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April 3rd: Leviticus 1 & Mark 2:23—3:12

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The sacrificial system. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Some passages referenced:

Leviticus 21-22 (qualifications for priests and sacrifices); Exodus 29:38-43 (the burnt offering as the core daily sacrifice); Leviticus 3:1 (the peace offering can be female); Leviticus 4:28, 32 (purification offering for a commoner needs to be a female goat or lamb); Genesis 15 (the cutting of the covenant with Abram); Exodus 3:4, 19:3 (God calling Moses and speaking to him); Exodus 33:7 (tent of meeting prior to the tabernacle).

1 Samuel 21:1-7 (David and the shewbread); Matthew 12:1-8 (parallel passage in Matthew); 1 Kings 13:1-6 (the withering of Jeroboam's hand).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Leviticus 1 1 2 3 The Book of Leviticus is one of the hardest books in the Bible. It's the point where many Bible reading plans fail. My first two attempts to read through the

Bible in a year found it on the rocks of the opening chapters of Leviticus.

If the instructions for building the tabernacle and the description of its construction was tedious, at least it wasn't anywhere near as strange and foreign as the Book of Leviticus. The sacrificial system is connected to the tabernacle. The tabernacle, however, is typically spoken of in Leviticus as the tent of meeting.

It's the place where God encounters his people. And the point of the sacrificial system is to facilitate and to make possible that proper encounter. And the sacrificial system is very much a meaningful system of particulars.

It's like a language. We can often think about the meaning of language in terms of the relationship between a word and the external object in the world that it refers to. But the meaning of terms can also be discovered through the internal relationships of a language and the way that terms, even when referring to the same object in the world, can carry very different shades of meaning and present things within very different contexts.

So if we're talking about a dog, for instance, you can talk about that dog as a pet. It's a very different thing from talking about the dog as a canine or as a hound or a pooch or a doggo. These are all different terms that carry different connotations and frame that single object in the world in different ways.

Now, when we think about language, language works in terms of such a system. And the sacrificial system is also a system. It's a number of different practices that are understood not just with their relationship to something outside of themselves - maybe they point to Christ, for instance - they are also to be understood in terms of their differences from one another.

By the way that they are associated with, differentiated from, juxtaposed with, or homologous with other realities or practices or persons within the system. For instance, we can see an association between the legitimate sacrifice and the legitimate priest. Human life, society and relation is mapped onto and symbolically enacted within a system of animals, architecture, furniture, agricultural seasons and ritual.

And the animals, the architecture, the furniture, the agricultural feasts and the rituals, they're not magic. As the book of Hebrews argues, the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. The tabernacle was always patterned after and a copy of a greater realm of the Lord's presence.

It was never the true archetype. It was rather a sort of extended and enacted metaphorical system, a sort of mirror within and through which Israel could comport itself to the reality. Now we tend to think about things in terms of abstract and disembodied concepts.

We can be tempted to think of the tabernacle and the sacrificial system as pictures, particularly of Christ. The point of it all, we suppose, is to reflect upon the pictures and to see what ideas they are teaching. And then we try and translate the pictures into ideas and that's what we're supposed to derive from it.

Now such an approach is not altogether without some truth to it, but is extremely misleading. The tabernacle and the rites of the sacrificial system were designed to be inhabited as reality-filled symbolic objects and practices. They weren't primarily designed to be looked at from without and translated into abstract ideas.

The tabernacle is a symbolic building but God is really present there and the structure of the building and its associated rituals provide frameworks within which the reality of people's relationship to God could be lived out. To some extent we could maybe compare this to a coronation or a wedding ceremony. The ceremony has all sorts of ritual and symbolic elements and those symbolic elements are not just pictures that we reflect upon from without.

They're not just fripperies that are there to be decorative. They're the means by which we enter into the reality. The exchange of rings, for instance, is not just a picture to be thought about.

It is actually a symbolic rite that is part of effecting the reality of a marriage. If you were to strip away all the symbolic elements of a wedding ceremony and translate it fully into the realm of ideas and rational commitments, it would be a lot less effective as a marriage. The actual symbolic processes are means by which we navigate the reality and enter into that reality.

