

Shaken but not forsaken

There are times when things happen that leave us almost without words. It is no small victory that a man or woman wins if they can stand amid the ruins of a dream, a home or a business or even a Country and say, "Even so I still have something in my hand that remains." During WWII, the Norwegian town of Narvik was seized by the Germans. It was bombarded by the British day after day, again and again by planes. One day the mayor of the city stood among the wreckage and ruins of this seaport city. He was surrounded by newspaper reporters. He glanced at the snow-clad peaks that looked serenely down from their lofty heights he uttered these simple words, "The mountains are still ours."

It takes a great deal of discerning faith to be able to see beyond what often surrounds us on a daily basis. This kind of thinking is found in the book of Hebrews by a writer that had lived to see the religious world shaken to its very foundations. He was writing to Jews who along with himself had become Christians.

His words were ringing out to these new believers and disciples so that they would understand the importance of realizing that it was the living God that was shaking things up. As you will see in a moment when we read the text, he was calling them to realize that this was far different then when Moses went to Mount Sinai. He is saying to us and to them in essence, "You that take the name of Christ, have not come to a mountain that can't be touched. You have not come to Moses' holy mountain and a God that was dangerous to even glimpse at. You have come to Jesus Christ the Son of God and the One who makes it possible for us to survive and even thrive in our world. He is the provider of the new covenant with mankind.

In fact when this was written they were about to witness the violent overthrow of the city of Jerusalem. The legions of Rome were getting ready to lay the city in ruins. They were going to kill thousands and destroy everything they could. It was a shaking truly of Biblical proportions. Their world was turning upside down.

Listen to the words found in Hebrews 12:25-29:

Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, we will certainly not escape if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven! ²⁶ *When God spoke from Mount Sinai His voice shook the earth, but now He makes another promise: "Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also."* ²⁷ *This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.* ²⁸ *Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping Him with holy fear and awe.* ²⁹ *For our God is a devouring fire.* Hebrews 12:25-29 NLT

For some in the midst of turmoil they may be tempted to question if God has deserted them. They may tend to question if He even ever existed. But the writer is saying, God is alive, God is not idle, God is fulfilling His word. Not everything that is happening is what He would like to happen but nothing that is happening is wholly removed from His will. This shaking will have a purpose. Amid the devastation that might occur God is always redemptive.

If you and I are to believe that how do we get there in our faith? Let me suggest three things that I believe can help shape our thinking and give us hope.

1. True Grit: You're going to need this

For many of you that title may bring up a couple of movies by that name. One of them starred John Wayne in 1969 and a newer version was released in 2010. It is the story of a young girl determined to bring her father's murders to justice. She is the personification of the phrase "true grit."

True Grit is also the name of an Australian Military Style School based on an obstacle course used for training people. In their words, "The obstacle course has been designed to test your mental resolve and stamina, with an emphasis on tackling obstacles, not running a marathon.

Why am I suggesting that we need true grit? It is a very interesting time to be alive. Our world is filled with much uncertainty. It is not just an American thing but it is a global issue. The stability of the world's oil in certain regions is at jeopardy. The ability of the world being able to feed itself in the future is a constant source of debate and study. Economics around the world are constantly in turmoil. For anyone having money in the stock market or retirement funds often you just live with the notion that it could go away and you could do nothing about it.

In the USA, it is more affordable and in some cases necessary to live on government support then work because it pays more or takes care of health insurance. While this may bring comfort to some it is money coming from a government that has no money. We all know that sometime that has to stop.

Internationally there is tentativeness around the world that never seems to go away. Lasting peace in certain world areas seems impossible and you just wait to see what will happen next. Of course we feel this most when it affects the world's oil supply.

Even within the church world, things seem to be turning upside down. It should not be surprising in some ways but in other ways it is shocking to watch the church world destruct from the inside out in an effort to be politically correct or tolerant. Listen the Bible is about always being loving but it is not a tolerant or politically correct book. It never has been and never will be. Millions of people have lost their lives over the last two thousand years because they didn't conform or compromise to what society at the time deemed acceptable to believe.

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. ¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. ¹⁷ And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever. 1 John 2:15-17 NLT

We need to develop the grit and ability to hold strong to what we know is right. I going to confess to you that the older I get in some ways the harder it has become. I'm not sure that is

everyone else's testimony but there is so much at stake that I think the devil works very hard to get us to not think correctly.

May God grant us the grit to hold on when everything is shaking around us.

When the shaking is happening what are we to do? When God's shakings are loose in the world we must have the grit to face the facts as they are and to center our faith on God and His word.

2. Get a grip!

To find hope and help when things are shaking around us it is critical to cling to things unshakeable. Sometimes the things we count on let us down. Many times the people we count on will let us down. So what do we have to hold onto that is unshakeable in our lives?

- a. We have an unshakable person in Christ

When you look at the context of this text you find some really great supportive words. Look at verse 18:

You have not come to a physical mountain, to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai. ¹⁹ For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking. ²⁰ They staggered back under God's command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." ²¹ Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he said, "I am terrified and trembling."

²² No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. ²³ You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God Himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. ²⁴ You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel. Hebrews 12:18-24 NLT

That's why the songwriter penned these poetic lines.

My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly trust in Jesus' Name.

On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand; All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale, My anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, His covenant, His blood, Support me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my Hope and Stay.

When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh may I then in Him be found.
Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne.

Jesus never fails. He will not leave you alone. He will not forsake you if you put your trust and faith in Him. I'm not suggesting that it is easy or that it will always be what you want but Jesus Christ is unshakable and He is our Savior. Other religious icons live and die but Jesus lives on and is sitting at the right hand of God interceding for you and me today.

b. We have an unshakable peace.

