

## **A Tale of Two Cities**

Joshua 20:1-21:3

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### TRANSCRIPT:

Greetings from your brothers and sisters in Christ at Emanuel Baptist Church there in Glenwood. God has been very gracious and good to us.

And unlike you down here who are still very young as a church, Emanuel has had the privilege of being in the area where we are for over 50 years. I haven't been there for 50 years, obviously, but I've had the privilege of serving on staff there for about nine years. And we've been blessed by a season of growth in the life of our church. And we do pray for you. And we often hear updates about how the Lord is blessing you down here. So just to let you know that you are in our minds and on our hearts. We love your pastor, Brother Josh. And it's been such a privilege to get to know him over the last couple of years. And I do really appreciate the invitation.

My family is with me here today, my wife Janelle, my five daughters. And I brought my parents along as well, just as my dad said, just to keep me honest, apparently. But it is a joy to be with you.

I do invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the passage that was read, Joshua chapters 20 and 21. Thank you for the reading of God's Word. And perhaps as the reading was happening, maybe you thought maybe this is a supplementary passage or something. But no, this is the text that we're going to be looking at this evening.

And I know it's a little bit tricky as you kind of parachute into a church and kind of jump into the middle of whatever the Lord is doing here in terms of the passages or the text that you're going through. Not only that, we're kind of parachuting right into the end of an Old Testament narrative book. But I hope and pray this text has been on my mind for the last couple of weeks. And it's been a joy to prepare this. And Lord willing, it'll be a blessing to you.

So let's pray and entrust our time to the Lord. And Father, we thank you for our time together. We thank you so much for this church, this body

of believers, and the witness and testimony that it is here in southwestern Sydney. We thank you, Lord, for the work of the gospel that is so evident in the lives of Your people. And we thank you, Lord, for the privilege it is now to open the scriptures and to read of Your great wisdom and Your purpose and plan for Your people in an Old Testament picture form. And so, Lord, I pray that we would walk away from this place knowing that our one true refuge, the one place that we go for eternal life, for safety from our sin, and from the avenger of blood, is the Lord Jesus. And we commit these things to You in Jesus' name. Amen.

I don't know about you, but I've often been interested in history and in the formation of nations. It's fascinating when you look at world history and even in many ways our own history, and look at the various problems and struggles and structures and institutions that are built into a society. And there's the reason for all of those institutions. Again, when you look at even our own nation and its founding, it was founded on the backs of convicts and with a very sort of dubious sort of beginning. But you look at the struggle that those early settlers and those early migrants who had to kind of come and build and form and work to build a nation, not from scratch necessarily because we were importing so much of our institutions from the United Kingdom. But nevertheless, it's always fascinating to watch nations in their beginning and how they start.

Our passage this morning is a passage which details kind of the ending of an era of the formation or the beginnings of the nation of Israel. Now again, I know we're parachuting into a passage here in Joshua which is the end of the book of Joshua. But if we're familiar at least with our history in our Old Testament, we know that the people of Israel had come out of Egypt, out of slavery, wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Moses had passed on. The mantle's passed to Joshua who is the one who is charged with the task of taking the people into the Promised Land, expelling the people that God had allowed to be there for 400 years and had made an absolute travesty of the place. And God was driving them out by using the people of Israel to do so and establishing them in the land.

The last couple of chapters, the previous few chapters in Joshua, what was taking place is that after the enemies of Israel had for the most part, not entirely but for the most part, had been driven out, God had been giving allotments to the 12 tribes of their place in the Promised Land. Some were on the east side of the River Jordan, a few were on the west side. Some were on the east side of the River Jordan. And God was giving each tribe their allotment of land. And this is where they were to settle. This is where they were to build a society. This is where they were to come under the law of God. The tabernacle was established and placed in the city of Shiloh, which is where we find some of the events taking place and the

conversations taking place here. And the end of all of this culminates in the establishment of two kinds of cities in the land.

And so the title of my message this morning is "A Tale of Two Cities." Now I must confess, I have never actually read the novel by Charles Dickens, "A Tale of Two Cities." But the title sounded great, and we're talking about two cities. So my apologies to Dickens for borrowing his title, but I couldn't have thought of anything better.

