

December 29, 2013

## **PUT ON YOUR IRON SHOES IN 2014**

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

### “The Missing Ladle”

John invited his mother over for dinner. During the meal, his mother couldn't help noticing how beautiful John's roommate was. She had long been suspicious of a relationship between John and his roommate, and this only made her more curious. Over the course of the evening, while watching the two interact, she started to wonder if there was more between John and the roommate than met the eye. Reading his mom's thoughts, John volunteered, "I know what you must be thinking, but I assure you, Julie and I are just roommates."

About a week later, Julie came to John and said, "Ever since your mother came to dinner, I've been unable to find the beautiful silver gravy ladle. You don't suppose she took it, do you?" John said, "Well, I doubt it, but I'll write her a letter just to be sure." So he sat down and wrote, "Dear Mother, I'm not saying you 'did' take a gravy ladle from my house, and I'm not saying you 'did not' take a gravy ladle. But the fact remains that one has been missing ever since you were here for dinner." Several days later, John received a letter from his mother which read, "Dear Son, I'm not saying that you 'do' sleep with Julie, and I'm not saying that you 'do not' sleep with Julie. But the fact remains that if she were sleeping in her own bed, she would have found the gravy ladle by now. Love, Mom.”

**Deuteronomy 33:25** *Your bars are iron and bronze; and as your days, so is your strength.* (NRSV)

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

The matter of shoes is important. Especially is this true when the roads are rough and hard. We cannot get along without something strong and comfortable to wear on our feet. One would scarcely expect to find anything in the Bible about such a need as this. Yet it only shows how truly the Bible is fitted to all our actual life to discover in it a promise referring to shoes.

No matter what version you read from, God here is lifting the veil of the future for God's chosen people to see. It was as if in these words, God was saying to them, 'your road is going to be so rough that you will need iron shoes in order to walk.'

As we stand on the brink of a new year, we wonder what the future holds. Most of us probably approach a milestone like this with a combination of excitement and a bit of apprehension. We're excited about what 2014 might mean for us, and for the same reason we're aware of possible peril, danger, and difficulty. Certainly both reactions are appropriate. After all, we have just passed through a very tumultuous year in 2013.

Because of Christ we enter the New Year, 2014, with the same confidence we have always had. No one knows what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. That alone is enough.

This morning's text is a much-beloved promise of God. It was actually a prophecy given by Moses to the Tribe of Asher just before Moses's death - "Your shoes shall be iron." In the [Book of Genesis](#), Asher is the second son of [Jacob](#) and [Zilpah](#) – the handmaiden of Leah.

By God's choice this tribe was being given land on the seacoast north of modern day southern Lebanon. Asher's land was fruitful, rugged and mountainous. Common sandals, made of wood or leather, would not endure the wear and tear of the sharp, flinty rocks. There was need, therefore, for some special kind of shoes. Hence the promise: "Your shoes shall be iron" for the roads they must travel.

Every New Year is the beginning of a new journey. How will we fare? What will the road be like? Will our way be rough or easy? Our text suggests that we may have some rough road to travel before the year is done. If the way is to be flower strewn, velvet slippers will do. And if all we're going to do in 2014 is sit and be pew potatoes, we don't need iron shoes. Thick socks will do just fine. But if we plan to travel rocky roads, if we plan on **IGNITING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT, THE WORD, CHURCH and RELATIONSHIP in 2014** we need good footwear. As coaches like to say, No pain, no gain. No guts, no glory. No struggle, no growth.

I am sure we will all walk on rocky roads during 2014. There are no silk slippers on the road to heaven. We need iron shoes because the road is hard, the way difficult, the path sometimes treacherous. God gives great promises because the road itself is difficult, steep, and hard to climb. "Your shoes will be of iron and brass" means "The road ahead will be rocky and dangerous."

Look forward to the New Year; God's word to his people is clear: "Forward, March!" And the good news is this: What God demands, he supplies. When he puts his people on a hard road, he gives them iron shoes for the journey.

Then there is the last part of the verse—a promise of great provision: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Note that it is "days" not "day." This means three things. First, God will give strength for each individual day in the year ahead. Christians have the promise that no matter what may come, God will give strength, which will be sufficient. God's supply is always adjusted to the need. God has promised that He will not forsake or fail us. Second, God will give strength for every kind of day we may face. Some days are filled with joy, peace, and happiness; others with sadness, tears, frustration, pain, and heartache. Whatever each day brings, there will be strength sufficient enough to meet it no matter what. 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. The more days, the more strength God gives.

Will you have hard days? Fear not. Your strength will equal your days.  
Will you have days of sickness? Fear not. Your strength will equal your days.  
Will you have days of doubt and confusion? Fear not. Your strength will equal your days.

