

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 75**

#### **Taking The Land?**

#### **The Kingdom Series Part 14**

*by Alex Robertson*

A couple of issues ago in Challenge we looked at the doctrine of 'Salt in Society', which suggests that by influencing society, we can gradually change the world for the better and make it more godly, preparing the way for Jesus to return to a world where Christian values reign triumphant. And we saw just how far that was from the bible truth, which tells us that society will become totally antichristian prior to Christ's return. Closely linked to the concept of 'Salt in Society' is the idea of 'redeeming' areas of society. It goes something like this: "This world belongs to God, but the devil has stolen many things which are not his right, and the church needs to stand up and 'redeem' or take back the things Satan has stolen in every area of society."

Underlying this concept is a misinterpretation of Genesis 1:26 & 28. These scriptures say that God gave Adam dominion, but the "redeeming society" argument goes way beyond this and says that Satan has usurped man's dominion, and that we (Christians) should "reclaim the lost dominion" and gain rulership and authority in every area of life and society; we should be successful in everything, "the head and not the tail" in every way. We are told that this is "our blood-bought right" and we need to claim it and take it back from Satan.

#### **Dominion over what?**

Let's deal with this straight away. Genesis 1 certainly says that Adam was given dominion - but over what? Over the animals, birds, fish and creeping things - a dominion which man has never lost! Genesis 1 says nothing about believers having dominion over other men, or about spiritual dominion. And as for the idea of 'redeeming' things, we have been redeemed, but we cannot redeem other people or things. The whole concept is unscriptural.

But this doctrine of "reclaiming our lost dominion" is wide-ranging, extending to evangelism, intercession and spiritual warfare; so we are told that we should be on the offensive in the world, claiming and taking our cities and nations for Christ, tackling the principalities and powers, the "territorial spirits" behind the nations. The idea of the church being an army on the offensive has given these teachers some difficulty, for there is nothing in the New Testament that supports their view; in order to get some 'scriptural support', they have to look to the Old Testament and borrow imagery from the book of Joshua – spiritualized, of course – and the results are seen in well-known choruses of recent decades such as Graham Kendrick's "Rejoice, Rejoice": "Now is the time for us to march upon the land / Into our hands He will give the ground we claim ..." But we should not be applying imagery from the book of Joshua to our situation in the world now. Jesus is the 'new

Joshua' who will come and 'conquer the land' – the whole earth – when he returns. But not now. We are to witness, to evangelize, to pray, but not to conquer and reign.

Some of the 'scriptural support' used by proponents of this doctrine is quite absurd. For instance, Joel chapter 2 refers to the Lord's army, and these teachers have said that this symbolizes the church on the offensive in spiritual warfare and evangelism. But in context, the army is quite obviously not an army of God's people at all; on the contrary, it is an army of judgement against God's people. It is called "the Lord's army" because the Lord uses this army to come against his own people in judgement for their sins! But such is the desperation of these teachers to find scriptural support for their doctrines that they grasp onto any verse that seems to even remotely support their view, and their motives make them quite blind to the context and the real meaning of the scripture.

### **Preaching the gospel or winning the lost?**

Of course, prayer and evangelism are good things, and it is right that we should preach the gospel and pray for the lost. But there is a difference between what scripture says and the way evangelism is often taught today. Scripture says that we should preach the gospel, but today we are taught that we should "win the lost" or "get souls saved". The difference is subtle but radical. If we are taught that what we must do is "win souls", then the emphasis is on results; and if the results are the important thing, then whatever gets more results (more "decisions") is a good thing. So if more souls are saved because we don't mention sin in our gospel presentations, or because we provide good entertainment, then that's good, because the end justifies the means. The way is wide open to compromise the gospel message. But contrast this with scripture: when Jesus says "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; he who believes and is baptized shall be saved, he who does not believe shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16), he is telling us to faithfully preach the gospel, not to be concerned about the results. The results are not our business; our business is to preach the gospel without compromise, without watering it down or making it 'palatable'. The results are up to God.

### **What was Paul's aim?**

The present-day 'results-centred evangelism' and the push to 'win the world for Christ' and 'take the land for Jesus' are very much linked together, and form a subtly dangerous combination. When we compare the New Testament, there is never a hint that Paul was ever 'mobilizing evangelism troops' or aiming at world domination. Paul expected persecution and opposition wherever he went, and ended his life under house arrest in Rome, saying "All they which are in Asia have turned away from me" (2 Tim 1:15). If Paul had been aiming at 'taking the world for Christ', he would surely have felt a miserable failure at the end of his life. But he did not; he knew he had preached the gospel without compromise, and that was all he needed to do. He could say confidently, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).

