

THRU THE BIBLE SYNTHESIS
"Part XXXVII: Mark - Becoming Productive In A Spiritually Hostile Environment"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) On Thursday morning, I received a telephone call from a Christian who was very distressed. She had been reeling from a crisis of trying to stand for the truth when doing so put a barrier between her and a formerly close "Christian friend." It seems that this friend had found a book in a Christian **bookstore** here in Connecticut promoting one's being Gay **and** a "Good Christian", and had used it as an authority to start **practicing** a lesbian lifestyle!

Amazingly, Romans chapter 1 in the Christian Bible exposes both homosexuality and lesbianism as condemned by God. The earthly half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, Judas, in his Epistle of Jude, verse seven reminds **Christians** that God rained fire and brimstone down on Sodom and Gomorrah because of their gay lifestyles! He there states that this destruction is an "example" of God's "vengeance of eternal fire" for such sin!

This believer was distraught at finding that her Christian friend had slid by the wayside to the point that there seemed to be no real space left for continued fellowship with her!

Problem: what does a believer do to handle the inner ache of losing a friend to such a sin when separation from such a person is a "must" if one is to retain a godly walk in Christ?! (1 Cor. 5:11)

(2) Many at Nepaug Church over the years have had to face taking Christian stands in the workplace, in their homes, in even areas of Christian fellowship like Bible studies, churches, etc. simply because not doing so would have compromised their Christian walk. Some have even suffered the loss of formerly close friends or finances as a result!

If doing and believing what is Biblical costs, and drains one, and there is no way for him or her to escape having to take the stand and even suffer persecution, how can he COPE?!

(We turn to the "Need" section of the sermon . . .)

Need: "I function in an environment that is hostile to my Biblical beliefs, it's an irreparably 'no win', draining situation and there is no way for me to escape it! How can I be PRODUCTIVE there?!"

- I. **Throughout the Old Testament, God's institutions of men consistently failed to COUNTER the evil in the world about them:**
 - A. Though God created the world and set man up as His deputy, sin deposed him, and Satan became ruler on earth, Gn. 1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4.
 - B. The Lord renewed history through the Noahic flood, Gen. 6:1-9:7.
 - C. Yet, Noah's descendant, Nimrod, began an apostasy opposing God's rule on earth, Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9; Rev. 12:1-3.
 - D. God thus chose Abraham to start a nation to check his sin, Gn. 12:1-3.
 - E. Yet, the Old Testament records not only that nation, Israel's repeated failure to curb Nimrod's error, but her tendency to be corrupted by it in spite of God's discipline to the contrary, Gn. 12:4-Malachi.
- II. **Thus, when the New Testament Messiah came only to be rejected by that world, His FOLLOWERS HAD to face PERSECUTION:**
 - A. When Messiah arrived to offer His Kingdom, sinners **rejected** Him, so Christ postponed installing that reign, Matthew 1:1-12:50.
 - B. Consequently, God's program turned to discipling **individuals** living **WITHIN** the world's **rejecting** environments, **even** in **ORGANIZED CHRISTENDOM** environments, cf. the sermon notes on Matthew.
 - C. Life in a world that opposes their **Lord** leaves **Christians themselves HAVING** to face hostility and persecution, cf. Jn. 15:18-25.
- III. **Mark's Gospel guides CHRISTIANS on following their Lord's productive SERVANTHOOD pattern in a HOSTILE environment:**
 - A. Mark wrote his Gospel for **Christians** facing **Roman persecution**:
 1. Clement of Alexander reported that Mark penned his Gospel at the urgings of Roman Christians who needed pastoral guidance to face Nero's persecution, Wyc. Bib. Com., p. 988; Lane, Mark, p. 12-14.
 2. This witness is affirmed by internal evidences in Mark's Gospel:
 - a. The presence of Latinisms in Mark reveals his readers to be **Romans**, *Ibid.*, Wycliffe Bible Commentary.
 - b. Mark assumes prior acceptance of Jesus' **credentials** by **Christians** as he **omits** Christ's **first 30 years** of life, *Ibid.*

- c. Mark's Gospel **alone** identifies Christ with **persecuted Romans**: he notes that Jesus was "driven" into the wilderness like they were driven into the catacombs, and that He faced wild animals there as **they** did under **Nero**, Mk. 1:12, Ibid., Lane, p. 15!