So as Israel is settling in their new home, thankfully, they also had with them an instruction manual on how they were to live and interact with one another in the Promised Land. And that was, of course, the law of God given to them on Mount Sinai by Moses, which consisted of the moral law, those Ten Commandments. How they were to relate to God and how they would relate to one another. They also were given the civil law. And that was how mainly the second part of the moral law was to be enacted amongst one another. How they were to love their neighbor. How they were to deal with matters of conflict. How they were to deal with matters of hygiene. How they were to deal with matters of justice. And all of these things that God had given to them. And then, of course, God gave to them the ceremonial law which consisted of all the sacrifices, the priesthood, all of the means through which God was picturing and providing atonement for their sin. Because it was inevitable that they would break the moral law of God and that they would break the civil law of God. And so the ceremonial law was put in there in order to provide that picture of the once-for-all atonement that was going to come for them in the Messiah, but to demonstrate and to reiterate in their minds again and again that when sin has been committed, atonement must be made for their sin.

And so as a nation, they were miles ahead of the people around them. As a matter of fact, the law of God was so full of wisdom and so full of God's righteousness that the plan was for Israel to be a light to the nations. Deuteronomy 4:7-8, God had told them that when they went into their land, if they obeyed the law that God had given to them, that they would serve as a beacon, as a light to the nations that were around them. Deuteronomy 4:7 says, "For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I have set before you this day?" The law of God, and when you read the Old Testament, you see the wisdom of God on such display, the glory of God, the righteousness of God, the holiness of God, the mercy of God, the love of God, the grace of God in all of these aspects of the three parts of the law that God had given to them.

And the point was that if they stayed in the land and followed these com-

mandments and the law, that the nations would go, "Who in the world is their God? Who is so wise and so righteous and so loving and so merciful? We want to know their God." Now we know how the story goes, don't we? They did not do a very good job at all because, of course, they disobeyed the law. This is the lack of strength of the Old Covenant. They disobeyed the law of God. They did not reflect the glory of God, and God had to send them into exile. But nevertheless, we are jumping into this aspect where God is establishing two very important types of cities that were going to serve to bless the people of Israel, but also they were given as a means to point them and point us to something far greater that is going to come.

Now maybe you're like me. Sometimes you read the Old Testament, you read some of these laws, you read some of these precepts, and you think, "Well, what does this have to do with me? Is this just useless information? Because now we're in the New Covenant. We're not under the Old Covenant. We don't abide under all of these Old Covenant laws anymore. Christ has abolished, or Christ has fulfilled, excuse me, the law of God. And so we don't necessarily have to abide under these things." Well, first of all, I want us to appreciate that these cities were very important to them. And I hope by the end of this message, you'll see that they also should mean something to us.

When we read the Old Testament law, particularly those aspects which come under the heading of the civil law, all those tedious instructions that God gave to them, "In this situation, you do this. In this situation, you do that. In that situation, you do this. And this is how you handle this dispute. And this is how you deal with this problem." It's easy to read those through the lens of our 21st-century world, in a world that has been heavily influenced already by Christianity, and to read those and think, "Wow, this is very primitive, and this is very inane. We don't really need to learn anything from this." But I want to encourage us that when we read these portions of Scripture, we need to do so with two different backdrops in our mind. First of all, we need to understand these things through the backdrop of the character and the nature of God. That the reason why God gave all these specific instructions is because they are a revelation of His character and to show His people how they are to live, to reveal the character of God. They reveal His righteousness. They reveal that God is a God of justice and impartiality. They reveal that our God is a God who loves mercy, that He is not a God of just pure vengeance like the gods of the ancient world. He is not a God who is fickle. He is not a God who could be swayed or bribed or manipulated or influenced by anything. But He is a God of righteousness.

We also too need to analyze these texts against the backdrop of all the nations that were surrounding them at that time. You see, Israel stood

out, and they were supposed to stand out. And as they administered God's law and as they lived under God's law, it was to be a testimony to the nations around them, nations that were ruled by tyrants, nations that were ruled by people who claimed to be gods themselves, who changed laws on a whim, who made decisions based upon personal preference or ego or power or whatever it is. Nations that were cruel, excuse me, and harsh and had no sense of consistent justice and righteousness.

