

Chapter 4

Jesus' Graduate School of Discipleship

The School of Jesus and the School of John

The normal sense of succession from teacher to student is not unfamiliar in Mark's Gospel. Mark provides us with at least a very strong hint that Jesus was also the student of a teacher, for in Mark 1:7, John the Baptizer refers to Jesus as "one stronger than I [who] comes after me": **Erxetai o(isxuroteroj mou opisw mou**. Johnson correctly sees that this statement refers to a teacher-disciple relationship but then muddies the waters when he writes that this was only an apparent relationship.¹ What about the passage tells us that the relationship should be understood as "apparent" only? France correctly summarizes the evidence and correctly concludes that the words "after me" do not express a temporal relationship but is an occurrence of a known idiom that indicated a student-teacher relationship.² Somehow, though, he concludes that the reader who knows nothing of any other relationship between the two other than the Baptism would not understand the reference.³

There is no particular reason why Mark should not have introduced John as Jesus' teacher and no reason why an ancient reader should not have understood the passage in that way. Such a relationship between John the Baptizer and Jesus would also help the reader understand why Jesus posed the question of the origin of John's Baptism to the chief priests and the scribes in Mark 11:30. To the ancient reader it may well have maintained the idea of the deference of a student for his teacher. Indeed, the distinction between the teaching of a student and that of his teacher is by no means easy to maintain. For instance, there is a discussion about what to do if someone forgets to mention the New Moons in the blessings after a meal. R. Zera could remember the proper blessing to insert in such a situation which he had learned from R. Giddal, but did not know whether the tradition had come to Giddal on the authority of Rab. Even so, there was no doubt about the authority of the ruling.⁴ So, then, there is no reason to imagine that we must disentangle the teachings of John from those of Jesus. Indeed, the great Rabban Gamliel once greeted R. Joshua both as "my teacher and my student—my teacher in wisdom and my student because you have accepted my teaching."⁵ There are, however, important

¹ Johnson, *Mark* 37. Even wider of the mark is the suggestion by Mann, *Mark* 197, that the expression suggests a master-slave relationship. It is the case that the first-generation Palestinian Amora R. Joshua b. Levi ruled (*t. b. Ketubot* 96a) that a student's duties to his master included all of those of a slave for a master—with the possible exception of removing shoes.

² France, *Mark* 70-71

³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴ Rab ("the Tall") was a third-century Amora, credited with founding the rabbinic academy at Sura and a major authority. See the article by W. Bacher in the online version of the *Jewish Encyclopedia* <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=127&letter=A>, accessed 17 July, 2005). On R. Zera (Zeira) see Hermann L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1931), 125.

⁵ *T. b. Rosh ha-Shanah* 25a, *t. b. Eruvin* 63a

boundaries. A student, for instance, may not render a decision in the presence of his teacher.⁶ It is said of the great King David that he continually asked his teacher Mephibosheth as to whether his decisions were correct and did not lord it over his teacher who was, at the same time, his subject.⁷ In general, a student owes a teacher the respect he owes his father.⁸

There is also evidence in Mark that Jesus commissioned his own students much in the way that rabbis commissioned their students, authorizing them to teach and act in the name of their teacher. At one level we may see the School of John becoming the School of Jesus and, eventually, becoming the School(s) of the disciples. Jesus' commissioning of the twelve is for Mark a commissioning principally for action, but in verse 11, parallel to "does not receive you," the author has written "does not listen to you," so we are to see the students as passing on some measure of their master's teaching.⁹ Like John the Baptizer, their message is a call to repentance.¹⁰

And he went around the villages teaching. And he calls the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and he was giving them authority over the unclean spirits, and he commanded them that they should take nothing on the road except a single staff: neither bread nor knapsack nor copper¹¹ in¹² the belt, but wearing sandals and not putting on two cloaks. And he was saying to them, "Wherever you enter a house stay there until you leave from there. And whichever place does not receive you, will not listen to you when you have left there, shake the loose dirt that is under your feet as a witness to them." And when they had left, they were proclaiming that people should change their minds, and they threw out many demons, and they anointed many sick people with oil and cured them. (Mark 6:6b-13)

While the component of healing is surprising in comparison with the stories of the Rabbis and their students, the idea that Jesus would commission students to carry on his work is unremarkable. Whether we should compare this to the single-teacher "ordination" that

⁶ *T. b. Berakot* 31b. Indeed, a student probably should not utter a halakic decision in the place where his master has resided previously (*t. b. Sanhedrin* 5b).

