



17 | JOSHUA 20

CHRIST, OUR REFUGE

We need to enjoy the refuge of Christ in a dangerous world.

Outline

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Call to Worship

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior— ... 32 For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God? 47 The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Savior! 50 Therefore I will praise you, LORD, among the nations; I will sing the praises of your name. 2 Samuel 22:2-3, 32, 47, 50

Songs

Is He Worthy?

Here is Love

Just as I am (I Come Broken)

His Robes for Mine / His Name is Wonderful

In Christ Alone

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet from the Welcome Center if you are visiting with us.

GIVING: You can still give over Zelle through your bank with no fees.

Use secretary@livinghopechurch.net.

We also have a collection box on the Welcome Center

CHILDREN'S CHURCH: Children's Church is available for ages 2-6 at the start of the sermon

LIFE GROUPS: Life Groups are in full swing! If you need a group check with one of the pastors or elders and we will get you connected. There will be no Midweek service on Life Group weeks. Check with your Life Group leader to confirm meeting dates and locations. All meet on Wednesdays at 7pm.

Leader: Matt Black; Host: Cerrillos, Elgin

Leader: Mike Klikas, online

Leaders: Marcel Reid/Jerry Soen; Host: Andrews, Carol Stream

Leader: Mike Tiberi; Host: Poldermans, Bartlett

Introduction

We continue in a series in the book of Joshua called "Footsteps of Faith." Our title this morning is: "Christ, Our Refuge".

We're going to be in the Old Testament, but we're going to be talking about Jesus, our Lord and Savior. One of the things I've learned about the Bible is all of the Bible is about Jesus. Sometimes people say, "Have you read the four gospels?" Dear saint, I've read all sixty-six of the gospels. Every book in the Bible is all about the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the hero of the Bible. Salvation is the theme of the Bible. And since Jesus is the hero of the Scriptures, we find Jesus standing somewhere in the shadows in all of the Old Testament if we study it carefully and look at it. Every page, every chapter, points to Jesus. So God has tucked away so many illustrations that point to Jesus in the Old Testament. Here we find Jesus in the cities of refuge in Joshua 20.

Key thought: Only in Jesus can we find our perfect refuge, true happiness and a perfect government to guide our lives.

Today a lot of people are divided in our country, but the people of God do not need to be discouraged. We serve a God that has already set up a perfect government in Jesus! Let's look at how we get that perfect government in our own lives in Joshua 20. We find Jesus is our place of refuge.

Joshua 20:1-3 | Then the Lord said to Joshua,² "Say to the people of Israel, 'Appoint the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses,³ 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.

Now what is this talking about? In Bible times, they did not have the court system that we have today. If a man were guilty of intentional manslaughter, or he was careless, or even somehow felt that what he did in killing another was justified in self-defense, there

were cities of refuge. The cities of refuge were six cities allocated to the Levite tribe in the Old Testament that provided asylum for perpetrators of unintentional manslaughter. Divinely appointed and subject to Mosaic Law, the cities offered offenders refuge and protection from retribution of the avenging family until their case went to trial (cf Num 35:9–34; Deut 4:41–43; 19:1–13). The town must guarantee protection for the person who is found not guilty of murder, but if the person wanders from the town he may be killed by the avenger of blood.¹ This avenger, or redeemer of blood, was “a near relative of the slain person charged with maintaining family rights, might.”²

The Levites were the mediators, or the highest-ranking judges in the land, in these cities. So the Levites established and maintained these cities. But they also presided as the judicial authorities over them. They taught the law of God, and they also adjudicated them (Deut 33:10). These are cities of protection, where justice can be carried out carefully, without vengeance.

God appointed these six cities of refuge. We're going to say more about that in a moment, but just remember this: Jesus Christ is our city of refuge.

1. THE SAVING NATURE OF THESE CITIES (20:1-6)

As we look at this passage, Jesus is unmistakable.

Joshua 20:4-6 | 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. ⁵And if the avenger of blood pursues him, they shall not give up the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor unknowingly, and did not hate him in the past. ⁶And he shall remain in that city until he has stood before the congregation for judgment, **until the death of him who is high priest at the time**. Then the manslayer may return to his own town and his own home, to the town from which he fled.

The passage teaches that the high priest's death is the only ransom for the manslayer, that the high priest's death, in some prophetic way, atones for the blood shed by the manslayer and satisfies the claims of justice. Only the high priest's death can release the offender from his banishment and bring him home again. What a remarkable picture of what our “merciful and faithful high priest” has done for us.³ We see this language in the book of Hebrews a lot.

Christ is our “merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” –Hebrews 2:17

¹ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 305.

² Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 148.

³ Ibid., 150.

