

NEVER GIVE IN!
HEBREWS 10:19-39

Winston Churchill – the story goes that he was delivering a lecture in the USA to students and when he stood up to speak all that he said was ‘Never give in!’ It was then supposed that he sat down, that his whole talk was in these 3 words. I’ve heard that story and even repeated it. It became one of these urban myths that people hear and pass on! What in fact happened was this: he was invited to Harrow School and on Oct 29th 1941 he went to hear some of the school songs as well as speak to the students. His speech lasted about 4 minutes. What he actually said was this: “Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never--in nothing, great or small, large or petty--never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.” The story might be different but the force of his words is certainly the same.

These words were delivered in the midst of one of the bleakest times in the recent history of the UK, to urge people to keep hoping that war would end and that the outcome would be good. By these words he was trying to stir up the people to keep believing, to keep working for victory, to keep their spirits up. It seems to me, from this distance and being no expert that the power of Churchill’s oratory had a remarkable effect. His speeches are some of most quoted words in recent UK history and are well-remembered; the nation listened avidly to his broadcasts and spirits were lifted by the power of his words and perhaps by the force of his personality.

The early Christians were in danger of giving up: they were being persecuted for their faith, some had been thrown into prison for being Christian; the stories of being thrown to the lions and being forced to fight gladiators are true; they are not the stuff of myths and legends! What do you do in these circumstances? The temptation is to give up believing, to give up faith and hope because life is too hard, or following Jesus too costly. We don’t face lions or gladiators, but there is a whole pile of other reasons which make Christian faith a difficult thing for us: the circumstances of life are hard and we wonder where God is in midst of these; people around us make fun of our faith and our church commitment; the Church is shrinking and it seems as if we are fighting a losing battle, so do we give up the fight altogether, and there are not many people like us come to Church (that is certainly true for young people, even families now!); there are other reasons, other pressures. What do we do? Do we give up?

Hebrews is probably a sermon written, even preached, to hard-pressed Christians from a Jewish background, designed to help people understand how great Jesus is, how much better than anyone else Jesus is. By the time we get to chapter 10, the writer is dealing with issues that make Christians struggle. He has 5 “let-us-es!” Not salad vegetable, but 5 times he says *‘let us...’* to try to help Christians see that they should persevere and not give up. Their circumstances might be different, the issues they face might be different from ours, but the solution is the same – persevere! But the beauty of the Bible is that it does not just tell us to persevere; it gives us a whole pile of reasons why we should persevere; it does not just tell us to have confidence, but tells us why we should have confidence. Our confidence doesn’t come from the power of a person’s oratory, no matter how good the preacher; it does not come from the force of words that we read, even Bible words; our confidence comes from the God to whom these words point and what God is like and what God has done.

“Since...” (10:19-22) The whole of Hebrews is based on Jewish Old Testament images. The ‘Most Holy Place’ is the heart of the temple, the place where God lived amongst His people. People weren’t allowed in to the Most Holy Place; only the high

priest could enter once a year and then only with sacrifices, and when he did, he took away the sins of the people for the year by the blood of these sacrifice. The priest prayed for the people in the presence of God. 'Jesus is better' is Hebrews' theme; Jesus has done better things for us; Jesus has given better promises. We can all enter the presence of God now because of what Jesus has done, when He died, by His sacrifice of Himself; He prays for us in His Father's presence. The way is open for us to believe, to pray, to worship, to enjoy being in the presence of God; Jesus has opened up way for us to come to God in faith and in prayer and for us to enjoy the promises and the blessings of God. Because of this, since we have Jesus who has done this for us... now never give up.

The 5 let-us-es!

1. draw near to God – keep believing, keep praying. *Why does it always rain on me?* Title of a song by the pop-group Travis; you might never have heard the song, but you will be familiar with the sentiments it expresses, especially if things go wrong for you and seemingly keep going wrong. The next line: *is it because I lied when I was 17?* "Things go wrong; I must have done something to deserve it", as if things going wrong are a punishment from God. So we stop praying because God doesn't seem to answer our prayers anyway and why should He if I have done all these wrong things; and we stop believing. Hebrews tells us that we are forgiven people, people for whom the slate is wiped clean, nothing stands against us in the mind of God, so this can't be punishment. We should keep believing, keep praying, keep coming to God for help, grace, peace, strength.

