# BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

Mike Mazzalongo

**Introduction**

I want to share this sermon with the intention of encouraging each of us to persevere in our life as a child of God!

Ask everyone to think about a time in their life when they had to be “strong and courageous”…

Share my personal experience of how I went through a divorce after 17 years of marriage and how I had to be “strong and courageous” to make sure that I could take care of my children so they would be okay after us going through a divorce and the work that I did to support myself and my family. Share how we also left a church and then searched for a new church to call home and then after an extensive search, we were blessed to find the Cortland Church of Christ. We have been so blessed to become part of the family here at Cortland and to be members of the congregation for a number of years.

Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory.  
- Joshua 1:1-4

So begins the book of Joshua that chronicles the life and times of its author who succeeded Moses in leading the people into the Promised Land after their forty years of wandering in the desert. In this first chapter, God promises Joshua complete success and protection in his efforts to take over the land inhabited by fierce pagan nations, many of which were heavily armed and experienced in the art of war. We also note that God encourages Joshua three times to be strong and courageous while promising him total victory and safety.

This brings up a contradiction of sorts. If you are going to win and God is with you, why should you need to be strong and courageous? After all, if God gives you a "sure thing," why would you need strength and courage?

**Joshua's Need for Courage and Strength**

Joshua heard God's command (to take the land) and God's promise (he will surely win) and His encouragement (be strong and courageous). Later on, however, Joshua found out why he would need strength and courage despite the guarantee of victory from God. He needed strength and courage because...

**Leadership Would Be Difficult**

No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.  
- Joshua 1:5-6

God promised that He would be with Joshua as He had been with Moses. In other words, He would guide and confirm Joshua's leadership. But this did not guarantee that the people would follow, nor did it guarantee that the enemy would just lie down and give up. Joshua needed courage and strength because the people would rebel, become unfaithful, and act in a cowardly manner just as they had done under Moses' leadership.

God had promised to be with Moses also and that he would succeed, but it required forty years of struggle and heartache to bring the Jewish people to the point of entry. Joshua would also need strength and courage because the enemy was cunning and there were constant challenges to his leadership. He was a leader guaranteed of victory by God but not before he would face many trials and disappointments. He was going to win, but God didn't say it was going to be an easy victory! He needed strength and courage because…

**The People That He Led Were Weak and Sinful**

Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have 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 success.  
- Joshua 1:7-8

God provided the assurance of success based on obedience to His Word, but the people were stubborn and disobedient. It required strength and courage to continually teach God's Word and remain faithful in the face of such widespread paganism.

It was easy for sinful men to assume that their military success was based on their own physical abilities and bravery, while forgetting the role of God's providence in their victories. Only a morally strong leader could maintain faith while the natural tendency was to revel in national pride. To obey God's Word when unsure, to maintain God's commands when the world and its allurements surrounded him, required that Joshua have the highest form of courage and commitment.

Joshua would need to keep the standard required by God's Word if he wanted to see the victory promised by the Lord.

Strength and courage would be necessary because...

**The Journey Would Be Long**

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."  
- Joshua 1:9

Yes, God would be with them but the people didn't realize how long the process would take before they saw complete victory. They had to learn about the land and fight many campaigns over several decades before their goal would be reached. There were times when the wars were going badly or little to no progress was being made. There were even instances of in-fighting between various factions among the Jewish people themselves.

During these periods it was easy to forget God's promises or begin doubting the promises themselves because the "immediate" circumstances didn't look anything like a victory. It was during these "down" periods where the people were easily seduced into various forms of idolatry and sexual immorality. And yet, God's promise was there all along — shadowing them as they went from battle to battle and temptation to temptation. Joshua and the people had to remain strong and courageous in order to keep the promise in full view, despite their long and arduous journey.

**Our Need for Strength and Courage**

The book of Joshua sadly records that the people did not succeed in the end because they disobeyed God. They did possess the land, but not to the extent that they could have because they permitted certain pagan nations to survive. Later on they were seduced into idolatry by the very same people that God had commanded be destroyed.

It is easy for us to criticize them for losing a "sure thing", but before we do we need to realize that we are in a similar situation today. We have also been given a guaranteed situation, a "sure thing" by God in Christ.

