

Hebrews 12:18-29 “Unshakable”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! How Jesus is greater than anyone or anything else.

And today we come to the powerful conclusion of the sermon. Yes, there's one more chapter next week and there is great stuff in there.

But it is more of a P.S. than part of the main argument of the written sermon. And what you'll see this morning is that the writer gets a bit fired up.

I'll be honest with you, I probably will too. I've been looking forward to this particular passage since sometime last year when I was planning this sermon series. And that's just fair warning to you that I'm pretty excited about it.

[1 : 14] I told you last week, I'm warning you again. Just reading it here in a moment should get your heart pumping, okay? Remember where we are. We're running by faith in things that we can't see with our eyes yet.

But we're enduring because we're looking to Jesus. And then we pick up reading at verse 18 of chapter 12. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, And I tremble with fear.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

At that time, his voice shook the earth. But now he has promised, Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens. This phrase, yet once more, indicates the removal of things that are shaken, that is, things that have been made, in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

[3 : 16] Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And thus, let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

This is the word of God. Let's ask for his help. God, we do so need your help. God, we need you to open our eyes this morning that we would see wonderful things in your word.

Not just that. God, you know that we need you to change us inside out. Don't just help us to see and know things.

Help us to grasp with the depths of our being the wonders of who you are and how you love us.

Make us new people. Bring us into new relationship with you today.

By your word, by your spirit. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I brought an object lesson for us this morning.

[4 : 28] It's not real pretty. A lot of dirt. I also have a helper for us. Charlotte is going to come up and help me a little bit. Because you see, you get this ball of dirt.

And, well, there's all sorts of things in there. But show us what happens when you shake it.

Charlotte's really strong. So she's going to shake it up for us a little bit. Yeah? Shake it harder?

Really, really hard? Oh, man. There's a lot of stuff coming off of that, isn't there? Okay. Hold on. Let me see. Let's get it out and see. Ooh. What's all that stuff that came off of it? What do you see in there? Dirt and leaves.

Dirt and leaves and sticks just kind of hanging. What's that? Play-Doh. Ugh. Play-Doh just kind of chunking up. What color is the Play-Doh?

Green and purple. Green and purple. Ugh. But you shake it. And the harder you shake it and you kind of beat it around a little bit, it just kind of breaks off all over the place, doesn't it?

[5 : 27] It's not really sticking together anymore. I tell you what. That's a lot of Play-Doh. Let me clean it up for you before I give it to you, okay?

Brought this towel in here to finish the job because Play-Doh is kind of messy. But hold on. What's that? What's that under all the Play-Doh?

A rock? A rock. Huh. There's all sorts of stuff in that big ball of dirt, wasn't there? Okay. I tell you what. I'm going to give you this rock to keep with you during the sermon, okay?

And what I want you to do is I want you to keep shaking it while I'm preaching, okay? Because I think if you just keep shaking it enough, stuff will keep breaking off and falling all over. I want you to see if it disappears like all that other stuff, okay?

Can you keep the rock for me? You keep the rock and just shake it for us and we'll check back in and see how it's going, okay? Thank you, Charlotte. She'll come back up in just a minute. We'll check in on the rock.

[6 : 29] I can still feel my hands shaking as I tried to grip a bat walking to the plate in the high school state championship baseball game.

I was usually really confident. I played a lot of baseball and my whole life had been that. But all of a sudden, this was different. The guy was throwing like 90 miles an hour.

Never seen that. I didn't know if I could keep up with that. To be honest, I'd never tried. And if I didn't, we might lose.

And what would that say for me? I'd be exposed as not good enough. I can still remember those same hands shaking, sweating, nervous as I prepared to propose to my wife years later.

I was pretty sure that she liked me. I mean, I'd been a pretty good boyfriend, I thought. But she was so amazing.

[7 : 42] I mean, what if she finally wised up in that moment and realized how far she was out of my league? And what if the person who knew me best, rather than pulling me in, pushed me away?

That was still a possibility. That was scary. Many of us, many days, just kind of coast through life without shaking and trembling.

Maybe you're used to living that way. But at the same time, we're in an unstable world, aren't we? Maybe there's some scary experiences that you're going through or that you see around you.

