

Who's Your Hero?

By Rex Morgan

A hush fell over the crowd. Thousands of eyes fixed on the ball as it raced from the bowler's hand. Whack! A huge heave from the batsman connected sweetly and smashed the ball heavenward. SIX! He had done it! Grant Elliot had won the Cricket World Cup semi-final for New Zealand. A new hero was born, according to a subsequent storm of newspaper headlines, TV and radio bulletins, and posts on social media.

But is that what heroism is all about? Does sporting prowess equate with heroism? What is it that makes a hero? Who's your hero?

The dictionary defines a 'hero' as 'one greatly regarded for outstanding achievements or noble qualities', whereas 'one capable of defeating competitors in sport' is termed a 'champion'.

Great sportspeople like Brendon McCullum, Ritchie McCaw, and Valerie Adams can rightly be described as 'champions', but to be a 'hero' involves more than that. Heroes are admired for their noble qualities, the inspiring example they set for others, and for doing things in a selfless and sacrificial way.

Remember Lance Armstrong, the road racing cyclist who won the Tour de France seven times, but was stripped of his titles after a doping scandal? Perhaps he may be called a cycling champion, but he lost any claim to 'hero' status when he was found to have used performance-enhancing drugs over many years, and to have lied about it.

On the other hand, someone like Austin Hemmings is an example of a true hero. In central Auckland in



Disgraced cycling champion Lance Armstrong, seen here racing in February 2009, has lost his 'hero' status. As this article points out, high moral values are a vital attribute of a true hero.

2008, Hemmings stood in front of a woman to shield her from a knife-wielding attacker when she cried out for help. After urging her to run for safety, Hemmings was stabbed to death.

In a similar incident in Auckland last year, Lucy Knight was brutally assaulted when she intervened to stop a bag-snatching in a shopping mall. Austin Hemmings and Lucy Knight have been widely lauded as 'Good Samaritans' and true heroes.

Too Many Heroes?

It's possible to confuse heroes with celebrities. Modern society suffers from a 'celebrity culture', according to Lord Robert Winston, a high-profile British professor, scientist, and

television presenter. He believes the stars of the entertainment industry and the sports field are given recognition out of all proportion to their value or their attributes.

On a visit to this country in 2009, Lord Winston noted that he believes Kiwis ignore the worst behaviour of our sports stars and do not value intellectuals. 'New Zealand celebrates attributes which really aren't that important', he said, '... celebrity worship is a very good example of the lessening of genuine values in society'.¹ As someone has wisely observed: 'Celebrities make news, heroes make history'.

The word 'hero' does seem to be somewhat overused these days. Indeed, in today's news-hungry



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and flashy society it often isn't good enough to talk just about heroes. The term in vogue nowadays is 'superheroes'!

In this context, it is well worth noting that as the great tennis player Arthur Ashe stated: 'True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost'.

Ironically, true heroes are the type of people who don't really think they are heroes at all. They are often humble, self-effacing people who never want to take the credit—they are thinking of others rather than themselves.

A search of Google images for 'hero' brings up a plethora of pictures of Superman. He could well be called the archetypal hero of all time. Superman is a true legend, a global

icon. He always stands up to evil, protects the innocent, and fights for truth and justice. He is smarter, stronger, and more handsome than anyone else, and 'faster than a speeding bullet'.

The actor and film-director Christopher Reeve, famous for his movie portrayal of Superman, had some great insights into what makes a hero.

In 1995, Reeve was thrown head first from a horse in an accident that broke his neck and left him unable to move or breathe. In an instant, the one who starred as Superman was deprived of any strength and power, totally dependent on medical assistance even to draw breath. Reeve fought a heroic battle as a quadriplegic for nine years, courageously struggling against multiple health problems and lobbying extensively for people with spinal cord injuries. He died of a sudden heart attack in 2004 while co-directing a movie called *Everyone's Hero*. It has been observed with good reason that he was even more of a Superman in real life than he was in the movies.

On his website Reeve wrote:

When the first Superman movie came out I was frequently asked 'What is a hero?' I remember the glib response I repeated so many times. My answer was that a hero is someone who commits a courageous action without considering the consequences—a soldier who crawls out of a foxhole to drag an injured buddy to safety. And I also meant individuals who are slightly larger than life: Houdini and Lindbergh, John Wayne, JFK, and Joe DiMaggio.

Now my definition is completely different. I think a hero is an ordinary individual who finds strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.²

By that definition, each and every one of us can be a hero! And why not be inspired by people like Christopher Reeve to do our best to act energetically for the good of others? 'I want to democratise heroism to say any of us can be a hero', observed Philip Zimbardo.

Thankfully there are millions of unsung heroes in our world.