## **The counterfeit kingdom**

The biggest danger which comes from 'results-centred evangelism' is that it works towards the development of the counterfeit kingdom. If we are so focussed on 'getting decisions' that we compromise the gospel, how do we know whether people are truly being saved when they 'make a decision', or whether they are just drawn in by an attractive, entertainment-centred gospel which says that Jesus will solve all our problems and make us rich, happy and successful? And even if they are saved by such a gospel, how far away is all this from the gospel of the kingdom – the radical message of self-denial, paying the price, taking up the cross and losing our life for the sake of the gospel which Jesus preached to his disciples? Preaching a 'results-centred gospel' brings about a compromised church, a leavened church, over-inflated with people who claim to be Christians but have never been challenged by the message of discipleship; people who are taught that they are in the kingdom, that they can claim health, wealth and success, and that things are going to get better and better in the world until we 'bring his kingdom in'. That is exactly the message of the counterfeit kingdom, and it acts as a deceptive smokescreen to the true gospel of the kingdom.

Lest anyone should say that I am against evangelism, let me repeat that we should evangelize and be uncompromising witnesses to Jesus – by our lives as much as by our words. (St. Francis said "At all times preach the gospel. If necessary use words.") To get a New Testament perspective on evangelism, try and find anywhere in the letters of Paul, John, Peter, James or Jude where there is an exhortation to win souls, bring unsaved friends to the meetings, get out and do street evangelism, or any other of our typical evangelistic strategies. There is nothing. But Peter does say this: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). Be ready to answer those who ask you about the gospel! That's a different perspective. But it begs a question: why would they ask you? Answer: because they see something in you, something different, something they do not have. But they will only see something different in you if you are different, in your lifestyle, at home, at work, in your attitudes and thoughts, in your actions and reactions – in your character. If you are a light in the world, people will either be attracted to you or they will oppose you. You will always have some effect.

In other words, Peter is saying that the character of Christ in you will be your chief means of evangelism. When people ask you, you can tell them the uncompromised truth. You don't need to water it down or make it 'acceptable'. But when was the last time someone asked you about the hope that is in you? And what does that say about how much of Christ is in you? These are uncomfortable questions, but they need to be asked. I ask them of myself. Here's another uncomfortable question to end: Is our emphasis on big evangelistic crusades and programmes actually a substitute for the true evangelism of a changed lifestyle and character – an attempt to try and make up for the lack of light in our personal lives, the lack of Christ's character in us?

## EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE

*by Joanna Barratt*

### Walled Cities

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

In this issue of ‘Challenge’ we are looking at the idea of ‘taking the land’. As we have already seen we cannot take Joshua’s promise and apply it to ourselves – for one thing we are not Joshua, and we can’t possibly go around killing men, women, children and animals when Jesus himself instructs us to “love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us and pray for them which despitefully use us” (Matthew 5:44). But there is a war on, and it’s a very serious war. It’s a battle for something which desperately needs reclaiming ... and that is our relationship with God. Adam plunged the whole world into sin and broke down the communication between God and man. Jesus lived a sinless life and died an unjust death because he chose to be obedient, thus giving every man, woman and child an opportunity to have a relationship with God again. Jesus came to reverse what the devil had done. To make holy what the devil had defiled and made unholy.

There are areas inside each one of us which have become ‘walled cities’ - places where we don’t allow God to penetrate and rule. And unless we allow God access into these areas, then the ‘giants’ we have permitted to have free reign will always have domination over us and dictate the terms on which we walk (or don’t walk) with God.

### Unforgiveness

For years I was dogged with unforgiveness. The bible warns that it is permissible to be angry but that we should never let the sun go down on our wrath (Ephesians 4:26), and we should always seek to be at peace with brethren and neighbours. I loved God with all my heart (I thought), but there were issues in my relationships with others I wasn’t prepared to look at because I felt justified about my attitudes. I always had a good reason for how I felt, and it was usually because somebody had done something which was out of order and had caused me to react strongly to their provocation. But the bible does not allow us any room to pity the flesh or feel sorry for ourselves. Indeed, we are to act like soldiers and love, no matter what treatment we receive from the hands or mouths of others.

