

ISAIAH 40:3-5

THE STRAIGHT HIGHWAY

A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”¹

Most Christians will recognise this passage as one applied to the Baptist when he came [MATTHEW 3:3; MARK 1:3; LUKE 3:4]. This is the second of four times in this Fortieth Chapter that we witness a voice crying out to speak to God’s people. The voice does not merely speak; rather, the voice cries. This is not mere information transmitted in a casual manner; there is a sense of urgency in each of the statements that are recorded as the voice demands attention through volume and intensity.

A voice is commanded to comfort God’s people [ISAIAH 40:1, 2]. Presumably, it is the same voice that cries out, warning of the brevity of life and reminding all who hear that the Word of God stands forever [ISAIAH 40:6-8]. Again, a voice demands proclamation of good news that God is present bringing to mankind His salvation [ISAIAH 40:9-11]. In the text that is now before us, the voice cries out calling mankind to prepare for the coming of the LORD God.

Let’s establish a truth that is perhaps obscured by our experiences. God does not need us to prepare a highway for Him to appear. It is a perception in some eschatologies that man must prepare the way in order to ensure that Messiah comes a second time. Of course, such thinking is silly. God did not need man’s help to create the universe. We read in the prologue of John’s Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men” [JOHN 1:1-4]. God did not require mortal assistance in preparing for the Advent of Christ the Lord. We are specifically informed, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” [GALATIANS 4:4, 5]. Moreover, God will not require human assistance for His Anointed One to come a second time. Jesus warned His disciples, “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” [LUKE 12:40].

The highway that is to be made straight is not to ensure that Messiah is able to come; rather, it is to permit man to meet Him when He does come. The emphasis is not on bringing Messiah, but preparing to meet Him when He does come. The cry that is heard is a call to ready oneself for the coming of God’s Anointed One.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

THE MESSENGER — It is vital that for us to stay focused on the message rather than focusing on the messenger; the message, and not the messenger, is what is important. You will recall that the prophecy before us was applied to John [see LUKE 3:2-6]. He was the forerunner for God's Messiah [see LUKE 1:16, 17 NASV]. His role was to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy, heralding the presentation of God's Anointed One. This is witnessed through referral to another passage in John's Gospel.

"This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord," as the prophet Isaiah said.'

"(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, 'Then why are you baptising, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptise with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.'" [JOHN 1:19-27]. John understood that he was but a voice crying out in the wilderness. He did not exalt himself; rather he exalted the Messiah.

When the Baptist denied that he was Elijah, he referred to yet another prophecy provided by a prophet under the Old Covenant. Malachi, writing the words inspired by the Spirit of God, said, "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts" [MALACHI 3:1]. Though the Pharisees knew the testimony of Malachi, they ignored the remainder of that prophecy.

"Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can keep standing when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire, like a launderer's soap. He will act like a refiner and purifier of silver and will cleanse the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then they will offer the LORD a proper offering. The offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in former times and years past.

"I will come to you in judgment. I will be quick to testify against those who practice divination, those who commit adultery, those who break promises, and those who exploit workers, widows, and orphans, who refuse to help the immigrant and in this way show they do not fear me,' says the LORD who rules over all" [MALACHI 3:2-5].

This was not a messenger who would confirm them in their sin or permit them to evade responsibility for wickedness; he would confront them in their sin and call them to repentance. It has been well said that the preacher whose little message is "Repent," had best pledge his head to heaven. The Baptist understood that his role was not to draw attention to Himself. He was appointed by God to point people to the Son of God who was to be revealed. Shortly after this, we read of another instance in which John fulfilled his appointed role. "The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me." I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.' And John bore witness: 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God'" [JOHN 1:29-34].

You may recall that we are given an account of John's service in which it seemed as if those bringing a report about Jesus' ministry were attempting to induce John to jealousy. However, the Baptist responded, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease" [JOHN 3:27-30].

"He must increase, but I must decrease." Establish in your mind that the Baptist understood his role, which was to announce the coming of God's Messiah. Thus, it remains even in this day that every true messenger knows that his role is to point all who listen to the Master. The messenger must not draw attention to Himself; rather he must point to the Master.

