Christianity Lite.
Hebrews 5:11-6:3

Have you ever had someone come up to you and say something really shocking? Something you just think 'man, I can't believe they've just said that!' I remember when I was about 13 or 14, I was on school trip in Scotland, we were out walking in the woods, when the head teacher of the Christian school I went to approached me and said that he didn't think I was a Christian, at least I didn't show any signs of being a disciple! "How dare he?" I was shocked, even horrified that day! And in fact, I so needed to hear it! It was God's grace to me. And I really believe that it's because of him challenging me like that about my spiritual condition, those years ago, that I'm a Christian today. Mr Moon was very bold in his assessment of my spiritual condition. Well, so is the writer to the Hebrews in our passage this morning. He feels the need to interrupt his flow to send in a sharp, but necessary rebuke.

You see, he's started a discussion about Jesus as the superior high priest, which we began looking at last week, and he'll continue this discussion in chapter 7, but he senses his audience are switching off, they're not on the same wavelength, and so he breaks with the topic and says, "You know what you guys are? Spiritually dull!" He just comes out with it! Accusing them of spiritual immaturity! Suddenly they're all sat up in their chairs. "I can't believe I've just been called spiritually dull!" they're thinking! But now he's got their attention, he can proceed to warn them about the consequences of their current spiritual condition. It's definitely for their own good. And so he tells them they have become '*dull of hearing.'* Or spiritually dull. But does it mean to be spiritually dull?

<u>Spiritual dullness</u>
He's not accusing them of not being saved, he's basically saying in verse 11, "I've got so much else to say about all these glorious truths about Jesus and about him being High Priest and so on, but what's the point in me carrying on? You guys clearly don't get it. You're spiritually dull!" It's not a nice word is it dull? Who wants to known as dull? No one aspires to dullness! Dull means lacking interest or excitement! Who wants a Christianity that's lacking interest or excitement? I'm sure they weren't dull people, just dull spiritually!

He says in verse 12, "you lot should be teaching by now! But look at you! You're still eating happy meals! You should be getting the chef's special, but you want the children's menu!" He expects them to be way past the basics by now! Imagine if you'd been skiing 20 years and you still went down as slowly as possible in the plough! That's where these guys are at: they should have been instructors, but instead they're still on the bunny runs! But why? They're not new believers. He wouldn't be saying this if they were only 6 months into their journey of faith. But that's far from the case. They've been Christians 20 years some of them, and they should have been growing and exercising their faith, but they haven't been. Instead of growing in Christ, believing God's word, deepening their knowledge and love of Jesus and trying to obey his commands, they were choosing to stop short. They decided not to put the effort in. You see there's more going on here

than meets the eye! They're not just been lazy. They're actually choosing not to grow. They're holding back! But why? Why are they holding back? Well there's a simple answer: fear. Fear was holding them back.

Holding Back

What were they scared of? Well we need some context: remember these guys were Jewish. This is what they'd grown up with. All their lives they'd been going to the temple, participating in the temple worship, offering sacrifices and these traditions were deeply instilled. They were now offered a far better way in Jesus. But they're not fully decided. They didn't know if they wanted to go all the way with Jesus and face the persecution from the Romans and even from their own relatives and all the difficulties, or whether they should just go back to the temple worship, go back to the high priest, back to taking their sacrifices to the Jewish priests again.

So as the author moves into chapter 6, having blasted them with this rebuke out their spiritual immaturity, he moves on to challenge them to correct their present course and press onto maturity. But how does he do it? You might expect him to say, 'right let's start at the basics then. Here's the milk, you drink that and let me know if it's warm enough for you!' But he doesn't! Instead he says come on guys, 'let's leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. So is he saying that these things are unessential? Repentance, faith, baptism, resurrection? Surely these things aren't redundant? Of course they're not, these basic Christian teachings, provide the groundwork for further understanding and maturity but the striking thing about this list is that it is not distinctively Christian. All these foundational doctrines share common ground with Judaism, the very thing that they're likely to drift back into.

So you see by camping out here at the basics, and not progressing from these elementary teachings, they thought they'd found common ground between Christianity and Judaism: a kind of hybrid, thus avoiding persecution and ridicule. You see living in this comfortable common ground; they wouldn't stick out so much would they? After all, a Jew and a Christian could say together, "Let's repent, let's have faith, let's talk about the resurrection," and so forth. But this was a subtle denial of Jesus. And it was a subtle temptation for them to slip back into Judaism.

And so you can understand the author's frustration! He calls them spiritually dull because they are choosing to stay at first base and never move on. They understand the basics, in fact they even know what they have to do, but for now they're holding back real commitment to Christ. They have been trying to survive with a minimal Christianity to avoid persecution and to avoid awkwardness with friends and relatives. They've opted for this lite version of Christianity. They want a cost free faith that doesn't stick out so much – a bit more like Judaism. Most of us have smart phones these days so we understand apps. You know how it is: you can buy the full app at a cost or just download the 'lite version' for free.

It's a taster of the full package without any real commitment or any cost. That's what's going on here. They're opting for cost free Christianity. But are we so different? We are scared to evangelise or to give until it hurts and we daren't step out in faith and then we wonder why our spiritual life feels dull!

This phrase he uses: 'spiritually dull,' it's only used one other time in the New Testament, and guess where? In the next chapter of Hebrews! Just turn over chapter 6:11-12 and you'll see what the opposite of dullness is: *'Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true.* ***12*** *Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent.'* '*Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and endurance.'* So the opposite of dullness is what? Faith and endurance! How do we avoid spiritual dullness in our own lives then? By stepping out in faith and trusting God. These are the most exciting times!

