

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320073048>

Diakonia: In Conversation with John N. Collins

Article in *Ecclesiology* · September 2017

DOI: 10.1163/17455316-01303005

CITATION

1

READS

1,292

1 author:



Gert Breed

North-West University

40 PUBLICATIONS 124 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



The diakon word group in the New Testament: a Biblical based ministry plan [View project](#)

Diakonia: In Conversation with John N. Collins

Gert Breed

North-West University, Potchefstroom 2520, South Africa

Gert.breed@nwu.ac.za

Abstract

The work of John N. Collins on the *διάκον*- word group makes an important contribution to understanding church ministry. Although it receives much attention and support, there is some criticism of Collins's exegesis. If his conclusions are accepted by churches, there will be an impact on their ministry. It is therefore important that his underlying assumptions be thoroughly tested. This article analyzes Mark 10:45 in the context of that Gospel and particularly in the context of Mark 8–10. Collins's supposition that *διακονία* is never done out of love or compassion for other people is found wanting. Rather, Mark describes Jesus's *διακονία* as done out of compassion and love for others, and as an envoy of God.

Keywords

diakonia – John N. Collins – Mark 10:45 – disciples – compassion – mercy – blindness – service

The Research of John N. Collins

The importance of John N. Collins's work on the *διάκον*- word group must not be underestimated.¹ Benjamin Hartley says: 'Collins's research has radical implications for general Protestant assertions about the ministry of all Christians, particularly in relation to the nature of the episcopacy and an understanding

¹ John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); John N. Collins, *Diakonia Studies: Critical Issues in Ministry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

of ordination.² Andrew Clarke says: 'Collins has in a large measure overturned a consensus' about the *διάκονο-* word group.³ Assessing the results of Collins's work, Paula Gooder states:

Sea changes in opinion on New Testament subjects usually go unnoticed within the church. Just occasionally, however, a change takes place that has enormous impact on the life and self-understanding of people within the church – this is one of those occasions.⁴

Collins says the following about the impact of his own research results:

Working with such changed semantic parameters – and totally freed from the constricted ambit of lowly service – we will necessarily arrive at ecclesiological conclusions substantially at variance with principles espoused within the contemporary diaconic consensus.⁵

It is therefore essential that Collins's theory should be thoroughly tested to save the churches a possible wrong turn in their ministry. Collins's work has been recognized, among others, in Germany, America, South Africa, the UK and Finland.⁶ The most important acknowledgement was the use of his findings in the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early*

2 Benjamin L. Hartley, 'Connected and Sent Out: Implications of New Biblical Research for the United Methodist Diaconate', *Quarterly Review* 24 (2004), pp. 367–80, at p. 379.

3 Andrew D. Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership* (London: T&T Clark, 2008) p. 100.

4 Paula Gooder, 'Towards a diaconal church: some reflections on New Testament material', in *The Diaconal Church: Beyond the Mould of Christendom*, ed. David Clarke (Peterborough: Epworth, 2008), p. 103.

5 Collins, *Diakonia Studies*, p. 182.

6 Hans-Jürgen Benedict, *Barmherzigkeit und Diakonie : von der rettenden Liebe zum gelingenden Leben* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), pp. 114–37; Johannes Eurich, Heinz Schmidt and Christian Oelschlägel, *Diakonie und Bildung : Heinz Schmidt zum 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008); Clarke, *A Pauline Theology*; Gert Breed, 'The Meaning of the *Diakon* Word Group in John 12:26 Applied to the Ministry in Congregations', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35.1 (2014), <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1>; Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament : Studien zur Semantik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rolle von Frauen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), pp. 21–3, 143; Kari Latvus, 'The Paradigm Challenged: A New Analysis of the Origin of *Diakonia*', *Studia Theologica* 62 (2008), pp. 142–57, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00393380802559816>.

Christian Literature.⁷ But his research has also attracted its fair share of criticism.⁸

In his first book on this subject, Collins devoted a whole chapter to the discussion of Mark 10:45.⁹ He also later said that 10:45 has long been reckoned ‘within ecumenical theology of ministry as the quintessential expression of what ecclesial ministry is.’¹⁰ In his first book, most of the chapter on 10:45 consists of a comparison between 10:45 and Luke 22:27. However, a discussion of 10:45 in the context of Mark’s Gospel is absent. Throughout all his books and articles, this is the one thing that puts a question mark behind his findings. Collins does not discuss a word or verse in the context of the entire Gospel or letter in the New Testament; also, his research contains no structural analysis. This article tests Collins’s findings on 10:45 by placing the verse within the structure of the Gospel of Mark and thus attempting to determine what Mark and his readers had in mind when writing or reading the verse. Collins quotes Anni Hentschel approvingly, who translates 10:45 as follows: ‘The Son of Man has not come to have tasks carried out for himself but to carry out a task himself.’¹¹ He also quotes Hentschel to explain the consequence of this translation for the identity of Jesus according to 10:45: ‘In Mark 10:45a Jesus is presented neither as waiter nor as a humble neighbour-loving servant who would be motivated by such an attitude to give his life for people.’¹² In a 1995 article, he sums up his new interpretation of the δῶλον- word group as follows: ‘Never an expression of loving service but service of one another always expressing the mandate of the subordinate from a superior.’¹³ It is his opinion that the precise meaning of

7 William Arndt, Frederik W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature: Based on Walter Baur’s Griechisches-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, 3rd rev. edn. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

8 E.g. Benedict, *Barmherzigkeit*, pp. 125–8.

9 Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, pp. 46–62. All scriptural references are to the Gospel of Mark unless otherwise indicated.

