

## ROAD WORK (Part 1)

### *Here comes the King!*

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—<sup>2</sup> during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.<sup>3</sup> He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:*

*“A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.<sup>6</sup> And all people will see God’s salvation.” Luke 3:1-6*

*“Your kingdom come and your will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6:10*

As an unripe 18 year old, I gave my first “sermon.” (I’m not really crazy about that term for what I do. It sounds way too churchy and professional for my taste. Plus, what I did that day, being only one year into my walk with Jesus, couldn’t have been mistaken for being the least bit “professional.” It took over an hour and seriously tried the patience of the saints there that day!) Whatever you call it, I talked about John the Baptist, and how he was sent by God to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. His job was to get his contemporaries to *fill their valleys, level their mountains, straighten out their crooked ways, and smooth their rough spots*. In my rookie way that day, I talked about our contemporary job description being similar. As John lived and preached in such a way as to get his generation ready for the King’s first arrival, we should also be living in such a way that provides a highway on which Jesus can make his kingly entrance. If, in John’s day, they had *valleys, mountains, crooked places and rough spots* – our world has more!

When a king of ancient times planned to visit a region, a work party would precede his coming, and clear the way. They would make sure to get the road in shape ahead of His Majesty, the King. If there was no road, they’d see that one was constructed. Valleys would be filled, mountains leveled, crooked spots straightened, and rough places smoothed. Obstacles, barriers, and hindrances would all have to go – anything that would impede the King’s travel.

The King was coming, and God was crying out in the vast and devastating wilderness of John’s day. John made God’s “voice” audible to his generation. He heard what the Almighty was saying, and he interpreted what the voice said... “Prepare! Everyone, prepare!”

John said two main things... **“The Kingdom of heaven is at hand!”** (i.e. The King is coming, and he wants to include you, as well as everyone around you, in his kingdom!) - and - **“Repent!”** (i.e. Get rid of everything in your life that’s in the way of the King’s coming! Whatever is in you that’s in his way, it has to get out of the way!) And as John’s spiritual descendents, we have to make the Lord’s way straight - both in our own lives, and in the culture around us.

Don’t forget that we’re both “subjects” and “agents” of King Jesus...

As subjects of the King...we’re responding to God’s voice and thus doing, *“Personal Preparation.”* We’re making his way straight into us to be King over all of our being.

As agents of our King...we make audible the voice of God calling in the wilderness of our world. In this way we are doing more of a “*Planet Preparation.*”

As subjects... we are learning how to expand Jesus’ ruling influence in us to include more of our own lives and personalities.

As agents...we have to learn ways of effectively extending his kingly influence around us in the world in which we live.

As subjects... the King benevolently conquers and captures more territory in us.

As agents... his healing kingdom spreads over more and more of the earth.

## ***Personal Preparation – responding to the voice as subjects of the King***

Though I’ve been a Jesus follower for almost four decades; I still have *valleys, mountains, crooked places, and rough areas* that are in his way. There are things in me that impede his travel, attitudes and actions that obstruct his rule in me and through me. I know that he wants a “freeway” into and through my life, but I have some things to work on in order for his road to be considerably less treacherous.

### **Filling valleys...**

Valleys are areas that I’m *low* on, places that I need him to “*fill up*” what’s lacking in me. If he has to go down into the valley and up again on the other side, the things that he aspires to do will, at best, be delayed, if not canceled altogether. If I really want to give him the most direct route to me, in me, and through me; I’ll have to let him fill the huge craters that still exist in my character.

Sometimes I’m low of faith, on confidence, on self-esteem, on endurance, on self-control... These are all “valleys” which need to be filled. These are things that I need him to fix in me.

***“... Christ lives in me, and the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God...”***

For example, I’ve noticed lately that I’m particularly low on patience. I’ve caught myself being uncharacteristically impatient with other drivers on the road, with God as he takes his time answering my prayers, with myself in how slowly I let go of bad habits. It seems to me that “the valley of impatience,” was once was more full than it is today. I don’t know if it sort of eroded while I wasn’t looking, or if I’m discovering in me a new stretch of road that needs to be forged. Whichever is the case, I need to fill that valley up so that the King can have free course in me and around me as he brings his Kingdom.

