

HARVEST FOR THE HUNGRY

Sermon outline – Keep on loving!

Reading: Hebrews 13:1-3

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Introduction

Context – the writer of Hebrews is summing up their letter. Making key points and pushing forward those things he wants to really put front and centre of the readers. If that is the case it is the worth us paying attention!

Written for those with a deep knowledge of the Old Testament. Possibly to a house church near Rome

Members of the church were becoming discouraged by their Christian commitment and needed challenging and encouragement (Heb. 2:1-4, 4:14, 6:9-20, 10:19-39, 11)

The passage for this sermon sits at the beginning of a list of very practical ways the church should apply itself to living out its faith and **continue** to show its Christian commitment.

Key point 1: Keep on loving

“Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters.” In the Greek “Philadelphia” must continue. It is his first point and so it is like the writer is saying ‘**Above all**’ **keep loving each other**. God is love (1 John 3:16). The source of all good things, the foundation of all good things is love. Live and operate out of love.

Keep on – the writer realises we don’t always feel like it. **Love is hard**.

Illustration – As a husband and dad I love my family but if you’re anything like me, there are times when it is harder than others. I never stop loving them, but I sometimes find it hard to in practice.

Why not put your own example in here?

As we think about harvest, we are challenged that showing our love through our giving is not easy. You may have had a tough year with Covid-19 and other things in your own life, you may not feel like loving others sometimes. “Keep on loving each other...”

The Angels of Ihtiman project in Bulgaria, which Harvest for the Hungry helps fund, goes to the toughest part of town. **Day in day out** they keep on loving the people they are serving through giving them much needed food as well as encouragement and sharing the gospel with them.

The example they are following is God's 'steadfast love' which is mentioned 127 times in Psalms!

We are called to root our Christian walk, our doing, giving, praying in love. This is because we serve a God who "abounds in love." (Psalm 103:8).

So how do we do it?

Key point 2: How to keep on loving

This is not an exhaustive list, but the writer gives us a few key examples of how we can keep on loving. It is not enough to want to do it, we have to keep doing it.

A note of caution: it may be that I am suggesting we have to summon the energy up, push ourselves and yes there are such times but remember fundamentally our motivation is that God first loved us and he keeps loving us!

How many of us have had good intentions that we have not followed up on? It is by putting ourselves in the place of those who are strangers, prisoners and abused that we keep on loving.

Illustration: Have you ever visited somewhere you know no-one? I have a lot. During the last 18 years of ministry I have spoken at a lot of churches where I knew no-one. The ones I enjoyed most were where, though I was a stranger I felt welcomed as people talked to me, listened to me, asked me about the ministry. In the place where I was not really welcomed but just announced to speak and then barely said good-bye to, I felt lonely and very strange. It was not nice! Why not put your own example in here?

Jesus illustrated how to love through the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and

James in his letter writes, "Faith without action is dead." (James 1:22 and 2:20)

In the passage we have read we have these examples:

- Give hospitality to strangers
- Remembering those in prison
- Remember those who are abused and mistreated

If I was to ask you who are the people you regard as most loving in your life, who would you say? My guess is it would be those who showed you that love in their words but also their actions. Perhaps how they listen to you? Or maybe how they have served you in some way? Or perhaps how they helped you at a particularly difficult time in your life.

Harvest for the Hungry is one way you can quite literally give hospitality to strangers and enable the serving of the abused and mistreated. Every year Harvest for the Hungry enables the feeding of thousands of people who are marginalised, poor and have very little. The Coronavirus is going to make those needs even greater.

Real life: One of TEN's partners in Romania was telling us that because of the lockdown, Roma communities have not been able to earn money in the same way. Normally they are able to earn something to help with provision during the colder months but that has been hit hard by not being able to go and work. Harvest for the Hungry as a way of showing love will be even more important this year.

Perhaps today as you make a gift to the offering you might also consider who is there in your own community that you could offer hospitality to? Who are the abused and mistreated that I could show love to?

Action: Why not make a gift to Harvest for the Hungry and gift some time to someone in your community who needs to know God's love?

Key point 3: You never know who you serve as you keep on loving!

v.2 contains one of those lines that makes me wonder, **"Have I ever entertained an Angel?"** I hope so.

During Covid-19 you may have taken food to a neighbour or some other item they could not get whilst in isolation or lockdown. Whilst Covid-19 has been very hard it has been wonderful to see people reconnecting with neighbours and serving in ways they have not done before, or for a long time. I met neighbours on my street I had never spoken to before.

The point of this of course is not for me or you to get too hung up on whether, when we delivered that food parcel to Mrs Smith at no. 34, she was in fact gleaming rather brighter than you remember her on previous occasions.

No, the point here is that we are called to serve with our best. **Keep loving with all you have because if you knew you were entertaining angels you would do so.** Like Abraham (Genesis 18:2-8) when he got Sarah baking and he went and got the meat. He wanted to give his best. He knew his guests were special.

How do you offer hospitality? Do you treat a stranger as if they could be an angel?

Jesus in Matthew's gospel says (Mt 26:35-40) that those who serve in this way, serve Jesus himself and they won't even realise it. "You did it to me." He says. How awesome is that! **When you serve the stranger, the prisoner and mistreated you may be entertaining angels and you are serving Jesus!**

Our partners at TEN go out to serve generously to those they give food parcels to or make soup for. **Harvest for the Hungry is a very practical way of enabling our partners and you to feed the stranger, show love to the marginalised and meet the needs of the mistreated.**

Conclusion

To sum up.

- We are called to keep on loving the last and the least
- We are called to keep on loving them through our actions
- We are called to keep on loving them, giving the best way we can.

Concluding Prayer **(here is a suggestion, but please do come up with your own version)**

Dear Father God,

Thank you that you love us and that you consistently show us your steadfast love. Thank you for the example of the Angels of Ihtiman consistently showing love to the Roma communities in Bulgaria. Help me to see that and to then live in the light of that love. Please give me a deeper love for the stranger, the prisoner and the abused. Please show me how I can put that love into action and give me the desire to do so. Right now, I stop and in the quiet ask that you would speak to me about how I should respond **[pause for several seconds and give time for people to hear from God]**. Give me the courage I need to make a difference this week. For Your glory and in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Discussion questions – for use in church or home group setting

1. Watch the film of the Angels of Ihtiman (again). <https://youtu.be/sRQHHcocsi8>
2. What can we learn from their example?
3. What are the key takeaway points for you?
4. What else can we learn from the passage in Hebrews 13:1-3
5. Who are the strangers, prisoners, abused – in your community context?
6. What stops you loving the stranger, the prisoner, the abused?
7. What one thing could you do in response?
8. FINISH by praying with and for each other

Follow up: Watch TEN's film about the Roma people – Forgotten

www.ten-uk.org/forgotten