B. The **productive example** Rome's Christians were to heed was Christ who was persecuted in a massive **assignment** as **God's SERVANT**:

1. Mark's Gospel builds to a climax by Jesus revealing His identity as the Son of God, the Messiah, Mark 1:1-8:26, Ibid., Lane, p. 1.
2. However, as **soon** as that identity is **verbalized** by Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah (Mk. 8:29), Jesus **begins** to inform the disciples the previously **unthinkable** truth that Messiah would suffer persecution and death and be resurrected, 8:31-32!
3. At Mark 10:45 where Jesus reveals He was come not to be served, but to serve as man's sin bearer, the Gospel **shifts** from Jesus' service in **life** to preparing to serve God by **death** to **REDEEM** man **PRODUCTIVELY**, Ryrie. Study Bible, KJV, Intr. Mark, p. 1397.
4. Thus, as patterned by Jesus, believers in Rome were to **adjust** to their persecution by **denying** self rule (taking up their cross) to **face persecution** as God's **SERVANTS** in the **hope** that **God** would make their **suffering** eternally rewarding, Mk. 8:34-38.

IV. **Mark's contribution to the "thread of redemption" is the insight that God USES unavoidable persecution for ETERNAL PRODUCTIVITY by means of the believer's SERVANTHOOD!**

***Application:** If we experience painful, unavoidable persecution, to be productive, (1) make **SURE** we are a child of God by faith in Christ for salvation from sin (1 Jn. 1:12-13). (2) As a believer, fellowship with God by (a) confession of sin (1 Jn. 1:9) and (b) rely upon the Holy Spirit for the power (Gal. 5:16-23) to (c) obey Scripture, 1 Jn. 2:1-6. (3) Since all godly people will face unjust persecution for their beliefs and actions of righteousness (2 Tim. 3:12), **WHEN** it arrives, (a) at first sensibly try avoiding unnecessary trouble by withdrawing from confrontations, 2 Tim. 3:5b. (b) However, if this is not possible, instead of dismay, by The Holy Spirit's power, **BEAR** it as God's assignment with a **SERVANT'S** heart, 2 Tim. 1:8. Trust God to accomplish great **ETERNALLY LASTING** things in the process, Mk. 10:42-45; 1 Pet. 4:12-19.*

***Lesson:** Instead of unproductive dismay, believers should **FACE** unavoidable persecution as God's assignment and bear it with a **SERVANT'S** attitude so that **GOD** can make the experience productive.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Just before the Axis powers of Italy conquered Ethiopia in 1936, a group of missionaries had led a few of the Wallamo tribesmen to Christ, and left them with two booklets in their native tongue: one was the eight-page pamphlet of selected Bible verses, God Hath Spoken and the other was the Gospel of Mark.

The Italians tried forcing them to recant by torture. One man had his beard plucked out by the roots as had Jesus. Others were dangled by their arms tied behind their backs for hours in trees until there they had no feeling left. Yet, through it all, they had an eight-page pamphlet and the Gospel of Mark to sustain them during their darkest hours.

Upon returning to the Wallamos after the war and reporting on the results of this suffering, Ray Davis in his book, Fire on the Mountains, reported: "**Those who cannot read have memorized what they have heard others read, and have passed it on. They have obeyed what they do know. And the Holy Spirit has proven able to meet their needs in this realm as in so many others.**"

Ray wrote how one man, Ginja, during the Italian occupation. He had put his Bible of Mark's Gospel in an earthen jar, and one night was roused by what was a vision of the Lord Jesus saying to him, "Ginja, you place your Bible in a clay pot and you just rest? You do not read my Word? Why have you hidden your Bible in your clay pot? I will ask you about that someday if you do not take it out and read it!" Frightened at this event, Ginja decided to live for God and do his service, took his Bible out, started to read it and to begin witnessing the gospel widely to all he knew. He eventually pastored a church of Wallamo believers, Ibid., p. 167.

This group of people grew from a handful to 20,000 during the time of World War II until the missionaries returned. They grew under persecution with an eight-page pamphlet of selected Bible verses and their own copy of the **Gospel of Mark!** (Ibid., p. 161-162)

If we are persecuted and there is no relief, God wants us to turn to the Gospel of Mark and read and apply it as did the original martyrs in the persecution of Rome and as did the Wallamos of Ethiopia in World War II! He wants us to follow Jesus down the pathway of assigned servanthood for production!