

Joshua 07-10-26a2

This is Friday, the 26th of October, 2007. We are in the Book of Joshua, Chapter 20, looking at the Cities of Refuge. Let's take a moment as we begin to, as is our custom, to recognize the grace that God has given us through His Holy Spirit so that we can partake of spiritual nourishment and be strengthened thereby.

Shall we pray? Father, thank You for this opportunity to partake of the truth of Your Word, have it instilled in our souls by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. We thank You that that process and the strength that we derive from it is not dependent upon us. It isn't dependent on me or the hearers, but it is a matter of Your grace and Your faithfulness and Your love for us in providing a means to lift us out of the mundane and the ordinary and the fleshly and the limitations that are upon us because of our corruption and our fallen nature.

We thank You that You have given us access to the kingdom of light through the truth of Your Word and through the constant and ever-present ministry of Your Spirit. We thank You that through Him we can see the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that as we study this evening the reality of our position in Him and our opportunities from You will be clear to us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Joshua 20.

The Lord spoke to Joshua, told Joshua to speak to the children of Israel. A chain of command there. God speaks to us, we speak to our children, we speak to one another.

The cities of refuge are appointed, and the details of this are over in Numbers chapter 35. I want to correct a little bit of a misstatement I think I may have made last time in terms of the way a particular individual would be treated under this provision of God's law for Israel. You have a case where someone is responsible for another man's life, loss of life.

It is not for certain if it was murder or manslaughter, but it is clear that this individual is responsible in some fashion for another person's death. So the provision, and this goes all the way back to Numbers chapter 35, if you want to turn there, this provision was made way back in the days of Moses, and the specifics of it are important, and there is an application which we have not really detailed yet. Numbers chapter 35, verse 9. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel.

Same pattern. Say to them, When you cross the Jordan and the land of Canaan, 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.

You'll have six cities of refuge, three on one side, three on the other side of the Jordan. They are, in verse 15, for the children of Israel, for the stranger and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there. Very interesting provision.

Anyone. Native-born, God-fearing son of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or anybody else who is lingering or malingering or associated or hanging on, some camp following, some wandering itinerant type of desert dwelling person that comes along and accidentally rolls his cart over a guy that's sleeping and breaks his neck or something, he's covered. Anyone.

This is a grace, this is a provision, available regardless of age, race, sex, color, gender, nationality. It's irrespective. If he strikes him with an iron implement so that he dies, he is a murderer.

The murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer. The murderer shall surely be put to death.

This is another sort of difference in our modern law. We talk about mitigating circumstance, crime of passion, self-defense and things like that. There are no amplifications and endless provisions under this.

If you strike a guy with an iron implement, with a rock, or, in verse 18, with a wood hand weapon, and the guy dies, you're a murderer. A rock, a stick, or an iron implement, and once again, this is something that I won't digress into the whole Iron Age debate and when did the Israelites have access to iron and so on. This is 400 years before David and Solomon and Saul and Jonathan, and remember when Saul and Jonathan were the only two that had a sword? That doesn't mean there was no iron available or no iron smelting.

It means that the Philistines had such control that nobody could own them without retribution. This is kind of like the Mafia taking over and saying, well, nobody's going to run a business without our little tax system going into effect. You pay protection money and we'll let you run your business.

Well, the Philistines had that kind of domination in the land in the days of the inception of the monarchy and so on. But here, 400 years earlier, if he strikes him with an iron implement. Now, it would be pretty tough to strike him with an iron implement if there's no such thing as an iron implement, or if the Israelites haven't learned how to smelt, or if they didn't learn how in Egypt.

I mean, it's completely crazy. You go and look at the artifacts that are in the tomb burials for pharaohs and so on, and you find that there was iron working going on well before. So, this is another effort by liberal scholarship to try to undermine what the Bible says.