If a coronation was stripped of all its pomp, if there were no crown put on someone's head, it would not be so effective as a coronation. Entering into the reality requires a lot of this symbolism. All of the attention to the dress and the ceremony and the different parts of the rituals are integral to the effectiveness of these rituals.

Of course, if you stand back and look at it in a very abstract way, it seems strange to represent the sovereignty over a nation in a piece of jewelled metal put upon someone's head. But in the practical context of the coronation ceremony, it really makes a difference. So the sacrificial system is not about the communication of abstract ideas and pictures which, if we just grasped them directly, would make the ritual irrelevant.

No, the drama of the ritual is integral to what makes it work. But the ritual isn't automatic and purely objective, as if, for instance, the exchange of rings has some weird magical character to bind people together in blissful matrimony. That's not how it works.

The symbols and the rituals must be inhabited by those who perform them. The tabernacle, for instance, isn't a talisman, and the sacrifices don't substitute for hearts far

from God. However, properly inhabited, the sacrifices and the tabernacle comport people and genuinely relate people to God in an appropriate way.

It's giving the reality through the symbol. The whole sacrificial system, then, is an extended system of metaphor, a poetic mapping of Israel's life onto the animal and vegetable reality of creation. It's ordered around an architectural symbol that is a macrocosm of the human body and a microcosm of society, the creation and the wider cosmos.

Israel was to understand and to articulate its existence and its fellowship with God in terms of this profoundly material and particular reality. And the created cosmos was not for them merely a site for the operation of abstract mathematical laws upon generic particles. It wasn't just a reservoir of raw material to be extracted and pressed into the service of humanity's power.

Nor was it just a realm of beautiful surface spectacles to gaze upon. It was a charged realm of meaning and communion where the particular objects of the world bore divine truth. And such a system of analogies places the particular and its realm of differences into sharp relief.

The animals of the sacrificial system and the dietary laws, for instance, present Israel with a system by which to understand and be formed into its unique place within the world. Clean and unclean, sacrificial and non-sacrificial animals, and the many other distinctions within each category, are metaphorical frameworks for thought. They're a concrete framework designed to teach the art of discrimination in the realm of the particular that could not contrast more with our very abstract systems of thought.

The people relate to God through specific and symbolic sacrificial practices, in which the restoration of their relationship with and their new comportment of themselves towards God is symbolically enacted by them in the sacrificial rites. Now, within this sort of framework, within this way of viewing the world, particular differences assume great salience. Male and female, Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised, priest, ruler, people, firstborn and laterborn, cooked and raw, seedtime and harvest, boiled and roasted, within the camp, without the camp, clean and unclean, feast, fast, ordinary time, morning, evening, etc.

All of these differences are highlighted through metaphorical and poetic frameworks of thought and practice that are designed both to bear considerable weight and to have authoritative and theological force. To sacrifice a donkey, for instance, rather than a bull for the priest, would be a violation of truth. It wouldn't just be the breaking of an arbitrary ritual command.

It would be misrepresenting the place of the priest within the system. Now, this may seem all very primitive to us, but within this framework Israel had a far more

sophisticated practical framework for grasping its relationship to God than we generally do with our abstract theological concepts. The power of the sacrificial system is that as animals represented Israel and its various members, by performing sacrifice through symbolic substitutes, Israel could represent its own proper approach to God.

However, the sacrifices also highlighted that something was lacking, as the animals substituted for human beings at the crucial point. So human beings weren't actually sacrificing themselves to God. They were giving animals substitutes instead of sacrificing themselves.

But the suggestion being that there's something lacking. There is some need for the human being to offer himself to God and something needs to provide for that. The animal can represent it, but it can't actually fulfil the reality of it.

Something is still missing. And the point of the rituals was always primarily as things to be performed, not primarily to be fodder for theologising. Although we do have this extensive description of the sacrifices, a description of the sacrifices that is addressed to the whole people.

It's not just a book of ritual for priests that they're supposed to reflect upon by themselves. It's something that's given to the nation as a whole. And the whole people would have to learn the meaning of these sacrifices as they watched them being performed, as they inhabited the practices, and then as they stood back and reflected upon their practice.

