

## Pastor Letter: Unshakeable Kingdom of God (8/21/22)

About 42 years ago I made a 4-year commitment to participate in a Bethel Bible program at our church. This entailed an in-depth studying of the Bible for 2 years followed by 2 years of teaching the congregation the same material. Four months after endeavoring to study the Old and New Testaments for 2 years, I was notified that 80 of us at a local refinery would be losing our jobs. Little did I realize just how much of an impact these two different events would have on my future physical and spiritual life.

Wanting to fulfill my commitment to the Bethel Bible program, I turned down several transfers within the company system. This spiritual commitment resulted in being laid off 5 times over the next two years. When I first learned of my initial layoff in January, I immediately went looking for another job in the local area so I could finish Bethel. I heard about a potential job at a certain machine shop. Not knowing the area, I went to the wrong business location but the owner of that shop offered me a job when I was finally terminated from my current position.

When I finally was laid off eight months later, I went to this shop owner only to find that he had already filled the position. Dejected, I went around the corner to the machine shop I had originally intended to seek employment and was hired on the spot. Several months later that machine shop started losing business so I was sent to remodel a house that the machine shop owner was leasing to a new business. After meeting the new tenant, I would attempt to meet her wishes within the orders of my boss. The new tenant's teenage son was hired to work with me in the reconstruction project. Little did I know that the tenant's husband was the personnel manager at a local manufacturing company. Realizing I was about to be laid off again, I asked the tenant's husband about a position at his company. I was laid off on Friday and started working with the new company on the following Tuesday.

I worked several positions with this company for about six months, after which several hundred of us were laid off. Within a week another industrial company that had my job application for nearly a year, called me for an interview. This same scenario went on for two years and five layoffs. I was finally hired by a local business that was owned / operated by one of my fellow students from another church in the Bethel Bible.

I tell you of these unfortunate layoffs not to brag about my success of obtaining new employment but to highlight the blessings of Almighty God that is extended to a faithful servant of the Kingdom of God. I believe God blessed me because I chose to be faithful in completing my commitment to the Bethel Bible program. This program has been extremely beneficial in every arena of my life, especially in pastoral ministry.

One valuable lesson I gleaned from the Bible studying and teaching endeavors as well as my shutting down of five different industries in my local area is the knowledge of what is truly important in life. This week's scriptural passages were a major source of that spiritual discernment process in identifying what is spiritually significant.

I came to the very vivid realization that any physical thing in my life could be taken away from me just like what happened to Job. I could lose my job, the stock market could crash, I could lose all my retirement, my wife could leave me, my kids could get sick and die, someone could steal my car, my house could burn down, friends could leave me, and I could contract a terminal disease. When one comes to this staggering realization, one develops an entirely new perspective on what is truly important.

One of the first books I purchased and digested when beginning Bethel Bible was a book entitled *The Kingdom of God* by John Bright. The author develops the concepts of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament in Hebrew thought, in the New Testament in Greek thought, and in modern times with Christian thought. Realizing the Kingdom of God exists before Genesis through Revelation and beyond the end times, became another vivid realization in my spiritual faith journey.

The author of Hebrews is comparing the OT covenant of works given on Mt. Sinai with the NT covenant of grace dispersed from Mt. Zion. The author is highlighting the fear surrounding the Mt. Sinai events along with the grace, mercy and love extended from the Mt. Zion events.

The author uses the symbolism of God's shaking earth and heaven as God's eventual righteous judgment upon all that exists. The author writes, "At that time his (God's) voice shook the earth (at Sinai); but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain," (Hebrews 12:23-27).

This Biblical passage helped me to discern that eventually only the spiritual Kingdom of God will remain after a righteous God shakes (judges) all things. This is why the author encourages us to worship this righteous God while we journey this earthly sod, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire," (vv. 28-29).

I have been truly blessed to discern what is genuinely important and what are the benefits of comprehending the certainties of the Kingdom of God here on earth. So many individuals are striving to assemble a vast collection of physical amenities that we will leave behind when we leave this earthly existence in death or Christ's second coming. We should be striving to assemble those spiritual things that will not be shaken when Almighty God establishes the eternal Kingdom of God. Keep in mind there are no pockets in a funeral shroud.

May the Lord open your minds and hearts to the reality to what is truly important and to what are the spiritual items that will survive God's shaking process. May you also embrace the reality of the Kingdom of God here on earth as you anticipate Jesus Christ's second coming. Blessings in the risen and glorified Christ.

Pastor Larry