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October 6th, 2011

# Mark and Work

Theology of Work Project

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## Recommended Citation

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**ADOPTED ON:**

October 6, 2011

## Mark and Work

## Introduction to Mark

The Gospel of Mark, like the other Gospels, is about the work of Jesus. His work is to teach, to heal, to perform signs of God's power, and most of all to die and be raised to life for the benefit of humanity. Christ's work is absolutely unique. Yet it is also a seamless part of the work of all God's people, which is to cooperate with God in restoring the world to the way God intended it from the beginning. Our work is not Christ's work, but our work has the same end as his. Therefore the Gospel of Mark is not *about* our work, but it *informs* our work and *defines* the ultimate goal of our work.

By studying Mark, we discover God's call to work in the service of his kingdom. We discern the rhythms of work, rest, and worship God intends for our lives. We see the opportunities and dangers inherent in earning a living, accumulating wealth, gaining status, paying taxes, and working in a society that does not necessarily aim toward God's purposes. We meet fishermen, labourers, mothers and fathers (parenting is a type of work!), tax collectors, people with disabilities that affect their work, leaders, farmers, lawyers, priests, builders, philanthropists (mostly women), a very rich man, merchants, bankers, soldiers, and governors. We recognize the same bewildering range of personalities we encounter in life and work today. We encounter people not as isolated individuals, but as members of families, communities, and nations. Work and workers are everywhere in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark is the briefest Gospel. It contains less of Jesus' teaching material than Matthew and Luke. Our task, then, must be to pay close attention to the details in Mark to see how his Gospel applies to non-church work. The primary work-related passages in Mark fall into three categories: 1) call narratives, as Jesus calls disciples to work on behalf of God's kingdom; 2) Sabbath controversies concerning the rhythm of work and rest; and 3) economic issues concerning wealth and its accumulation, and taxation. We will discuss the call narratives under the heading of *Kingdom and Discipleship*, the Sabbath controversies under the heading of *Rhythms of Work, Rest and Worship*, and the episodes related to taxation and wealth under *Economic Issues*. In each of these categories, Mark is primarily concerned with how those who would follow Jesus must be transformed at a deep level.

As with the other Gospels, Mark is set against a background of turbulent economic times. During the Roman era, Galilee was undergoing major social upheaval, with land increasingly owned by a wealthy

few — often foreigners — and with a general movement away from small-scale farming to larger-scale, estate-based agriculture. Those who had once been tenant farmers or even landowners were forced to become day labourers, often as a result of having lost their own property through the foreclosure of loans taken to pay Roman taxes.<sup>[1]</sup> Set against such a background, it is small wonder that economic and fiscal themes emerge in Mark's narrative and in the teaching of Jesus, and an awareness of this social context allows us to appreciate undercurrents in these that we might otherwise have overlooked.

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## Kingdom and Discipleship (Mark 1-4, 6, 8)

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### The Beginning of the Gospel (Mark 1:1-13)

The accounts of John's preaching and of Jesus' baptism and temptation say nothing directly about work. Nevertheless, as the narrative gateway to the Gospel, they provide the basic thematic context for all that follows and cannot be bypassed as we move to passages more obviously applicable to our concerns. An interesting point is that Mark's title (Mark 1:1) describes the book as "the *beginning* of the good news about Jesus Christ." From a narrative point of view, drawing attention to the beginning is striking, because the Gospel seems to lack an ending. The earliest manuscripts suggest that the Gospel ends suddenly with Mark 16:8, "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." The text ends so abruptly that scribes added the material now found in Mark 16:9-20, which is composed from passages found elsewhere in the New Testament. But perhaps Mark intended his Gospel to have no ending. It is only "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ," and we who read it are participants in the continuing Gospel. If this is so, then our lives are a direct continuation of the events in Mark, and we have every reason to expect concrete applications to our work.<sup>[2]</sup>

We will see in greater detail that Mark always portrays human followers of Jesus as beginners who fall far short of perfection. This is true even of the twelve apostles. Mark, more than any of the other Gospels, presents the apostles as unperceptive, ignorant, and repeatedly failing Jesus. This is highly encouraging, for many Christians who try to follow Christ in their work feel inadequate in doing so. Take heart, Mark exhorts, for in this we are like the apostles themselves!

John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-11) is presented as the messenger of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. He announces the coming of "the Lord." Combined with the designation of Jesus as "Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1), this language makes clear to the reader that Mark's central theme is "the kingdom of God," even though he waits until Mark 1:15 to use that phrase and to connect it to the gospel ("good news"). "The kingdom of God" is not a geographical concept in Mark. It is the reign of the Lord observed as people and peoples come under God's rule, through the transforming work of the Spirit. That work is

highlighted by Mark's brief description of the baptism and temptation of Jesus (Mark 1:9-13), which by its brevity emphasizes the descent of the Spirit onto Jesus and his role in driving him into (and presumably through) the temptation by Satan.

This passage cuts across two opposite, yet popular, conceptions of the kingdom of God. On the one hand is the idea that the kingdom of God does not yet exist, and will not until Christ returns to rule the world in person. Under this view, the workplace, like the rest of the world, is enemy territory. The Christian's duty is to survive in the enemy territory of this world long enough to evangelize, and profitably enough to meet personal needs and give money to the church. The other is the idea that the kingdom of God is an inner, spiritual domain, having nothing to do with the world around us. Under this view, what the Christian does at work, or anywhere else aside from church and individual prayer time, is no concern of God's at all.

Against both of these ideas, Mark makes it clear that Jesus' coming inaugurates the kingdom of God as a present reality on earth. Jesus says plainly, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). The kingdom is not fulfilled at present, of course. It does not yet govern the earth, and will not do so until Christ returns. But it is here now, and it is real.

Therefore, to submit to the reign of God and to proclaim his kingdom has very real consequences in the world around us. It may well bring us into social disrepute, conflict, and, indeed, suffering. Mark 1:14, like Matthew 4:12, draws attention to John's imprisonment and links this to the commencement of Jesus' own proclamation that "the kingdom has come near" (Mark 1:15). The kingdom is thus set over against the powers of the world, and as readers we are forcefully shown that to serve the gospel and to honour God will not necessarily bring success in this life. Yet at the same time, by the Spirit's power, Christians are called to serve God for the benefit of those around them, as the healings Jesus performs demonstrate (Mark 1:23-34, 40-45).

