

The Substance of Things Not Seen

4. After the Shaking Hebrews 12:18-29

You have probably heard the expression, “a shakedown cruise.” It doesn’t take much thought to figure out what a shakedown cruise is. It is the maiden voyage of a new ship. When a new ship is built, it is taken out for a brief trip to see what shakes loose.

No matter how careful the ship makers are, it is nearly impossible to get everything right. Somebody will forget to tighten down a bolt, or somebody will leave a tool in bad place, or maybe something is just put in wrong or doesn’t function as expected. Invariably on the shakedown cruise problems will be uncovered that would not be found without the ship being shaken by the winds and the waves.

Luxury boats actually make shakedown cruises with passengers on board. Now, they give the passengers discounted prices for their shakedown cruise. But I’m not sure I would take a discounted price for a shakedown cruise. I think I might ask the cruise line to pay me for being a guinea pig.

A shakedown cruise makes clear what is well built and what is not.

As we have seen over the last few weeks of studying Hebrews, we have been called by God to build something far more complex than a ship. We have been commissioned to build the Kingdom of God on earth, to prepare the way for the New Jerusalem. Hebrews tells us that before God is finished with the New Jerusalem, our eternal home, the Kingdom of God here on earth, this creation will be give a final shake. The heavens and the earth will be given a great shake. The purpose is to expose anything that cannot endure for eternity. Whatever is not strong enough or secure enough to withstand that shaking will not last for eternity and does not belong in the final creation.

When we enter into the New Jerusalem, we can be absolutely certain that we can trust everything about it, because it has been thoroughly tested. It has been shaken. Nothing imperfect will remain.

But, of course, the thought of the heavens and the earth being shaken is frightening. At least it is frightening to those who have not already been through a shaking. Most likely, if I were to give you an opportunity to tell of a time when your life was shaken to its foundations, every one of you would have a story to tell.

I can remember times when I have had a good shaking. When I went to seminary, I had all the answers. I had already been preaching for three years. The people in my churches were telling me how good I was at teaching and explaining the gospel. I was sure that the seminary professors would be wowed by my intelligence and insight. They weren’t. What I discovered at seminary was that not only did I not have all the answers, I didn’t even know what the questions were. The second semester of my first year, our Conference Board of Ordained Ministry interviewed me. They asked me how I was enjoying seminary. I said, “I feel like the foundations upon which I built my life have been shaken apart.”

They had. The foundations upon which I had built my life were my understanding of the gospel. When I discovered that my understanding of the gospel was

inadequate and even wrong in some ways, I felt like my life was falling apart. It was a scary time.

One night, as I was lying on the bed, unable to sleep staring at the darkness of the ceiling, I was deep in despair. I felt like I had lost my salvation. I didn't know what to believe. I didn't know what to think. I was lost and confused. In desperation I cried out to God, and God answered me. In that still small voice, God spoke to me. I said, "God, help me. I don't know what is true anymore." And God said, "You don't need to know what is true. All you need to know is that I know what is true, and I will show you the truth you are ready to learn."

What I learned that day was that my understanding was not a sufficient foundation upon which to build eternal life. I lost my faith in my own understanding. Instead, I discovered that God, and God alone, is the foundation which cannot be shaken. Even when I don't know what to think, what is true, all is well, because God can be trusted to guide me through the darkness of my confusion.

The shaking showed me what is eternal and what is not.

Every so often life gives us a good shake. It's never pleasant. But what we find is that when we go through a good shaking, a lot of stuff shakes out that we are better off without.

We may get a lot of false things shaken out of us. False pride falls. False fronts are revealed. False beliefs come unglued. False friends fall away. Oftentimes we will have false gods shaken off their pedestals.

At the same time, it doesn't matter how hard you get shaken, some things will remain intact and in place, such things as the real truth, true righteousness, good friends and, most importantly, God's abiding presence and love.

We don't want anything there that we cannot put our whole faith in. We are like the man who was on a safari with a local guide. They came to a rope bridge over a steep valley. When the man started across the bridge, his guide grabbed his arm and pulled him back. Then he gave the bridge a vigorous shake. Several of the boards on the floor of the bridge fell off. The guide said, "The boards which are left are strong. Now you can cross the bridge safely."

The shaking is coming. But there is no need to be afraid of it. We need a good shaking, so that we can let go of the things which cannot endure and see clearly those things which are eternal.

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