Maybe it's the need to prove ourselves worthy that can all of a sudden make us shake when we don't see it coming. Or when the bar is suddenly set really high.

We are especially shaken when all of a sudden we encounter the real God. This passage opens by contrasting two ways of relating to God.

[8 : 55] That's really what the verbs that say you have come or you have not come, that's what they mean. How do you relate to God? The first way is represented by the mountain you can touch, Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were given to God's people.

Let me read you just a bit of the background of this passage out of Exodus 19. This is right after God brings his people out of Egypt and across the Red Sea and they come to the foot of Mount Sinai where God tells Moses, I'm going to meet you there.

Here's what it looks like when he does. There were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp trembled.

Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now just get this picture. Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire.

The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln and the whole mountain trembled greatly. The creation is shaking. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder.

[10 : 35] Then in chapter 20, when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid. Yes, can you understand?

And they trembled and they stood far off and said to Moses, you speak to us and we'll listen, but don't let God speak to us lest we die.

The people stood far off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. You see what was going on?

Suddenly people who had felt pretty good about themselves most of the time a leader who had just stood toe to toe with the most powerful people in the world, performing signs and wonders before them.

All of a sudden they are shaking and trembling in fear. Hebrews highlights seven aspects of this way of relating to or worshiping God right here really fast.

[11 : 42] The physical mountain that they were kept from touching. A blazing fire that keeps them back. Darkness that seems to weigh on them.

Gloom. That's the spirit they feel. The storm. The thunder worse than you've heard in summers in Alabama, I'm sure. A trumpet blast that is loud and startling.

A frightening voice. A frightening voice. So frightening it leads people to beg not to hear it again. Everyone is shaken.

Terrified. Even their mediator, their leader, Moses. The emphasis as I read it, it's on the people being kept at a distance.

Far off, right? Far off, out of fear and for their own protection. Now to be fair to Moses and the Israelites, they're not wrong about their distance from God's holiness, are they?

[12 : 51] God himself is the one who says, any man or beast who touches the mountain will be killed. Would you stay far off? Just to be safe.

Further, being shaken to the core is what tends to happen to people in the Bible when they encounter God. I mean, even as righteous a guy as Job, he was a pretty holy guy, but he begins to see God for who he is and he feels small and despises himself and repents in dust and ashes.

The great prophet Isaiah sees God high and lifted up and what does he say? Woe is me! Unclean! I'm unclean! What about the apostle Peter?

Pretty great guy. He pleads in desperation. Depart from me. I'm a sinful man. That's what happens to even the best of us when we encounter a holy, holy, holy God.

Someone has to intervene between us and him. Get him away. I can't be near him. In this case, it's Moses. And he's trembling himself, isn't he?

[14 : 11] He's the representative. See, many of us navigate life based on performing well enough to measure up. And then we encounter the holiness of God and we're shaken.

There's no Play-Doh exterior that holds on in the shaking. The dirt and the sticks, they don't cling anymore. All of a sudden, the things that seemed pretty decent start falling off.

And many of us hate that feeling so much. Either consciously or subconsciously, we start to relate to God the way these people did at Sinai.

How's that? Keep your distance, right? It's safer, really, just to observe church every once in a while.

It's safer, really, just to know some things about Jesus and to talk about praying. That feels safe. It's safer, isn't it, just to bring God up when we've been doing well or feeling spiritual lately.

[15 : 28] So, now maybe I can talk about God. After all, if it's based on my performance, deep down, I know that I don't measure up.

I'm finally faced with something harder than a 90-mile-an-hour fastball. The majesty of the Creator. The holiness of the lawgiver.

The justice of the judge. And I start to get the sense that the one who knows me best wants me to keep my distance.

Mostly wants me to know that he's way out of my league. I'm unworthy of being with him. Yeah, I was afraid of that.

Charlotte, you still shaking? Yeah. Okay, she's working on it. If you can relate to any of those feelings, a feeling like God might want you to stay far off, that you're so unworthy of him and he's so far beyond you, you may have even heard us say some of those things this morning because they're not untrue, are they?