The commandment to love in the bible does not come with any exceptions. People brought lots of different situations to Jesus to see how he would deal with them and he never veered from his principle that we should unconditionally forgive. Jesus said that we were to forgive 70 x 7 so a man

should love his wife so much that even if she had committed adultery and he had justification to lawfully put her away, he should forgive and take her back to himself rather than divorce.

I honestly believe that unforgiveness is one of the worst 'walled cities' we can have in our hearts. If we will not permit this barrier to fall down then we are endangering the very future of our own salvation. Jesus said in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6) "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." After the prayer he went back to this particular section and said "For if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." A walled city is a strong hold, and many of our character defects have 'strong holds' over us. We cannot walk in the spirit of Christ whilst we allow our own spirits to rule us.

## **Fear**

Fear is another walled city we struggle with. We all have a measure of fear, and it is vital that we do, as it stops us from doing stupid things like jumping off cliffs or running blindly across a busy road. But fear which stops us from living a 'normal' life needs to be dealt with. Some people are afraid of the dark, or of being alone, but we must remember that "God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). The 'sound mind' is the part that I like about this particular verse. I sincerely believe that Christians are the only people on this planet who can think straight, because "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). We must bring all these unhealthy thoughts of fear into captivity. We must take a good look at them and try to get to the bottom of why we have these fears - has something happened in our past that we cannot forgive and forget? Has someone said something to frighten us and we can't shake it off? Once we have looked squarely at the fear we must then bring it into subjection to the obedience of Christ and realise that nothing can happen to us unless God allows it. Romans 8:35 asks "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

When Maurice began to get busy preaching in house groups on a regular, nightly basis, I began to be fearful of being alone in the house with my 3 children. It wasn't so bad when Alex was at home, but often both Maurice and Alex would be out preaching in different house groups on the same evening. As we live in a big Victorian house I felt very vulnerable and sometimes an unreasonable panic would strike at my heart. I have recently been told by a police officer that the area I live in has the highest number of burglaries in the whole of Europe as it is populated mainly by the students of Manchester University. I knew it was wrong to have this fear, but it was there. This was something I had to take hold of and work through. There's no point preaching principles if we don't practice them, and I firmly believe that nothing can happen to me, or my children, unless God allows it. My children had total confidence in me – I had to have total confidence in God.

I remember going to bed one night when Maurice was out of the country preaching. Alex was away also. I had fallen asleep and had a dream that the cellar door was open and someone was coming around the back of the house to get in. I woke up from the dream, and, realising it was only a dream, tried to dismiss it. Shrugging off the uneasiness I felt, I snuggled under the covers and tried to get back to sleep. A few minutes later I heard my bedroom door open and felt pressure on the bed. As my heart started to pound I wondered if it was my imagination and kept as still as possible with my

ears wide open, afraid to move in case there really was someone in the room. The pressure on my bed moved upwards slowly towards my face. I nearly freaked out. Opening my eyes I was astonished to see one of my cats staring at me.

### **God's protection**

I couldn't believe it. Not permitting the cats to roam around the various rooms of the house, I keep them restricted to my lounge and kitchen. If they did happen to sneak out of these rooms they would prefer to find their way to the children's bedrooms because they know they would be welcomed there. They certainly wouldn't have come to me knowing they would be scolded and removed. Because I put my 2 cats out of the house at night time I was shocked to see him and realised that the only way he could have come into the house was via the cellar door. I didn't waste any more time, I ran down the 4 floors to the cellar and found that the door was wide open. I was so blessed that God had taken care of us. I realised that I could be absolutely secure in God knowing that he loved and cared for us. Even though I had ignored the warning dream, he had sent the cat to alert me and get my attention. God is so good.

Another fear that is common even amongst Christians is to be afraid of silence, or our own company. It is not healthy and the bible teaches that we should not fear these situations, we should actually seek them as this is the place where God can really speak to us.

But whatever way in which our 'walled cities' manifest themselves, whether it be in fear, insecurity, pride, a sharp tongue, etc., we must not defend these attitudes and allow them to remain uncontested in our lives. We must bring down all these strongholds and make them obedient to Christ. If Christ didn't display the characteristics we portray, then it's the characteristics which have to go, not Christ. Like all fathers, God longs to have a relationship with us, his children. Let's not rob him of his role.