

Sermon Transcript from September 4th, 2016
Jesus the Teacher
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Turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark. As Dave said, we're all – both my church and yours and a couple of others – are reading through the Bible from Genesis all the way to Revelation in one year. And I think tomorrow we wrap up the Gospel of Matthew and then Tuesday start the Gospel of Mark. So, up in Portland, we're still wrapping up the Creative Minority series, but this is San Francisco. You guys are all Type A. You have to be two or three weeks ahead. You just have to. So, whatever. That's your thing. That's fine.

So, let's talk for a few minutes about Jesus of Nazareth.

Holy Spirit, we just invite You to come, even now, and to give shape to the next half hour or so that we invest in the text as we open our heart and our mind and really all of our life to the voice of God as made manifest in the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the teaching from the Scriptures. Just, Holy Spirit, come.

Jesus was a lot of things. Most of us know Him best as the Son of God. But, He was also the Messiah. Or, another word for that is the Christ; the long-awaited king of Israel. But, if you were a first century Jew and one Sabbath morning Jesus were to show up in your synagogue and teach from the Torah or whatever, the odds are that the category you would have put Jesus in was that of a rabbi. A rabbi is a Hebrew word meaning "Teacher." A rabbi was a teacher who would travel around from village to village and synagogue to synagogue with his yoke or his set of teachings on the Torah or the Bible of his day.

Rabbis were kind of like rock stars in first century Jewish culture. So, Dave and I were at the Coldplay concert last night. Anybody else? Yeah. Well done. Fantastic. So, I was there with all of your parents, by the way. I know I'm dating myself. First thing I said to Dave, I'm like, "Man, where are all the young people? What does that say about you and me?"

Anyway. It was a great show if you're 36. But, Chris Martin has absolutely nothing on the hype of a first century Jewish rabbi, and that's what Jesus was. A young, brilliant rabbi or teacher. And this needs to be said. You know, our country is marked, as we all know, especially right now, by the polarization between the left and the right. And that's not only true politically, but it's also true even theologically. Depending on who you read, at least in the U.S., that goes back about a century longer than that in Europe, where there was this kind of split in the church and you had the liberals or the progressives on one side who emphasized the humanity of Jesus and said all the time, "Hey, Jesus was a teacher."

But, that was kind of code for "He was a teacher and no more. He was a teacher like Buddha or like whoever, but He was not the Son of God or the Messiah or all of that stuff."

And then the comeback from the other side was, "No, no, no. He is the Son of God. He's the embodiment of the Living God."

And that was kind of the conservative tag line who put the emphasis on the divinity of Jesus. So, you had – and still have to this day – a back and forth tug-of-war between left and right. And what this means is that if you grew up in the conservative arm of the church like I did, then the odds are a lot was said about Jesus the Son of God or even Jesus the Messiah, but very little was said about Jesus the Teacher. That aspect of Jesus' personhood was kind of just off to the side. And a lot of people don't even think of Jesus as that smart. It's like, "Yeah, I believe He was God, but do you think He was intelligent?"

We're like, "I guess so."

But, He actually was the most brilliant, intelligent human being to ever live. So, Dave asked me to chat this morning about this idea of Jesus as a rabbi and then, on the flip side, what that means for you and me to be a disciple of Jesus the rabbi. So, just to clarify before we jump in, all that other stuff about Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah, we believe all of that. I know I'm from Portland, so that – trust me. We're okay. We believe all of that and you'll get into that in a few weeks. But, for today, let's talk about this aspect of Jesus.

So, let's read a story or two. Mark 1, if you have your Bible open. Look down at verse 16.

Mark 1:16: "As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a new net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' At once they left their nets and followed him.

"When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and follow him."

Turn the page to chapter 2 and skip down to verse 13.

Mark 2:13: "Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus told him," – and that can be translated "become my disciple" – "and Levi got up and followed him."

Turn the page. Chapter 3. Skip down to verse 13.

Mark 3:13: "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him."

So, all sorts of people.

"He appointed twelve..." – out of that group – "...that they might be with him..." – remember that for later – "...and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name [something or other], which means 'sons of thunder'), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him."

Now, one more. Turn over to chapter 8. Just a few pages to the right. And look down at verse 34.

