

Jesus Was a Youth Pastor

By Bobby Schuller

Well, can you believe it? We're already in a series about back to school. In August, a lot of schools – Oklahoma where I went to high school for part of my high school tenure, we start school in August. I know it's that way in parts of the Midwest and the south. A lot of other schools here in California start in September. And it's a great opportunity to take the next three weeks and talk about the value of investing in children, the value of investing in teenagers and in young people, and this is something that we're going to do the next three weeks in a series called Disciples Making Disciples.

Now if that sounds familiar to you, that was the vision of Irvine Presbyterian Church, the other half of this community, the church that we merged with. It was a thing they lived by. I've always thought that's a perfect description of what Jesus wants us to be. He wants us to be disciples and He wants us to make disciples. So we're going to talk about that and especially about how disciple making in the New Testament scriptures was mostly geared towards children and teenagers.

So before we get into that, I want to share with you one of my favorite quotes of all times. It's a Greek Proverb and it says this: "A society becomes great when its elders plant trees under whose shade they know they will never sit." Isn't that beautiful? Every great society is

the result of that happening. My guess is everybody sitting in this room, everybody watching on television, you can think of people in your life, maybe they're not here any longer, and they did things, made sacrifices so that you could enjoy the life you're experiencing now. All the fruit in our life that we experience as a society is the result of sometimes hundreds of years of women and men making these kinds of sacrifices for us.

Therefore, it is our responsibility to do the same. To be planting trees that our posterity will be sitting under. Trees that we'll never see fully grown. That's a good, good thing to do, amen? To believe in the next generation and the generation after that.

I'm thankful that God put people in my life that I stand completely on the shoulders of other giants who have come before me. I thank God that I had parents in my life who taught me about the faith, about the scriptures, and gave me wisdom. And Hannah's family, too, same thing. Hannah's family.. one of the great things, they really lived this out. Hannah has five brothers. I don't know if you guys know that. She has five brothers, she's the only girl. The princess. Princess Presley. Her maiden name is Presley. And she probably hates that I said that, but it's great.

And one of the things I love about her parents, both of them, they said for us parenting was our hobby. It was more important to us than any of the other things we did because we knew that window was so

short. And one of the things they did to their kids is not only taught them how to live a godly life and how to make good and right decisions, they also taught their kids to teach their kids.

In other words, when Hannah was 14/15/17, she and her brothers were hearing from their parents: when you're parents someday, here's how you teach your own children. When you're a parent someday, here are the things that worked for us. So they not only were teaching them the things they needed to learn, but teaching them how to teach others. Isn't that great? It's the belief, the firm belief that the next generation matters.

Now many of us watching on TV or here are not called to be parents. We don't have kids, and that's great. That's fine. I mean Paul himself said I'm not called to be married, I'm not called to have kids. And I would suggest that Paul would say what I'm going to say to you, and that is that all of us can have spiritual children. That means all of us can have kids, young people, teens, or others in our lives whom we can mentor, help, come alongside, and guide for the Lord's purposes. And that's what we're going to talk about today. How do we disciple our own children, but we're also going to talk about how do we disciple our neighbor? And how do we change our view so that we care very, very much about the next generation, particularly youth.

Now in Jewish tradition, Jews loved kids and Jews have loved kids forever. It's like one of their big things. I know we all say we love kids, but

I'm going to unpack this a little bit. First of all, open your Bible's to Matthew chapter 28:16-20. Before you read, we're going to read what's famously known as the great commission. And if you've gone to church for a long time, and I were to ask you what does the great commission say, you would probably say something along the lines of go into all the world and preach the gospel: Judea, Samaria, uttermost parts of the earth, and baptize them, or something like that. Almost everybody gets this wrong.

The great commission does not say to go out into all the world and preach the gospel, did you know that? It says it in Mark, but the part in Mark you'll see is in italics. That's because it's not a part of the original gospel of Mark. It actually wasn't there. So if you look in Matthew, the only place this is located, it says; we'll bring it up on the screen or you can read in your Bible: "then the 11 disciples went to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him. But some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and preach the gospel.'" Is that what it says? No it doesn't. "Therefore go into the world and make disciples."

See there is actually no difference between preaching the gospel and making disciples. In the first century view, it's the same thing. To preach the gospel is to say the kingdom of God is here. You can be a disciple. Kids can be disciples. Women can be disciples. Old people can

be disciples. Sinners can be disciples. Anyone! Gentiles. Everyone can be disciples. Everyone is now invited to follow rabbi Jesus. That's the gospel.