And you just look at the Bible and it's fine as it stands. Moses knew all about iron implements and they are mentioned in the law. So, if you have an iron implement in your hand and you whack a guy with it, and it's a weapon used for killing, and you kill him, well, guess what? You are a murderer under the law.

They don't delve into your motivations or your passions or your extenuating circumstances. If you did that, you're a murderer, and you have to go on trial for murder. The avenger of blood shall put, verse 19, the murderer to death.

When he meets him, he shall put him to death. This is not an option. You know, there are people who kind of get soft-hearted at the point of meeting out justice, and it's a mistake.

God doesn't say the avenger of blood, if he should so desire, has the option, if he feels like it, or any lesser punishment in terms of monetary payment or endless blackmail or whatever else he might want to do. Can you imagine? You pay me ten shekels a month or I will be the avenger of blood and take your life. There is no option here.

The avenger of blood is required when he meets him to put him to death. If he pushes him out of hatred or while lying in wait hurls something at him so that he dies, or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. There is no other choice here.

He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him. However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity or throws anything at him without lying in wait or uses a stone by which a man could die throwing it at him without seeing him so that he dies while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments.

So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood and the congregation shall do what? Return him to the city of refuge where he had fled. So you had this incident. A guy was down digging a big hole.

He was throwing big rocks out and a biker came by to see how his friend was doing. He walks too close and a rock comes up and hits him in the head and he dies. Well, the guy in the hole fled to the city of refuge.

The city of refuge protected him and didn't let the avenger of blood get near him. They escorted him back to his community where the congregation, in this case probably his tribal council or clan council, will hold a trial. They will determine, they will judge between the avenger of blood who says, this guy always hated the victim and he just tried to make it look like an accident and the guy who says, look, I couldn't see anything.

I was down there heaving boulders. Look, watch, I'll show you. Here's the hole.

Here's the boulders. This is what I did. How could I know? The congregation will judge and if they say accidental death, not his fault, he doesn't come back home and resume his life.

He goes back to the city of refuge where he will remain until the death of the high priest. Why? Even though it was not intentional, he still has blood guilt. In the same way, you know, a little child runs out in front of your car and you hit him and they say, well, it's accidental.

You know, it gets written up initially as manslaughter or whatever, but you're found not guilty and so on. Look, you are still the one who drove a car that took a life. And from the standpoint of the law, that person has that stain.

What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

No other fount I know. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. That is foreshadowed here in the death of the high priest.

Because when the high priest dies, symbolically speaking, his death, one death, takes away that guilt that was not your fault. But you're guilty anyway. I wasn't there in the Garden of Eden when Eve ate the fruit, gave it to her husband, and he ate also.

I was born living with the unintentional guilt of the corruption of the human race. Whereas by one man sin entered the world, death by sin. So the death passed upon all men, for all have sinned.

In Adam all die, but in Christ all are made alive. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. All things are passed away, all things are become new.

It is the death of our high priest that takes away our guilt. But to avail yourself of that grace, you have to be obedient. You have to follow the rules.

So when you look at the situation here, what is this a picture of? This whole arrangement whereby someone guilty of manslaughter, but found not guilty of murder, must go and return and live in the city of refuge. Remember when Paul was talking about these issues in the New Testament, and he says that believers were shut up under the law until Christ should come. This is a picture of Old Testament saints who are enclosed and protected by the provisions of the law.

As long as they live within those boundaries, they are protected. It doesn't take away their guilt. Anytime they step outside, judgment can be swift and final.

Stepping outside in terms of loss of physical life, judgment on your physical life, stepping outside. It doesn't change your guilt or innocent status. Even if the avenger of blood kills

you, it doesn't turn you into a murderer.

It just means you left the protection that God provided. The protection of the city of refuge, and remember these are Levitical cities, they represent the law itself, and the blood guilty individual who flees, and has not brought guilt on his own head by actively committing a murder, but has nevertheless become guilty, goes and lives in that city of refuge, and is protected there, shut up within that environment until the death of the high priest. The high priest's death releases those manslaughter perpetrators, and they can then come home.