And when you understand the backdrop of which God is establishing the nation of Israel, and you understand how unique they were as a people, as a nation, you can appreciate more and more God's wisdom. Now again, perhaps you're wondering, "OK, so we've read about in our text two different types of cities. One, the cities of refuge that God was going to set up. Two, the cities of the Levites that were to be spread throughout the land. What in the world does this have for us today? Why would we spend our time this morning learning about two ancient cities that no longer are really part of our society?" Well, Romans chapter 15 verse 4 reminds us that whatever was written in earlier times, the Old Testament, was written for our instruction, so that we, through the perseverance and the encouragement of the scriptures, might have hope. So when you go to the Old Testament, remember Romans 15 verse 4. There's something in here that is going to encourage me that we may have hope.

By the end of my sermon this morning, I hope that we will see two very important things. I hope first of all that we will see that in these texts, we see the wisdom, the justice, and the mercy of God's law as a foundation for human progress and flourishing. Even though, like I said, we are no longer under the old covenant system, and I'm not suggesting that we should go to Parliament and say, "Hey, we need to build some cities of refuge and cities of Levites." I'm not saying we should go to our local member and say, "I have an idea." But what we are going to see is that when you take the principles that God establishes, you can see His wisdom for a flourishing society.

But most importantly, I want us to see that God has embedded in His law a continual and constant picture of the gospel. So there are hope and is found not in the shadows of what He has made but in the substance which, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. So let's get started.

Now I'm going to do something. I'm going to actually change up my notes. This is a last-minute decision to do so, which is always dangerous. But I think that we need to do this. Rather than looking at chapter 21, I'm going to look at chapter 21, which is the cities of the Levites, the cities of the Levites. Now our brother read verses 1 to 3. I'm not going to read the rest of the chapter because it's a lot of cities and a lot of names that I can't pronounce. And we are just going to, you're just going to have to take my

word for it, OK, as we go through this chapter and look at the purpose of the cities of the Levites.

God had instructed Moses back in Numbers chapter 35 that when they came into the land, that the people were to set up 48 cities, or they were to designate 48 cities that were to be given to the tribe of Levi as part of their inheritance. All the other 11 tribes got an allotment of land. Manasseh got their portion. Gad got their portion. Dan got their portion, et cetera. But Levi was not given a particular piece of land. Why? Because they were the priestly tribe. Their role in the land was to be the priests before the Lord. And they were to be scattered throughout the land. God had instructed them that over the 12 tribes, that 48 cities were to be designated as cities of Levites. The Lord was considered their inheritance. Their role was to administer sacrifices, to administer the tabernacle and soon to be the temple duties. And they acted as teachers and instructors of the law.

So you can imagine, they've got 12 tribes and scattered very sort of within reach of most of the people in the land. There's 48 cities that are designated. And because the Levites, not only do they have a work to perform in the tabernacle, but they also need a place to live. And they need to have pasture land. And they need to have a means to support themselves. And so part of the inheritance that God gave to the tribes was to be given over to the Levites as a place for them to live. And they were to live amongst the people, ministering spiritual things to the people that they lived amongst as they also ministered before the Lord in the tabernacle.

Deuteronomy 33 verse 10 tells the priests, the Levites, that they shall teach Jacob your judgments and Israel your law. They shall put incense before you and a whole burnt sacrifice on your altar. So you can see the two roles of the priests. They were to be teachers, ministers. And they were also to be priests before the Lord to take your sacrifice. So if you live in the tribe of Gad, you went to a city of the Levites, and you gave them your sacrifice. And the priest took that down to the tabernacle. And he would sacrifice and offer that before the Lord on your behalf. He was a minister in that sense. He served the people in spiritual form. And they rewarded, or they gave back to them, a bit of their physical needs as well.

