

The Compassion of Christ in the Gospel of Mark: A Christological Study and Its Implications for Local Church Ministry

¹Steven Richard Dotulong, ²Art S. Thomas, ³Denni H. R. Pinontoan

^{1,2,3}Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Manado

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | Abstract |
| Received: | 7 July 2025 | This study aims to explore the compassion of Christ in the Gospel of Mark as a central aspect of Markan Christology and to trace its implications for local church ministry. In various pericopes of Mark, Jesus is portrayed not only as the one who suffers and redeems, but also as the Messiah who actively touches, heals, and restores the wounded and the marginalized. Using a qualitative approach and a library research method, this study analyzes key texts exegetically and interprets their theological and contextual significance. The findings indicate that Christ's compassion is not merely an emotional or human response, but a manifestation of divine authority and a concrete expression of God's saving mission. These insights call for a renewed ministry paradigm in the local church—one that is more compassionate, contextual, and transformative—so that the church may truly embody the face of Christ who cares deeply and acts redemptively in a broken world. |
| Revised: | 6 July 2025 | |
| Accepted: | 23 July 2025 | |
| Keywords: | | <i>The Compassion of Christ, Christology, Gospel of Mark, Local Church</i> |
| (*) Corresponding Author: | | stevenrdotulong@gmail.com |
| How to Cite: | | Dotulong, S., Thomas, A., & Pinontoan, D. (2025). The Compassion of Christ in the Gospel of Mark. <i>International Journal of Education, Information Technology, and Others</i> , 8(3.B), 109-116. Retrieved from https://jurnal.peneliti.net/index.php/IJEIT/article/view/12180 |

INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of contemporary biblical theology and church ministry, Christological discourse often centers around three major themes: the suffering of Christ, His sacrificial death on the cross, and the power of His resurrection. While these themes are indeed foundational and inseparable from the core of the Gospel, a theological framework overly focused on suffering and post-crucifixion triumph risks reducing the complexity of Jesus' personhood as portrayed in the Gospels. The modern church requires a more holistic rereading of the figure of Jesus—not merely as the Suffering Savior but as the Compassionate One who fully enters the realities of human pain and brokenness in everyday life.

One often-overlooked aspect of Christology is the compassion of Christ. In the context of the Gospel of Mark, compassion is not merely an emotional expression or human sympathy but rather a manifestation of divine authority that heals the broken, touches the untouchable, and saves the lost. Mark depicts Jesus not only as a teacher and healer but also as one who actively seeks out those suffering physically, socially, and spiritually (Katawal, 2018). In Mark's narrative, Jesus' compassion becomes a radical entry point into His messianic mission—a mission that embraces the totality of human suffering. Thus, failing to examine this compassion as a Christological category would strip Mark's Gospel of a vital dimension that binds narrative to messianic identity.

Previous studies have emphasized the pedagogical and ethical significance of Christ's suffering in the spiritual life of believers. For instance, Anjaya et al. (2021) highlight the role of Christ's suffering in shaping spiritual formation and resilient faith. Similarly, Oet (2017) views the suffering of Jesus as an ethical model for believers in facing rejection and injustice. However, these approaches tend to be reactive, focusing on how believers should imitate Christ in suffering, rather than exploring Christ's own active initiative in showing compassion toward those who suffer.

Moreover, there remains a significant gap in theological literature that explicitly connects Christ's compassion to His divine authority. Even when Siahaan (2023) mentions Jesus' loving attitude toward children as an act of compassion, he stops short of framing it within a comprehensive Christological structure, especially within the context of Mark's Gospel. In fact, Mark consistently presents Jesus' compassion as part of His self-revelation as the Messiah—transcending the exclusivity of Jewish religious law and reaching into the deepest vulnerabilities of the human condition. His encounters with the leper (Mark 1:40–45), the demon-possessed man (Mark 5), and the hungry multitudes (Mark 6:34) all demonstrate a compassion that is active, intentional, and rooted in divine mission.

Therefore, this study emphasizes that the compassion of Christ in Mark must not merely be interpreted as an emotional or ethical attribute but rather as an essential Christological component. It reveals not only “what Jesus felt,” but “who Jesus is” in relation to a wounded world (France, 2002; Wright, 2013). In Mark's Christology, Jesus is not just a moral teacher or prophetic healer but the very Son of God, whose compassion becomes a means of divine self-disclosure and redemptive restoration of creation.

The lack of emphasis on this dimension has concrete implications for today's church. Many local congregations risk falling into spiritually dry and relationally shallow forms of ministry—prioritizing structure and doctrine while failing to address the tangible suffering of people. In a world overwhelmed by collective trauma, structural poverty, violence, and social alienation, ministry that does not arise from Christ's compassion inevitably loses its relevance and transformative power.

