

Cities of Refuge

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the book of Joshua, the book of Joshua chapter 20.

The book of Joshua chapter 20. Then the Lord said to Joshua, say to the people of Israel, appoint the cities of refuge of which I spoke to you through Moses, that the manslayer who strikes any person without intent or unknowingly may flee there.

They shall be for you a refuge from the avenger of blood. He shall flee to one of these cities and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and explain his case to the elders of that city.

Then they shall take him into the city and give him a place and he shall remain with them. And so on. Now as we know, God is a God who cares deeply about us.

And so he should because he is the one who has made us. And he wants that the society that we live in is a society that is structured and ordered and a society that is decent and a society where it is safe to live and where everything is done in a proper way.

[1 : 51] And back in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, God had laid out details of how society was to function in the Old Testament from the time that Israel were to enter into the promised land.

They were going to, it was to be a new beginning because you've got to remember that the nation of Israel was to a certain extent born in Egypt.

Although they were, you remember how there was, Abraham was called from the era of the Chaldees and Isaac, then Jacob, Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. And Israel, or Jacob, had the twelve sons.

And you remember how Joseph went down to Egypt, or he was sent, taken as a slave down to Egypt, and of the great famine that was there. And eventually, in due time, Jacob and the other sons and their family, they went down to Egypt.

And they lived there for many years until they became really a great nation. Remember how God delivered them out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness until they came to the promised land.

[3 : 02] So, in a sense, when they arrived in Canaan, this was the first time, although they lived for forty years wandering in the wilderness, and in that forty years, God was setting out before them laws and statutes and the whole sacrificial system, which was known as the ceremonial law, where all these things were set out for society to function.

But when they were to come into the promised land, into the land that was to be their own, then, of course, society had to be structured in a proper way.

So, we find these sort of things set out. We've got to remember that in those days, they didn't have police forces the way that we have today. They didn't have the setup in society in that way.

So, God had set out particular laws. And maybe to a certain extent, as we look at them in today's modern society, in a society that we're used to the structure that we have, we might see this as being kind of strange in some ways.

But God has set out a pattern for life. And this chapter, chapter 20, is looking at the appointment of the cities of refuge, which we read about in Numbers, in chapter 35, because God had said to Moses that he was to instruct the people that when they came into the land of promise, that they were to select six cities of refuge, three on one side of the Jordan and three on the other side.

[4 : 48] Now, we see straight away that one of the things that God detests is murder. The killing of a person is a fearful thing.

And we noticed, or we read at the end of chapter 35, that blood pollutes the land. And that God is aware of the pollution that takes place when a person is killed.

And we've always got to remember that. And sadly, we live in a society where life is becoming cheaper and cheaper because there are almost so often we read about in the paper about murders within our own nation.

And often it takes very little space in the paper to record it. If you go back several years, certainly the older people will remember that when a murder occurred, the papers, pages would be full giving an account of what had happened.

Because it wasn't, thankfully, the way it is today. And so society, there is no doubt whatever society, despite all the many benefits and all the good things that we enjoy, in many ways it's in a downward spiral, certainly in some aspects of its being.

[6 : 07] And murder is something that the Lord hates. It, blood, as he says, pollutes the land. And God demanded that the person who committed murder, that that person be dealt with most severely.

In other words, when a person committed murder, that that person forfeited his or her life. And we've got to remember that God actually made this requirement.

Some people think that this is a requirement that belongs purely to the Mosaic law. But we've got to remember that if we go all the way back after Noah came out of the ark, one of the first things that God said to him, as life was beginning again, so to speak, that this was one of the things he said, whoever, God said this in Genesis chapter 9, whoever sheds blood by man, by man shall his blood be shed.

For God hath made man in his own image. So really from the very beginning, God was showing how murder, this is the, and as we see, we'll see this in a moment, that God put a distinction between what he termed a murder, the premeditated, the determined killing of somebody, and the killing which was accidental, which was not premeditated, something that happened by accident.

There was a big distinction. God makes a great distinction between that. But the actual, the murder, and as we read through in numbers, we see something of that distinction.