10 Collins, *Diakonia Studies*, p. 26.

11 Collins, *Diakonia Studies*, p. 26. See also John N. Collins, *Are all Christians Ministers?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 252. It needs to be pointed out that Collins and Hentschel arrive at their understanding of the statement independently and only after extensive individual semantic investigations of a large body of ancient Greek usage.

12 Collins, *Diakonia Studies*, p. 26.

13 John N. Collins, ‘A Ministry for Tomorrow’s Church’, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 32.2 (1995), pp. 159–78, at p. 167. See also John N. Collins, ‘Fitting Lay Ministries into a Theology of Ministry’, *Worship* 79 (2005), pp. 209–22, at p. 219; Paula Gooder, ‘Diakonia in the New Testament: A Dialogue with John N. Collins’, *Ecclesiology* 3 (2006), pp. 33–56, at p. 41.

the *διάκον*- word group should be gleaned from the context in which it is used, but nowhere do his writings offer a detailed exegesis of Mark 10 within the structure of the Gospel.¹⁴ The nearest he comes to this is in his latest work.¹⁵ He argues that Mark 10:45 should be read as a whole. He sees the *καὶ* (and) in the last part of the sentence as exegetical. Thus read, 'giving his life as a ransom for many' explains his 'service'. This far we can agree with him. But when he answers the question, 'Who was Jesus serving?', he disregards the context of Mark 10 to aim to prove that his service was only to the One that sent him and not service to people. The context of 10:45 is not taken into account. Instead, as Clarke also points out, Collins applies to 10:45 what he presumes is true of the use of the word group in other writings without testing it against the context of Mark.¹⁶

One of Collins's conclusions is tested in the present article with a detailed exegesis of Mark 8–10: this is that the *διάκον*- word group is 'never an expression of loving service'. The goal will therefore be to establish the meaning of the *διάκον*- word group as it is used by Mark with proper consideration of the context.¹⁷ The question to be answered is: According to Mark, does the word group (also) express loving service to other people?

The Background of Mark

Roskam discusses in detail the background to the Gospel of Mark, his readers and their situation, and the time and purpose of the Gospel.¹⁸ She also gives an overview of the development of the research on Mark.¹⁹ The discussion around the background, writer, readers and history of the text cannot be addressed in this article. The text is used as it appears in Nestle-Aland.²⁰ To understand the meaning of the *διάκον*- word group in Mark, it is necessary to look at the context of the verses in which it occurs, as well as the themes that Mark addresses.

14 Collins, *Are all Christians Ministers?*, p. 249; Cf. also Collins, *Diakonia Studies*, p. 20.

15 Collins, *Diakonia Studies*, pp. 79–93.

16 Clarke, *A Pauline Theology*, pp. 65, 66.

17 For the importance of context when establishing meaning, see Robert C. Tannehill, 'Reading it Whole: The Function of Mark 8:34–35 in Mark's Story', *Quarterly Review* 2 (1982), pp. 67–78.

18 Hendrika N. Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in its Historical and Social Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 1–142.

19 Roskam, *The Purpose*, pp. 1–13.

20 E. Nestle et al. (eds), *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

The Structure of Mark

Cilliers Breytenbach says about the Gospel of Mark that ‘there can hardly be any doubt that the gospel of Mark is a carefully composed text.’²¹ He also says: ‘With Rhoads’, Dewey’s, and Michie’s *Mark as Story* appearing in a third edition in 2012, there is no need to dispute the approach that the Gospel of Mark should be heard as a narrative read to an audience, and, if one may add, an episodic narrative.’

When considering the structure of Mark, it is wise to listen to the advice of Francis Moloney: ‘Narrative units are not separated by brick walls. One flows into the other, looks back to issues already mentioned, and hints at themes yet to come.’²² Moloney says about the Gospel of Mark:

this book showed admirably how close attention to the literary features of narrator, setting, plot, characters and reader(s) that can be traced within a narrative could lead to a fresh understanding of the Gospel of Mark as a deliberative contrived ‘whole utterance,’ a passionate and unified story that runs from 1:1 to 16:8.²³

Meyers says about this Gospel: ‘Every element in the story is there for a reason, which we will discover only by combing back and forth through the text until it yields its own narrative coherence.’²⁴ Ben Witherington describes several of Mark’s techniques to build micro and macro structures.²⁵ One of Mark’s widely accepted techniques in the micro structures is

the weaving together of two stories by splitting the first story in two parts to serve as a frame around the second story. Another micro structure device of Mark is the so called doublets. Mark uses two descriptions about

21 Cilliers Breytenbach, ‘The Gospel of Mark as Episodical Narrative’, *Scriptura* 4 (1989), pp. 171–97.

22 Francis J. Moloney, *Mark: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), p. 19; cf. Gregg, S. Morrison, ‘The Turning Point in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in Markan Christology’ (D.Phil. thesis, The Catholic University of America, 2008), pp. 54–5.

23 Francis J. Moloney, ‘Writing a narrative on the Gospel of Mark’, in *Mark as Story, Retrospect and Prospect*, eds. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), pp. 95–114, at p. 95.

24 Ched Meyers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), p. 109.

25 Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 36–9.

similar things that happened or blocks of similar teachings of Jesus. He uses this as a way of leading the readers to interpret the encapsulated material.²⁶

These techniques are relevant in the discussion of the meaning of the *διάκον*-word group in Mark. From this viewpoint, it therefore can be accepted that the structure of Mark 8–10 is important for the understanding of 10:42–5. Different themes in Mark 8–10 will now be discussed in greater detail in order to work towards determining the structure of Mark 8–10 to establish the place of Mark 10:45 in the structure.

