

Giants With Feet of Clay

by Anton Bosch

The sermon highlights the vulnerability of spiritual leaders and the importance of supporting them in their roles.

Scripture: Acts 14:19

Topics: "Spiritual Leadership", "Human Weakness"

Description

Anton Bosch emphasizes the misconception that spiritual leaders like pastors and preachers are invincible superheroes, when in reality they are vulnerable and in need of support, encouragement, and prayers. Using the example of Paul, who faced tremendous challenges and struggles, Anton highlights that leaders often hide their pain and weaknesses to encourage others and protect themselves from opposition. God chooses to use weak instruments to showcase His power, as seen in Paul's humility despite his powerful calling and revelations.

Transcript

People often see spiritual leaders like pastors, preachers and teachers as spiritual giants who are bullet proof, strong and self-sufficient. People feel that such leaders have little need of help, support, encouragement and advice since they seem to be so self-contained and strong.

I am sure that is how many people saw Paul when he spoke with much authority and assurance when he said things like "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:9) or any of the many other very bold, assertive and decisive statements that he made. When one looks at his tremendous courage in facing his detractors, torture, persecution and even Caesar himself, one cannot help but feel that this giant (for indeed that is what he was) had no fears, insecurities, doubts and personal struggles.

It seems that he shrugs these things off and marches on like some comic book superhero, with the bullets, insults and hostility just bouncing off him. Think for instance of the time they stoned him and dragged his dead body out of the city to the rubbish heap (Acts 14:19). Yet God raised him (I believe) and he marches right back into the city. Surely this is a true super man? Remember the other time he was beaten to within an inch of his life and chained to the stone floor of the prison and he just began to sing songs? (Acts 16:23-25). Surely this man is not like any one of us - he has to be super-human, invincible and untouchable.

Many times we look at our own pastors and teachers in the same way. They just seem to be able to cope with every situation and nothing seems to ever phase them. Many times these men deliberately cultivate this image for various reasons. Sometimes they do so to hide their own pain, fears and doubts. Sometimes they feel that as leaders, they need to show a tough exterior in order to encourage others not to faint or flee in the face of adversity and challenges. The old adage "cowboys don't cry, especially not in front of their horses" seems to apply. And sometimes they feel the need to hide their vulnerability because those who oppose the message will, and do, take advantage of such displays of weakness. I see a bit of this in Paul when some accused him of being aggressive in his writing but weak when physically present, to which he replied: "Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present" (2Corinthians 10:10).

The tough exterior may be a result of his culture and upbringing. Many cultures do not allow men to display their emotions, especially not emotions of weakness, vulnerability and weeping. Finally, some leaders bear a huge burden of pain and sorrow because of the state of the church and of Christians while others have been abused so much that they cease to show the pain outwardly while they constantly mourn and weep in the depths of their being. Preaching is a serious business and no preacher worthy of his calling can help but be deeply troubled by the apostasy, disobedience and shallowness of people around him.

Does all this mean that they are super heroes or machines that just keep going without even feeling the blows? No. On the contrary, these men are often more vulnerable and more in need of prayer, support and encouragement than anyone can imagine. This is because God, in His wisdom, chooses to use weak instruments rather than strong and powerful ones. Paul, in spite of his education, powerful calling, gifts and revelation did not have a good self-image in modern terms. He says of himself and other leaders: "We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now" (1Corinthians 4:12). He also says: "I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1Corinthians 15:9) and "(I) who am less than the least of all saints" (Ephesians 3:7). And "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" (2Corinthians 11:29)

In 1Corinthians 1:26-29 he says: "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." There's the key. The Lord calls and uses weak instruments so that none will glory in themselves and that those who do boast, should boast in the Lord's power and sufficiency and not in their own.

In 2Corinthians 12:7 he says: "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." From this and other scriptures we can conclude that the more powerfully God uses a man, the greater the problems that he will have to endure in order that he may remain humble and broken before God. If the blessing on a man's ministry is not balanced by problems and challenges, then he is could be set up for the fall. These problems may come in many forms. Paul sums it up thus: "... we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears" (2Corinthians 7:5). Maybe you never thought of Paul struggling with fears and insecurities, but he did. And if Paul had these struggles, you can be sure that lesser mortals also do. Leaders are not less sensitive to tribulations, discouragement and

attacks, they feel these things much more acutely than many others.

No pastor or teacher is invincible. He needs your support, encouragement and prayers much more than you can imagine. Paul speaks about the glory of the gift that God has deposited in the life of His servants, and of himself in particular "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2Corinthians 4:7). Spiritual leaders may look like giants but they have clay feet and they contain God's gift in a weak, frail and very human container.

If you have been blessed by a sermon, book, tape or some form of ministry, then tell or write to the author. Don't think because he has a "big ministry" or has written a book or because he has a high profile that he does not need to be encouraged - he does. At times I think Christians see it as their job to keep the preacher humble. But there is no Scripture that tells us to keep each other humble! That is God's job. Our job is to build up, encourage and comfort one another and leaders are no different to other people, they are just that - people.

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