

Jos221 – Our Refuge and Hope – Joshua 20:1-8

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Open your Bibles. Literally and actively, open your Bibles. Title of the message this morning, “Our Refuge and Our Hope.” Can I just ask you right up front, do you need a refuge and a hope? Would you say yes? Yes, I do. Amen. We need a refuge and a hope. We are going to Joshua Chapter 20 verses 1-8.

I’ll just tell you right up front the whole point of the message in one sentence: Jesus Christ IS our refuge and our hope. The writer of the Book of Hebrews was almost certainly thinking of our text in Joshua when he wrote,

Hebrews 6:18–19 (NLT)

18. . . Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us.

19 This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls.

What a truth!!! And what a truth we need today.

Let me just start with the facts. You and I are guilty of a crime against God that is worthy of death. Our crime is clear and God’s judgment is perfectly just and fair. God has an Avenger who brings this moment of judgment – it is the *Avenger of Death*. And God’s Word makes it perfectly clear the judgment for our crime of sin – *is death*.

And yet this same God who must judge our crime of sin has also become a place of refuge for us. He – HIMSELF – has become the *only place* where we can be free from the judgment of our crime.

Jesus Christ is our refuge and our hope, and this hope is a sure and steadfast anchor for our soul.

Let’s pray. Lord Jesus, now make it real. Now make it stick, now make it come alive. God by your Living Word and by the power of your Spirit, make this truth come alive to us. Pierce our hearts, inspire us, and convict us. Bring fear if necessary. But move us, Lord. Don’t allow us to be in your presence and under the power of your Word and your Spirit and leave unchanged and even unmoved, God. We say, Lord, we’re here. We’re open to what your Word has to say, please bring it. For your glory and in your name, Jesus, amen.

Last week we left the seven apathetic tribes in Joshua 18 and in Chapter 19 there is a listing of (most of) the final allotments. I wanted to look at how one more of the tribes approached taking possession of their Promised Land. But for a reason known only to God (and maybe you at the

end of today) we're going to jump ahead and do Chapter 20, and maybe come back next week to look at one more tribe in Chapter 19.

Since Bible scholars have been writing, our text today has jumped off the page to them as a wonderful picture of who Jesus Christ is – for us, and what being “in Christ” means to us. Joshua 20 may not be a perfect illustration because there are some differences. But illustrations in the Old Testament are much like parables in the New Testament. They are not meant for you to dissect and nitpick every word. They are meant to put you right in the middle of the story to help you receive what God is trying to give you.

So today, I want to tell you a story that *you* are in. I want to paint a picture that you can see yourself in. It's a living illustration of God's free and merciful salvation and of his grace filled provision for all that we truly need today.

For every struggle – for every battle – for every fear and every sorrow – Jesus Christ became for you a *City of Refuge*. Jesus Christ is our hope. Jesus Christ is our fortress, our strong tower. He is all that we need. And if you will set yourself with all that you have to reaching the heart of this City of Refuge, then God will meet you there and you will be saved from *all your enemies*.

Joshua 20:1–2 (NLT)

1 The Lord said to Joshua,

2 “Now tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed Moses.

Let's get some background on the Cities of Refuge. Let me put up a few verses from Numbers 35 (where God instructed Moses – as we just read.)

Numbers 35:13–15 (NLT)

13 Designate six cities of refuge for yourselves,

14 three on the east side of the Jordan River and three on the west in the land of Canaan.

15 These cities are for the protection of Israelites, foreigners living among you, and traveling merchants. Anyone who accidentally kills someone may flee there for safety.

Anyone who accidentally kills someone was known as the “man-slayer” or simply “the slayer.” And why was there a need for a City of Refuge for this unintentional man-slayer?

Because God had clearly put in place the law of capital punishment or “death-for-death” and the execution of this judgment of death was to be carried out by a relative (next of kin – male) of the person who had died. And this person who was to carry out the execution was called the “Avenger of Blood” or simply “the Avenger.” He was to stop at nothing until he accomplished his judgment of death upon the unintentional slayer. It may come fast or slow, but by the Law of God the judgment of death would surely come.

However, right along with the law, God made a way for the slayer (who was under this judgment of death) to flee to a City of Refuge, a place where he would (ultimately) be set free from the judgment of the law. It was the City of Salvation designed and built by God right alongside the law of God's righteous judgment.

Joshua 20:3 (NLT)

3 Anyone who kills another person accidentally and unintentionally (Slayer) can run (flee) to one of these cities; they will be places of refuge from relatives seeking revenge for the person who was killed (Avenger).

So let's put names on the Slayer and the Avenger.

The Slayer – is us. Each of us by our own sin nature is in the process of slaying our own souls.

James 1:15 says (ESV)

15 . . . and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Our sin, both in our sin nature and our action, is right now (without Christ) slaying our own souls.

The Avenger (the one who brings judgment) is named – Death. Not just death in this life but eternal separation from God. And if you have not securely taken refuge in Christ today, then this Avenger of Death is coming after you, hunting you down and it will not stop until it catches up with you.