⁷ *T. b. Berakot* 4a.

⁸ Moore, *Judaism* 2:134. The duties of the teacher toward the student are, if anything, much more severe than those of the student toward the teacher. See Moore, *Judaism* 2:243.

⁹ France, *Mark* 247. I believe France has missed the fact that **mhde la]kousws in u(mwa** in Mark 4:11 also implies a preaching component to Jesus' ministry.

¹⁰ I cannot agree with Johnson, *Mark* 115, that repentance is an "afterthought." Mark has introduced and summarized the work of John the Baptizer as "proclaiming a baptism of mind-change" (Mark 1:4), and in Mark 1:15 repentance is also the content of Jesus' preaching in the Galilee after the arrest of John the Baptizer. The preaching of the twelve, then, is consistent with and a continuation of that summary.

¹¹ Copper here in the sense of copper coins.

¹² On **ei]** replacing **eh** in a local sense see BI-D §205.

was later prohibited¹³ is not particularly important. What is important is that we still do not see anything that is significantly different from the practice of a Palestinian teacher sending out students.

T. W. Manson¹⁴ suggested that the restrictions on the dress of the students in this passage resemble those of *m. Berakot* 9:5:

ולא יכנס להר הבית במקלו, ובמנעלו, ובפונדתו, ובאבק שעל רגליו, ולא יעשנו קפנדריא ורקיקה – מקל וחומר.

Let him not enter the Temple Mount with his staff or with his shoes or with his money bag, or with dust on his feet. And they shall not make a shortcut. And as for spitting, [it is forbidden] *qal wa-xomer*.

Manson's belief led him to suggest that the mission was sacred in the same sense that the Temple Mount is sacred. Hooker is rightfully dubious about the relevance of this passage to Mark since Mark 6:8-9 allows both staff and shoes.¹⁵ Hooker takes the reference to shaking the dust from the feet to be a reflection of the idea that the soil of foreign nations is unclean and therefore that the town from which it comes does not belong to the Land of Israel.¹⁶ This shaking of foreign dust from the feet is something to which France also refers,¹⁷ citing the evidence used by Hooker, none of which mentions anything about shaking dust from the feet.

The Graduate School of Jesus

Mark 8:34-38, however, suddenly and absolutely changes our understanding of the School of Jesus and differentiates his academy from that of John and from those of the Pharisees:

And when he had called the crowd around him, together with his students, he said to them, "If anyone would follow after me, let that one deny himself and pick up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake and for the Gospel

¹³ T. j. *Sanhedrin* 19a. See the article of Jacob Zallel Lauterbach in the online version of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=119&letter=O&search=ordination>, accessed July 18, 2005).

¹⁴ T. W. Manson, *The Sayings Of Jesus As Recorded In The Gospels According To St. Matthew And St. Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1949), 181.

¹⁵ Hooker, *Mark* 156-157.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 157. See *m. Oholot* 2:3 and *m. Taharot* 4:5. This last is reproduced in *t. b. Shabbat* 15b. *m. Oholot* 18:6 says that one becomes unclean when traversing mountains and rocks in a foreign land. The next mishnah, however, makes it clear that lands in Syria near the Land of Israel may be traversed in a clean state. For a thorough discussion of what it means for a city like Caesarea Maritima to be "outside the Land of Israel" while being within its geographical territory, see Ephrat Habas, "The Halachic Status of Caesarea as Reflected in the Talmudic Literature," *Caesarea Maritima: A Retrospective After Two Millennia*, Avner Raban and Kenneth G. Holum, eds (Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996), 454-468.

