

A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken

by Tom Macartney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of belonging to a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and encourages listeners to enter into the reality of this kingdom through genuine new birth and a deepening relationship with God.

Scripture: Psalm 18:1, Haggai 2:6, Malachi 3:1, Matthew 16:18, Romans 8:17, Ephesians 5:25, Hebrews 12:26, Revelation 21:2

Topics: "End Times", "Spiritual Preparation"

Description

Tom Macartney preaches on the significance of God's promise to shake the heavens and the earth, emphasizing the removal of temporal things to reveal what is unshakable. He discusses the current state of the world, the professing church, and the believing church, highlighting the need for purification and discernment in these times of crisis and confusion. The sermon delves into the message of Haggai, connecting it to the building of God's eternal house, the church, and the importance of holiness and preparation for Christ's return. It concludes with a call to understand and embrace our role in God's unshakable kingdom, emphasizing the need for growth, grace, and readiness for His second coming.

Transcript

"But He has promised, 'Yet once more and only once, will I shake the heavens and the earth ... and I will shake all nations; and the Desire of all nations shall come ...' These words, 'Yet once more', indicate the removal of what can be shaken - that is, created, temporal things - so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, keep on receiving grace so that we may serve God acceptably with reverence and awe..." Hebrews 12:26-29; Haggai 2:6-9, 20-23.

These Scriptures are both instructive and encouraging in these days of crisis and confusion. Surely the word 'shake' most aptly describes the situation today with its instability, uncertainty and foreboding. Yet it is God, in His sovereignty, who is behind this 'shaking' - "I will shake ... everything." In the world, He is permitting sin to run its course, to come to a head - His holiness and love demand it, to end man's folly and rebellion with their horrible consequences, to end man's day and usher in His Day with His Son's return. In the professing church, He is sifting the wheat from the chaff (Matt. 3:5-12). In the believing church, He is "Purifying the sons of Levi, like a refiner's fire" (Mal. 3:1-3). All this is the purpose of His shaking.

Now, many Christians over the centuries have felt they were living in the last days, and been mistaken; we just mention three things which suggest the time may now be near: (i) In these verses we read, "I will shake all nations". Never before in history has the whole world been shaken - today anything can happen, anywhere, overnight, and world affairs are now so perilously inter-locked: (ii) The universal, rising tide of lawlessness, of which we read in 2 Thess. 2, is winning. Governments cannot (or will not) withstand it. And fallen man's last great hope, democracy, is about to fail; (iii) Then there is the spread and increasing militancy of false religions, and deception of every kind. To this we must add false Christianity with its false gospel from which the heart of the true Gospel is missing. All this, surely, is part of the apostasy we read of in 2 Thess. 2 and elsewhere.

The terrible confusion within 'the church', the growing pressure of every kind upon true believers everywhere, the increase of militant atheism and the state of the whole world, all point in one direction, the coming again of the Lord Jesus. In such a day of shaking, how glorious it is to belong to a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and to know its King!

Now, let us consider these passages, in their wider context, a little further, noting the links between the little book of Haggai (circa 500 BC), the passage in the letter to the Hebrews (circa 65 AD) and our situation today. This is our train of thought.

The message of Haggai and its relevance today

When the remnant returned from Babylon to Jerusalem in 536 BC, after the 70 years' exile, their chief purpose was to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1) - the majority of the exiles, of course, chose to stay on in Babylonia. The Altar was set up first and the foundations of the Temple laid. Then the work of building stopped for some 20 years, partly because of opposition and discouragement, and was only restarted through the ministry of Haggai (and Zechariah) in circa 518 BC and completed in 516 BC. Note the importance of Haggai's ministry and contribution. The return of the remnant, the setting up of the Altar, the building of the Temple, and, later, the building of the City Walls through Nehemiah, were all vital parts in the preparation for the first Coming of Christ. "Consider your ways," cries Haggai, "Consider the reason for your return to Jerusalem, consider your selfish pre-occupation with your own affairs, build God's house which lies in ruins, be strong and work, and God will be with you as you do so and live in holiness before Him."

Note Haggai's main emphasis on building God's house and the link with holiness of life, for the remnant were unclean and needed the refiner's fire (2:10-19), as we do. Now we know from the N.T. that all the Temples, from Solomon's, foreshadowed the spiritual and eternal House of God, built of living stones, people redeemed and conformed to the image of God's Son (1 Pet. 2:4-5; Rom. 8:29). This is the abiding message of Haggai.

Important though Zerubbabel's Temple was in the unfolding of the divine plan in history, in the mind of God was something infinitely greater, the real house of God, the church, (whose house are we, Heb. 3:6). The Lord always looks beyond the earthly to the eternal. This is made clear by the interruptions in Haggai concerning the day of shaking in chapter 2 (vs. 6-9, 20-23). It is as if Haggai is caught up from the present into the eternal, and has a glimpse through the immediate situation in Jerusalem into its eternal fulfilment in the New Jerusalem. The passage in Hebrews, still to be considered, confirms this. The shaking of the heavens, the earth and all nations, the overthrow and destruction of kingdoms, the filling of the house with glory, and the promises to 'Zerubbabel my servant' only find their real fulfilment in the Day of our Lord

Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7, 8).