[7 : 53] And so, in the Mosaic law, it was very much a law that was set out where the punishment tended to fit the crime.

For instance, if somebody stole, supposing somebody stole a sheep, it was, they had to make restitution. If you stole a sheep, then you had to pay back four sheep in return.

If you stole an ox, you had to, one ox, you had to return five oxen in return. This was a way, it was a way of restitution.

The punishment had to fit the crime. But as we say, God made a great distinction over death. That if a person, as we say, was murdered, and that was a deliberate, premeditated, it was callously and carefully worked out, if it was where somebody took a knife, or took a stone, or took this thing, and deliberately killed the other person, then that person was to forfeit their life.

However, as we see, if somebody was killed by accident, then this was different. And every death had to be investigated, and nobody could be put to death on the strength of one witness.

- [9 : 16] We read about that. So it was for the sake of justice, and for the sake of a proper trial to take place, these cities of refuge were set up.
- So the law was that the person who killed another, when he killed somebody, would run to one of these cities of refuge.
- Because the avenger of blood, who was a close relative, had the freedom, or had the right, to kill the manslayer.
- The person who murdered could be put to death by the avenger of blood, who was the near relative. So if somebody has killed somebody, whether it is by accident or deliberately, they would run to the city of refuge.
- And it was there, once they were in the city of refuge, they were safe. But their case would be investigated by the judges. And if it was found to be a premeditated murder, the person was put to death.
- [10 : 28] However, if it was discovered that the death was accidental, that it was maybe what we might term manslaughter, it wasn't something that was deliberately set out upon, then the city of refuge was there for that person, the manslayer, to live.
- And he could live there forever. He had freedom to live there. And the only time that he was allowed outside the boundaries of that city was when the high priest died.
- The high priest who had been anointed while he was around, when the high priest died, then he was free to go back home. So there were these six cities of refuge, three on one side of Jordan and three on the other.
- And maybe some people are saying, well, what has that got to do with us now? We live in a different society with a different system, with different government, different order to everything.
- What have the cities of refuge got to do with us here tonight? Well, very simply because many people have seen the cities of refuge as a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- [11 : 43] Not a complete picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because while there are many comparisons, to the city of refuge and the Lord Jesus Christ, there are also contrasts.
- But these cities that were set out as cities of refuge speak to us in many ways of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we come to look at ourselves, we find we put ourselves in the place of the manslayer.
- Because we are all guilty. we are all under the sentence of death. Whether we like it or not, that's how we are by nature. We cannot, nobody born into this world can in any way prevent them coming into this world as sinners.
- Because we inherited sin from our parents. we inherited, they inherited what we term original sin from their parents and so on, all the way back to our first parents to Adam and Eve who fell.
- And it is something that we can, in the very same way as characteristics and the genes and all these things are tied up within our parents and you know, you'll often see characteristics coming through and people passed on from one generation to another.
- [13 : 16] You'll sometimes see it in the way that people walk and the way they conduct themselves and the way they speak and so on. But there's nothing we can do naturally about it.
- It's the same idea. If you plant a potato or plant potatoes in the ground, it's a crop of potatoes you will get. You won't go out and find after planting potatoes and say, oh my strawberries have grown here.
- That doesn't happen. Like produces like. And similarly for ourselves like produces like in the sense that because sin has run all the way down through the human race from Adam we are sinners and we're under the sentence of death.

The Bible tells us God told Adam in the day that you eat of the fruit of the tree you shall die. That was it. Death came in physically death came in spiritually so that we are all under the sentence of death.

And as such we are like the manslayer we are in a state of grave danger. and so we need a place of refuge because the judgment of the holy law will come upon us.

[14 : 42] And the only place where we can find that refuge is not in a place as such but in our person and that is in Jesus Christ.

Now just as these cities of refuge were provided by God so our city of refuge in Christ is provided by God.

Everything has been done by him. This way of salvation this way of deliverance was planned by God purposed by God it was presented by God it was worked out by God it was revealed to us by God it's all of God.

Tonight we know about it because God has revealed it to us. And what a great mercy it is. You know sometimes people say I don't want to hear this.

