

## **Take me to your leader!**

Though it's barely more than half gone, 2020 is already a year that will keep generations of historians busy. The Covid-19 pandemic and the 'Black Lives Matter' movement have put the world's leaders under a harsh spotlight and many, perhaps even most, of them have been failing woefully. Sadly I would have to rank Boris Johnson and Donald Trump among the worst, and it would be easy (*very easy*) to criticise them.

I can imagine the stereotypical alien emerging from his flying saucer and saying "Take me to your leader!" might be met with an awkward silence or a strangled cry of, "Must I?". Unless it was in New Zealand... I think I've got a bit of a crush on Jacinda Ardern, one of the very few exceptions!

This is a time, more than ever, when we need to look to *God* and not *man* for leadership and guidance. Rather than focus narrowly on one passage, I want to touch briefly on many, building a big picture in broad brushstrokes...

## **The example of Jesus**

Jesus said "I and the Father are one" *John 10:30* and "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" *John 14:9*, so if we look at him we can see the kind of leadership God provides, and it's very different from the world's idea of leadership.

From the beginning, Jesus' model of leadership is not an authoritarian one:

- Perhaps the single thing that best frames his approach to leadership is his statement in *John 10:11* that he is "the Good Shepherd". His task is to protect, provide for and nurture his flock, not to exercise dominance over them.
- We see also Jesus as what Graham Kendrick in his song calls "the Servant King". *Philippians 2:7* says he "took the form of a servant".

Within that framework we see a number of qualities of Jesus that are central to his leadership and are in marked contrast to most of our world leaders...

## **Compassion**

- *John 11:35*, famously the shortest verse in the bible (at least in English translation), tells us that when he learned of the death of a friend "Jesus wept". He knows, understands and *shares* our experiences and emotions because he is one of us.

## **Integrity / principle**

- In *John 14:6* he says, "I am the way, the *truth* and the life". He is literally the very embodiment of the truth. Compare that to the old joke, "How can you tell when a politician is lying? His lips are moving!"
- In *Matthew 4:1-11* he resisted all the devil's temptations and remained faithful to God's word. It's hard not to contrast this with Dominic Cummings driving a coach and horses (or a Land Rover) through the government's lockdown rules he himself drafted!

- With Jesus there is *not*, as *After the Fire* put it, "One rule for you, one rule for me."

### **Humility**

- Returning to *Philippians 2:6-7*, although "in very nature God" he "made himself nothing".
- When put to the ultimate test in *Luke 22:42*, rather than spare himself the suffering he knew lay ahead of him, he prayed to his Father, "Yet not My will, but Yours be done."

### **Self-sacrifice**

- In *John 15:13* we read of his willingness to lay down his life for his friends... that's a high price to pay to ensure their well-being! Can you really imagine Donald trump ever doing that?

### **Purpose**

- *Luke 19:10* reminds us of the purpose that drove Jesus throughout his time among us, and that he never lost sight of... "The Son of man came to seek and save the lost." For too many of our world leaders gaining and holding power seems to be their only purpose.

### **Black Lives Matter**

Before finishing I want to come back to the 'Black Lives Matter' movement that I mentioned at the beginning, and I make no apology for getting rather political (as if the rest of this hasn't been!). It has become a highly emotive and divisive issue. While some stand, metaphorically if not physically, under the banner in support, others, sometimes angrily, respond, "*All lives matter!*"

The fact is, *both are true*. Jesus is a good shepherd to *all of his flock*, they are all important to him, and he died for *all of us*, irrespective of colour, gender or anything else. Yet at the same time, in *Matthew 18:10-14* we read of him leaving ninety-nine sheep (undoubtedly in a safe place and with sufficient provisions) to look for one lost sheep. Though *all* of his sheep mattered to him, in that moment *one* was in particular need and received his particular focus. In the same way, giving special attention *now* to one group of people, who have suffered systemic mistreatment and need our help, in an effort to right a wrong, does not mean that others are in any way diminished in value or neglected.

### **And finally...**

Once again I say look to God for leadership rather than man, and look to Jesus to see that leadership in practice. I thought a lot about a song for this and kept coming back to one, Gary Glitter's *I'm the Leader of the Gang (I Am)*. But it's a proud, boastful strut... nothing could be less like Jesus! Then I realised the key is to turn it around, for *us* to sing, "*He's the leader of the gang!*" and to sing it with pride. Then when that alien comes to us saying "Take me to your leader", we can say, "Gladly!"