The radical significance of the Holy Spirit's coming into the world is made clearer later in the Gospel through the Beelzeboul controversy (Mark 3:20-30). This is a difficult section, and we have to be quite careful in how we deal with it, but it is certainly not unimportant to the theology of the kingdom that undergirds our theology of work. The logic of the passage seems to be that by casting out demons, Jesus is effectively liberating the world from Satan, depicted as a strong man now bound. Like their Lord, Christians are meant to employ the Spirit's power to transform the world, not to escape the world or to accommodate to it.

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## The Calling of the First Disciples (Mark 1:16-20)

This section needs to be treated cautiously: while the disciples are paradigms of the Christian life, they

also occupy a unique position in the story of salvation. Their summons to a distinctive kind of service, and to the forsaking of their current employment, does not establish a universal pattern for Christian life and vocation. Many, indeed most, of those who follow Jesus do not quit their jobs to do so (see [Vocation Overview](http://www.theologyofwork.org) at [www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org)). Nevertheless, the way in which the demands of the kingdom cut across and override the usual principles of society are transferable and enlightening to our work.

The opening clause of Mark 1:16 presents Jesus as itinerant (“as he passed along”), and he calls these fishermen to follow him on the road. This is more than just a challenge to leave behind income and stability or, as we might put it, to get out of our “comfort zone.” Mark’s account of this incident records a detail lacking in the other accounts, namely, that James and John leave their father Zebedee “with the hired men” (Mark 1:20). They themselves were not hired men or day labourers, but rather were a part of what was probably a relatively successful family business. As Suzanne Watts Henderson notes in relation to the response of the disciples, the “piling up of particulars underscores the full weight of the verb [to leave]: not just nets are left behind, but a named father, a boat and indeed an entire enterprise.”<sup>[3]</sup> For these disciples to follow Jesus, they have to demonstrate a willingness to allow their identity, status, and worth to primarily be determined in relation to him.

Fishing was a major industry in Galilee, with a connected sub-industry of fish salting.<sup>[4]</sup> At a time of social turbulence in Galilee, these two related industries supported each other and remained steady. The willingness of the disciples to forsake such stability is quite remarkable. Economic stability is no longer their chief purpose for working. Yet even here we must be cautious. Jesus does not reject the earthly vocation of these men but reorients it. Jesus calls Simon and Andrew to be “fishers of people” (Mark 1:17), thereby affirming their former work as an image of the new role to which he is calling them. Although most Christians are not called to leave their jobs and become wandering preachers, we are called to ground our identity in Christ. Whether we leave our jobs or not, a disciple’s identity is no longer “fisherman,” “tax collector,” or anything else except “follower of Jesus.” This challenges us to resist the temptation to make our work the defining element of our sense of who we are.

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## The Paralytic Man (Mark 2:1-12)

The story of Jesus healing the paralytic man raises the question of what the theology of work means for those who do not have the ability to work. The paralytic man, prior to this healing, is incapable of self-supporting work. As such, he is dependent on the grace and compassion of those around him for his daily survival. Jesus is impressed by the faith of the man’s friends. Their faith is active, showing care, compassion, and friendship to someone who was excluded from both the financial and relational rewards of work. In their faith, there is no separation between being and doing.

Jesus sees their effort as an act of collective faith. “When Jesus saw *their* faith he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’” (Mark 2:5). Regrettably, the *community* of faith plays a vanishingly small role in most Christians’ work lives in the modern West. Even if we receive help and encouragement for the workplace from our church, it is almost certain to be *individual* help and encouragement. In earlier times, most Christians worked alongside the same people they went to church with, so churches could easily apply the Scriptures to the shared occupations of labourers, farmers, and householders. In contrast, Western Christians today seldom work in the same locations as others in the same church. Nonetheless, today’s Christians often work in the same *types* of jobs as others in their faith communities. So there could be an opportunity to share their work challenges and opportunities with other believers in similar occupations. Yet this seldom happens. Unless we find a way for *groups* of Christian workers to support one another, grow together, and develop some kind of work-related Christian community, we miss out on the communal nature of faith that is so essential in Mark 2:3-12.

In this brief episode, then, we observe three things: (1) work is intended to benefit those who can’t support themselves through work, as well as those who can; (2) faith and work are not separated as being and doing, but are integrated into action empowered by God; and 3) work done in faith cries out for a community of faith to support it.

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## The Calling of Levi (Mark 2:13-17)

The calling of Levi is another incident that occurs as Jesus is moving (Mark 2:13-14). The passage stresses the public nature of this summons. Jesus calls Levi while teaching a crowd (Mark 2:14), and Levi is initially seen “sitting at the tax booth.” His employment would make him a figure of contempt for many of his Galilean contemporaries. There is a measure of debate over just how heavily Roman and Herodian taxation was felt in Galilee, but most think that the issue was rather sore. The actual collection of taxes was contracted out to private tax collectors. A tax collector paid the tax for his entire territory upfront, and collected the individual taxes from the populace later. To make this profitable, he had to charge the populace more than the actual tax rate and the tax collector pocketed the mark-up. The Roman authorities thereby delegated the politically sensitive work of tax collection to members of the local community, but it led to a high rate of effective tax, and it opened the doors to all sorts of corruption.<sup>[5]</sup> It is likely that this was one of the factors contributing to land loss in Galilee, as landowners took loans to pay monetary taxes and then, if their harvests were poor, lost their properties as collateral. The fact that we initially encounter Levi in his tax booth means that he is, in effect, a living symbol of Roman occupation and a reminder of the fact that some Jews were willing collaborators with the Romans. The link made in Mark 2:16 between tax collectors and “sinners” reinforces the negative associations.<sup>[6]</sup>

Where Luke stresses that Levi leaves everything to answer Jesus’ call (Luke 5:28), Mark simply

recounts that Levi follows him. The tax collector then throws a banquet, opening his house to Jesus, his disciples, and a mixed group including other tax collectors and “sinners.” While the image is suggestive of a man seeking to share the gospel with his business colleagues, the reality is probably a little more subtle. Levi’s “community” comprises his colleagues and others who, as “sinners,” are shunned by leading figures in the community. In other words, their work made them part of a sub-community that had high-quality social relationships internally, but low-quality relationships with the communities around them. This is true for many kinds of work today. Our co-workers may be much more open to us than our neighbours are. Being a member of a work community may help us facilitate an encounter with the reality of the gospel for our co-workers. Interestingly, the hospitality of communal eating is a major part of Jesus’ ministry and suggests a concrete way by which such encounters might be hosted. The hospitality of lunch with colleagues, a jog or workout at the gym, or a shared beverage after work can build deeper relationships with our co-workers. These friendships have lasting value themselves, and through them the Holy Spirit may open the door to a kind of friendship evangelism.

