

An Unshakable Kingdom

Hebrews 12:25-29

Halifax: 24 March 2024

Introduction:

Over the past few weeks, we have been in Hebrews 12.

- Here, we have seen how God has given His people this most wonderful way that brings us to this most wonderful destination!

Jesus has made the way from *ruination in sin to glory with God* in His house.

- Psalm 84 has been our theme song—
 - How lovely, LORD of hosts to me
 - The tabernacles of Thy grace!
 - O how I long, yes, faint to see
 - Jehovah's court, His dwelling place!
 - My heart and flesh with joy draw nigh
 - As to the living God I cry.
- Just think of it!
 - We are going to the house of the best Father that there has ever been.
 - The perfect Father.
 - A most holy, most just, most powerful, most gracious, most wise, most merciful, most welcoming Father.
 - A Father who rejoices in our progress.
 - A Father who will welcome us into His house with singing.
 - A Father who has pardoned us by the blood of His only begotten Son that we might return to Him.
 - A Father who gives us His Spirit that we might be willing to come.
 - A Father who will purify us so that we can live in perfect love and perfect devotion to Him as those who are truly transformed from a heart of love.
 - A Father who will show us His beauty and majesty and goodness forever.
 - Jesus is *the way* to the Father.
 - To become the way, He had to go to the cross to bear the punishment of all our sins.
 - It caused Him, the mighty lion of the tribe of Judah, to cry out in anguish: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"
 - His agony was so great that his sweat was mingled with blood in anticipation of it.
 - And He did it all to open the way for us to come to His Father's house.
 - He and the Father planned it.

To be without this way leaves us in the most twisted, diabolical, wicked condition, missing the purpose for which we were created.

- We are worse than useless.
 - Like an employee who not only does not work, but one who becomes a thief and a destroyer—one who assaults our employer...
 - But much worse—because the one we oppose is our creator.
 - We deny and destroy the very essence of what we were created to be.

- How wonderful is this way that Jesus has made for us to come to our Father's house!
 - In Hebrews chapter 12, we have been looking at this wonderful way and have been encouraged to continue in it.

And now, today, at the end of this chapter, we are urged to see that we do not refuse Him.

- I will read the passage to you now. It is Hebrews 12:25-29
- Please listen reverently, this is God's holy Word.

Heb 12:25-29: See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, ²⁶ whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." ²⁷ Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the

removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.

And there we will end the reading of God's holy word.

- May He bless it to us.

Let's jump right in with the initial admonition in v. 25...

I. See that you don't refuse Him who speaks.

A. Who?

1. If we look in the verse just before our reading, we see that it tells us of Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant.
 - In the New Covenant, God promised forgiveness of sin by the blood of Jesus (that is, by His suffering and death for our sins),
 - And it speaks of God giving us His Spirit to transform our hearts to come to God and His salvation and to serve and obey Him.
2. The point is, don't refuse Him—
 - The one who graciously came to save us from our sins.
 - The one who has made the way for sinners to come to God.
 - The one who calls us to turn from our own way and to take His way.

B. It's quite a shame, isn't it, that we need to be urged not to refuse Him?

1. It shows how twisted and pig-headed we are.
2. The Son of God has opened the way for sinners who are lost, condemned, and without hope to come to God and be fully accepted and He has called us to come.
3. Who would be so foolish as to refuse Him who speaks?
 - Who would even think of refusing Him?

C. But since we are that foolish and since we need to be told, how good it is of the Lord to send His prophets and ministers to tell us.

1. Right here in our text He tells you, "See that you do not refuse Him who speaks."
2. This is the point of this whole epistle to the Hebrews—to show us how excellent Jesus is and to urge us to keep on with Him.

TRANS> But it does not stop with a simple exhortation.

- The Lord knows that we need more.
- He also gives us arguments.

II. **The first reason you should hear is because now God has spoken not only from earth, but also from heaven.**

A. You can see how the contrast is made between God speaking from earth and God speaking from heaven.

- Verse 25 says: **See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven,**

1. Jesus, the Son of God, actually left heaven to come here.

- This is highlighted in the very first verse of this letter to the Hebrews.
 - Heb 1:1-2: **“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;”**

2. It was very kind, very gracious, and very wonderful for God to speak to His people through prophets and ceremonies and covenants and all sorts of ways in the past.

