

2011-12-08 Joshua 1:9 God gives strength for the new year! New Year's Eve Service December 31, 2011
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Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our powerful Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!
God's Word to strength our faith in the Lord is written in Joshua 1:9
These are Your words heavenly Father. Give us strength to prepare for the challenges and remain strong
in our faith through Your Word. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

What will this new year bring for us? Will we be healthy or sick? Will our plans work well or will things happen that we never would have expected? There could be dramatic changes in our country, too. Who knows what trouble there will be in the world and how it will affect us? God has not given us a guarantee for an easy life. But, He can prepare us for the new year no matter what happens. Even in times of frustration or disappointment, we can still turn to God in faith rather than doubt. Our God, who has brought us safely to the end of this year, will be with us in 2012 and

God gives strength for the new year!

First, what plans does God have for us in the new year? Think of what He told Joshua to do. Moses had died. God appointed Joshua to lead the people, who had so often rebelled against Moses and God. If it would have been a time of peace, Joshua would have had plenty of challenges. But the people were just about to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land of Canaan. They would have to battle many strong enemies in fortified cities. The task seemed impossible.

What plans does the Lord have for us in the new year? What battles must we face for Him? Will it be battles against our own sinful nature and against strong temptations that have caught us unprepared before? Also, it seems with each year there is growing number of people in our country who openly mock God and Christianity. They don't believe in God and they don't want anyone else to believe or proclaim the truth. In general, more of the government policies of our nation seem less moral. As things that the Bible describes as clearly immoral are legalized or encouraged by our culture, how can we respond? Will we be able to stand against such temptations? Will we be able like Joshua to convince others to follow the truth rather than sinful practices of unbelievers?

If we think we can simply stand on our own strength against temptations and sinful ways, we're doomed to fail before we begin the new year. If we think that simply passing laws will be enough to stem the tide of evil, we need to re-think it. Any lasting change for good in anyone's lives must come from the heart. That change can only happen by the power of God's Word.

Second, God gives His promises to help us. Before telling Joshua to move forward for the battle without fear or discouragement, God gave him promises. He said, "*You will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.*" (v.6) Joshua had seen God keep His promises for 40 years in the wilderness. He knew that when God makes a promise He keeps it. We can have that same assurance. Earlier today at church we had a baptism, where through water and the Word, God promised to make the child His child for eternity. He keeps His promises as we remain faithful in following His Word.

Also in our verse God promised Joshua, *“The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”* (v.9) Tonight we will be receiving the Lord’s Supper. According to Christ’s promise we will be receiving His body and blood with the bread and wine to fully assure us that He was sacrificed on the cross for our sins. Tonight Christ personally comes to each one of us in Holy Communion and tells us, *“Do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous, for you are forgiven. I will be with you now and forever!”*

Joshua would continue to need encouragement and guidance as he crossed the river the new land. The Lord reminded him to follow His truths. *“Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.”* (v.7) Some people think of the new year as a time for making choices. Will they continue to live as in the past or decide to make changes for the better? When the people entered the land they would be tempted to turn to the other gods once they had victory and to neglect God’s Word. Near the end of his life, Joshua let the people of Israel know where he stood. *“Choose for yourselves this day who you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”* (Joshua 24:15) Success was not measured in military victories. It came as the people remained faithful to God and His Word. The idea of “Scripture alone” did not begin at the Reformation. It was the Lord’s principle used to bless His people as soon as the Bible was written.

One of the greatest temptations we will have is to lessen our time with God’s Word. But God told Joshua to make it his highest priority. *“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.”* (v.8) One commentator stated, *“At the very core of [God’s] encouragement, the Lord insists that Joshua cling to the written Word. He was to read his Bible thoroughly so that he would know and obey all “the Law.” It was to be regular, “day and night.” It was to be a personal meditation and not just an academic exercise. The promise attached to this kind of Bible reading was that Joshua would be successful.”* As we enter this new year, let us recommit ourselves to God’s truth, to better learn it and to follow what it says. Paul told Timothy, *“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you--guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”* (2 Timothy 1:13-14)

Third, we enter the new year trusting in God. God told Joshua, *“Be strong and courageous.”* (Joshua 1:9) God’s promises call for faith to trust that our powerful, loving, and wise God goes before us into this new year. As Joshua trusted God, he saw victory after victory for God’s people in the new land. Life was not easy. Sometimes the people failed to trust as they should. But, as they repented and lived in God’s forgiveness, they continued to fight in God’s strength.

They were no different than us. To be firm in faith, we need to hear God’s uplifting words again and again. As we cross over into a new year, we can be confident that God is with us just as He promised. He has the power to help us in every situation. God chose us to be His people through faith in Christ. We live by faith with humility and confidence. We have humility because we don’t deserve to have God’s love. Yet, He sent His Son to give us eternal life while we were still sinners. God has forgiven us in Christ to give us confidence in Him. Paul wrote, *“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.... Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, and with the breastplate of righteousness in place.... Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God....”* (Ephesians 6:10-18) Who knows in the new year whether we will be well or sick, whether employed or unemployed, or what direction our country will take. But this we do know, because of Jesus’ life and death for us, we can say with Paul, *“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 15:57) Amen.