These interruptions not only lift our gaze from the temporary to the eternal, but also give us an urgent reminder of the close link between the building, completion and refining of the church and the second coming of Christ. He said, "I will build My church" - then, "I will come again" (Matt. 16:18; Jn. 14:3). "He shall come to be glorified in His saints to present the church to Him-self a glorious church ..." (2 Thess. 1:10; Eph. 5:27). Yes, the key to the second coming, with all that follows, is the realisation of His purpose in His church. This is what the building of the Temple by the remnant in preparation for His first coming foreshadowed. And Haggai's concern for the building of God's house foreshadowed, we may say, Paul's concern for the fulfilment of God's glorious plan for His church, of which his letters are full. Paul saw the building of the church as the chief concern of the Father in this age between the two comings of His Son. We tend to forget that the building of the church is the goal of evangelism. Saved believers are living stones and these must be built together into a spiritual house. The church is much more than a congregation of believers who attend meetings. The true church was chosen for the highest possible destiny, given by the Father to His Son to be His wife and to share in His future government of the redeemed universe (Eph. 1:4. John 17:9, 10). The church is the capital of the kingdom that cannot be shaken.

We need to grasp two things about the church: (a) The glorious church - the gift of the Father to His Son is now being prepared in heaven, so to speak. It cannot be affected by the sad history of the church on earth. Man cannot spoil it. Jesus said, "I will build My church" and He will do it. The glorious church is only fully revealed at the end - the holy city, the new Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband in God's new day (Rev. 21:2, 10). (b) Does it not matter then what happens in our churches now? Of course it does. The living stones are now being prepared in the quarry of this world, just as the stones were cut and shaped in the quarry for Solomon's temple, before being built together in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:7). Just as our spiritual progress as individuals has a direct bearing on our future usefulness, so does our learning the meaning of 'life together' as His church. We can learn something of being built together with other living stones, next to us in His sovereignty, within a local fellowship and in our relationships with other Christians. In this way something of the reality of the church may and must be known, and essential lessons learned. There is no place for egoism in the city of God. Our understanding of, and commitment to God's plan for our lives and for the functioning of His church here and now, has a direct bearing on our future.

Note also that only those who returned to build the temple and the city made a direct contribution to His first coming. The more responsive to Him we are in our personal lives and function together as He would have in our church life, the more He will be satisfied, the more we shall be built together, the more effective will be our witness, the more we shall hasten His second coming and the greater will be our usefulness to Him in His government in the ages to come.

The expansion of Haggai's message in Hebrews 12:18-29

As the remnant to whom Haggai spoke lived in perilous times, a day of shaking, so the church to which Hebrews was written was also being severely tested, as the letter shows. Some were in danger of abandoning the faith of Jesus and returning to their Jewish allegiance; others were in danger of losing their inheritance in Christ - not their salvation (Hebrews 3 and 4), by trying to live in two different dispensations (law and grace) and insisting on maintaining their separate Jewish identity within the church and new creation, which, of course, is impossible (Gal. 3:27, 28. Eph. 2:13-16; Col. 3:10, 11).

Looking at our passage briefly, we see the contrast between law and grace in Sinai and Zion (Heb. 12:18-24); we have the warning against turning back to the Old Covenant (verse 25); we have the reference to Haggai - the final great shaking - and the meaning of this (verses 26 and 27); and finally, words of encouragement and exhortation (verses 28 and 29).

Notice the expansion of what Haggai says regarding the shaking of heaven and earth, and all nations, showing the nature and purpose of it. "These words, Yet once more, indicate the removal of what can be shaken - that is, created, temporal things - so that what cannot be shaken may remain" (verse 27). Here we have the final removal of the old, temporal creation, the present order of creation, to make way for a new heaven and a new earth, a new order, when God makes all things new (Rev. 21:5).

Note: It is against this background of cosmic upheaval, the conclusion of the period of shaking, that the kingdom that cannot be shaken is mentioned and seen (verses 27 and 28), just as the glories of Rev. 21 and 22 follow the last judgment at the end of Rev. 20.

Let us now focus on the meaning of receiving this kingdom.

For Christians it is a matter of great rejoicing that they are receiving and entering into such a kingdom. It is permanent, everlasting - it cannot be shaken. In verses 22-24 we have a glimpse into this kingdom. But what does this receiving of the kingdom mean? Two things: (a) Christians have received it, in the sense that they belong to this kingdom - You have come ... to Zion ... (verse 22) - they are already in the kingdom, as citizens, through grace, and may here and now enjoy something of the wonder of this fact. But, (b) they are still receiving it, in the sense that they must enter into its reality in experience, and its privileges and responsibilities; these are not automatically conferred. It is one thing to walk the streets of Zion, it is another to have special access to its Sovereign and to share in His government. Some know the Lord better than others, and are consequently more useful to Him. Nearness and usefulness to Him in His kingdom, is, of course, the reward (prize or crown) of which we read, given to or forfeited by Christians at the judgment seat of Christ. Of course, the reward varies from person to person (1 Cor. 3:8, 14; 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 5:9, 10; Rev. 3:11; Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27).