The theology lies beneath the surface of the ritual texts, implicit in the logic of their performance, which tends to surface through close attention to their place in the system as it emerges through comparative study of many texts. But as you practice these things on a regular basis over many years, you would get a sense of what was meant. You would have a feel for what it meant to approach to God.

And this would be a knowledge, a tacit, implicit knowledge, that would be enjoyed by Israelites more generally, not just by the gifted theologians among the scribes and the priests. The sacrifices tend to be conjugations of a root meaning. And if you look through the sacrifices you'll see they're very similar in their form.

And it can be difficult to understand what makes them about one thing rather than another. Some emphasise the ascension of the offering on the altar, some emphasise the blood rites, some emphasise the meal aspect, etc. And we're supposed to see them within the system, comparing them with each other and their slight differences, that they're conjugating a root meaning, but also in that conjugation they're set over against each other.

So we need to ask questions like, what type of animal is offered? What is the species of

the animal? What is the sex of the animal? What actions shall be performed upon the animal before it is killed? Where is the animal killed? How is the animal divided? How are the parts arranged and prepared? Where does the blood go? What parts of the offering are eaten? Who eats the offering? What parts are disposed of in some other manner? What is the effect of the offering? Going through Leviticus chapter 1 we notice many of these sorts of details. For instance, we're told that the bull that has to be offered has to be a male without defects. Defects can disqualify a sacrifice, they can also disqualify a priest.

And there's a ritual here with a moral connotation. We see the connection between some of these things in Leviticus chapter 21 and 22. There's an analogy drawn between the external lack of blemish in an animal and the lack of moral fault in a person.

In this chapter we also see a list of different animals to be sacrificed. Bull, goat, sheep, pigeon and turtle dove. These are the core animals of the sacrificial system.

And different animals represent different parts of the people. This becomes apparent as we go through the book of Leviticus. It's not yet clear here.

The burnt offering as we see in Exodus chapter 29 verses 38 to 43 is the core daily sacrifice. There's a morning and an evening burnt offering. And there is a collective and an individual character to Israel's worship.

So there is this common practice of worship every single day at the tabernacle. And then there are also these festal occasions when people would all gather together and have an event for the people more generally. And then there are times when an individual worshipper will offer something themselves as an individual or for their family perhaps.

The sex of the animals isn't arbitrary. It's part of a system of meaning. The burnt offering of the herd or the flock has to be a male without blemish.

Some sacrifices however could be female. For instance the peace offering in Leviticus chapter 3 verse 1 could be female. The sin or purification offering for the commoner described in Leviticus chapter 4 verse 28 and 32 had to be a female goat or lamb.

So this helps us to see that there is some sort of logic underlying this. The fact that the primary sacrifices had to be male but that not all of the sacrifices were male and that in the case of certain sacrifices it was stipulated that they should be female, it raises problems for almost all of the typical explanations. If male animals were simply more expendable then we would expect the greatest sacrifices to be female.

But that's not what we find. If the sacrifices had to be male simply in order to symbolise Christ as a male we wouldn't have female sacrifices. If the sex were a matter of indifference the sex of sacrifices wouldn't be stipulated at all.

If the point was that male sacrifices were to be offered on the basis of some natural superiority of the male sex then we wouldn't have female sacrifices required at certain points. Something more seems to be going on. If we go back to Genesis chapter 15 I think we see a further part of the background here.

In Genesis chapter 15 again we see the sex is stipulated but it helps us to understand what's taking place in Leviticus chapter 1. In Genesis 15 God tells Abraham to gather animals together for a covenant ceremony. God is making a covenant with Abraham, cutting a covenant with him and this covenant ceremony is at the very core of it. He said to him, bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle dove and a young pigeon.

These are all the animals of the sacrificial system. And he brought him all these, cut them in half and laid each half over against the other but he did not cut the birds in half. And when the birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abraham drove them away.

And then later on, when the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between those pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying, to your offspring I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Canaites, the Canaenites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites and the Jebusites. So it's the covenant ceremony and there's the same five animals divided in the same sort of way.