In God's love we have an unshakeable peace. Look back to verses 5 and 6 of this chapter.

*"My child, don't make light of the LORD's discipline, and don't give up when He corrects you.
6 For the LORD disciplines those He loves, and He punishes each one He accepts as His child.*
Hebrews 12:5-6 NLT

When you feel that you are suffering it is important to know that while God didn't cause it He obviously has allowed it and yet He will not leave you to go through it alone. Sometimes things that caused us the most pain may have happened a long time ago. They sometimes haunt us later in life but God gives us His promise of peace.

There are times when His discipline comes to correct us when we are wrong or have done wrong. If you are feeling conviction over something you've done that is wrong, be thankful because it means that God is loving you by correcting you and not letting you go in the wrong direction.

c. We have an unshakable principle

Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 NLT

Living a life of holiness is God's standard. It always has been and always will be. What does it mean for us? It means we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and we love our neighbors as ourselves. It means that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts and that it changes how we treat people no matter who they are.

d. We have an unshakable proclamation

Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. Hebrews 12:25 NLT

God has always had a word for His people. As far back as the beginning of creation it has been His word against ours. His words have given directions, corrections, convictions, and provided a manual to live our lives by. He spoke to Moses and told Him what to do. But the writer here is saying that hearing from Jesus is much more important.

Open His word and read it. Open your mind and let it be filled with God's words given so that mankind would know how to live.

In the eighteenth century Voltaire wrote, "In one hundred years the Bible will be an extinct book." Well you don't get any more ridiculously mistaken than that however in our world the Bible's effectiveness has been brought into question due to people professing to be Christians that don't have a clue what it says.

Listen, no matter what has happened you can always find hope in Christ and the Word of God.

Hope motivates us to keep going and not give up. Without hope we don't want to do anything. Peanut's cartoon: Lucy and Linus were sitting in front of the television set when Lucy said to Linus, "Go get me a glass of water." Linus looked surprised, "Why should I do anything for you? You never do anything for me." "On your 75th birthday," Lucy promised, "I'll bake you a cake." Linus got up, headed to the kitchen and said, "Life is more pleasant when you have something to look forward to."

Do you have a steadfast unshakeable hope in God? Hope not only opens the door to receive a touch from God, hope also moves you through the door. Like Linus, when you have hope you're willing to get up and do something.

3. Grow by God's grace

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:28-29 NKJV

We need this grace for one reason and one reason alone. God's grace in times of shaking enables us to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

The life of a disciple or Christian is one of transformation. It starts at the acceptance of Christ as your Savior, it continues as you deepen your walk with Him by the act of full surrender and sanctification and most importantly this transformation is ongoing until your life on this earth ends.

To grow by God's grace is to do things His way. To grow by God's grace we have to stay connected to Him.

S. D. Gordon tells of a spring storm that broke a large limb on his cherry tree. Although it hung by a very slender strand, to his surprise the blossoms came anyway. Later some fruit began to grow as it did on the other branches. He noticed, however, that only those in full contact with the tree bore "much fruit," while the partially severed branch produced only a scanty supply. As believers, we must be careful about our spiritual connections, making sure we are fully abiding in Christ. The fruit we bear, whether much or little, tells the story.

We grow by the grace of God. We serve by the grace of God. We love others by the grace of God. We live by the grace of God. We are protected by the grace of God.

Let me give you a true example of God's grace at work. It's a little sensational but not too much of our Lord.

A missionary on furlough told this true story while visiting his home church in Michigan, "While serving at a small field hospital in Africa, every two weeks I traveled by bicycle through the jungle to a nearby city for supplies. It was a journey of two days and required camping overnight at the halfway point. On one of these journeys, I arrived in the city where I planned to collect money from a bank, purchase medicine and supplies, and begin my two day journey back to the hospital. Upon arriving at the city, two men were fighting, and one was seriously injured. I treated his injuries and told him about Jesus Christ. I then traveled two days, camped overnight, and arrived back home without incident. Two weeks later I repeated my journey. When I arrived back at the city, I was approached by the young man I had treated. He told me he knew I carried money and medicines. He said "Some friends and I followed you into the jungle, knowing you would camp overnight. We planned to kill you and take your money and drugs. But just as we were about to jump your camp, we saw that you were surrounded by 26 armed guards!" At this I laughed and said that I certainly was all alone out in that jungle campsite. But the young man pressed the point, saying, "No Sir, I was not the only person to see the guards. My five friends also saw them, and we all counted them. It was because of those 26 armed guards that we were afraid and left you alone."

At this point in his message, a man in the audience jumped to his feet and interrupted the missionary and asked the exact day that incident happened. The missionary told him - and the man excitedly told THIS story - "On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here, and I was preparing to play golf. I was about to tee off when I felt the urge to pray for you. In fact, the urging of the Holy Spirit was SO STRONG, I called men to meet me here to pray for you. "If you were here with me that day to pray please stand up?" The men who met together to pray stood up. The missionary wasn't really concerned with who they were - but he wept as he counted their number - You guessed it - there were 26!

You know with a God like that you and I can know that we can stand strong even when we feel the weakest.

With a God like that we ought to do everything we can to do things His way and not our way.

Will you join me in praising Him today in song? Will you join me in worshipping Him with your voices and your hearts?

²⁸ *Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshipping Him with holy fear and awe.* ²⁹ *For our God is a devouring fire.* Hebrews 12:28-29
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