

“WE SERVE AN UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Hebrews 12:25-29

Introduction.

I don't have to spend much time making you aware of what is going on in the world around us. Never has a people on earth been more informed and inundated with news.

We now have 24/7/365 news on TV, radio, internet, social media, print media. Some of us remember growing up with CBS, NBC and ABC evening news and at around midnight the TV went silent. Now those three channels have multiple channels and internet feeds.

Some of us are looking forward to the Olympics when we can binge 24/7 for two weeks on sports events. And we are double blessed up here in our corner of the world where we can watch it all on NBC and CBC.

So with all our access to all the news all the time, here is a question. Are you surprised by all that is happening in our world, and how events are unfolding? Are you surprised that things seem to be getting worse?

Are you surprised by the floods in Europe, fires on the west coast, buildings collapsing in Miami, the racial tension and uprisings in South Africa and the US, the pandemic that has killed a million people, political division, crime and immorality, wars and rumors of wars?

Second, do you know why the world is the way it is and getting worse? Can you explain it or do you do what so many people do and just wring your hands and throw them in the air?

Finally, do you have any hope about the future? Is there a light at the end or just gloom and doom?

Context, background, Hebrews 12:18-24.

The writer of Hebrews is writing to Jewish converts to Christianity, Hebrew Christians, who are facing persecution and were being tempted to go back to their old religion with its comfortable, tangible rituals. Was following Jesus and the way of the cross really worth it?

In a nutshell he was saying to them it is far better to be a Christian than to be a Jew.

Why? Because the Jewish kingdom can be shaken and has been shaken. The country was taken over by the Romans, and soon after this letter was written the temple was destroyed, Jerusalem was no longer a holy city.

The writer is urging them to see that the old way was only a shadow, only a type of the new way, it was only temporary, a preparation for something permanent.

Why is it better to be a Christian than a Jew? Because of the difference between the two great mountains, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. Because of the difference between the Law and the Gospel, a shakable kingdom and an unshakeable kingdom.

Unshakable Kingdom, Hebrews 12:25-29.

There are three things we are to do with this unshakable kingdom.

Listen because God has spoken, vs. 25.

Our text starts with a rather strong warning. Why?

It is based on the stark contrast the writer draws showing the difference between the people of Israel being led to Mt. Sinai by Moses, and Christians being led to Mt. Zion and the new Jerusalem by Jesus.

The writer is drawing a contrast to the two greatest revelations on earth, the two greatest revelatory events, God speaking on Mt. Sinai and delivering the Law to His people, and God speaking from heaven through His own Son, Jesus Christ, to give us the Gospel.

The first verses of the book of Hebrews make this contrast clear.

Hebrews 1:1-2 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

The problem was the Jews didn't listen. They hardened their hearts and rebelled against God.

If it did not go well for the Jews when they refused to listen to the prophets on earth that God sent, how much worse will it be for those who refuse to listen to the one God sent from heaven.

Remember the parable of the vineyard owner who lived far away and sent his servants to collect what was due him. The vineyard workers abused and persecuted the owner's servants. So then the owner sent his son, surely they will accept him and listen to him. And you remember what happened, the vineyard workers attacked and killed the son (Matthew 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-19).

This is an urgent plea, don't refuse to listen, don't refuse to hear and obey the one who is speaking to you. Don't ignore the truth.

In the midst of all the voices you hear today, don't let them drown out the voice of God. Why is God's Word better than man's words? It is unshakable, unchanging, everlasting.

I Peter 1:24-25 All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.

If it was a serious thing to ignore or resist or refuse God in the OT, it is an infinitely more serious matter to refuse Him now that Jesus has revealed everything to us. Let us not ignore or neglect the Word of God read, spoken, preached.

We have been given an unshakable kingdom. Because of this magnificent salvation we have received as gift from God, we have a greater responsibility to respond with obedience, and we have a greater danger if we disobey and reject it.

This tells us that the message we have received in the Gospel is superior to the message the Jews received in the Law. It has greater privileges and greater warnings. Don't presume on the grace of God. To refuse to listen to the one who warns us from heaven is to lose all hope. See to it you don't refuse Him who has spoken and is speaking to you today.

Believe because God has promised, vs. 26-27.

The writer continues to draw a strong contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant, between Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion, between what can be shaken and what cannot be shaken.

In Moses' day at Mt. Sinai when God spoke the whole mountain trembled violently. But in the coming last days everything will shake, the entire earth and heavens. And they will not just shake, they will be removed. The words in quotes are from Haggai's prophecy:

Haggai 2:6-7 For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. 7 And I will shake all nations.

The day is coming when everything that is will be no more, it will all be utterly destroyed and removed. Yes, the entire physical universe as we know it.

Reading in I Kings this month I was struck how the OT kingdom of Israel was shaken and divided after the death of Solomon. The nation of Israel was torn asunder, the people of God were divided against each other into the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom.