And we forget sometimes that when we talk about preaching the gospel, that's what we're talking about. We're talking about going to people and making disciples.

And it continues: "making disciples of all nations" actually that word there is ethnos; of all ethnicities and people groups and languages. "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son or the Holy Spirit," or the Trinitarian reality, one translation says, "and teaching them to" what – obey. "Obey everything I have commanded you and surely I am with you always, until the very end of the age."

Now this word disciple is not a word Jesus invented. In fact, it was a part of a greater educational structure that was already in place. The Hebrew and Aramaic word for rabbi is the word Talmid. Everyone say Talmid. A group of disciples is called the Talmidim. Everybody say Talmidim. A Talmid is not necessarily one who confesses certain Greek theological ideas, although we do that. We're Presbyterian, right? We got to do that. That was a Presbyterian joke. Only Tim got it, but anyway. We're CREDO. We are CREDO, you know?

But that's not necessarily what discipleship means. A disciple is an apprentice. Just like any other skill for plumbers or carpenters or any other practice, you have to apprentice to someone. And this discipleship

thing had been in place for four or five hundred years by the time this thing came about.

So what is a disciple? It begins, first of all, when Jesus is saying this: it's not for everyone. We often think as Christians, everybody's a disciple, right? But in Jesus' day, not all Jews were disciples. Only the best of the best, only men, and only those who were in training to become rabbis themselves.

So to give you some context for disciple, we're going to look to our favorite book, the Mishna. Mishna's a commentary in the Old Testament from Jewish Orthodoxy. And the Mishna says this. See if you recognize the characters that are described in this ancient document.

Okay Moses received the Torah at Sinai, right? We know that. And transmitted that to Joshua. Who's Joshua? That's his disciple, right? The general that leads the Jewish people into the Promised Land. And Joshua gives it to who? The elders. And the elders to the prophets, the Naveem (??), and the prophets to the men of the great assembly. Who here knows what the men of the great assembly is? Okay we'll come back to that. They, that is the great assembly, they said three things: be patient in justice, raise many. Okay, so here's one of the earliest places. Raise many disciples and make a fence around the Torah.

Okay, now the men of the great assembly is so important for us to know. This is a group of people that was gathered together at the end of the Old Testament in 410 B.C. as a hundred and twenty men, they were

sajews (??), prophets and scribes. And they got together and they decided we need to define who we are as a people, and what we believe. We're growing, we're thriving. This is after the second temple is sort of being reestablished, and so Ezra, Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi, these are all great men that are in this group. And one of the first things they do is they organize the Old Testament. There are hundreds of thousands of prophets that had existed in the life of Jews. So they had to pick: well which writings do we believe are really from God that can bless generations. So this is where the Old Testament comes together and becomes cannon.

The second thing they do is they define synagogue. Synagogues kind of emerge that when you have ten or more Jews in a place, they form what's called a minyan and they can worship together, and they celebrate Torah and study Torah.

And then third they decided this is what oral tradition is. So oral tradition becomes a very important part of Judaism, and that is how do we preach on this Bible? We do that in denominations, don't we? That's what our creeds and confessions are. It's our oral tradition, as well, in a way. When we say adultery, what does that mean? When we say murder, do not murder, what does that mean? When we say do not covet, what does that mean? It is a commentary on what this Torah means.

But at the heart of this was this firm belief by the Jewish people that this story that God has given us, that is the Tenakh that we call the

Old Testament, the story God has given us must never, ever, ever be forgotten. And they said all the time if one generation forgets, if one generation forgets the Bible, it might as well have never happened. It will matter for nothing. Therefore, it is our duty as a people to make sure that every generation and every generation after it knows the Bible, loves the Bible, can quote the Bible, understands the Bible and lives the Bible. Isn't that beautiful?

And so out of this emerges this synagogue style of worship where the Torah is taught and oral tradition is celebrated, and how do we pick rabbis to teach that thing. One of the things that I love about like these synagogues is sometimes in a celebration they'll go and take a Torah scroll and they'll walk around and everybody will jump up and down and celebrate, and they'll play music and have like the violins, and people will reach and kiss it and touch it because this is God's word! God chose us, the Jewish people to give His word. Don't you wish when I said open your Bible's, everybody was like yes! And just music started breaking out and confetti falls from the ceiling and fireworks go off. This is how first century Jewish people, and today Orthodox Jewish people view the Torah, view the Bible. It's just this amazing gift – God's word to us. And who needs it more than anybody? Not me. My kids. My posterity. Generation after generation.

