

JOSHUA 19-20
CITIES OF REFUGE!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Joshua chapter 19 as we continue our study through this amazing book on victorious Christian living.

The children of Israel are in the land of Canaan, the Promise Land and they have defeated the major enemies within the land of Canaan.

But now they still have to drive out these smaller areas where the enemy remained in the land, these pockets of resistance you might say.

The difference now is that Joshua was dividing up the land for each tribe and it was the responsibility for each tribe to drive out the enemy, destroy them. No longer were they going to fight as a nation, but again, each tribe is now responsible.

And over the last few weeks we have been looking at some of the dangers they needed to guard against, and we need to guard against.

We looked at the danger of not driving out the enemy completely and how that was going to be a thorn in their flesh down the road, an irritant to them. You see, you can't comix with the enemy because, in the end, they will pull you over to their side.

Then we looked at the danger of complaining and it is easy to think that God owes us everything and when we don't get it, we begin to complain. We need to learn to walk by faith and serve the Lord with gladness, no matter what comes our way. He is in control and He is the Good Shepherd who is leading our lives!

In our last study we looked at the danger of complacency or just getting comfortable where you are at. In other words, you are not doing anything and that is a dangerous place to be. We need to go forward and obey the Lord and as we do, we will see the blessings that come our way!

We have one more danger to look at, and that is the danger of conflict, and we will get to that one next week as we dig into Joshua chapter 22.

This morning we are going to look at the solution to all these dangers, the solution to all our problems, the solution to our sin that has separated us from God!

And as we have done in our previous studies, I will give you an overview of the division of the land and then we will focus in on the verses we will be studying this morning more thoroughly.

I have called this study, *Cities of Refuge!* And, as you will see as we go through this, it was important for the children of Israel and it is important for us today, our city of refuge, Jesus Christ!

Let me share this with you and I think you will get an idea about cities of refuge. We are told,

When traveling lately through one of the great Alpine passes leading from Switzerland into Italy - I observed, close by the roadside, at regular distances, a number of plain, square buildings.

On these (sometimes over the doorway, sometimes on the ice) were inscribed the words – “Refuge No. 1,” “Refuge No. 2,” “Refuge No. 3,” etc. I think there were twenty altogether.

I was told, on inquiry, they were intended as shelters for any hapless travelers who might be overtaken by the sudden storms which so often sweep down from the snow-white mountains bounding the prospect.

These "Refuges," at the time I saw them, were empty, for it was in the beginning of summer, when everything, even in that elevated region, was looking bright and green. The Alpine rhododendron was blooming, with its pink blossom, the mountain sides; and growing up were lovely blue flowers, close by stray patches of winter's snow which were still filling the ridges and hollows in the higher parts of the pass.

Seldom at this season are travelers exposed to any peril from an Alpine storm.

It is different, however, in winter or spring, when the avalanches come tumbling from the heights, or the snow is drifting in huge masses over that wonderful road.

Many shivering wayfarers have fled with thankful hearts into these shelters.

Some have been carried there, in a state of insensibility, by unknown benefactors, and on gradually awaking to consciousness, have blessed the kind hearts and hands which have saved them from certain death, and were now ministering to their necessities.

By others, alas! they have been reached too late. Rescued from the snows of the mountain, they have been conveyed to these 'refuges' only to die.

As I passed those Alpine "refuges," I could not help being reminded of the wonderful Cities of Refuge which God graciously provided of old in [Israel], for the unfortunate manslayer.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Joshua chapter 19 and see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word this morning!

JOSHUA 19

VERSES 1-9

Again, I am going to give you an overview of these verses where the land is being divided between the tribes of Israel.

Here we see that the tribe of Simeon occupied a portion of land within Judah, in the southern portion of the land of Canaan.

VERSES 10-16

Now we see the tribe of Zebulun occupy an area of land in the north, west of the Sea of Galilee. It included Nazareth and Cana.

VERSES 17-23

As we read on, we see that Issachar occupied the land south of the Sea of Galilee and to the north of the half tribe of Manasseh.

VERSES 24-31

Next we see that Asher was allotted the land to the north along the Mediterranean Sea. It is the area of Lebanon today. And, by the time we get to King David, Asher has fallen into insignificance, but their tribal identity remained.

