

Title: Jesus the Teacher

Summary: Jesus was a special kind of teacher. I try to show this by comparing him to a college professor. To have a professor teach a student, the student must first jump through hoops, grades and recommendations and the like. Jesus accepts us with no prior accomplishments. The only qualification Jesus requires is that we ask. So also we teach and minister to others without demanding that they jump through hoops before we act.

Key Scripture: John 14:6-12, Mark 1:21-28

We have begun the season of Lent. Lent is a time to prepare for Jesus' resurrection. A time to celebrate it and begin to truly live it. And so over the next several weeks we are going to look at the many ways Jesus has affected our lives.

Today I am going to describe Jesus as a teacher. Teaching us to live after His resurrection was one of His major goals while he was alive. And just as He changed our perspective on the Ten Commandments, Jesus changed our perspective on everything that had been taught before His ministry.

In Jesus' time, the teachers in Israel were called rabbis. They had much in common with today's college professors.

First, they spent their lives becoming experts in their subjects. Their authority came from everyone who lived before them. Take a professor of French literature. He or she is expected to know everything about French literature: French novelists, French playwrights, French poets, etc., from the earliest documents up to the modern day. When they teach about French literature, they cite these sources and describe how everything fits together. For example they show how Les Miserables was written to describe a time in French history.

This was how Rabbis taught. They were experts in Jewish laws going back to Moses. When they taught about the laws, they cited the written law, like Leviticus, oral traditions, and everything earlier rabbis had already written. In other words, they were experts in the past.

A second thing about college professors is that, as mentors, they play hard to get. If a graduate student wants to be mentored by a professor, he or she has to spend years jumping through high and narrow hoops.

Rabbis were the same. Jewish students with good reputations from their local synagogue teachers would apply to a well-known Rabbi and ask to be taken on as a proselyte. Only if the Rabbi agreed, a proselyte could study to become a Rabbi under his direction. The apostle Paul boasted that he had been a student of Gamaliel and he had been trained in Jewish law. Gamaliel was famous so it was quite an honor for him to have accepted Paul as a student and it gave Paul credibility when he explained his roots in Judaism.

Jesus did not fit the Professor or the Rabbi mold.

First, as we saw in the first Scripture reading, people were amazed because Jesus taught as an independent authority. He didn't just repeat previous Jewish laws. Whatever came from the past, He reinterpreted. And He added a great deal that was scarcely dreamed of before Him. New revelations from God.

Second, Jesus didn't play hard to get. Disciples did not have to seek Jesus out. Jesus sought them out. And Jesus did not choose people who had studied for years. People who had jumped through a bunch of hoops. He chose a variety of disciples who hadn't prepared, some who He had never met before selecting them.

These two facts about Jesus have profound implications for us, about nearly all of which we can say, "Thank goodness!"

If Jesus had defended Jewish law, we would still believe that God wanted us to obey rituals like washing our hands before meals and that God would base his approval on how diligently we washed our hands.

I'm not saying hygiene isn't important. Washing hands before handling food prevents contamination and disease. But God bases His approval not on how carefully we wash our hands but on how diligently we share food with the needy.

If Jesus had repeated Jewish interpretation of events, we would see God as one who punishes us with disaster when we misbehave. Hurricanes and tornadoes would be seen as God punishing the eastern seaboard and the Midwest for their sins.

If Jesus had based his teaching on Proverbs, we would say that rich people were rich because God approved of them and poor people were poor because God did not approve of them.

In other words, we would be missing the revelation that God loves and forgives each individual based on the condition of their heart, independent of their wealth. God does not punish us with tornados or demand hand washing.

If we think this is a big difference, this result of Jesus speaking with the authority of God rather than the authority of past practice and tradition, then we will really be blown away by Jesus not waiting for people to prove themselves before inviting them to becoming Christian.

Remember the model of the Rabbi and the college professor? To get into graduate school, I had to spend years, full time, learning things and proving I knew them by passing tests. I had to get letters of

recommendation from trusted people. I had to write applications and jump through hoop after hoop to get someone to take me on. And even when I had done all these things, I didn't know if I would be accepted. Because professors only take a set number of persons each year.

Imagine if to win a place in God's heart you had to spend years, full time, doing good deeds. Imagine if you needed to pass tests on Bible knowledge. Imagine if you needed three pastors to write you letters of recommendation before God accepted you. Imagine if you didn't know whether God would accept you because God only accepted a certain number of people each year.

Here is another example. Say you want to buy a house. First you have to get a mortgage. Again there is hoop after hoop. You have to have a credit history. That can take years, a lot of them if you have a bankruptcy in your past. You have to have a work history and an income level and good health. And then you have to fill out a massive application. Meanwhile the house you want to buy has to be inspected to be sure it's worth the mortgage if you default and the bank takes it. That's unnerving because you don't have any control over how the last owner maintained his or her house. Is termite damage lurking in the basement? And, after you apply, you wait; you might not be granted the mortgage.

Jesus did not wait for disciples to prove themselves. As we saw in our memory verse, Jesus went to the disciples and invited them to follow him, even though they had no training, no recommendations, and very little understanding of what Jesus was going to ask of them.

This is the model that Jesus set for us. We invite everyone to become a disciple, regardless of background or station in life. Thank goodness.

Jesus taught that we have immediate access to God through prayer and access to eternal life through belief. Even if we have not prepared at all. Even if we

have done things that cause guilt and hurt. Jesus seeks us out and invites us, regardless.

And now I'd like to go one step further. When a Rabbi was finished with a proselyte, he had made a clone of himself. It's a rare student who outdoes his or her professor during training. The mortgage company does not throw in extra money after the process. There is a ceiling to all these earthly examples.

Jesus erased ceilings. Remember John chapter 14 verse 12 in our second scripture? **“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.”**

Jesus teaches us to do not just what He did, but more. I'm not sure what this means because I'm not fit to carry Jesus' sandals. But here are two possibilities. First, Jesus concentrated His spectacular teaching into a three year ministry. We can do it for more years than that. Second, Jesus was tempted but did not sin. We have to dig out of a hole when our lives are transformed. Sometimes the hole is very deep, filled with anger, neglect, addiction, and greed. With God's help we have to put all that behind us. Jesus didn't have to climb out of that kind of hole. Maybe in this way we do something more than He had to do.

The teacher who accepts us with only a profession of faith regardless of our past, who teaches us truth on the authority of God, and who sets no ceiling, no upper limit, on what we can do. That is Jesus. Thank goodness. Amen.