The Avenger of Death is God's right and just judgment upon our sin and upon us as sinners. It was the result of the first sin in the Garden of Eden and it has been the result of sin ever since.

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

23 for all have sinned . . .

Romans 6:23(a) (ESV)

23 For the wages (just payment) of sin is death . . .

And this Avenger is always just around the corner waiting for sin to become full-grown in us bringing forth the just payment of death. The Good News is in the second half of Romans 6:23. The just payment for our sin is death, but Romans 6:23 goes on to say,

Romans 6:23 (ESV)

23 . . . but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Being found “in Christ Jesus” IS our refuge and our hope and Jesus Christ has become a City of Refuge that is open for all who would flee to him.

Continuing in Joshua 20:4 (explaining the City of Refuge),

Joshua 20:4 (NLT)

4 “Upon reaching one of these cities, the one who caused the death (that’s you, the Slayer) will appear before the elders at the city gate and present his case. They must allow him to enter the city and give him a place to live among them.

WHY must they do that? Because this person has left all that they had and they have fled to the only place God has created where they will be safe from the Avenger of Death and if they can just get to that City of Refuge no matter what it takes, the gates will be open and they will be given a place to live among the saved.

How safe are we (as the Slayer) once inside our City of Refuge?

Joshua 20:5 (NLT)

5 If the relatives of the victim (The Avenger) come to avenge the killing, the leaders must not release the slayer to them, for he killed the other person unintentionally and without previous hostility.

Once we are in, we will *not* be released to the Avenger. In John Chapter 10 Jesus is talking about us being inside the Sheepfold which is the same metaphor as the City of Refuge in Joshua. And as Jesus says in John 10:28,

John 10:28 (NLT)

28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me,

Once we are truly saved – we are permanently saved. And as the history of these “Cities of Refuge” developed there were (good) additional requirements put on them by the religious leaders (nice to know the religious leaders did something right).

The roads into the Cities of Refuge were to be kept well maintained and easily travelled upon under any condition. There were signs put up on all roads in the area with the word “Refuge” and an arrow pointing the way to safety from the Avenger of Death. The gates were to remain open day and night with a person always posted there to that access was never restricted, and the moment a Slayer stepped inside the Gate they were saved. They were saved from the Avenger of Death the moment they entered their City of Refuge.

And so, as we go on living our lives as the Slayer of our own souls by our own sin there comes a moment – prayerfully – when you realize that you are being chased by the Avenger of Death

and rightly so. And you come to grips with the fact that the Avenger will not stop and will ultimately overtake you and you will surely die by God's law. And so, at that moment you make an eternal life saving decision to flee to your City of Refuge, you are forced to leave your old ways and your old life behind. You are fleeing with haste to your only hope to your only place of refuge. You know the Avenger is coming – you just don't know how far behind you he is. But suddenly you are more aware of him than ever.

As soon as you begin to really look, you see the signs "refuge" with an arrow pointing to the only way to freedom and so you run faster and faster. You know now that you are in an eternal life or death struggle and so at all costs you run to the safety of your only refuge and hope. And you see others on the road and they proclaim to you "Run to your refuge – the Avenger is close – do not delay. Let today be the day of your salvation."

And we believe if you will throw yourself completely into Jesus Christ – as your refuge and your hope then your salvation will be permanent. But I think there is still plenty to take from the next verses in Joshua Chapter 20.

Joshua 20:6(a) (NLT)

6 But the slayer must stay in that city and be tried by the local assembly, which will render a judgment . . .

We must stay in our City of Refuge. We must learn to abide in Christ – no matter what. Our City of Refuge is not a tourist stop. We cannot say, "Yeah, I swung by there on my way to Disneyland so I'm good to go." If that is you, you may not be so "good to go." But instead,

Psalms 91:1-2 (ESV)

*1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
2 I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."*

That is not the language of a tourist passing through. That's the language of one who has made a permanent home in the refuge and fortress of their God.

And by the way, back in Joshua 20:6(a) it said the slayer must *be tried by the local assembly, which will render a judgment.*

I'd really like to use this as an illustration of just how trying and judgmental the local assembly can be within the City of Refuge and it might even be appropriate. But in regard to the judgment of God, Romans 8:1-2 says this.

Romans 8:1-2 (ESV)

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

No condemnation and set free from the law of sin and death by the Spirit of Life – in Christ – who is our refuge and our hope.

And did you know that Hebrews is all about Jesus Christ being our High Priest in heaven?

Continuing in Joshua 20:6(b) we read,

Joshua 20:6(b) (NLT)

. . . And he (the slayer) must continue to live in that city (of refuge) until the death of the high priest who was in office at the time of the accident. After that, he is free to return to his own home in the town from which he fled.”

After the death of the High Priest the Slayer was free from the consequences of their sin. While there was an historical reason for this, then which was a statute of limitations issue, because of our identification with Christ (by faith) as our High Priest, his death on the cross is what set us free from the eternal consequences of our sin; just like the death of the High Priest here set the Slayer free from his consequences.