I don't want to come to church and hear this kind of stuff because I want to come to church and feel good. Well the bottom line is that through hearing this and acting upon this you will feel good.

[15 : 54] it would be no mercy on God's part were he to say oh see these poor men and women and all these boys and girls I don't want to disturb them.

I don't want to awaken them out of their deadly slumber. They are all heading to hell but I don't want to awaken them.

I don't want to point out to them that they are sinners lost. Would that be a merciful God? Of course not. God in his mercy has revealed to us our condition has revealed to us the end of our condition and has revealed to us that he has made provision to prevent us being destroyed so that the avenger of blood will not catch up with us.

Oh the avenger of blood has to deal one way or another but the avenger of blood my dear friend my Christian friend tonight has dealt with Jesus Christ.

That's where the avenger of blood came. The avenger of blood came upon Christ in your place and that means tonight that you're free. This city of refuge has given to you this freedom and this liberty.

[17 : 23] And so that was the purpose of the city of refuge. It was to give this deliverance. And the great thing was in the cities of refuge was that they were easily found.

These cities there were three on the one side of the Jordan and three on the other. And cities in the Old Testament times tended to be on hills and places that could be easily seen but easily defended.

You didn't have a city in a valley. A city was always on a raised hill so that people could see it more clearly but also that it could be defended more ably.

And so the cities of refuge were clearly marked. And that is true also with regard to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is not something that is obscure.

The way of salvation is not something that is hidden away that you have to leaf through the Bible and there is a wee text here and another wee text one or two in the Old Testament and one or two in the New Testament telling about Jesus Christ and the way of salvation and that it takes great Bible knowledge to be able to find it.

[18 : 36] No. All the way through the Bible it is so clear God has set out for us so that the youngest are able to understand and grasp the way of salvation.

God says it from beginning to end the soul that sinneth it shall die but I have made a way of salvation I have sent my son into this world I God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

so you see it's not something obscure people know about it thing is many people choose to ignore it but the fact is people know John 3 16 is such a well-known verse and I'm sure there are many many many people who never darken the door of the church who know that verse they've heard it it's it's written everywhere it's written outside many at church you'll see it in the city somewhere you travel all around a city and you're bound to pass somewhere where there is a verse of scripture a gospel invitation version people will see it what they choose to do with it is another thing but just like the cities of refuge were well marked and highlighted so is the way of salvation nobody who comes under the word nobody who was a bible is ever able to turn round and say well I didn't really I didn't

I couldn't make out what it was saying it is clear but the other wonderful thing about the city of refuge was that these cities of refuge were for everyone every person who had killed anybody they could run there and the city of refuge of Jesus Christ is for everyone and my dear friend it doesn't matter what you have been or what you have done doesn't matter how much baggage you may feel that you're carrying from the past it doesn't matter how low you may be in your own soul and you may say to yourself oh the Lord will never take me my friend he will there is room for everybody and that's the great and the wonderful thing about this gospel it's for everyone and you know we have a duty to tell everybody that and the Lord gives us opportunities to tell people about the gospel you know that's one of the great things you know sometimes we say how do we witness you know one of the things to say to the Lord is Lord give me opportunities to witness for you and the

Lord will open doors and people sometimes it's an amazing thing how often and particularly if I could maybe say to relatively young Christians and I mean young in the faith it's amazing particularly in a community like this how often people will say people who know you will say what happened yep they might say it they might sometimes say as I say here I hear you got the quorum or I hear you become religious I hear you've I hear you've joined the church sometimes people use these kind of expressions and I say well what happened well they've asked the Lord has opened a door and you have an opportunity you're not forcing anything upon them they are the ones who have come to you and they are the ones who have asked and says what has happened so you see the Lord gives to us these great and wonderful opportunities however while the city of refuge speaks so much about the gospel speaks so much about the safety and the security that is in

