

Hebrews 12:25-29 "Receiving a Kingdom that Cannot Be Shaken" **

Main Idea: Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, there are two bottom line realities we must face according to Hebrews 12:25-29. One has to do with the way we receive the Word, and the other with the worship we give.

I. Since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, here's something we must not do (25-27).

A. We must not resist God's Word (25).

1. To resist what God says is to resist God Himself.
2. To resist what God says brings significant consequences.

B. We must recognize the power of God's Word (26).

1. In the past, God's voice shook the earth.
2. In the future, God's voice will shake the earth and heaven, too.

C. We must recognize the implications of God's Word (27).

1. God says that all shakable things will be removed.
2. God says that only unshakable things will remain.

II. Since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, here's what we must do (28-29).

A. We must receive grace.

B. We must give God our worship.

1. Not all worship is acceptable to God.
2. Worship that God accepts is marked by reverence and awe.

C. We must recognize that God is a fire.

1. Fire purifies.
2. Fire consumes.

Take Inventory: Ask yourself these questions...

1. Are you sure you are receiving an unshakable kingdom?
2. Do you know the King?
3. Are you living like it?

I want to tell you at the beginning where this message is going. I want to fix a truth in your mind, then journey through the text before us to prepare for it, and then show you the truth itself. The truth is

stated plainly in Hebrews 12:28, but it's in the mind of the author of Hebrews in every phrase of the verses that lead up to verse 28. Indeed, this truth has been shaping every word the author has penned since he began the letter. The truth? *We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.*

We—that's referring to the unknown author of this letter, as well as to the recipients of this letter (first century Jewish Christians), and to those including us who have done what the original recipients had done, namely trusted in Messiah Jesus as our Savior and King. We, we who have come to know King Jesus and have given our allegiance to Him, *we are receiving a kingdom.* We live in a world with many "kingdoms" (small "k" kingdoms), but we are receiving a kingdom in a class all by itself. It's not a kingdom of this world, for it's the kingdom of God. And that explains why, in contrast to the kingdoms of this world, this kingdom *cannot be shaken.* It's permanent, fixed, secure, and eternal. And don't miss the fact that *we are receiving* this kingdom—we're experiencing its benefits right now in the present, at least the firstfruits, and we are guaranteed to receive its fullness in the future.

It's a life-changing truth, my friend. Young people, if you believe it, it'll affect how you choose your career, the type of person you look for in a mate, not to mention what you do with your time day by day, for starters. And as we get older, this truth will certainly affect the way we raise our kids and the dreams we set before them, and still later how we view retirement and the purpose of it. It's a truth, my friend, that will change the way you watch the evening news and how you respond should the pink slip come. It's a pillow you can lay your weary head on at night, and though all around you are in dismay, you can rest secure, for indeed, although there are many things you *don't* know, you do know this. *We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.*

This is a truth that can inspire even young children to do something extraordinary for Christ, as the following true story illustrates. What you're about to hear is taken from *Extreme Devotion*, a Voice of the Martyrs publication:

The boy, only twelve, swallowed his fear as he stood before the Communist officer, "Captain, you are the man who put my parents in prison. Today is my mother's birthday, and I always buy her a flower for her birthday."

"Since my mother taught me to love my enemies and to reward evil with good, I have brought the flower instead for the mother of your children. Please take it home to your wife tonight, and tell her about my love and the love of Christ."

Captain Marco, who had watched unmoved as Christians had been unmercifully beaten and tortured, was stunned at the act of love of this boy. His tears fell as he slowly walked around the desk and grabbed the boy in a fatherly embrace. Marco's heart was changed by the gift of Christ's love. He could no longer arrest and torture Christians, and soon he himself was arrested.

Only months after the boy's visit to his office, Marco slumped in a filthy prison cell surrounded by some of the same Christians he had previously arrested and tortured. He tearfully told his cellmates of the young boy and the simple gift of a flower. He considered it an honor to share a cell with those he had previously attacked.[\[1\]](#)

When you know where you're going and what awaits you there, when you know for certain that you are receiving *a kingdom that cannot be shaken*, you can do amazing things in the present that will stagger the onlooking world.