This raises a question. If Christians today were to host a meal with colleagues from work, friends from their neighbourhood, and friends from their church, what would they talk about? The Christian faith has much to say about how to be a good worker and how to be a good neighbour. But do Christians know how to speak about them in a common language understandable to their colleagues and neighbours? If the conversation turned to workplace or civic topics such as a job search, customer service, property taxes or zoning, would we be able to speak meaningfully to nonbelievers about how Christian concepts apply to such issues? Do our churches equip us for these conversations? It appears that Levi — or Jesus — was able to speak meaningfully about how Jesus’ message applied to the lives of the people gathered there.

The question of taxation will recur later in the gospel and we defer until then some of our questions about Jesus’ attitude towards it.

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## The Twelve (Mark 3:13-19)

In addition to the accounts of the calling of specific disciples, there is also the account of the appointing of the apostles. There is an important point to be noted in Mark 3:13-14, namely, that the Twelve constitute a special group within the broader community of disciples. The uniqueness of their apostolic office is important. They are called to a distinctive form of service, one that may depart significantly from the experience most of us will have. If we are to draw lessons from the experience and roles of the disciples, then it must be through recognition of how their actions and convictions relate to the kingdom, not merely the fact that they left their jobs to follow Jesus.

The qualifications listed for Simon, James, John, and Judas in Mark 3:16-19 are relevant here. Simon’s

name is, of course, supplemented with the new name given to him by Jesus, “Peter,” which closely resembles the Greek word for “rock” (*petros*). One cannot help but wonder if there is both a certain irony and a certain promise in the name. Simon, as fickle and unstable as he will prove to be, is named The Rock, and one day he will live up to that name. Like him, our service to God in our workplaces, just as elsewhere in our lives, will not be a matter of instantaneous perfection, but rather one of failure and growth. This is a helpful thought at times when we feel we have failed and brought the kingdom into disrepute in the process.

Just as Simon is given a new name, so too are the sons of Zebedee, referred to as the “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). It is a quirky nickname, and seems humorous, but it also quite likely picks up on the character or personality of these two men.<sup>[7]</sup> It is an interesting point that personality and personality types are not effaced by inclusion in the kingdom. This cuts both ways. On one hand, our personalities continue to be part of our identity in the kingdom, and our embodiment of the kingdom in our place of work continues to be mediated through that personality. The temptation to find our identity in some stereotype, even a Christian one, is challenged by this. Yet, at the same time, our personalities may be marked by elements that themselves ought to be challenged by the gospel. There is a hint of this in the title given to Zebedee’s sons, since it suggests a short temper or a tendency toward conflict and, even though the name is given with fondness, it may not be a nickname to be proud of.

The issue of personality makes a significant contribution to our understanding of applying the Christian faith to our work. Most of us would probably say that our experiences of work, both good and bad, have been greatly affected by the personalities of those around us. Often the very character qualities that make someone an inspiring and energizing colleague can make that person a difficult one. A motivated and excited worker might be easily distracted by new projects, or might be prone to quickly formed (and quickly expressed) opinions. Our own personality plays a huge role too. We may find others easy to work with or difficult, based as much on our personalities as theirs. Likewise, others may find us easy or difficult to work with.

But it is more than a matter of getting along with others easily. Our distinctive personalities shape our abilities to contribute to our organization’s work — and through it to the work of God’s kingdom — for better or worse. Personality gives us both strengths and weaknesses. To a certain degree, following Christ means allowing him to curb the excesses of our personality, as when he rebuked the Sons of Thunder for their misguided ambition to sit at his right and left hands (Mark 10:35-45). At the same time, Christians often err by setting up particular personality traits as a universal model. Some Christian communities have privileged traits such as extraversion, mildness, reticence to use power, or — more darkly — abusiveness, intolerance, and gullibility. Some Christians find that the traits that make them good at their jobs — decisiveness, skepticism about dogma, or ambition, for example — make them feel guilty or marginalized in church. Trying to be something we are not, in the sense of trying to fit a stereotype of what a Christian in the workplace ought to be like, can be highly



problematic and can leave others feeling that we are inauthentic. We may be called to imitate Christ (Philippians 2:5) and our leaders (Hebrews 13:7), but this is a matter of emulating virtue, not personality. Jesus, in any case, chose people with a variety of personalities as his friends and workers. Many tools are available to help individuals and organizations make better use of the variety of personality characteristics with respect to decision making, career choice, group performance, conflict resolution, leadership, relationships at work, and other factors.

While on one level this needs to be related to a theology of wealth or property, on another level it needs to be related to the point at which the theologies of church and work meet. It is always tempting, and in fact can seem like an obligation, to maintain a network of Christians within the working environment and to seek to support one another. While laudable, there needs to be a certain reality injected into this. Some of those who present themselves as followers of Jesus may, in fact, have misplaced hearts, and this may affect the opinions they advocate. At such times, our responsibility as Christians is to be prepared to challenge one another in love, to hold one another to account as to whether we are truly operating according to the standards of the kingdom.

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## Discipleship in Process (Mark 4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21)

The Gospel of Mark, more than the other Gospels, highlights the ignorance, weakness, and selfishness of the disciples. This comes despite the many good things Mark has to say about them, including their response to Jesus' initial call (Mark 1:16-20) and to his commissioning of them (Mark 6:7-13).<sup>[8]</sup>

Certain incidents and narrative devices develop this portrait. One is the repetition of boat scenes (Mark 4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21), which parallel one another in emphasizing the disciples' inability to truly comprehend Jesus' power and authority. The last boat scene is closely followed by the unusual two-stage healing of a blind man (Mark 8:22-26), which may function as a kind of narrative metaphor for the only partial vision of the disciples regarding Jesus.<sup>[9]</sup> Then follows Peter's confession of Christ (Mark 8:27-33), with his dramatic moment of insight followed immediately by Satanic blindness on the apostle's part. The disciples' limited grasp of Jesus' identity is matched by their limited grasp of his message. They continue to desire power and status (Mark 9:33-37; 10:13-16; and 10:35-45). Jesus challenges them several times for their failure to recognize that following him requires a fundamental attitude of self-sacrifice. Most obviously, of course, the disciples desert Jesus at the time of his arrest and trial (Mark 14:50-51). The juxtaposition of Peter's threefold denial (Mark 14:66-72) with the death of Jesus throws the cowardice and courage of the two men, respectively, into sharper relief.