So when we get to Leviticus chapter 1 we see for instance that the animals are divided between the priest who represents the Lord and the worshipper and they have to take care of different halves of the animal. And then in the case of the turtle doves and the pigeons, he must wring off its head and burn it on the altar, its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar, he shall remove its crop with its contents and cast it beside the altar on the east side in place for ashes. He shall tear it open by its wings but shall not sever it completely.

It's the same description as we have back in Genesis 15. There is a connection between these things. Every time the sacrifices were performed it harks back to that original covenant making ceremony.

It's a recalling of God's statement to his people. God established this sacrificial movement and every single sacrifice is based upon that root meaning. It's a development out from that.

It's also a re-enactment of Passover. If you think about the initial covenant that God established with Israel through the Exodus, it involved this sort of sacrifice. It involved the sacrifice of the firstborn sons.

And the worshipper brings the animal to the door of the tabernacle, places his hand upon the head of the animal, it's designated as his representative, his substitute, and this corresponds to the whole setting up of the Passover lamb. Which is related of course to the child, the son. These are sons of the herd or sons of the flock that are brought forward.

The worshipper slays the animal. It's connected with the Passover lamb being killed. The priest splashes the blood on the altar as the blood is put on the doors of the house.

And the priest stokes up the fire on the altar. The altar is a sort of sine eye. We've seen the connection between the mountain and the altar.

And the worshipper will wash parts of the animal. This is Israel's passage through the water to God's presence. Those parts that are washed are placed onto the altar fire and it turns it to smoke.

And this corresponds to the ascent upon the mountain. And whenever any sacrifice was being offered then, it was a replaying of the history of the Exodus and the making of the covenant at Sinai. It was also looking back to God's forming of the covenant with Abraham at the very beginning.

And in the deep background there's something more. Eden. It's the return to the sanctuary, to fellowship with God, that place that people have been cut off from.

The word for the person who brings forward the sacrifice at the beginning of this chapter is Adam. When an Adam brings an offering to the Lord, it's a return to the realm of God's presence. It's drawing our minds back perhaps to Cain and Abel.

This is the proper sort of approach to God that overcomes the anxiety that your sacrifice might not be accepted. If you approach in this proper manner, you will be accepted. God will invite you into his presence.

The Lord called Moses and spoke to him. That's the sentence that introduces this chapter. It's the introduction to the speech is more generally that expression.

The Lord spoke to Moses saying is repeated on several occasions throughout this book. 37 occasions I think actually. Chapter 1 to 3 is a single speech all held by this initial introduction.

And there is some difference on this particular occasion because the Lord calls first and then speaks. We might think about the events of the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3 verse 4 and Sinai also in chapter 19 verse 3. As we go through Leviticus, it will also become apparent that this is occurring before the events of Exodus chapter 40. The tabernacle has not yet been fully set up.

So this is happening within the tent of meeting which is mentioned in chapter 33. The tent of meeting which is set outside of the camp where God speaks to Moses. The Ascension offering seems to be the sacrifice par excellence and which is why it's mentioned first of all.

Why it's the one at the very heart and beginning of the book of Leviticus. It involves bulls from the herd or sheep or goats from the flock or turtles and pigeons as birds. These animals are the set of the animals of the sacrificial system representing Israel as a nation and all its different members.

So the bull represents the whole congregation or represents the high priest. The goat represents the leader of the people, the male goat. The sheep can represent the common person of the flock.

The turtle doves and the pigeons can represent the poor among the people. And so the whole nation is represented through this set of animals in its distinctive parts. This chapter introduces us to some of the fundamental elements of sacrifices that will be developed in different ways in the chapters that follow.

For specific sacrifices that emphasise a particular element of the sacrificial rite for a particular purpose. So if you're dealing with expiation or purification, the blood is particularly important, the blood rite part of it. If it's the peace offering, it's the meal part of it that's particularly important.

And these fundamental sacrifices can be joined together in particular ways for larger ceremonies such as the Day of Atonement. We also can see deviations from the fundamental template in specific cases. We should be especially attentive on such occasions as those sorts of deviations are meaningful and can also serve to illuminate the underlying logic.