The present pastoral context therefore calls for a renewed paradigm grounded in a deep theological understanding of Christ's compassion. The local church is summoned not only to proclaim the Gospel with words but to embody that compassion through healing and liberating action. By engaging the Christology of compassion in Mark's Gospel, this study aims to bridge the ancient text with contemporary pastoral challenges, so that the church may become a faithful reflection of the incarnate Christ who draws near, heals, and saves in contextually meaningful ways.

Accordingly, this paper focuses on an exegetical-theological exploration of the compassion of Christ in the Gospel of Mark. The findings are then interpreted in light of local church praxis, particularly in shaping ministry models

that are relevant, transformative, and deeply rooted in the compassionate character of the Messiah. Through this approach, it is hoped that a renewed ministry paradigm may emerge—one that speaks directly to the urgent needs of today’s world, a world longing not only for a truthful Christ but for a deeply caring one.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory-theological design, as developed within the qualitative research framework described by Creswell (2016). The primary focus lies in the narrative and thematic exploration of selected texts in the Gospel of Mark that portray the compassion of Christ, using exegetical methods and critical theological analysis. The main data source is the biblical text (the Gospel of Mark), analyzed through a historical-literary lens and biblical theology framework. Secondary data are drawn from contemporary theological literature, commentaries on the Gospel of Mark, and relevant peer-reviewed academic journals.

Data analysis follows an inductive process, beginning with the identification of compassion-related themes in the text and proceeding to connect them with Christological doctrines and the pastoral needs of today’s church. The validity of the research is ensured through source triangulation and critical dialogue with scholarly works in theological literature. As a result, the study aims not only to produce a robust theological understanding of Christ’s compassion in Mark but also to offer practical implications for local church ministry in contemporary contexts.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the research findings and discussion, it is important to emphasize that this study focuses on a narrative and theological exploration of selected texts in the Gospel of Mark that portray the compassion of Christ as an integral component of Markan Christology. The research also considers previous studies that have examined Christ’s suffering in the context of spiritual formation and pastoral ethics. However, these earlier works have not specifically addressed compassion as the theological foundation of Christ’s redemptive actions and ministerial mission. Therefore, the following discussion presents the key findings of this textual analysis and highlights their contextual and theological implications for local church ministry.

The Compassion of Christ as the Core of Messianic Identity in the Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark consistently portrays Jesus not only as the suffering Messiah who is ultimately crucified, but also as one who is deeply moved by compassion to act concretely amidst human suffering. The compassion of Christ in Mark is not presented merely as an emotional response, but as a dynamic and radical movement of divine love. In Mark 1:41, for example, Jesus heals the leper not simply as a demonstration of power, but because He is “moved with compassion.” A similar expression appears in Mark 6:34, where Jesus sees the

crowd as “sheep without a shepherd” and immediately begins to teach them, and again in Mark 8:2, where He expresses concern over the crowd’s hunger. These narratives illustrate that compassion was the driving force behind Jesus’ ministry, a tangible revelation of His divine character (France, 2002).

These stories place the compassion of Jesus not merely as a reaction to suffering but as a manifestation of His identity as the Messiah who brings total salvation. Compassion, therefore, is not secondary or optional in the ministry of Christ, but lies at the heart of Markan Christology. Jesus does not merely demonstrate compassion as a moral virtue; He embodies it as an expression of divine authority that reaches out, touches, and heals. In light of Mark’s theology, compassion is the language of God to a broken world—an incarnational act that embraces the rejected and uplifts the marginalized (Wright, 2013).

When compared with the study by Anjaya, Fernando, and Arifianto (2021), which emphasizes the suffering of Christ as part of the spiritual formation curriculum for believers, the Gospel of Mark goes further by highlighting Christ’s initiative in compassion prior to His suffering. Mark presents compassion not as the result of suffering, but as the very lifestyle of Christ from the beginning of His ministry. In this context, suffering is not the only channel of spiritual education, but rather one of the consequences of living in radical love. In other words, the compassion of Christ is the path that leads Him into suffering—not the other way around.

Moltmann (1993) argues that the suffering of God in Christ is not a sign of weakness but the highest form of active, participatory love. In Mark’s narrative, this is evident in Jesus’ deliberate choice to be present among sinners, the sick, and the demon-possessed—those typically cast aside by religious society. Rather than distancing Himself, Jesus enters their pain. This compassion becomes a Christological power that challenges prevailing conceptions of the Messiah as a militaristic ruler, replacing them with a Messiah who reigns through gentleness and solidarity. Such a reading enriches Christology by demonstrating that divine power is not expressed through domination, but through salvific presence.

