

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW; YOUR KINGDOM COME...ON EARTH

JROC - Week 8 – Discipleship in Jesus' Day

March 6, 2022

- How much did the Jewish people know about the Scripture?
- Have you ever wondered why the men whom Jesus called to follow Him dropped everything and ran after Him? (Matt. 4:18-22) Peter and Andrew, James and John weren't young boys. These were men who had occupations. Yet, when Jesus called, they left their families and occupations.
- Jesus used the term "disciple" for the men whom He called who appeared to believe AFTER He told them "Come and see" (John 2:11). And, then these "disciples" returned to fishing? What were their beliefs?

Jewish education before the 1st Century/before Jesus' day - The Jewish people taught their children from the Hebrew Bible (Deut. 6:4-7). Under the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the family had the primary role in the educational process (Gen. 18:19). Under the monarchy, the Kings of Judah, the priests taught the law (II Chron. 17:8-9 – going through Judah; II Chron. 30:22 – Hezekiah; II Chron. 35:3 – the Levites taught all Israel).

When the Kingdom of Judah was carried away captive to Babylon, the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed (586 BC). While the Jewish people were in exile in Babylon, it is believed that synagogues were established and rabbis (teacher/master) came into being.

After the Babylonian exile and the return to the land, Ezra the Scribe and the Levites (Neh. 8:9), taught the Torah (Ezra 7:10, 25; Neh. 8:1-12 – a MUST read!). The Torah became the accepted basis of individual and community life.

In the time of Jesus, He was not the only One who had disciples. John the Baptizer had disciples (Matt. 9:14) as did the Pharisees (Matt. 22:15-16).

Discipleship in Jesus' day - Jewish boys in Jesus' day began learning God's Word at 6 years of age. The Talmud (Rabbinic opinion/commentary) states, "Before the age of six do not accept pupils; from that age you can accept them. and stuff them with Torah like an ox."

Beit Sefer – House of the Book

A child usually attended Beit Sefer from age 6 to age 10. A local synagogue Torah teacher began teaching the children the Torah. On the first day of class the teacher instructed the children to pour honey over their clay tablets. In the Jewish mindset, honey was a sign of God's favor...of His delight. The children were instructed to lick the honey from their tablet. As they did so, the teacher said, "May the words of God be sweet to your taste, sweeter than honey to your mouth" (Psalm 119:103 – *How sweet are*

Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.). Is this how we feel about the Scriptures?

The children were taught that there was nothing more enjoyable in the entire universe than tasting, receiving, accepting the words of God, and making them a part of their lives. From ages 6-10 the children memorized Torah!

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Beit Talmud – The House of Learning

Following Beit Sefer, only the best of the best students continued their education from Scripture at the age of 10 at Beit Talmud. They memorized the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures through to Malachi. By 13/14 years of age, a young Jewish boy had memorized the entire Hebrew text. At Beit Talmud, students began to learn the Jewish art of questions and answers. In Jesus' day the teachers taught the young boys to answer a question with a question. We see Jesus engaging in this art throughout the Gospels esp. when He spoke with the religious Jewish leadership. During Passover at age 12, Jesus was *sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers* (Luke 2:46).

At Beit Talmud, the students learned “remez” (a teaching technique) which means “hint” in Hebrew or “harkening back” to a passage in Scripture. The teachers called out a passage of Scripture and the students replied with the Scripture before and after that passage. They lived in the text!

Beit Midrash – House of Study

At the end of study at Beit Talmud, at the age of 13/14, if a Jewish boy was the best of the best, he would then present himself to a rabbi. The rabbis would not recruit. The student approached the rabbi – the one whom he wanted to emulate. The student had to ask permission to follow a rabbi!

The rabbi then would examine the student and ask many questions to find out if indeed this child was the best of the best. The rabbi had a vested interest. The goal for the rabbi was to have a number of disciples teach his thinking, his philosophy/his yoke, his interpretation of Scripture. If the rabbi believed that a young boy was able to become a rabbi, he would say, “Lech Acharai – Come, follow me.”

