

# Receiving a Kingdom

## Hebrews 12:18-29

### INTRODUCTION

One hundred high school students were asked:

What is the greatest gift you have ever given or received?

Their answers ranged from such things as a puppy to a baby brother, from a handknit blanket from Grandma to an I-Phone.

- One student with a positive self-image responded that, according to his mother, he was the greatest gift she had ever received.
- His response reminded me of a T-Shirt I saw recently.

Gonna lay under the tree to remind my family that I am a gift.

Perhaps you know the story "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. For many of us, it was "required reading" in high school. If you remember the story, you will recall that ...

- It is Christmas Eve, and a young woman named Della discovers that she has only \$1.87 to buy a present for her husband Jim. She does have, however, beautiful, knee-length brown hair... which she sells to a wig maker for \$20.
- With that \$20 she buys a fob chain to go with Jim's most prized possession – his family heirloom gold pocket watch.
- Unbeknownst to her, that same day Jim sold his watch so that he could buy her Christmas present – a set of ornamental combs for her beautiful hair.
- Wow. What great gifts.

Think about it. What is the greatest gift you have ever been given?

If we think about that question theologically, we should answer that the greatest gift ever given to us is our salvation. That's how the Gospel of John presents salvation in one of the most famous of all Bible verses:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Paul's letter to the Ephesians describes salvation in the same way.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God ... (Ephesians 2:8)

Salvation is without question the greatest gift ever offered to us. But today's text talks about another wonderful gift that is ours because of our walk of faith. And this gift is presented as a certainty ... something that truly belongs to the people of God.

**Since** we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28)

As I have been trying to communicate in this series of sermons, the word “since” is an important word in your Bible study because it communicates a truth – a certainty:

In view of this stated fact, these next statements should be the natural consequences.

So the writer of Hebrews tells us that we are indeed receiving a kingdom ... and not just any kingdom ... an unshakable one.

- Unlike earthly kingdoms, which are subject to change, decay, and destruction, God's Kingdom will never be destroyed.
- Throughout Scripture, there is a clear distinction between earthly kingdoms, such as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. These come and go. No kingdom, except for the Kingdom of God, will stand forever.

That's really good news. If you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, this unshakable kingdom is yours. It is another gift from God. So what do you do about that? The text identifies two responses:

### **#1: LET US BE THANKFUL**

Look at verse 28:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful ... (Hebrews 12:28)

Let me ask you:

Are we “taught” to be thankful, or does it happen naturally?

I don't think I know the answer to my own question.

I am picturing Christmas Eve at our house. It could be any Christmas Eve – when our kids were little or now with our grandkids.

- We have a family tradition that each child will have one package under the tree that is filled with clothes: underwear, pajamas, shirts, pants, socks.
- We cram it all into one box, so that there only one such box.
- Now we have one granddaughter who loves to get clothes, so she is the exception to this observation.
- For everyone else, this present of clothing is a disappointment. They will tear into the paper and then moan when they see the contents
- Karen has even tried to decorate the package with candy to soften the disappointment, but not even a Reese's peanut butter cup or a Kit Kat does the trick.
- And when the package is open, the child's parents have to remind their children “say thank you” ... which is followed by a less-than-exuberant “thank you.”
  - The thank you doesn't come naturally.

- CONCLUSION: Thankfulness is taught.
- On the other hand, when they open the remote-controlled gecko that climbs walls, the thank yous abound ... without being requested.
  - CONCLUSION: Thankfulness is not taught.

So which is it? Are we taught to be thankful? Or does thankfulness naturally flow?

I ask because this text sounds like I need to be taught to be thankful. Look at the verse again:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful ... (Hebrews 12:28)

There are many things that God gives me for which I am quickly thankful:

- I am thankful that my new knee works great!
- I am thankful that God gave me a great wife.
- I am thankful that God allows me to serve Him in this wonderful church.
- I am thankful that car didn't hit me.
- I am really thankful that my sins have been forgiven and forgotten by God – buried in the deepest sea.

But why should I be thankful for an unshakable kingdom? Let me take you back to something I said just a few minutes ago:

Throughout Scripture, there is a clear distinction between earthly kingdoms, such as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. These come and go. No kingdom, except for the Kingdom of God, will stand forever.

Look at our world today. Russia, the Ukraine, Israel, the Gaza strip, floods, fires, increased violence in our major cities.

- When everything around us – in our world and in our lives – is falling apart, we have a gift from God that cannot be shaken. His Kingdom stands forever.

There is an old legend about a man who found the storage barn where Satan kept his seeds ready to be sown in the human heart. He discovered that there were many more seeds of worry and discouragement than any of the other kinds of seeds in the barn.

- Satan told him that there were so many of those because he couldn't get rid of them. You see, they could grow anywhere ... except for one place.
- "Where is that?" the man asked.
- Satan reluctantly admitted the only place where they could not thrive was "In the heart of a grateful person."

Are you discouraged by what is going on around you? Try being thankful instead.

## #2: LET US WORSHIP GOD WITH REVERENCE AND AWE

What's the second response to God's gift of an unshakable kingdom? Look again at verse 28:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe ... (Hebrews 12:28)

There is an unmistakable connection between thankfulness and worship. Let me illustrate it with a couple of stories. You might remember these:

From Luke 17:

<sup>11</sup> As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. <sup>12</sup> As he entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, <sup>13</sup> crying out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

<sup>14</sup> He looked at them and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy.

<sup>15</sup> One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, "Praise God!" <sup>16</sup> He fell to the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan.

From Luke 7:

<sup>36</sup> One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. <sup>37</sup> When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. <sup>38</sup> Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.

<sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"

<sup>40</sup> Then Jesus answered his thoughts.

"Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

<sup>47</sup> "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."

In each story, what did their thankfulness prompt these people to do? The answer is clear: Worship.

When we enter worship with a spirit of thankfulness, our perspective changes. Our worship changes.

- Instead of focusing on what we need or lack, we become more aware of what we have received – love, mercy, salvation, and grace...
- A spirit of gratitude in worship invites us to pause, acknowledge, and celebrate God's goodness, shifting our focus from our circumstances to the boundless love and faithfulness that hold us each day.

There is a story about a cluster of churches that were all served by an old retired pastor. This pastor insisted that his people come to church in a spirit of thanksgiving, and he modeled that for him.

- They were amazed that no matter the circumstances this old preacher would always have some word of thanksgiving to open the service.
- One December Sunday morning, the old preacher was delayed by the large amount of snow and snow drifts. It was cold and miserable, and they were all wondering what that pastor could find to be thankful for.
- When the preacher finally arrived, he went straight to the pulpit and opened the service with prayer: "Lord, I am so very thankful that every day is not like today."

## APPLICATION

Let me close with the words of the Psalm 95:

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

<sup>2</sup>Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.

<sup>3</sup>For the Lord is the great God,  
the great King above all gods.

<sup>4</sup>In his hand are the depths of the earth,  
and the mountain peaks belong to him.

<sup>5</sup>The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.

<sup>6</sup>Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;

<sup>7</sup>for he is our God  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
the flock under his care.

Amen.