It might be short, it might be long. If a 19 year old guy just became the high priest, you might as well settle in. You could be there a long time.

If he's an old, tottering, 3 score and 10, grey beard, cabode, in more than one sense, well then maybe it won't be so long. But they looked for, and kept a close eye on, the high priest. Because he is the key to freedom.

Freedom from the city of refuge. Freedom to return and live an unrestricted life. And there is a picture there, and the more you think about it, and I will leave some of this to your own meditations, because we need to move on, but there is a reason why it is built this way.

There is a different penalty if you come back and are judged by the congregation, and they find you guilty of murder. I don't think this was an accident. You lay in wait, and then rise up and smack the guy, and now you're trying to claim self-defense.

You were lying in wait. You picked this up and did it with malice of forethought. You're guilty.

That person, what happened to him? Turned over to the Avenger of Blood. And the Avenger of Blood, who was the male next of kin of the victim, would slay him. Not stoned by the congregation.

Not an Aiken type of deal. This is mano a mano, one on one. And by whatever means, I think it would be interesting, in a macabre sort of way, to know how this was accomplished.

Did they just stand and hold him by the arms while the guy does what Samuel did to Agag, cue him in pieces? Is it quick? Is it slow? What is the method? That's up to the Avenger of Blood. The Avenger of Blood is to slay him. The means is unspecified.

And the amount of participation by any onlookers is not specified. It doesn't say public, private. Obviously, if he is picking daisies and wanders beyond the city limits of the city of refuge and the Avenger of Blood is out there, he can get him with an arrow.

He can use a throwing hatchet. He can get him with a javelin. He can drop a big rock on his head.

He can tackle him and strangle the life out of him. He can do whatever he wants. He can rip his arm off and beat him over the head with it.

God is very non-specific about that. Why? Because the real point of this is not giving Israel the details of a practical... not that it's impractical, but the purpose is not to give them a procedure that they can follow in every case. It's the principle of the thing.

It is the idea of it. They can work out the details, just as churches today work out the details of church polity, church organization, church leadership. How many pastors? What kind of teaching? When do you have services? What do you sit on? Do you have a parking lot? Do you have an education building? Do you have a baptistry? Do you have a choir? Do you have musical instruments? Who teaches? Can women do this, that, and the other? Largely, all of that is up to the congregation.

Do what you think is honoring to the Lord that is decent and in good order. Elders that labor in preaching and teaching are worthy of double honor. The early guys set the standard.

You people dish out the bread to the widows. We're going to devote ourselves to prayer and the study of the word. There's a division of labor in that sense.

But beyond that, God doesn't sit and dot I's and cross T's on exactly how many doors the church is supposed to have and what color the windows are and the carpet and so on. And the same thing here. So the principle is the idea, and what is the principle? There is grace available.

There is a shelter available for unintentional taking of life. Two different kinds of sin involved here. Is there provision for lesser sins? We've been through Leviticus 1 through 6 and 7 where you have the trespass offering, you have the whole burnt offering, you have the peace offering, fellowship offerings, all these different elements of worship.

And smaller things, there is also provision. You can come and lay your hand on the head of the animal and find atonement and be restored to function and good graces. But this is an extreme.

Why not City of Refuge for other capital crimes? Are there other capital crimes? How about standing up and saying, Let's have a Baal worship festival. Everybody for Baal, raise your hand and come over here. And somebody comes up and says, Hey, I believe you're trying to lead Israel astray.

That's a death penalty offense. Oh no, it isn't. I was only kidding.

Run to the City of Refuge? There's no provision for that. Some guy walking down the road with his arm around another guy's neck, I think you're a homosexual and that's a stoning offense in Israel. Oh no, he was helping me because I'm limping.

I don't think so. Run to the City of Refuge? It's not in there. This is only one crime.