[16 : 46] Not entirely. But God actually wants to change those feelings for you today. He wants you to experience him very differently.

See, Hebrews says you have not come to that mountain. In other words, that is not the relationship that you have with God, that he desires for you to experience with him.

The Greek says it actually emphasizes this. The very first word of this whole section is not you have come. Verse 18, not you have come.

Verse 22, but on the contrary, you have come. Where? To Mount Zion.

Now, maybe that in itself doesn't mean a lot to you. But we're going to get a seven-point description of this other way of relating to God that is entirely in contrast with the first.

[17 : 54] What is the feel, the atmosphere, the experience of coming to this mountain? Well, it is the heavenly city.

Not merely the created earthly one you touch here, but the place that God made for his people to find peace and rest forever.

However, countless angels are there in what can only be understood as the most exhilarating party that you have ever been to.

That's what festal gathering means. We don't use those words. It means they are in joyful celebration all over this mountain with the assembly, the church of the firstborn enrolled in heaven. Now, Jesus is often referred to as the firstborn, the one who receives the inheritance, who leads the next generations. But now, on the mountain, it's the whole assembly of his people who get that treatment because their names are written in heaven.

[19 : 06] They're heirs to the kingdom, if you will. This is from earlier in the chapter, the cloud of witnesses that has gone before us, right? They are there rejoicing with the angels, celebrating all on the mountain.

And then, and then incredibly, who else is at your party? There's God himself. God himself is there, the judge of all.

Now, that's a turn, isn't it? How does that fit with all this good news and celebrating that's going on? The judge has shown up to ruin the whole thing.

This is our great fear, right? Judgment. Shaking. I'm gonna fall apart. I'll be ruined. Except, except that in this case, God is here indeed as the judge who will set all things right and yet, we are safe because the people there are spirits of the righteous made perfect.

So, there's nothing for the judge to hold against them, to hold against us. How can that possibly be? The holy judge is there. This must be the group that finally got it all right, got it together and performed well enough to impress the judge.

[20 : 36] Is that what happened? No, you know better than that. You've read Hebrews. That's not what's happened. But before we get to the next two things, I wanna recognize the tension here.

This is the same God. He's there in judgment. Majestic. Holy. Just.

There's on this mountain too fire, lightning, thunder. And yet, what's the atmosphere? The atmosphere, even in spite of that, there's joy over gloom.

There is wild celebration instead of darkness. The people are actually right there with the judge, aren't they? Instead of far away from him. What is going on?

How is that possible? There's a greater mediator here on this mountain. Verse 24. Jesus is there.

[21 : 42] The mediator of a new covenant. In other words, the representative who did not tremble or shake before the presence of the holy God, but walked, bearing our sin into the holy place to take God's wrath towards sin upon himself.

Right? And then he rose to be our living representative in the holy place because he brings us into a new relationship with God. He, Jesus, has hushed the law's loud thunder.

He has quenched Mount Sinai's flame toward us because he took that wrath in its fearsome fullness upon himself.

He has washed us with his blood. He has brought us nigh to God. Amen? And he does that, of course, by his blood.

His blood is there. The sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Interesting.

[23 : 01] God told Cain when he killed his brother Abel that the blood of his brother cried out to God from the ground.

It cried out for justice upon Cain. God told Cain that he would certainly be cursed for shedding his brother's blood.

What word does the blood of Jesus speak? Father, forgive them.

Mercy in place of judgment. Meaning that Jesus bears the curse so that not only the soldiers who nailed him to the cross but did not know what they were doing but also we whose sins held him there on the cross would get what?

Blessing instead of curse. A better word? You like that one better? Amen? Blessing, mercy, forgiveness is what his blood speaks to us.

[24 : 15] Are you surprised at this point in Hebrews that Jesus is greater than? That Jesus is better? I hope you're not missing that message. Are you surprised that it is Jesus who makes all the difference at how we relate to God?

See, that's what happens. The tenor of things on this mountain is not this fearful distance from God but this joyful nearness to him. you've come to the mountain into the city where God himself dwells and you've come there through the blood of the eternal son of God.