[22 : 48] Jesus Christ and that was one of the wonderful things the city of refuge did for the for the manslayer if this is somebody who was guilty of killing a person but only by excuse me accidentally then that person could live there for the rest of his days secure and the avenger of blood could be sitting outside the city every single day every year but he couldn't touch him the city the people in the city would make sure of that however there are contrasts we see that there are similarities but there are also contrasts because you see when we come to Jesus Christ no investigation takes place when we come to Jesus Christ here's the person right who comes to the city of refuge and they'll come running panting into the city and they say to the elders

I've killed a man and the avenger of blood is behind me and no doubt they would I suppose most people would say I didn't mean it was an accident even if they had it was premeditated and they would say okay the avenger of blood would be held outside and they would say we'll investigate the matter and if it was found that the man was innocent of murder then the avenger of blood could go no further now when we come to Jesus Christ imagine imagine if you came to the Lord and said Lord I can't go on any longer myself I feel helpless please Lord come into my life take my life I can't I can't do this anymore on my own imagine imagine if an investigation had to take place in heaven where the father and the son would enter into a discussion as to whether you would be accepted or not and an investigation would go in as to the kind of person you were and the kind of sins you committed and whether you were somebody suitable for taking in or not no my friend that does not happen the invitation is given to all come and you are accepted freely the Lord knows everything about you from start to finish knows far not just far more about you than you know yourself he knows everything about you and still he welcomes you in there is no investigation isn't that wonderful and again with regard to the city of refuge if here's somebody who's guilty of manslaughter somebody who has killed somebody but did so accidentally and for some reason or another goes outside the boundaries of the city and the avenger of blood is lying there waiting and he pounces and he kills him then that man has died in his own blood he was told don't go outside the boundary of the city because the avenger of blood is allowed to kill you if you go out there so while there was security given to man the manslayer there was always a question mark there was always a wee question mark over things but you know in

Jesus Christ there is never a question mark once we're in the avenger of blood can never ever ever get hold of us we are safe and secure forever and ever and ever that is the wonderful liberty and freedom that we find in Jesus Christ and you know these cities of refuge you know it's wonderful because even the very names that we have so they set apart Kadesh Kadesh means righteousness see even the very name was significant there's our righteousness in Jesus Christ we talked about that this morning where our sin was placed up to his account where he died in our room and stay and his righteousness was made over to us it's an extraordinary transaction the most extraordinary transaction that ever took place well my friend remember

God has set out the word he has set out in the Old Testament so much it's a pattern for life but it's set out in almost in a pictorial way somebody said that the Old Testament is God's picture book I think we've said that before I think it's a lovely description where God by way of illustration has set out for us so many things that are fulfilled in the passion of Christ in the new it's like x-ray plates you know how you have these x-ray plates and you bring them up to the light the light is the New Testament the x-ray plates like the Old Testament where you're able to see things in the light of the new and so we see something of the security something of the freedom something of the liberty of Jesus Christ here I hope tonight that all of you have this I don't want anybody to go out of here and say well that was that was interesting enough this is for you

God wants you to come to him you are the highest point of his creation this is a marvelous creation you know sometimes when you when you look at this universe when we begin to delve into the extent of it and we can only see a little of it and we realize that what God has done is no no human mind can actually grapple or take hold or grasp the enormity the magnitude the mystery the marvel of all that this world and this creation and this universe is and yet you are the highest point of the creation it's an amazing thing and the most wonderful thing of all is that he has made us for himself and we will never be at peace at real peace we will never fully function in life we will never find that ultimate satisfaction in life until we come into union with himself there's always going to be something missing and you know every

[30 : 14] Christian in here tonight will say that they will talk about the fulfillment that they found in Christ they'll find that there is a peace of satisfaction in Jesus Christ and I would urge anybody who is without Jesus tonight remember the avenger of blood is after you but God has said I've made a place for you there is a place of refuge in my son won't you come in tonight and be safe let's pray oh Lord our God we we pray that we may hear the word of God we pray that our souls may live we pray that we might go on rejoicing in the great provision that the Lord of heaven and earth has made for us Lord bless and pity us shine on us with thy face Lord keep us safe and put thine arm around us protecting us from the darts of the evil one protect us

Lord from even ourselves and lead us in the way of truth forgive us all our sin in Jesus name we ask it Amen so thank you thank you