So there's the truth. Now let's see it in the text, Hebrews 12:25-29. Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, there are two bottom line realities we must face, says our text. One has to do with the way we receive God's Word, and the other with the worship we give. The first pertains to something we must *not* do, the other something we must do.

I. Since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, here's something we must not do (25-27).

Verse 25 exhorts us, "See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks." The God who made us is a God who speaks. He speaks to us through His creation—as Psalm 19:1 indicates, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." That's *general revelation*. Yet God also speaks to us through *special revelation*, through the giving of His Word through His servants the prophets and ultimately through His Son.

As we saw when we began this series, the book of Hebrews began emphasizing the speech of God in Hebrews 1:1-2, "In the past **God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets** at many times and in various ways, but in these last days **he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

The immediate context for the charge is in the preceding verse, Hebrews 12:24, where the author pointed out that Jesus' blood "speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." So God speaks through creation, through the prophets, through His Son, and through the blood of His Son.

The question is, how should we respond to the One who so speaks to us? Our text says, "See to it that you *do not refuse him who speaks*." In other words...

A. We must not resist God's Word (25). Think of it this way. When God speaks, it's not simply information that we hear. It's a *person*. Consequently...

1. *To resist what God says is to resist God Himself.*

Boys and girls, suppose you came home from school and found a note from your father on the kitchen table that said, "Your mother and I are running some errands and will be home in a couple of hours. I'd like for you to clean your room, take out the trash, and then you can go outside and play before supper." What do you think about that note? It's just paper and ink, isn't it? No, it's more than that for those words came from your father, and the way you respond to that message is a response to your father himself. To resist what your father says is to resist your father himself.

"See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks," says the writer of Hebrews. What happens if we do refuse His Word and thus refuse Him? To put it plainly...

2. *To resist what God says brings significant consequences.* And of course, that's a truth that many have learned the hard way. The author cites such an example in the middle of verse 25, "If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?"

That's what happened to God's people at Mount Sinai, as we were reminded back in verse 19. At that mountain the people came "to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them." What a sobering thought. The Jews at Sinai heard God speak, yet they begged Him to stop speaking.

Likewise, the first century Jewish readers of this epistle had heard the word of God. They'd heard the message of Christ, the message of salvation and forgiveness through Christ and His atoning sacrifice. Yes, they heard it, but apparently some weren't sure they wanted to hear it any more. They were being persecuted for their association with Messiah Jesus, and they were considering bailing out on Jesus and going back to their old beliefs and practices.

Don't do that! says the writer. *See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks.* If they didn't escape, surely we won't!

This isn't the first warning the writer has given us about how we hear God's Word. In fact, it's the fifth in the letter. Let's take a walk back to the previous warnings...

First warning: Hebrews 2:1-3 "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, **to what we have heard**, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation

and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him."

Second warning: Hebrews 3:7-8, 12-14 "So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, **if you hear his voice**, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert...' See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first."

Third warning: Hebrews 6:4-6 "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have **tasted the goodness of the word of God** and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

Fourth warning: Hebrews 10:26-29 "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have **received the knowledge of the truth**, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

And again, *the fifth warning:* "See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks." How we treat God's Word is a serious thing. For centuries, the Jews heard God's warning on earth, resisted it, and did not escape God's chastisement. How much less will we escape if we have heard His warning *from heaven*, that is, if we have heard the message of His Son and resisted that message? It's unthinkable. We must not resist the voice of God.

So how do you listen to the Word of God? Is your heart tender and teachable this morning? Did you come to church with a prepared heart saying, "Here I am, Lord. Speak, for I'm ready to listen and obey"?

You say, "What is it about God's speech that deserves that kind of attention?" Good question. The answer, according to Hebrews, is that there's something about God's Word that makes it inherently superior to any other word, namely, its *power*.

B. We must recognize the power of God's Word (26). "At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.'"

When God gave His Law at Mount Sinai, He sent a visual aid to grab His people's attention. The earth shook. The Scriptures tell us in Exodus 19:18, "Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently."

Later the psalmist offered this commentary in Psalm 68:8, "The earth shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel." We read in Psalm 77:18, "Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked." And in Psalm 114:7, "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob."