Mark 8:34: "Then Jesus called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?'"

Now, we could keep reading story after story, but I think that's enough for this morning. Did you see the pattern? Did you happen to notice it there? In story after story, the call of Jesus was not, "Hey, everybody. Believe in God and believe this, that or the other. Go to church once in a while, live a semi-moral life and then go to heaven when you die."

That was not the call of Jesus. The call was come and what? Follow me. Or, another way to put that was "come and be my disciple."

Now, this word "disciple" in Hebrew is "talmidim." Can you say that? Talmidim. Well done. And there's all sorts of ways to translate it. Disciple is the most common. It can also be translated "follower" or "student." But, don't think "follower" in the sense of "I follow you on Instagram" or whatever. Or "student" in the sense of "Yeah. I'm at university and I go to class and I take copious notes and then I'm done."

It's way more than that. In fact, I think that in the English language, the word that best captures the idea behind talmidim is this word "apprentice." To be a talmidim was to be an apprentice; to live your entire life under the shadow of your rabbi.

Now, a little bit of backstory. Discipleship – and a lot of people don't realize this – was not invented by Jesus. So, He was not the first rabbi to have disciples or the last. In fact, discipleship didn't even start in Israel. It started, as far as we can tell, in Greece with Socrates and Aristotle. All that to say discipleship, or apprenticeship, was part and parcel of the first century world. But, sadly, and particularly if you've been around the church for a while, a lot of the time, when we talk about discipleship, it's torn out of its first century, Mediterranean context.

So, really fast – and if you're not a history nerd, just bear with me for a few moments. But, let me frame up for you discipleship in the first century, because I think it has the potential to really reframe how we think about what it means to be a disciple or an

apprentice of Jesus in the twenty-first century. Alright?

In the first century, discipleship was the pinnacle of the Jewish education system. So, there were three levels of education. The first was called "bate sefer" in Hebrew. It's a phrase meaning "house of the book," and it was essentially a grade school. The textbook was the Torah and you would memorize most, if not all of it. So, Genesis all the way – if you have your Bible there, just look at how much that is – to Deuteronomy memorized in the back of your head. It was an oral culture, and I say that to make myself feel better, because that sounds impossible.

Now, the vast majority of children were done right after that. Around age 12, if you were female, you would get married and start to bear children by 13 or 14. If you were a male, you would go into the family business. But, the best of the best moved on to a second level of education called "bate talmud," or the "house of learning." This was for young men, no women, ages 12 to 14. The school was built off of the synagogue and you would learn every single day from the local scribe. And you would memorize most, if not all of the Old Testament.

So, think about what you've been reading for the last, what, eight months? Genesis to Malachi memorized in the back of your head. And then, after that, you were done. But, the best of the best of the best, the summa cum laude, the road scholarship recipient, the upper echelon, the absolute top, would become a talmidim, or an apprentice, of a rabbi. But, this was really hard to get into. You would have to go out of your own volition and search out a rabbi. You would follow him around for a bit. He would grill you with questions. How well do you know the Torah? What about the Talmud? Are you up to speed on that? Are you familiar with Rabbi Hallel's take on the nephilim? What about Rabbi Shammai? Who do you think's right?

I mean, he would just grill you to see. And if he thought after a few weeks' time that you had a knack for it, you were smart enough, you have the acumen and the intelligence, you had the drive, you had the work ethic, you were Type A enough that you, one day, could become a rabbi yourself, then he would say something to you like, "Okay. Come and follow me. Come be my disciple. Come be my apprentice."

Now, let's say that you were in that type 1% and you made the cut and you became an apprentice of a rabbi. If so, then you had three goals. If you're taking notes, feel free to just jot this down. Goal one was to be with your rabbi. Think of that line we read. "That they might be with him."

So, apprenticeship was 24/7. Literally. You would follow your rabbi around from village to village, from synagogue to synagogue. You would spend every waking moment with him. You would eat three meals a day at his side. You would sleep at his side. I mean, all day long. There was a well known Hebrew blessing in the first century that went like this:

"May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi."

