

## How Can I Serve God in My Occupation?

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Luke

The first teaching in the Book of Luke is directly about work. John the Baptist exhorts his audience to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” lest they face judgment. When people ask specifically, “What then should we do?” John gives economic, not religious, responses. First, he tells those who have an abundance of possessions to share with those who have nothing. He then gives instructions to tax collectors and soldiers relating directly to their work. Tax collectors should collect only what they are required to, rather than padding the tax bill and pocketing the difference.

These were radical ideas for a profession marked by entrenched, systemic injustice. Throughout Palestine governors and other high-level officials outsourced the right to collect taxes in their jurisdictions. In order to win a contract, a prospective tax collector would have to agree to give the official a certain amount over and above the actual Roman tax. Likewise, the tax collectors’ own profits were the amounts they charged over and above what they passed to government officials. Since people had no way of knowing what the actual Roman tax was, it would have been hard for tax collectors to resist the temptation for self-enrichment, and almost impossible to win bids without offering fat profits to the governmental officials.

John does not offer them the option to stop being tax collectors. Instead, he tells them how they can do their work, within their given occupation.

Imagine other occupational groups pondering the same question today:

- school teachers asking, “What should we do?”
- business executives asking, “What should we do?”
- grocery store clerks asking, “What should we do?”

The text invites us to understand God’s intent for our specific work, not only for work in general. How might we, in our present occupation, respond to the call of the Gospel?