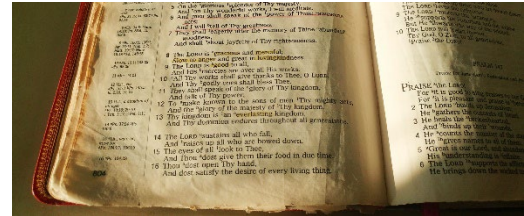




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The Highest Form of Worship

Learning from the Master

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In his book *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus, Insights from His Jewish Context*, David Bivin writes about the first century schools in which Jewish children began their study of Torah (the first five books of our Old Testament) at five years of age. He writes,

“One might assume that the synagogue as the place of worship would be considered more important or more sacred than the schools, but this was not the case. To this day the *bet midrash* [the secondary school in which children and adults studied Torah and the oral traditions] is given more prominence than the synagogues – not because education is valued more highly than worship, but because Judaism does not make a distinction between the two. Indeed, Judaism has always held that study of Torah is one of the highest forms of worship.”

This is the culture in which Yeshua (Jesus) was raised. The words of Torah were sealed in their memories by diligent, repetitive recitation from an early age.

So, why is study so important? Because studying Torah (as well as the Writings and the Prophets) is studying God’s ways. As you study, you become more and more intimately acquainted with the beauty of the One you study. This intimacy leads to worship with all your mind, emotions, and strength.

The ancient, inspired texts of Torah studied by Jews were written about 1500 BC and attributed to Moses. They stood in stark contrast to the dark, perverted surrounding culture of the day. In the words of these manuscripts, God used aspects of the only culture the Israelites knew to bring them into His light. His ways were not like their ways. His people were to learn new, contrasting, light-filled truths about the sanctity of human life, love for one another, respect for and honor of women, care for the poor, liberation for victims of oppression, and so much more. The Law that reflected God’s character brought light and healing into the otherwise chaotic, self-absorbed, and cruel landscape.

Down through the centuries, these words of Scripture were passed on orally through rabbis. Although there were hundreds and perhaps thousands of rabbis in the first century, the Rabbi Yeshua uniquely came to embody and fulfill the Torah, the Writings, and the Prophets; He explained and lived their fullest meaning. He was the Word made flesh (John 1:14). He spoke repeatedly about His fulfillment of Scripture. (Matthew 21:42-43; Luke 4:14-12, 24:24-27, 44-49; and John 5:39 record just a few of these passages).

Scripture says, “He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature and upholds all things by the word of His power.” (NASB, Hebrews 1:3a) The MJLT translates the words, “who being the brightness of the glory and the exact imprint of His substantive existence...” And Paul writes, “He is the image of the invisible God.” (Colossians 1:15a)

This One was the incarnate Word of God. He is the Rabbi we want to study and get to know. He calls out to us to receive, learn, and follow Him:

“Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and My load is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

To fully understand the ramifications of Jesus’ invitation to His disciples in these words, let’s look at the culture of His day. I gleaned a few facts from the first four chapters of David Bivin’s book:

- *Rabbi* meant *my Master* and only later came to mean *Teacher*. Although unique from other rabbis in His deity, Jesus was a typical first-century rabbi in that He traveled from place to place, depended on the hospitality of others, had disciples who traveled with Him, taught in parables, did not charge a fee, and supported Himself with His trade. His highest calling was to make disciples.
- Learning from a rabbi would require the disciples to travel, leave their family, and “take the yoke of the Torah upon themselves,” a rabbinic expression for accepting God’s reign over one’s life and to live according to His will. (Pg. 14) A disciple had to be completely committed with no other priorities before following the rabbi into often austere conditions. Parents would be honored to release their children to follow a notable rabbi.
- David Bivins writes an excerpt found in the Mishnah (a compilation of recorded activity encasing the time of Messiah): “Despite the hardships, there was nothing to compare with the exhilaration of following and learning from a great rabbi and being in the circle of his disciples. A special relationship developed between rabbi and disciple in which the rabbi became like a father.” (Pg. 19) The disciple desired to become just like the rabbi.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:28-30 reflect the difficulty, and yet the exhilaration of discipleship:

“Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

“Come to Me” echoes the refrain of the entire word of God calling us to Himself saying, “Return to Me. My presence will go with you. Lay down your burden and come.”

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls.

Jesus knew the burdensome nature of learning, and although it would not be easy to follow, as they walked with Him, they would see the age-old Scripture come alive before their eyes in Spirit and truth.

For my yoke is easy and My load is light.”

As they learned from Him by living with Him side by side, He would gently guide them as a shepherd. They would find rest in His acceptance and forgiveness along the journey. They would find exhilaration in seeing the fruition of all they had memorized in their heads becoming a life-giving wellspring to others. In essence, Yeshua declared Himself to be the Messiah by likening His yoke to the yoke of Torah (the Law).

Lord, draw us close to learn from You and walk in Your ways. We want to be like You. We want to learn all we can about You. Fill us with the Ruach, the Holy Spirit to love You and to love others as You loved.

Isaiah 58:11-12:

And the Lord will continually guide you and satisfy your desire in scorched places,
And give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.

Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will raise up the age-old foundations;
And you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell.