

The Invisible, Unshakeable Kingdom Made Visible

Hebrews 12:28-13:6

11.14.2021

Context: Last week we learned that we have received a kingdom. Not a physical kingdom that we can see or that can be taken over or destroyed, but a spiritual kingdom. 12:27 says that this world, the things that we see, is going to be removed in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Note that that's coming in the future. And yet we read 12:28, which is like the theme verse of our passage this morning: "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken..." In the present. We've received it. There's a future fulfillment. But also a present reality.

- This kingdom can't be shaken because (1) it's not a physical kingdom. The strongest of physical kingdoms in our world have been destroyed. The kingdom we have received is not a physical kingdom. This is why the spread of the gospel hasn't been stopped. It's a kingdom that takes over hearts and reigns in individual lives regardless of their physical location. It's a kingdom that is spreading in the most unlikely places, like the mountains of Laos, the valleys of northern Utah, a hospital in Togo, West Africa, and in countries dominated by Communism and Islam.
- This kingdom can't be shaken because (2) it's a kingdom in which God rules and reigns. And this king doesn't merely have the authority to command his subjects to do things. He has the power to change the hearts of his subjects to delight to do what he requires of them. You remember we learned about this in Hebrews 8:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with [them] after those days, declares the Lord:
*I will put my laws into their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.*"
- And so this kingdom has not been stopped and cannot be stopped. It is always advancing by the hand of our invincible God. It's a spiritual kingdom, where Christ reigns in hearts. ***But while this kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, invisible in comparison to all other kingdoms of our world, this invisible, unshakable kingdom is made visible through the transformed lives of those who have received it.*** That is what our text will make clear this morning.

Pre-Application: So, as we begin, let me ask you these questions: does your life look distinct from the lives of those around you who don't know Jesus? Are your goals and dreams different? Do you use your possessions and resources differently? What about the way you spend your time? Or what you value? God intends to make his invisible, unshakable kingdom visible through the transformed lives of those who have received it.

Structure: If you will persevere with me for a moment, I'd like to make some big-picture structural comments about this passage before we jump into it. Lord-willing, this will help you better understand these verses as we work through the specifics. Sometimes we think of commands like those in 13:1-6 as disjointed, random commands. ***But I hope to help you see that this text is beautifully and intentionally structured to help us to see how the invisible, unshakeable kingdom is made visible.***

- (1) The first thing is just to give you the overall structure. You probably noticed that I backed up into last week's text because I think that 12:28-29 are intended to be connected to 13:1-6. Remember, chapter divisions are not inspired. The writer of Hebrews didn't write a big number 13 after the word "fire." So, notice with me what happens after v.28 ("Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken..."). What comes next? "And thus..." And then what comes next are 5 ways that this invisible, unshakable kingdom becomes visible, appropriately translated as commands in our English Bibles.
 - (1) "Let us offer to God acceptable worship" (12:28-29)
 - (2) "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers" (13:2)
 - (3) "Remember those who are in prison" (13:3)
 - (4) "Let marriage be held in honor among all" (13:4)
 - (5) "Keep your life free from love of money" (13:5)
 - *You may have noticed that I skipped over 13:1. The reason is that I believe this command is fleshed out in vv.2-3. General command: "Let brotherly love continue." Specifics: vv.2-3.
- (2) Another interesting but important point about the structure. Notice that each one of these commands is grounded in a truth/motivation about this unshakable kingdom. Every single one of these commands is followed by another clause that is introduced with the words "for" or "since."
 - "let us offer to God acceptable worship...**for** our God is a consuming fire" (12:28-29)
 - "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...**for** thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (13:2)
 - "Remember those who are in prison...**since** you also are in the body" (13:3)
 - "Let marriage be held in honor among all...**for** God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (13:4)
 - "Keep your life free from love of money...**for** he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (13:5)
- (3) The final point about structure that I want to make is that there is a movement in these commands that shows that the effects of this unshakable kingdom are holistic (all of life). The commands start big and narrow (concentric circles). The first command starts with **how we view God (outer/maroon)**. The next two with **how we view others (dark gray)**. And the final two turn us inward to examine our own hearts and **what we value (light gray)**.

Transition: We've received a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a kingdom that through the gospel of Jesus radically transforms our lives from God-ignoring to God exalting, self-serving to self-sacrificing, from covetous to content. It's an invisible kingdom. ***But an invisible kingdom that is made visible by the way that we live.*** Let's see how.