We live in a day when it seems that the professed people of God too often adulate the messenger; we exalt mere mortals, elevating them to positions of prominence among the churches of our Lord. However, we seem incapable of accurately assessing the message that is delivered. So long as the message we hear makes us feel good about ourselves, we convince ourselves that it is good and that it is of God. We are reluctant, if not unwilling, to judge the message according to the perfect standard of the Word. For too many of the professed saints of the Most High God, the message is assessed by the messenger and not by the message itself.

This does not mean that we are to be unaware of the messenger. The fact that there is a messenger implies that there is a message, and we shall examine that message shortly. Moreover, the messenger speaks to the character of the one who sends the message. God has honoured John because he did fulfil the role to which he was appointed. As John the Evangelist opens the Gospel that bears his name, he speaks of the messenger: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John" [JOHN 1:6]. John was appointed by God to a specific role. Reading further, we discover, "He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light" [JOHN 1:7, 8]. Bearing witness about the light was assuredly the assignment John received; and it is the role assigned to every messenger appointed by Christ the Lord. The one proclaiming the Word of God is appointed to bear witness to the will of the Living Saviour. It is not his role to promote his theories or suppositions; rather the one appointed by God must declare the certainties revealed through the Word of God.

I have often pointed out that the angels of the churches, held in the hand of the Living Christ [see REVELATION 1:16, 20], are the pastors—the messengers whom God appoints to His service. Something similar becomes apparent in the words of Malachi when he writes, "The lips of the priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" [MALACHI 2:7]. Pastors are not responsible to preach what is novel or entertaining, nor to declare what the listeners want to hear; pastors are appointed to speak the truth, pointing people to the Master and revealing His will as given in the Word of God. In that respect, each pastor could adopt as his model for ministry the life of the Baptist.

Moreover, the Baptist was bold, stalwart and fearless. He could have been a courtier in the court of Herod. In the Word we are informed, "Herod stood in awe of John and protected him, since he knew that John was a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard him, he was thoroughly baffled, and yet he liked to listen to John" [MARK 6:20 NET BIBLE]. However, John chose righteousness rather than fame or notoriety. Because he preached fearlessly, without compromise or equivocation, he was murdered because of the queen's ferocious and bitter hatred [see MARK 6:24-28]. John chose commitment to the Word of God rather than comfort.

Make no mistake! It was prophesied of John that he would be “great before the Lord” [LUKE 1:14]. He would “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God” [LUKE 1:16]. John would “go before [the Lord God] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” [LUKE 1:17]. Such selfless service merits divine commendation; and to this day, it is the mark of one who bears the imprimatur of heaven.

None less than the Master Himself would say of John, “Among those born of women none is greater than John” [LUKE 7:28]. ***John was great before the Lord because of his fidelity.*** He trained for long years and preached for short months. It was not the length of his service that made him great, but his devotion to the task he received from the True and Living God. ***John was great before the Lord because of his submission to the Spirit.*** According to the Lord’s own Word, he was “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” [LUKE 1:14]. John the Baptist moved at the order of the Spirit of God, and fulfilled every task that he was assigned. ***John was great in his statements concerning the Son of God.*** We witness his message that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” [JOHN 1:29]; there is no greater message than this.

All this leads me to point to the greatness of God who sent God as the forerunner of Messiah. God sent one who is righteous and godly; it is a mark of God’s character. John came as one who reflected the glory of the True and Living God. Just so, every godly preacher who stands to proclaim righteousness demonstrates the goodness and glory of God.

THE MESSAGE — Look at the message, for this is the most vital aspect of the message today.

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

This is a message that declares three great truths worthy of every follower of the Living God. The King is coming. God will accomplish His purpose. The glory of the LORD will be revealed to the entire world. Hold these truths as dear. Let them guide your thoughts. Seize on them and employ them in every facet of life.