- *How about you? What are you “low on” in your life?*
- *What is it that you have in your heart that doesn’t belong there?*
- *And how does this either keep the King from working in your life, or at the very least delay his efforts?*
- *What will you do about it?*

### **Leveling mountains...**

Valleys need something *supplemented*; but mountains represent something that needs to be *subtracted*. In the former, there was something lacking in my life, something that I need to add, in

order for the King's ride to be more direct. "Mountains," on the other hand, protrude themselves in Jesus' way. They stand arrogantly in his path as he attempts to get where he wants to go and distribute his kingly influence. Valleys are my sins of *omission* (when I fail to do what I should be doing). Mountains are sins of *commission* (where I do what I shouldn't do).

***"You can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done." Matthew 21:21***

***"What are you, O mighty mountain? ... You will become level ground." Zechariah 4:7***

Sometimes the mountains in my life are leveled by some enormous blast, detonated by the Holy Spirit, an immediate and potent intervention by the King who's looking for a more level road on which to travel. There is in me an obstruction, and when I call upon him to rescue me; he intervenes with dynamite to decimate the obstacle.

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considerably less treacherous.

At other times, what he engineers is much more incremental. My friend Trevor says that with him, God works much more often in the *mundane* than in the *miraculous*. Though I really like it when he does an instantaneous miracle, I too most often experience the slow-going activity of the King as he gradually forges his road to me, in me, and through me. He usually cuts down my self-centered protrusions inch by inch, stone by stone, sin by sin.

Envy, lusts, and pride all stand in the way of the King's agenda for me. These are among the many mountains that he's been chipping away for decades. Though these habits die slowly, they do gradually lose potency in my heart. The mountains turn to hills, and eventually to the level ground that the King needs for his unimpeded travel.

Throughout my life one of my main mountains has been *anger*. Whether inherited or learned, when I realized that it loomed gargantuan between me and the King, I went on a quest to access his power to level it. Over the years, it's been three steps forward and two steps back; but by God's grace I've made a lot of progress. To this day it's not nearly flat ground, but my mountain of anger now looks more like a hill of periodic irritation.

- *What are the "mountains" in your life?*
- *What does the King have to climb over in order to get to you?*
- *How is his Kingdom obstructed by your sins of commission?*
- *So, what are you going to do about it?*

### **Straightening crooked roads...**

King Jesus is trying to get somewhere. He's looking for a road on which to travel, one that gets him to his destination with the least amount of hindrances. We've begun to build, and when we look back at

the route we took, we notice that our road is crooked. It's not at all the *"straight path"* that he was looking for. John told us to *"make straight paths for him,"* so that he has a direct path to bring his Kingdom. In Beginning Geometry we learned that the shortest route between two points is a straight, not a crooked, line.

The "Road to Hana," on the island of Maui, boasts the most curves per mile of any other road in the U.S. They say it's the "Crookedest Road in America!" I can tell you from experience that it takes forever to get from one end of it to the other. In fact, I've been on it twice, and never made it past the half-way point to the little town of Hana. Out of weariness and more than a little frustration, I turned back at that point both times. But to this day when someone asks me if I've completed the trip, I usually say, "I've been half-way to Hana twice, and since two halves make a whole; yes, I've completed the trip! Two 'Half-Hanas' makes one whole Hana!"

So how did the road we're making for Jesus become such a zigzag? One theory I have is, that rather than deal directly with them, we've avoided certain obstacles, and built our road around them. We've taken the easy way by neglecting to face our personal issues straightforwardly, and getting them out of the Lord's way. The King would much rather travel the shortest route to our hearts, but the path we've forged for him is more dizzying than direct.

I've seen it in me and in many of my friends with whom I've walked over the years. When we were young, we gave to Jesus everything we knew we had. We were aware of holding nothing back. He was Lord, and that was all there was to it. But then a decade or two later we realized that we had evaded a number of our flaws, infected wounds in our souls, and/or dysfunctional ways that we'd been developing since childhood. Often without realizing it, we'd skirted certain pot holes and blockages which protruded in the King's way. We see now that we'd built a crooked road for him to travel. The route he has to take to express his kingly activities is circuitous. The many turns and curves slow him down and even restrict many of his regal aspirations.

