

THE LAND OF BEGINNING AGAIN

"Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Joshua 3:4.

There is a poem entitled, "The Land of Beginning Again," and the first verse goes like this:

"I wish that there were some wonderful place,
Called the Land of Beginning Again,
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
And all our poor selfish grief,
Could be dropped, like a shabby old coat, at the door,
And never put on again."

I like to think of life as a book in which one writes his diary. There are as many pages in this book as there are years in the life. On the first page the name is written, and on each succeeding page the record of how the succeeding years are spent. On some pages we find many blots and lines which make us blush; while here and there are passages which we like to read again and again. At this time each of us is starting a new page. What are we going to write on these new pages?

When he became the leader of the children of Israel, Joshua was a young man. He took the place of Moses and had to bring the people to the Promised Land. When they came to the Jordan River, Joshua sent couriers through all the tribes with this message, "When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Joshua 3:3-4). They did not know the way, but God did, and He led them safely to the other side.

We now stand at the border of the Land of Beginning Again. We do not know what is ahead of us, but God knows. If we will only let Him, He will lead us.

There are some things we never get accustomed to, no matter how often they may be repeated. They thrill us every time they arrive. Always, right to the very end of life, when a New Year comes to greet us, it evokes a certain response within the heart.

It is true that we do not measure life by years. We live in deeds, and not in breaths. Our reckonings are independent of the calendar. They are regulated by personal experiences. We are like the Israelites on the banks of the Jordan River; we have reached an end which is also a beginning. As behind us all there is a common journey, so before us is an untrodden way.

This New Year, which is a time of hope, dawns with great possibilities of faithful living and finer service. Joshua's words come to us, as they did to those who first heard them, as a call to faith and a challenge to renewed endeavor. Whereas their hopes were fixed on a new land, ours are fastened to a New Year; both alike present new potentialities.

The children of Israel were leaving behind their wandering, and their leadership was being transferred from Moses to Joshua. We are leaving behind the weaknesses and failures of the old year, and we are facing the New Year with its unknown days and ways. We are faced by the fact, fear, force and fascination of the future. We are starting the New Year with anticipations, plans, projects and purposes, but we do not know an aught of fulfillment, realization or certainty. We do not know what any day may bring forth. Quite likely we shall be introduced to duties, temptations, trials and probably sufferings equal to or greater than any we have yet experienced.

Because the future is unknown to us, we need a guide. Our need of a guide is one of life's imperative necessities. How dimmed our vision; how unchartered our lives; how faltering our feet; how futile our efforts; how impotent our strength; how purposeless our lives; how small our conceptions; how derelict our ship of life without the guiding hand of God!

Behind the Israelites to whom the words of our text were spoken was the desert with its hunger, thirst and restlessness. In front of them was Canaan, unknown and feared. The journey through the desert had been a long and weary task, but the crossing into the Promised Land was a more fateful trial. They were going from the known to the unknown. Our present situation is somewhat similar, as another year has passed into the eternal records. Whatever we have done in 1962 is done, and we cannot rewrite the story. All of the mistakes are past, but the past is not beyond the possibility of forgiveness. The old year is beyond recall, with all of its failures, disappointments, accomplishments and encouragements, and we must abide by the consequences of our living during it. Many joys, opportunities, and sorrows have also passed with it.

Another milestone along life's highway has been passed, and time has again opened to us the gates into another new year. We shall face the blessings and responsibilities of this new year, with its opportunities and hopes. We have not passed this way before.

When the Israelites looked back and longed for the fleshpots of Egypt, they were guilty of idolatry of the past: a living in and on the past. God save us from relying on the blessings and experiences of days that have disappeared!

For twenty centuries our File-Leader has never once failed any of His followers, He has been adequate for every occasion and sufficient for all their needs. He has never failed one of them. There are no surprises to Him. He sees the untrodden road from above: and every turn and bend of it; and He is capable of preparing us for it.

The future holds defeats and victories, so courage and poise will be required. There are three attitudes concerning the future. Some will face it complainingly. A mother, whose son was in service, facing bullets and death, opined, "I cannot understand why God deals thus with me and my son." This discerning answer was given: "Your son's exposure to bullets and death, and your heartaches are not the acts of God. They are the results of misguided men." We accuse God of many things for which the choices of men are responsible. Some people will face the future despairingly. An old man said, "We were told that World War I would end all wars. Now here we are in another. My time is short anyway, and I will soon be out of it all." If disappointments are just grounds for

despair, the whole world would be sabled with its gloomy death. We are to face difficulties with faith in God. Things looked discouraging for Christ; He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. We are not to whine despairingly, but rather face the days with faith and fortitude. Still others face the future courageously. A minister lost two children near the same time. Things were sorrowfully gloomy for him. He said: "It was dark, but I opened my eyes and saw the Ark of God going before. A sense of His presence came to me, and I followed with hope and joy."

"There are no primrose paths to the Promised Land." We face crises, meet defeats; Jordan's billowy, murky waters rise to floodtides before our eyes; internal weaknesses destroy our morale; the spirit of diverse-ness reduces the strength of ten to the strength of one. All our days will not be victorious, but, thank God, all of them will not be filled with doom and defeat, if we follow the Lord.

Life has its bitters. These make its sweets but the sweeter. If it is imperative that we trust and follow Christ in the imperious hours of black despair, it is obligatory that we follow Him when the sun shines and the birds sing. The ultimate triumph of God's people is certain, but the time of their triumph is unknown to us. We are assured, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

It is best that we do not know what the New Year has for us. Let us make an honest effort to adjust our lives in full accord with God's will. Let us read the Bible and pray. Let us have faith in Christ, in others, and in ourselves. Bring out the best in yourself and help the other fellow to be a better person.

The success of a thing often depends on how we start it. There is only one way to properly start a new year in life and that is with Christ, and if we continue thus success is inevitable. With Him you need fear no evil. With Him the joys of life will be yours. With Him you will be able to accomplish tasks that lie before you, and as you journey through the year with Him He will cheer you and comfort you. Start on this unknown way with Jesus, to walk with Him and to work for Him. This book contains three hundred and sixty-five pages, a page for each day. The book is open, and the pages are spotless and clean. Each day is a golden opportunity made up of twenty-four hours of possibilities. How much good we can do with this time! Let us work for God as never before. This may be the last year of our lives, but it will be a happy year for those who march in close fellowship with Christ.

We need One to go before us and to lead us in the right way. The Bible is a chart for us, but we need a living guide. That guide is Jesus Christ. His knowledge of the way is perfect, and He will never lead a soul astray. May we be obedient to the instructions of the Heavenly Guide. Let us open our hearts to Christ, and live one whole year for Him and then compare it with any previous year, and be convinced of its priceless worth.

Resolutions are much in vogue at this season of the year, but there is danger of stopping with the resolutions rather than the realization of its fulfillment. Put them into practice, or we shall be no better off with them than without them. Have the courage to make this one year spent in the service of the Master.