¹⁷ France, *Mark* 250.

shall save it. For how does it help a person to procure the whole world and lose his life? For what would one give in exchange for one's life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of that one will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."¹⁸

The expression, "follow after me," as we have seen,¹⁹ is a specific reference to becoming a student of Jesus, of enrolling, as it were, in the school of Jesus. What school, though, asks its pupils to give up their lives for the sake of their teacher? Vincent Taylor correctly points out that nowhere does Jesus ask for faith in himself as redeemer or savior,²⁰ and he mentions favorably the observation of Maurice Goguel to the effect that after Peter's Confession we find Jesus asking for attachment to his person as well as to his teachings.²¹ Although that attachment might have been a surprise to Goguel, the material we have studied to this point makes it clear that in Judaism of the first century attachment to the teacher went together with attachment to what the teacher taught. What we do not find either in Jewish tradition or, for that matter, in Hellenistic-Roman tradition,²² is any expectation that the student should give up life itself for the teacher. Attachment—yes; death—no. For those of us who teach as a profession, the idea that students should die for their teachers is almost unthinkable. We teach for the benefit of our students, expecting in many cases that it is through them that we may have some positive benefit for generations who come after us.

The story Elisha's succession to the position of his teacher Elijah is an important biblical paradigm for the relationship of teacher to student.²³ Although Elisha's solicitude for his master is so great that he will not heed Elijah's command to stay behind in Gilgal (2 Kings 2:2) and then Bethel (2 Kings 2:4) and, finally, Jericho (2 Kings 2:6), he does not ask to be taken into heaven with his teacher. As Elijah prepares to take his flight into heaven, Elisha only asks that he may inherit a double measure of Elijah's spirit, a request that is, indeed, fulfilled when Elisha witnesses his teacher's ascent. The succession of Elisha to head of the prophetic school comes about not as a result of the inheritance of the mantle of his teacher but as a result of seeing Elijah's miraculous translation into the heavens.²⁴ The successor then leaves the place to assume his master's former role as head of the prophetic school, thereby continuing his master's work into the future.²⁵

¹⁸ See 3-10 above.

¹⁹ See above 1-1 and also Mark 1:17, 20.

²⁰ Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice: A Study of the Passion-Sayings in the Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1948), 291. To make this claim he must argue against the originality of John 3:16, but the point is certainly true for the Gospel of Mark.

²¹ Maurice Goguel, *The Life of Jesus*, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 385.

²² In what for westerners may be the paradigmatic death of a teacher, Socrates rebukes the students in attendance only for their tears and asks that Crito pay Socrates' debt to Asclepius. See the account in Plato's *Phaedo* 115b-118a.

²³ 2 Kings 2:1-14.

²⁴ The mantle Elisha receives is not so much a symbol of the succession as a means for expressing the truth of that succession. After all, this is the same mantle Elijah had already put over Elisha when Elisha

Even if Mark does present Jesus as favored student of his teacher John, the school of Jesus operates differently from the School of John. When the students of Jesus seek to identify which ones of them should be the favorites, they incur only criticism from their master. In the school of Jesus succession does not work the way it does in other schools:

And they came into Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they were silent because on the way they had been discussing among themselves who was the greatest. And when he had sat down he called the twelve and says to them, “If anyone wishes to be first, that one will be last of all and servant of all.” And taking a child he stood it in their midst, and embracing it, he said to them, Whoever receives one such child as this in my name receives me, and whoever receives me does not receive me but the one who sent me.”²⁶ (Mark 9:33-37)

Those who would be the leading students must, ironically, become the slave of the others. Best has incorrectly supposed that the ordinary meaning of greatness within a school context does not apply here. Rather, he believes, the real setting is the community of Mark in which the students of Jesus represent the membership generally.²⁷ This leaves Best to see this pericope in terms of “human nature.” While there is no reason to argue that Mark is unacquainted with the weaknesses of human nature, the specific rebuke of teacher to student is to the effect that the way to the top is counter-intuitive and does not derive from excellence of scholarship or piety of behavior but in willingness to be subject to all, indeed, to be least in order to be the greatest. It is not a matter of common wisdom about human nature but a special requirement of discipleship in Jesus’ school.

The point is important enough for Mark to associate it with the third prediction of the Passion in chapter 10. In this case Mark sets the issue in political-apocalyptic terms:

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him saying, “Teacher, we want to ask you to do something for us.” And Jesus said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Allow us to sit one on your right and one on your left in your glory.” And Jesus said, “You don’t know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And

first indentured himself to the prophet. (1 Kings 19:19-21.) See Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings* (“Anchor Bible,” No. 11; np: Doubleday & Company, 1988), 33-35.