Yet Peter and the others will go on to lead the church effectively. The angel who speaks to the women following the resurrection (Mark 16:6-7) gives them a message to the disciples (and Peter is singled out!), promising a further encounter with the resurrected Jesus. The disciples will be very different

following this encounter, a fact that Mark does not explore but that is well developed in Acts, so that the resurrection is the key event in effecting such change.

What relevance does this have to work? Simply and obviously, that as disciples of Jesus with our own work to do, we are imperfect and in process. There will be a good deal that we will be required to repent of, attitudes that will be wrong and will need to change. Significantly, we must recognize that, like the disciples, we may well be wrong in much of what we believe and think, even about gospel matters. On a daily level, then, we must prayerfully reflect on how we are embodying the reign of God and prepared to show repentance over our deficiencies in this regard. We may feel tempted to portray ourselves as righteous, wise, and skilled in our workplaces, as a witness to Jesus' righteousness, wisdom, and excellence. But it would be a more honest and more powerful witness to portray ourselves as we really are—fallible and somewhat self-centred works-in-process, evidence of Jesus' mercy more than demonstrators of his character. Our witness is then to invite our co-workers to grow along with us in the ways of God, rather than to become like us. Of course, we need to exercise ourselves rigorously to growth in Christ. God's mercy is not an excuse to be complacent in our sin.

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## Rhythms of Work, Rest and Worship (Mark 1-4, 6, 13)

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### The First Days of the Movement (Mark 1:21-45)

A major block of material (Mark 1:21-34) takes place on the Sabbath, the day of rest. Within this block, some of the action is located in the synagogue (Mark 1:21-28). It is significant that the weekly routine of work, rest, and worship is integrated into Jesus' own life and is neither ignored nor discarded. In our own age, where such a practice has been greatly diminished, it is important to remind ourselves that this weekly rhythm was endorsed by Jesus. Of course, it is also significant that Jesus does his work of both truth and healing on this day. This will later bring him into conflict with the Pharisees. It also highlights that the Sabbath is not just a day of rest from work, but also a day of active love and mercy.

#### [10]

As well as the weekly rhythm, there is also a daily rhythm. Following the Sabbath, Jesus rises while it is still "very dark" to pray (Mark 1:35). His first priority of the day is to connect with God. The emphasis on the solitude of Jesus in this time of prayer is important, stressing that this prayer is not a public performance, but a matter of personal communion.

Daily prayer seems to be an extremely difficult practice for many workplace Christians. Between early morning family responsibilities, long commutes, early working hours, a desire to get ahead of the day's responsibilities, and late nights needed to accomplish the day's work (or entertainment), it seems almost impossible to establish a consistent routine of morning prayer. And later in the day is harder

still. Nowhere does Mark depict judgment against those who do not or cannot pray daily about the work that lies ahead of them. But he does depict Jesus — busier than anyone around him — praying about the work and the people God sets before him every day. Amid the pressures of working life, daily prayer may seem to be a personal luxury we can't afford to indulge. Jesus, however, couldn't imagine going to his work without prayer, much as most of us couldn't imagine going to work without shoes.

Regular time set apart for prayer is a good thing, but it is not the only way to pray. We can also pray in the midst of our work. One practice many have found helpful is to pray very briefly at multiple times during the day. "Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families," found in the *Book of Common Prayer* (pages 136-143) (available online [here](#)), provides brief structures for prayer in the morning, at noon, in the later afternoon and at night, taking account of the rhythms of life and work during the day. Even briefer examples include a one- or two-sentence prayer when moving from one task to another, praying with eyes open, offering thanks silently or out loud before meals, keeping an object or verse of Scripture in a pocket as a reminder to pray and many others. Among the many books that help establish a daily prayer rhythm are *Finding God in the Fast Lane* by Joyce Huggett<sup>[11]</sup> and *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard.<sup>[12]</sup>

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## The Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-3:6)

We have noticed already, in our discussion of Mark 1:21-34, that the Sabbath is integrated into the weekly rhythms of Jesus. The clash that takes place between Jesus and the Pharisees is not over whether to observe the Sabbath but over how to observe it. For the Pharisees, the Sabbath was primarily defined in negative terms. What, they would ask, is prohibited by the commandment to do no work (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15)?<sup>[13]</sup> To them, even the casual action of the disciples in picking ears of grain constitutes a kind of work and thus ignores the prohibition. It is interesting that they describe this action as "not lawful" (Mark 2:24), even though such a specific application of the fourth commandment is lacking in the Torah. They regard their own interpretation of the law as authoritative and binding, and do not consider the possibility that they might be wrong. Even more objectionable for them is Jesus' act of healing (Mark 3:1-6), which is depicted as the key event leading the Pharisees to plot against Jesus.

By contrast with the Pharisees, Jesus regards the Sabbath positively. The day of freedom from work is a gift for humanity's good. "The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Moreover, the Sabbath affords opportunities to exercise compassion and love. Such a view of the Sabbath has good prophetic antecedent. Isaiah 58 links the Sabbath with compassion and social justice in the service of God, culminating with a description of God's blessing on those who will "call the Sabbath a delight" (Isaiah 58:13-14). The juxtaposition of compassion, justice, and Sabbath suggests that the Sabbath is most fully used as a day of worship by the demonstration of compassion

and justice. After all, the Sabbath itself is a remembrance of God's justice and compassion in delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15).

The first Sabbath account (Mark 2:23-28) is triggered by the disciples' action of picking ears of grain. [14] While Matthew adds that the disciples were hungry, and Luke describes their action of rubbing the ears of grain between their hands before eating them, Mark simply describes them as picking the grain, which conveys the casual nature of the action. The disciples were probably absently picking at the seeds and nibbling them. The defence that Jesus offers when challenged by the Pharisees seems a little strange at first, because it is a story about the temple, not the Sabbath.

Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions. (Mark 2:25-26)

Scholars are divided over how — or even whether — Jesus' argument works according to principles of Jewish exegesis and argumentation. [15] The key is to recognize the concept of "holiness." Both the Sabbath and the temple (with its contents) are described as "holy" in Scripture. [16] Sabbath is sacred time, the temple is sacred space, but lessons that may be derived from the holiness of one may be transferred to the other.

Jesus' point is that the holiness of the temple does not preclude its participation in acts of compassion and justice. The sacred spaces of earth are not refuges of holiness *against* the world, but places of God's presence *for* the world, for his sustenance and restoration of the world. A place set apart for God fundamentally *is* a place of justice and compassion. "The sabbath [and by implication, the temple] was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Matthew's version of this account includes the detail, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," from Hosea 6:6 (Matthew 12:7). This makes explicit the point that we see with more reserve in Mark.

The same point emerges in the second Sabbath controversy, when Jesus heals a man in a synagogue on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). The key question that Jesus asks is, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" The silence of the Pharisees in the face of this question serves as a confirmation that the Sabbath is honoured by doing good, by saving life.

How does this apply to our work today? The Sabbath principle is that we must consecrate a portion of our time and keep it free from the demands of work, allowing it to take on a distinctive character of worship. This is not to say that the Sabbath is the only time of worship, nor that work cannot be a form of worship itself. But the Sabbath principle allows us time to focus on God in a different way than the

working week allows, and to enjoy his blessing in a distinctive way. Crucially, too, it gives us space to allow our worship of God to manifest itself in social compassion, care, and love. Our worship on the Sabbath flavors our work during the week.

The topic of Sabbath is discussed in depth in the article, *\*Rest and Work* (CONTENT NOT YET AVAILABLE) at [www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org). Recognizing that there is no single Christian perspective about the Sabbath, the Theology of Work Project explores a somewhat different point of view in the section on "Sabbath and Work" in the article *Luke and Work*.

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## Jesus the Builder (Mark 6:1-6)

[The Art of Making, The Carpenter \(Click to watch\)](#)

[The Art of Making, The Carpenter](#) from [Deep Green Sea](#) on [Vimeo](#).

An incident in Jesus' hometown gives a rare insight into his work prior to becoming a traveling preacher. The context is that Jesus' hometown friends and acquaintances can't believe that this familiar local boy has become a great teacher and prophet. In the course of their complaints, they say, "What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:2-3). This is the only passage in the Bible to directly state Jesus' trade. (In Matthew 13:55, Jesus is called "the carpenter's son," and Luke and John do not mention his profession.) The underlying Greek (*tekton*) refers to a builder or craftsman in any kind of material, [17] which in Palestine would generally be stone or brick. The English rendering "carpenter" may reflect the fact that in London wood was the more common building material at the time the first English translations were made.

In any case, a number of Jesus' parables take place at construction sites. How much of Jesus' personal experience might be reflected in these parables? Did he help construct a fence, dig a wine press, or build a tower in a vineyard, and observe the strained relations between the landowner and the tenants (Mark 12:1-12)? Did one of his customers run out of money halfway through building a tower and leave an unpaid debt to Jesus (Luke 14:28-30)? Did he remember Joseph teaching him how to dig a foundation all the way to solid rock, so that the building can withstand wind and flood (Matthew 7:24-27)? Did he ever hire assistants and have to face grumbling about pay (Matthew 20:1-16) and pecking order (Mark 9:33-37)? Was he ever supervised by a manager who asked him to join in a scheme to defraud the owner (Luke 16:1-16)? In short, how much of the wisdom in Jesus' parables was developed through his experience as a tradesman in the first-century economy? If nothing else, remembering Jesus' experience as a builder can help us see the parables in a more concrete light.

## Parables at Work (Mark 4:26-29 and 13:32-37)

Mark contains only two parables that are not also found in the other Gospels. Both of them concern work, and both are very short.

The first of these parables, in Mark 4:26-29, compares the kingdom of God to growing grain from seed. It has similarities to the more familiar parable of the mustard seed, which follows immediately afterwards, and to the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-8). Although the parable is set in the workplace of agriculture, the role of the farmer is deliberately minimized. “He does not know how” the grain grows (Mark 4:27). Instead, the emphasis is on how the kingdom’s growth is brought about by the inexplicable power of God. Nonetheless, the farmer must “rise night and day” to cultivate the crop (Mark 4:26) and go in with his sickle (Mark 4:28) to reap the harvest. God’s miracle is given among those who do their assigned work.

The second uniquely Marcan parable, in Mark 13:32-37, illustrates the need for Jesus’ disciples to watch for the second coming of Jesus. Intriguingly, Jesus says, “It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch” (Mark 13:34). While he is away, each servant is charged to keep doing his work. The kingdom is not like a master who goes to a far country and promises to eventually call his servants to join him there. No, the master will be coming back, and he gives his servants the work of growing and maintaining his household for his eventual return.

Both parables take it as a given that Jesus’ disciples are diligent workers, whatever their occupation. We will not discuss the other parables here, but refer instead to the extensive explorations in [Matthew and Work](#) and [Luke and Work](#) at [www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org).

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## Economic Issues (Mark 10-12)

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### The Rich Young Man and Attitudes to Wealth and Status (Mark 10:17-31)

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#### Wealth (Mark 10:17-22)

Jesus’ encounter with a rich man who asks “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” constitutes one of the few passages in Mark that speaks directly to economic activity. The man’s question leads Jesus to list (Mark 10:18) the six most socially oriented commandments in the Decalogue. Interestingly, “Do not covet” (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21) is presented with a definite commercial twist as “Do not

defraud.” The rich man says that he has “kept all of these since my youth” (Mark 10:20). But Jesus states that the one thing he lacks is treasure in heaven, obtained by sacrificing his earthly wealth and following the vagrant from Galilee. This presents an obstacle that the rich man cannot pass. It seems that he loves the comforts and security afforded by his possessions too much. Mark 10:22 emphasizes the affective dimension of the situation—“When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving.” The young man is emotionally disturbed by Jesus’ teaching, indicating an openness to its truth, but he is not able to follow through. His emotional attachment to his wealth and status overrules his willingness to heed the words of Jesus.

