

Deuteronomy 33:1; 24-25

Jan. 9, 2022

Matt. 3:13-17;

Baptism of the Lord

Ephesians 6:10-13

Iron Shoes for a New Year

Most of us probably approach the New Year with a combination of excitement and a bit of apprehension – that’s natural. We hope 2022 will be an improvement on the past couple years. But most of us know that there could be more difficulties. After the last couple years of pandemic, then economic and social dislocations, that affect us all, not to mention problems abroad and natural disasters, it is understandable that we might begin 2022 with some apprehension. So, for the next several Sundays I going to try to share some reflections about “Starting the New Year Right.”

On the church’s traditional calendar for today is the remembrance of a pivotal event in the life of our Savior: the baptism of the Lord. While his cousin John was baptizing people as a sign of repentance, Jesus came to be baptized; not because He had sins to repent of, but to “fulfill all righteousness.” **Jesus’ baptism began His public ministry.** In like manner the baptism of Vanisha, this morning, begins her life in Christ, while her family and church family, teach her what that means. As we begin this new year let’s reflect how we can model for Vanisha the right way to start life.

Iron Shoes for Rough Roads

In the distant past (probably 1,000 years before Christ) the Israelites, led by Moses, fled slavery in Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for a generation. They were headed for the Promised Land that God was leading them to. This story is told in Exodus and Deuteronomy. As they were about to enter and take possession of the land God had promised them, Moses pronounced a blessing on the tribes of Israel. Great challenges were ahead of them; the unknown lay in front of them... Though it was long ago, their situation is not so distant from ours as we enter a new year.

One of those blessings that Moses gave was to the tribe of Asher. Moses said ***The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will equal your days, Deut. 33:25 NIV.***

In the KJV it goes like this: ***Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be, Deut. 33:25 KJV.*** Note the word “shoes.”

The two translations are different because there is a Hebrew word involved that can be translated more than one way. The symbolism is slightly different, but the final meaning in either case is the same. The tribe of Asher was given the land along the coast north of modern-day Haifa, extending into what we today call southern Lebanon. It was fruitful and productive land – a highly favored place – but also mountainous, traversed by many people, and a place of

potential danger. Iron and brass for bolts on gates would be needed for protection from attack, or iron and brass for shoes that would have to march out on rough roads against enemies.

Good shoes or boots are necessary if you do a lot of walking, especially on unpaved ground. I have lug soles on my hunting & hiking boots; I can walk over and through just about anything with them. If you are a runner or jogger you know that shoes make all the difference in your performance and in protecting your feet. Do some of you, when you travel by air, wear good walking shoes (sounds like an irony), for the terminals you must walk through and the lines you must stand in? As they prepared to enter a new land God promised those Israelites “shoes of iron” for the roads ahead of them.

What will the road be like in this New Year? How will we fare as we begin a new journey? Will the way be rough or easy? If the way is to be flower strewn, velvet slippers will do. If all we're going to do in 2022 is watch television, we don't need iron shoes. Thick socks will do just fine. But if we plan to travel rough roads, we need good footwear. I believe we can count on two things in 2022:

1. I am pretty sure **we will all walk on rocky roads before this year is done.** For some it will be challenges of family, or health, or finances, or even faith in God. For all of us together, called to fulfill the mission of bringing more people to the transforming power of Jesus Christ, we will likely struggle to share the gospel with younger generations, even as we seek to grow to maturity in Christ. There is no use for silk slippers on the road to heaven because the road is hard, the way difficult, the path sometimes treacherous. We will need iron shoes. As coaches like to say, “No pain, no gain. No guts, no glory. No struggle, no growth.”

2. **God's great promises of old still stand.** For those who trust in the Lord “your shoes will be of iron and brass” because God knows what struggles you face. In our personal lives we always face struggles. But do you realize that God has called you and me to also be with Him in the struggle against evil and human sin? God wants each of us to do our part to resist evil, grow in grace, and bring others to His grace. This best happens in the company of believers. Are you in a small group? **In the New Year we can take strength in God's word for us: that word is the living Word of Jesus himself, Immanuel, God-With-Us, whom we celebrate at Christmas.**

Meaning of Christmas

Okay, so it's been more than two weeks since Christmas... many of you know the true meaning of Christmas, right? It's not the commercialism, or warm feelings, but Jesus, right? Even more: **the meaning of Christmas is about an important Christian doctrine: the Incarnation.** That means God coming in human form, becoming one of us. You might be nonchalant about the

Incarnation, but for many people (Jews and Muslims) this idea is preposterous; as preposterous as resurrection. How could a holy God possibly defile Himself as a human? But Christians know that God *did* enter history as a human in Jesus of Nazareth, and *that* event makes a world of difference in our living.

