

Seems like every great spy movie has a chase scene where one car is pursuing another. Wherever the lead car goes the chase car follows. If the lead car winds through city streets then the chase car winds through the same city streets. If the lead car jumps a ditch then the chase car jumps the ditch. If the lead cars goes through a bunch of barrels then the chase car goes through the barrels. The chase car cannot afford to let the lead car do something they're not willing to do. They must follow at all costs.

Knowing who the lead car is then would be vitally important. There might be all sorts of cars on the road you don't want to follow. They won't lead you where you want to go. Nothing about a chase is easy, although in the movies they're necessary. We're chasing our leader, Jesus. He came before and he's leading. We are following. We want to be perfectly clear who he is so we know who to follow. We want to avoid all the other spiritual 'cars' we might be tempted to follow. Most of all we have to know that following won't always be easy.

Once Jesus was sure his disciples were clear on who he was he revealed himself more clearly to them. He was the one they were going to want to follow. He made clear for them and us what Lent is really all about in the gospel. Following wouldn't always be easy because...

**We follow Christ
Through suffering
To glory**

Have you ever had one moment where you were getting praised for something you had done or said and the next moment you were getting yelled at for something else? Nothing quite catches you off guard like that. One second Peter was being praised by Jesus for a brilliant and beautiful confession of faith, **"You are the Christ."** The next second he was getting called Satan. Peter knew Jesus was the Messiah, but to Peter that meant conquering hero. Peter and the rest of the disciples figured Jesus was the Messiah and that meant guaranteed victory. Jesus gave some sobering news.

To follow this Messiah, the only true Messiah, would mean watching him suffer, die, and rise again. **"He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the Law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."** This was the path laid out for the Messiah to go. What do you think the disciples heard? Of course they heard suffer, reject, and die and probably nothing else. For months they had been following Jesus yet he hadn't quite spoken with such clarity. Now it was clear, Jesus was planning on dying.

Jesus was completely serious about it too. Anyone or anything that got in his way was a problem to be dealt with. Even Peter, fresh off his good confession, had to be dealt with harshly if he stood in the way of the cross. **"Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** There was no easy way out. The road to the cross would include suffering. If these disciples wanted to stick close and follow Christ they would see him suffer. No easy task for anyone.

For followers that means suffering too. It just doesn't seem right to suffer while following Jesus. He's the Savior, how is it we still have to suffer to follow him? Jesus made it clear. **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."** Following Jesus means denial of one's self. That's suffering for many right there. No pleasures, nothing can be more important. Nothing, not kids, not sports, not money. Following Christ means carrying a cross. Not all suffering is a cross. Only suffering specifically because we're believers and followers of Christ is a true cross. Feeling humiliation when a friend makes fun of your belief in a six day creation. The mocking you receive when a relative hears they can't take communion at your church because we practice close communion. The rejection you feel when someone finds out you attend a church where the roles of men and women are clearly taught. These are crosses. Carrying this weight can make us want to relieve the pressure and give up the fight. We expected great things following Christ and got suffering instead.

Jesus prepared his disciples and us, his suffering would be real. We're fools if we thought that the price of salvation would be cheap. The cross our Savior went to was very real. But his cross is the one that saved us. It's only his sufferings that demonstrate God's grace. It's only his sufferings and death that pay for sins. All those times we gave up carrying the cross or we refused to deny ourselves, Christ paid for those. Jesus became our substitute before God to redeem us from sin and guilt. But best of all is what he makes clear, suffering comes before glory. Jesus would rise. **"After three days rise again."** Jesus lives and because he lives we are saved.

Years ago my family vacationed with extended family in California. We did all the tourist things. We saw Disney, Sea World, and the San Diego Zoo. But my dad and I love airplanes and we wanted to go see the Spruce Goose. This single all wood airplane built by Howard Hughes in the mid 1940s was a seaplane, one made to go on water. It still is the biggest flying boat ever with the largest wingspan of any airplane ever. It flew one time and only for about a mile. At that time it was still on display in Long Beach. Inside the giant dome building the anticipation built up inside a closed room with a screen to see a movie about the plane. After it finished while still looking at the screen the entire wall moved to the side. There was the Spruce Goose standing right in front of you. It was awesome. All the waiting to see it led to something great. Jesus had to go through suffering to get to something great. It was greater than we could ever imagine. Jesus went through the suffering to glory and so will we.

The sinful world doesn't so much care about the soul. Life after death isn't something most people think about daily. Sinful human beings take such a short sighted view on things. Going after money and giving up time in worship for other worldly pursuits. Jesus wanted his disciples to know the short view wasn't the better view. **"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"** The soul is being used to describe the place that's better than this world. The place where souls go to rest for all eternity. Jesus was talking about heaven. The disciples needed the long view of life. Be willing to lose their entire lives. Give up gaining fame, power, and money to see what was waiting for them. Nothing worldly would ever be worth as much.

Like all sinful people we want the glory now. If it's between glory now or glory later, we want it now. Financially, personally, whatever we want glory. Our career can become our glory. It defines us and causes people to be proud of us and our accomplishments. Or athletics become our glory. Winning medals and trophies, competing and accumulating stats is what we're about. Or our financial status becomes our glory. If we have enough and can buy what we want when we want that gives us pleasure and power here. We want the good times now. We want to enjoy life. So we ask what's the harm in missing some weeks, or not giving an offering, or feeling good right now? We may not realize we could be losing our soul. We want the glory but we forgot that life now is about the cross and the suffering.

Jesus has promised us the glory. It's his guarantee. Nothing will compare with that glory that awaits us in heaven. It isn't something we earned or deserved. It's something that Christ alone won for us. He did it through the suffering and the cross. **"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."** The gospel of Christ will cause us to lose our physical life to gain an eternal one. Christ gave the gospel that power. Christ went all the way through the sufferings and achieved the glory and he's leading us to do the same.

Following Jesus is not something we're forced into doing. **"If anyone would come after me..."** No one is excluded from becoming a follower of Christ, but everyone who does is a volunteer. To follow Christ means a will won over by the grace of God shown through the Savior. This is no command or demand, but rather a loving invitation. His suffering saved us; our suffering is required to follow. We follow Christ through the suffering to glory.