

Characteristics of a Statesman: The statesman displays the heart of a shepherd

a. Compassion toward the people, especially the most disadvantaged

King Solomon provides a good example. Early in his reign when he clearly had the heart of a statesman, he said to His Creator (paraphrasing and transposing from the third person to the first):

I will rescue the poor who cry out and the afflicted who have no helper. I will have pity on the poor and helpless and save the lives of the poor. I will redeem them from oppression and violence, for their lives are precious in my sight. (Psalms 72:12-14)

What is especially captivating is Solomon's attitude toward the people he was governing — *for their lives are precious in my sight*. What an amazing attitude this is for any governing official — to view the lives of the powerless, those without a voice, those taken advantage of by the more powerful in society, those who cannot help him/her politically — as *precious in his/her sight*. Truly, exercising the authority invested in office on behalf of these people is to be an instrument of Almighty God.

We gain additional insight by studying his preceding words:

God, give Your justice to me the king and Your righteousness to me. I will judge Your people with righteousness and Your afflicted ones with justice... May I vindicate the afflicted among the people, help the poor, and crush the oppressor. (Psalms 72:1-2,4)

Solomon expressed a concern of his heart for those who are weak and generally taken advantage of and ignored by those in Government. Too often, the powerless have come to view Government as an 'oppressor'. Not only did Solomon not want to be an oppressor, but he wanted to use his authority to aggressively prevent any other oppression — in his words to “crush the oppressor”.

In looking at the lives of statesmen, there is willingness to listen to the hearts of the constituents. I have always been amazed at Abraham Lincoln's “open door” policy to his office, whereby each morning, he allowed people to meet him without an appointment. Winston Churchill visited people whose homes were destroyed by the German rockets. Both leaders stayed close to the people. **They were not afraid to allow people to get in the way of “more important affairs of State”. After all, they understood that “people” are the purpose of the State.**

b. The attitude of a shepherd in meeting the needs of the sheep

God paints the picture of the head of the nation as a shepherd. God uses the analogy of the shepherd to describe the tender care that governing officials must have for the people.

For example,

“God...who says to Cyrus: My shepherd, he will fulfill all My pleasure” (Isaiah 44:24,28). Cyrus II was King of Persia 559-530 B.C. As in the case of Cyrus, the determination as shepherd has nothing to do with what the official thinks of God. In the extended passage, God said twice of Cyrus: “though you do not know Me” (Isaiah 45:5). Hence, ‘shepherd’ is an overview of the job

description of the work God expects of the Government official. In the case of King David, God tells us that:

He chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds; He brought him from tending ewes to be shepherd over His people.... He shepherded them with a pure heart and guided them with his skillful hands. (Psalms 78:70-72)

The shepherd is responsible for the welfare of the sheep and for anticipating and overcoming the threats to the sheep. There are two implications:

1. Relatively speaking, the sheep are ignorant of the threats to their safety and limited in their ability to meet their own needs. The sheep are dependent upon the shepherd and his/her diligence for their safety. It is the needs of the sheep that drive every action of the shepherd. **Realistically, it is the sheep who are the masters and the shepherds who are the servants.**

2. **Furthermore, the shepherd has responsibility for all of the sheep**, not just the ones who may have chosen this individual as shepherd. Once the shepherd is placed in responsibility for the flock, he/she does not have the privilege of distinguishing the level of care provided for different sheep within the flock. The shepherd may not be selective in which sheep he/she cares for. In fact, the responsible shepherd must often give more attention to serve the most difficult and the neediest sheep.

It was against the backdrop of this, that I learned that an incumbent presidential candidate warned voters from a group resisting his leadership during the campaign “If you do not vote for me, do not expect that you will get anything from me.” The incumbent had not learned the lesson of his being a shepherd to his flock. Fortunately, upon victory, he relented from that threat.

Nelson Mandela, in his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, correctly uses the analogy of shepherding to describe the governing process.

God warns against the evil or irresponsible shepherds:

This is what the Lord GOD says to the shepherds: Woe to the shepherds ..., who have been feeding themselves! Shouldn't the shepherds feed their flock? (Ezekiel 34:2)

God has high standards for those who shepherd on His behalf. He has little tolerance for those mistreat our Master's sheep.

God's Admonition to Shepherds through His servant:

I exhort the elders among you: shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but freely, according to God's will; not for the money but eagerly; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-4)

The analogy is with God as the Chief Shepherd and ourselves as His under-shepherds. As such, we certainly need His help in being the shepherds He intends us to be. Returning to an earlier discussion, Psalms 23 begins with the words “The Lord is my shepherd.” I submit to you that we must allow Him to be our shepherd before we can be His shepherd in the lives of the sheep He has entrusted us with.