

Covered in the Dust of Your Rabbi! by Rob Bell

Education was huge in Jesus' day, and there was an ongoing argument as to which age a Rabbi would receive a youth as a pupil. One Rabbi made the statement, "Under the age of six, we do not receive a child as a pupil. But from six upwards, receive him and stuff him with Torah like an ox!" You see, education was important to educators, students, and parents in those times. The Mishna has a phrase that says, "Above all, we pride ourselves on the education of our children." This is the same system that Jesus would have probably grown up in and learned from.

Jewish education was made up of three primary sections:

Bet Safar

Bet Talmud

Bet Midrash

Bet Safar

Usually from the ages five to ten, it is a time taught in the synagogue by the Rabbi. During this time, good Jewish boys memorized Torah - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy - memorized by the age of ten! Whoa!

Bet Talmud

Progressing on from Bet Safar, it continues from the age of ten on to fourteen. During this time, the student would continue his memorization of the Psalms, prophets, and the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament). It wasn't uncommon in that day for a good Jewish boy to have the Old Testament memorized by the age of fourteen.

The student would also during this time begin to learn the art of questions and answers. In our western civilization today, we are into information transfer, but in those days, answering a question wasn't quite as direct. A rabbi might ask a student what is two plus two? Today, we would spout off the answer of four. But back then when a Rabbi would ask what two plus two was, a student might answer with, "What is the square root of sixteen?" This not only told the Rabbi that the student heard and understood the question, but was able to process it and respond with a question of his own. So you see, when we find Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve (Luke 2), we find him doing just what a boy of his age would be doing, questions and answers with the elders.

Bet Midrash

At the age of fourteen, the best of the best would continue to apply oral and written law from the Talmud, the Mishna, Sages, and years and years of commentary on the scriptures. Each Rabbi would have their own interpretation of how to live out the Torah. For instance, Honor the Sabbath: One Rabbi might say that you can't go farther than the distance to the synagogue. While another might say you can't go twice the distance to the synagogue, because you have to return home. You see, you have the law itself and then

the Rabbi's interpretation of the rules required to obey the law. The Rabbi's rules were called his yoke. When you studied under a Rabbi, you took his yoke upon you.

But Jesus came and said His yoke was easy. That He isn't about endless lists of rules and regulations (Matthew 11). You see, when Jesus is speaking, He's not just picking words out of the air; He's speaking as a Rabbi would.

When Rabbis spoke, they got into heated, animated debates because these are the teachings of God and a direct reflection of worship. They believed that the highest form of worship was study and that true study always leads to wonder.

So a Rabbi might ask a student, "What does it mean to honor the Sabbath?" And one student being wrong might answer, "To sit and do nothing and have a boring day." The Rabbi would passionately respond, "No! You have abolished Torah!" meaning that the student has missed the point. But another student may respond, "To remember and reflect that we are no longer slaves. That we are brought up from a kingdom of darkness and redeemed by the blood of the lamb. That we take one day a week to remind ourselves that our worth doesn't come from making bricks, but from the one who made us!" And the Rabbi would then say, "Yes! You have fulfilled Torah!" And Jesus comes (Matthew 5) and says I didn't come to abolish what you've learned, but to show you what it looks like in flesh and blood.

So, at the age of fourteen, the best of the best, the Harvard and Yale of the Jewish boys took another step. All Jewish boys wanted to be Rabbis, because teachers were the most respected people of the day. At fourteen, the Harvard and Yale would approach a Rabbi and request to become his disciple.

The Rabbi would then quiz the boy. For instance, he may ask, "Give me the four references to Deuteronomy in Habakkuk in order." And as if that weren't enough, the Rabbi would also engage the boy in what were called remezes. A remeze is where the Rabbi would form his question based around a piece of scripture, so he would quote, for instance, the first three verses of the passage. But the actual question the Rabbi was asking was about the fourth verse. Now, because the boy had been raised through Bet Safar, Bet Talmud, and Bet Midrash, he knew the scriptures and his mind continued on through the next verses and was able to understand that the Rabbi was really referring to verse four with his question. The boy would then form his answer around another piece of scripture and quote a few verses, stopping just shy of the one he was referring to or starting shortly after it. The Rabbi would then have to figure out what the boy was referring to and judge how well he had answered his question. If it sounds complicated, it was!

If the Rabbi quizzed you and determined that you were good enough, that you were indeed the Harvard or Yale, he would say, "Come, take my yoke upon you and become my disciple." And at that time, the boy would leave everything, (home, mother, father, synagogue, community...) and devote his entire life to being just like the Rabbi.

