

“AN UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM”

I. Introduction

- A. There is a lot of political instability in our world.
1. We certainly see plenty of examples of this whenever we look at the news, and when we do we should be thankful that we live in a nation that is as stable as it is.
 2. At the same time, we should also realize that our nation is not going to last forever.
 3. When we look across history, we see very clearly that even the greatest kingdoms, empires, and superpowers eventually come to an end.
- B. The writer of Hebrews wants us to understand that this is what makes Jesus Christ and his kingdom so special.
1. Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, a covenant that administrates a kingdom that can never be shaken.
 2. Understanding this truth will help us persevere in our faith, which is why the writer of Hebrews spends so much time impressing this truth upon his readers.
 3. As we study our text in Hebrews 12 this evening, we will consider three things that it teaches us about this unshakable kingdom.
 4. First, this kingdom is centered on Mount Zion, which is very different than the kingdom that was established at Mount Sinai.
 5. Second, this kingdom issues a warning from heaven, which is very different than the warning that was issued from Sinai.
 6. And third, this kingdom calls for a response of grateful, reverent worship to the God who continues to be a consuming fire.

II. The Difference between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion

- A. We begin by looking at verses 18 through 24, where the focus is upon the difference between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.
1. Mount Sinai was the place where God set up the primary Old Testament administration of the covenant of grace.
 2. That administration had its purpose.
 3. It was given in order to show the people of Israel their need for a Savior.
 4. But now that Christ has come the old administration is over.
 5. Its purpose has been served.
 6. As we have seen in our study of this letter, the writer repeats this point again and again.
 7. He does so because these Christians were thinking about going back to Judaism, which meant going back to Sinai.
 8. They were responding to the suffering that they were beginning to experience because of their Christian profession by wondering if Jesus was really worth it.
 9. They thought back wistfully to the things that were so solid and substantial about Judaism.
 10. Judaism had the temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, a land, a national identity.
 11. Christianity didn't offer any of these things, at least not in any tangible way.
- B. It is amazing that the writer totally concedes this point to his readers.

1. He doesn't say, 'Well, you know, the magisterium is just about ready to implement some highly tangible things, things like a priesthood, incense, the sacrifice of the Mass, and penance.'
 2. He says, "you have not come to what may be touched."
 3. He tells them that they have come to something that is far better than what the Israelites came to when they arrived at Sinai.
 4. When God came down on Mount Sinai, the mountain was filled with darkness, gloom, and fire.
 5. The people were utterly terrified when God spoke to them from Sinai because the message that he spoke was essentially, 'Do this, and you will live.'
 6. Mount Zion stands in sharp contrast to this.
 7. Mount Zion was the mountain upon whose slopes the city of Jerusalem and the temple were built.
 8. Zion was the symbol of the city where David had his throne.
 9. Zion stands for the fulfillment of the unconditional promise that God gave to David, the promise that God would establish an eternal kingdom for David's greater son.
 10. Michael Horton summarizes the distinction between Sinai and Zion well when he writes, "Whereas Sinai represents everything that is conditional, violable, threatened by human disobedience, and subject to political intrigues from within and without, Zion is the 'unshakable kingdom' because it is Christ's throne." [*The Christian Faith*, 969]
- C. After describing the terror of Sinai, the writer then piles up all of the benefits that we receive by coming to Mount Zion.
1. We have come to God's own city, the city of the living God.

2. We have become citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, the only city whose founder and builder is God.
- D. We have come to innumerable angels in festal gathering.
1. We are a part of this angelic festival.
 2. No earthly spectacle can even begin to compare to the spiritual reality that we participate in as members of Christ's kingdom.
- E. We have come to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.
1. You may recall that Jesus was referred to as the firstborn back in chapter 1.
 2. Because of our union with Christ, we have been given an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.
- F. We have come to God, who is the judge of all people.
1. What comfort this is for Christians when we suffer for our faith.
 2. No matter what injustices we face in this life, we can be certain that our God will set them right on the last day.
- G. We have come to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.
1. This is referring to the intermediate state, or what happens to Christians when they die.
 2. Though the dead in Christ still await the resurrection of their bodies, their spirits are perfect.
 3. They are completely set free from sin.
 4. In the words of our Shorter Catechism, "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in

their graves till the resurrection.” [WSC 37]

- H. We have come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.
 - 1. In the old covenant, the Israelites trembled with fear at the bottom of Sinai.
 - 2. They didn't even want God to speak with them directly.
 - 3. But we can draw near to God with confidence because we have Jesus as our mediator.

- I. Lastly, we have come to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.
 - 1. Abel's shed blood cried out for justice because Cain had broken God's law.
 - 2. But when our consciences are sprinkled with Christ's blood, that blood speaks of God's mercy instead of judgment.
 - 3. By shedding his blood on our behalf, Christ satisfied the law's demands.

- J. As we think about how this section applies to us today, I just want to point out that we have the same kinds of tendencies as these Hebrew Christians.
 - 1. We too have a preference for religion that is outwardly impressive and socially acceptable.
 - 2. We too are inclined to go back to a religion of earning God's favor by our performance.
 - 3. We too have a tendency to think that Christ is not enough for us, especially in the face of life's trials.
 - 4. This is why we too need to reflect upon what the Bible tells us about the blessings that we receive when we lay hold of Christ by

faith.