And so what emerges is this school of rabbis and students and synagogues and Torah memorization and education. And by the second

century B.C., there's a guy named Shimon Ben Shetach, who's considered one of the great sages. And he establishes what's called Yeshiva, which is the process of helping children memorize, learn and understand Torah.

Now this gets really good. By the time Jesus is on the scene, there have been many great teachers of Torah, many great rabbis, but one of the most interesting things is that every child can read, and every child has Torah memorized. When you're five-years-old, and I feel so bad for five-year-olds when I think about this. When you're five years old, every boy and every girl goes to a school, goes to Yeshiva, and in that time, they begin the process of memorizing the Torah, which isn't just Genesis and Exodus. You kind of wish it was. That's also Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy. That'd be a bummer, wouldn't it? Not for them. For them it's this great thing and it becomes the center of their education.

And in those days, as they continued to learn, by the time they're like nine, ten or eleven, almost every kid who doesn't have a disability or something, has the Torah memorized. Memorized. That way, if they burn every Torah, if they burn every school, if they kill every rabbi, still every single Jewish person can recite the Bible from beginning to end. The only way the Bible dies is if we die. Wow, isn't that great? They wanted their kids to have this. And not only that, because the Torah doesn't just tell us what to do, and it's not just religious, but it also tells us who we are

as a people. It tells us why we exist. To be blessed and be a blessing to others, right? And on and on it goes.

And then in that school, some of the kids that would graduate from that school, some were the best of the best. And they would then go on to memorize the rest of the whole Old Testament. Can you imagine that? So then Joshua and the writings and Chronicles and Psalms and Proverbs and all that, they would have it all memorized. And some of those ones then would go on and would then try and become rabbis.

So I just love that the Hebrew people in the first century, all of them, they just obsessed with their kids, not only knowing the Bible, but memorizing it! Can you imagine if all of the kids in this church had the four gospels memorized? That would not be near as hard as memorizing the Old Testament.

Actually there's a great story; Ray Vanderlin tells a story about being in Israel, he would give tours to Christians and talk about our Jewish roots. And one day they were coming out of a bookstore that sold different crafts and things, and a school bus full of Orthodox children had stopped and it had like broken down in front of the place. And he was just telling them earlier that day about how even today Orthodox children do this memorization. And when the bus broke down, what do you think they did?

First, let me ask you, if you saw a bus full of kids, 8th graders or something, break down out here, what do you think every kid would do?

All right, I have to do this, right? Every single kid pulled out their Bible. Everyone. And they started studying and talking to each other and laughing and going back and citing. And they said hey, Ray, do these kids, do they have the Torah memorized? He said absolutely. He said ask them a question about anything. So they went and they talked to these kids, and they said hey kids, what was Aaron's wife's name? And like they all laughed, like oh, her name is.. actually I don't know Aaron's wife's name. I don't, I'm an ordained pastor. Anybody know? No, okay. Anyway, they spouted it out like in unison. What are Aaron's kid's names? Everybody's like ba, ba, ba, ba, ba, all the kids. I think if you asked one of our kids at school; if you asked my daughter or something, what's Aaron's wife's name? It's like oh Aaron's my friend at school.

And then Ray says, come on guys, ask them a bigger question. Ask them something about their story, or something off the wall you think there's no way they would know. And somebody said how many birds are mentioned in the Bible? And one by one, all these kids began to recite every word starting with pigeon at the beginning, and they cited every single verse in the Torah that had a bird in it. Whoa!

All I'm trying to say is that in the first century, this is the world that Jesus grew up in. Jesus did this. His disciples did this. Every single boy and girl could do this in Jesus' day, and when you're talking about the chaos and violence of the ancient world, this is utterly and historically remarkable. That there is this small tribe of people who loved

children so much and wanted them to be educated, and to know the Bible, and to carry it, not just in their heads, but in their hearts.

