



# “Courage under fire”

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Hebrews 3-4. Rev. Bruce Stanley

Sermon audio and text available at [www.waitara.anglican.asn.au](http://www.waitara.anglican.asn.au)

## What is courage?

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### **III** – persecuted Christians

What were you doing 4 weeks ago on Sunday September 30? I was on holidays.

Probably somewhere on the beach after going to church in the morning.

In Nairobi, KENYA, on that day, a Sunday School was attacked with a grenade.

A nine-year-old boy was killed and at least three other children were seriously injured.

During a worship service for children aged between six and ten, witnesses heard a loud explosion then 'people started running for their lives'. A total of nine children were hospitalised.

Its in times like this in places like Nairobi that Christians need great courage to stand up under the persecution they face. But so do we! WE need courage as Christians in the trials WE face. We need courage to be open about our faith and to be able to speak with truth about what we believe. We need courage to live differently to the people of this world in our hedonistic individualistic society. We need courage to live as Christians, no matter what time or place we find ourselves in.

Every Christian need courage.

## The community of God under Moses and Jesus

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Hebrews chapter 3 starts where chapter 2 finished – encouraging us to fix our thoughts on Jesus, because of who he is – creator, sustainer and God himself; and because of what he’s done – providing purification for our sins by dying on the cross for us.

Hebrews 3 takes us back to the time of Moses and compares him with Jesus. But the writer also wants us to compare the community of God’s people back then to today’s community and warns us of the dangers we face.

First, verse 2, we’re told that Moses was a faithful priest. And Jesus is a faithful priest. But Jesus is superior. Why?

Verse 5 – Moses was faithful as a servant in God’s house.

Verse 6 – But Jesus was faithful as a Son OVER God’s house.

Both faithful. One as a servant in the house. One as the son of God OVER his house.

Moses is a good role model of faithfulness in the house of God, but Jesus is superior as the ruler of the house.

But now, let's compare the pair. Let's compare the house of God then and now. Under Moses, and now under Jesus.

Verses 7-11. Under Moses, God's community faced so many trials and struggles when they left Egypt and wandered in the desert for 40 years before entering the promised land. What happened in those years?

They hardened their hearts. They grumbled against God. They complained. They did not trust him. They were not obedient. And so... none of that generation entered the promised land of Canaan. Listen to just a few verses from Numbers 14:1-4, 26-30:

*1That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. 2All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! 3Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."*

And how did God respond?

*26The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: 27"How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. 28So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Lord, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: 29In this desert your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. 30Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.*

God's people under Moses did not enter God's rest.

And we see this reminder as a warning all through the book of Hebrews. Our goal, as a community of Jesus' disciples, is to enter God's rest. Rest is an important theme in the Bible.

First we see it in Genesis. God creates the whole world and then rests on the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

Then we see it in the Exodus, when God rescues his people from slavery in Egypt to bring them into the promised land so that they can REST.

And finally, we see it in the New Testament. **We** are waiting for Jesus to return to take us to heaven so **we** can REST with God. That's our goal. To rest with God forever.

A whole generation of Israelites did not enter God's rest because they were disobedient. When they faced trials and temptations, they gave up on God. The writer of Hebrews doesn't want that to happen to us!

Now, it's important to note here that we're not talking about individuals. We're talking about a whole community. The whole community of Israel, the whole generation,

turned away from God. This letter of Hebrews is written to us as a community – as the house of God. God wants us to be a community of courage. Hebrews 3:6 –

*“6But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.*

Holding on to courage and hope is the way we remain faithful as a community. To hold on, to be faithful, to be obedient, takes courage. To hold to the truth of the gospel, especially in this society, takes great courage. Many people in our world think that what we believe is just plain silly. And many Christians have gone away from the Bible's teaching on many things, seeing God's Word as a helpful book, but not always correct.

## Where does courage come from?

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It takes courage to hold to our beliefs in a world that laughs at us and to speak that truth into people's lives. We need courage. And where does courage come from? Hebrews 3:12-13 –

*12See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

To remain faithful, we need courage. And courage comes from... encouragement! It's pretty obvious isn't it? Courage comes from **enc**couragement. Where do we get the courage to stand firm in our faith during times of trial or suffering or persecution? From encouragement. From our community. Where do we get the courage to speak the truth and hold firmly to what we believe? From the encouragement of God's community.

As chapter 4 continues on, it reminds us again how important it is to enter that rest. 4:11 –

*11Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that **no one** will fall by following their example of disobedience.*

Again, a community statement – a call to the HOUSE of God. Make every effort AS A COMMUNITY so that NO ONE will fall. Make every effort to encourage each other to stay faithful and obedient to God. We have this responsibility to one another. A responsibility to encourage. That is our commitment to one another. That we will encourage and strengthen one another during times of trial and suffering. Our aim is not just to reach the finish line. Our aim is to be at the finish line TOGETHER.

I think we often read these words thinking about ourselves. We think about how others should encourage us. How we come to church to **be** encouraged. We may even

judge our church for not being supportive or encouraging enough. But this is **your** community. **You** are part of this house of God. And **your** aim is the same as mine. To see us all walk obediently with God until the very end. To give each other the courage we need to stand firm in our faith.

And what is the best way to do that? To ensure that NO ONE falls? Where does God's community get their encouragement training from? 4:12 –

*12For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

God gives us his word s our source o encouragement. And because God's word is active, it penetrates the depth of our hearts. And, importantly, it uncovers everything.

**III** – It is tick season. I never worried much about ticks until we moved to the Bushland Shire! Ticks bury themselves below the skin and poison our blood. They're especially nasty if they get into your head and get covered by your hair.

That's such a great picture of sin. Sin buries itself in us and poisons us. And the longer its left, the harder it is to see and the more damage it causes. God's Word uncovers it all. It exposes the sin in our life. **And that is a good thing!** When we encourage with God's word, it not only gives courage, it also uncovers sin so it can be dealt with in our lives.

Let me suggest three things to take away from these chapters:

1. It takes courage to be faithful and obedient to God. When we lack courage, we lose hope, and then it's really easy to be disobedient to God, just like the Israelites in the desert.
2. Courage comes by **en**couragement from the community of God. Consider spending just 5 minutes a day focusing on encouraging your brothers and sisters in your church family. Make a phone call, send an email, post a letter, visit, show hospitality. Not once a month. Or once a week. Once a day. Imagine 250 members of our church encouraging another person each day in some small way.
3. Encourage with the Word. God's word is our weapon. Read the Bible every day and you'll find you will naturally encourage people with God's Word.

We need courage. That comes through encouragement from our community, and we get that from God's Word.

Let's pray:

1. For courage.
2. To encourage
3. To be in God's Word