It is the taking of a human life. When we look at the symbolic value, what does that connect to? What does that translate to in spiritual terms? This is, in the life and death sense, I think, speaking of salvation. There is a place for believers to go who are unintentionally guilty, have availed themselves of God's grace in every other way, and have not been disobedient.

The ultimate act of rebellion is the taking of a life with malice of forethought. This is why Satan is called a murderer from the beginning. This is why Cain, who rose up against his brother and slew him, is put under such a profound judgment and curse.

This is why the first piece of legislation God gives Noah when he's out of the ark is here's the mark of the new dispensation in terms of what you're going to eat and your new diet, and now here is the new justice system. If man sheds blood, by man shall his blood be shed. That capital punishment specifically for murder is now in the hands of people.

It was not so before the flood. That's why Adam and nobody else rounded up a posse to go find Cain. God put a mark on Cain.

The whole idea is, in that dispensation, God's justice prevailed. God meted out justice because the human race wasn't large enough and it wasn't at the point of being able to do it for themselves. It's just like a child.

Certain things you do for them until they reach an age where they can do it for themselves. After the flood, with the wiping out of the only evil all the day, wicked imagination of the heart mode, God says, look, you're grown up now. You're starting fresh, and you're going to do the justice for the taking of a life.

You figure it out. You execute the sentence, and that began after the flood. This is an extension.

What would that actually translate to? It reminds me of a sermon I heard Dr. Crystal preach recently while we were working on our materials there. He was talking about, and I've mentioned this before, what someone would typically do. It's the James idea that faith without works is dead because it has no fruit.

You show me your faith without your works, I will show you my faith by my works. Where there is faith, there is going to be work. The idea is if you are saved, you ought to look like it.

You ought to be known by your works. Jesus said, by their fruit ye shall know them. You don't pick grapes off of thorns or figs off of thistles.

There is a sense in which you ought to be able to tell if someone has any sort of a living faith. In that case, when you look at the Old Testament age in particular, those who had the Hebrews 11.6 type of belief, he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Why do you go to God? Why do you seek God as an Old Testament saint? I am a man of unclean lips.

I am unworthy. I recognize my sinfulness. I have to throw myself on God's mercy.

This is just like the man who recognizes that he is blood guilty and he will flee to the city of refuge because it is not his heart and it is not his intent to be a murderer. He is not a murderer at heart and yet he finds himself guilty and he wants absolution. He wants to avail himself of God's grace and not die because he is not that kind of person.

A murderer is a different kettle of fish. This is someone who has got that self-centered thing going where if you are in my way, I will kill you, and now you are not in my way anymore. That willfulness is put for.

I am not saying that every murderer was unsaved and everybody else was in Israel, but these are put for. They are symbolic values. The murderer is put for the satanic view that rejects God and says, I want no part of Him.

The guilty but innocent person who flees to the city of refuge is the Old Testament saint who says, I recognize that I am worthy of death and judgment is at my heels. I will flee to the refuge. I will go to the place that God has made and I will wait for His mercy, which is pictured in this scenario in the death of the high priest where at last, through the death of another, one who is in a sense blood guilty is set free.

So that is the picture. There are very few notes in the Bible about the actual practice of this, which again makes us think that its value is primarily to communicate God's priorities and to communicate spiritual truth. It seems that there is a provision also for laying hold of the horns of the altar as sort of a place of refuge.

This was mentioned in the law and you find it happening in 1 Kings 2 I'm sorry, 1 Kings 2 where after the death of David, Joab who was guilty of the murder of Abner. David made peace with Abner after one thing and another and Joab killed him by trickery. And the murder of Amasa.

You remember just a 30 second sketch. You have David and Absalom. Absalom, Absalom, would God have died.

David is kicked out of Jerusalem. Absalom sleeps with the concubines. Eventually Absalom is routed back out of Jerusalem.

He is fleeing. His wild red hair is flowing in the breeze. He gets tangled in the tree.

Joab finds him. David gave explicit orders, do not kill him. Joab killed him anyway.

