

December is upon us and so we pause our study in James to think toward the birth of Christ. One of the images in scripture connected with the prophecy of Jesus is the crooked path made straight. When traveling, it makes sense to take the straightest path to a given destination. Back roads are beautiful, but if you really want to reach your location quickly, you take the interstate.

Is the straight path always the way that God leads? When the Hebrews are led out of captivity in Egypt, we find that God's plan for them doesn't include the quickest route to the Promised Land. Read Exodus 13:17-18

God's plan of protection for His children was to avoid the land of the Philistines. He knew that if they faced such terrifying warriors, they would be afraid and want to turn back. Sometimes God's plan along the crooked path is the best plan for us. After a year like 2020, filled with changed plans and destinations, this is very reassuring. We can trust that God is using the crooked path, even when we can't see His plans and purposes.

Isaiah, the Old Testament Prophet, gives us many clues to the coming of Jesus. He even points to the announcement of Jesus' coming in the New Testament. Read Isaiah 40:3-5

Long before Jesus' birth, Isaiah was talking about what He would do for His people. He mentions that valleys will be lifted and hills will be made low. Our last devotion from James echoes the same idea – that Jesus equalizes things. It is here that we learn that Jesus will also make the crooked path straight.

When we read Luke's gospel, we hear Isaiah's words echoed by the prophet John. It is important to read the list of names at the beginning of this passage – it ends up being a list of the major political players in Jesus' lifetime. See if you can fit them into Jesus' story after reading the next passage. Read Luke 3:1-6

Luke is intentional about retelling the events of Jesus' life within the context of who was in leadership. This is important because it places Jesus, his birth, ministry, death, and resurrection within a historical framework. It is here that we meet John the Baptist, the voice crying in the wilderness that shares Isaiah's prophecy again.

When Jesus began His public ministry, He tried to tell those around Him about God's purpose for His coming. Even those closest to Jesus had a hard time grasping it. In one of my favorite passages of scripture, Jesus lays it out as simply as He can for the disciples. Read John 14:1-7

Jesus tells Thomas that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. During Advent, as we think about the crooked path, we realize that it is made straight at the foot of the cross. When you cast light on a cross, the shadow is always straight. It's one of the images that I love on our STP stage – the cross in the light and the shadow that it casts. It reminds me that Jesus' death and resurrection made a straight path to an eternal home in heaven with God. No matter how crooked the path may seem, when we trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior, his path leads us straight to heaven.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. John 14:1

**In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see,
so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:16**