

# No Pain! No Gain!

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No Pain! No Gain! That was the mantra that I heard repeatedly as a young man lifting weights at the Y.M.C.A. I can still vividly remember my friends crying out those words as I strained to do another repetition of bicep curls or attempted one more rep on the bench press. The encouragement that I received from likeminded friends helped instill in me a passion for a sport that I've continued to enjoy for over twenty-five years.

Pain has been something that I've also experienced on a ministerial level. Unfortunately, I have not been the only one to experience this phenomenon. I have talked to godly men who have known the scars of ministry that have been afflicted upon them from within their own ranks. It is to these compatriots that I will address my words of encouragement so that they might better understand the gain that God brings in the midst of pain.

First, let us now look at the life of our Servant/Savior who addresses this issue in Mark 8. He asks His disciples the question, "Who do men say that I am?" in verse 27. Jesus doesn't ask this question because He doesn't know the answer; rather, He wants to give some new information about His person and work to the disciples. The first point that we should know is that Jesus desires us to understand His person and His work. Many in Jesus' generation didn't fully understand who He was and what He came to do. They identified Him as a prophet or a miracle worker (like John the Baptist or Elijah). Jesus is not satisfied with this answer so He emphatically asks His disciples "but who do you say that I am?" It is intriguing that when Peter speaks for the twelve he says, "You are the Christ." Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah. Does Peter give the title "Christ" because he is thinking about ruling and reigning with Jesus in the kingdom? I think so (see Mark 9:30-34). Jesus doesn't elaborate upon His Messiahship but rather His sufferings as the Son of Man (Mark

8:30-3 1). Jesus is desirous that His servants understand that His person and work would involve suffering.

Second, we must understand that suffering precedes glory. Mark 8:31a says, "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things." Going back to our weightlifting motif we could say "No Pain, No Gain!" Our Lord predestines us to be like Him (Rom. 8:29). We are not only to know "the power of His resurrection," but also "the fellowship of His suffering." Peter is commonly believed to be the source of Mark's information for his Gospel. He is the one who attempts to thwart the Lord from going to the cross (Mark 8:32), yet he also is the one who later would learn the concept that suffering precedes glory. He writes in 1 Pet. 4:12,13, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." This same apostle writes these words to his fellow elders, "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed (1 Pet. 5: 1)." He then proceeds to exhort the elders to be faithful to their calling "and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away (1 Pet. 5:4)." Brethren, we must persevere through the suffering with the hope that the glory will come! The apostle Paul concurs with Peter when he writes in Rom 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

The third observation that I want to make from Mark 8 is that we shouldn't resist the cross because it is part of God's plan for us. Peter was rebuked by our Lord because he wanted the glory without first suffering. Jesus shows that this thinking is Satanic in nature and worldly in practice (Mark 8:33). Peter again would write later, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps (1 Pet. 2:21)." The cross is first introduced

in Mark's Gospel in Mark 8:34 which says, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." The identification of the cross in the first century meant extreme suffering and death. The Scripture is clear that we must proclaim the message of the cross in our preaching (1 Cor. 1: 17) and manifest its power in our lives. Gal. 2:20 says, "I have been crucified (the perfect tense shows a completed action with continuing results) with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

The motif for this article "No Pain, No Gain" is "lifted" from my youngest son (Kenny, Jr.) who preached a message with this title from 1 Pet. 3:13-17 at the Youth Convention in Ohio. You see, God called him to preach the Gospel of Christ while I was going through a period of suffering. I can truly say that in my pain I've seen gain; therefore, we should earnestly strive to please our Servant/Savior who modeled for us that suffering precedes glory.

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