

## JESUS NO BASHFUL RABBI

Whatever else you can say about Jesus, this much is sure: He certainly wasn't bashful! In fact, it may have been his rather brazen way of locking horns with the authorities that led to his eventual downfall. A retiring milksop he was not.

And it wasn't just his opponents who noticed his lack of shyness. From the word Go his closest pupils had to contend with their rabbi's straightforward, no nonsense style. In fact, Jesus' determined approach may have been what got them on his team in the first place.

Several passages in the Christian scriptures tell how Jesus recruited his band of followers, but two paragraphs from Mark's gospel catch the spirit of the matter.

Mark 1:16-20 is the first example. This encounter must have taken place sometime near the onset of his career.

On the shore of Lake Galilee Jesus runs into two fishermen, the brothers Simon and Andrew. He watches them toss their nets into the shallows and drag out a few fish.

"Come along with me," he offers, "and I'll turn you into fishers of men."

Apparently this is an offer they can't refuse. They drop their gear and traipse along behind him.

Farther down the line in a beached skiff sits a fellow named Zebedee with his sons James and John. As they patch and fold their nets Jesus approaches. When he calls to the boys, they climb out, join the rabbi's troop, and leave their dad and the hired hand sitting in the sloop.

The second example of Jesus' unbashful way of drafting follower is Mark 2:13-14. Some weeks later he is in the same vicinity.

After a round of teaching, he sees the local customs agent collecting taxes on imports and exports. The civil servant's name is Levi. Again, Jesus walks up to his desk and says, "Follow me." Without further ado Levi deserts his office and follows.

Three things are remarkable about these incidents. The first is Jesus' style. It ran completely contrary to what was expected of a respectable rabbi in his day.

The normal procedure was for aspiring students to find a reputable teacher and then attach themselves to their mentor's entourage.

In Jesus' case everything was done backwards. Instead of the students finding their rabbi, the rabbi recruited his own disciples. And he wasn't bashful about how he went about it!

Secondly, his choice of recruits is surprising. Instead of soliciting a class of aspiring young students of religion, he signed up a handful of common fisher folk.

There was nothing wrong with men who plied that trade, of course, but neither was there anything particularly promising about their prospects as students of an up-and-coming rabbi.

Furthermore, if Simon, Andrew and the brothers Zebedee seemed unexceptional, the choice of Levi must have seemed suspect. As a collector of taxes and customs, Levi would have been something of a social outcast.

For in his day tax assessors were ostracized because they collaborated with the Roman occupational forces and because they were notorious for lining their own pockets at the expense of their customers.

Thirdly, notice how spare are these accounts. Only the fewest possible details are told. There's no mention of the motives of the men who followed Jesus.

What compelled them to accept this unorthodox invitation? Why did they leave relatively comfortable positions to tag along after an itinerant rabbi?

You get the impression these stories must have been told and retold until they were so polished that only one point remained: When Jesus calls people, they follow. No questions asked.

All in all, these glimpses into Jesus' career give an insight into his personality. There must have been something compelling about his manner because he was remembered as being anything but bashful.

Perhaps it's that direct, almost audacious style which gives the ancient biblical narratives some of their irresistible charm even today.