* [Acts 2:38](https://bibletalk.tv/verse/86) — A promise that those who repent and are baptized will be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit.
* [Matthew 24:13](https://bibletalk.tv/verse/1513) — A guarantee that those who remain faithful to the end will be saved.
* [John 6:40](https://bibletalk.tv/verse/1514) — An assurance that all of Jesus' disciples will be raised from the dead to be with God forever.

These things are promises, sure things, guarantees from God of even better things than were promised to the Jews of Joshua's day (they were promised land, we are promised eternal life). However, despite the fact that these are promises and guarantees from God, we too need to have strength and courage because...

**Being a Leader for Christ Is Difficult**

Yes, Christian leaders (elders, teachers, preachers) are going to heaven and that is a promise. However, there is no guarantee that those who are led will want to follow or cooperate with our efforts. In addition to this there has always been skepticism, and various levels of rejection and persecution of those who proclaimed Christ. To this day there is still general disbelief and marginalization of those who encourage others to follow the narrow way of Jesus. Those who lead need strength and courage to continue preaching the gospel and serving in the name of the Lord when others think they are wasting their time and energy. Strength and courage are necessary too because...

**We Are Weak and Sinful**

It seems so easy!

* Repent and be baptized = forgiveness + Holy Spirit ([Acts 2:38](https://bibletalk.tv/verse/86))
* Believe in Jesus = resurrection + eternal life ([John 3:16](https://bibletalk.tv/verse/988))

And yet Paul cries out in Romans 7:24:

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Here is a man who has done miracles, been imprisoned for his faith, established churches, trained others, produced inspired writings — and yet when he looks at himself what he sees is a sinner. Paul the Apostle declares that he is a human being filled with good intentions and faithful service trapped in a sinful body. Does this sound familiar?

Even if we know that God loves us and we are going to heaven, our lives continue to be filled with doubt, temptation, and failure (because of sin). We need courage and strength to overcome these obstacles in order to remain true to the course we have set, and that course is to follow Jesus despite our failures. Our strength and courage come from the same place that provided it for Joshua and the children of Israel, God's Holy Word. Through the daily reading, through the regular study, and through the weekly exhortation from our ministers God provides the spiritual power we need to remain faithful despite the presence of sin in our lives and all around us.

We need strength and courage because...

**The Journey Is Long**

When the Jews came out of Egypt they thought that they would be in the Promised Land in a matter of weeks. It took forty long years!

When we come out of the waters of baptism, we do not know where the Lord will lead us or allow us to go. It would be wonderful if we could simply go straight to heaven immediately after baptism, but Christian life does not work that way. The period between our baptism and our entry into heaven is usually long. Sometimes there are moments of rapid spiritual and personal growth; however, Christian life also has long stretches of difficulty. Things like illness, loneliness, spiritual dryness, as well as family and professional problems are just a few of the challenging experiences that all Christians undergo at one time or another.

Many of these are caused by our own sins and foolishness but sometimes we suffer because of someone else's carelessness, evil, or ignorance. It requires strength and courage to maintain faith, hope, and love when it seems that the end of our suffering will never come! However, the end does come for those who have endured faithfully and they will receive a glorious welcome to the heavenly realm from the Lord Himself ("Well done good and faithful servant." - [Matthew 25:21](https://bibletalk.tv/verse/1515)).

**Summary**

If you are among those who have been given the "sure thing" of salvation and the "guarantee" of heaven by Christ, but you have been on the journey for a long time and have faced disbelief and opposition, struggled with Satan's many temptations, and even suffered much pain and sorrow, I say to you...

Be strong, have courage, the Lord has seen your way, knows your heart, and is intimately acquainted with every bit of your suffering. If your courage is lagging, if your resolve is weak, remember Joshua who entered in after forty years; remember Paul who withstood the opposition and even his own feelings of inadequacy to eventually say,

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.  
- II Timothy 4:7-8

That "all" He refers to when he says, "...*all* who have loved His appearing" refers to **you** and me!

Be strong and courageous therefore, and remember that the race is not to the swift or the powerful but to those who remain faithful until the end. In the Christian journey it is not how fast you go or how much you do along the way. The rewards go to those who **finish.**

* Prayer
* Invitation