The mountains turn to hills,  
and eventually to the level ground  
that the King needs for his unimpeded travel!

But how do we straighten our crooked road? If it's bent because of our evasion of defects, we have to let the Holy Spirit help us identify those flaws in us and submit them to his healing virtue.

***"Search me and try me and see if there be any wicked way in me." Psalm 139***

***"Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed....." Hebrews 12***

- *What's "crooked" in your life right now?*
- *What do you need to "get straight" with him so that he can better establish his Kingdom rule in you?*
- *Do you have pot holes and blockages (character flaws or infected wounds in your soul) that you've skirted?*
- *What will you do about it? How will you bring them to him.*

## Smoothing rough places...

I've never worked on a crew that made roads, but it stands to reason that you'd start with the big obstacles and then work your way to the smaller. I don't think you can begin with smoothing out the small rocks and filling the small pot holes. First comes the imposing mountains and cavernous valleys. Once you've filled up the valleys and leveled the mountains, then you can begin work on getting your roadway straight. And then after that, you can begin smoothing out the rough places. This might be a more subtle work, but it's just as critical when we're constructing a road for the Lord.

When I was teenager I had a dirt bike, a motorcycle that I loved riding out in the hills above our town. I'd find a dirt road, and unless there was a locked gate or barbed wire fence that kept me out, I'd motor forever out in the "boonies." I had the experience of sitting on my bike on a hill looking at another hill in the distance, with another dirt road that wound around toward the next hill. From my vantage point the far-away road appeared smooth and easily ride-able. A few minutes later, when I arrived on said distant hill, I found the road there to be anything but "smooth." It was full of pits and large rocks, and I was forced to slow way down in order to wind around its bumpiness. It wasn't exactly the fast and exhilarating ride I'd expected.

From a distance your road may look smooth, but when the King gets up close and personal, he's looking for a highway without ruts and rocks. I'm talking about spiritual obstacles that can hide in the heart and not be visible to the casual observer. But God is no "casual observer." He cares about our heart, and about what might be buried in it. Tucked away there may be traits like prejudice, judgmentalism, or legalism. These, along with other habitual thought patterns may act as pits and potholes that impede the King's travel in and through us. Whereas valleys, mountains, and crooked paths might require explosives and enormous earth movers; smoothing out the bumps requires a more meticulous effort – a work that the Holy Spirit is apt in performing as we allow him to do his thing.

Among the hundreds (maybe thousands) of times that the Holy Spirit has done his healing thing in me, one instance in particular stands out. I am what they call, an "Adult child of an alcoholic," (an ACA). Until the Spirit pointed them out to me, I wasn't aware of the subterranean flaws in my soul, some of which probably resulted from my childhood experiences. As always, along with his conviction, came a promise of spiritual empowerment. Whenever he shows us our ruts and rocks, he offers help for their excavation. He began the process of doing in me what I couldn't do in myself. My road is still not nearly as smooth as it needs to be, but it's much better, due to the help of the Helper!

- *What are the "rough places" in your life?*
- *What is it that you have in your heart that doesn't belong there?*
- *And how does this delay the King's work in you or through you?*
- *How will you begin dealing with these "rough places," with God's help today?*

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but when the King gets up close and personal,  
he's looking for a highway without ruts and rocks.

As with any asphalt road, the heart-work of the Holy Spirit will undoubtedly need to be done repeatedly in order to maintain its integrity. Otherwise, the arduous efforts that

have been made before will be lost to the erosion and wear of weather and constant use. We can't assume that what was once removed from, or added to, our lives by the Holy Spirit will simply stay that way without consistent maintenance. If a valley was once filled or a mountain formerly leveled, don't presume you'll never have to excavate again. A previously crooked or rough road might very well need to be re-straightened or re-paved as the King sees fit to maintain his road.