VERSES 32-39

Next we see that Naphtali was also in the north by Hazor and had the area by the Sea of Galilee.

VERSES 40-48

As we get to the tribe of Dan, we see that they actually had two areas of land that they occupied. The first was down by the Mediterranean Sea and the other was in the far north, west of Mount Hermon.

VERSES 49-51

And now we see the inheritance for Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim. After all the land was distributed, now Joshua gets his portion. What humility we see in this man, who was the leader in Israel.

As we move into Joshua chapter 20, we will be dealing with these cities of refuge. And this is not something new, but it is something that they were told to establish even before they entered the land of Canaan.

Remember back in Numbers 35:11-15 how Moses instructed Joshua and the children of Israel to set up these cities of refuge when they entered the Promise Land. Moses told them, **“then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment. And of the cities which you give, you shall have six cities of refuge. You shall appoint three cities on this side of the Jordan, and three cities you shall appoint in the land of Canaan, which will be cities of refuge. These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there.”**

Now they are in the land and Joshua will establish three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan River and three cities of refuge on the west side of the Jordan River in the land of Canaan, the Promise Land.

And if you are not familiar with what these cities of refuge are all about, we will expound on them as we go through this chapter, because, as you will see, there is a beautiful picture of Christ that emerges from them.

Remember what the Psalmist said, **“Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me.’”** Psalm 40:7.

And it is speaking of Christ. Now some may not agree with that, but Paul makes it very clear as he quotes this verse in Hebrews 10:7. The Bible, from Genesis through Revelation is all about Jesus!

And, what we will see here with these cities of refuge, they are all about Jesus, our city of Refuge!

JOSHUA 20**VERSES 1-6**

What we see here is that the Lord instructs Joshua to fulfill the words He spoke through Moses in Numbers chapter 35 and establish these cities of refuge.

Now, what were these cities of refuge all about?

If you accidentally or unintentionally killed someone, manslaughter; you could flee to one of these six cities spread throughout the land. Obviously, you would run to the closest one for safety.

Now, why would you need safety, why would you have to flee to one of these cities of refuge if you accidentally killed someone?

Because the avenger of blood would be hot on your trail and this avenger of blood was usually a close relative, more often a brother of the deceased.

And this was a custom to make sure that justice was carried out upon the person who committed this crime, that the death of that family member would be avenged.

But in this case, in the case of manslaughter, they were safe within these cities of refuge.

Now, once you were in this city you would present your case before the judge, usually one of the priests, and if they ruled that it was manslaughter and not murder, you would not be handed over to the avenger of blood, you were safe within the city walls.

But, because life is precious and you did accidentally kill someone, you had to remain in this city until the death of the high priest and then you could go free.

If you left before the high priest died, then the avenger of blood, if he found you, he could kill you and he would be innocent of any crime.

But, if you did murder someone, premeditated murder, there was no safety within these cities of refuge for you. They would turn you over to the avenger of blood and you would be put to death for murder because murder was a capital crime!

We see God institute this long before the Law was ever established with Moses. Back in Genesis 9:6 we are told, **“Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.”**

And folks, God still considers murder a capital crime! In Romans 13:3-4 we are told, **“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”**

In other words, Paul is telling us that the state, the government has the power over life, they do have the right to use the sword of execution for a capital crime, for murder!

Now today we see those who are opposed to capital punishment. But listen to what the Lord says about the land when murder is prevalent, and nothing is done about it.

In Numbers 35, beginning in verse 31 we are told, **“Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. . . . So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel.”** Numbers 35:31, 33-34.

Look at how polluted our land has become! Life is not a gift of God anymore, just some random chance happening, and it is not important. Thus, we can kill millions of unborn children and not think anything of it. Tragic!

But here in Israel was the deterrent to murder. And it was not just one person's statement, this was carried out with the testimony of two or three witnesses. We see this in Deuteronomy 17:6-7, by the mouth of two or three witnesses the person could be found innocent or guilty of murder.

And the whole idea of these cities of refuge was to protect the innocent person from the avenger of blood, of being put to death for what he did, which was just an accident, it was not premeditated.

VERSES 7-9

Here we see that these six cities of refuge were spread throughout the land of Israel. They were located in the north, the middle portion and in the south, on both sides of the Jordan River. Why did they spread these cities of refuge throughout the land?

