

## THE PROMISE OF GOD'S POWER

"Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."  
Deuteronomy 33:25.

Life is so crowded with work and burdens and problems that we need to fortify ourselves with the promises from God's Word. We need to plead His promises when we pray. They are designed to fortify and inspire us. We do not make enough of them. There is not a condition in life that is not met by one of God's promises. These promises give us a grip on spiritual realities. We need to search them out, appropriate them, make them our own, and plead them before Him. One of the most precious promises is contained in our text: "And as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Moses was reaching the end of his earthly pilgrimage. He was about to surrender his leadership of God's people to his successor. He had enjoyed a long and useful experience, and had learned what God's children may expect from a world of selfishness about them, and from a God of grace above them. And ere he goes to Nebo to die and to be buried by the hand of God, he assembled the people to whom he had ministered so long in order that he might give them his parting benediction. The end of the road is appointed for all men, and the place in which they shall die is divinely determined. But we do not know where it is, nor when that hour will come, as Moses did. But who could desire a more happy parting from those he loves than Moses had? What a memory to leave behind him as he assembled the people and commended them to God and to the work of His grace!

This precious promise was given first to the tribe of Asher, about which little was recorded except that it was one of the least known of the twelve tribes. Asher's inheritance included a stretch of rugged hill country extending from Mount Carmel to Sidon, on the north-west corner of Palestine. It was a region in which travelling was very difficult. The traveller had to pass through rough places and climb over boulders which lay across his pathway. He had to tread upon sharp-edged stones, which unless his feet were suitably shod left them torn, bleeding and sore. The quality of his footwear, therefore, was of very great importance.

Asher was assured that while his life would be beset by many difficulties and much strain, he would be supported and sustained by an unseen power. He was told: "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass." Shoes of iron and brass are for rough roads and steep hills, and not for those who are appointed to walk on carpet.

This promise which God made to the sons of Asher is timeless in its application. The Shoemaker is always adapting shoes for those whose ways of life are along the hard roads. Our text promises us shoes to match the road -- "that if our lives are fallen in difficult places we will receive of the Lord's hand an outfit adapted to the demands of our circumstances." Rough places are to be encountered by all of us on the journey of life. For most people life has its difficult stretches. We come to the places in life where the road of disappointment looms before us and cuts across our dearest hopes. But I want to remind you of some of God's precious promises as we travel the rough roads of life. "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be." "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee and they shall not overflow thee." "There will no temptation overtake you above that ye are able to bear."

From the beginning to the end of his ministry Paul wore God's shoes. Most of us know what it is to have unrealized ambitions. But God has assured us that we can know a spirit of quietness in an unquiet world. Some are prone to question the wisdom of God in letting us live in a world in which there are many things which make for heartbreak and frustration. But surely God knows the kind of a world which is best for the development of our moral and spiritual capacities. Today things are certainly disquieting, dismaying and discouraging, but experience indicates that God is still in His world and that He will fashion footwear suitable to the needs of our times. God will not continue to give us life without giving us the strength which we shall need to live it aright.

Multitudes have put this promise to the test, and that without disappointment or embarrassment. Think of the hard way many people known to us have had to travel. Had they been told in earlier life what lay in front of them they might have given up in despair. But as the road of life became more and more painful for them, they seemed to increase in depth of character, and in sympathy for and understanding of others. All of life's travellers have to face the rugged roads of struggle, the hills of hardship, and the lonely paths of toil and sacrifice. Like the Asherites, we are not promised an escape from the roughness and steepness of life's road, but we are promised "shoes of iron and brass" which will enable us to travel the road and march forward, finding the necessary courage and blessing as we go.

There is much hill-climbing to do in the Christian life. Some have hills to climb because they have descended them. Those who have spent considerable time going down hill must not be surprised when they have to take a turn at climbing. Many of the difficulties which you meet are of your own making. You have to climb a hill because you persisted in running down the hill first. If you have chains to break, it is because you forged them. If you find yourself in a storm, as did Jonah, it is because you have run away from duty. You may wonder why the streets of life are not paved for you, why the stones have not been gathered up, and why the obstacles have not all been removed. Well, they are there for your exercise, and for the development of your Christian character. The promise of the text is not that God will pave the road, but that He will give you the shoes that are appropriate for any path that you will have to travel. Why should we ask for the removal of all difficulties and a paved road, if God promises us grace to meet the emergency whatever it may be, strength to climb the hills, strength to bear the burdens, wisdom to meet the foe, and strength to win the battle?

