

THE CROSS BEFORE THE CROWN

Mark 8:27-9:1

No Pain, No Gain is a reality we encounter in many different areas of our lives. Whether it be fitness, athletics, education, business or work projects around the house it often requires a certain amount of pain to achieve the desired gain. We constantly think in these terms to decide what we are and are not going to do. “Is the gain worth the pain?” The “gains” that we decide are worth the “pains” are what we value.

In this passage the disciples are confronted with this same question, “Is the gain worth the pain?”

JESUS QUESTIONS THE DISCIPLES (8:27-30)

Mark 8:27-30 (ESV)

²⁷ And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸ And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” ³⁰ And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

Caesarea Philippi is quite a ways north of the Sea of Galilee; Jesus and the disciples would have had a lot of time to talk. The popular opinions enumerated by the disciples were the same as those shared with Herod Antipas (6:14-16). What they have in common is that they all consider Jesus to be a prophet.

Peter acted as spokesman when He answered the question Jesus put to the disciples. Their recognition of Jesus as *the Christ* (Messiah) is encouraging – their spiritual blindness is beginning to lift. Just as the blind man saw clearly after the second touch (8:22-26) so now the disciples are seeing after the second miraculous feeding (8:19-21).

Why, then, did Jesus strictly charge them to tell no one He is the Messiah?

First century messianic expectations were nationalistic and political; the people were longing for a liberator and leader who would restore Israel’s sovereignty and prosperity. Jesus was concerned not to play into these expectations; He did not want to incite a popular uprising to make Him ruler by force. We may already have seen glimpses of Jesus’ concern in His abrupt dispersal of the crowds after both feeding miracles (6:45; 8:9-10).

In verses 31-33 Jesus revealed that God’s plan for Messiah and popular messianic expectations were very different.

JESUS REVEALS THE CROSS BEFORE THE CROWN (8:31-33)

Mark 8:31-33 (ESV)

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get

behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

The suffering, rejection, murder and resurrection that Jesus laid out as His future obviously did not fit the disciples’ expectations for the Messiah. Though the elders, chief priests and scribes would be the agents through whom Jesus’ suffering, rejection and murder would be accomplished it is God’s plan that these things occur to accomplish salvation through Messiah. Jesus was not describing the success of His enemies but the plan of God that will culminate in His resurrection from the dead.

He revealed to them that before the Crown there must be the Cross.

It is interesting to note the title by which Jesus referred to Himself in verses 31 and 38: *Son of Man*. This title comes from Daniel 7:13-14.

Daniel 7:13–14 (ESV)

¹³ “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Here is the promise of the Crown.

But contained in the Hebrew Scriptures was also the promise of the Cross.

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 (ESV)

13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely;

he shall be high and lifted up,

and shall be exalted.

14 As many were astonished at you—

his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,

and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

15 so shall he sprinkle many nations;

kings shall shut their mouths because of him;

for that which has not been told them they see,

and that which they have not heard they understand.

1 Who has believed what he has heard from us?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,

and like a root out of dry ground;

he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,

and no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by men;

a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?

9 And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Without the Cross there is no payment/forgiveness for sin. Without the Cross there would be no kingdoms for the Crown since all mankind would be in the Lake of Fire because all have sinned.

The Cross had to come before the Crown.

Praise Jesus He was willing to do the Father's will and suffer the Cross for us.

The way of the Cross not only affected Jesus, but all those who would follow Him. This He spelled out in verses 8:34-9:1.

FOLLOWING JESUS TO THE CROSS (8:34-38)

Mark 8:34-38 (ESV)

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Let us keep this passage in its first century context. Jesus is dealing with the implications of what it means for the disciples and any members of the crowd to follow Him from here on. To follow Jesus was to suffer, be rejected and potentially be killed along with Him.

Those who stick with Jesus may lose their physical lives, but they gain eternal life because Jesus is life, forgives sins and imparts life that will never end. Those who value their physical life and would be ashamed to be associated with Jesus when He is rejected by their religious and political leaders will prolong their earthly lives, but forfeit the spiritual life Jesus gives. They will not have a place in the Millennial Kingdom.

As one commentator expresses it:

What Jesus calls for here is thus a radical abandonment of one's own identity and self-determination, and a call to join the march to the place of execution follows

*appropriately from this. Such 'self-denial' is on a different level altogether from giving up chocolates for Lent. 'It is not the denial of something to the self, but the denial of the self itself.'*¹

With the recognition that Jesus is the Christ has come the further recognition that their journey will not be what they thought. But it will culminate in the power and glory of the Messianic Kingdom.

A GLIMPSE OF THE CROWN (9:1)

Mark 9:1 (ESV)

And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

I think this foretaste of the Kingdom was graciously given to encourage and strengthen the faith of those who will make the decision to follow Jesus to the Cross.

THINGS TO PONDER

Fulfilled Prophecy

In this passage we have Jesus plainly predicting His rejection, death and resurrection on the third day. Isaiah 52-53, written in the 8 century B.C. clearly predicted the suffering, rejection, death and resurrection of one who would die for the trespasses of the people.

Specific prophecies such as these and others are powerful evidence that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Jesus suffered death in our place; He was our substitute. All our sin was placed on Him on the Cross where God the Father punished our sin. Jesus rose on the third day overcoming death. Our sin will be punished. Either we will bear the punishment of our sin in the Lake of Fire for eternity or we can accept by faith the gracious gift of Jesus' bearing the punishment for us.

God loves you and desires a restored relationship with you. Jesus is the only way to restore your relationship with God. Trust in Jesus today and He will give you life that will never end.

The Key to Spiritual Transformation

While the primary application of this passage was to the original hearers, this passage continues to be relevant in those cultures where following Jesus is prohibited by law and tradition. Those who come to faith in such contexts do so knowing full well what it might cost them, but being fully convinced that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

Many of us came to faith in families and communities that sought our salvation. We have not suffered significantly for following Jesus. That does not make our faith any less genuine.

¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 340.

Whether persecuted or not, Jesus' call to deny ourselves, pick up our cross (symbol of death to self) and follow Him remains the key to spiritual transformation. The salvation of the Cross is not only to deliver us from the punishment of but the practice of sin. God is working to reform us to be like Jesus. We must surrender control of our lives to Jesus and yield our will to His.

From this position we are in place to be transformed through the Word, the Holy Spirit, prayer, worship and service.