I was struck by how contemporary and relevant it was. The shaking we have seen in our world and nation is clear evidence that God can and does shake our world. This is not the final shaking, but it is a warning of a greater shaking to come.

This shaking is not the work of Trump, Biden, Fauci, or Inslee. This is a shaking from God, and they are his instruments. This is not a call to arms against our leaders, this is a call to humbly submit to God's judgment, this is a call to tremble before a holy God who is a consuming fire, who is doing according to His purpose and will.

Christians are not naïve about the bad news in the world. We don't despair, we know what God is doing.

All the foundations are being shaken. The foundation of nations is shaken, the foundation of science is shaken, the economic foundations are shaken, the foundation of the fourth estate, the integrity of the news media has been shaken, the foundation of democracy is being shaken. God is shaking our trust in everything that is not eternal, not spiritual, not holy.

The day is coming when our once great and powerful nation will be shaken and destroyed just like every other once great and powerful nation. God is shaking and we must be sure we are building our faith and our lives on what cannot be shaken.

What God is doing now are labor pains leading up to the second coming and great shaking.

The purpose is to show God's mercy in offering hope and salvation in an unshakable kingdom. The safest place to stand in the great shaking is on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Why does a Christian have confident optimism for the future and not despair? Because of a bloody cross, an empty grave, a resurrected King who now rules and reigns in heaven and on earth. One day all His enemies will bow before Him.

Christians belong to something that cannot be shaken, cannot be removed, cannot be taken from us. The more God shakes our world, the more we Christians have the opportunity to demonstrate a non-anxious spirit, an immovable spirit, a rock solid, steady security, that nothing that happens in this world can shake us loose from our confident assurance in our sovereign God.

Worship and serve because God has given, vss. 28-29.

Therefore. Therefore, since we are receiving a gift from God of such staggering worth and value and benefit, we have a great encouragement to do something in response.

This unshakeable kingdom is a divine gift we have we have not made or earned or deserved, therefore, what is our response to this news?

Humble gratitude and worship. Worship and gratitude are how we cultivate and sustain a confidence in our future home and reality, how we keep alive confidence in an unshakable kingdom and an unshakable King.

It's how we keep faith alive during this time between the promise and the fulfillment.
It's how we keep faith alive during suffering and hardship.

What is acceptable worship? It includes but is not limited to what we do here on Sunday mornings. It includes pleasing sacrifices to God in the form of doing good for others and sharing and giving and serving.

Hebrews 13:14-15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Consider your service through a Serve opportunity to be an expression of worship, an expression of gratitude to God for all you have been given. The ***time*** you give, is time that God has already given to you. You only give to Him what you have already received from Him.

The ***energy*** you expend, is energy and strength God has already given to you. You only expend what you have ready received from Him.

We serve not just because there is a need to be met, someone to be helped, but because we have received a gift beyond comparison and that calls for a response on our part.

Jesus was unshakably confident to give generously and unconditionally. Jesus could do His greatest work on earth because He was secure in the sovereign power of God. We can love and give and serve and sacrifice secure in the knowledge that God is sovereign and good and will take care of us and supply our every need. Who has ever been diminished or lessened or lost because they gave?

We are part of an unshakable kingdom and we follow an unshakable King. We follow this King who entered our world to love and give and serve, to minister to the needs of others.

By serving we show we belong to God's kingdom, by serving we show we are following a king who reigns and rules in our hearts and lives.

By serving we show we belong to a kingdom very different to this world. This world is about getting, it is about being self-centered, motivated by what we can gain and keep.

Can anyone imagine abandoning the Christian life, of deserting Jesus, of turning our back on all that is solid and true and real, and going back to living for ourselves and pleasing ourselves, and being the same as everyone else in the world.

Conclusion and application.

How shaky is your world? What are you looking to for security, stability, safety, assurance, comfort, control? What voices are you listening to, who has the greatest influence in our life, who helps you decide what to think, believe?

Are you worshipping shakable treasures and possessions? Is your security in shakable stock markets and retirement plans? Is the foundation of our lives built on friends and family and jobs or anything else that can be gone in a moment?

What gives you the most comfort and pleasure in this life, shakable things or unshakable things? What are you grasping, what are you hanging on to, what are you building, what are you investing in? Something that can burn up or something that is eternal?

Or are we worshipping and loving and serving the unshakable God? Is your heart fixed on Him? Do you trust Jesus to be your mediator who covers your sin with His blood so you can experience the glory of God's consuming fire and not the punishment of it?

Spend your life honoring Him for who He is and what He has done and what He has given you. Thank Him for His mercy, His salvation, His unshakable kingdom He has given you and received you into. Serve Him and others as an expression of your gratitude for the gift of an unshakable kingdom.

When we are part of the unshakable kingdom and following the unshakable King, then we ourselves are unshakable.

John 10:27-28 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

I Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

See words to our opening hymn The Solid Rock.