Tools for Wise Leadership

A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa

Series 10: The Leadership Style of Jesus
Talk 12: Leaders Displaying Humility

Welcome to the programme **Tools for Wise Leadership** where we are currently focusing on the leadership style of Jesus. In the last programme we saw that Jesus was full of truth and grace – not grace without truth, or truth without grace.

Today we focus on a very striking quality of Jesus' leadership – his humility. I say this is very striking because it is a totally unexpected quality by today's standards. Being king of kings and yet also being a servant just blows the minds of many. Jesus was the living proof of 1. Peter 5:5-6 which says:

> be clothed with humility, for "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time

There are two thoughts which run through this passage. The first thought is that of God humbling or resisting the proud. The second one is that of God exalting the humble.

Firstly, then, there is the thought of God resisting the proud. Think of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He became a megalomaniac – a real pathological egoist. In Daniel 3 we read that the king built a gigantic, all-gold statue some ninety feet high, presumably representing himself. Then he started strutting like a peacock on the flat roof of his palace in Babylon, talking to himself about his own imperial greatness. He was saying things like, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" In his soliloquy he never acknowledged the presence, let alone the power, of God. Nebuchadnezzar was in effect saying, "For mine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory."

But God says in Isaiah 42:8 "I *am* the Lord, that *is* My name; And My glory I will not give to another." It is not surprising, therefore, that while Nebuchadnezzar's words of self-glory were still on his lips, a voice came from heaven saying, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle." For a while he lived with animals and ate like them. His hair grew long like eagles' feathers and his nails like the claws of a bird. In other words, as John Stott says,

> "He went stark-raving mad. Only when he humbled himself, acknowledged that the Most High God rules over all human kingdoms, and lifted his eyes to heaven in worship were his sanity and his kingdom simultaneously restored to him."

What an illustration of Jesus' words, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled." Indeed those who put themselves up God puts down, whether the person be Nebuchadnezzar, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Idi Amin, Pol Pot and others.

Now contrast the pride and self-exaltation of Nebuchadnezzar with the humility of Jesus. Philippians 2 says:

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, "Who, being in very nature a God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness… Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of

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> Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

But in practice did Jesus actually humble himself? Well here is a good example. I never cease to be struck by the event recorded in John 13 when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. That task was reserved for the lowest household servants. But Jesus did it in humility. Peter found it difficult to stomach the thought of Jesus, his master, washing his feet!

Jesus' entire lifestyle is the opposite of Nebuchadnezzar. It is also the opposite of the celebrity mentality that characterizes the church of God today. Jesus was never upset when people did not recognize him. He usually avoided publicity and recognition. Wherever Jesus travelled, he expected no banners, no reception committee, no special honour. As he said in John 5:41 he did not come to receive honour from men. He came on a servant's mission: to do the Father's will – not to be a celebrity.

How can you as a leader apply these lessons to yourself? The obvious first thing is never to exalt ourselves as Nebuchadnezzar did. That is self-defeating because then we would be resisted by God himself. Who can win against God? If the great king Nebuchadnezzar could not, neither can you and I.

The next obvious lesson is to humble ourselves like Jesus did. But that is easier said than done. The temptation to pride is great, for our flesh desires exaltation. So how do we succeed?

Firstly we should surrender to Jesus and let him rule our lives. Then he can express his humility through us. We cannot just crank humility from within ourselves. That would be like pushing a car uphill. You can do it for a little while but you will soon get tired. Instead we should let go, and let Jesus do it through us.

Secondly, in order to be humble we need to be secure leaders. Like Jesus we need enough self-assurance or ego strength to know who we are under God. In John 13 we are told that Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God. That was the highest degree of security and self-assurance one could attain. And that self-assurance caused him to take off his outer clothing, wrap a towel around his waist and wash his disciples' feet. By contrast insecure leaders fear losing their positions. Therefore they try to bolster their egos through titles and other symbols of power and authority. Let me assure you, leader, that in Christ you are secure, and therefore you too can be a servant leader like Jesus was. You have been given an assured place within the Kingdom of God and therefore you don't have to compete with anyone else.

Lastly, we must learn from Jesus Christ about the importance of seeing to it that our work is done without caring who gets the credit. At one time John said, "Teacher, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." Jesus replied, "Do not stop him, for whoever is not against us is for us." How different from the attitude we so often see today where leaders want to be the ones who get the credit and where they, like John, want to downplay the work of others. No my dear fellow leader, let us uphold one another and not try to pull each other down in order to get the credit.

All we have been saying today can be summed up in that thought which says those who humble themselves, like Jesus, will be exalted. Those who exalt themselves, like Nebuchadnezzar, will be humbled. The choice is yours. I trust as a result of this programme you have chosen the Jesus' style of humility.

Please tune in to the next programme for us to explore other aspects of the leadership style of Jesus, and may the Lord bless you as you practice these tools for wise leadership.

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Discussion Questions

The *Leadership Style of Jesus* provides us with foundational leadership principles. We offer you three discussion questions to dig deeper in the episodes of ***Tools for Wise Leadership***:

Study Question 1: for Personal reflection
What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

Study Question 2: for Group Discussion
What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

Study Question 3: for applying the topic
What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

Have you considered discussing leadership principles with your own family – your spouse and your children? Here are the questions for **Talk 12 - Leaders Displaying Humility**

Study Question 1: Personal reflection

Are you leading with the focus of 'Jesus increasing while I am decreasing', or are you leading to be remembered, famous and well-liked?

Study Question 2: Group Discussion

What questions can we ask ourselves to assess our leading, making sure that we are remaining humble?

Study Question 3: Applying the topic

How can you as a Christian leader remind yourself to be a servant as well as a leader to those you are leading?

Please connect with us in response to **Tools for Wise Leadership**. We would love to hear what you and your family have learnt!

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