²⁵ The reference to prophets at Jericho wearing Elisha down until he agrees to allow them to search for the body of Elijah may suggest the idea that the student was not as firm or as sure of himself as his teacher. The main point, however, is that an exhaustive search did not produce the body and so, in some sense, built up the case for believing that Elijah had indeed been taken away bodily.

²⁶ Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 40-42 shows how Mark 9:35-50 holds together with the help of catchwords **ohoma**, **paidiwn-mikrwn**, **skandal izein**, **pur** and **al aj**, suggesting their combination in a pre-Markan oral tradition. The result is a collection of logia that do not all belong together except by catchword.

²⁷ Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNT Sup 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 78.

they said to him, “We are able.” But Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and the baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized, but to sit on my right hand or on my left is not for me to give but for the ones for whom it is appointed.” (Mark 10:35-40)

James and John still do not understand the requirements of the school of Jesus. In any other context it might be perfectly reasonable for students to expect special honor; and since Mark presents Jesus and his school as connected with the end time, academic honor and political honor are not easy to separate. In this case Jesus’ reply does not urge the students to outdo one another in martyrdom but, rather, makes it clear that martyrdom is the outcome of discipleship, not royal honors.

Jesus’ students, on the other hand, are to deny themselves the honors of the academy and of political prestige. Denial of self (**aparnhsasqw e(auton)**) involves loss of life, loss of social/academic standing and suffering. If one would “follow Jesus,” be a disciple, then the cost of that matriculation will be one’s life, one’s position, and one’s wellbeing.²⁸ What, though, is the object of that loss?

We may ask at this point whether the invitation is to a martyrdom or suicide that one undertakes for the sake of righteousness. There is strong admiration in the tradition for those who have died or even committed suicide for the sake of the Torah. The story is told, for instance, of four boys and four girls who had been abducted for immoral purposes and resolved to kill themselves rather than to submit.²⁹ The same passage reminds us of the moving story of the woman and her seven sons in 2 Maccabees 7. Either story, the Talmud claims, could be taken as illustrating the words of Psalm 44:23 (English vs. 22): “On your account we are being killed all day long.” The third-century Palestinian teacher, R. Simeon ben Lakish, was so bold as to maintain, “The words of the Torah do not continue except with one who kills himself for them.” This invitation to suicide/martyrdom is not different in kind from the call for one to lose one’s life for the sake of the Gospel (Mark 8:35). Commentators, indeed, have correctly seen that “for the Gospel” is Mark’s own contribution here. Neither parallel (Matthew 10:39, Luke 9: 24) contains these words. One implication Mark sees for the students of Jesus is that they must die for the sake of the message Jesus brought. What does this mean? This is not the same thing as choosing to die rather than break the precepts of the Torah. In point of fact, even the Rabbis recognized that one might circumvent legal restrictions under certain conditions so long as doing so did not bring dishonor upon the Name of God.³⁰ One does not die for absolute moral or ritual purity in Judaism. One might be called upon to suffer death rather than commit profanation of the Name of God, but that does not accord with Mark’s idea of being willing to die for the Good News.

While it is true that Mark 8:35 contains a special emphasis on death for the sake of the Gospel message, we must go on to ask whether that Gospel message is the only

²⁸ Hooker, *Mark* 208, may well be right to insist that the expression here does not have to do with ascetic practice. She claims that the word means “disown” here, but she gives no particular argument in favor of that translation.

²⁹ *T. b. Gittin* 57b.

³⁰ *T. b. Baba Kama* 113a.

object of the disciple's devotion. Some manuscripts of Mark do not have Jesus ask his students to die for his sake here, reading only "for the sake of the Gospel."³¹ This reading would be a neat solution to the problem of asking the students to die for the master, and it may be something someone tried by omitting the Greek **εμου=kai**, but when the authors of Matthew and Luke rendered Mark's text, they found and reproduced "for my sake."³² What they did not reproduce—if, indeed, it existed in their copies of Mark—was the expression "of the Gospel." Matthew and Luke, then, make the willingness to die specifically a willingness to die for the teacher and not just for the teacher's ideals. This fact should determine our view of Mark's text: "for my sake" is not extraneous.

If the cost of the disciples' enrollment in the school of Jesus will be nothing less than the loss of one's life, one's position, and one's wellbeing, it should not surprise us that the teacher expects no less of himself than of his students. Indeed, Mark attaches all three definitions of discipleship to Jesus' three predictions of his own loss of life, loss of station, and suffering.

