

Jan 18th 2009: Grandparent Sunday: Jesus Calls The 'Not Good Enoughs'.
Matthew 4:18-22

On this Grandparent Sunday it's so good to see a few extra children here and a few extra Grandparents. **It won't be too long** however, before some parents will see a little less of their children during week days, as with the end of holidays comes the beginning of a new school term.

How many of you kids are looking forward to going back to school?

What I have discovered recently in a book by Rob Bell, however, is that School for you seems to be a lot easier than what school was for children at the time when Jesus lived.

Children then began their education when they were about three on their mother's knee. It was her task to introduce them to a skill (ability) that would make learning so much easier for them once they started real schooling. **Can anyone tell me what that skill (ability) may have been?** Ability to memorize stuff.

Also in the home the parents would teach all their children, both boys and girls, the Hebrew language so that they could read the sacred scriptures and so that the boys would be prepared for the time when at 6, they would begin their official education.

You see the Jewish people strongly and rightly believed, that God had spoken to their leader Moses, and then given to Moses a copy of what He had said. Moses had written down God's words and they became the first five books of the Bible.

Who can name the first five books?

They called them the Torah, because they are filled with instructions about the way God wanted His people to live, and the word Torah means "Way".

Consequently every parent knew that the best thing that their child should know, especially if that child was a boy, was the Torah. The way of living that pleased God. **And the greatest ambition** any Jewish parent could have for their son, was that he would become first a disciple of a Rabbi or teacher of the Torah and the Prophets. And then become a respected Rabbi himself.

So at the age of 6 these children would front up for part of most every day at the local Synagogue where the Priest or perhaps a Rabbi would teach them to know and memorise the Torah. **They would begin with the book of Leviticus**, so that the children would learn straight away how important it was to be pure in the sight of God. **The teacher would at times put honey** on the finger tips of the students and tell them to suck the honey off. The Torah they would say is as sweet to your soul as honey is to your lips. Yearn for this teaching as your taste buds yearn for the sweetness of honey.

By the time a child had reached the age of ten, they had memorized the first five books of the Bible.

It was also then that the first separation of the best students from the rest took place. **Those students who were seen as having the natural ability** to understand and retain knowledge were chosen to continue their education. They entered **The House of Learning**, which was normally another building from the Synagogue that was set apart for their teaching. This building was seen as more important even than the Synagogue.

The other students went back into family life where they were apprenticed into the family business and became farmers, wine makers, carpenters etc. **They had missed out on the opportunity** to become one day a disciple or a Rabbi.

The best students continued their study and memorization of the Scriptures till they were 14 or 15. **By then they would have memorized** the whole of the OT. Genesis through to Malachi learnt by heart. Able to recite the 39 books and to explain their meaning. **They were also taught the art of asking questions.** Over the centuries many great scholars had asked and answered questions that the Scriptures raised. These students were expected to learn who had said what and their basis for saying it. Most verses had a massive oral tradition attached to them and the students had to know and understand that too. **They also had to respond to questions they were asked**, not just by giving back information. That's how we were taught. They had to respond by asking a question which proved that they not only understood what the questioner was asking, but were able to take the subject to an even deeper level.

So just imagine the standard of learning these young men had reached by 15.

But they still had a long way to go.

The very best would then seek out a well known Rabbi and apply to become one of his disciples by saying, **"I want to become one of your disciples"**. **That meant more than just learning what the Rabbi could teach him. The goal was to be like the Rabbi.** To impact the world as that Rabbi did. To live the life that would show God's people how they should live in order to please God.

The Rabbi would only want to train a youth who could become like him. He had no time to waste training up the good intentioned who did not have what it would take. So he would closely interrogate the young man on all the things he should have already learnt. If he decided that the student was not the best he would send him home with the words, **"You obviously love God and know the Torah but you do not have what it takes to be my disciple. Go home and learn the family business."** **And that was the end of that young man's ambitions.**

But if the Rabbi believed that he had what was needed, he would say to him, **"Come, follow me."** And the student would. He would probably leave his parents, his synagogue, his village, and travel around with that Rabbi learning how to do what that Rabbi did. He would give up his whole life just to be like this Rabbi and rejoice in the privilege that had been given to him.

Young Jewish boys would dream of being one day offered such a position. To be a Rabbi in that society was to be honoured above all others. **Sadly most**

arrived at the age of 15 knowing that they would never make it. They were just not good enough to be part of such a select group.

Then along comes Jesus. A Rabbi like no other Rabbi. And Matt 4:18 tells us:-

**"he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen."
"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."**

Rob Bell writing about this incident says: (page 131 Velvet Elvis).....

Here we find Jesus doing the totally unexpected. He doesn't call the A graders, but those who in that Society were not considered "Disciple" material, to be His disciples. To, by the power of God at work in them, become like Him in this world.

Jesus had faith in them. He knew that they could achieve the task that had to be done in His name, because He would enable them.

And when Jesus first touched your heart with the call upon your life. Or, indeed, if Jesus is calling you right now, and **said to you, Come follow me. If was not because you were amazingly intelligent, or extraordinarily gifted, or pure and unsullied by sin or the world.**

Its because He loves you. And knows that He can make you like Himself in this world. That He can impact the world around you through you.

I was thinking about this talk last Weds when I read the daily devotional in the Word for Today. **The featured verse was from 1 Cor 1:27**

"God chose the weak things:" It then went on to say:-

God can do much with little. Look what He did for David with a sling and a stone. Watch Him feed 5,000 with a boy's lunch. And He will do the same for you! Your life is like a pebble: it may not look like much, but drop it into a pond and watch the ripples spread in every direction.

Every day you live you have three options: (a) Think only of yourself and your own interests. (b) Since success doesn't come without the possibility of failure, take no risks and go no further. (c) Ask God to show you what you've got, then use it to make ripples.

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