

Boldly Into the New Year
Joshua 1:1-9
December 31, 2015

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

We are in the last few hours of 2015. Soon the ball in Times Square will drop. The new year will begin. The future of 2016 begins tonight.

In tonight's Scripture reading, we find Joshua facing not only a new future, but also the challenge of his life. Joshua was about to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. He had to be a bit nervous, but we hear God assuring Joshua that he can boldly step into the future.

Tonight, we are much like Joshua. We are standing on the threshold of the future. We don't know what 2016 holds for us. However, we have the same promise of God's presence that was given to Joshua. That promise is for you, it's for me, and it's for the church. With God's promise, we can boldly step into the new year.

One thing that helps us to boldly step into the future is to remember the past is gone. In the text we learn that Moses was dead. He would no longer be God's spokesman. He would no longer be the leader of the Israelites.

Many things had happened in the past while Moses was the leader. Some of those things were good. The Israelites were led out from Egyptian slavery. God provided manna and quail for the people to eat. God provided water when the people were thirsty.

Some bad things also happened. The people began to grumble and turned against both Moses and God. All of the people who were over the age of 20 died in the desert.

Many things have happened during 2015 here at Prince of Peace. New members were brought into our family. Babies were born and baptized. Our people provided for the needs of many who were in need. The people of Prince of Peace have grown in their faith and in acts of loving service.

Yet, the past is in the past, and we must leave it there. We must not look back to congratulate ourselves, or to lick our wounds. Good or bad it's all in the past. What's done is done. God never stops and, if we are going to follow God, we must keep moving forward.

Listen again to part of tonight's text: *Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you* (Jos 1:2a-5 ESV).

What lies ahead is the future, and God tells Joshua and the Israelites to get ready. Get ready to take the land God promised. Get ready to receive more than they had imagined. Get ready to be stronger than all their enemies. Get ready for God to be with them.

Like Joshua and the Israelites, God is telling us to get ready. Getting ready means making preparations. We need to prepare ourselves to follow God. We need to shed 2015's excess life baggage, because we can't successfully enter the future carrying the baggage from the past. We need to travel light.

We need to prepare to be used by God in ways we might never have imagined. We need to be prepared to be undefeatable as we carry out God's plans for 2016. We need to be prepared to trust the fact that God will always be with us.

God not only tells us to be prepared, he also tells us how to be prepared. Three times, God tells Joshua to be "strong and courageous." God tells us to be "strong and courageous." There are five things we are to do that will make us "strong and courageous."

Be Strong!

The dictionary gives us several definitions for being strong.

Power: We need to move into the future in God's power, not our power. We need to submit any power we have to God's authority. We surrender our ambitions to God's will.

Resistance to force: We must be strong to resist the forces of evil, forces that bring division and disharmony. We must use all our strength to keep Jesus at the center of everything.

Purity: We must be strong to keep ourselves and our motives pure. We need to keep our actions in line with what God wants his people to be.

Be Courageous!

The dictionary defines courageous as fortitude, and fortitude means persistence. We are to be persistent in following God. In good times, and especially in bad times, we have to keep our eyes on the goal. It takes courage, fortitude, persistence to be able to endure all things for the promises of God.

Keep God's Word!

To keep God's Word is to preach God's Word. That means we are to teach God's Word. Naturally, before we can teach a thing we must learn it ourselves. Therefore, we have to read God's Word. Reading God's Word isn't just a matter of reading the words. This reading is actually studying God's Word. Finding out exactly what God is telling us.

After we have studied, we must do God's Word. We keep God's Word best when we live God's Word every day of our lives. Staying close to God's Word will bring blessings to the work we do in God's name.

Don't Be Afraid!

One of the things that scares people the most is not knowing what lies around the next bend in the road. None of us know what tomorrow holds. The beauty of being a Christian is knowing that God knows what tomorrow holds. For that reason, we don't need to walk into the future in fear. We can look forward to tomorrow with hope and expectation. We can boldly go into the new year because even though we don't know what tomorrow holds, we know who holds tomorrow.

Don't Be Discouraged!

The world is full of nay-sayers. There is an unlimited number of negative people in the world. Don't let other people get you down. Don't listen to their litany of "that's impossible" or "you'll never succeed" or "we never did it like that before." Remember, you don't serve them, you serve God. The plans God has for you he will bring to completion despite what other people say. Just think about Noah building a ship in the desert.

In the new year, if there are times when you feel like you're standing alone, remember you are never truly alone. God has promised to always be with you. You and God always form a majority, an unbeatable force. So hold your head high as you bravely step into another new year saying to yourself and the rest of the world, "If God is for us who can be against us?"