Numbers 35 again states that they were to be given this inheritance. They were to have a piece of land allotted to them so that they could live. Now there's a very important principle that I think is in play here, which actually does carry over to the New Testament. God has told the people of Israel that they were not to muzzle the ox. They were not to, in other words, if something is serving you, that you are to feed it, you are to support it because it's doing you a service. That same principle is brought over into the New Testament when talking about the role of those who are ministering

to your spiritual needs. In 2 Timothy, or 1 Timothy chapter 5, we are reminded that those who serve you spiritually, you are to support physically so that they can give themselves over to the ministry of the Word and to prayer. So in other words, the ox that is serving you, that guy is to be supported physically. He is to be supported, and he didn't ask me to preach this, but it's just part of the text, is that as he ministers to you, or as other elders minister to you spiritual things, that it is your responsibility to give of your physical needs so that he can give himself over to the ministry of the Word.

Having the Levites, there's a beautiful principle also here at play, is that having the Levites spread throughout the land meant that every single person in Israel had access to someone or some people who could teach them the Word of God and who could minister to them. They were not far from those who could minister spiritual things to them, and people would be blessed by their ministry, both in the offering of sacrifices and in the administration of the law. They were never far away from those who could minister to them.

I think this is a really important principle for the people of God. Don't be too far away from those who can minister to you the spiritual things of God's Word. If you ever move from this place, and I remember this advice was given to us when we moved to Australia some almost 30 years ago now, that the advice was that when you move, find your church first. Find the people of God first. Your job, your school, whatever it is, your sporting interests or whatever it is, come second, third, fourth, and fifth compared to finding the people of God who can minister to you spiritual things. I often tell people if they're moving away from our church, you know, are you going to a place where there is a good church that you can be a part of? If not, it doesn't matter how great your career prospects are. It doesn't matter how wonderful the weather is, wherever you're going, don't move there because the priority is your spiritual life.

Having these priests scattered through the land was a constant reminder that the spiritual transcends the physical. Life was to be centered around worship, not pleasure, not possessions. And this was just part of life for the nation of Israel. Order our lives around worship.

Now their portion of land was given by the tribes. We see that in verse 3 of chapter 21. So the sons of Israel gave the Levites from their inheritance these cities with their pasture lands according to the commandment of the Lord. Numbers 35 gives the exact details of how this was to be allotted. But you notice also that the division was spread. So these cities were spread throughout all the land. Why? Not only so people would have access to the word and to those who would minister to them spiritually,

but it was also proportionately throughout the nation. In other words, one tribe was not solely responsible for supporting the ministry of the Levites. It was shared amongst the people evenly and equally.

Now again, one cannot but draw parallel to the New Testament principle of giving to support the work of the Lord. God in the Old Testament established the concept of a tithe. That is, that everybody was to give a tenth or a tenth of their inheritance or of their earnings to the work of the Lord. And that was a, and it's not an amount, it's an even percentage across the board. So if you were poor, that meant a tenth of that would be less than someone who was wealthy who gave a tenth of their inheritance. But nevertheless, it was even across the board.

Now again, we are not called necessarily, and I mean there's different ideas or different concepts around New Testament giving around whether the tithe carries over. I think it's a good principle that should be applied. But nevertheless, the principle is that the support of God's work should be done evenly across God's people. Now some people are able to give more because of their allotment that God has given to them. Some people give less. But the point is that the support of God's work should not fall on the hands and the shoulders of a select few, but that everybody is involved in support of the Lord's work.

There's a wonderful also principle here as you see these cities that are established in the Levites, is that the presence of the Levites among every tribe was a symbol to all the people that everyone in Israel had access to God, everyone. Because every tribe had cities of Levites that were allotted to them, that meant that every single tribe, the smaller ones and the bigger ones, the more prominent ones and the less prominent ones, but it didn't matter where you lived, you had access to someone who could sacrifice on your behalf. It was a reminder also again of their continual need of the intercessory ministry before God. The priest's work, as we know, was never done. There's nowhere to sit in the tabernacle. There was nowhere to sit in the temple. It was a life of continual sacrifices again and again and again as people were reminded over and over and over again of the need for the atonement of their sins.

And so we see that first of all, we have these cities of Levites that God had graciously established. Even the priesthood was a gift that God had given to His people. But second of all, there's a second city that we see in this whole text, and that is, of course, back in chapter 20, the cities of refuge.