No wonder there's a party going on, right? Who else would you want to be with? This is what you were made for. Joyful nearness to God and you're invited in.

God issues that invitation to this party. But there's a warning. Verse 25. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking in Hebrews.

God speaks. Remember the sermon started by reminding us that in these last days he has spoken to us how? By his son. That's his great word, his final invitation.

[25 : 36] See that you don't refuse it for if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

God then promises to shake not only the earth but also the heavens in that great day still to come. there's going to be a great shaking and only the things that can't be shaken will remain. You see what that means?

It means friend if you have never trusted Jesus run today to the one who is unshakable and fix your hope to him.

He is the only safe place. None of us measures up on our own and yet you don't have to run away from God you can run to Jesus and he brings you near to God safely so you just say Jesus rescue me Jesus anchor me Jesus hold me and he will he will.

[26 : 54] Maybe you've called yourself a Christian for a long time and you've been living distant from God for just as long. You've been right there kind of at the foot of Mount Sinai you know a lot of good things that God's people are supposed to do and you figure you'll just try to do most of them.

You say you've trusted Jesus but you live as though you have to tiptoe around God to avoid his gaze most of the time only talk to him when you've been on your best behavior lately.

Don't refuse him who is speaking don't stay at a distance when he is urging you to draw near.

Perhaps it's because you're thinking that Jesus is for after you die when you actually need him while you live.

Maybe you're realizing right now Jesus for you has been a moral example but that's really it and you realize that's actually not enough for me.

Even with a great example I'm not holy enough and you realize that you need Jesus to be a bloodshed sacrifice for you. Let me be as clear as I can for all of us.

[28 : 15] It's sobering but you and I were created. We're things that have been made. which God promises will be shaken and removed along with the rest of the world as we know it leaving only the things that cannot be shaken.

If that doesn't get your attention I don't know what else to tell you. We are things that have been made. Jesus was not made.

He has always been. Therefore let us be grateful so grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

God sends Jesus and we attach ourselves by faith to the one who lives and will hold no matter what shaking happens we've got to be connected to him.

Friends we must must cling to Jesus. Charlotte you've been shaking for us?

[29 : 38] You want to come on back up? Ooh that's really good. You did a lot of shaking. It looks just like I gave it to you.

You didn't get anything else off of it? Even with all this did you shake it? Did you shake it hard? And what is it? That's the same rock I gave you.

Just the same, huh? You know a little play-doh on the side but it's a rock. You did a great job.

Thank you for your help. This is a picture of the solid rock of Christ.

We have received this kingdom that cannot be shaken. Maybe you know from world history that even the greatest kingdoms eventually crumble and fall when shaken.

The Roman Empire around the time of this written sermon fell. Perhaps during today's sermon some are feeling shaking in the USA in ways that we haven't before.

[30 : 56] Listen, if Christ tarries, it will fall too. There will be economic danger. There will be political danger.

danger. There may even be physical danger. But the kingdom of Jesus, no matter what else comes, will never be shaken.

You want to give your neighbors, your kids, the next generation, something that they can count on and hold on to and that you know life's going to be there for them? Give them Jesus.

That's the one they can count on. God. Because listen, how does it end? Our God is a consuming fire.

He still is. That hasn't changed. He will shake and consume. And so we worship him with reverence and awe because of his holy greatness and because of his great holiness.

[31 : 58] holiness, this fire of who our God is would certainly consume us on our own. But because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed.

Because Jesus is so perfectly holy himself and gives himself in our place, we can draw near without being shaken, without being burned.

He makes all the difference. He is a sure and steadfast anchor for our souls, the greater rest, the greater sacrifice, the greater priest, the only man not made.

So he can bring us to and keep us in the presence of God, on the joyful mountain of God, in the safety of God forever.

forever. He can and will do that. And so that's something to look forward to, right? Absolutely. Forever.

[33 : 03] But according to this passage, it's actually something more than that. It is something to live in right now. It's this verb tense that means, yes, you'll be there forever, but you have come already to this mountain and the great celebration and the blood of your Savior cleansing you before God, the judge.