The King is coming. This is the first part of Isaiah’s message. You will find this truth at the heart of every message delivered by those whom God appoints—God is coming! That was the message Malachi delivered: “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple” [MALACHI 3:1b]. The Master you long for will come, and His coming will be precipitous, abrupt, sudden, unanticipated. When the Baptist preached, his message was pointed. “I baptise you with water, but He who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire” [LUKE 3:16, 17].

I have always marvelled at the prophecy Paul delivers concerning the coming of the Master. “While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:3-5a].

These words are reminiscent of Jesus’ warning to His disciples. “As for that day or hour no one knows it—neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son—except the Father. Watch out! Stay alert! For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey. He left his house and put his slaves in charge, assigning to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to stay alert. Stay alert, then, because you do not know when the owner of the house will return—whether during evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn—or else he might find you asleep when he returns suddenly. What I say to you I say to everyone: Stay alert” [MARK 13:32-37]! Indeed, the Master’s admonition applies to this day, for He has not yet returned: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” [MATTHEW 25:13].

We are convinced that Messiah has come, and that He presented Himself to Israel only to be rejected by the nation. Now, we anticipate that He shall return. Jesus said to His disciples, “Do not let your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me. There are many dwelling places in my Father’s house. Otherwise, I would have told you, because I am going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that where I am you may be too” [JOHN 14:1-3 NET BIBLE].

This wonderful truth is the foundation for the comforting promise given in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. “Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” [HEBREWS 9:27, 28].

At this holy season, we celebrate the truth that Messiah has come. However, there is always the underlying knowledge that He shall return. Christ the King is coming again; and how awesome will be His return. John received a preview of that day when Jesus shall come again. “I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” [REVELATION 19:11-16].

The terror that the lost will experience at that time has been captured in another place. “The kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’” [REVELATION 6:15-17]?

How dreadful and how real will be the terror that sinners will experience when it becomes apparent that the Lord whom they have long rejected has at last become their Judge! There is irony in the fact that the most desired real estate in that day will be rock fields and avalanche slopes as people flee from the One whom they have long rejected.

I take no joy in warning any who now reject the Saviour that they must one day face Him. He who would now be your Saviour shall assuredly become your Judge. The Father has given the Son authority to execute judgement, because He is the Son of Man [see JOHN 5:20-29]. In mercy, the Judge who is shortly coming warns, "I am coming soon, bringing My recompense with Me to repay everyone for what he has done" [REVELATION 22:12].

I would do a disservice were I to neglect giving a warning against trifling with the call to receive Christ the Lord as Saviour now. However, it would be an equal disservice were I to fail to remind those who look for His return that He comes with His reward. I find great comfort in the promise of God that "He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, He will give eternal life" [ROMANS 2:6]. There is equally comfort in the knowledge that there shall be "glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good" [ROMANS 2:10]. We who look for His return anticipate good when He comes again. Our hope is delineated in Peter's second letter when he writes, "According to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" [2 PETER 3:13].

God will accomplish His purpose.

"Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain."

Isaiah is not speaking of geophysical transformation of the landscape. If the message is focused on the coming of Messiah and the necessity of preparing to meet Him, then it is appropriate to understand that he is speaking of a new moral topography, the upheaval of true repentance. Isaiah is saying that changes are mandated in order to ensure that the Kingdom of God prevails. God is coming, and all flesh will meet Him. Therefore, God's people must prepare the way, warning the lost and calling them to turn from their own ways to embrace divine truth. We who are believers are responsible to make spiritual preparation for God's arrival.

There is an aspect in these words that can be easily overlooked. Isaiah's words speak of an act of faith on the part of the people. They do not see the King; but they dare believe He is coming. It also speaks of a measure of activity on their part. Though they may have previously been paralysed by discouragement, lulled into a stupor by the allure of this dying world, now they are working assiduously to ensure that all is in readiness for the coming of the King.

This is nothing less than a presaging of the witness of the Thessalonian Christians. Paul commended their energetic service with these words: "We know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" [1 THESSALONIANS 1:4-10].

