

## Sermon for 4<sup>th</sup> July

### Hebrews 10: 19-25

Good Morning! This Covid crises has affected us in so many different ways. People from all different backgrounds, nations in all kinds of places have been affected, and we all have a story to tell. How have you personally coped? Have you had enough? It's interesting listening to the radio and hearing how some people lives have improved during Covid. One thing this lockdown has produced are many habits, some good and some bad. Have you developed or started any new habits since the start of lockdown?

I have a list of some of these habits You can have a point for each one you've done

1 Snacking 2 Not clearing up 3 Constantly on your Phone

4 Spending the day in your pyjamas

5 Attending a zoom meeting with only your top half presentable

6 Hours on your X box or PS4 7 Amazon Spending spree

Now all of us, if we're being honest have habits some good and some bad

**Definition of a habit: a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up:**

Yes - hard to give up and many of us that make New Year's resolutions make ones about giving up something like chocolate or coffee that are hard to give up. Sometimes we make resolutions that are positive about what we will do and many people of faith say 'This year I will spend more time with God'.

So as we are about to leave this COVID period and have our vaccinations and life goes back to some normality - here is a chance for you and me to think about what Habits we can have or introduce to help us in our relationship with God. This can be about you the individual or even you the Church!

We come to this passage in the New Testament that mentions habit in Hebrews 10:19 - 25.

The writer of this wonderful letter to Jewish converts across Rome and the Roman Empire is wanting to encourage people that are being persecuted to not return to Judaism but to keep going in their faith. Many were tempted to fall

away and go back to their old life. Some had an amazing encounter with Jesus but didn't quite know how he fitted in with their Old Testament beliefs.

Let's face it this could be the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Look at all the pressures that Christians face today. Many Christians around the world and even in this country face persecution and even death. The temptation to leave and walk away must be huge.

Nigerian school girl Leah Sharibu was kidnapped along with 110 other girls by Boko Haram. A month later through negotiations most of the girls were freed except Leah. Leah had the chance to go home by renouncing her faith and become a Muslim. Her friends pleaded with her to just recite a prayer and pretend but Leah held firm and to this day 3 years later she still remains a captive for her faith.

What about you? Have you felt like giving up? Maybe life has become so hard, maybe your relationships are tough.

The message for you for today as it was for 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish Christians is don't give up, Persevere!

You've had enough of this lockdown? Don't give up!

As a church maybe God has given you a vision but you are far from where you should be, don't give up! Persevere!

Make Perseverance your habit. I have met many gifted and talented Christians that have given up whenever life or the Church gets tough. The writer of Hebrews (Ch12) describes our life and faith as a race 'Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith'. Run your race! This requires discipline. Has anyone run a marathon? You don't just climb off your sofa and run 26 miles, it requires training and discipline. Your feelings can be a hindrance. When I played for Gillingham F.C Under 18s our training was really hard and intense. Did I enjoy the pain? Did I fancy going on a dark winter's night on a Tuesday evening and run so hard your legs felt like jelly? Absolutely not! But for me to play the standard required I had to go through the pain barrier 'No pain, No gain!' It is through hard ship and difficulty that we grow.

Don't be solely controlled by your feelings. We live in an age where your feelings are what matter most. They are important but they shouldn't be

absolute. Turn your eyes upon Jesus who went to the cross for you, who took your sins on his shoulders. Do you think Jesus fancied torture and death? No but he said 'Not my will, but yours to his father and he went to the cross for you and for me.

Persevere!

Encouraging one another is another great habit. Are you a glass half full or a glass half empty person? A pessimist or an optimist? Pessimism is a very British trait. If you stand at a bus stop and you wanted to chat to a stranger so often it's easy to break the ice by saying the weather is terrible. One reason people get caught up in gossip is because they find complaining and pessimism so appealing. I rarely hear gossiping where people are praising and encouraging. The writer to the Hebrews says in verse 24 'and let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. In chapter 12 the writer talks about being surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses as we run the race. With the Tokyo Olympics coming up it's quite topical as the writer brings up this picture of the amphitheatres that everyone had seen across the Roman empire. Has anyone here seen one when they've been abroad? The crowd are there to cheer and spur on the athletes. There have even been races where fellow athletes have encouraged and have spurred on their fellow competitor. 1992 Derek Redman racing for team GB pulled his hamstring the race was over until his dad ran on to the track put his arm around his shoulder and spurred him on to finish the race. So our job is encourage each other to love and do good deeds. What a powerful witness it is when the Church does things to support others. We sponsored and supported Sophie to be on a BMS Action Team, it was a great witness. We have a team that meet down at food cycle on Mondays.

How about us today? Who are you encouraging? Is there an individual that you can encourage? Is there something in the community that the Church can rise to and encourage. Verse 25 says encourage one another. What a witness it would be if the Church across the UK was known for showing love and encouragement. Make it a habit along with Perseverance. So if you are a Pessimist this will not be so easy to look to be encouraging even when you don't feel like it. Is there someone struggling that you know of? Pick up the phone, message them commit to supporting them and spur them on.

Encourage!

Fellowship

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing says the writer to the Hebrews. The greek word for 'give up' speaks of deserting and abandoning - so let us not abandon / give up / desert meeting together.

If you're being persecuted and in those days being watched by those that were trying to stop the spread of Christianity it probably seemed an easy option to not meet.

Today in Britain, it may not be so extreme but we have our own issues. We live in such an individualistic age where my world can almost be how I want it. My smart phone will play me the music I want, pay bills, I can live alone without seeing or talking to anyone, I can listen to my favourite speakers on YouTube, with Zoom I can even attend a church anywhere in the world. If someone upsets me on facebook I can delete them, I can block them. It's my world and it's how I want it. Put into the mix Cancel culture and we have a society that isn't able to cope with opposing thoughts, different ideas and disagreements. The saying that man is his own island is true for many. Some people don't even know the names of their neighbours.

Yet with all these wonderful gadgets and with such an individual outlook is it any wonder that loneliness is so prevalent.

A survey carried out by Action For Children found that 43% of 17 - 25 year olds who used their service had experienced Loneliness

The number of over 50s experiencing loneliness is set to reach 2 million by 2025

What about Parents? A quarter of all parents surveyed said they were always or often lonely.

It's a fact that there are a lot on lonely people out there.

But what about us the Church, have we been influenced by the world? Do we really need to meet? Why is meeting together so important as the writer of Hebrews says.

Firstly, Jesus calls his disciples to not be in the world (John 15:19), he is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). The way of the world is not the way of Christ.

Paul encourages us to do nothing out of selfish ambition. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2).

Paul also says that we are all one body, yes church is not a club it's a living organism. Try going through the day using only 1 arm or hopping on 1 leg and that is a picture of someone who says they don't need church. If Christ is your saviour, if you follow Jesus you need each other whether you like it or not. We are the body of Christ and he is the head (Colossians 1:18) Peter in his first letter chapter 1 describes you and me as living stones being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Look how much we have in common. Don't be an island, be the church.

In closing let us build new habits and continue the healthy old ones. Persevere, encourage and meet together and may the light of Jesus shine through you and your witness to this lost world.

Amen