The reason for this is simple. No person would be more than a day's journey to one of these cities, which would be important if this happened to you.

Not only that but it was the responsibility of the Levites to take care of these cities. In fact, according to Jewish tradition, the roads leading up to these cities were kept clear, well maintained and well-marked with signs reading, "*Refuge! Refuge!*"

We see this in the Scriptures, Deuteronomy 19:3, "**You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.**"

Think about it. If those roads were not maintained and not well marked, these cities of refuge would be meaningless because you couldn't get there, you couldn't find them!

I like the way one writer put it as he wrote, "The glory of God, the purity of His land, and the integrity of His government, had to be duly maintained. If those were touched, there could be no security for anyone."

Now let's look at these six cities of refuge beginning with the three cities on the west side of the Jordan River and then we will look at the three cities on the east side of the Jordan River and you will see how they were spread throughout the land.

And, what you will see is that there is this beautiful picture of Christ that emerges from these cities of refuge!

Paul wrote in Colossians 2:17-18, "**So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.**"

Paul's point is simple. The Tabernacle, the Jewish religious feasts, even some of the stories in the Old Testament, were just a shadow of what was to come, they pointed to Jesus.

So what is the point?

The point, again, is simple. The food, drink, Jewish feast days, new moons, Sabbath days are not binding because they are a shadow and the shadow is gone for the substance is here, Jesus has come!

Think about it. If my wife, Julie's shadow was on the wall and you saw me walk over and hug her shadow, besides thinking I was crazy, it wouldn't make any sense because Julie, her substance, is standing right there and thus, I would rather hug her than her shadow!

The same should be true with our Lord, too often people hold onto a shadow of Him, instead of holding onto Jesus!

These cities of refuge are a picture of Christ, they point to the work that He has done, as you will see. And, as I have said, it is a beautiful picture and an amazing picture that God has for us, but remember, the substance is here, Jesus has come and thus, may we hold onto Jesus instead of the picture or the shadow!

First, let's look at this first city of refuge that is mentioned, Kedesh!

Kedesh was located in the land of Naphtali in Galilee. This was in the north part of the country and the name *Kedesh* means "*Holy of God.*"

Look at where this starts out!

First of all, we see the holiness of God and that is an important place to start! Why do I say that?

Because if our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ had any spot or blemish, He could not have paid the penalty for our own sin because He Himself had sin in His life.

But the Bible clearly shows us that Jesus is without sin!

Let me show you what I mean.

First of all, before He was born listen to what the angel said to Mary in Luke 1:35, "**And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.'**"

The angel speaks of this child who was to be born as "**that Holy One**" and there is only One who is Holy, that there is no darkness in Him at all, and that is God. And here it speaks of the Incarnation, God becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us. He is Holy!

Then, in Hebrews 7:26-28 we are told, **“For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”**

First of all, no priest could compare to Jesus in character.

No priest could be exalted in heaven.

No priest was without sin and thus, he needed to offer sacrifice for himself daily.

And the picture is perfect. You see, the priests were weak, but Jesus is not. He is able to save us, He is sinless, His character is flawless, He has been received up to the right hand of the Father, and thus, Jesus is far superior to any earthly priest!

Now, because Jesus is a perfect High Priest, He was able to offer Himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Peter reminds us of this very thing in I Peter 1:18-21, **“knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”**

Jesus alone is our Great High Priest who has been perfected forever!

Jesus, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world was a perfect sacrifice.

And did you notice that there was no **“blemish”** or acquired sin in His life.

There was no **“spot”** or inherited sin in His life.

Thus, Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:21, **“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

You see, we could never pay for our own sin because we have many blemishes in our life or we have sin in our life.

Not only that, but we also have a big spot in our life or that sin that has been passed down to us through Adam!

If Jesus had a blemish or spot, He could not have been our Redeemer. But He didn't and thus, He paid in full the penalty for our sin.

It is as Isaiah 53:4-6 tells us, **“Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”**

We also see this played out for us in Hebrews 4:15 as Paul tells us, **“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”**

Again, that is so important for us to understand, that Jesus was without sin, any sin!