Let me say very clearly that God's purpose is not ease of life for us; His purpose is our good and His glory. That truth is forgotten in this day; but it needs to be driven home for each believer. God's purpose is our good and His glory. We seek ease of life; He seeks for all who are called by the Name of His Son to be conformed to the image of His Son. As it is written, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" [ROMANS 8:28-30]. God has invested His very Person in the life of His child. The process of changing us is sometimes painful, and always challenging; however, it shall be successful.

Child of God, on the authority of God's Word, I can assure you that God is at work in your life. He is removing all the dishonours His Name and all that is associated with this dying world. At the return of the Master, the process will be complete and you shall be as He is. Surely you have read the encouraging words that the Apostle of Love has written to believers. "And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" [1 JOHN 2:28-3:3].

The glory of the Lord will be revealed to the entire world. The glory of the LORD shall be revealed to the entire earth. We may be certain of that, "for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." Isaiah's use of "the mouth of the LORD" is something that we see frequently in this book. For instance, when Isaiah warns mankind against rebelling against the mercy and goodness of God, he certifies that warning by stating, "The mouth of the LORD has spoken" [ISAIAH 1:20]. When he calls Israel to repentance, promising God's goodness to the nation, he affirms the promise by stating, "The mouth of the LORD has spoken" [ISAIAH 58:14].² It is a powerful way of stressing both that God Himself is the source for what is said and ensuring that the reader knows that though the words were written by a mere mortal (Isaiah), they are to be understood as the very Word of the LORD.

Here is the import of this final portion of the prophecy under consideration today: God's glory will be seen. All mankind will revel in it, tremble in awe at the knowledge of His grace, and long to see more of His wonderful majesty. When the Lord comes, it will be in glory, just as Jesus stated on multiple occasions. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus spoke of the great signs that would precede His coming, concluding with this statement, "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" [MATTHEW 24:30].³

Jesus pointed to the Day of His return, saying, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne" [MATTHEW 25:31]. Adjured by the high priest to respond to a question, Jesus warned, "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" [MATTHEW 26:64].

² Cf. ISAIAH 21:17; 22:25; 25:8

³ See also, MARK 13:26; LUKE 21:27

Earlier, during His ministry among His disciples, Jesus taught them, “The Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father” [MATTHEW 16:27]. The words presage those spoken at His ascension. They promised, “This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven” [ACTS 1:11].

The glory of the Lord is the matter that shall occupy the coming several minutes as I draw the message to a conclusion. We often speak of His glory; but it is doubtful that we actually think of His glory. We long for His glory, catching glimpses from time-to-time; but few of us know what it is actually to dwell in His glory. This is not an indictment of us as evil people or as errant—the apostles did not often see the Master in His unveiled glory; when they did, they were astonished and terrified, just as we will be [see e.g. MATTHEW 17:1-8].

THE MANIFESTATION — What is the glory of the LORD that shall be revealed? And how is it that all flesh shall see that glory? When Isaiah says, “The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,” he is not speaking of being aware of God’s glorious deeds in history. Neither is he speaking of witnessing God’s glory second hand as we witness the marvel of the universe His hand has made. Isaiah is telling us that all mankind will actually witness the glory of God Himself as He reveals His presence.

Seldom in history have individuals seen God’s glory—“the fiery radiance of His very nature.”⁴ The glory of God is His “blazing beauty.”⁵ While it is true that we who are believers can testify that “we have seen [Christ’s] glory, glory as of the Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” [JOHN 1:14], the glory of which Isaiah speaks is something different still. When the LORD appeared on Mount Sinai, His glory “was like a devouring fire” [EXODUS 24:17]. Ezekiel witnessed the glory of the Lord [EZEKIEL 1:4-28]. That glory was almost indescribable in its brilliance and beauty, in its might and majesty. When he was called to the LORD’s service, Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord, and was forever changed [ISAIAH 6:1-8]. At the birth of the Saviour, the glory of the Lord shone about the shepherds to whom that birth was announced. Witnessing the glory of the Lord, the shepherds were terrified [LUKE 2:9].

