

LEADERSHIP AND CONTROL

It is customary for us to look at John the Baptist as being the forerunner of Jesus Christ, preparing the way for the ministry of the King of Kings. Yet I doubt if we have ever really analysed the life and ministry of this key person in his own right. I am sure that you as a reader will agree with me that John was a leader in his own right but have you ever looked at his leadership in relationship to Jesus.

If you look at John 1:29 – 37 you will find that:

John was a successful preacher for we read that crowds followed him. Even the hypocritical Pharisees were coming to be baptised.

He commanded the respect of the populace of his day. People travelled great distances to see and hear him and many wondered if he was the promised Messiah. John was God's man for the hour.

His message pointed to a person who would come after him This person in fact would be the long awaited Messiah.

He did not know who the Messiah was. It was only when Jesus came to be baptised and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove did John know that Jesus was the Messiah.

In a real sense John had to deal with a matter of fading influence.

First of all, Jesus was John's cousin. They knew each other as children and played together. When John preached about the coming Messiah he at no time thought it would in fact be his cousin. Our scripture reading states as much in verse 3, and only when he saw the Holy Spirit as a dove on Jesus did he know that Jesus was the Messiah.

Secondly, prior to the baptism of Jesus, John was the person people came to hear. When Jesus started his public ministry more people followed Jesus and the crowd who followed John became smaller. In spite of all the fervour in his preaching at the river Jordan I am sure it must have been depressing for John to have fewer and fewer people come to listen to him. Just imagine if today I was ministering and a childhood friend had to come to the same place where I was and started ministering. I wonder how I would have felt if people in my assembly left me to attend his services! Remember this happened to John and with the dwindling crowds also came dwindling influence. It is one thing to preach that we are expendable, and quite another when the *we* is *me*.

With this in mind we are faced with the challenge as to whether leadership is a position or a role. Today we have the concept of leadership being a position where a person is **over** others and they **under** the leader. So we have two classes – the leaders and the followers.

Very often when we get a business card from a person we first look at the title and then the name so that we can determine in our minds the amount of respect we should show that person. In our modern society it is the person at the top who gets the most of our time and attention. Yet from a spiritual perspective if Jesus was here in human form who would he spend the most time with? Today we find our spiritual leaders spending more time with other leaders and very rarely do they ever get to dealing with that lost soul looking in from the outside.

John was placed in a leadership role by God and had the responsibility to minister to his calling. His greatest desire was to minister. Sadly, today many people want to start or lead **ministries** more than they want to **minister**. When a ministry takes priority over ministering then you are no longer a servant. You also spend more time on keeping the **ministry** going and funding its needs than to actually **minister**.

It is sometimes hard to believe that John's public ministry was only 6 months and that after that he spent 9 months in prison. This shoots down our assumption that when God calls us to a place we are there for the rest of our lives. For many years I was in Hillbrow and during that time God taught me the practical experiences that I now can use in our welfare ministry.

Many people talk about performance orientated work or ministry and here I must state that we are placing ourselves into bondage. Things get so people driven that there is no place for God to minister. Maybe by being in that position of prominence we are trying to cover up our own feeling of self-worth and our need to be in control over what happens to us.

The sovereignty of God makes no allowances for accidents. It was no accident that the start of the ministry of Jesus was heralded by one whose own ministry began to recede into the background. We need to learn how to lead by willingly taking a backseat. Sometimes one can accomplish more by providing a living demonstration of selflessness as opposed to our natural gifts, eloquence and decisive action.

It has been said that the sign of good leadership is to work oneself out of a job, however the true servant by their very nature will always be in demand to lead. It is a matter of relinquishing our dreams of fame, glory and ego fulfilment.

God in his wisdom, allows spiritual leaders to be repeatedly tested on the point of leadership identity. Are we willing to embrace God's will even when His will appears to put us in a deteriorating position of importance as leaders? Is my identity so wrapped up in my leadership position that it causes me deep emotional trauma?

Can I make John the Baptist's choice to decrease?