Applying this to work today requires real sensitivity and honesty with regard to our own instincts and values. Wealth is sometimes a *result* of work—ours or someone else’s—but *work itself* can also be an emotional obstacle to following Jesus. If we have privileged positions—as the rich man did—managing our careers may become more important than serving others, doing good work, or even making time for family, civic, and spiritual life. It may hinder us from opening ourselves to an unexpected calling from God. Our wealth and privilege may make us arrogant or insensitive to the people around us. These difficulties are not unique to people of wealth and privilege, of course. Yes, Jesus’ encounter with the rich man highlights that it is hard to motivate yourself to change the world if you are already on top of the heap. Before those of us of modest means and status in the Western world let ourselves off the hook, let us ask whether, by world standards, we also have become complacent because of our (relative) wealth and status.

Before we leave this episode, one crucial aspect remains. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him” (Mark 10:21). Jesus’ purpose is not to shame or browbeat the young man, but to love him. He calls him to leave his possessions first of all for his *own* benefit, saying, “You will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me.” *We* are the ones who suffer when we let wealth or work cut us off from other people and remove us from relationship with God. The solution is not to try harder to be good, but to accept God’s love; that is, to follow Christ. If we do this, we learn that we can trust God for the things we really need in life, and we don’t need to hold on to our possessions and positions for security.

This parable is further discussed under "[Luke 18:18-30](#)" in *Luke and Work* at [www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org).

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## Status (Mark 10:13-16, 22)

A distinctive aspect to Mark’s rendering of the story is its juxtaposition with the account of the little children being brought to Jesus, and the subsequent statement that the kingdom is to be received like such infants (Mark 10:13-16). What links the two passages is probably not the issue of security, of relying on financial resources rather than on God. Rather, the point of contact is the issue of status. In

ancient Mediterranean society, children were without status, or at least were of a low status.<sup>[18]</sup> They possessed none of the properties by which status was judged. Crucially, they owned nothing. The rich young man, by contrast, has an abundance of status symbols (Mark 10:22) and he owns much. (In Luke's account, he is explicitly called a "ruler," Luke 18:18.) The rich young man may miss entering the kingdom of God as much because of his slavery to status as because of his slavery to wealth per se.

In today's workplaces, status and wealth may or may not go hand in hand. For those who grow in both wealth and status through their work, this is a double caution. Even if we manage to use wealth in a godly manner, it may prove much harder to escape the trap of slavery to status. Recently a group of billionaires received much publicity for pledging to give away at least half of their wealth.<sup>[19]</sup> Their generosity is astounding, and in no way do we wish to criticize any of the pledgers. Yet we might wonder, with the value of giving so recognized, why not give away much more than half? Half a billion dollars still exceeds by far any amount needed for a very comfortable life. Is it possible that the status of remaining a billionaire (or at least a half-billionaire) is an impediment to devoting an entire fortune to the purposes that are so clearly important to a donor? Is it any different for workers of more modest means? Does regard for status keep us from devoting more of our time, talent, and treasure to the things we recognize as truly important?

The same question can be asked of people whose status does not correlate with wealth. Academics, politicians, pastors, artists, and many others may gain great status through their work without necessarily making a lot of money. Status may arise from working, say, at a particular university or remaining the toast of a certain circle. Can that status become a form of slavery that keeps us from jeopardizing our position by taking an unpopular stance or moving on to more fruitful work elsewhere?

How painful might it be to put our work-related status at risk — even a little bit — in order to serve another person, diminish an injustice, maintain your moral integrity, or see yourself in God's eyes? Jesus had all this status and even more. Perhaps that's why he worked so hard to set aside his status through daily prayer to his "father" and by putting himself constantly in disreputable company.

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## The Grace of God (Mark 10:23-31)

The subsequent words of Jesus (Mark 10:23-25) elaborate the significance of the encounter, as Jesus stresses the difficulty faced by the wealthy in entering the kingdom. The young man's reaction illustrates the attachment the rich have to their wealth and to the status that goes with it; significantly, the disciples themselves are "perplexed" by Jesus' statements about the wealthy. It is perhaps noteworthy that when he repeats his statement in Mark 10:24, he addresses the disciples as "children," declaring them unburdened by status. They have already been unburdened by wealth as a result of following him.



Jesus' analogy of the camel and the eye of the needle (Mark 10:25) probably has nothing to do with a small gate in Jerusalem,<sup>[20]</sup> but could be a pun on the similarity of the Greek word for a camel (kamelos) and that for a heavy rope (kamilos). The deliberately absurd image simply emphasizes the impossibility of the rich being saved without divine help. This applies to the poor as well, for otherwise "who can be saved?" (Mark 10:26). The promise of such divine help is spelled out in Mark 10:27, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." This keeps the passage (and hopefully us, as readers) from descending into a simple cynicism toward the rich.

This leads Peter to defend the disciples' attitudes and history of self-denial. They have "left everything" to follow Jesus. Jesus' reply affirms the heavenly reward that awaits all those who make such sacrifices. Again, the things left by such people ("house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields") potentially have connotations of status and not merely material abundance. In fact, Mark 10:31 pulls the whole account together with a forceful emphasis on status—"Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." Up until this point, the account could reflect either a love for things in and of themselves, or for the status that those things provide. This last statement, though, places the emphasis firmly upon the issue of status. Soon after, Jesus declares this in explicit workplace terms. "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:44). A slave, after all, is simply a worker with no status, not even the status of owning their own ability to work. The proper status of Jesus' followers is that of a child or slave — no status at all. Even if we hold high positions or bear authority, we are to regard the position and authority as belonging to God, not ourselves. We are simply God's slaves, representing him but not assuming the status that belongs to him alone.

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## The Temple Incident (Mark 11:15-18)

The incident where Jesus drives out the vendors and money changers from the temple has mercantile overtones. There is a debate over the precise significance of this action, both in terms of the individual Gospel accounts and in terms of the Historical Jesus tradition.<sup>[21]</sup> Certainly, Jesus aggressively drives out those who are engaging in trade in the temple courts, whether selling clean animals and birds for sacrifice or exchanging appropriate coinage for temple offerings. It has been suggested that this is a protest over the extortionate rates being charged by those involved in the trade, and thus the abuse of the poor as they come to make offerings.<sup>[22]</sup> Alternatively, it has been seen as a rejection of the annual half-shekel temple tax.<sup>[23]</sup> Finally, it has been interpreted as a prophetic sign act, disrupting the processes of the temple as a foreshadowing of its coming destruction.<sup>[24]</sup>

Assuming we equate the temple to the church in today's environment, the incident is mostly outside our scope, which is non-church-related work. We can note, though, that the incident does cast a dim light on those would attempt to use the church to secure workplace advantages for themselves. To join or

use a church in order to gain a favoured business position is both commercially damaging for the community and spiritually damaging for the individual. By no means do we mean that churches and their members should avoid helping each other become better workers. But if the church becomes a commercial tool, its integrity is damaged and its witness clouded.

