



“Stepping up”

Hebrews 5-6. Rev. Bruce Stanley

Sermon audio and text available at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

- **III** – Warning signs...

There are warning signs everywhere – for example: (see pictures)

- **The problem with milk**

5:11-14

This chapter of Hebrews is a warning against drinking milk! Its written to a community of mature Christians. But there's a problem. They're not acting like mature Christians.

- *5:11 - We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.*

Here is a church of mature Christians, Christian leaders and teachers, but they've taken a step back.

- He says in verse 5:12 – *“You need milk, not solid food!”*

And that's the problem with milk. It's not meant for grown ups as a food source. Experts are divided on the age a baby should stop feeding on breast milk, or formula. But I'm pretty sure none of them would say a 30 year old should be living on milk. Because it's for babies! Mature people need solid food.

III – baby teeth – also called “milk teeth”. What happens to them? They fall out. Why? Because they're not able to chew solid food as well. They're meant for babies and young children. Then they fall out and are replaced with grown up teeth to chew solid food.

And this is the problem an the warning. The warning is that these mature Christians have gone back to living on milk. They're not stepping up to the their level of Christian maturity. The warning is that if they continue this way, they will go back to being babies in their faith, not growing or maturing. And even worse, they may even fall away. They are in danger of becoming spiritually deaf. Unable to hear what God is saying to them, if they don't grow up.

And so he says in 6:1

- *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity*

III – Do you have goals in life? For your family? For your career maybe. Financial goals, relationship goals...?

Businesses have goals and missions.

Like Google:

- “Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.”

Or Ebay:

- “eBay's mission is to provide a global trading platform where practically anyone can trade practically anything.”

Goals, or missions, allow for growth. A goal expects a company to grow to meet that goal.

For us as a Church, we have a goal, a mission statement, that is

- **“To be disciples and make disciples”**

It's a mission that comes from Jesus. And it's a never-ending mission. There are always ways to grow as disciples of Jesus, and there are always more people we can reach to help them become disciples of Jesus.

Reaching that goal requires us to grow in our faith. And that takes work. Each one of us are called to mature in our faith to meet that goal, rather than just be satisfied with a childish knowledge of God's ways.

In this church, there are many people at different levels of maturity in their faith. Some are new believers. Some have been believers for 60 years or more. But that's not maturity. You see, we can sit in a church and not mature, especially if we have no goal or desire to mature. And the warning that Hebrews gives us is that this is a dangerous place to be. If we all just sit still in our faith, not aiming to grow as Christians, then who will be here in the future disciple new Christians? Who will be our teachers and leaders of the future? How do we continue to grow God's church if weren't prepared to grow ourselves?

Some Christians might say: “I know all I need to know about God. I don't need to study his word more. I read the Bible. I don't need to mature more than that. I'm good where I'm at now. This will do.” While it sounds like arrogance it is, in fact, foolishness from what Hebrews tells us. How foolish to think that God says: “OK, you've matured **enough**. Just stay there. No need to put any more effort in. That'll do.” No. God says “Go ON to maturity”. The foundation has been laid. Now it must be built upon. And every day with God is a chance to build on that foundation of repentance and faith.

So there is the challenge. And we'll come back to that a bit later and see how we can put that into action.

• The impossible

Now we get to verse 4 – one of those verses that many people seem to worry about:

6:4-6

- *It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.*

It seems to be saying that Christians can fall away. And if they do, they cannot be brought back to salvation. But don't we have assurance of salvation? Aren't we secure in our faith? Doesn't God look after us? We need to read these verses with caution and context. We need to hear the warning and the intent of these verses.

This is a warning against apathy – against not caring about our faith. It's a warning to those who are mature but have gone back to drinking milk.

- What is the warning?

If you remain as an infant, if you refuse to mature in your faith, then it is easy to become deaf. Spiritually deaf.

- It's a warning to be **diligent** (verse 11) and not **lazy** (verse 12).

Consider two things: God's role and our role.

God says that he is able to keep us from falling – Jude 24. God is able to hold us safely in his grasp. But we have a responsibility to respond to his call on our life. Hebrews 2:1 says "Pay more careful attention so that you do not drift away."

Hebrews is saying that it is possible to drift so far, if we are not paying attention to Jesus, if we are remaining as babies in our faith, to we arrive at the point where we don't even want to repent from our sins anymore. Where we don't even see the NEED for repentance.

III – I originally studied Maths at University. 22 years ago... And we did a course on Group Theory. And I used to understand things like this:

- $gH = \{g \bullet h : h \in H\}$ and $Hg = \{h \bullet g : h \in H\}$, respectively

Today, I don't have any idea what that means. If I wanted to understand it, because I haven't bothered with it for over 20 years, I would have to go back to basics. But the longer I don't bother with it, the less chance I really have of ever understanding it ever again. Which I'm OK with for Group Theory...

When we take our attention off Jesus, when we stop desiring to grow and mature in our faith, the warning of Hebrews is that we may reach that point where we no longer have a desire to repent from our sin.

That's the warning. It's a warning to respond to God each day. It's a warning to hear his call on us to keep maturing in our faith, and not to remain as a child.

But now, very importantly, the encouragement... Let's turn to the end of chapter 6.

• The encouragement

- **13**When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, **14**saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." **15**And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

What was God's promise to Abraham? That he will be blessed and have many descendants. And Abraham was faithful, and patient, and he received God's promise. But God did two things here: He made a promise and confirmed it with an oath. He said: "I promise to do this, and I swear it will happen". Why a promise AND an oath? To confirm it to Abraham's heirs, US. To confirm it to future generations – so that there will be no doubt that God will keep his promise.

And how has God fulfilled his promise to us? Through Jesus. And this is our great encouragement in verse 19:

- **19**We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, **20**where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.

He reminds us of what Jesus has done. Jesus has brought us into a relationship with God. Through Jesus, we can enter the inner sanctuary – we can be in a direct and personal relationship with God himself. We'll look at that in more details next week. But the encouragement for us is that God has kept his promise, and Jesus is our hope and anchor. Pay attention to him, because he is our anchor – the one who holds us firmly in our faith.

But we must listen to him. We must act on his word. So let me finish with this application today: I'd like us to consider our goals or maturing in our faith.

On your sermon outline is a commitment guide. Something to help us all to keep stepping up to mature in our faith. It's simply a guide to help us think about some ways we can actively seek to mature in our faith.

- (Explain sheet)

Reading the Bible

- ☐ I will read the book of _____ (Bible book) this week
- ☐ I will start a Bible reading program in _____ (month)
- ☐ I will spend _____ minutes a day reading the Bible this week/month

Studying the Bible

- ☐ I will join a Bible study group in _____ (month)
- ☐ I will commit to being regular at my Bible study group
- ☐ I will enroll in a theological course in _____ (month/year)

Prayer

- ☐ I will set aside _____ minutes every day this week for prayer
- ☐ I will pray once a week for _____ (person or ministry)
- ☐ I will pray with my spouse/family/children each day this week

Giving

- ☐ I will review my giving in _____ (month)
- ☐ I will increase my giving by \$_____ in (month)
- ☐ I will extend my giving to support _____ (church/person/mission)

Ministry

- ☐ I will seek to spend _____ hours per week in ministry in 2013
- ☐ I will train for ministry in _____ (ministry area)
- ☐ I will speak to a ministry team member about my ministry by _____ (month)