

Was Jesus really a carpenter?

Thoughts from a life in building

Richard Noble points out that in his teaching Jesus frequently uses examples from the general construction industry rather than carpentry, and argues that it is much more likely that Jesus was what we would today call a general builder. Richard goes on to illustrate from his own experience in construction the challenges that Christians face in the nitty-gritty of daily life, and the solutions Jesus provides.

What was Jesus doing in the years before his public ministry? Tradition has it that he was simply a carpenter, working with his father, Joseph. This tradition is deeply entrenched and celebrated by a wide body of paintings, hymns, songs, poems and other popular writings. However, the evidence is

pretty slim, being based on just two mentions, where the Greek word *tekton* was translated by William Tyndale in the 16th century as ‘carpenter’. Virtually every subsequent English language translation has followed suit. “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of

James and Joses and Judas and Simon ...?” (Mark 6:3) and “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?” (Matt 13:55)¹

Wood was a scarce commodity in Galilee, and would have been used very



J.E. Millais, *Christ in the House of His Parents ('The Carpenter's Shop')* (1849–50), Tate Britain