And he began to teach them that it is necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected³³ by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise. (Mark 8:31)

The Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of people, and they will kill him, and when he has been killed after three days he will rise again. (Mark 9:31)

Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and to the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the gentiles and they will ridicule him and spit on him and flog him and kill him, and after three days he will rise again. (Mark 10:33-34)

Betrayed, rejected, and ridiculed, his tormentors will make him suffer physically and will finally kill him. To imitate their teacher, the students will do likewise.

This may help us understand the expression "for my sake and the Gospel" in Mark 8:35. While the sense of **εheken** may be ambiguous in itself,³⁴ the disciples are being invited to give up their lives and positions in just the same way they will witness Jesus doing. Jesus is clearly not dying for himself, so it is reasonable to translate **εheken** as something like "because of" or "on account of." The disciples will not die to protect Jesus, even will they immolate themselves at the scene of his crucifixion. Nevertheless, they will be called upon to suffer, to lose all that they possess, and finally to die.

³¹ P⁴⁵ D 28. 700. it (sy⁸).

³² Matthew 10:39 and Luke 9:24.

³³ "Rejected" (**apodokimazw**) here in the sense of "rejected after examination" or "rejected for lack of qualifications."

³⁴ See the Bauer *Lexicon* (6th ed.; CD-ROM Version) under **εheka**.

The purpose of instruction, the goal of study, is always action. On this point there was general agreement among the Rabbis who, ironically, decided that study was greater than action because study led to action:

R. Tarfon and the Elders were reclining on the upper level of the house of Nithza in Lydda. The following question arose among them: "Is study greater, or action?" R. Tarfon gave answer and said: "Action is greater." R. Akiba gave answer and said: "Study is greater." Then they all gave answer and said: "Study is greater, for it leads to action." (*t. b. Kiddushin* 40b)

Mark has shown us that the teaching of Jesus led to actions by his students that led to questions. In Mark 2:18, there is a question as to why the students of John and the Pharisees are fasting but the students of Jesus are not. In the pericope following the Pharisees want to know why the students of Jesus pluck grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:24). Jesus answers these questions, however, not by an examination of the tradition³⁵ but by reference to himself as Son of Man.

The action to which Jesus invites his students now is the same action he himself takes, much to their amazement and distress. The action is not martyrdom for a moral or legal principle. Instead, it is a loss of life that is consistent with Jesus' reckless disregard of his own safety in the Gospel, his reckless disregard for the rulings of the Pharisees and Sadducees, his reckless lack of concern for the workings of the Temple cultus, and his reckless willingness to face certain death.

In response to Jesus' own recklessness, others have shown moments of heedlessness as well. It is no accident that the story of Bartimaeus follows the last of the predictions of the Passion (Mark 10: 32-34) and its associated teaching about discipleship (Mark 10: 35-45):

And they come into Jericho. And as he was exiting Jericho and his students and a sizeable crowd, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was seated by the road. And when he heard that Jesus the Nazorean is there, he began to cry out and to say, "Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!" And many warned him to be quiet, but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me." And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up; he is calling you." And he threw away his garment, jumped up, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbouni, that I might see!" And Jesus said to him, "Get up. Your faith has saved you." And right away he saw and followed him on the way. (Mark 10: 46-52)

What it means to have faith, what it means to follow Jesus, is to have the reckless faith of Bartimaeus who could not be constrained by the crowd or by his blindness or even by the

³⁵ To the chagrin of some, perhaps, Jesus' biblical knowledge in this passage appears erroneous. Abiathar was not the "high priest" at Nob, and the encounter with David involved is Ahimelech. (See 1 Samuel 21:1-9.) D W pc it sy^s, not surprisingly, omit this faulty reference. The name of the priest, however, is not important to the point Jesus makes about David's actions.

unlikely possibility of attracting the Master's attention. Heedlessly of all these constraints, he called to Jesus and found healing through his reckless faith.

The denial of self to which Jesus calls his students and which he himself models is this recklessness that Mark otherwise describes as faith. Unlike the "faith" of John's Gospel, it is not so much faith in Jesus, even less devotion to Jesus, but is, rather, a loss of self, a reckless hope and expectation for the kingdom of God.