Now why did I jump to 21 rather than 20? Well, the reason was is because you have 48 cities of Levites. Now what's interesting is that out of



those 48 cities, six of them, which were also cities of the Levites, were also designated as cities of refuge. Three on the west, sorry, three on the west and three on the east. And these cities served a different purpose.

Now again, these were not separate cities. These were Levitical cities that were also designated as what we call, or what the Bible calls, cities of refuge. Now what's the purpose of a city of refuge? Well, in the instance where a situation takes place that someone accidentally or unintentionally commits murder, not commits murder, but kills someone without premeditation or without laying in wait, as some translations put it, in the event of an accidental killing, the Bible calls this person a manslayer, which of course we have the word manslaughter for this instance, would flee to a city of refuge in order to escape what the Bible calls is the avenger of blood.

Now usually this would have been a relative or someone close to the person who had died who would be seeking revenge or vengeance or justice for the death of their loved one or the death of their family member. And of course, again, we have to put this against the backdrop of the ancient world where this would most often take place, that when even if there was an accidental killing, usually what that meant is there was some degree of harsh revenge that would go upon a person, but not just a person, sometimes an entire family or an entire tribe.

And again, if you ever travel or have the opportunity to read of missionary stories where we're talking about very primitive people or even people who have not been touched by the gospel, you see this kind of tribal justice taking place. So when the Bible talks about justice being an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, what God is establishing there is not so much that you have to enact exact vengeance upon people for that, but what he's saying is that in other words, if someone plucks out your eye, you're not allowed to chop off their head. You can't go over the top because that's how things escalate, isn't it? Someone does something, even by accident, that brings a revenge by this family upon this family. And then that escalates more and more. And before you know it, you have all-out civil war.

And so God establishes these cities of refuge as a place for the manslayer who would flee to in order to be examined and tried before a judge and before a jury, basically to see whether or not the killing was either accidental or intentional. An example would be as stated in Deuteronomy chapter 19, if you're out chopping wood and you swing your axe and the axe head flies off the handle and hits your friend or whoever is working with you and kills them, the one who swung the axe, in order to escape vengeance from a family member, would flee to the city of refuge and seek safety.

It provided a place of safety from the avenger of blood. And again, Numbers

chapter 35 gives very specific instructions. And again, think about how revolutionary this is against the backdrop of the ancient world, that Numbers 35 gives a very clear instructions on what was to take place. There was a very specific process. So if this is you and something happens and you accidentally do something which causes serious harm or death to another person, and you know that the family is coming after you, you hightail it to the city of refuge. The accused comes to the city of refuge and he makes his case before the city. And the judge or the priest at the gate of the city determines whether or not the person should be let in, and he is brought into the city. And the avenger of blood is not allowed to come in before a trial has taken place. He is brought before a congregation. In verses 12 and 30 in Numbers chapter 35, he is brought before a congregation or what we would call a jury. And they hear the testimony of the event. Verses 31 to 33 in Numbers 35 say very clearly that no bribery or payment was allowed, which would, of course, thwart justice. And the congregation or that group would decide on whether or not what took place, what degree of killing this was.

They would determine intention. Was there any intent? Was there any thought that went before this? Was this premeditated? And they would determine the degree of lethality of what took place. Now if the accused was to be found guilty of murder, then the avenger of blood was actually commanded and allowed to carry out an execution, capital punishment. If the accused is found guilty of manslaughter, in other words, this was an accident, a tragic event that took place, what was he to do? He was to stay in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. So he wasn't allowed to just go. He wasn't free to just go back to his life. But he actually was in many ways, I guess, punished because there was still a death that took place until the high priest died.

Now you kind of hope the high priest is old because this could be a couple of months. This could be a year. This could be a decade before the high priest died and the accused was allowed to go home. What principle is God teaching His people through these cities of refuge? And what principle is He teaching us? First of all, He's preaching to us, He's teaching us the principle of the sanctity of life. The first of the Ten Commandments, sorry, the first of those second set of the Ten Commandments, those that relate to our love of neighbor, the first one is "Thou shall not kill." The foundation for any just society is that it takes the loss of life, which is the removal of an image bearer of God on this earth, it takes it very seriously, whether it's by accident or by intent.

