

Reading: Hebrews 13v1-9

Theme: Living life for our awesome God.

This past week Doncaster E C has celebrated its 40th anniversary and this was focused on in the midweek meeting as some founding members shared about that exciting time, but here we are 40 years later. Throughout those 40 years the church has had its ups and downs, testing times and times of blessing. We are still in existence and have the same aim to reach out to the people of Doncaster, from all backgrounds and nationalities with the gospel of the Lord Jesus – the message that still gives true hope.

The book of Hebrews is an amazing book, but has no named author. Its 1st readers knew who it was from and historically many feel it was Paul. Ultimately, its true author is God Himself. I plan to bring an anniversary message today from our reading in Hebrews 13:1-9 - but in 2 parts and not one really, really, really long one! I quickly noticed that chapter 13 follows chapter 12! Hebrews 12 is an amazingly encouraging chapter - to keep on in the race, looking unto Jesus, any discipline was from their loving Father, to encourage one another on in the Christian life. Yes, there are solemn warnings that emphasise the awesomeness of our God and the seriousness of the gospel. The chapter ends about the kingdom we are receiving and the call to reverent worship of this God - described as a consuming fire in 12:28-29.

Yet, in contrast to the lofty themes in chapter 12, chapter 13 seems out of place - it seems to be a disjointed series of unrelated practical applications. Here the writer follows the pattern of many NT letters (especially by Paul) - truth, doctrine and lofty teaching followed by practical outworking. What is said in this chapter is a continuation, an outworking of all the great truths written in the letter, which are specifically connected to 12:28-29. Our true heart worship of this awesome God is to spill over into our daily lives and every area of our lives are to be lived in reference to this

awesome God and our relationship with Him. This is to affect our relationship with other believers, with strangers, those suffering for the gospel, in our marriages and our marriage bed, our contentment, our leaders, foods and so on. This is for us all as individuals and on a church level. Our worship of this God who is a consuming fire is to be shown in the way we live. Note 5 areas in v1-6:

1. Philadelphia. (v1)

The Greek here is short and to the point only 3 words meaning “*let the philadelphia continue or abide or remain*”. Philadelphia = brotherly love and is an ongoing continuing command. The author goes from our worship of God - who is as a consuming fire, to loving our fellow Christians continually. This brotherly love is taught us from God (1 Thessalonians 4:9). It is not a coldly observed command, but an outworking of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. 40 years ago, those who formed the church needed it, through the years it has been needed and now in these confusing times we still need this philadelphia, brotherly love - as we have seen from John 13:34 recently - we are to love one another just as Jesus loves us.

It is more than a phrase to use or demand from others, but is to be expressed in practical ways where possible. We are to have a love and care for other brothers and sisters in Christ as well as those not yet Christians - especially shown in our own local church. These Hebrew Christians were being pressurised to go back to Judaism, were suffering and going through times of hurt and loss. In such times it would have been so easy to be preoccupied with self and forget or neglect our walk with and love for God, as well as our love for our brothers and sisters. Even in this time of Covid crisis it still remains so vitally important for us as believers to recognise its importance, seek to maintain and develop this

philadelphia between every one of us and encourage each other on in any situation we are in at this time. Now see:

2. Open heart and open door! (v2)

We are also shown this love is not to be restricted to those we know. We are to be willing to show hospitality to strangers. We are not to limit this to food alone, for hospitality, entertaining strangers is more to do with an open heart and door than an appetising open table. It is an open heart and home and not necessarily a 3-course meal! Basically, it means we are willing to have time for people, even time for those we do not know and so we become a welcoming church, a welcoming group of people and individuals.

In the first century, inns, hotels etc. were not the best of places – flea ridden, immoral, unhygienic, expensive and dangerous. When believers travelled to a place it was reasonably expected that other Christians would be willing to open their hearts and homes to them. It wasn't just for the well-to-do and well-off Christians - there would have been very few of those in the first century, but a floorspace, a sparse meal shared with Christian fellowship were and are precious things. In our time we are to consider the privileges we have. Would we be shamed by these early Christians and their open hospitality?

We are to be those who are still continually seeking to entertain, give hospitality as and when needed, to have people stay with us. As the author wrote this, he says some had entertained angels without knowing it. Who was he referring to? Abraham, also Lot - both these looked after angels and these were occasions for a blessing - Abraham and Sarah promised a son; Lot had deliverance from Sodom. Possibly we could include Gideon, also Samson's parents. Imagine entertaining, giving hospitality to someone and they turned out to be an angel! In Abram's case he also gave

hospitality to the Lord, who told him great things. Wow, what an honour and privilege! We'd all be queueing up and fighting over (*in brotherly love of course*) to entertain angels or the Lord wouldn't we! Yet consider Jesus' words as He talks about the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:35, also v42-43 - He says that things, when they were done or not done for one of the least of these brothers of His, were done or not done for Him (v40 & 45). The Lord takes personally our giving or not giving hospitality to Christians. This makes it a great privilege for us to do so. Do we express our worship in hospitality and care?