You have an unshakable kingdom led by an unshaken king with an imperishable inheritance, an unfading crown of glory in an invulnerable place through his unfailing love.

You have that. See, his kingdom that cannot be shaken means the life of heaven, the life of eternity is already alive in us.

By our union with Christ, the kingdom, he says, is already in our midst its righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.

Mine are keys to Zion City where beside the king I walk today. So, so tell me practically, pastor, how, how do I live unshaken when everything I hold dear seems to be shaking?

[34 : 43] well, when diseases ravage me and those I love, the unshakable kingdom says my greatest disease, the sin of my soul that runs all through me has been forgiven and cured so that I will live forever no matter what happens.

when financial disaster hits and I begin to wobble, the unshakable kingdom says my greatest debt has been paid once and for all so my good shepherd will make sure I have everything that I need. When I'm lonely or persecuted, I lean into the family of God that I've been welcomed into. When I'm weak and unable to handle the task before me, I draw on the power of the Holy Spirit already present in me.

It happens over and over and over in all these situations. How do I live unshaken when I'm so fearful about life all around me? It's just been a few years, Will, there was a pandemic and then more terror attacks and then wars and then there's all this unrest and division.

Are you kidding me? There's no stability anywhere. What's next? I'm worried. Friend, if God is for us, who can stand against us?

[36 : 11] You have come already to the mountain with Him and He won't let you go. When you're shaken to your core, and you will be.

The loss of a loved one, professional failure, a child wandering, divorce, depression, dementia, you feel like you're drowning, you think you'll be utterly destroyed, and the unshakable kingdom says nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Lord, you are more than conquerors. You possess a kingdom that cannot be shaken. That's why we say with Jim Elliot, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

When you've got the unshakable kingdom because of your trust in the unshakable king, no one and nothing can take that away, and you become more and more eager to live that way right now, to live in that joyful nearness to that God, to be with him as often as you possibly can, worshiping him with

overflowing gratitude.

I mean, there's got to be even more than that, right? You're not just a little thankful. It's like every part of me is grateful. How else could I worship? I don't have to come in here to do it.

[37 : 43] It flows for me every day, dancing in the aisles with holy awe. How is it that I can know this God? Praise Jesus. Brothers and sisters, we have come already to the kingdom that cannot be shaken, to Mount Zion, to the rock of Christ.

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand, and there will be plenty of chances to experience that, to be shaken in this world.

The waves of persecution, of pain, of problems in life will threaten to wash you away, but listen to the good news. You are not there desperately trying to climb up to that rock to get to the top of that mountain.

You're not scrambling as the waves wash over you to find footing for your feet, some solid ground that will hold you. No, we have come to Mount Zion.

On Christ, the solid rock, we stand with innumerable angels, with the firstborn enrolled in heaven, with God, the judge of all, making all things right, including our struggling spirits that he has already made perfect.

[39 : 07] Thanks to Jesus and his blood speaking blessing to us, you're already there on that rock. Y'all, Jesus is greater than anything else that we might hope would hold us.

The entire earth and heavens will shake one day, but you have already received the kingdom that cannot be shaken.

God, praise you, thank you, you're holy and you're gracious. Everything else is sinking sand, be warned. Don't grab on to something else, but on Christ, the solid rock, you stand.

You will not be shaken because he will not be shaken. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. We want to thank him together now.

I want to give you a chance to draw near to him, even in this moment as you hear him saying, this is how you come. You come through me. As we have our worship team come back up and as we get ready to stand and sing this last song, we're also going to have some of our elders and men and women on our prayer team.

[40 : 30] They're going to come down front and they'll also be in the back if that's more comfortable for you. They'd love a chance to pray with you for just a minute.

sing about Christ, the solid rock on whom we stand and maybe for the very first time in your life you're saying, that's the one I need.

Please come, we'd love to pray with you. Or maybe you've been there and you've been standing on him and you realize you haven't been able to find him lately and life's hard and you felt like you're going under or you know something that's coming up and you'd like us to pray for you because it's coming in the future.

We would love to be able to do that. Let's stand together and sing and I invite you to go ahead and start coming forward or back and we'll just take just a quick minute to pray with you even as we sing.

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