So, yes...

1. *In the past, God's voice shook the earth.* But He's not done shaking things!

2. *In the future, God's voice will shake the earth and heaven, too.* That's what the prophet Haggai had announced in his prophesy in Haggai 2:6, which the writer of Hebrews here cites, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."

God is going to shake the heavens and the earth. Why would He do that? What does *shaking*

something indicate?

Not long ago I took the floor mats out of my car and *shook* them. Why did I do that? To get rid of something, right? Ladies, why do you *shake* the rugs in your house? It's to get rid of the dirt, isn't it? You shake them to remove the undesirable dirt from them.

Think about it. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, their sin contaminated God's perfect universe. Subsequently, their descendants sinned and further contaminated His universe. But God is intent on getting rid of the sinful contaminants. That's why He sent His Son into the world who came the first time to take away the sin stains of repenting sinners. But He's not done. He's going to send His Son a second time to shake the entire universe and get rid of every trace of sin's contamination.

But that's not all. According to another passage, He's not only going to shake the universe, but also *burn* it. Listen to 2 Peter 3:10-13: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

By the way, the text quoted in Hebrews 12:26, Haggai 2:6, is actually a messianic prophecy, as indicated by what's stated in the next verse, Haggai 2:7, which says, "I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the LORD Almighty." Who is "the desired of all nations"? That's the Messiah. Haggai says that God is going to shake the nations in conjunction with the coming of the Messiah, and then He will fill His house with glory.

Beloved, God, and specifically God's Son, Messiah Jesus, is going to shake the world (see the book of Revelation; 6:12; 8:5). Indeed, we're feeling warning tremors even now.

So how should we respond to God's Word? Should we resist it? Never! To the contrary, whenever we hear it...

C. We must recognize the implications of God's Word (27). That's something the writer of Hebrews urges us to do in verse 27. What's going to be the effect of all this shaking when King Jesus returns and shakes the world? Verse 27—"The words 'once more' indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain." Don't miss the implications of that statement...

1. *God says that all shakable things will be removed.* Furthermore...

2. *God says that only unshakable things will remain.* Let that sink in. According to the assessment of God and His Word, there are only two kinds of objects in this world. There are shakable things and there are unshakable things. What are the shakable things? Our text says they're the *created things*, the things that have been made, things of this world—houses, cars, laptops, boats, diplomas, big screen tv's. All those things are going to be shaken, and since they can't withstand the force of the shaking, they will be removed.

Only the unshakable things will remain. What's unshakable? The Lord is, according to Hebrews 1:10-12, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

The Lord's word is also unshakable, for Hebrews 1:3 says He sustains all things "by his powerful word."

The person who does God's will is unshakable and therefore will remain. That's what 1 John 2:17 says, "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

So the Lord, the Lord's word, and the Lord's people are unshakable and thus will remain. Can we summarize that? The writer of Hebrews does in the next verse. He calls that which cannot be shaken a *kingdom*. Indeed, he says it's the kingdom that we are receiving, the unshakable kingdom of God.

No wonder Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Why would you not want to seek first in your life that will cannot be shaken and will remain forever?

But the problem is, as Warren Wiersbe observes, "Too many people (including Christians) are building their lives on things that can shake."^[2] Instead of putting God's kingdom first, we're living for the things of this world. But let's face the facts. The things of this world are not going to last. They're going to be *shaken* and then perish. Only God's kingdom will last for it alone is unshakable.

Beloved, we're in trouble when we live for shakable things. We're supposed to be using shakable things for the advancement of the unshakable.

Let me address a specific application. Do you see what's happening in our country right now? We are increasingly consumed with the here and now. It's not just that we're failing to live with eternity in mind. We're not even thinking about ten years from now. As long as I get my stimulus money now, who cares where it comes from or who's going to pay for it!