None other than Jesus is our refuge. He's our safety, and we can flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for ultimate refuge from the wrath of God that we deserve. Jesus is our wrath-bearer. He is our justice satisfier. He's the propitiation for our sins.

We who have fled to him [Jesus] for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. –Hebrews 6:18

Jesus is our refuge. We can delight in him. We can worship him.

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe. –Proverbs 18:10

Those who find their refuge in Jesus will never be disappointed. Jesus is our city of refuge. We flee to him for refuge, for forgiveness. He is our propitiation.

2. THE SIGNIFICANT NAMES OF THESE CITIES (20:7-8)

We see Jesus Christ even in the significant names of these cities. We read them here in verses 7-8.

Joshua 20:7-8 | So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. ⁸And beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they appointed Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland, from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh.

In verses 7, 8, we are given the names of these cities. And the Holy Spirit has given us all Scripture by divine inspiration. The Holy Spirit of God has set out six names. So sweetly it is that the names of these six cities really describe the character of our Lord Jesus Christ.

KEDESH: MY HOLY PLACE

In verse 7, you see “Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali.” This is the land where the Lord Jesus would grow up, in Galilee. This is where he would have his ministry. The city “Kedesh” means “sanctuary” or “holiness.” This city was representative of a place to flee that is a holy place. Every one of us need that holy place to flee to, and his name is Jesus. You see, Christ alone is our holiness. You can find cleansing and holiness in Jesus alone! Any real righteousness cannot come from ourselves, but through Jesus alone. Paul says:

That I may “be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” –Philippians 3:8

We need a holiness, a righteousness that is not our own. That's why I flee to Christ. Christ is my city of refuge. He is my holy place. And when we go to him, our holiness is found in him because as you would be in the city of Kedesh, the city of holiness, you are in Christ, the place of holiness.

Christ was born of a virgin. He lived a holy life, a sinless life. He died a vicarious death. His death makes me holy.

Holy means separated or dedicated to God.

You can't make dirty clothes clean by washing dirty clothes in dirty water. We have a Savior who is absolutely, perfectly holy that has removed all our sin.

SHECHEM: MY HELPFUL PLACE

And then look at the next name in verse 7, "Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim." The word Shechem means "shoulder", and it has the idea of strength. Not only do we have in Christ a holy place, but we have a helpful place. You see, Christ is our strong Savior. Christ bears us upon his shoulder. You know over there in Isaiah 9:6, the Bible says what? The government shall be upon his shoulder.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. –Isaiah 9:6

You take over there in Luke 15 where the good shepherd went out after the sheep that was lost. And the Bible says when the good shepherd found that sheep, and I've always been blessed by this, he places it upon his shoulders.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' –Luke 15:4-6

Now how did that sheep get home? That sheep did not come home on its own four legs. That sheep came home on two legs, the legs of the Savior. He put it on his shoulder. That's how I'm coming home. I'm going all the way to heaven on the shoulders of the Lord Jesus Christ because I have come into Christ, my city of refuge. I'm rejoicing that Christ carries me upon his shoulders.

The government is upon Jesus' shoulders.

He's the Head of his church. That's the government that ultimately matters.

Now I'm grieved that we have 75 million people in our country that voted for an anti-God agenda. An agenda of baby murder. An agenda that is anti-family. An agenda that promotes that a 7-year-old can decide to change his gender. We are living in dark times. But let us understand that the solution is never government. Government is the fruit of our society; it is never where our hope lies. Our hope is in the Lord. The hope to change humanity is in the church of Jesus Christ. It's always been this way. Before God changes this country, he has to heal his church. We've had a legislative agenda of murdering babies since 1973 in this country. How can we be surprised that we are getting the government that we deserve? The way forward now is to pray for the government. Pray for the President, and what looks like the President Elect.

But let's get this straight. Our help never has come from human government. Our help comes from the Lord. We need a national revival in this land. We need people's hearts to get right with their Maker and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The government that matters right now is the one who sets up kings and removes them. We are called to be responsible and pray for human government, but **we are never called to trust in human government**. My trust is in the Lord. Jesus is seated at the righthand of God, ruling and reigning. My eyes look to his Kingdom. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. I pray that we might run once again to the divine government of Jesus. Our trust and refuge is never human government. It is Jesus' government. And it's Jesus that will carry me home!

HEBRON: MY HARMONIOUS PLACE

The next city we find is "Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah," and the word Hebron means "fellowship." This is a place of harmony, where I am called to real harmony and fellowship with God. When you come to the Lord Jesus Christ, you come to a place of "**joy unspeakable and full of glory**" in the Lord Jesus. That's the reason the apostle John said our fellowship and joy are connected.