Also, John tells us in I John 3:5, **“And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.”**

The sinless Christ's death on the cross at Calvary paid the full penalty for the sin of all, but you must appropriate that free gift into your life by faith in Jesus.

Thus, what was lost at the fall was given back at the cross.

Just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam), God was able to redeem the world through one man - the sinless Jesus Christ.

And, remember what Paul said in II Corinthians 5:21, "**For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**"

God's righteousness has been given to us through the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. We see this played out for us in I Corinthians 1:30 where Paul writes, "**But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God-and righteousness, sanctification and redemption.**"

What a beautiful picture that we have here for we are holy in Christ!

Never forget that – ***JESUS IS THE HOLY ONE!***

Next we move to Shechem, located in the land of Ephraim, which was in the middle part of the land.

The name **Shechem** means "*shoulders.*"

Once again, I find that very interesting. What do I mean by that?

First of all, remember the story of Atlas? He held up the earth upon his shoulders, or so the story goes.

Again, that is a story, it is not real, but there is One who does hold the earth upon His shoulders, and that is Jesus!

How do I know that? Because of what we are told in Isaiah 9:6, "**For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulders.**"

Think about that one for a minute. In Isaiah 53:4 we are told, **“Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.”**

And my point is this. All the sins of this world, all our sins Jesus bore on that cross of Calvary for us. And because of what He has done, as Paul said in Hebrews 7:25, **“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”**

Again, a beautiful picture of our Lord!

The Holy One who bore our sins upon His Shoulders on the cross of Calvary has saved us to the uttermost!

From there, the next city of refuge was Hebron, located in the mountains of Judah. And Hebron was in the south part of the land.

The name *Hebron* means ***“fellowship.”***

Think about this one for a minute.

Sin has separated man from God. The Holy One has come and paid in full the penalty for our sins, bearing them upon His shoulders and thus, because of this finished work of Christ we can have fellowship with God once again.

Our sin which separated us from God has been paid for by Jesus!

Listen to what we are told in I Peter 3:18, **“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.”**

Jesus suffered once and for all for our sins. He paid them in full! But why? The just One, Jesus; became sin for the sinner and the reason is this, **“that He might bring us to God.”** I love that because the Bible says sin separated me from God, but Jesus came to restore that fellowship once again! Praise the Lord!

John tells us **“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.”** I John 1:3.

And again, that is all based in Christ for us, we have fellowship with God the Father through Jesus Christ!

These three cities of refuge were on the west side of the Jordan River, in the Promise Land, the land of Canaan.

Now we will look at the three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan River, outside the Promise Land. This is the area where Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh lived.

First of all, there is Bezer. And Bezer was located in the area of Reuben, in the south.

Bezer means, ***“fortified one”*** or ***“stronghold.”*** We might think of a Rock or, in this case, the Rock, Jesus Christ!

Think about this one for a minute.

Outside of Christ there is danger all around us and there is no place to run to, no place to hide. We are on our own and that is not good.

But in Christ, yes, there is danger all around us, just like for the unsaved, but we have a place to run to, we have a place to hide, Jesus Christ – ***THE ROCK!***

We are told in Nahum 1:7 of this very thing, **“The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.”**

And in Proverbs 18:10 we read, **“The name of the LORD is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and they are safe.”**

Also, in Psalm 61:3 we are told, **“For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy.”**

In this Psalm David is overwhelmed; he is crying out to God and notice where he gets his encouragement in the present situation that he is facing.

David looks back on God’s past help to strengthen him in the present situation that he finds himself in.

Where do I see that?

David says, **“For You have been a shelter for me.”** Notice, it speaks of the past and how God has been a shelter for him in the past and thus, it gives him the confidence in the present situation that he is in!

And because of that David will take safety under the wings of God.

Again, why is that so important for us to understand?

Because the only way for the enemy to get at David was through God. Remember what John said, **“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”** I John 4:4.

We need to have that perspective of God and His work in our lives.

We need to remember what God has done in the past to encourage us in the present situations we are facing!

And here’s the thing, if God is for us, and He is; then there is no one who can truly be victorious against us!

Folks, only in Christ do we have this safety! It is as Isaiah 26:4 says, and this is from the Amplified Bible, where we are told, **“So trust in the Lord (commit yourself to Him, lean on Him, hope confidently in Him) forever; for the Lord God is an everlasting Rock [the Rock of Ages].”**

Never forget that, He is our strong tower we can run to. He is our Rock and as we rest our lives upon Him, we will find the safety and stability we need!