Envoys of God

When Jesus announces his coming passion for the first time (8:31), the word *δεῖ* (must) is used. He must suffer, die and rise again because that is part of God's plan; that is part of the task for which he has been sent. This is written about him in Scripture (9:12–13; 14:21, 14:27). When Peter admonishes him, Jesus says that Peter is thinking the things of men and not of God.²⁷ After reprimanding Peter, he calls his disciples and the crowd and teaches them about the way of the kingdom of God, the way of the Christ.²⁸ Anyone who wants to follow Jesus must do three things (8:34). The first is to deny yourself, which entails 'denying or saying no to the self as the determiner of one's goals, aspirations and desires'.²⁹ The second is to take up your cross, which means to be willing to do what God asks of you in your unique situation, even if it means crucifixion in the figurative sense. The third is to follow Jesus: the sentence starts with 'follow' (*ἀκολουθέω*) and ends with 'follow' (*ἀκολουθήω*). The first 'follow' includes 'denying', 'crucifixion' and the second 'follow'. The last 'follow' therefore means doing the same as Jesus, living as he did and turning to action. The first two requirements for somebody who wants to follow Jesus are in the aorist tense (*ἀπαρνησάσθω; ἀράτω*), but the last 'follow' is in the present imperative (*ἀκολουθείτω*), pointing to an ongoing process. Following Jesus is a lifelong journey. The sentence can be paraphrased as: 'If you want to follow me, then "get in line" with me and do it throughout your whole life by not living

26 Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 36.

27 Mark 8:33; Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 241.

28 Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (New York: Continuum, 2001), pp. 55–6.

29 Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 407.

by your own desires, goals and aspirations, but be ready to give up everything to obey God.³⁰ With this teaching, Jesus describes his followers as his envoys who should represent him and his way with every detail of their lives, no matter the cost to them. ‘The exhortation means that the disciple gives up his right to his own life up-front.’³¹ Mark 8:38 proceeds with the explanation of what it means to follow Jesus, i.e. not to be ashamed of Jesus and his words. It is clearly language referring to an envoy. Jesus is calling his followers to be his envoys in this world; to remove everything that can prevent them from being that.³² If they do not represent Jesus and are ashamed of him and his words, they will lose their lives because Jesus will not be their representative before the Father (8:36–38).

Mark 8:31–38 is semantically connected to 10:42–5. In both passages, Jesus asks his disciples to deny themselves and to follow him. Both follow Jesus’s announcement of his coming death and the misunderstanding of the disciples. In 8:37, the question is asked what somebody can give as ransom for his life. The question is answered in 10:45, when Jesus says that he will give his life as ransom for many (see structure 1).

Mercy and Receptiveness

Mercy and receptiveness play a decisive role in 8:1–10:52.³³ In this part, Mark uses doublets and repetition as techniques. In 8:2, Jesus says to his disciples: ‘I have compassion (σπλαγχνίζομαι) on the crowd’. This section of Mark’s Gospel ends with Barthimaeus calling repeatedly to Jesus to have mercy (ἐλέεω) on him (10:47, 48). Mark thus frames this whole part in the terms of compassion and mercy. This is confirmed by his technique of repetition. Three times Jesus announces his coming suffering (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–4). After each of the first two announcements Mark records a deed of mercy, and after the third he relates the healing of Barthimaeus. After the first announcement, the text describes (8:17–27) how Jesus healed a father’s son with an evil spirit. The father’s plea to ‘have compassion (σπλαγχνίζομαι) on us and help (βοηθέω) us’ resonates with 8:2 and 10:47–8. Jesus helps despite the father’s little faith (9:24). After the

30 Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 243.

31 Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 245.

32 Suzanne W. Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 4.

33 See Moloney, *Mark*, p. 172.

second passion announcement (9:31), Jesus teaches the disciples again about discipleship, saying: 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant (δίακονος) of all' (9:35). He does this in reaction to the disciples' argument about who the greatest among them are (9:33–4). As part of his teaching about what the 'all' (πᾶς) in his command means, he brings a child among them and puts his arms around the child (9:36). He then identifies himself with the child, saying that what they do to this child they are doing to him and to the One that sent him (9:37). To be a διάκονος, as a follower of Jesus should be (9:35), means to be receptive even to such a person as the child represents, i.e. to someone with no claim to your mercy, and who is unimportant.³⁴ The διάκονος should be able to σπλαγγίζομαι (have compassion) with those who cannot demand it from him or her. Clearly the disciples do not understand this teaching of Jesus, because in 10:13 it is recorded how they try to prevent the children from coming to him. Mark describes Jesus's reaction with the word ἀγανακτέω (indignant, angry).³⁵ Jesus then 'took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them' (10:16). Again he links receiving a child with entering the kingdom of God, saying that whoever does not receive the kingdom as he receives a child shall not enter it.³⁶ That means that one should receive the kingdom unconditionally and with open arms as Jesus received the children.³⁷

After Jesus's teaching in 9:36, John asks him about a man casting out demons in his name. The disciples tried to stop the man, but Jesus's answer is not to stop him. What the motivation of the disciples were, is not known, but their attempt to stop him speaks of exclusivity. Jesus speaks of receptivity. He then returns to the example of a child (9:41–50), stating again the danger of not being a διάκονος of all; and, to the contrary, to cause one of the little ones to stumble.