Out of this, then, comes this thing where some of those kids are so excelled, so good, so smart that they themselves can become rabbis, teachers of the Torah, and the way they do that is they find a famous rabbi or sage, and they go to that person and they say rabbi, I want to become your Talmid. I want to become a disciple, a student of you. I want to enroll in rabbi seminary. And the rabbi would ask them a series of questions, and they'd go back and forth, and this or that. And then in most cases, 99%, I know this is review, we've talked about this before, but in most cases the rabbi would say to them go and ply your trade. It's a polite way of rejecting them. He's saying go and be a fisherman. Go and be a carpenter. Go and be a tax collector. And so in this way, with their head hanging, this 14, 15 or 16-year-old boy would walk away and go be a fisherman, or go do what his dad does.

But every once in awhile, if a kid was smart enough, and knew the Torah well enough, and just had a great mind that the rabbi wanted them in his little group, he would say to them these famous words: follow me. And these were famous words. Everybody in their world knew that these two words are great. And like the dad, if he finds out, the dad of a boy finds out that a rabbi said follow me to him, he'd be like my boy. My boy. He's going to be a rabbi. He knows Torah better than anyone. He's

been called. It's like getting into Harvard or something. Just incredible, like whatever that is times ten, this is what it would feel like for a dad.

And in fact the dad was always in the highest position of honor for any child, but there was only one person that was honored more than a child's father, and that was the child's spiritual father, the rabbi. In fact the Mishnah says that greater honor is ascribed to the rabbi than the father because, it says, for his father brought him into this world, but his rabbi who taught him wisdom, brings him into the world to come. Isn't that great?

Many of you, you're thinking I don't have kids. I'm never going to have kids, I don't have grandkids, or my kids moved out a long time ago. What if you became like that to someone? What if you became the kind of person that decided I'm going to find people in my life where maybe they didn't have a dad, or maybe they didn't have someone to teach them wisdom. They don't have somebody supporting them. They don't have somebody loving them, caring for them, and I'm going to make a disciple of this person. What I mean by that is I'm going to teach them that God loves them, I'm going to teach them how to walk in Christ's way, I'm going to teach them how to love their enemies, I'm going to teach them God's word and God's wisdom. I think that'd be an amazing thing for all of us to get in our hearts – that we want to be like this.

And so what would happen is this boy, if he got into this rabbinic school, he'd be called a Talmid, a disciple. And these are four things that

a Talmid has to do. Number one: Talmid has to memorize the teacher's words. That happened, that's why we have the gospels.

Number two: the disciple, the Talmid has to learn the teachers or rabbis interpretations and traditions. So what does he mean when he says to do this or to do that?

Number three, this is really key, that the disciple, this teenager or this young kid has to imitate the rabbi. If the rabbi's left-handed, you got to write left-handed. If he tells jokes about this thing, you got to learn those jokes. So you know everything the rabbi says, you know everything the rabbi believes, and you act the way the rabbi acts. That's what it means to be a disciple and in fact, that's what it means to be a Christian. Means that our whole life is geared around memorizing what the rabbi has said, seeing the world through the lens that the rabbi sees, imitating the rabbi in our behavior, and finally and number four, when you've reached the place to make disciples. To do for young people what the rabbi did for you.

I just love how the Jewish people loved children. I love that one phrase they say. There was a saying that say: we stuff our children with Torah as you would stuff an ox. And that's what we should do. We should become the kinds of people that like Jesus, we have our eyes fixed on disciple making of children, of teenagers, and of young people.

Anyway, Jesus totally models in His own life the fact that He loves kids. I mean most of the people that were standing there hearing the

great commission, when Jesus called them, they were like John was probably the youngest, between 13 and 15, scholars believe, so he would have been like a young teenager. Think 8th grade, 9th grade, something like that. And Peter, who was probably the oldest, he was married so he had to be over 18, but scholars believe he was somewhere at the high point of 23 to 27, in that range. Matthew was a little bit older, too. But most of these guys were teenagers, and college student age. So you're talking 15 to 25, something around that. Isn't that amazing?

And we think, for some of us, you hear that and you're like wait, is this credible that He did this through young people? And let me tell you, every single person who is sitting in this room is here because of one of those 12 kids. Listen to me: those 12 kids changed the world. Those 12 kids changed everything. That is amazing. That Jesus picked young people.

And then remember what He says about children. That when there's these kids that are trying to press and get close to Him, what does Jesus.. and the disciples tried to push, so the teenagers were pushing away the little kids? Right? What does Jesus say to them? Hinder not the children come to me. The kingdom of God is made of these. Become like these children.