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## Taxes and Caesar (Mark 12:13-17)

The issue of taxation has arisen obliquely already, in terms of the call narrative of Levi (Mark 2:13-17, see above). This section treats the matter a little more directly, although the meaning of the passage is still debatable in terms of its logic. It is interesting that the whole incident described here essentially represents a trap. If Jesus affirms Roman taxation, he will offend his followers. If he rejects it, he will face charges of treason. Because the incident hinges on such particular circumstances, we should be cautious about applying the passage to dissimilar contemporary situations.

The response of Jesus to the trap revolves around the concepts of image and ownership. Examining the common denarius coin (essentially, a day's wage), Jesus asks whose "image" (or even "icon") is upon the coin. The point of the question is probably to allude deliberately to Genesis 1:26-27 (humans made in the image of God) in order to create a contrast. Coins bear the image of the emperor, but humans bear the image of God. Give to the emperor what is his (money), but give to God what is his (our very lives). The core element, that humans bear the *imago Dei*, is unstated, but it is surely implied by the parallelism built into the logic of the argument.

In using such argumentation, Jesus subordinates the taxation issue to the greater demand of God upon our lives, but he does not thereby deny the validity of taxation, even that of the potentially abusive Roman system. Nor does he deny that money belongs to God. If money belongs to Caesar, it belongs even more to God because Caesar himself is under God's authority (Romans 13:1-17; 1 Peter 2:13-14). This passage is no warrant for the often expressed fallacy that business is business and religion is religion. But, as we have seen, God recognizes no sacred-secular divide. You cannot pretend to follow Christ by acting as if he cares nothing about your work. Jesus is not proclaiming license to do as you please at work, but peace about the things you cannot control. You can control whether you defraud others in your work (Mark 10:18), so don't do it. You cannot control whether you have to pay taxes (Mark 12:17), so pay them. In this passage, Jesus doesn't say what your obligation might be if you can control (or influence) your taxes, for example, if you are a Roman senator or a voter in a twenty-first-century democracy.

This incident is discussed in greater depth under "[Luke 20:20-26](#)" in [Luke and Work](#) at [www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org).

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## The Cross and Resurrection (Mark 14:32-16:8)

The topics of status and grace return to the fore as Jesus faces his trial and crucifixion. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Even for him the path of service requires renouncing all status:

The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again. (Mark 10:33-34)

The people — correctly — proclaim Jesus as Messiah and King (Mark 11:8-11). But he sets aside this status and submits to false accusations by the Jewish council (Mark 14:53-65), an inept trial by the Roman government (Mark 15:1-15), and death at the hands of the humanity he came to save (Mark 15:21-41). His own disciples betray (Mark 14:43-49), deny (Mark 14:66-72), and desert him (Mark 14:50-51), except for a number of the women who had supported his work all along. He takes the absolute lowest place, forsaken by God and men and women, in order to grant us eternal life. At the bitter end, he feels abandoned by God himself (Mark 15:34). Mark, alone among the Gospels, records him crying the words of Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). On the cross, Jesus’ final work is to absorb all of the world’s forsakenness. Perhaps being misunderstood, mocked, and deserted was as hard on him, as was being put to death. He was aware that his death would be overcome in a few days, yet the misunderstanding, mockery, and desertion continue to this day.

Many today also feel abandoned by friends, family, society, even God. The sense of abandonment at work can feel very strong. We can be marginalized by co-workers, crushed by labour and danger, anxious about our performance, frightened by the prospect of layoffs, and made desperate by inadequate pay and meagre benefits, as was so memorably described in Studs Terkel’s book, *Working*. The words of Sharon Atkins, a receptionist in Terkel’s book, speak for many people. “I’d cry in the morning. I didn’t want to get up. I’d dread Fridays because Monday was always looming over me. Another five days ahead of me. There never seemed to be any end to it. Why am I doing this?”<sup>[25]</sup>

But God’s grace overcomes even the most crushing blows of work and life for those who will accept it. God’s grace touches people from the immediate moment of Jesus’ submission, when the centurion recognizes, “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (Mark 15:39). Grace triumphs over death itself when Jesus is restored to life. The women receive word from God that “he has been raised” (Mark 16:6). In the section on Mark 1:1-13, we noted the abruptness of the ending. This is not a pretty story for religious pageants but God’s gut-wrenching intervention in the grit and grime of our ragged lives and work. The

busted tomb of the crucified criminal is more proof than most of us can stand that “many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (Mark 10:31). Yet this amazing grace is the one way our work can yield “a hundredfold now in this age” and our lives lead into “the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:30). No wonder that “terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (Mark 16:8).

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## Conclusions: Drawing Together Some Threads (Mark)

The Gospel of Mark is not organized as an instruction manual for human work, but work is visible on every page. We have drawn out some of the most significant threads in this tapestry of life and labour, and applied them to issues of twenty-first-century work. There are many kinds of work, and many contexts in which people work. The unifying theme is that all of us are called to the work of growing, restoring, and governing God’s creation, even while we await the final accomplishment of God’s intent for the world when Christ returns.

Within this grand outline, it is striking that much of Mark’s narrative revolves around identity themes. Mark shows that entering the kingdom of God requires transformation in our personal identity and communal relationships. Issues of status and identity were wrapped up with wealth and employment in the ancient world in a much more formal way than is the case today. But the underlying dynamics have not changed radically. Issues of status still influence our choices, decisions, and goals as workers. Roles, labels, affiliations, and relationships all factor into our employment and can cause us to make decisions for better or worse. We can all be vulnerable to the desire to assert our place in society by means of our property, wealth, or potential influence, and this, in turn, can affect our vocational decisions. All of these elements factor into our sense of identity, of who we are. Jesus’ challenge to be ready to relinquish the claims of earthly status is, therefore, of fundamental significance. Relatively few may be called to the particular choices made by the twelve disciples, to leave their employment entirely, but the challenge to subordinate worldly identity to the demands of the kingdom is universal. Self-denial is the essence of following Jesus. Such an attitude involves the refusal to allow our identity to be determined by our status in a fallen world.

