

## Wealth

### *From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Mark*

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 the six most socially oriented commandments in the Decalogue. Interestingly, "Do not covet" 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." But Jesus states that the only thing he lacks is treasure in heaven, obtained by sacrificing his earthly wealth and following Jesus 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.

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 for security.

In addition to possessions representing a false sense of security, Jesus also calls out a misguided reliance on status, saying "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Mark 10:31). 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 able 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.