God, "now in flesh appearing," came in the midst of a violent, messy, mysterious, and wonderful world. **The Incarnation means** at least two important things:

1) God's **reaffirmation** of the original goodness of the flesh and bone **creatures** He created so long ago; and...

2) His love is so deep for His earthly, fallen beings that He willed, through Jesus, to redeem us **body and soul**.

It is a source of comfort and hope to me to know that God still loves us and seeks to redeem us, even while we are slogging through our trials and tribulations. Our redemption is not a simple, magical deliverance – extracting us from life. **The Good News of the Incarnation is that we are being redeemed in the midst the messy business of life.** The Incarnation tells us that this flesh and blood life of ours has meaning and purpose.

In a culture that so often manages to simultaneously idolize and trivialize the human body, the wonder of the Incarnation has never been more important. For the elderly, who sense their bodies failing them, for teenagers who are bombarded with conflicting messages about their bodies, and for parents who marvel at the creation of new life in a baby, **God, now in flesh appearing, is our Creator's reaffirmation that we are created in His image, that He wills to redeem us body and soul, and will raise us up body and soul.** *He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand, Psalm 40:2.*

I don't know about you, but that gives me confidence to enter the unknown territory of 2022. No one knows what the future holds, but we know who holds the future, and He's been here.

Strength for Thy Days

Then there is the last part of that verse in Deuteronomy - a promise of great provision: ***As thy days, so shall thy strength be.*** Note that day is plural. Three notes of hope in that verse:

1) First, **God will give strength for each and every day in the year ahead.**

2) Second, **God will give strength for every kind of day we may face.** Some days are filled with joy, light, and happiness; others with sadness, tears, frustration, pain, and heartache. God gives strength enough to meet them all.

3) Third, **God will give strength to all our days until the end of our days.** We will run out of days before we run out of God's strength.

Will you have hard days? Yes. Fear not. With God, your strength will equal your days. Will you have days of sickness? Yes. Fear not. Your strength will

equal your days. Will you have days of doubt and confusion? Of course. Yet fear not. Your strength will equal your days.

Think about your three greatest worries as you enter this New Year. ... “As thy days, so shall thy strength be,” means **no matter what happens, God’s strength will always equal the days that are ahead.** We will find that the divine reservoir is enough to meet our needs.

He's Way Ahead of Us!

It would be enough if God simply walked with you through the events of life. But he does more than that. While you are slogging your way through this week, God is already in February stockpiling the strength you need so that when you get there it’s available. **While we’re living in Tuesday, He’s clearing the road for us on Friday.** Are you worried about next week? God is already there. How about June or September? Don’t sweat it. He’s already there. What about that tough decision that looms ahead of you? Fear not. He’s already there. God is already at work providing solutions for problems we don’t even know we have yet! Remember, just as God provided for those ancient Israelites as they wandered in the desert, God will also provide for you when needed.

Think who it is who promises us such a blessing: it is the One who created us, called His creation “good” and has loved us from eternity. His resources are unlimited and He came in the flesh to redeem us from our own mess of sin. We can trust that He will keep His promise.

Here are some practical lessons we can glean from this verse: Take each day as it comes. **Don’t try to force the future.** Let God lead. Do each day what God gives you to do. **Connect with God each day through Scripture and prayer.** Rejoice in the Lord always. In 2022 you may find yourself in a situation that seems unbearable and that’s when God will be there for you – if you will trust Him.

Trust Him

Christ's feet were pierced with iron nails that we might have iron shoes for the roads of life. I know I sound like a broken record... But I have to keep telling the truth: Jesus walks beside you as you provide space for Him. Don’t wait until you’re in real big trouble to call on Him – it’s always better to call on Him daily, so that the small challenges don’t become big ones.

The best way to provide room for Him is a daily dose of the Bible. Make that a new year habit. Parents: that’s why it’s so important for your children to be consistent with you at church. Add to that some prayer time: **The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them...** Psalm 34:17. **Pray about your daily routine or challenges.** Start a conversation with God. Get in a small group at church where you can grow in His grace with the support of other believers. That’s

what it means to ***Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes, Eph. 6:11.***

When the going gets tough, the tough have the armor of God to wear, and the backing of Christ Jesus Himself. The Captain of our Salvation has called us to join His army. Friends, it's time to put on your iron shoes! The day of march has come, the only way we can go is forward by faith. May God help us to press on in 2022.

Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be, Deut. 33:25 (KJV).