

Joshua Series "Cities of Warrior Priests"
Joshua 20
June 20, 2021

Romans 15:4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Joshua 20:1-9

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. **4** 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. **5** And 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. **6** And 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.'"

7 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. **8** And beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they appointed Ba-zer 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. **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.

This section of scripture highlights something that was unique about Israel. There weren't other places, other cities like the ones that are being established here, Cities of Refuge. Passages like this also offer us a **shadow** of greater things to come. This is what Romans 15

reminds us, that these older things, ancient things are meant to give us hope. That what I want us to hopefully see this morning. How passages like this that begin give us a **better grasp and delight in the gospel.**

So this morning -

- Develop a fuller understanding of these cities of refuge.
- How they reveal qualities of God's and God's people.
- How ultimately, they find their fulfillment in Jesus.

God said to Joshua, follow through with what I told Moses and establish cities of refuge in Israel. These cities had the purpose of being a safe place for someone who had **accidentally killed** another person, "**without intent or unknowingly**" You something special in this immediate distinction between someone premeditating murder and an accidental death. That the **circumstances** of the crime mattered in. There was a certain responsibility on God's people administer justice but also at the same time mercy.

Illus. Deut 19:5 For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to cut down a tree, the head may fly off and hit his neighbor and kill him. That man may flee to one of these cities and save his life by finding protection **from the avenger of blood.**

Avenger of Blood- was a recognized individual charged with carrying out this **communal justice.**

Exodus 21 - gives us the Law "**life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.**"

We have touched on this before, but this law did two things.

1 - the law was helped **restrict vengeance** beyond the magnitude of the crime. This prevented the feuds and the cycle of revenge.

2- It was a law that established the **sanctity of life.**

Genesis 9:6

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

Life was something **God given** and each human bears the image of God, so there was seriousness in taking another person's life because of the **immeasurable value** of each person.

So for justice to be meted out someone would be designated as the ‘avenger of blood.’ It was a legal status. Like a kinsman redeemer. Often a family member would be commissioned to avenge the lost life. So, If there is a loss of life, get to one of these cities as fast as you can.

Illus. Hide and Seek. Make sure Home base made was fair. Could’t make it to difficult to get to. You could consider the renaming the game “avenger of blood.”

If the manslayer gets to the city first then he would present himself to the elders. And if the crime was determined accidental then the elders of the city will protect the person on the run.

More details about these cities . The Bible and other non biblical sources gives us some further details about these cities.

One, They were scattered throughout the land. Making them easily accessible. There was a proximity to one of these cities that most Israelites would be helped by. There were three east of the Jordan and three west of the Jordan. Making most of Israel only a days travels from one of them.

(Slide of the Israel)

Second, they were given well maintained roads and signage.

Different than foot paths naturally created by traffic. Other sources say that bridges were built over ravines and low areas so help travelers not get lost or detoured. Rabbinic sources say that these **roads were repaired yearly.** If you didn’t know the area and came to a fork in the road, signs would be posted saying “**refuge**” and pointing in the right direction.

Also, the gates were never locked. Now, that wasn't normal for ancient towns. At night, the gates were closed and locked up. During war, it would be normal to lock the gates, but never at a City of Refuge, **any time, day or night,** if someone was on the run and had to flee, he could get in and find himself safe.

The people inside these cities were Levites.

Joshua 20 falls within the chapters in which each tribe of Israel were appointed particular lands. But the Levites were not given lands. They were given cities scattered through Israel. And it is this scattering through the land that has an interesting origin.

Illus. Genesis 34. Dinah and Shechem. Hamor, Shechem's dad. Levi and Simeon. We can't give you Dinah and we can't take your daughters for wives unless, all the men of your city are circumcised like all the men of Israel. Levi and Simeon - use the sign of the covenant that represents their relationship with God, as a ploy. When all the men, Hamor, and Shechem were circumcised and healing - Levi and Simeon grabbed a sword and slew all the men. Jacob was shocked and appalled at what they had done.

Genesis 49:5-7

5 "Simeon and Levi are brothers;
weapons of violence are their swords.
6 Let my soul come not into their council;
O my glory, be not joined to their company.
For in their anger they killed men,
and in their willfulness they hamstringed oxen.
7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,
and their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob
and scatter them in Israel.

We hear it, out of this violence and taking of lives, not only will the brothers be **divided**. It's not good for them to be together, but they will be **scattered** through out Israel. So these cities of refuge were filled with Levites are people with a history. **A history of revenge and blood shed.**

Levites were ready to fight, Mt. Sinai when as a consequence of worshipping the golden calf, Moses calls a particular group to sweep through the people with swords, killing all idolaters. So when you

think of the priests of Israel, the Levites, you don't think **warriors**, but Levites had history.

And now that zeal and that sense of justice would be leveraged for those who were to be killed. Now we see them being established in cities and cities of Refuge scattered throughout Israel, but now their role is **defend** the one who had shed blood.

