

I drove a school bus across 8 years of my life. I always referred to it as my 3<sup>rd</sup> church as I also had a part-time 2-point charge at Buckhorn and Rupert. They were probably the most demanding years of my life. I drove that bus on Rt. 42 and 487, on Mt. Zion Road to Susque View Drive to Pinnacle Drive and out Scenic Drive and then to school. Not all the roads were fully paved, though all were some of the first snow covered roads in any day and where many times I had to stop and put the chains on the bus while the children waited within. Three roads involved turn-a-rounds by the bus. I drove that old bus in snow and mud, stuck more times than I can count. I was towed twice by a truck that came out of Sunbury. I followed fire rescue vehicles through flood water where I had to open the school bus door to let the water out after having forded the runoff water. That day I got stuck in the turn-around and ended up in their way on a rescue of a family that lived by the Roaring Creek, which is why they towed me out of that spot and counts as a third tow now that I think of it. All this transpired while some children waited patiently just to get home, and others were not so angelic, and amused themselves to fill the time. Though I lost a lot of hair then, I am thankful for those years and the overall experience.

Now, why would I tell you this? I want you to understand what I would have given for a straight, level, and paved highway upon which to travel like Isaiah called for in the Bible. That kind of road would be a fitting road for a king to travel upon, and so it is not out of line for the Lord to call for such for his kingdom.

[1] Isaiah prophecy said: Comfort my people.

Speak tenderly and proclaim that God's chosen people's hard service was completed and the debt of their sin paid. The Israelites were being led by their God to return to the promised land; to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple; and to rebuild their spiritual lives in godliness also.

Christians too have heard the comforting words of forgiveness, that our debt to sin has been paid. How can a Christian help but read this and not hear of Jesus' atoning sacrifice upon the cross for us.

Country comedian Jerry Clower once told about a lady he knew down in Amite County, Mississippi. She lived near a construction site, and workers were putting a tar roof on the building near her house. This lady had sixteen children or "young'uns" as Jerry would call them. One day she lost one of her children [was missing]. She got to hunting him and discovered he had fallen into a fifty-gallon drum of black roofing tar at the construction site. She reached down, hauled him up, took a look at him and shoved him back down in that drum of tar. She said, "Boy, it'd be a lot easier to have another one than to clean you up."

[James T. Garrett, God's Gift, CSS Publishing Company]

Now, clearly he's joking, but just think about that for a minute.

One may wonder if God could think it easier to create another human being than to try to clean some of us up. Even though the story of Noah suggests he did just that, God has not done that with us. The Lord went to great lengths to clean us up, once for all. He has given us all we need to enter His presence again. That anticipation of Advent and Christmas is that of Emmanuel, God is with us. Because of Jesus Christ, each of us can be redeemed and reborn. The words “Prepare the way of the Lord” are not a warning but a gracious invitation to open the way for Christ in our heart and life. Isaiah declares that a voice of one is calling: in the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

The Jewish people of the Exile heard the voice of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and some of the minor prophets too. When those who awaited the immanent coming of the Messiah, they heard the voice of John the Baptist. Today we cannot help but hear the voice of most of the New Testament and our canonized faith as we await the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of our Savior and Lord. And we do believe that voice, to which we witnessed by the expression of our faith this morning, saying:

“...he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he will come to judge the quick and the dead.”

Early Christians like the Apostle Peter interpreted this scripture as preparation for Christ’s second coming: He wrote, “Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9b)

That is why a thousand years is like a day to God. He is so patient with us.  
[2] The 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent: there are no mysteries here.

A devotional which I read recently shared some of the following: Some aspects of scripture are hard to understand. The frightful visions of the book of Revelation at the end of this age, come quickly to mind. (Maybe those seem very mysterious to us.) But most of scripture’s instructions for living prepared for Christ’s return are quite plain. The things God wants us to do, the things that make us holy, are not mysterious at all. We don’t need to calculate some mysterious pattern and date to determine Christ’s return and be ready by entrenching ourselves like a survivalist on hilltop; but we can welcome the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of Jesus Christ as gladly as we anticipate the celebration of his first Advent or the Jewish return from Exile. Jesus will return for us as kindly and benevolently as his 1<sup>st</sup> Advent.