1. God-Exalting Worship (12:28-29)

Explanation: The first characteristic that makes this invisible, unshakable kingdom visible is God-exalting worship, which Pastor Conley covered last week. So, we won't cover that again. Except that I'll repeat one of the things that he said last week: when we see this word

“worship,” we shouldn’t think Sundays. Worship is all of life. Everyone is worshipping someone/something every day of the week, and every moment of every day. Our world revolves around self-worship: “I’m going to do what I want to do, and no one else is going to tell me what to do.” What the world around us doesn’t know is that our God is not one to be toyed around with. He is a consuming fire! [PAUSE] A consuming fire who poured out the fire of his wrath on his Son for all those who repent and believe.

Application: So, this invisible, unshakable kingdom is first made visible by those who wake up every morning and with joy, say, “You are God. I am not. Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Transition: But this kingdom doesn’t just change the way we view God, it’s visibly displayed in our heart towards others. 13:1 says, “Let brotherly love continue.” And this brotherly love is fleshed out in two specific ways. First of all, in...

2. Selfless Hospitality (2)

Explanation: Verse 2 says: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” It’s possible some of you have been waiting this entire sermon series through Hebrews to get to this verse 😊 How can I get an angel into my house?! I’m sorry to disappoint you. I don’t have any secrets on how to get an angel to come to your house. And at the risk of further disappointment, I don’t think the point of this verse is to encourage us to show hospitality to people *in order that* we might have the potential to play host to an angel!

We’ll come back to the angel part in a minute. But right now, let’s look at the first part of the verse: “do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers.” Literally this reads, simply, “do not neglect hospitality.” In this context, the word “hospitality” was likely used particularly with reference to Christians showing hospitality to other Christians who were traveling for the purpose of spreading the gospel. Showing hospitality to traveling Christians would have saved them expenses and provided them encouragement on their way: thus the translation “hospitality to strangers.” These traveling Christians would have been strangers to the ones who were showing them hospitality. So, strangers aren’t necessarily non-Christians. In this context, they were likely other Christians that they didn’t know yet. So, here’s the main point. ***These Christians were using their home/possessions to support the work of the gospel, the spread of the unshakable kingdom. We, too should use our home/possessions to support...***

Application: How do you view your home, vehicles, and other possessions? Are they just part of your own little kingdom, to be grasped tightly and protected? Or do you view them as tools/resources to be used to support the spread of the gospel? ***There are many ways that we, too, can I creatively use our home and possessions to support God’s work...***

- It could be housing our **gospel partners** when they are in town or providing them meals or just opening up your home to them for prayer and encouragement. We collectively

do this as a church through our mission house. We have a second house on our property that can be used for this once renovated.

- This could look like regularly opening up your home to your **unbelieving neighbors** or coworkers. Prioritizing this in our calendars.
- One of our local outreach partners, **iFace**, puts you in contact with international students to whom you can show regular hospitality.
- This could look like hosting a **LifeGroup**, where people come to build spiritually encouraging relationships in your home.
- *If you haven't thought of your home/possessions like this, what is one step you could take?

Explanation: And there is a motivation for this: “**for** thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Now, if this isn't meant to motivate us to practice hospitality with the hopes of meeting an angel, then why bring up angels? Think about this with me. He's talking about an unshakable kingdom, an invisible spiritual kingdom. And there are dimensions to this spiritual kingdom that we cannot see. Angels are real...sometimes seen, sometimes unseen. So, here's the point of mentioning angels: God is using all kinds of things, things that we can see and things that we can't see, to accomplish his purposes. God is using all kinds of circumstances, ones that we might think are significant and ones that we may think are insignificant, to accomplish his purposes.

Application: You might think your simple gesture of hospitality is insignificant, but it may be just what one of our gospel partners needs to feel refreshed and rested. Your neighborhood Bible study might be where the Spirit of God opens up the eyes of someone to the gospel for the first time. Your dessert and prayer with your neighbor who just found out he has cancer could be what God uses to draw him to himself.

Transition: You don't know how God might use the simplest gesture of selfless hospitality to accomplish his purposes...he's even used his people to host angels who were on their way to do his work (see Gen 18-19, where Abraham hosts some angels on their way to Sodom). This unshakable kingdom transforms us to look outside of ourselves, showing kindness even to those we don't know well yet. The next way this unshakable kingdom is made visible is through...

3. Prayerful Solidarity (3)

Explanation: Look at v.3: “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.” The recipients of this letter lived during a time when persecution of Christians was not uncommon. And so, he tells them that when one of their brothers or sisters is thrown into prison or mistreated, they should remember them as if they had been bound together with them or mistreated with them! The natural human disposition is to avoid those who are suffering/mistreated. To protect ourselves by distancing ourselves. The unshakable kingdom transforms us to identify with our brothers and sisters who are suffering for Christ.

2 Timothy 1:8 – “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God...”

And he gives them a **reason** that they should live this way: “**since** you also are in the body.” ***Here’s an important reality of this unshakable kingdom: this unshakable kingdom is advancing in the midst of a very shakable world...a broken world where suffering and mistreatment are a reality.*** The kingdom we’ve received is invisible, unshakable. But it’s advancing in a broken world.

Application: So, this invisible kingdom is made visible when we turn towards those who are suffering and enter into their suffering with them, when we feel the sorrow and pain that our brothers and sisters in Christ feel. 1 Cor 12:26 – “If one member suffers, all suffer together.”

1. One helpful thing to remember at this point is that we are reading this as American Christians. And we have brothers and sisters in many other countries who *are* regularly arrested and imprisoned for naming the name of Jesus. This is one of the reasons we read about this and pray for Christians in other countries on Sunday mornings. God-willing, we are teaching you, in a broad sense, to “remember those in prison and those mistreated.” ***Because one of the main ways we remember others is through prayer.***
2. But we should also remember that one of the main themes of Hebrews is to hold fast and to not turn away from the faith. And so this verse is also a call to not let the mistreatment of our brothers and sisters in Christ turn us away from the unshakable kingdom. Suffering and mistreatment are a reality. Know that it’s coming. Don’t be surprised by it or turn away. And don’t be afraid to identify with those experiencing it.

Transition: So, the second and third commands show that this invisible, unshakable kingdom is made visible through the way we love others. It changes the way we view God (12:28-29). It changes the way we view others (13:1-3). And in these next two verses we’ll see the way it transforms us from the inside out. And the author fittingly emphasizes this by talking about two of the main idols both during the time he was writing and during our own time: the idols of sex and money.

4. Purposeful Purity (4)

Explanation: Look at v.4 – “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” The unshakable kingdom transforms us to have a high view of marriage. Why? Because marriage is a visible picture that God created to display his love for his people, his bride. Do you remember what Paul says about marriage in Eph 5? After saying that a husband should sacrificially love his wife, “giving himself up for her” (5:25), he goes on to say (5:32): “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it [marriage] refers to Christ and the church.”

Application: So, why bring up marriage? Why is it so important that we hold in honor the biblical teaching on marriage? Because every Christian marriage is a visible picture of the loving, committed, sacrificial relationship between Jesus and his bride, the church. Married couples of Hampton Park, God intends for your marriage to be a visible picture of this spiritual

reality. Commitment. Forgiveness. Self-sacrifice. Grace. Love. Intimacy. All of these things display the steadfast love of Jesus for his people.

- Husbands, you are the primary ones who are called to make this invisible kingdom visible by your self-sacrificial love for your wife and families. Not demanding your own way. Not ruling over your family as if your house is your own little kingdom. Not ignoring the needs or desires of your wife. But pursuing her, caring for her physically, emotionally, and in particular spiritually. And by confessing your sin and repenting when you don't. Pastor Conley said this so well during our worldview series when he said that your wife should be more spiritually refreshed and vibrant the more years that she lives with you. Is this the case in your marriage? God created marriage to make this invisible kingdom visible.
- Wives, you make this invisible kingdom visible by following the spiritual leadership of your husband. By supporting him and encouraging him. Not by demanding perfection or by comparing your husband with other men. But by praying for him and supporting him physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Explanation: God created the sexual relationship to be enjoyed in the beautiful context of this committed, self-sacrificial relationship that we just described. This is why this verse says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, *and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for* God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." Do you see the point? There ought to be a distinct contrast between the surrounding culture's view of sex and the Christian view of sex. The surrounding culture makes sexual expression all about me. Whatever makes me happy. Whatever I feel like doing. Other people are objects for my pleasure. Our world makes an idol of sex, with heterosexual/homosexual pornography and explicit messaging and social media available in our pockets to worship at any moment. The Christian view of sex, on the other hand, is selfless and submitted to God.

Application: The unshakable kingdom is made visible through our transformed view of sex...

- If you are regularly giving yourself to sexual sin without repentance, then you need to hear the warning of this verse: "God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." Don't fool yourself into thinking that if no one else knows then it doesn't matter. Let the gospel of forgiveness and grace drive you to repent and to seek help. ***The church is a safe place that offers help, mercy, and hope through the gospel for repentant sinners.***
- There are some here who have been burned by the sexual brokenness of our world: through abuse or an unfaithful spouse or any other kind of sexual brokenness. And you may think that you can't make visible God's kingdom in this area because of your past. If this is you, let me encourage you that you make visible the unshakable kingdom of God by persevering in your faith and trust in a God who takes every circumstance, even the most difficult ones of our past, and works them out to his honor and our good.
- Finally, others are here who have burned yourself or others in this area and are experiencing the consequences. And you may think you can't make visible God's kingdom because of your past. Let me encourage you that you make visible the

unshakable kingdom of God by your repentance and faith in a God who forgives, no matter how big or far reaching your sin. God will judge the sexually immoral, but if you come to him in repentance, then he justly judges Jesus in your place.