Genesis 9 verse 6 says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." So the execution of those who take life intentionally, as determined by thorough investigation,

and you can see the whole process again, which is where honestly we get our whole concept of due process and trial by jury. I mean, that comes by revelation of God, not by the imagination of men. So if you go through that process by thorough investigation and you determine that someone has executed someone intentionally, this is the building block of a just society. It teaches people, it informs the people that life is sacred.

And when it is taken, even by accident, there is a payment that is to be made. God is also teaching the people the sanctity of justice. And looking at this through the backdrop of the character of the God and the condition of humanity, it is in human nature not to be just but to seek revenge, to seek obliteration, to seek all sorts of things which cause societies to crumble and to fall. But look at the principles that God puts in here. First of all, there's the principle of the presumption of innocence, that the man is innocent until proven guilty. That is not just allowed to be taken into the hands of the avenger of blood. The ministry of the Levites was to determine whether or not something had actually taken place which was criminal. There's due process. The accused was tried by a jury. There was witness testimony. There was a distinguishment between a sin or a mistake and a crime.

There's impartiality. OK, this was to be done. It's interesting that you see in Numbers 35 that the city of refuge was not just for the Israelite, but it was also set up for the sojourner and the alien and the stranger in the land. In other words, you were more safe in the land of Israel as a sojourner than you were in any other nation that surrounded them. There's a concept of a punishment fitting the crime. Manslaughter, if this was manslaughter, the person lives in the city until the death of the high priest. So this system was kind of part safe house and part halfway house, if you know what I mean. Murder, of course, was punishable by death. The one offended dispelled the punishment. Life was required for life. In God's law, there was mercy for those mistakes. In the ancient world, there was no mercy.

Now again, in a fallen world, you say, "Well, why is God being so tedious?" Well, remember, in a fallen world, mankind, who is not omniscient, who doesn't know the thoughts and intents of every human heart, has to have certain processes in order to see that justice is done and justice is seen to be done. Because when the innocent are killed, it pollutes the land. And when the guilty are allowed to go free, it also pollutes the land.

So the cities of refuge are a visible reminder of the preciousness of life to God, the importance of justice, and the price that had to be paid when death occurred. Because even the manslayer was not allowed to go free until the death of his high priest. And you say, "What does this all have to do with me?" Well, I hope that maybe by now, you can kind of get an idea

of where we're going. Because God reveals Himself through His creation, through His word, through His people, to give us instructions and to point us to something that is greater.

Because when you think about it, these six cities of refuge, which were also cities of the Levites, were a visible picture of both two aspects of God's character. The cities of refuge, which was a place where God's justice was being carried out. God is a just God. Sin has to be dealt with accordingly. The priests were primarily about sacrificing on the behalf of His people so that the mercy of God could be given to His people. And these two were in one city, six cities that were spread throughout Israel, all of them within one day's journey of everybody who lived in the land. So everybody could get to a place of justice and mercy.

And I hope we can see that these two cities, although providing a great degree of order and blessing for Israel, are actually pointing them and pointing us to a greater fulfillment, which is not a city, but it is a person. The person in which God's justice and God's mercy come together in perfect unity. In God's design and plan for His people, He's constantly putting all of these signposts in every aspect of everything that He commanded them to do, pointing them to something that was greater. These were places. These cities of refuge were a place where the sinner, where the guilty person, would run to in order to find safety in both the justice and the mercy of God. They were a place where they would escape the avenger of blood. They would run for their life, banging on the door to let them in so that they could experience safety from the one who was coming from their lives.

Now we don't often tend to think of God's justice as a place of refuge, but there is an immense security, an immense blessing in knowing that God will do and always does that which is right. Psalm 33 verse 5 says that God loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of the loving kindness of Yahweh. You see that God's justice and loving kindness are put together there. Psalm 89 verse 14, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne. Loving kindness, which is His mercy, and truth go before You." There you have justice and mercy coming together again. Oh, how different is Yahweh from all the other gods of this world. He is the judge of all the world who will always do right. He will not be bribed. He will not be bartered or bent by your emotion. You cannot bribe God. You cannot come to God and change your story or try to win one over against Him or try to sort of plead your case in a way that you think will target His emotion. No, He is a just and a righteous God, but He is a God who is full of mercy.