5. There is nothing in this world that is greater than the benefits that are described in these verses.
6. Why would we ever even consider giving these things up for something else?

III. The Seriousness of the Warning from Heaven

- A. This brings us to the second part of our passage, where the emphasis is upon the seriousness of the warning that accompanies the announcement of this unshakable kingdom.
 1. Once again, the writer sets a contrast between Sinai and the new covenant.
 2. At Sinai God warned the Israelites from an earthly mountain, but through the preaching of the gospel God warns people from heaven.
 3. The Israelites refused to heed God's earthly warning, and they suffered earthly consequences.
 4. An entire generation was barred from entering the Promised Land.
 5. Later generations were cast out of the land when they too were unfaithful to the Sinai covenant.
 6. As bad as that was, there is something that is far worse.
 7. The Promised Land was only a type of God's heavenly city.
 8. Some who were prevented from entering that land nevertheless gained entrance by faith into the reality to which the land pointed.
 9. Moses would certainly be one example of this.

10. Failure to heed the earthly warning from Sinai had tragic earthly consequences, but failure to heed the warning from heaven has tragic eternal consequences.
 11. Those who refuse to listen to the gospel will be barred from entering into the city of the living God.
- B. We need to be regularly reminding ourselves that a day is coming when God will shake the heavens and the earth.
1. The world may seem so solid and permanent to us, but the Bible tells us that it is transitory.
 2. It has an expiration date.
 3. A day is coming when everything that belongs to this world will be destroyed.
 4. As the psalmist puts it, "Of old you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end. The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you." (Ps. 102:25-28)
 5. The earth will perish.
 6. The only part of this world that will survive that catastrophic event are the people whose names are enrolled in heaven, the people who have a place in the world to come.
 7. And the only such people are those who have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly city where Jesus Christ has his eternal throne.
- C. We need to realize what we have been given in Christ.
1. We need to see that on the last day, the people who ignored Christ or who turned away from Christ will be utterly bewildered that

they ever thought that anything was more important than the gospel.

2. I want to impress this point especially upon you children who are here this evening.
3. You have your whole life in front of you, and you probably think often about the many exciting things that are out there waiting for you.
4. In a sense this is true, but the one thing that I want you always to remember is that there is nothing that is more important than Jesus Christ.
5. There may be times when you will be tempted to choose something else instead of Christ.
6. You may not even realize at the time that that is the choice that is confronting you.
7. There are all sorts of ways in which sin can be rationalized and made light of.
8. But you need to remember that the only way you will gain entrance into the glorious world to come is by holding onto Jesus Christ by faith.
9. Don't think that you will get into heaven on account of your parents' faith.
10. You need to have faith yourself, faith that perseveres to the very end, if you want to inherit the promises.

IV. The Response of Grateful, Reverent Worship

- A. This brings us to the third thing that this passage teaches us about the unshakable kingdom: we should respond to God's grace with grateful, reverent worship.

1. Notice that the writer says that we are “receiving” this unshakable kingdom.
 2. We are not building it with our own resources and efforts.
 3. Christ is the builder of his kingdom, and he freely gives it to all who put their trust in him.
- B. As with any gift, the proper way to respond to this gift is to express our gratitude to the giver.
1. One of the ways that we can show our gratitude to God is by cherishing his gift.
 2. When a person is ungrateful for a gift, they convey that they have little appreciation for both the gift and the giver.
 3. If we fail to value God’s kingdom above anything else in this world, then we are losing sight of both the kingdom’s greatness and God’s unmerited kindness to us.
 4. His kingdom is the one thing that cannot be shaken, the one thing that will endure throughout all eternity.
 5. It is an inestimable blessing to be a recipient of such a kingdom.
- C. Another way in which we can express our gratitude to God is through our worship of him.
1. The writer says that acceptable worship is worship that is characterized by reverence and awe.
 2. The worship of the living God is not a casual affair.
 3. It is not like a rock concert or a talk-show.
 4. If we are flippant in our approach to God in worship, we are failing to recognize who it is that we are worshipping.

5. Our God is a consuming fire.
6. He is the same God whose presence on Mount Sinai utterly terrified the Israelites.
7. The writer has set several contrasts between the old and the new in this passage, but he does not set any contrast between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.
8. He does not say, 'The God of the Old Testament was easily-angered and full of wrath, but the God of the New Testament is merciful and gracious.'
9. The reason why he doesn't say that is because it isn't true.
10. There is only one true God, and he does not change.
11. He is always the same.
12. The reason why Christians can draw near to him without fear of his wrath is because we draw near on the basis of Christ's satisfaction of the law's demands.
13. God is always the same, and we always need to be mindful of this when we worship him.

V. Conclusion

- A. The fact that everything in this world can and will be shaken means the only way we can find a lasting home is to look beyond this world.
- B. The only true comfort is heavenly comfort.
- C. The only true joy is heavenly joy.
- D. As we sing,

*Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;*

*Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.*

- E. So let us always cherish Christ, and let us give thanks to God for all the blessings that we have in him.