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Title: First Things First

Joshua 18-21

11/12/23

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you feel or have you felt God's peace in your life? Can you explain why or when?
 2. Why is it important to understand a certain kind of rest is learned not just given?
 3. Do you know people with a regular time of "gathering" with God? Do you have a regular time? How does it work for you?
 4. In what way could our attitude in the community be different if we embraced the mentality of "scattered to serve"?
 5. What is comforting to you about Jesus being our city of refuge?
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Teaching Notes:

Ancient Israel was a unique kind of nation.

A Monarchy has a king to rule.

A Dictatorship is ruled by a dictator.

In a Democracy the people are supposed to rule.

But Israel was a theocracy, and that is where God rules.

A major part of their national lives was...

...their obedience to what God established for their own good.

We as Christians are also a special kind of people.

We are born again citizens of God's heavenly kingdom.

This morning we will look at and apply three aspects of what God established for the good of the nation of Israel that are also applicable for how we should live as Christians...

...the city of Shiloh, the allotment of the Levites...

...and the Cities of Refuge.

Big Idea: What God commands is for our own good.

18:1 Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. And the land was subdued before them.

Israel has moved from Gilgal, their battlefield camp...

...to Shiloh, their peaceful place of rest.

Shiloh means peace or rest.

Even if there are still some skirmishes, the war is over.

There is a clear winner.

There is an obvious victor.

For us, the flesh may fight us, but we know who is our King.

Living in peace and rest means...

...we have crucified our flesh...

...we are not practicing sin, we are practicing righteousness.

Remember, Shiloh was the result of years of fighting and winning.

This kind of peace and rest are not instantaneous.

There is a peace that comes from knowing your sins are forgiven.

There is a peace that comes from surrendering to Christ.

But Shiloh's peace and rest came from consistent obedience.

This is the same for us...

Philippians 4:9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Jesus said,

Matthew 11:29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

1. Learning and doing results in peace and rest.

When you (cross over that Red Sea &) give your life to Christ...

...that is when the battle begins.

And after you have died to the flesh at the Jordan River...

...you will eventually get to Shiloh.

This is the real life of a disciple and the call of all believers.

A disciple is someone who learns and does.

You may feel like you go 2 steps forward and 3 steps back.

You may feel like it is never going to get easier.

But that is not true...

Walking with God is kind of like learning to ride a bike...

...As you learn & practice, **you get better & it seems easier...**

...There are still hills and turns maybe even falls...

...but for the most part you are riding peacefully.

- If we keep playing in the enemy's camp.
- If we keep feeding the flesh.
- If we keep dabbling in sin.
...We will miss this kind of peace and rest.

Another important thing about Shiloh is it is central.

They are no longer fighting and regrouping off to the side.

Shiloh is their central, established place to meet with God.

The tabernacle of meeting will be here for almost 400 years.

We also need a central established place to meet with God.

2. Gathering with God is central.

We cannot overstate how important **and** neglected this is.

Shiloh is central so it is accessible and available to everyone.

And it is also central as one of the first things they do.

Establishing an accessible regular meeting place with God...

...is central for them, and it should be for us as well.

- Set aside a regular place, a regular time, a regular rhythm.
- Make it attainable and accessible.
- And make it a central priority.

We gather with Him on our own and with others.

We worship, sacrifice, pray, listen, meditate, and seek Him.

We do it individually and corporately.

Time together is central to any relationship.

And here in the next couple of verses is another reason...

2 But there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes which had not yet received their inheritance. **3** Then Joshua said to the children of Israel: "How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers has given you?"

Joshua exhorts them to action, to engagement.

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. **24** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, **25** not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

It's what Joshua did, what we do, and what the Holy Spirit does.

And we need it.

The second part of Israel's national life that is applicable to our Christian life is in v.7...

...The allotment of the Levites.

18:7 But the Levites have no part among you, for the priesthood of the Lord *is* their inheritance.

The issue of the Levites is an interesting situation.

Much of the land division goes all the way back to Genesis when Jacob was blessing his sons.