The next place we will look at is Ramoth. And Ramoth was located in the area of Gad, in the middle part of the land.

The name *Ramoth* means *“exaltation.”*

Again, this speaks of Jesus as Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:9-11, where he wrote, **“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

We are to lift up and praise the name of the Lord and as we humble ourselves before Him, He will lift us up!

And lastly, there was a city of refuge in the land of Golan. And Golan was located in the area of Manasseh, in the north part of the land.

Golan means, *“joy.”*

Remember when the angel's announced the birth of the Messiah, of Jesus and we are told in Luke 2:10-14, **"Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'"**

Not only is Jesus the One who is filled with pure joy, but at His birth, there was **"great joy"** because the Savior of the world was born. And now that this joy has come into the world, we too have that great joy in our lives and that never changes because He never changes.

Paul tells us in Romans 5:1, **"And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."**

We should rejoice in the Lord for all He has done for us and most importantly, He has reconciled us back to God the Father!

As we have seen, these cities of refuge are a picture of Christ, whom we can run to and as long as we enter in through Him and remain in Him, we are safe from the judgment.

Psalms 46:1 puts it this way, **"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."**

We see that over 15 times in the Psalms that God is our refuge, and what a comfort that should be to us!

Also, in Hebrews 6:18 we are told, **"that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."**

I like the way that The Amplified Bible puts this verse. We are told, **“This was so that, by two unchangeable things [His promise and His oath] in which it is impossible for God ever to prove false or deceive us, we who have fled [to Him] for refuge might have mighty indwelling strength and strong encouragement to grasp and hold fast the hope appointed for us and set before [us].”**

We can run to Him and take refuge in our strong tower; we can take refuge in the shadow of His wings!

Now, this avenger of blood or GOEL in the Hebrew is literally the redeemer. That is one who buys back at the appointed price what has fallen into another’s hands. You see, our sins have separated us from God, and thus our lives are in the hands of the enemy. But Christ has paid the penalty for our sin and thus as we come to Him, we have safety from the judgment that comes upon the sinner.

You see, God never says that He wants to reform the sinner. You won’t find that anywhere in the Bible.

But what you will find is that He wants us to be transformed into His image through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is as Paul said in Galatians 2:20, **“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”**

And in Romans 12:2 Paul says, **“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”**

Listen to what David Guzik said regarding the similarity between these cities of refuge and our refuge in Christ. He wrote,

Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are within easy reach of the needy person; they were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.

Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are open to all, not just the Israelite; no one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need.

Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the one in need would live; you didn't come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around.

Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the only alternative for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.

Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection only within their boundaries, to go outside means death.

With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the death of the High Priest.

- David Guzik

But there is one major distinction between these cities of refuge and our refuge in Jesus.

These cities of refuge only helped the innocent.

That won't help us because we are all guilty before God. Paul put it like this in Romans 3:23, "**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**"

I think that is very clear. We are all guilty before God, our sin has separated us from God and there is no hope in what we can do to rectify that problem. God demands perfection and we fall far short of that!

Now here is the wonderful news.

Jesus, our city of refuge, He accepts all who come to Him, even the guilty and folks, like I have said, we are all guilty!

It is as the songwriter George Keith said, “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What more can He say than to you He hath said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled!”

Jesus Christ is our refuge, for which we can flee to and escape His judgment that is coming!

Let me share this with you and you will see our security in Christ, our city of refuge, you might say.

We are told,

The son of a chieftain of the Macgregors was killed in a scuffle at an inn on the moors of Glenorchy, by a young gentleman named Lamont.

The manslayer mounted his horse and fled, and though sharply pursued, in the darkness of the night succeeded in reaching a house. It happened to be the house of Macgregor himself.

“Save my life!” cried Lament to the chieftain, “men are after me to take it away.”

“Whoever you are,” replied Macgregor, “while you are under my roof you are safe.”

Very soon the pursuers arrived, and thundered at the gate. “Has a stranger just entered your house?”

“He has; and what may be your business with him?”

“The man has killed your son! Give him up to our vengeance!”