David was extremely rough with Joab and replaced him. He said, you are not going to be my general anymore. Amasa is going to be the general in your place.

This didn't sit too well with Joab because he thought he was doing what was best for the kingdom and best for David. Even if that was so, it was still disobedient. So David replaced him.

Joab never got over that. Later, when those guys all rose up and gave a call and said, everybody leave David, this is no good. David sent Amasa and he said, gather the armies of Israel.

You've got three days. Bring the armies back in three days. We've got to put down the shame or we're going to be back living out in the sticks again.

Well, Amasa went out to get the armies, but he took too long. He dallied around and he didn't get the job done. The three days went by and no armies.

David sat there saying, if this thing keeps on, we're going to really be in the soup. So he gathered the armies that he could find and went on out. Joab was in charge of this group.

Joab caught up to Amasa and said, hello there, Amasa, and whipped out a concealed sword and ripped him from one side to the other so that basically his inner contents became splayed all over the road. And he was, as it says in the Bible, wallowing in his own blood. Well, this was right in the middle of the main road, and all these armies trying to go do what David told them to do are presented with this horrific sight.

So I think Joab is the one that threw a cloak over his victim and dragged his leaking remains off to the side so that everybody could get on with the business. Well, Solomon said, Joab, your time is up. My father said, you know, it's kind of the reverse thing.

As long as David was alive, Joab was his near kinsman. He was his nephew, and he couldn't kill his own nephew. But Solomon is only half as related to Joab as David was.

And so David said, you be sure and mete out justice to Joab when I'm gone. And so he did. Well, Joab runs in 1 Kings 2 to grab hold of the horns of the altar.

Solomon said to Abiathar the priest in verse 26 of 2 Kings 2, Go to Anathoth, to your own fields, for you are deserving of death, but I will not put you to death at this time, because you carry the ark of the Lord God before my father David, and because you are afflicted every time my father was afflicted. So Solomon removed Abiathar from being priest to the Lord, that he might fulfill the word of the Lord, which he spoke concerning the house of Eli at Shiloh. If you go back and trace this out, you remember that there was a

promise made that Eli's line would be cut off from the priesthood, and this is the end of it.

Abiathar is the last guy. The news came to Joab. Joab had defected to Adonijah, though he had not defected to Absalom.

Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord and took hold of the horns of the altar. Normally, you remember the altar and the priestly environs there. An individual would normally not be able to go in there, but this is an act of desperation.

And he goes, and you know the horns are those pointed, upward-looking protrusions at each corner, and this is the place where the sacrifice was tied. Prior to being executed with the sacrificial knife, these horns were used for the ropes. So he would lay hold of the horns of the altar.

So Solomon was told, Joab has fled to the tabernacle of the Lord. There he is by the altar. So Solomon sent Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, strike him down.

Benaiah is basically the chief of security, the head of all things having to do with swinging swords and throwing spears and whatnot. So Benaiah went to the tabernacle of the Lord and said to him, Thus says the king, Come out. Come out of where? Remember, this is the inner precinct.

Not just anybody. You have to have special business. You have to be offering a sacrifice.

Not just anybody goes walking inside where the linen curtains had been. So he says, Come out. The king says, Come out.

He says, No, I will die here. So Benaiah brought back word to the king. Notice Benaiah did not enter in with no authorization to the place of the altar.

The king had already told him, Strike him down, but he would not do so at the altar. He went back to the king and he says, Joab said this. This is what he answered.

He's not coming out. He says he wants to die by the altar. So then the king said, Do as he has said, and strike him down and bury him, that you may take away from me and from the house of my father the innocent blood which Joab shed.

The Lord will return his blood on his head, because he struck down two men more righteous and better than he and killed them with the sword, Abner the son of Ner, the commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, the commander of the army of Judah, though my father David did not know it. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his descendants forever. But upon David and his descendants, upon his house and his throne, there shall be peace forever from the Lord.