Remember the other thing that seems like the greatest sin that you can commit almost to Jesus is this idea that if you harm a child. Jesus says anyone who causes a little child to sin. So notice, it's the opposite of

making disciples of children, anyone who causes one of these little children to sin should tie a millstone around their neck and throw themselves into the sea. Wow, powerful words from the Prince of Peace.

Jesus cares about kids, Jesus cares about teens, I think Jesus believes in this phrase: a society becomes great when its elders plant trees under whose shade they know they will never sit. When we go after the next generation and the generation after that, when we're not always obsessed with ourselves and what we want to accomplish and what we want to have, but instead we think about how to reach children, youth, college students, young people, people who are thirsty for life, people who have a fire, and show them to use that fire for good and not for evil, to use that fire to bless their neighbor, to use that fire to chase after God with all their heart, we begin to make a huge difference in the world. When ministries go after young people, they're going after Jesus' heart.

I remember there was this one story about Smith Wigglesworth, a famous evangelist, and he gave a Billy Graham style altar call, and a reporter came to him afterwards and said Pastor Smith Wigglesworth, how many salvations did you have? And he said three and a half! And the reporter laughed and said oh you mean three adults and one child? And he said no, three children and one adult. He said when you get a kid, you get them your whole lives. I love this idea.

So the great commission in context, one: means that anybody can be a rabbi. Isn't that great? That children can be rabbis, that old people

can be rabbis, that women can be rabbis. Anyone that is a student of Jesus can also be a rabbi. They can be a teacher, they can be a minister. This was revolutionary and amazing in the first century that you might be here and you think I don't have anything to offer, I don't have anything to say to anyone. God is saying to you I want you to make disciples. I want you to teach. I want you to lead. As Hannah said earlier in the quote that God doesn't call the qualified, He what? Qualifies the called. That's right. He will call you and He will give you what you need to do to be a spiritual parent to somebody today. Who's somebody in your life that needs a spiritual parent or a spiritual friend or guide in their life?

I remember when I was a kid we had this total change on my mom's side of the family. We weren't really going to church much and we were all Christians, but it just wasn't.. and there was this couple, old couple behind us in their 80's named the Meechum's. And they were so full of the Holy Spirit. And the first person to get to know them was my sister, Angie, and she started going over there when she was 17, and all of a sudden she got filled with this fire. And like it caught fire in our whole family where because of this old couple that lived behind us had just greeted us with warm cookies, and prayed for us. You know anytime we hit something, we were like we need the Meechum's to pray. It was their prayer life and their devotion to God and their love for Him that

drew us to them. And it's had an effect on this ministry, it's had an effect on our whole family's life. You could be that to someone.

Maybe you're here today and you're like well I'm a teenager, I'm young, I'm a kid. I'm 11. I'm 12. I can't tell you how many times I have also seen kids. It doesn't matter. Kids can make a difference, too.

My favorite story is, of course, my own daughter, Haven. When she was 7-years-old, the children's pastor here at the time, invited kids to invite their friends to come to this Christmas thing that we were doing so that their friends can hear about Jesus. So she printed out for her first grade class, printed out 23 invitations, that's how many kids were in her class, and with the teacher's permission went desk to desk and said come to church to hear about Jesus. Just did this in her class.

And one of the families that comes here, the Waltees, we met them because their kids came to that Christmas thing three years ago back when we were in Garden Grove because Haven invited them. And they were Christians, but the mom always says like little Haven was an evangelist! She was evangelizing the kids at the school!

Look God can use anyone. That's what's so awesome about God is He wants to use you. He wants to use you. You're not too old, you're not too young. Look, the older you are, the more wisdom you have. The younger you are, the more fire you have. You have something about you that nobody else has, and its unique to you, and there's going to be someone in your life that needs just exactly whatever that thing is.

So I want to encourage you today that God has called us to do more than just enjoy our faith, but to believe and to design our faith as the mother of our faith the Jews have, that we train and teach children and young people the word of God. Not just dogma and all this stuff, but we really teach them how to live with the wisdom of the scriptures. That we invest in the next generation, and that will make all the difference in the world.

Father, we thank you. We love you. And we thank you that you've called every single person in this place to be a disciple, and to make disciples. Lord, we will follow you. We want to be more like you in everything we do, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.