The preceding discussion implies that Mark puts 8:1–10:52 in a frame of compassion and mercy by describing Jesus's compassion for the hungry crowd and Barthimaeus's appeal for Jesus' mercy. Mark then strengthens this theme by describing Jesus' attitude, deeds of mercy and receptiveness towards persons in need and weakness, as well as his teaching on discipleship. Jesus applies this to every διάκονος who wants to follow him and he points out the grave danger of

34 Marie N. Sabin, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), pp. 87–9.

35 J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd edn (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), p. 762.

36 Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 279.

37 See Eric A. Farr, 'The Narrative and Discursive References to Children and Audience Duality in the Gospel of Mark' (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 2011).

neglecting this teaching. It is clear that Mark connects the *διάκων*- word group closely to compassion, mercy and receptiveness, emphasizing that it should be done to 'all' without exclusion. Mark repeats the involvement of the crowd in Jesus's journey (six times in Mark 8–10). This can explain for whom (all) he gives his life as ransom (10:45).

Blindness, Fear and Faith

In 8:1–10:52 Mark uses another important doublet to frame 8:27–10:45.³⁸ In 8:22–6 the healing of a blind man is described. The man is healed in two phases. At first, Jesus spits on his eyes and lays hands on him. After that the blind man's eyesight is partially restored. Then Jesus lays his hands on the man's eyes, upon which his eyesight is fully restored. In 10:46–52 a blind man asks Jesus to restore his eyesight. Jesus immediately sends him away, with his sight fully restored. The man then follows Jesus. Once again it is clear from the context that Mark purposefully introduces this doublet. In the verses just before the healing of the first blind man (8:11–21), Mark leads his readers to understand that the disciples are still blind to Jesus's identity and what it means for them.³⁹ Jesus feeds the crowd and then refuses a demand from the Pharisees for a sign that will confirm his identity (8:1–13). He warns the disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees and the disciples misunderstand him, thinking that he is referring to them not having enough bread. Jesus reminds them of two occasions on which he had multiplied the bread. Then he asks them: 'Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?... Do you not yet understand?' (8:17–18, 21).

This theme of blindness, not understanding and not remembering, or only seeing partially, is then taken through the whole of 8:19–10:45.⁴⁰ Barthimaeus, the blind man at Jericho, is a contrast to this. Mark records Barthimaeus's unwavering faith in Jesus's authority to heal him, his persistence have a part in Jesus' compassion (*σπλαγχνίζομαι*) and mercy (*ἐλέεω*) (10:46–52), and his abandoning of what little he has to come to Jesus to be healed.⁴¹ Barthimaeus is healed immediately (10:52), being an example of what Jesus asks

38 Morrison, *The Turning Point*, p. 84.

39 Robert W. Stacey, 'Fear in the Gospel of Mark' (DPhil. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 211.

40 Moloney, 'Writing a narrative', p. 107.

41 Moloney, 'Writing a narrative', p. 108.

of his disciples as described in 8:1–10:45. Barthimaeus follows Jesus after his healing (10:52). Within this frame of blindness and the healing of blindness, seeing only partially and seeing clearly, many incidents of blindness, hardness of heart, and unbelief and fear are described.⁴² The first incident is Peter confessing Jesus as Christ. Peter's confession can be described as 'a climax, concluding the question of Jesus' identity that has dominated the whole of 1:1–8:26.'⁴³ But Peter does not see the full picture. When Jesus predicts his coming passion, it does not fit into Peter's picture and Peter rebukes Jesus. Jesus sees Peter's rebuke as the onslaught of Satan. Peter does not see things through God's eyes, but through those of men (8:33). On the mountain of transfiguration, Peter speaks without understanding, because he is 'terrified' (9:6). In 9:24, the father of the son with the evil spirit confesses his situation as being between belief and unbelief. After each prediction of Jesus's passion, the misunderstanding of the disciples is recorded (9:32–9; 10:32–41). Mark also shows his readers that fear is the consequence of not understanding or not believing. The disciples fear because they do not understand fully who Jesus is and what he can do (9:6; 9:34; 10:32; see also 4:41; 5:36; 6:50). Mark also shows the hardness of people's hearts (8:17; 9:19; 10:6). The rich man (10:17) illustrates that it is difficult for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

Mark also presents Jesus as a person who is on a path with his disciples, the crowd, individuals and even the Pharisees. Jesus's prediction of his passion shows a development. The first prediction (8:31) is the only one that speaks of the elders' rejection of Jesus; the betrayal is mentioned only in the second prediction; the third one is the longest and most specific of the three and mentions Jesus's death, the scourging, mocking and spitting by Gentiles.⁴⁴ Both aspects that were separately described in the first two announcements appear in the last announcement. Although Jesus sometimes sounds exasperated by the blindness of his hearers (8:17–21; 9:19), he continues to teach them, never for one moment abandoning them. Mark frames this whole section with the healing of two blind people and uses the metaphor of blindness to illustrate the situation of the disciples, members of the crowd, and the Pharisees in their relationship to Jesus, in their misunderstanding, unbelief and hardness of heart. This frame should be borne in mind when the meaning in which the *διάκων*-word group is used in Mark 10:45 is explained.

42 See Stacey, *Fear*.

43 Roskam, *The Purpose*, p. 153.

44 Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 243.