When we think about sacrifice as Christians, our temptation is to think about it narrowly in terms of death. Whereas in many cases the death of the animal is not actually that prominent within the rite. It's something of secondary importance.

In the case of the whole burnt offering, the death is given a bit more significance. There's the hand placed upon the head of the animal, it's killed in a specific place, which is where the most holy sacrifices had to be killed more generally. And sacrifices that had to be killed in this particular place before the Lord could often be associated with the burnt offering.

They're sacrificed there because it is most holy, like the burnt offering. The point of the sacrifice, however, has a lot more to do in many cases with where the blood is put. It's the expiation or the purification that's involved.

Or maybe it's the case that it's a meal that's supposed to be shared. And so it's the eater

that's particularly important. Who is going to eat this and where are they going to eat it? Once we've moved beyond a narrow fixation upon the death of the animal as a substitutionary atonement or something like that, we'll begin to see that a lot more things are comprehended within the sacrificial system that we might initially have supposed.

So the whole ascension offering is the lifting up of this animal to God's presence, the ascension of that animal as a representative of the worshipper into God's presence. So it's not just about the death, it's about the rising up into God's presence in the smoke. The tribute offering is something that is given as an offering or gift to the Lord.

The peace offering is something that is eaten with the Lord, a fellowship of communion. And the purification offering is dealing with sin through blood, it's purifying things, expiating. The trespass offering is a sort of repayment of God, it's restitution for something that has been taken from God.

As the logic of the sacrificial system starts to come together then, we'll see it's a vast and beautiful and very subtle and nuanced system that helps us to understand what it means to approach God. It's one of the reasons why we should spend time in the book of Leviticus. There is much to reward us here, much to enlighten us, much to help us to understand what Christian worship means, what the work of Christ means, not just in the event of his death, but also in his resurrection and ascension, also in his work in the Holy of Holies in the heavenly temple and how his blood avails for us in that realm.

A question to consider, comparing the description of the whole burnt offering or the ascension offering within this chapter with the chapters that follow and the sacrifices within them, what are some of the most notable similarities and also variations between the sacrifices that share this fundamental template? Mark chapter 2 verse 23 to chapter 3 verse 12. One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain and the Pharisees were saying to him, Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? And he said to them, Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the bread of the presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him. And he said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Again he entered the synagogue and a man was there with a withered hand, and they watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, Come here. And he said to them, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent.

And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to

the man, Stretch out your hand. He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him.

For he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, You are the Son of God. And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

The conclusion of Mark 2 and the beginning of Mark 3 continue and conclude the sequence of events begun with the healing of the paralytic at the beginning of Mark 2. While Jesus' power, the problems of his rising fame, and the secret of his messianic identity were forefront in chapter 1, chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 begin a series of controversies. These controversies are about specific issues, the forgiveness of sins, eating with tax collectors and sinners, fasting and not fasting, picking the grain on the Sabbath day, and healing on the Sabbath. Sin and forgiveness is a common theme of the first two controversies, eating is a common theme of the second to the fourth, and Sabbath is the common theme of the fourth and the fifth.

While there are unifying themes of controversy, there is a deeper issue beneath the surface throughout, which is the identity of Jesus. He is the Son of Man who forgives sins. He is the Bridegroom who has come to his people.

He is the new David. He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Within the controversies then we are getting a clearer picture of who Jesus is.

Jesus' actions on the Sabbath demonstrate that he is the one who gives rest. This is the true intent of the Sabbath. The Sabbath stories are easily misunderstood as Jesus presenting some casuistic understanding of what the Sabbath law required in a way that circumvents something of the purpose of the law.

That's not what's going on. Rather Jesus is revealing the purpose of the law, what it was all about, and his fulfilment of it. He's not just trumping the law with his authority, he's fulfilling it.

The disciples were permitted by the law to eat of the grain as they passed through a field, as a form of gleaning. The issue was that they were doing so on the Sabbath, when what they were doing would count as work. And so Jesus is questioned concerning the behaviour of his disciples, for whom he is expected to bear some responsibility.