Levi had tricked and violently avenged a disgrace of his sister.
On his death bed, Jacob said Levi would be scattered in the land.

But later in the wilderness...

The Levites stood up for the Lord and God rewarded their passion for Him saying that they would belong to Him.

They took care of the worship and sacrifices.
They oversaw the cities of refuge.
They taught and explained God's word to the people.

So in the beginning, they were cursed to be scattered...
...but later they were blessed and rewarded.

Here at the tabernacle of meeting...

**...God brings those two things together.
...They are scattered, but they are His servants.**

They will be given special cities to dwell in across the nation.

And this is a picture of us.

We were under the curse and consequence of sin.
We were destined to be judged and scattered.

But when we come to Christ...
...We become His precious possession.

Like the Levites, by God's will and calling...

He gives us places and spaces to live and serve Him.
He provides and protects us.
And in the scattering is an honor and a blessing to serve Him.

For us...

3. We are scattered to serve.

We gather and then we scatter.

I Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”

We are scattered throughout our neighborhoods and communities and across the world to declare His praises and bring Him glory.

You are where you are...

...so God can use you to declare His praise.

In your home, in your office, in your coffee shop, in your gym.

The last aspect of the life of the nation of Israel that applies to our Christian lives are the cities of refuge.

20:1 The Lord also spoke to Joshua, saying, **2** “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Appoint for yourselves cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, **3** that the slayer who kills a person accidentally *or* unintentionally may flee there; and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood.

The Israelites didn’t have a police force...They had families.

Someone kills someone...someone in that family will kill them. But in the case of manslaughter, someone could find mercy.

These cities were all about a day’s journey apart in the nation. God’s direction was specific places set aside as cities of refuge.

For us, these cities are a great picture of Christ.

4 And when he flees to one of those cities, and stands at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declares his case in the hearing of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city as one of them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. **5** Then if the avenger of blood pursues him, they shall not deliver the slayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor unintentionally, but did not hate him beforehand. **6** And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, *and* until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the slayer may return and come to his own city and his own house, to the city from which he fled.’ ”

A city of refuge carried a consequence but not a death penalty

There was actually belonging and safety and Levites lived here. And when the high priest died, they were set free.

As Christians...though we have victory and peace and rest...

...Though we gather to worship and scatter to serve...

...We will still need to come to Christ for mercy.

Jesus is our city of refuge.

4. We all still need mercy.

Hopefully we don't intentionally or hatefully sin...

...But even when we do...we can still run to Christ for mercy.

And just like the death of the high priest set them free...

...Jesus' death sets us free.

Sometimes we need His mercy because of our sin.

Psalm 41:4 I said, "LORD, be merciful to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You."

Sometimes we need His mercy because of our struggle.

Psalm 57:1 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until *these* calamities have passed by.

But He is a God rich in mercy.

It's like riding a bike, I may have been riding for years, but accidents happen...and I need mercy and help.

Don't be afraid or hesitant to come for mercy.

Satan is the accuser of the brethren...

...when he shows up, don't fight, or argue or excuse...

...just tell the truth and run to Christ for mercy.

There may be a consequence to deal with...

...but there will always be forgiveness and belonging...

...and care from Christ our great high priest.

The meanings of the names of the 6 cities are interesting.

Joshua 20:7–8:

Kedesh = "righteousness";

Shechem = "shoulder";

Hebron = "fellowship";

Bezer = "fortress" or "strong"; and

Ramoth = "heights."

Hebraists do not agree on what Golan means, but the Gesenius Lexicon says it means "exile."

"These names then can be used to describe what sinners experience when they flee by faith to Jesus.

First, He gives them His **righteousness**, and they can never be accused again. There is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1)!

Like a shepherd, He carries them on His **shoulders**, and they enter into **fellowship** with Him.

He is their strong **fortress**, and they are safe.

They dwell in the **heights** even though they are **exiles**, pilgrims, and strangers in this world."

Wiersbe, Warren W

How great a refuge do we have in Christ?