- He gave us His law, He thundered from Mt. Sinai to show His authority and holiness.
- He gave them the whole service of the tabernacle (or temple) with priests offering animals for the forgiveness of sin and with all kinds of ceremonies and services to testify of His holiness, mercy, and grace.

3. But now He has done something that is vastly superior to them all—

- He has sent Jesus His Son to become human flesh and to speak to us.

B. And the speaking that He did was the most powerful speaking.

1. He came and lived a godly life—such as no one had ever lived before.

- He lived the way that every human being ought to live, but the way that no human being ever had lived.
- He lived so that God said that He was fully pleased with Him. He lived a righteous, godly life.

➤ But much more than that...

2. He also did something that so powerfully and so wonderfully and so remarkably reveals God that it cannot be ignored without incurring much guilt.

- Jesus became the perfect eternal high priest who was appointed to offer the one sacrifice that could atone or cover the guilt of human sin.
 - And that sacrifice was nothing less than the sacrifice of Himself.
- This one act of dying on the cross for our sins tells us so much about God that it makes anyone who refuses to hear—who rejects the message—very culpable.

- Here we learn that God is so holy and just that to save sinners, nothing will do but the sacrifice of His divine Son in our flesh...
 - And here we learn that God is so gracious and merciful that He would do such a thing—it is unfathomable.
3. It's all so God-like, so uniquely God-like—that no human could have ever possibly devised such a thing.
 - Here is a triune God.
 - Here is a God so much more holy than any human would ever have thought.
 - Here is a God so offended by sin, yet so gracious that He provides atonement in the only way possible at great expense to Himself.
 - These are divine revelations.
 - This is not something that man could or would ever come up with.
- C. So to refuse this one who has spoken from heaven is very wicked.
1. In fact, there is nothing that can compare with it.
 2. To refuse to hear God when He speaks—especially when it is a gracious call to salvation, is bad enough—but to refuse to hear Him when He comes down from heaven to speak in such a way as He has is far worse.
 3. Therefore, it is something that ought never to be done. It is wrong. Very wrong!

TRANS> The second reason we are given that we ought not to refuse Him who speaks from heaven is closely related to this.

III. Because we will be severely punished if we refuse to hear God.

- A. Those who refused to hear Him who spoke from earth did not escape punishment.
1. We are shown this very plainly in the Old Testament.
 - When the people envied Moses and Aaron whom God had appointed and tried to take their place, fire consumed some and others were swallowed up the earth.
 - When the people made a golden calf to worship, many of them were punished with death.
 - When a whole generation refused to go into the land that God had promised to give them, they were sentenced to wander in the wilderness for forty years until they died.
 - When David committed adultery, he lost the child of his adultery and was sentenced to suffer trouble in his family—three of his sons turned against him and brought great sorrow to him.
 2. Perhaps even more striking is the way God shook the whole nation of Israel.
 - He had given them their priests and kings, their temples and their altars and their land.
 - These were all things that, to use the language of our text, could be shaken.

- So it was that when Israel rebelled, there was a day when God raised up enemies to destroy all of these things.
 - They were all shaken.
 - They were all things that could be shaken.
 - God did this once in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but He did it again in AD 70 after they rejected Jesus and crucified Him.
 - Their temple was destroyed and it has never been restored.
 - 3. All this shows us that it does not go well when we refuse to hear God's voice.
 - It shows us in very direct and graphic way.
- B. But the argument in our text is this: If they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, how can we expect to escape if we refuse Him who has now spoken from heaven?
- The argument is in verse 25-26: **See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."**
1. This is very clear.
 - The punishment for rejecting God in the New Testament is much worse than the punishment for rejecting Him in the Old Testament.
 - It is not as immediate and not as graphic, but far worse.
 2. It is very common for people to speak of God being severe in the Old Testament, but that now that Jesus has come, He is no longer severe.
 - The only reason people say that is because the punishments in the Old Testament were so graphic and so immediate.
 - But if we look at Jesus's teaching compared to the prophets of the Old Testament, we see that He repeatedly speaks about eternal punishment.
 - If you could ask anyone in hell, they would tell you that it would be delightful to be swallowed by the ground if they could have that instead.
 - Those that were swallowed by the earth may have and probably did go to hell, but the ground swallowing them is a very little thing compared to eternity in hell.
 - And our text makes it clear that the punishment in hell will be worse for those who rebel against God speaking through His Son from heaven than for those who rebel against God speaking on earth.
 3. God is in fact more severe in the New Testament than He was in the Old.
 - The message is more compelling and more complete, so the refusal of His call brings worse consequences.
- C. But what is this shaking of heaven and earth that God tells us about?
- Look at verse 26-27: **whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."** ²⁷ Now this,

“Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

- This is not complicated.
- 1. The LORD is telling us that He is going to shake everything off the things that cannot be shaken.
 - Christ and His kingdom cannot be shaken, but all the hypocrites who profess to be in it can be shaken off of it.
 - Whatever is joined to Christ cannot be shaken, but everything else can.
- 2. As believers, we have things about us that are not conformed to Christ.
 - These things will be shaken off of us, but if we are in Christ, we cannot be shaken because He cannot be shaken.
 - We are absolutely secure in Him forever if we have come to Him in true faith that we might be reconciled to God.
- 3. Here is a great difference from the Old Testament.
 - In the Old Testament, the earthly kings and priests and the earthly tabernacle could be shaken, and it was shaken,
 - But in the New Testament, we have Christ who cannot be shaken.
 - Now that He has come, the kingdom of God can never go wrong because we always have Him as our perfect king and we always have Him as our perfect priest.
 - The kingdom as a whole will always be acceptable—perfectly acceptable—in Christ and it will never fail.
 - That means that we can always return to Christ.
 - There is always a place to God where there is forgiveness and full acceptance with God.
 - We don't have to worry about corrupt priests or kings who worship Baal.
 - Now we have God's Son.

IV. In view of this kingdom that cannot be shaken, we are given a wonderful encouragement.

- In verse 28-29 it says: **Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.**
- A. Isn't the very idea of it wonderful—we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken!
1. There is no such kingdom apart from Christ.
 - All the kingdoms of this world can boast of their power and their dominion, but they can all be shaken, and they all are shaken.
 - Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome boasted of their eternal majesty, but what became of them?
 - We could speak of France, the Soviet Union, England, the United States, in their glory days, but they are all decayed or decaying.

2. But whoever believes on Christ, whoever comes to Him for forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God—that one cannot fail.
 - That one cannot be shaken except for the remaining corruption—the sin that we still carry about with us...
 - That will be shaken, and of that we are very glad.
- B. Next there is the encouragement here to have grace that we may serve God acceptably in this kingdom.
- Having grace involves two things...
1. First, it is by grace through faith in Christ that we have forgiveness of sin.
 - Christ has a sacrifice for His people's sins, and He always lives to make intercession for us as our priest. We trust in Him for forgiveness and acceptance with God by grace.
 - We don't have to go on in our guilt.
 - Not only are we pardoned, but His righteousness is also credited to us.
 - We are fully justified through faith... that makes us acceptable.
 2. But the second way we need grace is to keep us clinging to Christ and serving Him.
 - We still have sin clinging to us, and it is by God's grace that we are able to grow and to persevere through trials and temptations.
 - Here again we look to Christ who promises to give us the Holy Spirit if we ask Him.
 - And then, by His grace, we bring forth fruit so that we live and love and serve and go on with patience and faithfulness until we are called home.
- C. We are also encouraged here that as those who are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, we should serve God with reverence and godly fear.
1. This call comes with great power when we consider the fact that everything will be shaken off except whatever is conformed to God.
 - Another way to look it is also given to us—that He is a consuming fire.
 - Everything will be burned up that is not conformed to Him.
 2. This helps us to see how ridiculous it is for us cling to anything that is not pleasing to Him.
 - What would you think of a neighbour who built a beautiful chimney for his house—but as you observe, you see that he is building it out of wood!
 - You would think him a fool! “Don't you realise that chimney with its wooden liner will not stand in the fire? It will all be ruined!”
 - But isn't that exactly what we do when we cling to idols, to our pet sins, to our selfishness, our pride, our sinful lusts and practices?
 - They will not withstand the fire.
 - They will be shaken.
 - Did Jesus not teach us that we should not lay up treasures on earth where moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break through and steal?
 - Did He not teach us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?

- What manner of persons ought we to be?
3. Serving God with reverence and godly fear means that we are careful to only do what pleases Him.
 - It means that we seek to conform ourselves to Him—
 - It means that we sit at His feet to learn of Him—
 - It means that we worship Him and adore Him—
 - It means that we obey Him and depend on Him—
 - It means that we run the race looking unto Jesus.

Conclusion: Thanks be to God for His precious word and His precious Son who has given us a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us indeed have grace whereby we may serve Him.