Because, most teaching was actually not done in a classroom, it was done out on the road from village to village. And your rabbi would kind of walk out in the front at a slow stroll and you, and, I don't know, a dozen or so other disciples would walk behind your rabbi and he would teach you and you would talk and dialogue and converse in kind of more of the Socratic method all day long. And if it was a good day, you would literally, by the end of the night, be covered from head to toe in the dust of your rabbi. And that was an honor in that time.

Secondly, your goal was to become like your rabbi. So, Jesus has this great line in the Gospel of Luke that we'll get to in a few weeks about how "the student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher." That was the goal. Every student, every apprentice of Jesus, the goal was to one day become like your teacher or your rabbi. That was the heart and soul of apprenticeship.

In our day and age, it's all about – in particular in a city like San Francisco or Portland – be unique, be true to yourself, stick out from the crowd, make a name for yourself. That's not the world that Jesus was born into. If you were an apprentice, it was all about become literally a carbon copy of your rabbi. You would not only follow your rabbi around, you would copy his every single move, you would imitate his tone of voice, his dress, his mannerisms. I mean, it sounds kind of creepy to us in the modern world. But, it was how it was. You wanted to be him.

Then, finally, your goal was to do what he did. Did you see that line back in chapter 3 about Jesus – wow. My. That's not a sneeze. That's way more. Or maybe it is like a dog

sneeze. We have a cow bell; we have a dog. Welcome to San Francisco. That's great. Oh my gosh. So fun already.

Did you see that line in chapter 3 about how Jesus' end goal was to "send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons?" That's what Jesus had been doing. Preaching and driving out demons. And there was coming a time when it was Peter, James, John's turn to do the exact same thing. The whole point of apprenticeship was for you, one day, to become a rabbi yourself after years, usually, of following your rabbi around Israel. If you made it through the program, if you made the cut, when you were ready, he would turn to you and say something like, "Hey, kid. I believe in you. I think you have what it takes. Go and make disciples," if that sounds familiar. If not, you'll read it tomorrow. Matthew 28.

Okay. So, take all of that in your mind. History lesson over. Flip it around from the first century to the twenty-first century, even in an urban, progressive city like the one you call home. To be an apprentice of Jesus today, you and I have the exact same three goals. This is what it means to be a disciple and an apprentice of Jesus. Goal number one is to be with Jesus. This is our first – and I would argue – most important goal. To be with Jesus. But, how does this work now? Like, obviously we're not Peter, James and John. We can't literally follow Jesus around because, as we'll read tomorrow morning, at the end of His life, after the resurrection, Jesus goes where? He goes back to the Father; back to heaven. And He's there at the right hand of God.

So, how exactly does that work for you and me? Well, if you keep reading, right before that, Jesus has this haunting line. He says, "I will be with you always," literally as He's going back to the Father. "I will be with you always. Goodbye. I will be with you always. Goodbye."

It's like this weird moment. And it's a bit confusing until you keep reading and you get to Acts 2 and then you read about the coming of the Holy Spirit, who is also called, all through the New Testament, the Spirit of Jesus. So, this means that's how we're with Jesus. We're with the Spirit of Jesus. This means that the first and primary goal of apprenticeship to Jesus is learning to live in a constant state of awareness of and connection to the Spirit.

This is like, if you're new to the whole Jesus thing, if there's a step – this is not really a step thing, but if there was, this is step one. This is the baseline for everything in the Kingdom of God. I think of John 15, one of Jesus' most famous teachings.

I'm guessing most of you recognize this. **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me,"** – that can be translated "abide in me" or "stay in me" or "live in me" or "set up shop in me" – **"as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.**

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Jesus' metaphor for how you and I are to be with the Spirit is that of a branch abiding in the vine. And I know we're in a city, but Napa Valley's not far away. So, you have that image in the back of your head. A branch abiding or remaining in the vine. I think it's fascinating that it's metaphor at that point. You know, there's all sorts of language used throughout the Bible and Church history to capture this kind of a relationship with God. So, Jesus calls it abiding or remaining. Paul, as you know, calls it prayer without ceasing. So, ongoing, continuous, 24/7 you're just living in the power and the presence of God. Our Catholic friends call it contemplation or contemplative prayer; contemplative spirituality. The Medieval Mystic, Brother Lawrence, if you've ever read his short little book, he called it the practice of the presence of God.