You can wonder if they were **chosen** for this role of filling cities of Refuge because of their history of bloodshed, now they were **advocates for those who had shed blood. Protectors** of those on the run. Out of their brokenness, now made them more protectors and **warriors for the vulnerable**. What a fascinating turn. The reckless are now priests.

Those that were scattered are now set a part to save.

?? What if churches were cities of refuge?

- **easily accessible** - they were close to where the people are. Reminds me of so many of the things Jay has been teaching us about sharing our faith in the Simplified Events. There is a **proximity** your life has with others that need help. (one of the reasons we try not to schedule too much on campus at Rivertree. We want you involved in other's lives)

- Roads **Maintained and Directional signs**- ready to engage and remove obstacles that people encounter on the way to help. Are we offering people the right conversations. It is so easy to get caught up on conversations that are more **divisive** than directional. Our lives are pointing. Directional. You aren't watching people get further lost around you but offering them a clear path towards rescue.

- **Unlocked**. - For everyone. "Cities designated for all the people of Israel and for the stranger **sojourning** among them". The Insider to the foreigner.

Illus. Ross and Ben - Open door policy with the family that lived there before us. Difficult culture to crack. from race and ethnicity, to economic class. Rich poor. Black white.

- **Filled with warrior priests.** Warriors without a cause or Good, moral people that aren't fighting for anyone.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 Peter holds out the idea that all the people of God are priests. And that there is something about our lives, from where they were, in **darkness**, to know marvelous **light**, that makes us perfect for displaying and declaring the excellencies of God. All the things that are awe inspiring and true about our God and Savior, we are ready to proclaim. Because of where we were, in darkness, and where we are now, in light - we become **helpful to the rescue of others**.

- Like these cities, Jesus is for all. He isn't just for a certain few. Every repentant person finds access to God through Jesus.
- Like the cities, Jesus is that place where the needy person can live. There is a putting into Jesus, a covenant established, a life that it shared.

- Like the cities, there is **no other alternative** for those who are on the run. If an ancient manslayer did not flee to one of the cities of refuge, there was **no hope** for him; there was no other provision in the law of Israel by which he might be saved.

This gives us greater clarity of the gospel.

But through Jesus, it is not just the **innocent** that receive his protection and but the **guilty**. There is an avenger. It is the wrath and judgment of God. It is the law of God that reminds us that we have **sinned** and it is the law of God that tells us that the wages of sin is death. It is **this curse**, this **pronouncement of guilt that follows us**. Jesus is better than a safe place for those who unintentionally killed someone, now Jesus is the place of refuge for the guilty, the condemned, the sick, the lost.

Illus. Sour patch kids. There is that initial sour taste before it taste sweet. It is that initial **shock to our conscience that I am guilty of**

sin and have no way to defend myself that the grace of God provided to those through Christ's sacrifice becomes sweet.

And so better through Jesus, there is **no trial** for those who are in Christ. No trying to explain away our rebellion. No trying to prove our innocence. But salvation comes as we claim the innocence and righteousness of Jesus. We aren't putting hope in our lives but in the good standing of Jesus.

John 3:18 says "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Like the cities, freedom and release follow the death of the high priest.

Joshua 20:6

6 And 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."

When the high priest dies, the manslayer can return home.

- That the high priest's death marked a **period of amnesty**, the end of a period of time and the beginning of a new one.
- Others see that the high priest because of his role of **interceding** for the people. To stand before God on behalf of a nation. That his death could have been seen **as sacrificial or atoning death for those who were waiting to go home. "life for a life was still at work."** But God allowed the death of the high priest to be the death that brought freedom.

But Jesus is an even better high priest -

Hebrews 7:24-25

he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Jesus holds the priesthood permanently because he is still alive.

He is able to save to the uttermost who draw near to God through him.

And because Jesus is alive he is *always interceding*. Always

declaring us justified. Always reminding anyone who brings up our offenses that we have been forgiven and declared righteous.

Jesus died so that you can come home, and he lives to make sure that you do.

Lastly, Jesus is a better refuge, because he isn't a place you have to get to, but a person that comes to you.

He is shepherd who leaves the 99 to find the one missing.

He is the one in the middle of night, that lights up the house for the missing coin.

He is the father, who runs down the road to embrace the wayward son, and surprises him not with a rebuke but with a party.

John 1:14 - And the word dwelt among us, and took on flesh, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the Son, of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus comes to us, he is close. He is unlocked. He has removed all obstacles. And to enter into true security, is to simply call upon Him. To realize you need a savior and ask Jesus to be that. To trust that his death, the high priest death you needed, to be free of guilty and shame.

If you feel like you've been on the run from your past, from you sin, wondering when things would catch with you. If you've on the run from your sin, then call on the one full of grace and truth. Call on the one that is close.

As James 4:8 - Draw near to him and he will draw near to you.

Pray -

Hebrews 6:18. we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

Like an anchor for our soul.

We pray Lord Psalm 46 - That you would be our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in trouble, the earth give way, mountains fall and quake, waters roar, we will not fear.

Let our trust be placed in Christ.