I was feeling my way through a foggy stretch of road along the coast when I came to a flashing sign a hundred yards or so before a stop light. I'd seen the sign before which had originally read, "PREPARE TO STOP!" It's so typically foggy in that area that you can't even see the stop light until it's too late to bring your car to a stop, thus the need for the sign. But on this day the lights that form the last two words, "... TO STOP," were not functioning, leaving the lone word, "PREPARE!" It was flashing, almost apocalyptically on and off and on again – "PREPARE! PREPARE! PREPARE!" This is the message of John the Baptizer, "PREPARE!" Prepare yourself to have the King come. Prepare yourself for his kingly influence in your life. Prepare the road on which he will come. Prepare yourself to be that road on which he works, and a road on which he will travel in order to work in others – PREPARE!

### ***Planet Preparation – responding to the voice as agents of the King***

In "Personal Preparation," our goal is to expand the King's influence in us. In "Planet Preparation," we're hoping to extend that same influence around us. The King wants to capture more territory in us so that he can do the same through us in his earth. It's our job to make a road on which he can travel in order to get to us, and then use that same road for him to travel through us to the world around us. There are "*valleys, mountains, crooked and rough places*" that need to be dealt with in preparation for his kingly influence - both in us, and in the world.

So many of the King's *subjects* don't get around to acting as his *agents*. He wants not only to come into our lives to establish his rule, but he wants to use our lives as his highway (smooth and straight) to reach the rest of the world, and advance his kingdom in them. But many of his disciples don't bother to make any other disciples. They occupy themselves only with working on the road that brings Jesus *to them*, and then neglect the road that would bring him to their world. They're "Spiritual Naval Gazers," delving constantly deeper into their own lives for a more and more profound experience in the kingdom, and isolate themselves from others who don't even know the King.

Granted, if the King has little-to-no access *to us*, he'll be hard pressed to use us to access the hearts of our neighbors. So, we have to be good *subjects* before we can presume to be *agents* who are committed to helping our broken world receive his kingship. But at some point, we have to begin taking seriously our responsibility to be world changers.

I don't know about you, but I need more power in my life to extend the kingdom in the world. And I'm pretty sure that if I exercised more power *over my own life* to let the King exert more of his rule over me, I'd probably have more authority to make a difference around me. I'm trying to more consistently obey "*the voice crying in the wilderness*" as it calls me to make myself ready for the King's rule, so I can be a "voice" to my own sphere of influence, and call others to get ready for the King's ways. I want to speak on his behalf, calling people to "Prepare" themselves for the King's reign in them. I hope I can call those within my own sphere of influence to *fill their valleys, level their mountains, straighten their crooked ways, and smooth their rough places* so that the King can come to them.

## Filling valleys...

Do we really have to search very long in order to identify the “valleys,” the things that are missing in our world? Maybe each of us would say it differently, but to me it all boils down to – what we’re lacking is “God.” What we’re missing is our original mooring, our middle. It’s the King and his influence that we’ve omitted. We have no nucleus. We’re missing our center. And when there’s no core, there’s no absolute, and no moral anchor. That, to me, is our world’s most cavernous “valley.”

In John’s day, his people had “religion” at the center, which is not the same as having God there. A system of do’s and don’ts won’t cut it as a replacement for the Maker. Religion isn’t the same thing as the presence of the King. It’s not the kingdom. John challenged them to replace their customs with Christ. He preached that Jesus was the hub they were looking for. And in our culture, we have no hub at all. We revolve around nothing - unless it’s our own twisted selves.

People who try to be their own king leave a valley-sized gap in society. It’s up to us to fill the gap by modeling the blessedness of lives happily submitted to our benevolent King. We’re his agents standing in the gaping hole between God and the people he loves, asking him to fill that gap, and assert his tender influence to build a road that reaches their hearts. We’re filling valleys between God and man by the way we live, the way we pray, and the way we tell them about the King.