Right: Nearly half of national essay contest writers named a family member as their personal hero, with 'my mum' coming well ahead in first place.

In a national essay contest for high school students in the USA, StageofLife.com, a writing resource centre for teens asked around 3,000 students to submit an essay on the topic 'Who is your hero?' Nearly half of the essay writers named a family member as their personal hero, with 'my mum' coming well ahead in first place. Other heroes such as Lady Gaga, Britney Spears, and Mahatma Gandhi were cited, but it's pleasing to see that close family members came out as leading role models in the majority of cases.³

It is a natural human trait to desire to be a hero. We all dream of being able to make the big difference at just the right moment to resolve a challenging situation. And there's nothing wrong with that, as long as

it isn't a matter of selfish pride and vanity. It's good to have the desire and ambition to help and serve others in special ways. The world would be a better place if each of us would try more frequently to be a hero to those around us.

It's good to ask the question 'What more can I do to selflessly serve and assist the people in my life?' We can resolve to be a true hero to our close family and friends.

The Greatest Hero of All

Mother Theresa, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela are often listed as favourite heroes. They certainly deserve that accolade in view of their noble qualities and service for others.





Although Jesus committed no sin, he sacrificed his life so that the sins of all mankind could be forgiven.

But I'd like to submit that the greatest hero the world has ever seen is none other than Jesus Christ. Let's consider his credentials for this honour. Jesus is surely the most widely known person in history, with time itself being split into B.C. and A.D. in reference to him. He is admired and followed by millions of people who are happy to be called Christians, proudly wearing his name (sadly we often fail to live up to it, but you can't blame him for that).

Interestingly, the story of Superman borrows many elements from the life of Jesus. There are numerous parallels between the two stories. For instance, Superman's earthly parents were originally called Joseph and Mary, but the names were later changed to Jonathan (retaining Joseph as his middle name) and Martha.

Superman was sent to earth as a baby in a rocket ship shaped like a star, landing in a rural cornfield.

Christ's arrival was also heralded by a star seen by shepherds in a field. Superman was raised on earth in a backwater town called Smallville, reminiscent of Nazareth. Like Jesus, Superman grew up where people had no idea of his true identity, or his special powers.

Superman's family name, El, is a Hebrew word for God. Jor-El, the father, sent Kal-El, the son, to Earth to be a protector and to 'show them the way'. Clark Kent became

Superman at the age of 30, the same age Jesus started his ministry. Superman's mortal enemy is Lex Luthor. Reminiscent of Lucifer, who became Satan, Luthor is insanely jealous of Superman's powers, just as Lucifer is of God's.⁴

In the movie *Superman Returns* the voice of Jor-El said: 'They can be a great people, Kal-El. They wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. That is why I have sent them you, my only son'. The 'S' on Superman's chest might just as well stand for 'Saviour', notes Cale Clarke in an article 'The Gospel According to Superman'.⁵ Bryan Singer, director of *Superman Returns*, put it this way: 'Superman is the Jesus Christ of superheroes'.

In the 2013 sequel, *Man of Steel*, director Zack Snyder deliberately explored the biblical allegory, showing Clark Kent in a church with a stained-glass Jesus in the background and having Superman extend his arms like a crucifix in space before diving back toward earth.⁶

Just like Superman, the story of Jesus has been portrayed in many films. Bruce Marchiano, the Hollywood actor who played Jesus in *The Gospel of Matthew*, summed up Christ's life and character in this way:

Consistently, he spoke truth against a sea of opposition. Shockingly, he lived fully in his personal life exactly what he preached in public. Time after time, he stood heroically alone for what was right, regardless of what it might cost him. Without hesitation, he went out of his way to care for the most objectionable people of society, never turning a hungry soul away, always taking time to love an unlovable or care for an uncareable, knowing he would suffer ridicule and rejection for it. Humbly and openly, he marched across cultural barriers, decrying centuries of racist arrogance. Never a respecter of persons,

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unconcerned with status, wealth, gender, or popularity, he stood, champion and friend of the 'little guy'. And for all this and more, he constantly took it on the chin, keeping his mouth shut, his face set like flint, eyes riveted on his greater cause and mission.

This was truly a man among men, bigger than life itself yet as down-to-earth as it gets. This was the ultimate definition of masculinity, the very personification of character and integrity. He was the human coming-together of everything that is truly noble, good and honourable. We all go crazy for the big-screen hero. But take a look at Jesus—storming in against overwhelming opposition, giving his literal all, his very life—to rescue the helpless, the widowed, the orphaned, the crushed, the rejected, the despised. I don't know about you, but in my book, that's the living definition of 'hero'—the true definition of hero.⁷

Every other human hero made (or makes) mistakes. But Jesus stands out head and shoulders over anyone

else because he never did anything wrong. High moral values are a vital attribute of a true hero. Jesus is the epitome of standards in this area, laying out the highest set of ethics and virtues ever presented—values that are prized by millions of people to the present day. He lived a pure and a selfless life, constantly teaching, healing, and helping those around him. Although he committed no sin, he sacrificed his life so that the sins of all mankind could be forgiven.