I read a sobering quote last week that's attributed to Alexander Fraser Tytler (1747-1813), although there's debate concerning its origin. Regardless of its source, it's worth pondering:

"A democracy is always temporary in nature; it simply cannot exist as a permanent form of government. A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover that they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse due to loose fiscal policy, which is always followed by a dictatorship. The average age of the world's greatest civilizations from the beginning of history has been about 200 years. During those 200 years, these nations always progressed through the following sequence: from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependence; from dependence back into bondage."^[3]

Brothers and sisters, of all people, we who know Christ ought to be living with the future in mind. Yes, we live in the present but always with an eye on the future. What's that mean practically speaking? That's the very issue the writer of Hebrews addresses next...

II. Since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, here's what we must do (28-29).

Verses 28-29 "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'"

There it is. There's the truth we highlighted as we began this message. *We are receiving an unshakable kingdom.*

But what exactly is this kingdom? When we read the Gospels we hear Jesus speaking often about the kingdom, and it's been said that "the kingdom" is the most frequent subject in the teaching of Jesus.^[4] Ironically, this is only the third mention of the term in the book of Hebrews (in 1:8, plural in 11:33).

Philip Hughes calls it, "an ordered and harmonious society governed by him who is the Sovereign Lord of all."^[5] That's helpful. To have a kingdom you must have a *realm* (an ordered and harmonious society), the *ruled* (the people who are governed), and a *ruler* (the Sovereign Lord of all). In God's kingdom there is all three. There's a realm, the ruled, and the ruler.

How do you enter this kingdom? Please note from the text that it's not something we can earn or

merit. It must be *received* like a gift. In fact, our text says specifically we *are receiving* this kingdom. The King is giving it to us. He's giving it to us right now, although the full experience of it is yet future. The writer didn't use the term in back in verse 22 but I assume he had "kingdom" in mind when he affirmed, "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly."

Paul used similar kingdom language when he wrote this to the Colossian believers in Colossians 1:12-13, "Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the **kingdom of light**. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the **kingdom of the Son** he loves." Again, notice that God has *brought us into the kingdom*, past tense. In a very real sense, the kingdom is a present reality for God's people, for we have come to know the King. But as you well know, we're not yet experiencing the fullness of His kingdom. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, "May your kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10)."

So to summarize, we're talking about a kingdom we *will* receive when Christ returns, but even now we *are receiving* it, for we presently know the King and are experiencing the firstfruits of His kingdom life.

Let the reality of these words sink in. *We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken*. I'm sure you've noticed that everything around us is shaking and quaking these days. Wall Street is shaking. Detroit is shaking. The Middle East is shaking. To the natural man the shaking is cause for great alarm. Yet while we as God's people ought to be concerned about what's happening in this world in which God has placed us, we have no reason to despair. To the contrary, we have incentive to rejoice, *for we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken*.

I'm encouraged by Raymond Brown's helpful comment, "Christians are alert to what is happening in the world, but the news does not fill them with fear. Conscious as they are of political instability, social pressures, economic hazards, religious apostasy, physical hardship and moral decay, they do not despair. Their trust is in God and they are safe."^[6]

So what difference should the truth of God's kingdom make in our lives? The writer challenges us with three responsibilities.

A. We must receive grace. "Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful," says the NIV. The Greek text is actually difficult to translate with certainty for the last part of that statement can be taken in a variety of ways (*echomen charin*).

Echomen means, "Let us have." The Greek term *charin* can mean "gratitude, thanks, kindness, and good will." So you could translate it, "Let us have gratitude," hence the NIV's rendering, "Let us be thankful."

But *charin* can also mean "grace," and it often does in the New Testament, and in fact, it does elsewhere in the book of Hebrews (see 4:16). Consequently, while the sense can be either *gratitude* or *grace*, and I lean towards the latter, "Let us have grace."

It makes sense, if you think about it. We are receiving an unshakable kingdom, an out of this world kingdom. What's it take to be a good citizen in that kind of kingdom? Please know that what it takes, you don't have in yourself. You must receive it. Hence the charge, *let us receive grace*.

You need grace to enter this kingdom, but you also need grace to live in it. You need God's undeserved favor and help, and in Christ, it's available. But you must ask for it. Again and again and again, day after day, moment by moment, you must be on the receiving end of grace.

"I can't make it today!" you say. No, not in your strength you can't. You need to be a receiver. You need to receive grace, and you must receive it from the King.