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. -1 John 1:3-4

So many Christians have no real harmony and wholeness in their lives. Their lives are like a great big roller coaster. Their happiness is sometimes here and sometimes not. A lot of Christians are truly miserable a lot of days of their life, living in anxiety and anger a lot of the time. I have lived that way at times in my Christian life, I am sad to say.

Now that I've discovered the abiding life, I'm not lonely anymore. I don't have to get irritated with any kind of mistreatment by people. The life of fellowship is one of rich friendship with the Lord. Do you have it?

I can try to fill that lonely void with people. And don't get me wrong, people are a blessing. I want to be around people constantly. It's a joy. But I have found a better way: a place of harmony and peace that is never lacking. I have found a place where I am never lonely. I have found my Hebron. Jesus is my place of harmony and fellowship. He is the "friend of sinners". He is the "friend that sticks closer than a brother."

I am not taken aback by people's opinion and difficult events in my life. I don't found my happiness on who's president or not. My joy is founded on my fellowship with Jesus. He loves me! He has prepared a place for me! When all of this world is shaken, then that which cannot be shaken will remain.

BEZER: MY HIDING PLACE

And then, look at the next one in verse 8, "Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland, from the tribe of Reuben." And the word Bezer means "stronghold." It means fortification. It's a place of security. The Lord Jesus is also my hiding place. He is my fortress. He is my security. You know, the Bible says,

The name of the Lord is a high tower, and the, and the righteous run into it and are safe. –Proverbs 18:10

And there is a hiding place that keeps us safe until the storm passes over. Thank God that we can come to the Lord Jesus Christ in our Bezer and find that hiding place. Now Jesus is our hiding place. He's defeated our sin, our guilt, our shame.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. –Psalm 103:12

But let me be clear. Jesus is our refuge from the wrath of God. He's our refuge from our own sin, but we will suffer in this life.

The assumption that God should give faithful believers a comfortable life, and certainly no more than one dose of sorrow, seems to be an American-made version of the Christian life that doesn't hold up to examination. And it certainly doesn't hold up to what we see in the lives of followers of Jesus in the Bible. We've mistakenly determined an appropriate and acceptable trajectory of the victorious Christian life, thinking if we declare our solid belief in Jesus, he somehow owes us a life of limited difficulty.⁴

Don't be ashamed that you are weak. You need Jesus! He's your refuge!

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
²Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, ³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah* –Psalm 46:1-3

Selah! Think about it! Dive into it. Run to Christ your refuge. He is a very present help in trouble. That's why "we will not fear". His presence is magnified greater than every fear. All fears disappear when Christ is near, and oh, he is nearer than ever, united to you, his beloved child.

RAMOTH: MY HIGH PLACE

And then look, if you will, at the name of the next city in verse 8: "Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad." The name Ramoth means "exalted." It speaks of a lofty place; a place where I can run to in trouble, a place free from fear and frustration. Jesus is my high place.

The Bible says:

He makes my feet like the feet of deer and sets me on my high places.
–Psalm 18:33 (NKJV)

When I came to know Jesus, I'm told in Ephesians that I'm seated with Christ in the most exalted place: in heavenly places—the realm of God.

That you may know "what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all

⁴ Ibid., 44.

rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” – Ephesians 1:19-23

However this presidential election turns out, you want to know something? God is going to use it to expand his kingdom. All authority and power and dominion belong to Jesus, Name above all names! And he’s controlling not only all things “in this age, but also in the age to come” for the expansion of his kingdom. Take heart dear saints. God is still on his throne in that high place. And you are united to him, where he is ruling and reigning!

Listen, when Jesus gained the ultimate victory, there was only one vote that mattered: God the Father. And you know what God did when Jesus won the victory over sin, death, hell, Satan, and the grave? Let’s see how God voted.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. –Philippians 2:9-11

Let’s declare the victory today: we have a place of refuge, and it’s in no political party; our refuge is in Jesus alone. He’s won the victory. He is exalted above every politician, every candidate for office. All presidents and kings, senators and congressman. They will all bow their knees and confess with their tongues that Jesus Christ is Lord! To him alone be the glory and honor and dominion forever and ever and ever.

GOLAN: MY HAPPY PLACE

And then the last city of refuge named is in verse 8: “Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh.” And the word Golan means “a place of rejoicing.”⁵ And that speaks so much to me of the joy of the Lord.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. –Nehemiah 8:10

The number one question I am asked in discipleship is: how do I get from knowledge of the Lord to real practice and experience of victory in my life? How do I put on meekness when I begin to experience anger? How do I put on forgiveness when I am hurt? I’ll tell you: you’ve got to get over you. You’ve got to die to you. How do you do that? You have to experience the divine love and joy of God.