So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and struck and killed him, and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness. The king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his place over the army, and he put Zadok the priest in the place of Abiathar. So after this, you have a new king, a new priest, and a new captain of the host in the place of David, and Abiathar and Joab, you have Solomon, Benaiah, and Zadok.

And there's the idea that this was a place of refuge, but of course, how many people can lay hold of the horns of the altar, and for how long? This was sort of an emergency stopgap, and where is this altar? It's in a non-city of refuge. This is, as it were, the seventh city of refuge in Jerusalem. Interestingly, as time went on, and the kingdom divided, of the six cities of refuge that we've seen in Joshua chapter 20, only two of them actually remained in possession of the Israelites.

The other four disappeared away. If you look back in Joshua chapter 20, the three on the far side of the Jordan, of course, were the first to go, and you end up basically with Hebron as one of the two that remained. I'm not going to find it in Judges.

It's all about concubines. It bears very little resemblance to the city of refuge. So out of these cities, you have Kadesh in Galilee, Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and Kiriath Arba, which is Hebron.

Only Shechem and Hebron remained down through the time of the divided monarchy. They lost Kadesh in Galilee. They lost the three on the other side of the Jordan.

But for the children of Israel, and for the stranger who dwelt among them, this is a reminder when you think of the spiritual equivalence here, that you didn't have to be in Israel to flee for refuge to God's grace in Old Testament days. This is why you have Rahab the harlot, Uriah the Hittite, Naaman the Syrian, Ruth the Moabitess, and so many others who were part of the mixed multitude that left Egypt, who were the strangers and sojourners, the ones who often would end up gleaning the corners of the field and so forth, taking advantage of God's grace, even though they were not native-born Israelites. They were not children of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.

Nevertheless, the provision is there. And once again, it is a reminder that this is specifically with a view toward salvation. The law was given to Israel.

It is their responsibility to keep. And in the Old Testament, from the time of Moses forward, if you were a believer, you were basically Israel. And you come to Israel, you join Israel, you operate under the law that God gave to Israel, because that is the place of believers.

Previous to that patriarchal age, you operate under the patriarchal law, the patriarchal priesthood, the father in the house. He is the family priest, like Job and Abraham and Jacob were. And you are in that house.

And you could be a servant, you could be a friend, you could be a neighbor, and you could come to association. Job prays for his three friends at the end of the book. They are not in his family.

He is not technically their priest, but they are believers in God, and they come into that grace that is provided. God says, you will receive grace through this particular guy. He is the one in your periphery.

He is my faithful follower. So, he is the guy. In earlier days, you could see Shem, you could see Melchizedek, priest of Salem, king of Salem.

And when people came within the periphery of his domain, even Abraham paid him a tenth and shared bread and wine with him. Priestly functions. So, bottom line, we say, so what? Cities of refuge.

I am a church age believer. I don't need a city of refuge. I don't plan on killing anybody.

I am going to be real careful not to have any manslaughter on my conscience. So, what does it all mean? Well, it is a reminder of our priesthood. These cities of refuge were Levitical cities.

Now, the deliverance depends on the high priest and the death of the high priest and on God who in grace set the whole system up. What is the role of the priests? What is the role of the Levites who live in the cities? What do they do? For example, let's think in terms of evangelism. You got somebody out there.

Oh, Elijah was out there digging a hole through a rock. Guy died. Let's send a detachment of Levites from the city of refuge to escort him, to drag him, perchance, into the city of refuge.

That's not what it says. If someone wants the protection, if someone wants to avail themselves of that grace, they have got to get themselves there. It was a law in Israel that the roads to the city of refuge be well marked and easy to travel and kept open at all times.

The road is easy. The way is straight. No place in Israel was further than a one day's journey from the city of refuge.

They were strategically placed so that you could get there in a day. If your axe handle flew off the head, or vice versa, at the end of the day, you'd have to travel under cover of darkness. But it's a relatively short trip.