Transition: This unshakable kingdom is made visible by our view of sex. It takes it from something dark to something light. From a sin that enslaves us to a gift that God gave to be enjoyed. “Let marriage be held in honor among all...” The last command probably searches our hearts the deepest because it gets at what we value.

5. Intentional Frugality (5)

Explanation: Look at v.5: “Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” The invisible, unshakable kingdom is made visible by what we value. One of the greatest temptations of our hearts is to place value in what we can see. This is why we value money. It’s tangible. We can touch it. Feel it. See it. We can see its results in our lives. Money purchases us security in the present and in the future. Money increases our status and influence on others. Money expands our friendships and our ability to have fun. You’ve probably tasted one or more of these. It’s no wonder then that money pulls at your heart. It draws you to organize your life around it. To put your hope in it. To protect it at all costs. To become its slave. There are few things that can make you more fearful than someone threatening to take away your money.

But there’s a contrast being made here: “keep your life free from love of money, and [we might add the word “rather”] be content with what you have.” There’s something peaceful about contentment, isn’t there? It doesn’t demand more. It doesn’t assume that more is better. It doesn’t place too much value what more can give. It’s content. Contentment makes the invisible, unshakable kingdom of God visible by pointing to something more trustworthy, more valuable, more precious than money and the things money can buy.

Really, it points back to a correct view of God, which was the first command we considered in 12:28. Contentment shows that you have a right view of God. This is what the passage goes on to say. Why do I not need to set my hope in money? Why am I able to be content? V.5 – “...for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” I can be content in every circumstance because the king of the unshakable kingdom is always with me. And he will never abandon me.

Context: These words are quoted from Deut 31. Moses is exhorting Joshua who is on the brink of taking the Israelites into the Promised Land. An overwhelming, impossible task. And God’s words to Joshua are, “Don’t be afraid. I will never leave you. I will never abandon you.” Don’t let these overwhelming circumstances change what you know to be true. There is a king who is ruling over the earth. He is going before you. And this same king says to those who have received his kingdom: “Don’t be afraid. I will never leave you. I will never abandon you.”

Paul in Phil 4:12-13 – “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger,

abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” “I will never leave you. I will never abandon you.”

Application: Where is your heart? What do you value?

- Is your heart drawn to the king of this unshakable kingdom? Is your heart resting in his presence with you and his rule over your circumstances? Or is your heart drawn to trust in yourself and in your own control of your circumstances through things like money?
- Is this unshakable kingdom big enough in your mind to sell what you have and move across the country or across the world to help others receive it? Or are you too nervous about what that would mean for your 401K or your kids' education or your salary? He has said, “I will never leave you. I will never abandon you.”
- Some of us have filled our lives with so many financial commitments that have stretched our budgets so thin that we have almost chained ourselves to the money that we need to keep all of our commitments going. We've taught ourselves to be discontent by pursuing houses or cars or vacations that are right at the edge of our means or even beyond our means. God's unshakable kingdom teaches us something different. It teaches us contentment. Why? Because he is with us. And he will never abandon us.
- Christians have regularly made the invisible kingdom visible by making life decisions that others would think are careless and fiscally irresponsible: like taking a lower-paying job that gives more flex-time to invest in other people or in short-term missions. Or choosing to live well-beneath their means so that they have an abundance of finances with which to be generous to the church, church members, and gospel partners. What some would call irresponsible, they would call “keeping themselves free from the love of money and being content with what they have.”

Conclusion: Verse 6 is such a fitting conclusion to all of this. 12:28 says we've received a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And 13:5 says that the king of this kingdom is always with us and will never abandon us. 13:6 – “So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’”

It's possible that you feel that you've failed in one or more of these areas. Praise God that he's opened your eyes to this. Repent and turn to Jesus in faith. It's your connection to him that enables you to display through your transformed life this unshakable kingdom. You might ask yourself what's one step you could take in faith? This kind of life is worth it. While we make visible this kingdom in our lives now, let me remind you what we saw at the beginning: this kingdom has a future reward/fulfillment. ***Ultimately this invisible, unshakable kingdom is made visible through our trust in its King. He is a good king. And he will never leave us or abandon us.***

Personal Reflection. Prayer.