Authority, Kingdom, Glory and Servanthood

Narry Santos opens up the paradox of authority and servanthood in Mark.⁴⁵ He shows four juxtapositions of material in 1:1–15 (1:2–8, 9, 10–11 and 12–13). He says that this section of Mark leaves the reader with a question about Jesus and John the Baptist: ‘Why are these men of authority pictured as men who serve? As men of authority, are they not the ones who are to receive service?’⁴⁶ In 6:32–8:9 the paradoxical nature of Jesus is highlighted by misunderstandings from various characters.⁴⁷ The linking of the motifs of servanthood, authority and misunderstanding in this section is framed by two feeding miracles (6:32–44 and 8:1–9). In 8:10–21, the linking of the motifs of servanthood, authority and misunderstanding continues, as has been shown above. In 8:22–10:52 the paradox is intensified by Jesus’s announcements of his coming passion on the one hand and on the other hand his authoritative deeds and teaching. In this section the emphasis shifts to Jesus’s death and resurrection and its implications for his followers.⁴⁸ The paradox lies in the way Jesus will exercise his authority. He will not do so in the way that Peter thinks he should, but by fulfilling the plan of God in his passion (8:31–2). People may be ashamed of him, but he will come into the glory of his Father, and the kingdom of God comes into power on the mountain of transfiguration. He is identified (again, cf. 1:11) as the beloved Son of God, while the disciples see him in glory and the heavenly voice tells the disciples to listen to him (8:38–9:7). However, he is left behind to fulfil his calling (9:7). He shows his power over demons, because he can make anything possible for those who believe (9:17–28), but he will be delivered into the hands of men and killed. Then he will rise again (9:31). He receives little children and blesses them, but sends a rich man away, aggrieved.

The paradox is also clear when tracing the use of the phrase ‘Son of Man’ in Mark’s Gospel. The Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins as only God can do (2:10) and is the Lord of the Sabbath (2:28); but he must (δέν) be rejected, betrayed (14:21, 41), delivered to the Gentiles, suffer many things, and be killed and rise on the third day (8:32; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33) because he came to serve and not to be served and to give his life as ransom for many (10:45). However, the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (8:38).

45 Narry Santos, *Slave of All: The Paradox of Authority and Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

46 Santos, *Slave of All*, p. 74.

47 Santos, *Slave of All*, pp. 162–3.

48 Roskam, *The Purpose*, p. 154.

He will come on the clouds with great power and glory (13:26) and he will be seen seated at the right hand of Power. With this, the close relationship that Mark constructs between Jesus's ministry, passion and glory becomes clear. Mark 10:45, as one of the Son of Man sayings, cannot be understood correctly without considering this relationship. Mark paradoxically juxtaposes the motifs of authority and servanthood, glory and humiliation, power and apparent powerlessness to teach the readers the true identity of the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Christ.⁴⁹ In the Gospel of Mark

Jesus takes a phrase which refers to human frailty and infuses it with divine action until finally, at the trial, the Son of Man clearly has divine undertones. Thus, Jesus used a phrase which referred primarily to his humanity, but which he informed with references to his divinity giving new meaning to the title Son of Man.⁵⁰

Mark's use of the 'Son of Man' phrase in 10:45 can thus be expected to carry the same paradox.

This paradox is also emphasised by Jesus' teaching about discipleship.⁵¹ Robbins convincingly points out that the three-step progression in 8:27–10:45, evident in the context of each of the passion predictions, is also present in every scene throughout the Gospel where Jesus calls disciples to him to teach them (8:34; 9:33; 10:42).⁵² 'These scenes are constituted by a three-step rhetorical sequence in which Jesus summoning his disciples is the final step.'⁵³ Jesus announces his coming passion three times (8:31; 9:31; 10:32–4). Each announcement is followed by resistance from the disciples or behaviour that shows an understanding or mind-set contra to that of Jesus (8:32–3; 9:33–4; 10:35–41). Every time Jesus reacts with corrective teaching on true discipleship (8:34–9:1; 9:35–7; 10:42–5). This 'pattern extends to the way in which the corrective teaching is formulated.'⁵⁴ According to Mark, Jesus uses an antithetical aphorism in each of the teachings. This plays a key role in bringing out the paradox between Jesus's attitude and way to greatness (glory) and the common (men's)

49 Cf. Santos, *Slave of All*, 18, 251; Sabin, *The Gospel*, p. 96.

50 Bruce A. Bain, *Literary Surface Structures in Mark: Identifying Christology as the Purpose of the Gospel* (PhD thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), p. 197.

51 On discipleship, see Moloney, 'Writing a Narrative,' p. 105.

52 Vernon K. Robbins, 'Summons and Outline in Mark: The Three-Step Progression,' *Novum Testamentum* 23 (1981), pp. 97–114.

53 Robbins, 'Summons,' p. 97; cf. Tannehill, 'Reading it Whole,' p. 69.

54 Tannehill, 'Reading it Whole,' pp. 69–70.

assumptions on how things work. Each of these teachings concerns how to follow Jesus in search of being the greatest and first (9:35; 10:43, 44), or how to save your life and share in his glory and the coming of the kingdom (8:38, 9:1; cf. James and John's request for positions of preference in the coming glory, 10:37). Tannehill formulates this from another angle:

The three antithetical aphorisms following the three Passion announcements focus on two human concerns: security in face of death (i.e., saving one's life) and status or domination (i.e., being first). These two basic concerns are challenged, for the call of Jesus conflicts with both.⁵⁵