The terrible news filled the house with lamentation; but the chief with streaming tears said, “No; you cannot have the youth, for he has Macgregor's word for his safety, and as God lives, while he is in my house he shall stay secure.”

This story has been told for centuries to illustrate Highland honour.

What shall we say of the older story, that illustrates Divine love? To Jew and Gentile, high and low, rich and poor, friend and enemy, the grace of Christ is free.

- The Biblical Illustrator

What a beautiful picture that is for us regarding Jesus Christ and how we are secure in Him.

Also, keep in mind that these cities of refuge were not just for the Jews but also for the stranger, the Gentile you might say.

They were there for all who needed refuge, they could enter in, no one was restricted, no one was turned away, not even Green Bay Packer fans!

Now here's the thing. The door of salvation is open to both Jews and Gentiles and access is made through Jesus Christ.

Paul, in Romans 1:16-17 makes this point about both Jew and Gentile being saved by the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Gospel message.

He wrote, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”**

Not only that, but God's desire is for all to be saved and not face His judgment.

In II Peter 3:9-10 we are told, **“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”**

But apart from Christ you will not enter in, you will die in your sins and face His judgment!

But make no mistake about it; the door of salvation is open to all, not just to the Jews. You don't have to fear that you will be turned away, left out because if you enter by the Door, Jesus Christ, He will not turn you away. Salvation is yours!

And let me also share this, it is important for us to understand.

You did not come to these cities of refuge to check out the shops they had, what kind of work was there, what kind of homes they had. You did not come to these cities of refuge just to look around!

You came to these cities of refuge to live, to find protection, a place of refuge!

Too often today people say things like, ***“I will try Jesus.”*** I am not even sure what that means completely but I do know it is not good.

What they are basically saying is that, ***“I will try Jesus as long as I get what I want. I will stick with Him as long as things go the way I want them to go. As long as I am happy, this Jesus will be okay! If it doesn't work out, well, I will try something else!”***

If that is the mentality you have, you are in trouble.

You don't "*try Jesus*" you receive Him into your life by faith to be Lord and Savior of your life. You allow Him to come into your life just as Jesus said in Revelation 3:20, "**Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.**"

Folks, we are all in need of Jesus and we need Him in our lives. He needs to be on the throne of our hearts to rule and reign in our lives. We don't just "*try Jesus*" we receive Him by faith!

Look at what we have seen this morning in regard to our city of refuge, Jesus Christ.

KEDESH – HOLINESS

SHECHEM – SHOULDER

HEBRON – FELLOWSHIP

BEZER – STRONGHOLD

RAMOTH – EXHALTATION

GOLAN – JOY

The Holy One of God, Jesus Christ had the sins of the world placed upon His shoulders, to pay in full the penalty for our sins so that we can once again have fellowship with the Father. He is our Stronghold or Rock that we can run to, a strong tower to protect us from the enemy and He has been exalted once again to the right hand of the Father. And that joy of the Lord has filled our hearts and lives, what a great God we have, our city of refuge!

As I close this morning, I hope you have seen that our refuge, our hope, our shelter is only found in Jesus, the one who died for our sins as this story illustrates for us.

We are told:

According to the Chicago Tribune, on June 22, 1997, parachute instructor Michael Costello, forty-two, of Mt. Dora, Florida, jumped out of an airplane at 12,000 feet altitude with a novice skydiver named Gareth Griffith, age twenty-one.

The novice would soon discover just how good his instructor was, for when the novice pulled his ripcord, his parachute failed. Plummeting toward the ground, he faced certain death.

But then the instructor did an amazing thing. Just before hitting the ground, the instructor rolled over so that he would hit the ground first and the novice would land on top of him. The instructor was killed instantly. The novice fractured his spine in the fall, but he was not paralyzed.

One man takes the place of another, takes the brunt for another. One substitutes himself to die so another may live. So it was at the cross, when Jesus died for our sins so that we might live forever.

- Craig Brian Larson, *Choice Contemporary Stories & Illustrations For Preachers, Teachers, & Writers*, p. 57

Folks, what a wonderful Savior we have. Wherever you are at this morning, may you find that rest, that refuge, that shelter in the arms of our loving Savior Jesus Christ!

Jesus is our City of Refuge!