The way is plainly marked and it's straight. And when you get there, what do the Levites do? What's their job? They take you in. They do not judge you.

They do not make an assignment of guilt. They do not hold a courtroom trial. They

ascertain that you are someone who is legitimately coming for the protection of the city of refuge.

And they bring you in. And they care for you. And they feed you.

And they clothe you. And they give you a place to live. And they make arrangements for your disposition.

Eventually, you are going to need to go back and be judged by the congregation. But you are protected until that time. Now, this is our opportunity.

We are priests. We are, spiritually speaking, in the church age, the Levites. We are the keepers of God's truth.

In the Old Testament days, the Levites kept the ordinances and implemented the worship life. But we are all our own priests. And we are priests for ourselves, aren't we? We are not each other's priest.

I'm not your priest. You're not my priest. I'm not my wife's priest.

My wife is not my priest. Who am I a priest for? Where does my Levitical function, as it were, operate? It's for me. I represent myself before God.

I've got a one-man congregation that I minister to as priest. And it's me. So, what am I supposed to do as a Levite living in the city of refuge? Remember the story that was told to David by Nathan of the man who had the flocks and herds.

And one day a visitor comes and he wants to make a meal for him. But instead of going from his own flocks and herds, he goes and takes the one lamb away from his poor neighbor, slaughters it for the visitor. A visitor has come to him.

And caused him to do this heinous thing. And David says, this is an outrage. Bring me the guy.

I will dispense justice. Nathan says, you are the man. We are playing both parts here.

We are the murderer who comes looking for refuge. And we are the Levites who are supposed to operate within the grace that God has provided. We are our own priest.

We are our own city of refuge. Our soul has become the refuge and the fortress. It is out of us that we can draw the resources to take care of ourselves.

So, what do we do? We have to look at the case and bring it to judgment. If we acknowledge our sins, homo logeo, say the same thing, compare it to the standard of God and say, was that a sin? Yes, it was. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us. The high priest has already died. We are already delivered.

This whole scenario is sort of an heiress. It is a punctilious heiress. Everything happens at once.

We sin and we are guilty of a small crime or we are guilty of something large. It is an unknown sin. It is like manslaughter.

I did not intend, but it happened anyway. We go to the refuge that God has provided, which in this case is the cleansing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. His blood cleanses us.

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship, and he keeps on cleansing us from all sin through his blood. This entire scenario is sort of stretched out and dissected apart for us in this story. The principles of it, that there is both intentional guilt and unintentional guilt, that there is provision for unintentional guilt, that that guilt is removed by the death of another, the death of the high priest, and that upon that death, the slate is wiped clean and we can return in freedom.

You can press the details too far and come up with conundrums. Like, well, what is the scenario? Am I guilty of murder if I commit an intentional sin? Is that unforgivable? Is there no grace for that? This is why it is important to distinguish the nature of that crime of the taking of a life as speaking of salvation primarily. This picture is primarily salvation.

But the principles apply in either case. Just as we saw in the Levitical offerings, you confess your known sins and even the unknown ones are transferred by the laying of your hand on the animal's head. Whether you know them or not, they are transferred.

Those threads run through all of these provisions. The bottom line is, we have fellowship with God. We have sonship and a family claim and a royal priesthood through Jesus Christ.

There is nothing that is not provided for. God's grace is sufficient. It supplies every need.

But you have to understand where it is and where to go flee to lay hold of it. There is a strong element of volition. It doesn't come get you.

You have to go claim it. And if there is a single emphatic point in the cities of refuge principle, it is that when something goes wrong, it is up to us to go and claim the pre-existing grace of God. The roads have already been cleared.

The city has already been put in place. There is provision for everything. But you have to hide yourself down that road and seize it.

And waste no time. There is no point in delay. Delay means judgment.

Delay means death. And it is the same for us today. Well, we'll pause here and take our break.

We'll come back and continue looking at the cities of Levites in chapter 21.