

## CHRIST BE MY LEADER

In 1415, Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> of England laid claim to the French crown and invaded France with an army of about 9000 men. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, St. Crispin's Day, Henry's soldiers joined battle with the armies of France just outside a small French village by the name of Agincourt. The English troops were outnumbered four-to-one, they were dangerously short of provisions, and they had spent several nights sleeping in heavy rain. Nonetheless, fighting fiercely under Henry's command they completely routed the French army. When the battle was over, the English had lost only 113 men, while the French had lost 5000. The Battle of Agincourt is one of the most famous examples in military history of what a capable leader can accomplish in the face of overwhelming odds.

Leadership is a subject which has fascinated mankind since ancient times. The names of great leaders in history are familiar to us all: Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon Bonaparte, George Washington. Or, in our own times, George Patton, Billy Graham, Knute Rockne and Vince Lombardi. In the business world, leaders like Jack Welch and Steve Jobs and Bill Gates may be controversial, but what they have accomplished for their companies is indisputable. Good leaders—whether in the armed forces, the world of politics, the business sector or the sports arena— all have one thing in common: they get outstanding results.

But what exactly IS leadership? We can all point to effective leaders, but what is it that MADE them effective? When we try to analyze leadership in terms of abstract qualities or characteristics it proves to be difficult. We know that Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> was an effective leader because he inspired a group of followers to accomplish an extremely daunting task, but given the paucity of information we have about Henry, it's impossible to say what his characteristics were as a leader—all we know is what he accomplished. On the other hand, what he accomplished does provide one clue about the nature of leadership, and that is that *leadership exists primarily in the minds of followers*. Effective leaders create proselytes, enthusiastic followers who adopt the leader's goals as *their* goals. A good leader makes believers out of followers who then go out and accomplish what he never could have accomplished by himself. To use a military analogy, a good leader is like an aircraft carrier rather than a battleship: he projects power rather than merely wields power.

St. Paul was that kind of leader. He found and trained proselytes, capable and enthusiastic followers like Timothy and Apollos, who themselves became effective leaders. He sent them to churches he had founded in the key cities of Asia Minor and Greece, cities like Corinth and Ephesus and Thessalonica so that the Good News of Jesus Christ would not only reach people in those cities but would flow outward from them into the surrounding countryside. Paul deployed the spiritual equivalent of aircraft carriers—major churches which projected the knowledge of Jesus Christ throughout the Mideast and the Mediterranean world.

But the greatest leader of history, measured strictly in terms of the results he obtained, was Jesus Christ. For two thousand years His disciples have been laying down their lives for him and today one quarter of the world's population—one and a half billion people—call Jesus their leader. Those are impressive numbers.

So what kind of a leader was Jesus? From a strictly secular perspective, what things did He say and do to inspire such loyalty and enthusiasm in his followers?

First of all, Jesus loved his disciples. He believed that each and every one of them had a priceless value. He didn't differentiate between them on the basis of looks or intelligence or money or anything else. They were all precious to him and he loved them with a love that literally knew no bounds. John writes of him that on the night before his crucifixion, *"...having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love."* (John 13:1) WE know, of course, what that "full extent" was: complete self-sacrifice.

Second, Jesus regarded each person as gifted, as capable of serving Him usefully. He drafted tax collectors, soldiers and fishermen into His service. He reached out to lepers and prostitutes, to rich men and beggars, to lawyers and moneylenders, to the healthy and the sick. All of them were potential salt and light and Jesus recruited them all.

Third, Jesus believed that every human being had infinite potential. He said to his disciples, *"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these..."* (John 14:12) And again, *"...if you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you!"* (Matthew 17:20) With words like these Jesus convinced His followers that anything was possible for them and that there were no limits to what they could achieve. By showing faith in them he unleashed their faith.

Fourth, Jesus led by example. He didn't say *"Go there,"* he said, *"Follow me."* (Luke 10:59) Unlike many business leaders today, who with untroubled consciences claim substantial bonuses while their employees are being laid off, Jesus suffered the slings and arrows of hard times along with his followers. But he was bluntly honest with those who wanted to follow him about the hardships they would endure if they chose to do so. *"Count the cost"* he said. *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."* (Luke 10:58)

Fifth, Jesus was a servant-leader. He led by serving. He embraced lepers and washed the feet of his disciples. He didn't build himself up at others' expense; he built others up at his own expense, writing with letters of his own blood how much he loved them.

Sixth, Jesus was steadfast. He expressed boundless confidence in his mission and relentless dedication to his goal. He believed in it and he called for his disciples to do the same. *"In this world you will have troubles,"* he said. *"But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33) And, *"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne."* (Revelation 3:21) Even under the most trying circumstances Jesus remained confident of reaching His goal and helping others reach it as well.

Seventh, Jesus constantly communicated with his followers. Over and over again he described his mission and taught them about it in fresh and new ways. With all due respect to Ronald Reagan, Jesus was The Great Communicator, and he never assumed that once was enough when it came to encouraging his followers to pursue the goals he had given them. The Gospels show that Jesus repeated his sermons and parables many times during his ministry to make sure they were firmly implanted in the hearts and memories of his disciples.

Finally, Jesus helped his disciples free themselves up in radical ways for service in his kingdom. First, he urged them to do away with anything which distracted them from their main mission. When a man Jesus had called said *“Lord, first let me go and bury my father,”* Jesus replied, *“Let the dead bury their own dead: you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.”* (Luke 10:60) He asked for total commitment to the mission he had given them. When a rich man asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life, Jesus responded, *“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* (Mark:10:21) That is asking for commitment! He commanded his disciples to practice the same kind of self-sacrificial love He practiced: *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* (Luke 9:23) And to Ananias he said concerning Paul: *“I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”* (Acts 9:16) Jesus could command his followers to do such things because he walked the walk as well as talked the talk, demonstrating in the most extreme way his willingness to lead the way down the path he had marked out.

By any standard, Jesus Christ is the greatest leader in history. He led by doing what the Father had sent Him to do. And just as he was sent, he sends us to complete the work He began. And so we pray:

Christ be my leader by night as by day;  
safe through the darkness for He is the way;  
Gladly I follow, my future his care;  
darkness is daylight when Jesus is there. Amen.

### **1 Kings 3:7-9**

<sup>7</sup> And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. <sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”

### **1 Corinthians 12:27-31**

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles?

Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

### **Matthew 20:20-28     A Mother's Request**

<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. <sup>21</sup> And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." <sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." <sup>23</sup> He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." <sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."