

A Sermon “Unshakable”  
From Hebrews 12:18–29  
Preached at Plymouth Presbyterian Church  
St. Helens, Oregon  
By Rev. Peter Blank  
August 24, 2025

Introduction: When the Ground Shakes

Years ago, while I was studying in Fresno as a Seminary student when the cement floor began to move as if waves were going through it. At first, I thought it was a truck rolling by. But the rattling kept on. Then, I realized the ground I always trusted wasn't so solid.

Most of us have lived through an earthquake, that kind of shaking—even if we've never been near a fault line. The phone rings and it's bad news. The company downsizes. The doctor calls back with results you didn't want to hear. Suddenly the ground shifts.

Here in St. Helens, we've felt it in our community too. When the paper mill closed, it shook families and the whole town. Today, rising housing costs shake many of our neighbors. The ground beneath us isn't always steady.

But Hebrews tells us this: in a world that trembles, there is one thing that does not. God and God's kingdom are unshakable.

I. Two Mountains, Two Feelings

The writer of Hebrews gives us a picture of two mountain scenes.

Mount Sinai: thunder, fire, trembling. The people so terrified they begged God to stop speaking. That's what it feels like when we stand before God on our own. Shaken, undone, overwhelmed.

Mount Zion: angels celebrating, saints gathered, Jesus at the center. Instead of fear, there's joy. Instead of trembling, there's belonging. You shall see the face of God and Live!

Sinai shows us our weakness. Zion shows us God's grace. Sinai shakes us down. Zion holds us steady.

II. Why God Allows Shaking

The Unnamed writer of Hebrews says God will “once more shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” Why? So that what cannot last will fall away, and what is eternal will remain.

Think of shaking a fruit tree—the spoiled fruit drops, the good fruit holds. Think of shaking a rug—the dust flies off, but the rug stays. God's shaking clears away what cannot last so that what is real and good will stand.

III. A St. Helens Story: The Habitat Build (I tell this as if I was at the St. Helens build, while in fact I was at the Newberg build.) Let me tell you a story that many of you here lived through. A couple years ago, we gathered on a patch of ground in St. Helens—a bare lot. Nothing but dirt, lumber piled up, and a blueprint that looked more like a dream than a reality.

That first morning, it didn't look like much. And honestly, it felt a little overwhelming. Hammers in the hands of people who hadn't swung one in years. Volunteers measuring boards three times

because they weren't sure they could cut it right the first. Dust on boots, splinters in fingers. There was laughter, yes—but also plenty of “Are we really going to get this done?” But then something happened. Walls started to go up. Neighbors who had never met learned each other's names. Kids brought water to workers in the heat. Folks who had worked at the mill for decades, now retired, taught younger hands how to square a corner or drive a nail straight. I'll never forget the day the family came to see the walls framed. The kids ran through the bare studs of what would become their bedrooms. “This one's mine!” they shouted, even though there weren't doors yet. Just open air and a promise. And then, months later, the day the house was finished. We stood there, handing over the keys. The ground we started on was just dirt, shifting and unstable. But what stood there in the end was something solid—a home, a future, a sign of hope. Do you see it? That build wasn't just about wood and nails. It was about the kingdom of God showing up in St. Helens. The shaking in our community—the instability of housing, the fear of families without a place to stay—was met by something unshakable: neighbors loving neighbors, people building together, God's steadying presence holding it all. That Habitat house is a parable in lumber and paint. It reminds us that when everything else shakes, God plants something firm. That parable is beginning again with the recent St. Helens build. It's happening right now.

#### IV. Receiving What Cannot Be Shaken

Here's the good news: Hebrews says we don't build this kingdom by our own power. We receive it. “Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God.”

Yes, we swing hammers, but the deeper truth is this: the house is a gift. The kingdom is a gift. Our salvation is a gift. We don't hold the world together—God does.

And when Hebrews says, “Our God is a consuming fire,” it's not to scare us, but to remind us that God is at work burning away what's false so that what's true and good shines through.

#### V. Living Unshakable in St. Helens

So what does this mean for us?

When the world shakes—wars, headlines, politics—we remember God's reign isn't up for grabs.

When St. Helens shakes—when housing is scarce, when jobs are uncertain—we remember God's kingdom is still here, still steady. We've seen it in a Habitat house. We've seen it in neighbors who show up with casseroles, in churches who open their doors.

When your own faith shakes—when you're not sure you believe enough—remember: it's not the strength of your grip on God that saves you. It's the strength of God's grip on you.

#### Conclusion: The Rock Beneath Our Feet

There's an old hymn that says:

“On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.”

That Habitat house in St. Helens is a standing sermon: the ground shakes, but God builds what lasts. The kingdom is unshakable, and by grace, we are part of it.

So when everything else quakes, remember this: you belong to a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And you are held by a God who never trembles. Yes, Unshakable!

Thanks be to God.