People who trust in God are never left to fight their battles alone. To read the biography of Henry Moorehouse, the famous preacher of England, is to be impressed with the way he explained the value of faith in God in days of hardship and trial. He had a little daughter who was a cripple, and never able to walk. One day Moorehouse came home carrying a parcel and when he was about to carry it upstairs his daughter called out: "Let me carry the parcel, Daddy." "But how can you, my little daughter, who cannot even walk, carry the parcel?" "Daddy, I will carry the parcel, and you will carry me." Friends, it is something like that that God does for us. In the hour of need we get help. We carry the load but find ourselves being carried. That is what happened with Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. The bitter cup was not taken away. He had to drink its contents. But we read that there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening Him.

Christ carried the load of our redemption in His suffering and He did it in that same strength that God offers you, if you trust in the Father as Jesus did. You remember how Paul was troubled by a thorn in the flesh, some strange physical condition which was making his life a misery. With reference to this handicap, he had a desire which he thought was legitimate. So much did he think that his desire was legitimate that Paul prayed about it three times, asking God to remove it in order that he might serve Him better. God did not remove the thorn, and Paul learned that his desire was not in conformity with God's will. However, the Lord did say to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Such is ever the experience of trusting souls. God does not remove our difficulties and trials, but He gives us grace and strength to carry them. We carry our load of suffering and sorrow, but we find ourselves being carried. And this is what God offers us who trust Him in the promise of our text. He offers us shoes which will be appropriate for the road that we shall travel. Don't be afraid of the shoes that God offers you. Wearing them will enable you to turn a minus into a plus.

On the frontispiece of an old Bible is the following inscription: "Lay any burden on me, only sustain me." Burdens will be laid upon us. There is no doubt about that. Neither is there any doubt about God's promise to sustain us.

The door to the future is locked against us. Only God can open it. What the future holds in store for you, what your days are to be, you cannot know. But there is one thing about

the future that you can know, and that is, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." We are promised strength for the day when it comes, and for what it brings, but not strength for the day before it comes, and not strength for a day that never comes.

Too many of us ask God for strength for a day that has not come, and may never come. Our baseless fears are a reproach to our faith. One of the frequent and familiar sayings of Lincoln during the stormy days of his presidency was his parable of the Fox River. Riding the circuit in Illinois once, when there had been heavy rains, and the rivers were flooded, some of the lawyers who were with him were in great anxiety about how they could ford the Fox River. They appealed to Lincoln as one who had often ridden through that part of the country. His answer was, "I have often forded the Fox River, at all times of the year, and in all kinds of weather, but I never ford the Fox River until I come to it." Do not try to ford your rivers before you reach them, but have faith enough to believe that when you reach them God will help you to cross them.

In his autobiography Mark Rutherford wrote: "I learned, almost when it was too late, to live in each moment as it passed over my head, believing that the sun as it is now rising is as good as it ever will be." Many of us are so easily convinced that it is only in the territory of tomorrow that we are to find our finest treasures, or to know our direst woes. Instead of thinking that, we should take the wonder of the present moment and find it packed with the power of God. Accept each moment as it arrives, and know that within it is sufficient strength to live it out. The Lord has said, "My grace is sufficient," and nothing is missing here.

We don't know how much more time we shall have. The old sun dial that carries as its motto the words, "It is later than you think," is preaching a message which all of us would do well to heed. The arresting thing about "our days" is that God gives them to us. What is going to happen during them we do not know. There will be mornings when the dawn will sound every note of joy, and there will be evenings wet with tears. One day we shall feel as if we were sitting on top of the world, and another day we shall feel like dust beneath the chariot wheels of fate. What a strange jumble and pattern our days seem to make! And yet, they have been entrusted to us by the Father, and His Spirit dwelling in us will make us more than adequate for every demand they present to us. There will not be a single day for which the strength of God will be insufficient.