Thus, compassion in the Gospel of Mark not only shapes the image of Jesus as a caring figure, but radically defines who He is—the Messiah who came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). This serves as a theological correction to narrow interpretations of Christ’s suffering solely as penal substitution. On the contrary, Christ’s compassion is the operative mode of His entire ministry. As Zaluchu (2017) rightly notes, the suffering of Christ is the embodiment of God’s solidarity with humanity, and in Mark, that solidarity is first expressed through compassion—even before the cross becomes a historical reality.

The Suffering of Christ and the Formation of Pastoral Ethics: From Imitation to Participatory Compassion

Oet (2017) argues that the suffering of Christ holds exemplary value in shaping the faithfulness and spiritual endurance of believers, particularly in facing humiliation, persecution, and injustice in real life. The suffering of Jesus is not

merely a historical moment of atonement, but a living narrative that compels believers to imitate His sacrifice and humility. This aligns with the findings of Siswantara (2020), who emphasizes that Christ's suffering has direct pastoral consequences for Christians: it invites them to confront the realities of life with hope and ethical integrity. Thus, the suffering of Christ is not solely a subject of spiritual contemplation but serves as a source of practical ethics that guide the direction of both individual and communal Christian living.

Nevertheless, within the perspective of the Gospel of Mark, spiritual formation does not end with passive imitation, but rather calls for active participation in Christ's compassionate mission. Jesus in Mark is not only a symbol of suffering but the initiator of restoration who deliberately enters into the pain of others. His compassion becomes a concrete summons for the church to transcend individualized spirituality and live out real social solidarity. This resonates with the insights of Anjaya, Fernando, and Arifianto (2021), who describe Christ's suffering as shaping a "formula for Christian life," one that demands unconditional love, forgiveness, humility, and a total willingness to sacrifice. Consequently, Christ's compassion cannot be separated from the dimension of spiritual formation that touches the social body of the faithful.

Furthermore, Christological discourse in Mark becomes deeply enriched by demonstrating that the compassion of Christ is an active expression of His divine identity. The church, therefore, must see suffering not merely as a test of faith, but as sacred space for encountering God's love in action. As Moltmann (1993) insists, the God revealed in the suffering of Christ is not distant or untouchable, but the God who suffers with humanity and lifts them from despair. In this light, the church is called not only to teach truth but to embody compassion that crosses social, structural, and religious boundaries—just as Jesus did for lepers, sinners, children, and the poor in the Gospel of Mark (France, 2002; Wright, 2013). Thus, the pastoral ethics formed from the suffering of Christ are incarnational, contextual, and restorative in nature.

Christological Implications for Local Church Ministry

The findings of this study affirm that the compassion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is inseparable from His identity as the Son of God. In His acts of healing, exorcism, teaching, and interactions with the socially marginalized, Jesus reveals that compassion is the central path through which He discloses Himself as the Messiah. Markan Christology does not merely depict Jesus as a suffering figure, but as one who actively restores the world through concrete acts of love. Thus, compassion is not simply a moral quality but an authoritative expression of the saving and healing presence of God in human history (France, 2002; Wright, 2013).

The theological implications of this truth are critical for local church ministry. When the church fails to recognize compassion as central to Christ's identity, ministry risks degenerating into ritualism or institutional routine. Many congregations become entangled in programmatic cycles while remaining blind to the real suffering around them. Moltmann (1993) underscores that the true God is

the One who suffers with humanity; therefore, the church as the body of Christ is called to be present in the world's wounds—not only proclaiming the Gospel with words but embodying it through acts of solidarity and restoration. A church that lives out the compassion of Christ will perceive suffering not as a problem to be solved but as sacred space for encountering the incarnate God.

Ministry grounded in Christological compassion demands a renewed and holistic paradigm. Church engagement must go beyond well-structured teachings and liturgies to address the contextual needs of the people—spiritually, emotionally, and socially. As noted by Anjaya et al. (2021), the suffering of Christ becomes a living curriculum that shapes love, perseverance, and humility in the believer's journey. The church is therefore called to become a tangible representation of this compassion through inclusive, empathetic ministry. In doing so, the local church may be transformed from a closed community into an open fellowship that manifests Christ in action: reaching out to the sick, embracing the outcast, and strengthening the broken (Oet, 2017; Siswantara, 2020; Zaluchu, 2017).

A Contextual and Transformational Paradigm of Ministry

As Anjaya, Fernando, and Arifianto (2021) have noted, the suffering of Christ carries a deeply formative value, shaping a spiritual framework for Christian living. Values such as love, prayer, forgiveness, humility, and perseverance become pillars in imitating the suffering yet obedient Christ. Within the context of the Gospel of Mark, these values are not merely spiritual ethics but form the root of Jesus' compassionate lifestyle as the Messiah. Mark portrays Jesus not only as one who teaches about love but as one who actively reaches out, touches, and heals—an expression of compassion that is deeply rooted in His Messianic identity (France, 2002; Wright, 2013).