2. hold unswervingly to hope – hope is future faith, in a sense. Hope focuses on what we don't yet have. On my trip to Cambodia three years ago I spoke with an American missionary working in Poipet, where our friend Chomno works. This American said that for him the most difficult thing about Cambodians was that they had no hope; they lived in poverty and could see no way out; tomorrow would be just the same as today; next year the same; the future the same; they had no hope and it killed their spirit, it brought a sense of despair. The Christian hope is that God will bless us again tomorrow, that His love is new every day; the Christian hope is that God has promised to bless us in so many ways; the Christian hope is that ultimately we will be with God. Why can we keep hope? The Lord is faithful! He will keep His promises!

3. how to spur one another on

4. keep meeting together

5. encourage one another

These other 3 belong together. Christianity is a group faith; there are some parts of our faith that are, of course, intensely personal and unique to you and me, but Christianity is not something we do on our own. It is a group faith; we are all part of Church. Yet, when life is hard, our instinct is to draw back; we withdraw into our shell where we feel safe, I suppose. There is a significant number of people in our communities who once were part of Churches, even this congregation, but who now are not part of any Church. Why? They had some hard experience in life and stopped going to Church for a time. Church did nothing wrong; Church didn't neglect them or harm them; but they just stopped going to Church for worship or other things. They withdrew into their shell; they just tried to survive on their own; they gave up church for a time, but never got back. Now they might still have some faith, but find it very hard to get back into Church. Others see Church as a lost cause, as past its sell-by date, and feel that there's nothing they can do about it, so they give up.

The heart of these 3 'let-us-es' is to keep meeting together. The most obvious way or place where Christians meet is on Sundays for worship. It should be our regular habit

to be in Church for worship on Sunday; indeed it is a promise at the heart of being a member of the Church. There are other ways and places for Christians to meet and some of them we are good at and others we're not! We are all part of smaller groups within the Church that meet for a particular reason – the choir to sing, the finance committee to discuss business, the Guild of Friendship, the Kirk Session; these groups have a reason to exist and a job to do and they do that. They also function as a place to belong, so that as well as belonging to Church and coming to worship with 180 others, we meet and talk with smaller number of people in these other places; keep meeting, keep talking, keep belonging.

Meeting together has 2 benefits: 1)to spur one another on, to challenge one another to follow Jesus more closely; 2)to encourage one another, strengthen and help one another, so that faith is stronger and we are more able to deal with all that is difficult. We are not so good at specific groups that are focused on doing this through Bible Study and prayer; the Discovery Groups that we set up last year were designed to do that and had a limited amount of success; as a Church perhaps we need to be better at this, more intentional in this, so that we have more opportunity to learn together, to challenge one another, to support and encourage one another. Let us not shy away from that!

“Never give in!” Or “*Do not...*” (10:35) Confidence is a dirty word amongst Christians at times. It smacks of arrogance and self-confidence and being brash or complacent. Yet, what was it that kept Bartimaeus calling out to Jesus? He was a blind man begging outside Jericho and wanted to be healed and he called out to Jesus as He was passing where the blind man was begging. People told him to be quiet, but he didn't give in; he kept calling. Why? Because he knew that Jesus could heal him. He didn't just think it might be possible; he was completely confident in Jesus. It is that kind of confidence that we need to have as Christians and that we need to keep; confidence in Jesus; confidence in God.

Jesus has opened the way for us to come to God – keep believing and praying; God has promised many good things to us and is faithful – keep hope in our hearts; God has many good things still to give to us and love and good deeds are valuable ways to live our lives – keep meeting together that we may spur one another on and encourage one another in faith and life. Never give in! Keep on believing and praying; hold onto hope; keep meeting together; spur one another on, encourage one another. Don't throw your confidence away; Jesus did not give up on us; God has not given up on us; the challenge we face is never to give up on faith, hope, church, but to always persevere!