I think that's actually my favorite language, because this way of living takes practice, right? Especially if you have an iPhone or you live in the city or you have to commute to work. Like, this is just not – at least if you're anything like me – natural. My mind and heart and body do not default to, "Ahh." Like, that's just not my default setting. Maybe that's just me.

The philosopher, Dallas Willard, has this great line. This is, not to over promise, but this is my all-time favorite quote ever. Like, I literally have it on the inside of my closet and I read it every single day before I go to work. He writes this:

"The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds. This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in thus practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our practicing, we may well be challenge by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God."

He's so kind about it. You know?

"But, these are habits, not the law of gravity, and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon, our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the polestar of our inward beings."

I feel like I could just walk off stage right now. That's so – don't nod at that, by the way. But, that's so good. Willard's point is that living in a constant state of awareness of and connection to the Spirit of God all day, that takes practice. That doesn't come naturally for most of us. This is what the spiritual disciplines, or what I prefer to call the practices of Jesus, are all for. Silence, solitude, prayer, fasting, Scripture, Sabbath and on down the list. Every single one. The spiritual disciplines get a bad rap as legalistic, and that's people who don't have a clue what they really are about. They are not an end. Every single one is a means to an end. So, if you're Type A and you have a to-do list thing like me every morning, you have your Evernote and your to-do list for the day or whatever, the spiritual disciplines aren't on there. Right? It's not like, "I read my Bible. I prayed. Check. Boom. Move on."

The spiritual disciplines are a means to an end. All they are is a way to orient your life around abiding in the vine. All they are is a way all through the day, all through the week, all through your life to present yourself before God. "God, You're here in this time and this place. I have not been here. I've been on Twitter or I've been checking me email or I've been in traffic. Or, this morning, I was trying to get down the elevator and it took me 15 minutes. It's like I was in a movie. It was just this – I'm going to go to therapy for it this week. It was crazy. Literally stopping at every single... whatever. I've not been with You. I've been somewhere else. But, now I'm here. You're here. I'm here. We're together."

That's all it is. That's the end goal. And man, I'm telling you, if you're new to following Jesus, this is the best part. The best part about following Jesus is Jesus. Every morning I have this little exercise. It's kind of my spiritual discipline to start the day. I make my Chemex coffee – that's not the spiritual discipline. That is kind of a spiritual discipline actually. I have my little Japanese scale and all of that and I do my thing. And then I take a seat in this little quiet room and I just spend the first 10 minutes with Jesus. I don't read my Bible yet. I don't pray, even, really. I'm just there. "God, You're here. I'm here."

Ten or so minutes. That's the beginning. And that's like, nine times out of ten, that's the best part of my day. Especially if I have Sightglass coffee. Then it's like extra, extra good. But, seriously. Nine times out of ten, that is the highlight. That's the best part. This is it, you guys. Just being with Jesus.

Secondly, moving on, our second goal as an apprentice of Jesus is to become like Jesus. Okay. I have a lot here. Out of that place of abiding in the vine all through the day, your next goal as an apprentice of Jesus is to become like your rabbi; to become like Jesus. So, back in the day, this was called sanctification. Now, if you know the lingo, we call it spiritual formation. Again, Willard puts it this way:

"Spiritual formation, in the Christian tradition, is a process of increasingly being possessed and permeated by the character traits of Jesus as we walk in the easy yoke of discipleship with Jesus, our Teacher."

Now, here's the thing you have to wrap your head around when it comes to spiritual formation. Spiritual formation isn't a Christian thing, it's a human thing. Meaning we're all being formed. To be human is to be dynamic, not static. You are, I am, we are all becoming somebody. I'm not the same person I was yesterday and hopefully I will change and more of an evolve into tomorrow. You could argue that we're all disciples of somebody or something. The question is not "are you being disciplined," but "who are you being disciplined" or "what are you being disciplined by?"

Or in more, I think, New Testament language, "Who are you becoming like?" If you plot the trajectory arch of your character forward a decade, two, three, four, who is that person? Is it you in your true self as shaped into the image of Jesus or does it look more like San Francisco or more like your job or more like whatever the end goal of your career is? I don't know about you, but I want to become like my rabbi. I want to grow and mature into the kind of person whose default setting is not to worry, but is to peace; is not to anger, but is to love, for friend and for enemy; is not to pride, but is to the place of a servant. How can I serve? How can I serve? How can I serve?