Contemporary church ministry must therefore resist the tendency to rely solely on structural or cultural patterns that have become stagnant. Instead, ministry paradigms must be grounded in deep exegetical engagement with Scripture, especially the Markan narratives that reflect the incarnational love of God through tangible action. An incarnational Christology—where Jesus is present amid human suffering and acts with compassion—must serve as the foundation of ministry. This resonates with Moltmann's (1993) theological reflection that God is not distant and impersonal, but the God who suffers with humanity. True ministry, then, is that which dares to be present in the world's wounds—not merely in ritual or words but in solidarity and restorative action.

Therefore, local church ministry must be directed toward generating practices that are solidary, liberative, and healing. Ministry must not be reduced to moral instruction or liturgical performance; rather, it must become a living expression of Christ's compassionate presence in a wounded world. Such a church does not simply “teach love,” but truly becomes the living body of Christ, moving within a world that thirsts for the presence of a God who heals and restores. As Siswantara (2020) and Zaluchu (2017) emphasize, this is where church ministry

becomes transformational—not by the force of power, but through the power of love that serves.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the compassion of Christ in the Gospel of Mark constitutes a central expression of His Messianic identity. Mark presents Jesus as a divine figure who not only teaches love with words but also actively enters into human suffering—touching, healing, and restoring the broken. These compassionate actions are not peripheral but are the very manifestation of the Messiah’s authority, providing direct access to God’s presence for those marginalized socially, theologically, and existentially.

Unlike many existing studies that focus on Christ’s suffering as a pattern for spiritual formation or ethical example, this research elevates Christ’s compassion as a Christological foundation intimately bound to His redemptive mission. By positioning compassion as a core dimension of Markan Christology, the study calls the church to reread the Gospel not merely as a doctrinal text, but as a living pastoral map for contemporary ministry. Compassion, in this light, must not remain a moral ideal, but be embraced as a paradigm of ministry that fully engages the concrete realities of human life.

For the local church, the implications of this study offer a new direction for developing contextual, transformational, and incarnational ministry. The church is called to move beyond institutional patterns toward becoming a community that embodies the compassionate face of Christ. By responding to a wounded world through tangible acts of mercy and restoration, the church does not merely proclaim the Gospel in words—it lives out the Gospel through saving, healing, and redemptive action. This is the true face of Christ: faithful in word, and deeply caring in deed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anjaya, C. E., Pasaribu, N., & Napitupulu, L. (2021). Penderitaan Kristus dalam formasi spiritual yang mendidik orang percaya. *Jurnal Efata*, 8(1), 63–74.
- Berutu, M. (2020). Makna penderitaan Yesus di kayu salib (Eksegetis Lukas 23:33–43) dan refleksinya bagi umat Kristen masa kini. *Areopagus: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Teologi Kristen*, 18(2), 76–83. <https://doi.org/10.46965/ja.v18i2.332>
- Boland, B. J. (2011). *Intisari iman Kristen*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia.
- Brill, J. W. (2011). *Dasar yang teguh*. Bandung: Yayasan Kalam Hidup.
- Darmaputera, E. (2007). *Iman dan tantangan zaman*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia.
- France, R. T. (2002). *The Gospel of Mark (New International Greek Testament Commentary)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Gutrie, D. (2010). *Pengantar Perjanjian Baru Volume 1*. Surabaya: Momentum.
- Katawal, R. (2018). Jesus the compassionate healer in the Gospel of Mark. *Journal of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 8(1), 45–57.

- Limasaputra, A. D. (2018). Memandang penderitaan melalui perspektif the already and the not yet dari Rasul Paulus. *Veritas: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan*, 17(1), 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.36421/veritas.v17i1.305>
- Moltmann, J. (1993). *The crucified God: The cross of Christ as the foundation and criticism of Christian theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Murray, A. (1965). *Membina iman*. Bandung: Kalam Hidup.
- Oet, S. (2017). Teladan penderitaan Tuhan Yesus berdasarkan Matius 27:32–44. *Manna Rafflesia*, 4(1), 57–74. https://doi.org/10.38091/man_raf.v4i1.81
- Ryrie, C. C. (1966). *Teologi dasar*. Yogyakarta: ANDI.
- Siswantara, Y. (2020). Memaknai penderitaan Yesus dalam konsekuensi pastoral. *Epigraphe: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan Kristiani*, 4(1), 98–110. <https://doi.org/10.33991/epigraphe.v4i1.146>
- Wright, N. T. (2013). *Mark for everyone*. London: SPCK.
- Zaluchu, S. (2017). Penderitaan Kristus sebagai wujud solidaritas Allah kepada manusia. *Dunamis: Jurnal Penelitian Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani*, 2(1), 61. <https://doi.org/10.30648/dun.v2i1.129>