Just for a moment think about your three greatest worries as you enter this New Year. What three things will occupy your mind and heart in these opening days of 2014? Yes, God desires that we not worry - but in all things lean not on our own understanding - but we are human and feel like we have to help God along. So let's pause - and in our minds - confess those three great concerns to Almighty God. [Deuteronomy 33:25](#), NRSV - "*The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will equal your days*" assures us that no matter what happens, God's strength will always equal the days that are ahead.

I find this promise means more to me now than it did 20 years ago. When you are young, you feel strong and able to take on the world. In your 20s, you think you've got the world by the tail on a downhill slide. In your 30s, you can work for hours and not feel tired. But in following years your body starts sending you unexpected messages. You aren't as strong as you used to be, your energy doesn't last as long, and your stamina seems to disappear quickly. And the parts of your body that seemed invincible are now beginning to show signs of wear and tear.

We will exercise, take vitamin supplements and have healthy eating habits. But despite our best efforts or intentions, our physical bodies will get tired and worn.

But **PRAISE** be to a loving God - that is precisely where this promise becomes so significant. We discover with the passing of time that God's strength is more than enough for everything we face. So even though we grow older, our faith grows, our hope grows, our love grows, our zeal grows, and our patience grows. As God helps us, we find more and more of what we need.

And when the moment comes to leave this life, we find the strength we need to make that final journey. We go from God to God, from life to life, from strength to strength, from joy to joy, from love to love, from God by faith to God by sight, and from Christ within to Christ enthroned in heaven.

“As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” What does this suggest for us at the start of a new year? It means that God's strength will be there when we need it. We will never find a day when God's strength is lacking. God is your refuge.” We need a place of refuge, for there are times in life when life is too much for us and we cannot keep our chin up. We are wounded and sick at heart. Remember, Christian, God is our refuge, our present help in times of trouble. God has given us such places of refuge as PRAYER, GOD'S WORD (the Bible), FELLOWSHIP and RELATIONSHIPS with being a part of GOD'S BODY, the Church. Make use of these places of refuge. We will have strength as long as our days last. Therefore, we need not look anxiously ahead. In happy days filled with sunlight, we may not need much strength, but when hard times come, we will find that the divine reservoir is more than enough to meet our needs.

The one whose love will never fail.  
The one whose resources are unlimited.  
The one who gave himself for us.

Think about it this way: While we struggle with the problems of today, God is hard at work providing solutions for the things we are going to face tomorrow. God is already there, working creatively in situations we have yet to face, preparing them for us and us for them.

While we're living in Tuesday, he's clearing the road for us on Friday. God is already at work providing solutions for problems we don't even know we have yet! Are you worried about next week? Forget it. God's already there. How about June or September? Don't sweat it. God's already there. What, getting back to college, high school, middle school, and elementary school after a fun filled winter break is making you anxious? DON'T SWEAT IT – GOD IS ALREADY THERE! Or that crucial meeting that's set for the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January has you concerned? EVERYONE

SLEEP WELL!!! Look at that student and tell them – SLEEP WELL! Look at your pew neighbor and say – SLEEP WELL!!! **OUR Loving and caring God says peace be still, I'm already there.** What about that tough decision that looms ahead of you? Fear not. God's already there.

It would be enough if God simply walked with you through the events of life. But he does much more than that. He goes ahead of you, clearing the way, arranging the details of life, so that when you get there, you can have confidence that God has already been there before you.

That's why this promise is true: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." While you are anxiously getting through the final two days of 2013, God is already in January 2014 stockpiling the strength you need so that when you get there, you've got what you need; and plenty more besides. Rejoice in the Lord always. **RUN TO THE CROSS AND PRAISE THE LORD.**

God will not put you in an unbearable situation in 2014. But you may find yourself in a situation that seems unbearable so that you will turn to God. Each day of 2014 you will have what you need. We may therefore go forth into the New Year with confidence, hope, and joy.

Christ's feet were pierced with nails that we might have iron shoes for the road. We cannot succeed this year without Christ; but with him by our side we can and will face whatever may come with confidence and with joy!

Happy and a Blessed New Year, my Salem Family! The Captain of our Salvation has called us to join his army. **Brothers and sisters, it's time to put on your iron shoes!** The day for marching has come. The cry comes from the front, "**Forward by faith.**" And off we go, adventuring into this New Year. May God help us to press on as we go forward **IGNITING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT, THE WORD, CHURCH and RELATIONSHIP in 2014.** Amen. Amen. Amen.

Adapted from Ray Pritchard