Historian Philip Schaff considered Jesus so amazing that he didn't believe humans could have made up such a story. He wrote:

A character so original, so complete, so uniformly consistent, so perfect, so human and yet so high above all human greatness, can be neither a fraud nor a fiction. The poet...would in this case be greater than the hero. It would take more than a Jesus to invent a Jesus.⁸

Jesus is uniquely placed to be a true hero because he was God as well as man. This makes him alone worthy

Why Would Anyone Want to Be a Christian?

In several nations it is illegal to become a Christian. But people become Christians anyway, despite penalties and even threats of death. Thousands of believers are killed each year, yet more people become Christians.

Christianity can spread even when it is persecuted. That is the way Christianity started—Jesus was killed as a political criminal. In the first 200 years after his death, thousands of Christians were killed as the Roman Empire tried to exterminate this new faith.

Millions of people become Christians each year. Scientists, farmers, historians, and clerks—people from all walks of life—become Christians. Why? This article gives several reasons. You can see whether any of them make sense to you.

Check out the article at: <https://www.gci.org/gospel/whyanyone>

of ‘hero worship’. He was able to perform powerful miracles, such as feeding thousands of people with a few small pieces of bread and fish, walking on water, turning water into wine, and even bringing back from the dead someone who had been in a tomb for four days. Not one of his miracles was done for his own benefit; all were for the good of others, including the healing of scores of sick and dying people.

What a remarkable hero! In fact, Jesus is manifestly worthy of the modern appellation—‘superhero’! Wikipedia states that ‘a superhero is a type of heroic character possessing extraordinary talents, supernatural phenomena, or superhuman powers, and dedicated to a moral goal or protecting the public’. By this definition Jesus is the ultimate superhero.

But one important factor sets Jesus clearly apart from other superheroes. All of the others are fictional characters, but Jesus really did live and do these things. Some question his historicity, but there is ample historical proof of his life and the things he did and said.

The Wikipedia article, ‘Historicity of Jesus’, surveys a great deal of material in this regard, concluding:

‘There is near unanimity among scholars that Jesus existed historically’. There is of course plenty of evidence in Christian sources such as the writings of the New Testament, but Jesus is mentioned in the works of first-century Roman historian Josephus and the second-century Roman historian Tacitus, among other places.

Classical historian Michael Grant wrote:

If we apply to the New Testament, as we should, the same sort of criteria as we should apply to other ancient writings containing historical material, we can no more reject Jesus’ existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned.⁹

A large number of websites lay out various proofs of Christ’s historicity,¹⁰ including one which concludes:

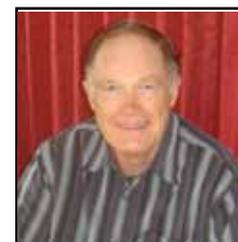
There is overwhelming evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ, both in secular and biblical history. Perhaps the greatest evidence that Jesus did exist is the fact that literally thousands of Christians in the first century A.D., including the twelve apostles, were willing to give their lives as martyrs for

Jesus Christ. People will die for what they believe to be true, but no one will die for what they know to be a lie.¹¹

Why do literally millions of people choose of their own free will to follow Jesus and look up to him as their hero? Why not read about his life and see what attracts people to him? Read through the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible. Each can be read in one sitting. After carefully considering these, ask yourself the question: ‘Who’s my hero?’

NOTES

- ¹ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/science/3155697/Worship-of-Kiwi-celebrities-a-false-idolatry>
- ² <http://www.chrisreevehomepage.com/stillme.html>
- ³ http://www.stageoflife.com/Who_Is_Your_Hero.aspx
- ⁴ Isaiah 14:12-14
- ⁵ <http://www.thefaitheexplained.com/blog/the-gospel-according-to-superman/>
- ⁶ For other examples, see for instance <http://wakeup.unhypnotize.com/superman-jesus-similarities-24-revealed/>
- ⁷ Bruce Marchiano, *In the Footsteps of Jesus*, Harvest House Publishers, 1997, p. 141.
- ⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1910, p. 109.
- ⁹ Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels*, 1977.
- ¹⁰ See for instance <http://www.bethinking.org/jesus/ancient-evidence-for-jesus-from-non-christian-sources>; http://www.insidelifelife.org.nz/files/8698/IL_issue_06.pdf
- ¹¹ <http://www.gotquestions.org/did-Jesus-exist.html>



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