While Jesus emphasizes in his passion announcements what will happen to him physically, the antithetical aphorisms reveal and challenge fundamental inner human motivations. Jesus in this way teaches what the attitude of a disciple should be, contrasting how God thinks about the way to glory/greatness with how humans think about it.⁵⁶ Various incidents described in 8:22–10:52 can now be better understood in light of the antithetical aphorisms and the passion predictions. The disciples could not heal the boy with the deaf and dumb spirit because they were relying on their own power (and maybe seeking their own glory), instead of appealing to God by way of persistent prayer (9:14–29). The disciples tried to prevent the children from coming to Jesus because they didn't understand Jesus' receptiveness towards all people (1:13–16). The rich man could not inherit eternal life/enter the kingdom of God because his own performance and riches determined his security (10:24) and so it is with all rich people, except when God does what is impossible for men, which is to change the heart and mind (10:27). Barthimaeus understood the authority of Jesus over his blindness (to do what is impossible for men), the grace of God personified in Jesus, and the receptiveness of Jesus. Therefore, despite rebukes from the crowd, he persisted in crying out for mercy from the one sent by God, the Son of David promised in the Old Testament (10:46–53). Barthimaeus understood that Jesus had come to serve. This contrast between the way of God and the way of humans can therefore be expected in Jesus's third teaching on discipleship (10:42–5).

55 Tannehill, 'Reading it Whole', p. 70.

56 Mark 8:33; Cf. Santos, *Slave of All*, p. 208.

The Meaning of the *διάκον*- Word Group in Mark

John N. Collins's theory about the meaning of the *διάκον*- word group, especially in 10:45, can now be evaluated in light of the context of the Gospel and in particular 8:1–10:52. Our analysis of this context calls into question Collins' finding that *διάκον*- word group never expresses loving service. It is important to establish the unity of Mark 8–10 in order to determine which potential meaning of the *διάκον*- word group was most likely in the mind of the author and readers when they wrote and read Mark 10:42–5.

As argued above, various researchers point out that Mark 8–10 is a deliberately structured narrative. Breytenbach argues that Mark is an episodic narrative.⁵⁷ Each episode forms a unit and the parts should be read in the light of the whole and the whole in the light of the parts. The structure of Mark has a three-level repetitive form. Each of the three levels has three parts. The different corresponding parts are linked by their contents and by corresponding words. The three parts of the third level seems to be the summation of the previous parts.⁵⁸ Mark 8–10 is bound together by two inclusions. The themes of the inclusions are repeated in Jesus's words and deeds in the narrative between the different parts of the three levels. This closely knit structure is illustrated in Figure 1.

The structure may be explained as follows:

- Mark builds his narrative repetitively (A,A,A,B,B,B,C,C,C).
- What is described in Mark 8–10 is the attitude of a disciple of Jesus Christ. This attitude is ultimately described as being a *διάκονος* and a *δοῦλος*, that is, to serve and not expecting to be served (A,A,A).
- This attitude is further described by Jesus' words of compassion (B¹) and his deeds of compassion (B²).
- Jesus provides the ultimate description of this attitude by announcing his death three times (C,C,C).
- Compassion forms an inclusion through the description of Jesus's compassion for the hungry crowd (8:2) and Barthimeus's cry for mercy (10:46), through which he shows his faith in the compassion of Jesus.
- The theme of compassion is also repeated in the body of the passage, with Jesus receiving underserving people and healing the sick (B¹ and B²; 8:22; 9:14; 9:36).

57 Breytenbach, 'The Gospel of Mark', pp. 1–21.

58 Cilliers Breytenbach, 'Narrating the Death of Jesus in Mark: Utterances of the Main Character, Jesus', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 105 (2014), pp. 153–68, at p. 162.

- Jesus’s suffering and death are pictured as the ultimate compassionate service (A,A,A; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33).
- Mark 10:45 describes Jesus’s attitude as one that serves (διακονέω), but the verse combines all three elements of the structure. The attitude of a διάκονος (A: The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve), the compassion (B: to give his life as ransom *for many*) and his coming suffering and death (C: to give his life as ransom).

If this structure is accepted, it serves as the first very strong indication that the meaning in which Mark uses the διακον- word group must be determined with thorough consideration of this whole, according to Breytenbach’s theory of the episodic narrative.⁵⁹