He is a God who loves mercy. God's mercy is His loving kindness towards those who are guilty, to those who seek refuge from the avenger of blood. God's mercy is His loving kindness towards those who are guilty, to those

who seek refuge from the avenger of blood. Because the avenger of blood is coming for all of us. There is a debt that we owe. There is a penalty that we deserve to pay. And if you think about it, if an "innocent" man, quote-unquote innocent man, had to flee to safety from the avenger of blood, how much more does the guilty need refuge from the avenger of blood? But sin, as we know, was never to be unpunished. Bloodshed was never to go unnoticed.

What took place in that city of refuge? The person stayed, and he waited until someone died, the high priest. And when the high priest died, and the man was allowed, or the woman was allowed to go free, it was a beautiful picture that the high priest dies in the stead of even the manslayer. He took his place. He died in his stead. You see, we must run to the only place that we can find refuge and safety from the avenger of blood. We must run to God through Jesus Christ, our great high priest, who has died on our behalf and paid the once for all sacrifice for sin, who provides all salvation to all who come in humble and simple faith, seeking mercy and forgiveness.

Can you just picture what it would be like for that person who had accidentally killed someone, and they know that their life is in danger? What do they do? They drop everything. And they run as fast as they can to the only place that they can find safety. And they pound on the door of the city, "Let me in! Please, let me in! I don't care if I have to stay here for 10 years. I don't have to care if I stay here for 20 years. But let me in because the avenger of blood is coming for me." That's how most come to Christ. You come to Christ, you drop everything. You leave everything. You put it all behind, and you run to the one who can save your soul. And even if it costs you everything, the price, the cost that it is to follow Christ, to find safety and refuge in Christ, is nothing compared to what is coming for you if the avenger of blood comes and finds you.

Look at the conclusion of chapter 21. At the end of chapter 21, this is a conclusion of the whole matter, verse 43: "So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the Lord gave them rest on every side according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not one of their enemies stood before them. The Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the Lord had promised to the house of Israel failed. All came to pass." There's a common theme. I don't have time to go into it. That one of the promises of Israel when they came into the land is that they would have rest, peace, safety under the care and watch and protection of their father, the one who would provide them refuge. Not one promise failed. That is the promise that He gives to us today. When you come to God through Jesus Christ and Him alone, you will have rest. And one day, that rest will turn into eternal rest, but the avenger of blood cannot touch

you, will not reach you, but you will find refuge and safety.

Do you seek rest and refuge for your weary soul? You must run to Christ. Don't delay. Come to Him. The hymn writer says, "Other refuge have I none; hangs my helpless soul on thee. Leave, ah! leave me not alone; still support and comfort me. All my trust on thee is stayed; all my help from thee I bring. Cover my defenseless head with the shadow of thy wing. Plenteous grace with thee is found, grace to cover all my sin; let the healing streams abound; make and keep me pure within. Thou of life the fountain art; freely let me take of thee; spring thou up within my heart; rise to all eternity." Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for our time together this morning. Thank You for Your gracious hand. We thank You, Lord, for the reality that You are the place of refuge. Lord, it is in Thee we trust. It is in You we find rest. I pray for each soul here this morning that they would find refuge in the person of Jesus Christ. I pray for those who are in Christ that they would seek and labor to enter into that rest which You have given to them. Let us not strive. But Lord, let us rest wholly on the Lord Jesus. We thank You that He, and that You, are both a God of justice and the God of mercy. But that justice did not fall upon us, but that Lord, it fell upon Your Son, that He took the blows of the law, that law that would crush us, that law that would smother us. And He covers us and takes all the wrath that we deserve upon Himself so that Your mercy can be justly and freely applied to those who come in simple and humble faith. Lord, let us wonder and trust and rest in these gracious promises and these gracious truths. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.