Our preparation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming is not mysterious. It is a preparation of the soul along the lines of the teachings of the Bible. We improve our conduct in ways that bless others around us and honor our Creator. God has made His expectations plain. We give Him our heart; we trust and obey; and we bear fruit of the Spirit. Human as we are, we might struggle at times to humbly follow God's instruction but we can never honestly argue that His desires are mysterious, nor do we need fear the return of Jesus Christ anymore than his birth in Bethlehem.

[from Daily Wisdom for Men 2023 Devotion “No Mysteries Here” November 29, 2023]

It’s a wilderness today. We know that. This may have been spoken first for the Israelites, but Christians also see their world as a wilderness in certain respects. The world can be such a carnal place and filled with values that we certainly did not share.

Christians have always found that they could “...not love the world, or anything in the world, ...for everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. (1 John 2:15-16) Christians are to be in the world but not of it for sure. They have gladly looked for the day when they will leave this earth for a new heaven and earth.

### [3] A highway for our God

For now, we know that we should prepare a highway for our God. The Jewish people had to exercise a courageous faith to make the journey back to Jerusalem. It was as much a spiritual journey as it was an arduous trip through the desert.

The same was true for the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent. Charles H. Bayer referring to Christ’s birth indicated that the road to the manger was not an Interstate. Nor was it a sentimental journey. There were no shortcuts.

[Leveling the Landscape by Charles H. Bayer]

We who await the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of Jesus are to make a highway for the Lord’s kingdom to encompass our life more fully as Peter says: “The day of Lord will come.” (2 Peter 3:10a) They built some amazing structures including roads in antiquity without so much as a bulldozer. Our preparation may need to be extensive too, though it is spiritual in nature. The highway needs to be straight first and foremost, as opposed to crooked. We should draw a clear line against some things in our character; deceit, trickery, corruption, theft, false witness, as well as the bigger transgressions of illicit drugs and sex, and murder. We can’t endure seeing them in our government official’s lives, and so we need to be done with these things for the Lord’s glory in the church too, beginning with our lives. Peter’s description of the highway we prepare sounds like this: “You ought to live holy and godly lives.” (2 Peter 3:11b)

Billy Graham, who often played the 20<sup>th</sup> century role of John the Baptist, had these comments about the disease running rampant in our world: "We’re suffering from only one disease in the world. Our basic problem is not a race problem. Our basic problem is not a poverty problem. Our basic problem is not a war problem. Our basic problem is a heart problem. We need to get the heart changed, the heart transformed."

[Michael J. Anton, Good News for Now, CSS Publishing, p. 12]

### [4] Every valley will be raised up and every mountain made low.

Every valley in our attitude including valleys of discouragement, despair, depression or grief need lifted. We may need the use of dump trucks filled with grace and encouragement for others and all that bathed in prayer.

Likewise Isaiah proclaimed that every mountain and hill be made low. Peter indicated that the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. (2 Peter 3:10c) Spiritually speaking, pride and arrogance in our lives doesn’t serve the Lord’s glory. A haughty personality may be where Isaiah would suggest that our rough ground shall become level and rugged places a plain. Rev. David E. Leininger, in One Shock after Another, says we need road graders and then a paving machine so “Bring on the heavy equipment!”

There are mountains that need to come down - mountains of terrorism, antisemitism, vengeance, and any other way that blocks our way to healthy relationships internationally or personally. And in this way, Christ can be born again in Jesus Christ.

Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar says that when he was a boy, his mother told him to hoe two rows of beans. He was about eight years old. She showed him exactly how she wanted him to do it and she told him, "Now, when you get through, call me so I can come and look it over." When he finally got through as per her instructions, he called her to look it over.

When she got there, she started shaking her head and she said, "Well, son, it looks like you're going to have to do this over. For most boys this would be perfectly all right. But you're not most boys, you're my son. And my son can do better than this."

[Unknown source]

We can do better for we are the children of God, and our salvation is coupled with an ensuing sanctification according to the Bible. In this way, then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken, as Peter wrote. (2 Peter 3:13)