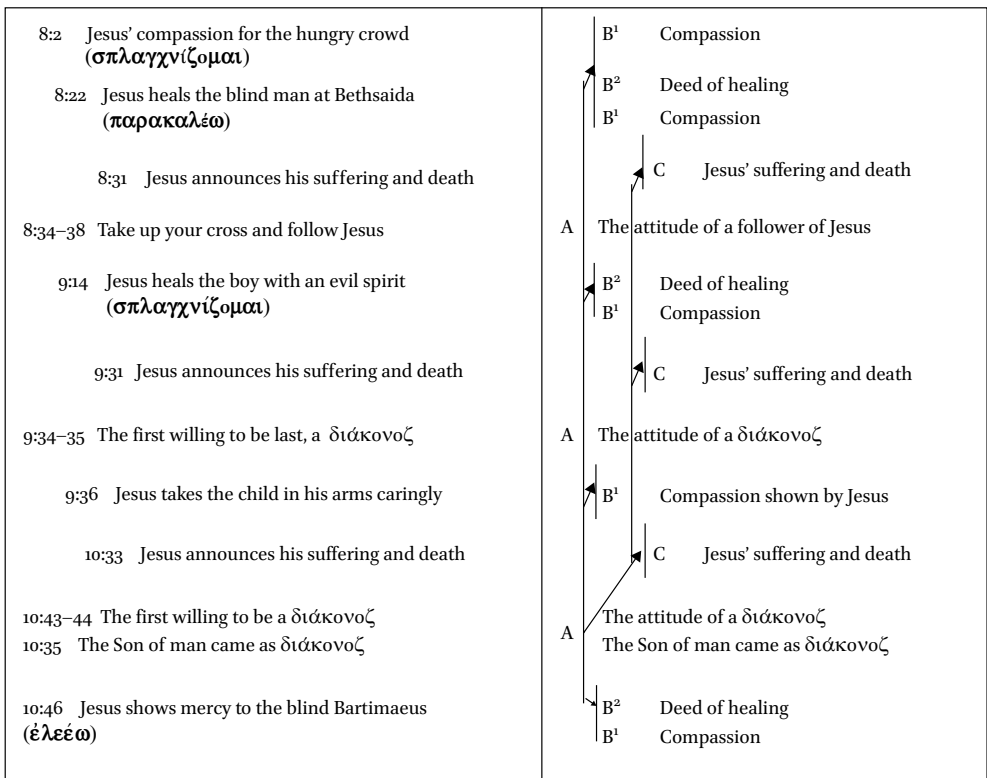


FIGURE 1 Schematic presentation of the structure of Mark 8–10

59 Breytenbach, ‘The Gospel of Mark’, pp. 5–7.

The second indication of a unitary structure in Mark 8–10 is of semantic nature. The first teaching of Jesus on discipleship is linked to the last one by the two words ἀντάλλαγμα and λύτρον. In 8:37, Jesus argues that if somebody save his life by winning the world, he will lose it. And then he asks the question: ‘What shall a man give as ransom (ἀντάλλαγμα) for his life?’ The suggested answer is that he has nothing to give. Jesus, according to 10:45, will give the ransom (λύτρον) for many. Breytenbach says about these verses:

In the narrative sequence, Mark 10:45 must be understood in the light of previous utterances of the main character on giving one’s life. In the light of his utterances in 8:36 and 37, it is fair to argue that Jesus as Son of Man in Mark announces to give his life as λύτρον for many, because at the final judgment men and women have nothing that they can give as ἀλλαγμα for their lives.⁶⁰

The second teaching on discipleship is linked to 10:45 by the διάκον- word group as has been indicated above. From this semantic argument it follows that Jesus’ teaching on διακονία should be read in light of the two previous teachings.

To determine the meaning in which Mark uses the διάκον- word group, the third important aspect is to look at the three other places in the Gospel where the words are used. In Mark 1:12–13, as part of a very short description of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, it is said that the angels ministered unto him (διακονέω). R.T. France says about this verse: ‘οἱ ἄγγελοι διηκόνουν αὐτῷ supplies the opposite side to the hostility of Satan and the animals. Jesus is not alone in his conflict’.⁶¹ Edwards writes: ‘Although God leads Jesus into the test in the wilderness – as he leads Mark’s Roman readers – God does not abandon either Jesus or them in it. The imperfect tense of the Greek verb for ‘attended’ indicates that the angels ministered to Jesus not at the end of the test (so Matt 4:11), but throughout the forty days.⁶² The emphasis is on the hostile environment and the two opposing sides – Satan and the animals against Jesus and the angels. The διακονία of the angels was focused on supporting Jesus in his temptation, caring for Him and providing in his needs. It can be read as a loving care.

The second passage is Mark 1:31. Jesus heals Simon’s wife’s mother and she gets up and ministers to them. France states:

60 Ibid.

61 R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2002), p. 87.

62 J.R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2002), p. 42.

The completeness of the cure is emphasised by the clause *καὶ διηκόνει αὐτοῖς*; no period of convalescence was needed. While *διακονέω* has a wide range of meaning, in this context its basic sense of domestic provision seems most likely; she fulfilled what would have been the expected role of the mother-in-law in the family home, by serving up refreshments.⁶³

The emphasis is not on the service, but the *διάκον*- word group is used again to describe an action in which somebody provides for the needs of others. This ministry could be out of love or thankfulness.

The third place in which the word group is used is Mark 15:41. Here it is said that there were women who ministered to Jesus. It is impossible to determine the precise meaning of the *διάκον*- word here. But if it is compared with Luke 8:3, where it is said that many women ministered to him from their substance, the possibility must be considered that the women cared for his physical needs of food, clothing, etc.

Mark's use of the *διάκον*- words in these passages does not exclude service as loving care for somebody. However, it is also important to look at the link between 10:45 and other parts of Mark. If it is accepted that the *καὶ* in 10:45 is expegetical, as Collins suggests, and that the giving of life as ransom therefore describes Jesus' *διακονία*, it is important to ask with what meaning *λύτρον* is used here. Breytenbach points to the link between 10:45 and 14:36:

In Mark's narrative, the main character announces his death (8,31; 9,31; 10,33–4), he takes it upon himself voluntarily (14,36) as something that has to happen by divine ordinance (8,31.33), and declares that as Son of Man he came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (10,45). When Jesus identifies the bread with his body and the wine in the cup with his blood, the utterance in Mark 10,45 is presupposed and the bread and cup metaphorically refers to his life, the life about to be shed for many (14,24).⁶⁴

Jesus' *διακονία* is a voluntary giving away of his life in obedience to his Father because that was what he came to do/was sent to do. The question could be asked why Mark added the last part of the sentence '*ἀντὶ πολλῶν*'. The answer can be found in the link that Breytenbach sees between 8:37 and 10:45: 'Because man can give nothing in return for his life (8,37), it is the Son of Man

63 France, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 108.

64 Breytenbach, 'Narrating the Death', p. 166.

who gives his life as a ransom for many (10,45).⁶⁵ Jesus' *διακονία* is therefore done for the many that follow him but who have nothing to give in return for their lives.