To enlarge: Apart from the intervention of grace, man has no future, save judgment. Man was created to enter into an eternal relationship with God, apart from which there is no point in his existence. This is part of the tragedy of being lost - to be lost is to have missed the glorious reason for one's existence. We may say that this receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, in its practical application, is receiving the eternal life, nature and character of God. God is a rock - He cannot be shaken. He is everlasting, He is permanent, He does not change (Heb. 1:12; 13:8). This means that in the day of shaking, only what is truly of God in our lives will stand and remain. Our self-centred, old natures (the flesh) will perish - only our God-given individuality, redeemed and transformed, will remain. It also means that every time of testing will reveal how well we know God as our rock. Hence the importance of really knowing the Lord, growing in grace, being changed into His image. Only what is of Christ in us, that gracious, transforming work of the Spirit, what we have truly entered into in experience, will stand in the day of testing. Hence the futility of false gospels, gospels in which His redeeming blood and the new birth have no place. Through such gospels many are only building on sand - the sand of human nature and good intentions, and so on. We can only enter the kingdom that cannot be shaken through genuine new birth, an act of God by which we receive His eternal life (John 1:13), when He breaks into our lives, shines into our hearts and He becomes real to us. Nor will weak, watered-down gospels do, by which people are merely influenced and persuaded to open their hearts to Jesus because they need His help. A true Christian experience (and the true

church) is built upon the rock of revelation - the realisation of who Jesus is, and our response in faith and obedience (Matt. 16:15-18). The Gospel as often presented today is dangerously inadequate and misleading.

From this beginning, when we enter the kingdom, we must grow up into full citizenship, grow up into permanence, become more like our God and Father in every way, including His Rock-like character. Day by day we must go on receiving grace upon grace at the throne of grace (John 1:16; Heb. 4:16). This is the heart of the meaning of verse 28, "Therefore let us have grace (let us keep on receiving grace) by which we may serve God acceptably." Through daily supplies of grace, we shall enter more and more into the reality of this unshakeable kingdom to which we belong. What a privilege, what a destiny, but what a challenge! For it will not just happen without our full co-operation.

Conclusion

1. It is beyond question that we live in a day of shaking, in the nations, in the religious world, in the believing church, and for individual Christians, especially the wholehearted. Let us therefore rejoice that we belong to a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and seek to enter into more and more of what this means.

2. It is clear that the great, final day of shaking, of which, it seems, we may well be seeing the beginning, prepares for and ushers in the day of His appearing. Let us therefore be watchful, be urgent in witness and be ready for Him, like the wise virgins (Matt. 25).

3. It is also clear that the building, completion and purifying of the true church is the key to His coming again, for His church is to be the spiritual capital of His Kingdom and His centre of government. Let us therefore see that we have got our priorities right - that they are His priorities. His chief concern is that His church should be sanctified, cleansed, holy, without blemish and glorious (Eph. 5:25-27). So, this should be our chief concern.

"The perfecting of the saints, the building up of the body of Christ and the building together of living stones into a spiritual house for God, should be central to our thinking (Eph. 4:12; 2:19-22). Too often other things, even important things, pre-occupy us, and we lose sight of God's great goal. Needless to say, this will make us more, not less, concerned about proclaiming and sharing the Gospel and personal holiness.

4. Our high calling and destiny is the spiritual reality (not just the status or potentiality) of union with Christ. This is something beyond eternal redemption. A baby may be born the son and heir to a great estate, but only if he grows up will he actually enjoy his inheritance. Through union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:4, 5) and conformity to His image, we may actually become joint-heirs with the heir of all things, called to share in His reign over a redeemed universe throughout the eternal ages (Rom. 8:17, 29; 2 Tim. 2:12; Heb. 1:2). In the plan of God, the church stands in a very special relationship to Christ, as a wife to her husband and as a capital to a king in his kingdom. All believers (those eternally saved) are in the kingdom, but not all are in the city, which is both His 'wife' and 'capital' (Rev. 21 and 22). As we have said, nearness (as wife of the Lamb) and usefulness (as capital city) to Him in His kingdom, is the reward of faithfulness and the result of maturity (likeness to Him), both made possible for us all, through grace. While our eternal salvation does not depend upon our faithfulness or maturity, our inheritance, our nearness and usefulness to Him, our place of service in God's future plans, does. Seeing this distinction explains many things.

5. Finally, returning to our starting point, we see the glory of being citizens of a kingdom that cannot be shaken, in this day of increasing uncertainty and fear. It is clearly a vital part of our testimony in a world that is disintegrating around us to be unshakeable people, demonstrating in our lives that God is our rock!

"I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the rock except our God? The Lord lives: Praise be to my rock! Exalted be God my Saviour!" (Psalm 18:1, 2, 31, 46)

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