Is not to the slavery of lust or greed or more, but is not the freedom of the way of Jesus. Now, to become like Jesus, to live this way, it takes a lifetime of practice. You know, last week, I think it was last week, you guys all read Matthew 5, 6 and 7 and what is usually called the Sermon on the Mount. That's kind of all of the most important teachings of Jesus put into one place. It's kind of Jesus' manifesto for how you and I are to live as an apprentice in the Kingdom of God. That's kind of the end goal.

And, as I read it, the Sermon on the Mount is not this pie in the sky idealism. I mean, read it and read it again. It's messy, it's down to earth. Jesus is just assuming that you'll make mistakes right and left, that you will sin against people and need to ask for mercy and that other people will sin against you and even slap you on the cheek. That you'll get stressed out about stuff, you'll get lustful, you'll get greedy. Like, he's just assuming all of that that you're a work in process, just like every other human being on the planet.

But still, if you read it and you remember, it's a high bar. Am I right? But, one of the problems I think, in my opinion, with the church in America is we set the bar way too low. We made the bare minimum requirement to be an apprentice of Jesus way too low. A lot of people don't even try to read the Sermon on the Mouth. Don't even try to live into that vision; try to become like Jesus. They just assume, "Well, it can't be done."

But, if you pay close attention, you notice that the Sermon on the Mount begins and ends with this idea of practice. So, at the beginning, right before Jesus starts into the commands of "you've heard it said, but I say to you," there's this really odd, kind of beautiful line.

Jesus says this: **"Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever..."** – and there it is – **"...practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."**

And then, at the very end of the Sermon on the Mount – literally the last paragraph and just about the last line – Jesus says this: **"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into..."** – what? – **"...practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose,"** – you know that story. Next slide.

"Yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into..." – what? – **"...practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand."**

And the story goes on. Jesus bookends the Sermon on the Mount with this idea of practice. Meaning what? Meaning Jesus assumes this way of living is going to take a lifetime of practice. Anybody who's good at anything knows this, especially if you're an athlete or a musician. Like, you know that to get good at your instrument of choice, your sport or your skill or your career or you're an artist or your craft or whatever, it takes a lifetime, years and years and years of practice.

Now, when I say practice, please don't hear me wrong. I don't mean – and really listen to me right now – "Hey, go out this coming week and just try really, really hard to be like Jesus."

Like, that will get you, if you're lucky, through tomorrow morning, and that's only because it's a holiday. Alright? You won't get all that far. You know, Willard had this great line. "It's not about trying, it's about training." I love that. It's not about trying, it's about training. The best analogy I know is that of exercise. So, let's say, just for theory, that you're out of shape and you're overweight. And this afternoon, for whatever reason, you decide you want to run a marathon.

So, okay. How do you run a marathon? Do you wake up tomorrow morning on your day off – hopefully you have the day off – and go run 26.2 miles? Nope. What would happen if you tried? You would die. Exactly. What if you tried really hard? Is there somebody who's super athletic around here that you all know? Troy? Alright. What if Troy – Hi, Troy, by the way. It's great to see you again.

What if Troy was there and he was running next to you like, "Come on!" and he was giving you the pep talk or Dave was there and he was anointing you with prayer and the Holy Spirit. Maybe you'd make it from mile three to mile four, but then, yeah, you'd die or you'd fall on the side of the road leaking lung fluid or something like that.

So, how do you run a marathon? You wake up tomorrow morning and you run one mile. Then Tuesday you run two if you feel like you're up for it. Then Wednesday, you take the day off. Then, if you've ever run a marathon, you know you add one mile on to your long run every single week. So, the first week it's like three miles and then the next week it's four miles and the next week it's five. Then you take a week off. Then it's five again. Then it's six. Then it's seven. Over a long period of time. Six months goes by, nine months, twelve months. One my best friends is training for a marathon next fall right now. A year goes by and you're up to 20, 23, 24, 25, 26 over a long period of time through practice. You become the kind of person for whom running 26.2 miles, that's hard. Like, that's always hard. But, it is well within your capacity as a human being.