So often we wonder what the future may have in store for us -- whether the coming days will be filled with joy or with sorrow, with prosperity or adversity, with gladness or with gloom. But while we recognize the impossibility of forecasting with the slightest degree of certainty what any single day or hour may bring to us, yet, with such a promise as this upon which to lean, we may pursue our journey in happy confidence, and in the assured conviction that He Who does know all that shall befall each one of His children has already so provided for them that they need never feel overwhelmed by life's sorrows or overburdened by its duties. As they enter upon each day, with all its varied tasks and responsibilities, its perils and possibilities of good or evil, they will find strength proportioned to their needs which await them, and on every step of their journey will be watched over and upheld by the omnipotent God.

Such a promise as the one before us is suitable for all of God's children, whatever their circumstances may be. The Christian, who is assured of the gift of divine strength to meet every need, enters into a rest of which the world does not know anything, and becomes the possessor of riches that can never perish. This promise covers all the days without exception or limitation -- days that are crowded with life's activities, and days that are spent in solitude and silence, in weariness and suffering; days in which we walk in the sunshine, in the fair garden of prosperity, with the birds singing all around us and the flowers of love and joy and peace filling our lives with fragrance and beauty; days when the chilling winds of adversity rob us of all earthly delights; days when storms and tempests break over our heads, when dark clouds blot out the sun, and when over the wild and boisterous waters there shines no ray of light, and there is not a single star to cheer us on our way. There

are days that bring to us all manner of difficulties and perplexities, that lay upon us heavy burdens of responsibility, anxiety and care, but we have the promise of all-sufficient strength. What more do we need?

Notice carefully how the promise of God's power runs. It does not say as thy life is, or as thy years are, or as thy weeks are, but "as thy days, so shall thy strength be." For each day as it comes, God's promise is that strength will be given us, but just for a day at a time. The way to live under any circumstances is just a day at a time.

Worry comes from the bad habit of importing into today the burdens and tasks that belong to tomorrow. We see, stretching ahead, things to be done, troubles to be met, emergencies to be faced, till the mind staggers under the burden and becomes unfit to cope with the duty of the present. Our Lord lived a day at a time. He saw things coming but He never allowed them to distract Him from doing the immediate duty. He was going on an important journey, but He always had time for a cripple by the wayside. His entire time was given to that which claimed His immediate attention. He never crossed a bridge or climbed a hill before He came to it.

The happiest people are those who have learned the art of living a day at a time, and of depending upon God for that day in simple trust. Augustine gave sound advice when he said: "Trust the past to the mercy of God, the present to His love and the future to His providence." Learn to live a day at a time, utterly dependent upon God for strength. He Who tenderly cares for us will provide for us in all the emergencies of our daily lives.

Living a day at a time is easier talked about than done. Because we do not live a day at a time, our lives become clouded with fretting about the past and worrying about the future, and this renders us incapable of living effectively in the present. A hospital patient who was reasonably sure it would not be a short hospitalization looked up anxiously into the face of her doctor and asked: "How long will I have to lie here, Doctor?" The doctor replied, "Only a day at a time, sister," Even sick people who take it that way get well faster than those who do not, and people who are well continue that way longer who take it that way. Such people conserve their strength rather than fritter away their energies in anxious worry about a tomorrow which has not yet come.

A boatman ferried an old-fashioned boat across the English Channel. He remarked that he did not wait to start until he had enough steam to carry him all the way across. He explained, "The old boat would blow up if I did that." Instead, he would get up about thirty or forty pounds of steam, and start. But he did always carry sufficient coal on board to make enough steam for the total crossing. Draw your own application from that, friends. God does not give us enough grace at any point in life to carry us all the way through. We would not have the capacity for it. But He does say, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Lord, for tomorrow and its needs, I do not pray;  
Keep me, my God, from stain of sin, just for today.  
Let me both diligently work, and duly pray;  
Let me be kind in word and deed, just for today.

Let me be slow to do my will, prompt to obey;  
Oh, keep me in Thy loving care, just for today.  
Let me no wrong or idle word, unthinking say;  
Set thou a seal upon my lips, just for today.

Let me in season, Lord, be grave, in season, gay;  
Let me be faithful to Thy grace, just for today.  
So, for tomorrow and its needs I do not pray;  
But, keep me, guide me, love me, Lord, just for today."