3. Locked down and hurting. (v3)

We learn that among those he wrote to were some who had been imprisoned or suffered for their faith (10:34) - another outworking of brotherly love was to remember and keep in mind such suffering ones. It was not just feeling sorry for them, but having a mind to do some practical good - care for their families, if possible, give care to and visit them (*also mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 25*). These believers, through no fault of their own were locked in and down in prison, hurting through this hardship and unable to get to church. While we are not experiencing such in our land, it has happened before e.g. John Bunyan, but is happening in other lands at this time. We may know those, who because of shielding, are having to be confined to their home or may be imprisoned by their concerns in this pandemic. Maybe someone has been confined to home because of vulnerability or because they are looking after loved ones. They need to be remembered, visited and cared for by us as believers. Nowadays we can contact, visit them easily in so many ways, even see them using Zoom or another available online system. Even visit them, for a safe face-to-face meeting - much better, as long as it does not aggravate their situation. We also need to be wise as to when and how long we visit!

The writer says do this (NIV) “*as if you yourselves were suffering*”, literally says “*yourselves being in the body*” the idea of “*in the body*” can mean part of the same body of believers and when one hurts, all feel it. This is a biblical picture and we are to empathise and sympathise with those who are suffering so we respond and care as we would want others to care for us if we were in that situation, but more importantly, it is to respond as the Bible requires. Another view of “*in the body*” is to recognise we are to only flesh and blood and could suffer in the same way - so respond and care as we we’d want others to do for us - show this love and concern for those stuck in and hurting due to things outside of their control – all as an outworking of our worship.

4. So to bed! (v4)

This v4 is an interesting verse! Let’s go onto the next verse... Your starter for 10 is to see the link of this to 12:28-29! The author mentions marriage being honoured by all and the marriage bed kept pure i.e. even lovemaking comes under the orbit of our Christian life and our worship of this great God who is a consuming fire! Throughout time some of God’s people have gone to one extreme or the other concerning God’s funnest gift to mankind. Some view it as something dirty, unnecessary, to be avoided and celibacy is a superior state, even say that sex, even in marriage, is only as and when for having children and nice people, spiritual people do not have a need or desire it! The other extreme is the pagan worldview - have sex as much as possible - whenever and with whoever and the more times the merrier!

The balanced biblical view is that God the Creator has designed men and women, their sexual organs, stimuli and the sexual relationship as one of the great gifts of His common grace, but only in the intimacy of ones’ own marriage between a man and a woman, it can be entered fully into. The Song of Solomon, in the Hebrew, has many intimate sexual references and Hebrew boys

under 16 were not allowed to read it. Here the author underlines the sanctity, the honour of marriage and that the act of marriage in the bedroom is not dirty, to be tolerated, but is pure (*the word has a force which is positive*), but clean, good, a wholesome part of marriage and the Christian life. A warning is given of God's judgement on adulterers and sexually immoral.

We are all too aware of the view of society around us about such things, but we are to have a high and biblical view of marriage and the sexual side of marriage. We are to show to those around how honourable and pure marriages are to be and to make them jealous of our loving clean relationship as we live for our loving and holy God, to even show it in our nearest and dearest relationships and glorify God in such things. Moving on we see ask:

5. Is God enough? (v5-6)

These Hebrew Christians were suffering, had it tough and it would have been so easy to worry, be concerned when jobs were lost, when lifestyles were affected, if they were put in prison and the future seemed bleak and hard. Incredibly they were told to keep their lives free from undue concerns and a craving love for money, but to be content with what they had. We ourselves are living in a highly materialistic society and it's all too easy for us to be caught up with the expectations and desires of society around us as we are pressurised, bombarded with advertising through the media and we are to learn to be content with whatever God has given us at this time.

It is not wrong to strive to improve ourselves, our jobs etc, but we are to be content if God's providence keeps us where we are, or gives us a mysterious reversal of fortune. At such a time, we are not to doubt, fear, covet or desire many things - as if our only comfort, security, joy and peace rested on our bank balance or what we owned. One writer (Raymond Brown) wrote

“Covetousness is born of doubt; contentment is the child of faith.”
This is to be a developing, a cultivated attitude as it does not come naturally or suddenly. We need to be constantly reminding ourselves of our Father’s care, love and provision. We are to focus on Him, His righteousness and kingdom.

The author quotes OT promises about God never forsaking His people – Deut. 31:6 is to all the people of God, in Deut. 31:8 also Joshua 1:5, Joshua is addressed as an individual. These promises include all of God’s people - individuals or a whole. The author wants the Hebrew Christians to realise as individuals and a church that God is for them, with them and will not abandon them when things are rough or testing. The same is true of us as a church or individuals – whether we have been a Christian for a longer or shorter time.

Do we realise the care, attention and the help we have of this awesome, consuming fire of the God we have? He is no lame-duck, or tinpot god, but we have the awesome God of 12:22-29 as our God and Saviour. He will never, no never, no never forsake us or leave us on our own to face life and all it will bring our way. No child of God has ever been forsaken - except His darling one and only Son there on the cross of Calvary. He was forsaken so that we would never be forsaken by God if we trust Him as our Saviour.

This means that the confidence we have shown us in v6 is not arrogance, or misplaced confidence, mind over matter and it is certainly not the power of positive thinking. It is the contentment of faith in this awesome God. Matthew Henry wrote *“Men can do nothing against God, and God can make all that men do against His people to turn for their good.”*

If this God is our God through the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we can have a confidence for both now and the future. Having Jesus as our Saviour gives us great freedom, responsibilities, privileges and security for both now, the future and eternity. Is this awesomely great God our God because we have trusted Jesus as our Saviour? If so, we are to live it out with confidence in who He is to us and what He will do in us, through us and with us.

This evening will carry on with this passage and see what God's word says from v7-9 to further encourage us as we look back with thankfulness for God's keeping and preserving the church's work, life and witness throughout these 40 years and look to move on into the future and all it brings our way as a church, families and individuals.