



Mark's Pastoral Response to the Needs of the Flock

1. Mark addresses the reality of suffering



With Christian's as the scapegoat for Nero's fire and under direct attack now by Rome, Mark's task was the projection of Christian faith in the context of suffering and martyrdom. So Mark's gospel spoke to the situation of the Christian community in Nero's Rome.

- *Reduced to a catacomb experience, the read of the Lord who was driven deep into the wilderness (Mark 1:12). Only Mark records that there in the wilderness, Jesus was with the wild beasts (Mark 1:13). This held special significance to those who had to face the wild beasts in the arena.*
- *In Mark these Christians found that nothing they could suffer from Nero was alien to the experience of Christ.*
- *Like them, Christ had been misrepresented to the people and falsely accused (Mark 3:21-30).*

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1. Mark addresses the reality of suffering, cont.



- *In Mark, Jesus speaks openly of the persecution that could be expected in the Christian life. He referred to the “those who have no root in themselves” but endure for a while; then when affliction or persecution arises on account of the world, immediately they fall away” (Mark 4:17).*
- *When Jesus promises His followers “houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands” only Mark adds the qualification “with persecutions (Mark 10:30).*
- *Jesus speaks of cross bearing, a literal experience of Mark’s readers a literal experience of Jesus as well. Tacitus the historian confirms this reality. (Mark 15:15-20)*
- *The threat of such treatment could move a man to deny his Christ. In Mark, he learns that he could save his life only through denial in order to experience recognition of Christ at His return at the last day as sovereign Judge, (Mark 8:34-38)*

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2. Mark addresses the reality of betrayal



- *And they recognized the experience of betrayal from within a circle of intimate friends. It was sobering to recollect that one of the twelve had been “Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him” (Mark 3:19).*
- *Jesus did not withhold the cruel truth that brother would betray brother, and the father his child, and children their parents, and his followers would be hated by all men because they represent Christ. Precisely in this situation, they would bear witness for Him. (Mark 13:1-13)*

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3. Mark addresses the requirement of discipleship



- *Jesus foresees that others who heard the word, “but the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things” would prevent the gospel from being effective in their lives (Mark 4:19).*
- *Note the fulfillment of these truths in a man of great wealth turned away from him when he learned of the cost of discipleship (Mark 10:17-22).*
- *And later Jesus’ own disciples fled from Him (Mark 14:41-52, 66-72). In critical situations, unfaithfulness and betrayal always threaten the life of the Church from within.*
- *In crucial statements on discipleship brought together by Mark, Jesus made it clear that what He demanded was a radical abandonment of life in response to a call to martyrdom. (Mark 8:34-38)*

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4. Mark addresses the sovereignty of Christ



- *Mark’s gospel leaves no doubt as to Christ’s sovereign authority and the proper response to the call of discipleship.*
- *When called by Christ, men had left family, home and profession (Mark 1:17, 20, 2:14, 10:28)*
- *Jesus answered the question of Caesar’s authority when He was asked about payment of taxes to Rome. His answer, “Render unto Caesar . . . and unto God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17) imposed significant limits to the authority and dignity of Caesar.*
- *A Christian could not acclaim “Caesar is Lord” and also render unto God “the things that are God’s”.*

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4. Mark addresses the sovereignty of Christ, cont.



- *When Jesus stood before Caesar's representative, Pilate marveled at His dignity. Christ was delivered over to be scourged and crucified. But when the centurion saw how Jesus died, he exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God". (Mark 15:39)*
- *This acknowledgement by the centurion was validated by Jesus raising from the dead on the third day (Mark 16:6-7). Jesus vindication through the resurrection provided Roman Christians with the pledge of their own vindication.*
- *In the command to share these joyful tidings with the disciples (Mark 16:7), they found hope to continue their mission activity even in the face of imperial opposition.*

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5. Mark addresses the reality of Christ's forgiveness and the pattern of human forgiveness



- *The specific reference to Peter meant that the way was open for restoration to one who had denied his Lord (Mark 14:66-72).*
- *Here was a basis of forgiveness for those who had denied they were Christians when brought before the tribunals of Rome.*
- *Because of the critical situation of their betrayal, false accusations, persecution, sometimes denial and pronouncements of death, Mark brings the sweet truth of forgiveness from the Savior even against our most heinous betrayals of Him.*
- *These realities were no doubt born out of John Mark's own history of denial and restoration.*