I let them know this was voluntary. If they didn't get up themselves, I wouldn't be getting them up as this was their idea.

Can you imagine the change that has come over our household? Izaac brings my cup of tea at 6.20 a.m., gets in bed until 6.30 a.m. when Tamar's alarm goes off. She comes into my bedroom to wake me, Izaac gets out of my bed and Tamar gets in for a 5 minute cuddle and then she gets dressed. As I walk out of my bedroom I meet Nathan who has just come out of his bedroom, and I marvel at the way my children are doing this themselves. I have been reading from a Children's Bible which is an abridged version of the King James version published in 1953 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. It's been brilliant for the children, giving them proper scripture, but leaving out the bulky parts which are hard to digest. And God has met us.

One morning we were reading about the call of Samuel. God called Samuel in his sleep and when he had recognised it was God he asked him to speak. God told Samuel what he was going to do in Eli's

house because Eli had neglected to chastise his sons for the wrong they had done. God said no matter how many sacrifices and offerings Eli made for his sons from now on, he would not accept them because they had defiled his temple. After I had finished reading the scripture and talking with the children, I asked them what had come out to them personally. Izaak looked very sober and scared, saying he had been surprised that God had said he wouldn't accept any more sacrifices and offerings for Eli's sons. He asked if God would reject him for the things he had done. He had tried so hard to give up certain things which he knew weren't godly.

### **Soft inside**

Dear Izaak. My heart warmed towards him, he's so soft inside and wants so much to please God, but he's fighting 'Adam' like the rest of us. He broke down in tears and begged God to come into his heart and take away all his desires for wrong things and told me me fiercely that he wanted to be baptised. Suddenly, Gods' presence came very strongly into the room and I prayed and spoke in tongues over him. The other children could hardly believe what was happening as this was so different from what went on normally. Then I prophesied over Izaak as God spoke to him. Then I prophesied over Nathan. God was really moving.

The week after this Maurice, Alex and myself were having a retreat week when we fasted and prayed. Izaak said he wanted to join us by giving up his fruit break and lunch break at school. On the Saturday during the retreat an Evangelist and his wife, friends of ours, came round to visit us. Whilst chatting together, the Evangelist said he would like to lay hands on Izaak and pray for him, and that he had a word from the Lord for him. Izaak knelt down as hands were laid on him and God really touched him. He said he felt really freaky and was in a daze, shaking all over and wanting to cry all the time. He hung around me as though there was some magnetic force between us. I sat down to cuddle and comfort him because he felt so weird, then the Evangelist came over and sang the song "Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me ..." and the spirit of God came once more upon Izaak. The poor boy had been touched so much by God that he didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but he had a real experience that he will remember all his life.

A couple of days later, whilst still fasting, Izaak was required to take the assembly at school together with a couple of other boys. He had been so motivated by the Bible studies we are sharing together in the mornings that he started preaching one of the things we had studied about David and Goliath. The teachers were so impressed at his performance that he earned 25 merits for his effort!

### **So blessed**

I was thinking the other day what I would ask for if God said I could have anything, like he did with Solomon. What could God do to really and truly bless me. After a very great deal of honest thought I said the thing I most desired would be that my children would be sold out for God and that we could, as a family, fulfil Gods purpose in our lives ... My little bundle of laughter (that's what Izaak's name means), and my other 2 offspring, are just bits of putty in the hands of Almighty God. I feel so very, very blessed.