The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. – Psalm 28:7

We’ve already said that Jesus is a harmonious place over there in Hebron. But here, again, He is a happy place. Why? Because we have this joy of being with him.

⁵ James Strong, *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).

Did you know that when we invite you to come to the Lord Jesus, we're not calling you to a funeral; it's actually a feast! The call to Christ is one to come out of a life of misery, and into a life of abundant joy. There is deep satisfaction in Christ, and in Christ alone. Regardless of the recklessness of our country, there is safety, security and satisfaction in Christ! There is clarity and not confusion in Christ.

The saddest day for God in the history of the world was the day when we as the human race grabbed hold of something outside of him in an attempt to find joy and satisfaction. We believed the lie that God was withholding something from us that would make us happy. And in our choice to seek satisfaction apart from him, a great cavern of separation came between us. No longer could we walk together with God without shame or pretense. No longer could we enjoy a life of fulfillment, free of frustration. We opened the door to sin that day, and confusion came rushing into every aspect of our existence, taking away our freedom and our unfettered enjoyment of God himself. Sin always poisons our happiness.⁶ Fellowship with God is the exclusive place of true happiness and joy!

3. THE STRATEGIC NEARNESS OF THESE CITIES (20:9)

These cities were to be places of refuge. People needed to be able to get to the city very quickly. I mean, if you're in danger, if somebody is coming after you to imprison you and to put you to death, you've got to have a hiding place, a place where you can find a friend, a holy place, and a high place.

Joshua 20:9 | These were the cities designated for all the people of Israel and for the stranger sojourning among them, that anyone who killed a person without intent could flee there, so that he might not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, till he stood before the congregation.

NEAR TO ANYONE

Notice, anyone and everyone should be able to go there. And it has to be near. You've got to have it in a hurry, and so these cities were put in the east and the west of the Jordan River. They were put in the south and up in the north. They were put in the center of the land of Israel so that it would be very near, no matter where you might be.

Now that reminds us again of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Bible says what?

The LORD is near to all who call on him... –Psalm 145:18

If you look at this map of these six cities of refuge in Israel, you would find out how strategically near all of these cities were, because God in mercy wanted everybody to have an opportunity to come into the city of refuge. Now what does that tell me about the Lord Jesus Christ and you today?

⁶ Nancy Guthrie. *Hearing Jesus Speak into Your Sorrow* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2009), 29-30.

NEARER THAN YOU IMAGINE

Suppose you're here today. You are guilty. You know you deserve punishment for your sin. The judgment that your sin requires is coming for you, and you need to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, I've got wonderful news for you. Look at how near Christ is to you. Paul said:

God “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet **he is actually not far from each one of us**, ²⁸for ‘In him we live and move and have our being.’” – Acts 17:26-28

Turn to Christ. He is right there with you. He's not far from any one of us. In him we live and move and have our being. Turn to the one giving you breath right now. Turn to the one giving you the ability to move. Turn to the one giving you the ability to have your being and personality, sustaining your every movement. Turn to him dear sinner. You will not regret it.

NEAR AND CLEAR

The roads to these cities were always wide. Every obstruction was removed from these cities. If there were a river, there had to be a bridge over the river. The priests and elders would go out and inspect the roads and the bridges to make certain that the way was open. They would put signposts there: "This way—Refuge!" And there would be a sign pointing there. It was so clear. You couldn't miss it.

Do you want to be saved today? It's not difficult to understand. Jesus is the only way.

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. —John 14:6

So we get to God by Jesus. How does that work?

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. —2 Corinthians 5:21

So Jesus as our great High Priest gives you his perfect righteousness for your rags of sin. You get his robe of perfection, and he gets your robe of sin.

You have to come by faith and repentance. Let me illustrate it. Spurgeon, a 19th century pastor in London, said, repentance and faith is like a man who lived in a dark room. He lived on a bed of snakes, but he had no idea they were snakes. They were perfectly comfortable to him for his whole life. But once the light came on, he could see the ugliness of the snakes. He could see how vile and dangerous they were. He ran out of the room in the broad and bright light, into the arms of Jesus.

That's faith. That's repentance. Turn from that life of sin and turn to Jesus.

Conclusion

Suppose you were to see a house on fire, and in that house, you were to see a mother who has a little baby in a crib, and the flames are creeping closer and closer to that crib.

But strangely, you see that mother down on her hands and knees, and her arms are full of box filled with computer tablets and jewelry, putting them in this box. And, you see her as she begins to take the curtains down off the wall, folding them, and putting them in the box. And the house is being engulfed in flames. Of course, you'd say, "She's mad. She's insane, because the most precious thing there is the baby."

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? –Matthew 16:26

If you leave everything behind, you'll not regret it. Get the most important thing. Run to Christ as your refuge!