The problem is that's not how most of us think about apprenticeship to Jesus, and it's not how most of us – and this is a criticism of nobody but me – teach the way of Jesus. So, when somebody like me, if I stand up here and I say, "Hey, don't worry this coming week," that's the equivalent of saying to an obese person, "Go run a marathon right now."

Like, this is San Francisco. You make it maybe to your car, you check your email and there's an email from your boss and you're stressed out. Like, you didn't even make it home. Or don't lust or whatever. One of these commands from the sermon on the mount. Most of us can't get anywhere without this idea of practice. That's what it's all about. Practicing the way of Jesus one day at a time. We all have a gap between who we are and who Jesus is; between the life we have and the life we want; between how we're set up now and the man or the woman that God created and called you to be.

Apprenticeship to Jesus is about closing that gap one day at a time just through this life-giving art form of practice. So, goal one: be with Jesus. Goal two: become like Jesus. Goal three is to do what He did. And this is much faster. The central message of Jesus was "the Kingdom of God has come."

Repent – I skipped that word because we don't like it. But, "Repent." That was the summery if you're going to read it tomorrow or Tuesday in Mark. Mark's summary of the message of Jesus was one line: "Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near."

Repent. Reorder your entire life around this brand new reality that the Kingdom of God or the rule or the reign, the power and the presence of the God who made everything, it's breaking into human history through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. So, repent. Reorder your entire life around that reality. Jesus' life work was to usher in this Kingdom of God. As I see it, you can break down Jesus' work into 10 or so categories, and feel free to edit this as you will. But, here's how I read it.

Preaching the Gospel, teaching the way, healing the sick, casting out demons, doing justice, eating and drinking with people far from God, praying, prophesying, standing up against religious hypocrisy and pride, and speaking truth to political power.

That's about it as I read the four Gospels. Now, here's the thing: if you're an apprentice of Jesus, then your goal is to learn how to do all of that. And don't hyperventilate. Just stay with me. That's your goal. You're an apprentice. I was just in a conversation a few weeks ago with a guy who's new to our church who's an apprentice to a plumber. He just moved to Portland to go through trade school and become a plumber. It's a four-year process. So, if it takes four years to become a plumber, it's probably going to take you a little bit longer to become Jesus of Nazareth. Alright? So, that's not a slam on plumbing. Anyway.

All that to say, he's an apprentice. So, his goal four years from now is not just to know all about plumbing, it's to be able to plumb – is plumb a verb? I think it is – a house. So, you're an apprentice of Jesus. Your goal a year, two, three, four, a decade from now, four decades from now, is not just know all about Jesus and the Bible and, "Yeah, the Year of Biblical Literacy and I read through the whole thing and I watched every single Bible Project video, because I'm super weird and anal like that and I was at every single lecture and I know it all."

That's fantastic. But, once again, that's a means to an end. The end, for you, as an

apprentice of Jesus is to get to the point, to grow and mature of years of discipleship to Jesus to where you are out preaching the Gospel and teaching the way and healing the sick and casting out demons and doing justice and eating and drinking with people far from God and on down the list. Where you carry on the Kingdom vision of Jesus, your rabbi, your Messiah and the Son of God. To join in His Kingdom work in San Francisco as it is in heaven.

So, to recap, the three goals of apprenticeship to Jesus in the first century and in the twenty-first. It's really simple. Goal one: be with Jesus. Two: become like Jesus. Three: do what He did.

I was on your website just a few weeks ago to listen to one of Dave's teachings that was fantastic and I just go to steal a bunch of great stuff from it. It was really fun. And I love that, right on your home page, your tag line. That makes it sound cheap. But, whatever. Your vision. "A community following Jesus..." – and what's the second half? – "...and seeking the renewal of San Francisco."

I love that. "A community following Jesus."

But, you know, I think we say that a lot and I'm not sure we exactly know what it means to follow Jesus. It means that your entire life is built around three goals. Be with Jesus, become like Him, do what He did. That doesn't mean you have to become a pastor or work for a church or move to the other side of the world. Your life as an investment banker, as a mom or a dad, as a barista, as a designer, as a CEO, as a startup, as a whatever your thing is, you wake up in the morning and over every single other thing, the driving aim in your life is to live as an apprentice of Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, as we wind down, I just want to zero in on that line that we read just a minute ago from chapter 8. "Whoever wants to be my disciple, take up your cross, come after me, follow me."