Despite what life's throwing at us; no matter how tempted we may be to doubt God's goodness, even when we're not seeing him act as we want to, maybe we don't feel like our prayers are been answered. It's then that we 'follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and endurance' he says. People like Abraham, Sara, Rahab, Noah, who heard the promises of God and responded with faith and patience. But they pressed into God in faith, trusting his promises. So persevering in and trusting God's promises is the antidote to spiritual dullness. One preacher said, 'dull hearing doesn't mean there is anything wrong with your ears. It means there is something wrong with your heart.' It means the heart is not being diligent to embrace God's promises and turn them into faith. Rather, God's word, comes into our ears and when it goes down to the heart, it hits something hard. That's dullness of hearing. And that was the case here. Their ears were hearing the promises of God, but they weren't embracing them. They showed they didn't really believe them because they were holding back. They refused to take God at his word and really go all the way. They had a form of Christianity but weren't experiencing all that God had for them. They stunted their growth.

Jesus said in John 10:10 "I have come that you might have life and life to the full" Christianity Lite is not this life guys! or Christianity full version? I just can't settle for Christianity Lite. I want all that God's got for me! I want every person here. Every young person, to have all that God has for you. A bare minimum Christianity that tries to compromise and stay comfortable is not the Christian life that Jesus died to offer you! It's meant to be a life of adventure with him, stepping out in faith, trusting his promises, meeting other believers, praying with them, seeing God move in amazing ways. What are you afraid of? Ask yourself! Why do you hold back? Fear? Control? Idols? It's all a lack of trust in God's promises! That's what it all stems back to.

I'm the worst! Hear God saying 'let go. Just let go of this thing' and I tighten my grip thinking God's trying to discipline me and remove all the stuff I like, as if he's got it in for me, when actually the best thing I could do is let it go and surrender it to him. I sometimes wonder which bit of John 10:10 I don't understand!

Don’t get to 70 and still be on milk! Press into God on this journey. If you’re a Christian this morning He promises us in Ephesians 2:10 that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” So let’s walk in them. Grab his hand and walk in them.

And I just want to address those who would not call themselves Christians this morning. Perhaps, like these guys in the passage we’re looking at, you know what you have to do, but you've never committed your life to Him. You’re still on the fence. You’re happy for others to do it, but you resist him because of all that it could mean. I want to challenge you to move on from the basic facts and dive in. Explore further. Pray and ask God to reveal himself to you and decide to follow him. Receive Jesus Christ. Come all the way to salvation. Don't just allow yourself to go up to the edge and think it's good that all these people do this and think ‘I respect people who believe.’ Commit yourself to it. You only get one chance and it’s in this life. Once it’s over, and none of us know when that could be, we don’t get another chance.

So as we come into close I want to encourage you not to get casual about this book! It contains the very word of God: his promises, his commands, it reveals who he is. If you don’t hear this word with faith then you’re in danger of finding yourself in the same condition as these guys: spiritually immature. You’ll stay on milk your whole life if you don’t get to know this book! He says ‘Everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he’s a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.’ A sure sign of Christian maturity is having that discerning power in your life, which enables you to make good choices to honour God.` And how does that discerning power come? It comes from nourishing your spiritual maturity by the word of God. Because that is how you will grow the most. By this book! That’s why I bang on with the youth about reading their bibles all the time. They’re sick of hearing it but when they’re 25, 35, 45, and someone says do you remember anything of your teenage years, they’ll say, not really but I do remember my youth leader constantly saying read your bible and pray and every day – that’s what I hope anyway! The most mature Christians are the one’s who know their bibles, but don’t just know them: trust them, cherish them. Like David who said ‘oh how I love your word oh Lord, how I meditate on it day and night, it’s a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.’ So read and study this book until it becomes a "word of righteousness" – a discerning power in your life: a lamp to your feet. Let his word be your source and the Holy Spirit will use it to guide you in all truth!

As you mature in Christ, you look back, as I’m sure many of you do today, and think, ‘man did I really used to think that was acceptable? Did I really used to go there, watch that, and listen to those songs! Discernment and skill in the word of righteousness as he calls it here, is a sure sign you’re maturing.

You know I think we complicate things so much sometimes – or I do! But it’s really quite simple. God wants us to trust him. I remember when I used to go out

and try to move things in faith. After reading that my faith can move mountains, I'd go out and pray that God would move a tree or something, or even a pencil on my desk, which I know is ridiculous, but I'm convinced God is delighted when he sees us trusting that he can do great things. As I preached in January, 'without faith it's impossible to please God.' God desires hearts that believes him and takes him at his word. Unbelief will rob you of your joy in Christ guys. You see, it's not just about hearing sermons; it's about doing them! It's not just about reading your bible; it's about obeying it. And I'm not saying that to make it sound like obligation, I'm saying it because that's where the fun comes! It's about putting your faith into action and seeing God move. I can tell you there's nothing more exciting than seeing God move! That should motivate us to persevere – when we see God come through it's incredible. So we have to fight against sluggishness in our faith, for whatever reason it may have come in. It could be wilful or by accident. It might be laziness or it might be that we want Christianity lite, but neither are God's best for us. So let's allow our hearts to be softened to receive God's word in faith. Press into his promises, write them on things, talk about them, pray them back to him. God wants you to trust him. He wants me to trust him and He's got so much for you. The only person that loses out by holding back is you and me. God has so much in store. He's so gracious and wants to prove himself strong on our behalf so don't hold back.