This system continues today to some extent in Israel. It's not uncommon for a Rabbi to go into the bathroom and be followed by his disciples. Coming out of the stall, the Rabbi might say, "Blessed art thou O God, for giving us holes in our bodies." And then the disciples would repeat what the Rabbi had said, because their entire purpose is to be exactly like their Rabbi, even down to bodily functions.

One of the Sages from the Mishna is quoted as this, "May you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi." Rabbis are passionate and animated. They would spend their days taking their disciples around teaching them, and as they traveled from place to place, they would literally kick up a cloud of dust. And because the disciples were following the Rabbi, at the end of the day, they would actually be covered in the dust their Rabbi kicked up - May you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi...

Now there is always the possibility that the Rabbi might decide while quizzing you that you are not the Harvard or Yale. He would say, "Obviously, you know Torah, but you don't have what it takes to be just like me. Go, make babies, pray that they become Rabbis, and ply your trade." Go learn the family business and live a good life that your sons may grow up to be better than you.

And that brings us to the text, Matthew 4:18 - 22 and 16:13 - 20

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers; Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fisherman.

What were they???????????

Fisherman..... Why?

Because they didn't make the cut! A Rabbi had probably told them they weren't the best of the best, and sent them to "ply their trade". Jesus goes to the losers and rejects and calls them!

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Now, how many of you, honestly will say that this has never made sense to you? It didn't to me. Here comes a guy walking down the beach. Peter and Andrew are probably learning the family business. This is important to them. Their family's well being is probably dependant upon how well they learn this trade. They probably have a lot of money wrapped up in their equipment. And this guy comes walking up and says, "Come follow me." They drop everything and do it! On top of the picture I paint, Christian movies show a guy, wearing a bathrobe, a light-blue Miss America sash, who has Third Day hair, calls them out and like he has some mystical power, they jump out of the boat and chase after him.

But that is what happened! There is no more. Nothing is missing. The author didn't leave anything out. You see, Jesus was a Rabbi! He is calling disciples! He thinks they are good enough, even though others did not. He's giving them a chance to fulfill their dream. So of course they drop what they're doing and follow after the Rabbi.

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Where's the part about Zebedee filing chapter 11? Or the part about him standing on the dock waving his fist as his boys leave him stranded with a struggling family business? There is no such part. It was an honor to have your sons leave to follow a Rabbi. Instead of Zebedee being upset, I can see him that night, getting home telling his wife, "The boys are gone!" "Where did they go?" she might ask. "The Rabbi Yashewa of Nazareth called them and they are following his teachings now!" In fact, the next morning, I can picture Zebedee walking through town, chest puffed out, maybe even walking with a bit of a swagger to his step as he tells of how his boys are now gone.

Do you really think Jesus thinks you can do it? That's the whole premise of the system. The Rabbi won't accept someone who can't make it. We can tell, based on the context that several of the disciples were in their late to mid teens. Peter had a mother-in-law, and usually by the age of eighteen, a boy would be married. Jesus calls teenage rejects and second-class to be his disciples. And He continues to call them today!

But that's not all. What did Jesus do with his newly found disciples?

(Matthew 16:13 and on...)

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi

Caesarea Philippi - just another place? No, it was in those days, one of the centers of pagan worship. It was literally at the base of a really tall cliff. Onlookers could walk up to the top of the cliff and look down at the pagan worship going on below. In the face of the cliff there was a slit in the rock that was believed to be the point at which the spirits would enter and leave this world. The slit in the rock was named "The Gates of Hell".

..., he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

What's he saying? See, Jesus has just marched these boys up on top of this rock at Caesarea Philippi. Good Jewish boys just didn't go there. This is the place parents tell their kids, "You can't go there." The disciples were probably freaking out, "If my dad

finds out, he's gonna kill me..." But here they are, and the Rabbi is teaching them. He asks them, looking down at the pagans, who people say he is. Peter finally, speaks up and tells him who he thinks Jesus is. And Jesus acknowledges that Peter has been given that understanding from the God. And here's the really important part.... Christ looks down at the pagans and tells the disciples that "upon this rock" - on these types of people, the worldly, ordinary people Christ will build His church. And even the "gates of Hades" - the spirits of the world can't get in the way because it is commissioned by God Himself. He's telling the disciples that they are going to help Christ build the church among those types of people. He's not focusing all His attention on the religious people hanging out in the synagogues.

Jesus is still calling teens today. He's calling you! You see, upon that rock, the people in your city, your school, your circle of friends, He wants to use you to build His church. And not even the gates of hell can get in the way, because God Himself has ordained it to happen. But it all comes back to you - right where you are. Christ is walking down the beach towards you. He's calling out, "Come and follow me." What will your answer be?

MAY YOU BE COVERED IN THE DUST OF YOUR RABBI!

The content for this message is taken from Rob Bell's message on the same.