Just a couple of thoughts on that. One: notice that the invitation of Jesus is to become a disciple or an apprentice, not to become a Christian. You know, in the text, there are two categories. There's the disciples and then there's the crowd. That is used all through the Gospel of Mark. It's a literary device used by the writer for you, the reader, to kind of think about your place in the story. Are you a disciple, are you an apprentice of Jesus, or are you a face in the crowd?

The problem is we've done this weird number in America where we've created a third category that we call "Christian." You know that word "Christian" is used a meager two or three times in all of the New Testament, always in a negative light. The word "disciple" or "apprentice" is used 268 times in the New Testament. It's the dominant language for who you are as a follower of Jesus. And it's funny. You know, that word "Christian," I'm not against it. But, I think what that means for most people in the United States of America is that you believe in God or kind of basic, semi-orthodox Christianity. You go to church on a semi-regular basis, which might be like Christmas and Easter, and you're a semi-moral person. And that's about all that word means. It's flat and it's shallow.

But, we've created this third category where you can be a Christian without being a disciple of Jesus. I just want to say, in all love and grace, that category does not exist in the teachings of Jesus or the writings of the New Testament. You're either an apprentice of Jesus or you're in the crowd. What does that mean? I don't know. I'm not really sure. I don't really want to test it either. I want to be an apprentice of Jesus.

Again, Willard – and I know I just keep quoting him. I feel like I should say this message was brought to you by Dallas Willard or something. But, I just feel like he taught me how to follow Jesus through his writings. Anyway, I love this:

"The greatest issue facing the world today with all its heartbreaking needs is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as Christians will become disciples, students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from Him how to live the life of the kingdom of the heavens into every corner of human existence."

That's it. So, as you search your soul as we move into worship in a moment, where are you at in that? Are you a disciple, an apprentice, or a Christian? And then notice, also, that this invitation is for anybody. "Whoever wants to be my disciple."

Remember, discipleship was for the best of the best of the best. It was not for whoever. It was not for anybody. That was an unheard of idea that a famous rabbi like Jesus,

standing up in front of a crowd of who knows how many thousands of people and saying, "If anybody wants to come after me and be my disciple, sure. Take up your cross. Come follow me."

That would be like, I don't know, a famous professor today tweeting out, "If anybody wants a full ride scholarship to Stanford, just direct message me. No problem. You don't have a high school diploma? No problem. Just connect with me after. No problem."

Like, we laugh. That would never happen. This would never happen. "A famous rabbi, Jesus, saying anybody can be His disciple? But, I'm a woman. I can be His disciple?"

"Yes."

"But, I didn't make the cut. I didn't even make it to bate talmud. I didn't even make it to the second..."

"Yeah. You can. Every single one of you. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, what you've not done, what you know, what you don't know, how much you've messed up. Despite failure and despite of success, you can be and are invited and called to be a disciple of Jesus. Every single one of you."

Then, finally, just notice that disciple is a noun, it's not a verb. We use it as a verb a lot if you've been around the church a while. I get asked all the time, "John Mark, who are you discipling or who's discipling you?"

And I'm a bit cheeky and I usually say, "Nobody."

Because you can't. Disciple is something you are. It's not something that is done by me or done to me. It's my identity. It's your identity as a follower of Jesus. You wake up in the morning with that label in the best sense of the word draped over your shoulders. You crawl out of bed, you make your Chemex or whatever your thing is and you be with Jesus, you become like Jesus and you do what He did.

Let's stand together and pray. I always forget how noisy that is here. Wow. Let's just take a moment.

Holy Spirit, we just invite You to give shape to this next segment of our time together. We know the most important part is yet to come. It's in five minutes or ten or twenty as we respond to You, respond to the Gospel of Jesus, respond to the teachings of Jesus, respond to You, Jesus, the Teacher, the Messiah, the Son of God. So, Holy Spirit, come. Have Your way. We give You free reign. We open up heart, mind, life, future, budget, sexuality, identity, decision making, relationships, family, marriage. The next 10 minutes we open up all of it and invite You in as King to have Your way; to rule and to reign and to set us free. Holy Spirit, come.