Such a radical self-denial is impossible without grace. God’s grace is the miracle that transforms life and work, so that we are capable of living and serving in God’s kingdom while we dwell in a fallen world. Yet God’s grace seldom comes through instantaneous transformation. The narrative of the disciples is one of failure and restoration, of eventual, not immediate, change. Like them, our service in the kingdom of God remains marred by sin and failure. Like them, we find it necessary to repent of much along the way. Perhaps, though, we will also be like them in leaving a lasting legacy in the world, a kingdom whose borders have been expanded by our activity, and whose life has been enriched by our citizenship. As hard as it is to give up the things that inhibit us from following Christ to the full in our

work, we find that serving him in our work is far more rewarding (Mark 10:29-32) than serving ourselves and our follies.

## Key Verses and Themes in Mark

<p><b>Mark 1:16-20</b> As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake — for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.</p>	<p>The first disciples are called while they are at work. Their relationship with their work is re-oriented by their new relationship with Jesus.</p>
<p><b>Mark 1:35</b> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.</p>	<p>Jesus frames the daylight hours (the time of work) with a commitment to prayer and communion with God.</p>
<p><b>Mark 2:3,5</b> Then some people came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them ...When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”</p>	<p>A man incapable of work is brought to Jesus. The story is not just about his healing, but about the place of corporate faith and mutual help.</p>
<p><b>Mark 2:14-17</b> As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples — for there were many who followed him.</p>	<p>Levi is called to discipleship; he responds by offering his home and wealth to honour Jesus, and to provide an opportunity for others to encounter him.</p>

<p><b>Mark 2:27</b> Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath. (see context in 2:23-3:6)</p>	<p>The Sabbath rhythm is presented as valuable by Jesus, but as something for us to benefit from, not obsess about.</p>
<p><b>Mark 3:16-19</b> So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.</p>	<p>The Twelve are appointed. The presence of nicknames in the lists hints at the importance of personality within the group. The naming of Judas is a sober reminder that many claim to follow Jesus, but are not aligned with the Kingdom. As we consider our relationships with Christian colleagues, both of these points are relevant.</p>
<p><b>Mark 4:35-41</b> (Jesus stills a storm on the Lake of Galilee, after his disciples wake him from sleeping on a cushion in the stern.)  <b>Mark 6:45-52</b> (Jesus walks on the water.)  <b>Mark 8:13-21</b> (Jesus takes a boat across the lake, but the disciples have forgotten to bring bread.)</p>	<p>Three parallel boat scenes that emphasize the disciples’ lack of understanding. This is part of Mark’s intention to portray the disciples as being in process, from failure to strength.</p>
<p><b>Mark 10:21-22</b> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.</p>	<p>The rich young man cannot bring himself to part with his possessions and the status that they represent. Status is as important as luxury in this story.</p>

<p><b>Mark 11:15-17</b> Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”</p>	<p>Jesus disrupts economic activity in the temple, possibly because the particular practices he sees there are unjust or abusive.</p>
<p><b>Mark 12:15-17</b> “Bring me a denarius and let me see it.” And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him.</p>	<p>Jesus replies to the difficult question of taxation by emphasizing the ultimate authority of God, yet without denying the validity of taxation.</p>

## ENDNOTES

- [1] Sean Freyne, *Jesus: A Jewish Galilean* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 45-46.
- [2] J. David Hester, “Dramatic Inconclusion: Irony and the Narrative Rhetoric of the Ending of Mark.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17 (1995), 61-86.
- [3] Suzanne Watts Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 63.
- [4] Sean Freyne, *Jesus: A Jewish Galilean* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 48-53. For the place of fishing in the taxation structures, see Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, *A Social-Scientific Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 44-45.
- [5] Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, *A Social-Scientific Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 189-190.
- [6] The Mishnaic text *m. Toharot* 7:6 states that if a tax collector enters a house, then it becomes unclean.

- [7] Robert. A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 162.
- [8] Suzanne Watts Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in Mark*.
- [9] Robert. A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 426.
- [10] David Shepherd, *Seeking Sabbath: A Personal Journey* (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007) is a helpful and thought-provoking reflection on the significance of the Sabbath for the contemporary world and highly recommended for further reading.
- [11] Joyce Huggett, *Finding God in the Fast Lane* (Eagle, 1993).
- [12] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).
- [13] Rabbinic traditions on this point are widespread. Most obviously, see *m. Sabb* 7:2 and *m. Besa* 5:2.
- [14] Lutz Doering, "Sabbath Laws in the New Testament Gospels," in F. García Martínez and P.J. Tomson, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden/New York: Brill, 2009), 208-220.
- [15] Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 121-130.
- [16] The Sabbath is referred to as holy in Exodus 31:14-15, picking up on the command in the Decalogue to "keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8), recognizing that God himself has "consecrated" it (Exodus 20:11). This notion of holiness links the Sabbath to the temple, which is characteristically understood as "holy" (see, for example, Psalm 5:7 or Psalm 11:4) and, of course, has at its heart the "Holy of Holies."
- [17] Ken M. Campbell, "What was Jesus' Occupation?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/3 (September 2005), 501-519.
- [18] Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, *A Social-Scientific Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 238. "Children had little status within the community or family. A minor child was on a par with a slave and only after reaching maturity was he/she a free person who could inherit the family estate. The term 'child/children' could also be used as a serious insult (see Matthew 11:16-17)."
- [19] Stephanie Strom, "Pledge to Give Away Half Gains Billionaire Adherents," *New York Times*, August 4, 2010.



- [20] This is simply a myth that has circulated in popular Christian circles. William Barclay popularized it in his Daily Study Bible Commentary; see William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 253. It is unclear what the origins of this myth are, but no such gate has ever been found, in Jerusalem or elsewhere.
- [21] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 413-428; and more recently, J. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 213-245.
- [22] Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple," in C.A. Evans and B. Chilton, eds., *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity and Restoration* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 395-440, esp., 419-28. Evans surveys various strands of evidence that the priests were widely regarded as greedy and corrupt. His argument is set in opposition to E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 61-76. Evans's arguments are, in turn, challenged by Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice and the Temple*, 225-229.
- [23] R.J. Bauckham, "Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple," in B. Lindars, ed., *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988), 72-89, esp., 73-4.
- [24] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 413-428; Sander, *Jesus and Judaism*, 61-76.
- [25] Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York, The New Press, 1972), 31.