Here is the great sin of modern worshippers: we arrogate the glory of the Lord to ourselves without submitting ourselves to Him. We claim to believe in His glory, but we give no evidence that we have ever witnessed His glory, for had we known His glory we would be transformed. We treat those whom He has redeemed as people whom we can manipulate for our own purposes. We rank and rate fellow believers, dividing the heritage of the Lord based on our personal likes and dislikes. We imagine that we can discriminate against God’s people as though we were capable of making such decisions. Contaminated by the fallen world in which we live, we diminish the glory of God even as we exalt man. However, God is pledged by His holy Word that He shall overcome every obstacle and magnify Himself in the eyes of all mankind.

Jesus the Lord is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature” [HEBREWS 1:3]. This One is both man and God. Though the world refuses to acknowledge Him as Lord, neither can those of this world see His glory. Jesus infuriated religious zealots when He said, “I and the Father are one” [JOHN 10:30]. Those arbiters of Jewish religious practise understood that He claimed to be making Himself God [see JOHN 10:33]. To the inner circle of disciples, He said, “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father” [JOHN 14:9].

⁴ Gerhard von Rad, **Old Testament Theology** (Harper & Row, NY 1962) 1:146

⁵ Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, **Isaiah: God Saves Sinners, Preaching the Word** (Crossway, Wheaton, IL 2005) 237

Paul states the matter in unmistakeable terms when he writes of the Ascended Master, “You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had,

who though he existed in the form of God
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
but emptied himself
by taking on the form of a slave,
by looking like other men,
and by sharing in human nature.
He humbled himself,
by becoming obedient to the point of death
—even death on a cross!
As a result God exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow
—in heaven and on earth and under the earth –
and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord
to the glory of God the Father.”

[PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 NET BIBLE].

I have spoken as I have because I long for God’s people to seek His glory, to live in anticipation of His coming. I believe with all my heart that we should seek His glory in our meetings, the sense of dread and awe that attends knowing that we are in His presence.

I don’t know that Kenneth Grahame was a Christian, but I do know that he captured something of what we what we experience if we truly witness the glory of the Lord when he wrote of the experience of a rat and a mole who sought a lost baby otter.

“‘This is the place of my song-dream, the place the music played to me,’ whispered the Rat, as if in a trance. ‘Here, in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him!’

“Then suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror—indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy—but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near. With difficulty he turned to look for his friend and saw him at his side cowed, stricken, and trembling violently. And still there was utter silence in the populous bird-haunted branches around them; and still the light grew and grew.

“Perhaps he would never have dared to raise his eyes, but that, though the piping was now hushed, the call and the summons seemed still dominant and imperious. He might not refuse, were Death himself waiting to strike him instantly, once he had looked with mortal eye on things rightly kept hidden. Trembling he obeyed, and raised his humble head; and then, in that utter clearness of the imminent dawn, while Nature, flushed with fullness of incredible colour, seemed to hold her breath for the event, he looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper...

“{Mole] saw, last of all, nestling between his very hooves, sleeping soundly in entire peace and contentment, the little, round, podgy, childish form of the baby otter. All this he saw, for one moment breathless and intense, vivid on the morning sky; and still, as he looked, he lived; and still, as he lived, he wondered.

“‘Rat!’ he found breath to whisper, shaking. ‘Are you afraid?’

‘Afraid?’ murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. ‘Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet—and yet—O, Mole, I am afraid!’

“Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.

“Sudden and magnificent, the sun's broad golden disc showed itself over the horizon facing them; and the first rays, shooting across the level water-meadows, took the animals full in the eyes and dazzled them. When they were able to look once more, the Vision had vanished, and the air was full of the carol of birds that hailed the dawn.

“As they stared blankly in dumb misery deepening as they slowly realised all they had seen and all they had lost.”⁶

There is just such fear and longing when we know the glory of the Lord. Do you seek Him? Do you anticipate meeting Him when you come into His house? More importantly still, do you anticipate the day when He shall reveal His glory in all the earth? Lord, hasten the day. Amen.

⁶ Kenneth Grahame, **The Wind in the Willows**, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia 154-7, <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=GraWind.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=7&division=div1>