And so, please, if you have not yet fled from the Avenger of Death, if you have not yet fled to the only place of true refuge and hope in Jesus Christ – please don’t delay. Drop everything that may be holding you back and flee to Christ as your only refuge and your only hope. I’m going to give you a chance to make a commitment to do that in just a minute.

But there is one more thing the Holy Spirit has woven into this incredible story – *what is Jesus Christ to you?* What does it mean that Jesus is your refuge and your hope?

Just in the Book of Psalms here is just some of what Jesus Christ is to us.

He IS

My Shepherd

My Dwelling Place

My Light

My Portion

My Refuge

My Hope

My Help

My Shield

My Rock

My Strength

My King

My Strong Tower

Run to Jesus! Run to him as your only refuge and only hope. Flee to him from whatever is chasing you whether it be the Avenger of Death or the trials of this world. Run to Jesus Christ as your City of Refuge.

In Joshua Chapter 20 verses 7 and 8 are the six locations where the Cities of Refuge were to be built. Listen, please, to the meaning of these six names.

In verse 7 – **KEDESH** is the first City of Refuge

Kedesh MEANS – *Holiness*

RUN to Jesus - for your Holiness

Next is **SHECHEM**

and Shechem MEANS – *Strength*

RUN to Jesus - for your Strength

Next (verse 7) is **HEBRON**

and Hebron MEANS – *Fellowship, Communion*

RUN to Jesus - for your Communion with God

Next (verse 8) is **BEZER**

and Bezer MEANS – *Fortress*

RUN to Jesus – to be your Fortress

Next (verse 8) is **RAMOTH**

and Ramoth MEANS – *Lifted to a High Place*

RUN to Jesus - to be Lifted Up to a High Place

Finally is **GOLAN**

and Golan MEANS – *An Enclosure, Fully Encircled*

If you will FLEE– to JESUS – AS Your Refuge today

THAT is WHO he will BE to you

He will Fully Enclose you – Fully Encircle you

He will BE – *Your HOLINESS*

Your STRENGTH

Your COMMUNION with God

Your *Fortress*

and the *LIFTER of Your Head*

Psalm 139:5 (NLT)

5 You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.

Psalm 139:17–18 (NLT)

17 How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered!

18 I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!

How can we seeing our refuge and our hope so close with sign posts so clear and others proclaiming the way, how can we ignore so great a salvation? How can we not flee from

whatever enslaves us now into the open arms of our Savior and abide in him forever as our only Refuge and our only Hope?

Let's pray. Lord, you are who you are! But Lord our flesh and the world and the enemy of our souls clog it all up. They make it all foggy. We get all distracted and we get misaligned and we get off on tangents. And Lord we've got to drop it all. We've got to throw it all down, we've got to willingly suffer the loss and flee to you. We need you, Jesus. We need you as our City of Refuge. We need to be found in you, Lord. We need to be found in your salvation, we need to be found in your security and in your peace, in your holiness and in your strength. We need to be encircled by you. We need you to be our City of Refuge and our only hope.

And Lord I pray that you would begin to speak to our hearts that every one of us in this place would know specifically what you would say to us. That we would apply specifically what this is to our lives. Right now God, bring it up in our hearts and our minds and by your Spirit and say – it's this thing. You must flee that! You must run with haste to the City of Refuge where you will find salvation and hope.

I want to give you a chance to deal with the Lord right now. You speak to God. Let his Spirit speak to you and show you what is that thing that he is calling you to flee from in order to find yourself in the City of Refuge. Go one on one with God right now. Respond today to God. This is your time. Speak to God. Say, “*God Why am I here again? Why do I have to deal with that today? Because you love me. Because you gave your life for me. Because you have a great hope for us Lord. Bless you Lord.*”

Lord save me today! Save me! Save me today, Lord! I need you Lord! I need you today. I need you to meet me right here, right now. This is the day Lord that you're taking off the shackles. You're taking us from death to life. You're washing away the Avenger and the pain of this world. And you're drawing us into the City of Refuge where you, Jesus, are our strength and our hope. Move us from death to life Lord. The cross is freedom. Death is beaten in Christ.

Cry out to God ask him to fill your life. Take an action. Commit your life to Christ. Thank you Jesus. We will beat death in Christ. Ask God to just flood you with his presence; to draw you into his presence.

We'll sing your praise all our days, Lord. Thank you Jesus. Take us from death to life, and take us from grace to grace. Holy, holy, holy are you. How glorious you are! The price you paid for my victory, you've broken the chains and my debt is fully paid.

Jesus, I need you. I don't need you to fix my circumstances. I don't need you to make my life better. I need you. I need you personally. I need you to be who you are. I need you to be my

refuge and my hope and my strength and my song and my joy and my peace. I need you to be my revival. I need you to be my salvation. Lord Jesus, come into my life. Overwhelm me with your presence and your power and start in me a consuming fire that will never be put out.

Thank you for meeting us in this place today, Lord. Thank you for every commitment made. I pray that you would chase each of us down and remind us of what you've done here today. For your glory and in your name, Jesus. Amen.