And he gives the example of David in response to the objection of the Pharisees. In 1

Samuel 21 1-7, David and his hungry men were permitted to eat of the showbread, which was usually restricted for the priests. They would offer it one week and then at the end of the week they would be able to eat it.

Ahimelech, the priest, recognised that the law of the showbread existed for the good of God's people, not merely as an end in itself, and gave it to David. And in these circumstances the hunger of David and his men took precedence. But it seems that there's something more going on here.

It's not just that they were hungry, it's the fact that they were under David's leadership. Jesus is exploring the relationship between him and his disciples and David and his men. Jesus is the greater David, who has the prerogative to determine in this instance.

His men are like David's men. They are committed to a mission of God and the demands of that mission take priority over the strict requirements of the Sabbath law. In the parallel passage of Matthew 12, Jesus also points out that the work of the priests isn't counted as Sabbath-breaking work, because it's in service of the temple and Jesus is one who is greater than the temple.

The Sabbath was made to give rest to man, not to subject man to bondage. And the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath. He is the one who gives the true rest that the Sabbath bears witness to.

Mark records Jesus saying that this occurred in the time of Abiathar the priest, who was actually Ahimelech's son. And various explanations have been advanced to account for this seeming inaccuracy. My inclination is to say that Abiathar is mentioned because he was the more prominent than his father and Jesus wanted to evoke the larger story of David and the role that Abiathar played for David in the coup of Absalom, which would help to explain further his mission and the relationship between him and the people who were challenging him.

In Jesus' response to the challenge to the actions of his disciples in the grain fields, he makes an analogy depending upon David and his followers, aligning himself with David. The argument that Jesus is presenting then depends in large measure upon the authority of him as the leader of his men. He presents himself as the eschatological Son of Man again and as the Lord of the Sabbath as such.

Jesus moves from the more general point about the Sabbath being for man to the greater point of the Son of Man being the Lord of the Sabbath. It might be worth considering here the way that the Son of Man is also a corporate figure in Daniel chapter 7, not just an individual but a representative of the people. Jesus is the Son of Man as the Messiah and his people also participate in this.

David leads his men and as his men share in the authority of his mission, they can enjoy

a similar prerogative, a prerogative that means that their needs can take priority over the law of the tabernacle, and in this case of the Sabbath. Jesus is the eschatological Son of Man, the one who establishes the original purpose of the Sabbath in its great fulfilment in the last days. Jesus then heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath.

Although the man isn't in urgent need, Jesus gives rest on the Sabbath, which fulfils again the intent and the commandment of the Sabbath. Sabbath-keeping is about giving life and healing, not about laying burdens upon people. Perhaps we're supposed to hear the story of the withering and the restoring of Jeroboam's hand in 1 Kings chapter 13 behind the story here.

Jeroboam's hand was withered because of false worship and then it's restored to him in an act of grace. Our passage ends with a section that exhibits many of the things that we've seen so far, and so serves as a fitting culminating expression of its themes. Jesus needs to withdraw from the huge crowds that are gathering around him.

They're falling upon him, pressing upon him, and the extreme response to his presence. People are just trying to touch him to be healed. And this response is found not just from the crowds but also from the demons who are falling down before him.

Jesus displays great power in his healings and in his exorcisms. His ministry is characterised by an activity and an urgency and a speed and an immediacy. As we study Mark, we should get a sense of Jesus as the King, the one who's moving from place to place, the one who's engaged in a sort of military campaign against the forces of the evil one, the one who's bringing salvation and healing wherever he goes, the one who's growing these great crowds and rising in his fame.

Jesus is a new David. He's the eschatological son of man. He's the Lord of the Sabbath and he's the one who can forgive sins.

A question to consider. Jesus' teaching and practice concerning the Sabbath maybe suggests the Sabbath being thought of less as a command that people are subject to and under than as a mission to complete. Jesus is the one who gives the rest of the Sabbath to people.

Jesus is the one who is the Lord of the Sabbath, whose mission is a sabbatical mission. How might our practice as Christians be reformed as we think about the Sabbath in this particular way?