God is “the one crying in the wilderness,” and his cry is something like, *“I’m good King. Really I am. Become my subjects, and you’ll see. The kingdom which you currently serve is destined to self-destruct. Join yourself to me and become part of my eternal reign!”* That’s his cry, but he needs earthly “criers” to make it audible to pre-kingdom people. When we tell people from the other kingdom about God’s kingdom, we’re filling valleys for him to have a more direct route to their hearts. He trusts us to stand in that gap and bring the two sides together. It’s called, “a ministry of reconciliation”...

***“We try to persuade men... he gave us the ministry of reconciliation...he committed to us the message of reconciliation... we are Christ’s ambassadors... God is making his appeal through us... we implore (people), “Be reconciled to God!” (2 Corinthians 5)***

So many of the King’s *subjects*  
don’t get around to acting as his *agents*.

## Leveling mountains...

Mountains are anything that protrudes, and thus impedes the advance of Christ’s kingdom. Do you see anything like that in our society? If you can’t... well, you’re just not looking! Our world is full of mountainous protrusions in the way of the kingdom of God. The arrogance of humanism and a Tower of Babel-like self-indulgence prevails. Not only are there things *lacking*, but there are so many things *blocking* the way of the Lord into our society.

I’m pretty sure that we need continuous and repeated Holy Spirit-detonations to level those mountains. We need him to come and powerfully intervene and decimate the obstructions to the King’s entrance. But as with our personal lives, the Spirit often uses the incremental and the rock-by-

rock method of reducing our societal obstructions to the kingdom. While I'd prefer that he did it all in one fell swoop (he doesn't usually consult with me regarding my preferences about how to go about changing the world), it seems that his *gradual method* is the most common. Nevertheless, whether explosively or gradually, we need him to turn the mountains to the level ground.

Don't forget, as with valleys, we have to deal with our *own* mountains before can expect our world to deal with *theirs!* We have to "*get the mountain out of our own eyes before we can call our world to get the rock out of theirs!*" When they see how Jesus deals mercifully, yet powerfully, with *our* mountains, they'll have hope that he can do the same with *theirs!*

Fortunately the King invests in us a number of ways to advance his kingdom – prayer being one of the chief ways. When we pray with faith and authority we will say to the mountains, "*Be cast into the sea!*" and it will be done as we requested.

### **Straightening the crooked roads...**

The King is coming and he is looking for a "straight way" for his journey into the hearts of people. But the road is anything but straight. Have you noticed anything "crooked" in the world around you, any perverted ideas about God, any twisted ideas about life and spirituality? All these are impediments to his kingdom coming, and so once again, we have to call upon God who "moves earth!"

We saw above, that in our own lives, the road is crooked because we've neglected to deal with the defects in our souls. Rather than face our flaws directly, we went around them, and thus making our road crooked, leaving a circuitous path for the King to travel in order to have his way in us. There's so much confusion in our world (our own lives included), and so much pain as a result. Our culture has cut a crooked path attempting to find a path around its hidden wounds and dysfunctional ways. We'll have to go back to those "hard places" that we've been avoiding, and submit them to the King and his healing ways.

The best healers are ones who've given the Divine Healer the most access to their own woundedness. As we choose to expose the diseases of our own inner parts to Jesus, and trust our frailties to him, those in our spheres of influence will be attracted to his healthy reign. As we deal with our own crookedness with his help, we'll have more authority to call our world to "straighten themselves out."

When they see how Jesus deals mercifully,  
yet powerfully, with *our* mountains,  
they'll have hope that he can do  
the same with *theirs!*

### **Smoothing rough places...**

Like I said before, from a distance, our own road may look smooth, but with closer examination, we're filled with ruts and rocks. As his subjects, we have to let the Holy Spirit extract the obstacles that hide in our hearts, and thus smooth the way for the kingdom to come. Then we can model to the world around us how the King not only identifies our brokenness, but heals it. As his agents, our assignment is to help our friends in the other kingdom access the Lord's power to fill the ruts and remove the rocks in their lives. We have to pray for those around us to see their flaws in the light of



his loving face; and in the power of his dynamic grace, make the necessary changes to the road on which the King will travel to bring his kingdom!

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In the next chapter we'll talk about the heavy *earth-moving equipment* that we have at our disposal which actually gets this hard work of road-building done...