The young boy would then leave his family and his village. He would leave everything and follow the rabbi. The young boy would become a talmid, a disciple. He would give his life to that rabbi...to be exactly like that rabbi. Disciples, through the teaching of their rabbi, were to become reproductions of their master...their rabbi!

The first task of a disciple was to memorize their rabbi's words. The disciple was also to learn his rabbi's traditions and interpretations - how his rabbi kept the Sabbath,

how he fasted, how he prayed, how he recited blessings. The disciple was to imitate his rabbi's actions: deeds, speech, conduct.

And, the disciple was to raise his own disciples.

The disciples desired to emulate the rabbi in all of his mannerisms. They would eat the same food in exactly the same way as their rabbi. They would walk as their rabbi walked. They would sleep as their rabbi slept.

The rabbi always walked in front and his students behind. The disciples/talmidim followed so closely after the rabbi, that it was said of these talmidim/disciples, – “May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.” Did the disciples walk behind Jesus? As we read the gospels, let's observe how Jesus related to the disciples and they to Him.

For some Jewish boys when the rabbis quizzed them, the rabbi did NOT say, “Lech Acharai – Come, follow me.” Instead, the rabbi said, “Ah, my son, you do know

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Torah. But you are not able to be my talmid, my disciple. Go home to your village. Make babies. Pray that they become rabbis. Go home and learn the family business. You won't be studying to be a rabbi.”

In the Jewish culture, imagine hearing these words from a rabbi whom you wanted to EMULATE? Rejection!

CONSIDER Jesus' words: Matthew 11:28 - *Come unto Me all you who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*

What did Jesus do? I'm suggesting that Jesus called men who had already failed the “rabbi test.” Jesus told the grown, rejected men, “Lech Acharai...come and follow Me” Can you imagine how thrilling it was to the formerly rejected disciples to hear these words? They were valued! They had worth!

Why did Jesus choose these men – men who had already failed? God's GRACE! Jesus believed they could become like Him – not based on their own merit. Based on what He would do in their lives! Jesus called Peter who was impulsive. James and John were called the sons of THUNDER. The brothers had zeal, passion, ambition – and made obnoxious requests of Jesus. Levi/Matthew was a former tax collector – HATED by everyone! Thomas doubted.

Jesus believed that these men could become like Him! This is GOD'S GRACE in ACTION!

In Luke 6:40 Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." We are told in Scripture that we, as believers are being conformed to the image of God's Son (II Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29).

How are we as believers living today? Are we living so that we can be like Jesus? It doesn't matter who you are, where you are, how much you've memorized, or how much you know. It's all about Whom you follow.

These men who had seemingly been rejected by a rabbi in the past who was looking for disciples to teach his philosophy/his yoke were TRANSFORMED by the Rabbi Jesus, Teacher, Master, LORD God Who believed they could become like Him! (II Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29)

We are becoming conformed to His image. Do we believe this truth? II Cor. 3:18b - ... *beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

We stumble and fall. Peter denied Jesus 3 times. Did Jesus know that Peter would deny Him? Of course He did. Jesus still called Peter. Jesus is in the RESTORATION business! After Jesus' resurrection, we read of Peter, Thomas (the twin), Nathanael, James and John going FISHING! Seemingly returning to their trade! (John 21)

WHY? Perhaps because they didn't believe they could be like Jesus.

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Jesus spoke with Peter and told him, "Feed My lambs, take care of My sheep" – Be like Me, be like Me, be like me...

When we stumble and fall – Jesus says the same to us!

Before Jesus' ascension into heaven....

Matt. 28:18-20 - *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen.*

God had chosen Israel to serve as His witnesses/His servants to the Gentile nations (Isa. 43:10). Jesus told His disciples prior to His ascension into heaven to make disciples of all the Gentiles/the nations!

They obeyed His command. And, what are the results?

How is God using you to make disciples?