In his teaching Jesus draws a comparison between the way in which the rulers of the Gentiles become the first among their followers as opposed to the way in which the disciples (ἐν ὑμῖν) become great (μέγας) and the first (πρῶτος). He then gives the reason (καὶ γὰρ) or grounds for his teaching (10:45). Mark 10:45 therefore describes the way Jesus will become great and first, that is the Son of Man whom they will see 'seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven' (14:62).

To become great and first, the disciples should behave in a certain way because of the goal of the Son of Man's coming to earth (10:45). The behaviour of the rulers of the Gentiles is opposed to how the disciples should behave and to the goal of Jesus' mission.⁶⁶ The opposite of the way of the rulers is a *διάκονος* among the followers of Jesus and a *δοῦλος* of all. Being a *διάκονος* and a *δοῦλος* is compared to the way of Jesus, which is to serve (*διακονῆσαι*) and not to be served (*διακονηθῆναι*). The rulers of the Gentiles are convinced that they should lord it over other people and exercise authority over them to become great and first. The attitude of Jesus contrasts with that of the rulers. The way to glory and power, the way to the coming kingdom, is through obedience until death. Therefore when Jesus describes the goal of his coming, he says that he came to give his life as ransom for many (10:45).

A ransom was paid to free slaves, captives in war, or the bodies of people killed in war and taken by the enemy.⁶⁷ When did Jesus give his life as ransom? It was when he came as a baby, during his whole life on earth and, ultimately, on the cross. He lived in perfect obedience, withstanding all the temptations from Satan in the wilderness (1:12, 13) and during his life.⁶⁸ Ultimately he willingly went to Jerusalem to be crucified because that was part of the charge that the Father gave him. Mark does not go so far as to describe Jesus's life and death as substitutionary atonement, but the necessity (δεῖ; 8:31; 9:11) of his passion, his urging of the disciples to take up their cross and follow him, and the

65 Ibid.

66 Max Wilcox, 'On the ransom saying in Mark 10:45c, Matthew 20:28c', in *Geschichte, Tradition, Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), pp. 173–86, at p. 176; Clarke, *A Pauline Theology*, p. 65.

67 Joel Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), p. 749.

68 Bernard Combrink, 'Salvation in Mark', in *Salvation in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 33–66.

emphasis on the impossibility for man to save himself, informs the reader of the meaning of the ransom. The freedom he brings with the ransom of his life is illustrated by the different healings, but also by his teaching – which could free people of fear, conflict and lording it over each other. Jesus’s way to glory and kingship went through serving his father and serving people.⁶⁹ Serving people was an intrinsic part of serving his Father. As has been made clear, an intrinsic part of the disciples’ following of Jesus was being receptive to all (including children and beggars, e.g., Barthimaeus) and having compassion for those in need. ‘Disciples are called to transform their thirst for power and to accept the same type of glory as Jesus: that of the cross.’⁷⁰ This type of glory comes via being a *διάκονος* and a *δοῦλος* (10: 42–3). Alberto de Kaminouchi continues: ‘Two metaphors from the practice of slavery, *δοῦλος* and *λύτρον*, play a central role in the message of these verses.’⁷¹ Marcus says that *λύτρον*, because of the slave imagery in 10:43–5, points to the freeing of slaves.⁷² The strong emphasis on following Jesus and its positive results confirm that his whole life, not only his death on the cross, served as a *λύτρον* for many.⁷³ Those who follow him will be ready to leave everything and enter the kingdom of God (be freed).

Conclusion

The *διάκον*- word group in Mark describes:

- service to other people as envoy of God/Jesus
- service out of compassion and mercy for the needs of others
- service that is receptive even of people like children and beggars
- service with the authority that God gives to those who are prepared to lose their lives for Jesus and his words
- service that is void of self-interest and strive for honour among men
- service that is performed in expectation of the honour and glory that God gives.

69 Santos, *Slave of All*, pp. 207–8.

70 Alberto de M. Kaminouchi, *But it is Not So Among You: Echoes of Power in Mark 10.32–45* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), p. 206.

71 Kaminouchi, *But it is Not So*, p. 118.

72 Marcus, *Mark*, p. 749.

73 Andrew Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology: A Christological Foundation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 214–22.

From these findings it is clear that the translation of 10:45 by Collins and Hentchell is much too narrow to express the meaning of the διάκον- word group in Mark.⁷⁴ It recognizes only the fact that the word group expresses the διάκονος as an envoy. The other facets shown to be part of the meaning of the word group in Mark should also, as far as possible, be expressed in the translation. It is clear that compassion and mercy are also integral parts of the meaning of the word group in Mark. The translation to English can therefore not be too specific and should leave room for interpretation from the context of Mark. The ESV translation of 10:45 may be followed: 'For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Collins concludes that the διάκον- word group never expresses loving service; but this does not present the full picture. Kari Latvus says: 'in most of the cases Collins' view pushes the interpretation too much and is too mechanical'.⁷⁵ It has been shown that an integral part of Jesus's motivation for his διακονία was his compassion towards people. Therefore, obedience to God and love towards other people can never be separated in the motivation for διακονία. In Mark, caring for other people is never the only and primary motivation for διακονία, although may be part of the motivation.

74 'The Son of Man has not come to have tasks carried out for himself but to carry out a task himself' (cf. Collins, *Diakonia Studies*, p. 26).

75 Latvus, 'The Paradigm Challenged', p. 149.