Our King is a giver. He went to a cross outside of Jerusalem and gave His life for us. Then He rose from the dead and thereby gave us the gift of eternal life, simply because we asked Him for it. And He's

still giving! How does our King give His grace to His subjects today? He gives it through His Spirit who ministers grace to us through His Word in the context of His church.

B. We must give God our worship. Note the order. "Let us have grace *and so worship God acceptably.*" We must *have grace* before we can *worship*. We have nothing to offer God on our own apart from what He gives to us by His grace. We cannot worship Him as He deserves until we first receive His grace from Him. But having received His amazing grace, we'll want to give Him something, our *worship*.

Please realize that...

1. *Not all worship is acceptable to God.* "So worship God *acceptably,*" says our text, implying that not all worship is acceptable to Him. What kind is acceptable?

2. *Worship that God accepts is marked by reverence and awe.* That's what pleases Him. *Reverence*—according to Hebrews 5:7, Jesus prayed and was heard "because of his reverent submission." That's what God wants from us, worship that's marked by reverence. And *awe*. Philip Hughes says it well, "All self-esteem and self-righteousness renounced, it is centered entirely on him who is our sovereign Redeemer and Lord. Moreover, remembering our own insignificance and unworthiness and the infinite majesty of him before whom we serve, it is offered *with reverence and awe.*"^[7]

We must receive grace. And we must give God our worship. Finally...

C. We must recognize that God is a fire. Why should we worship Him with reverence and awe? Verse 29 gives a powerful incentive, "For our God is a consuming fire." We talk about God being love, and He is, that He's merciful, and He is that too. But fire? Yes, our God is a consuming fire.

What does fire do? For starters...

1. *Fire purifies.* It removes dross. 1 Peter 1:7 says that our faith, like gold, is refined by fire. Fire purifies. What's more...

2. *Fire consumes.* At the judgment seat of Christ our work will be judged by fire, and the fire will test the quality of it (1 Cor. 3:12-15). But for the person who doesn't know Christ, the day of judgment is unthinkable. Hebrews 10:27 speaks of "a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

John Calvin makes an interesting observation about the flow of this text which moves from grace to fire, observing, "God has left out nothing that may draw us to Himself because He begins with kindness so that we may follow Him more gladly, but if He makes no progress by allurements, He frightens us."^[8]

Calvin's right. Why should you worship God acceptably this morning? You ought to because He's *gracious* and gave His Son to rescue sinners like you and me. But if that reality doesn't move your soul, then perhaps this one will. He is a *consuming fire*, and if you turn from His gracious offer in Christ and you will perish forever!

And fellow Christians, how can we know that our God is a consuming fire and not show more compassion towards the lost people who are perishing all around us? I began this message telling you the true story of a little boy who visited the Communist commander who put his Christian parents in prison. That boy believed that he and his parents were truly receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and that's why that boy, instead of hating that man, gave him a gift, a flower for his wife. And it was that gift that God used to soften the hardened heart of that sinful captain so he would feel his need for Christ.

My question for you is this. Have you given away any flowers recently? Have you shown the love of Christ to any lost person this week? Beloved, we know where we're going, to a kingdom that cannot be shaken. But we also know where they're going unless they come to know Christ. What act of love might you demonstrate to a lost neighbor, or co-worker, or family member this week that the Lord might use to soften a heart for Christ?

Take Inventory: Ask yourself these three simple questions...

1. *Are you sure you are receiving an unshakable kingdom?* That's our hope, beloved, our certain hope. You say, "But how can I know for sure?" It's quite simple.

2. *Do you know the King?* Those who have come to know King Jesus as their Savior are receiving an unshakable kingdom. And if that's true of you, then answer this...

3. *Are you living like it?* Are you living like Christ is your King and His kingdom is your possession?

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] *Extreme Devotion*, a devotional by Voice of the Martyrs, Day 11.

[2] Warren Wiersbe, p. 326.

[3] For an explanation of the potential origin of this quote, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Fraser_Tytler.

[4] Observation by Leon Morris, p. 144.

[5] Philip Hughes, p. 559.

[6] Raymond Brown, p. 246.

[7] Philip Hughes, p. 560.

[8] John Calvin, p. 203.